



ANTARES 2

(BEYOND THE GATES OF ANTARES
SECOND EDITION)

GUIDE TO THE UNIVERSE

V2.011 G

Wargames rule for science-fiction combat in a far
distant future

Antares 2 Credits

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Antares 2 Structural Note

To help with downloading and printing rules, we have split the rules, background and lists into separate, smaller documents and focused more on grey-scale production. To print in grey-scale on Windows machines, we still highly recommend selecting dialogue box options 'Print in grayscale' or under 'Printer Properties', selecting 'Black and White' – other operating systems will vary.

This document contains huge swathes of background material on the peoples, worlds, history and the Antares machine itself, though more can be found online. Other documents include the *Core Rules*, which contains the *Antares 2* rule system with as minimum an amount of Antarean-specific material as possible; scenarios and playing instructions in *Antares 2: Playing the Game*; common weapons and equipment in the *Antares 2: Arms & Equipment Guide*; and faction-specific equipment, rules and units in the separate, free army lists for each faction. All are available to download at antaresnexus.com.

We are fully aware that this structure means that the core rules can be used in other universes and backgrounds: feel free to do so! Of course, in this document, everything is Antares!

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These PDFs are version numbered so players can keep up to date with any releases. Version numbering is in the following format:

<Version>.<Iteration> <Variation>

where 'Version' is '2' for *Antares 2*, 'Iteration' is numeric across all the rules and lists in a given set of alterations within that rules release, and 'Variation' is an alphabetic series (A ► Z, AA ► ZZ, and so on) that reflects any minor changes within that iteration.

2.11G Include stats and descriptions for Xilos creatures and fauna.

2.11F Initial release to the Nexus.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ANTARES UNIVERSE

Welcome to the many, many worlds of Antares!

This book summarise the background to the game *Beyond the Gates of Antares*. It is one of three books central to the game, along with the core rules and the *Playing the Game* scenario book, which introduces the army lists for each faction and how to build an army.

Antares is in its Seventh Age – or, more strictly speaking, the Seventh Age of humanity’s presence on or around Antares. For Antares is not a giant star but a giant machine, one powered by a red giant and a dwarf star companion (Obureg) called the Antares Nexus. The Nexus creates millions of interdimensional tunnels that open on the surface of Antares and exit in star systems around the universe and at many places throughout time.

The end of these tunnels through time and space are called gates: ships enter into one in their own system and it drops them out, sometime later, into the photosphere of Antares. The ships travel across Antares’ surface (if they can withstand temperatures well in excess of 2,000°C) to another gate, which they can then enter. Sometime later, again, they are deposited in a completely different star system, thousands of light years from where they started.

There are millions of these gates. But every so often the gates shut down in what is called a collapse and Antares rebuilds them again. This build-collapse cycle is what is termed an ‘Age’, and the post-humans (called panhumans in their many morphs) have seen six such collapse and are now experiencing the seventh such cycle – and perhaps a Seventh collapse.

We go into more detail about Antares below. It is important to note, however, that humanity has evolved into multiple morphs and sub-species, called panhumans. Panhumanity has constantly had to redevelop and rebuild its technology for at each collapse, many worlds are left with insufficient resources and revert to barbarism. At the dawn of each age, many of the panhuman and alien worlds of the Antares Nexus have to rebuild their civilisation.

Nonetheless, in the Seventh Age, the technology of panhumanity has created empires that are almost post-scarcity in their economy and outlook. Nanosphere technology abounds and machine intelligences roam free. There are even post-humans, NuHu, who are inextricably bound to the nanospheres in which they operate and can control devices with a thought. But this technology and interstellar travel has not brought peace. Indeed, at times it is the technology that causes conflict, the nanospheres attacking rival nanospheres, seeing a foreign nanospore as a potential virus – and there are also worlds and empires who want no part of the machine societies who dominate the gates on Antares’ surface.

On top of this maelstrom, we must not forget the very alien Vorl, a species who wishes to destroy panhumanity, regarding all of humanity with the same regard we would hold for an invasion of insects.

Antares has grown since its inception. Though we had partially expected a big document, once we pulled together the background that we considered most useful, we were still surprised to discover just how big the document had become. We have pulled out the unique characters of Antares into a separate supplement – due later – but it has still left us with a broad swathe of rich detail. Rather than break up the background even more, we decided to leave it all together, allowing players to extract what they wish.

Of course, more detail is being regularly added to the Antares Nexus at antaresnexus.com.

THE PEOPLES OF THE SEVENTH AGE

In brief, the major empires – or factions – are as follows.

- The **Algoryn Prosperate**, a machine-independent trade federation led by the Algoryn morph of panhumans.
- The **PanHuman Concord**, a near-post-scarcity society run by an intelligent nanosphere called the IMTel that connects its ruling NuHu, its people and its machine intelligences.
- The **Isorian Senatex**, a society similar to the Concord which has melded with an alien species call the Tsan and whose technology and IMTel is based on a merged, bio-silicon technology.
- The many **Freeborn Houses**, traders and travellers from system to system – the vardosi. Some Houses are reputable; others less so.
- The **Boromite Guilds and Clans**, a loose connection of people of the Boromite morph who consider themselves the ultimate development of panhumanity. Boromites provide Antares with its workers, miners and much of its criminal underworld.

There are other factions and peoples, chief amongst which are three species who can be regarded as foes to the panhumans:

- The **Ghar**, a species genetically engineered from humans in the distant past to wipe out humanity. For a decade or so in the Seventh Age they underwent a civil war, but this has ended and High Commander Fartok now leads the New Ghar Empire.
- The **Vorl**, an ancient, very alien species who broadly resemble arachnids and who have three, symbiotic parts. The Vorl are as intelligent and as advanced as the IMTel nations but more warlike due to a genetic xenophobia.
- The **Virai Dronesourage** (Viral AI), a machine species who wishes only to be left alone to prosper and develop themselves – and who cannot comprehend why biologics (people like you and I) are so scared of their expansionism and conversion of resources into more Virai.

We’ll explain more about these factions in the following chapters, but there are some critical terms and background we need to explain first. We’ll run through them on the following pages.

TERMINOLOGY OF THE SEVENTH AGE

There are some terms that occur throughout this background: an understanding of these is critical to understanding Antares. These are ‘shard’ and ‘nanosphere’. There are also some background concepts we need to explain, such as who built Antares – the ‘Gatebuilders’ – and one unit of measurement – the yan – which was adopted sometime in panhumanity’s history. We also need to explain Transient Observation Reports, the Antares equivalent of UFOs, upon which Virai or almost anything else might be found.

What is a Shard?

A shard is a machine entity subsisting upon a nanite base – a discrete fragment of machine intelligence. At the everyday level, each individual machine is a shard, but shards can also be cities or planets. Large shards contain a whole hierarchy of smaller shards, sampling data from lower within the hierarchy and monitoring or overriding shards that are subservient to it. A world’s nanosphere supports its overall directing shard, but contact with spacecraft allows compatible shards to exchange data. Groups of compatible planetary shards form the largest shards of all, federations of worlds such as the Algoryn Prosperate, Isorian Senatex and PanHuman Concord.

Where incompatible shards meet, defensive measures are triggered. A defensive measure might simply be a data-barrier designed to protect a shard from corruption. If the perceived threat is sufficiently hostile, armed forces are mobilised, and the result might be to launch an attack or start a war. The shards responsible for monitoring threats of this kind are called security shards. Security shards handle security in the military sense, but their primary role is to maintain the integrity of each world’s nanosphere. The most sophisticated security shards of all belong to military organisations within federated worlds, such as that of the Concord Combined Command (C3).

The incompatibility of rival shards at the beginning of the Seventh Age provided the stimulus for travellers within the Nexus to act as ‘honest brokers’ between different federations. These adventurers, explorers and merchants soon evolved into the people known as the Freeborn, who in turn divided into numerous rival groups known as Houses. The Freeborn have developed technologies that allows them to sterilise and ‘re-shard’ machines created for one shard in order to make them functional within another; with such protection from hostile nanospheres, they have become expert at inter-technological exchange in a universe that has grown to be dependent upon their services.

A Nanotech Society

Nanosphere are nanite machines no bigger than a virus and form an unseen part of a planet’s biosphere, saturating the air that living creatures breathe and the food that they consume. All the nanosphere in one place, upon a world or within a spacecraft for example, form an interconnected nanosphere.

The nanosphere is not just an inert cloud of micro-machines: it is the connective tissue that enables all other technologies to work. In the PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex, the nanosphere acts as a conduit between human and machine intelligences, creating an integrated decision-making network. This is referred to as Integrated Machine Intelligence and usually shortened to IMTel. The IMTel facilitates all kinds of decision making for the ultimate benefit of its citizen body. All

advanced societies have some form of machine integration, but most fall short of the full integration of either the Concord or Isorians.

Nanosphere also provide the basis for structural suspensor technologies that have largely replaced mechanical principals in all aspects of engineering and construction. Structural suspensors are energy fields held within a nano-shell comprising a contained body of self-replicating nanospore. All the functions that primitive technologies would accomplish with mechanical, electrical or magnetic components are effortlessly achieved by means of structural suspensors. Structural suspensors hold physical components together, move and manipulate them, fulfilling the role of drives, bearings, couplings, transmissions, hydraulics and all other mechanical structures. Structural suspensors are incredibly efficient, self-monitoring and to some degree self-repairing. They are fundamental to the technology of a post-mechanical age and dependent upon a nanosphere to function properly.

A specialist type of nanospore are nanophages, highly aggressive military nanites that hamper the activity of enemy nanospore or even completely destroy a nanosphere. Whilst nanophages are found in different forms, the most common compromise an opposing nanosphere’s ability to generate and conduct energy, or disrupt communications between nanospore making information exchange and co-ordination impossible.

How Far is a Yan?

A yan is a unit of measurement in the Antarean universe approximating to five metres. A thousand yan is often referred to as a kiloyan (abbreviated to ky), which approximates to five kilometres.

When talking about distances in star systems, Antareans generally use the incredibly ancient term Standard Astronomical Unit, or SAU. This is supposedly based on the distance of Old Earth to its sun and is around 30 million ky, or 30 gigayan (30gy). When measuring distances between stars in real space, the term ‘light year’ is used: the distance light travels in a time period equal to the orbit of Old Earth around its own star.

For ease on the tabletop, distances are given in inches. We give measurements here in both metric and Antarean yan, whatever is most useful or convenient at the time!

The Gatebuilders and the Antares Nexus

The mysterious Gatebuilders are legendary, often spoken of in hushed tones and always regarded with awe. It was they who built the Antarean Nexus, a huge, star-sized machine that creates interdimensional (time and space) gateways or tunnels between systems in real space and itself. The gate network based in and around Antares now connects all of civilised space: starships enter the gate in their own system, exit on the surface of Antares, then travel across the surface to enter another gate where they – eventually – exit into another star system. Each gate leads to a single, different star system, making travel between vastly-separated stars relatively easy providing the ships can withstand the temperatures and pressures on the surface of a giant star!

The Gatebuilders’ secondary legacy is the technology still surviving in vaults and installations around the universe. Surviving relics and artefacts are extremely rare, however, as

they have had to survive tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of years since Antares was first created. Nevertheless, their technologies made a profound impact on the development of all species who used the Antarean gate network, from panhumanity to Vorl and, perhaps, even the Tsan. As a result, even a hint of a Gatebuilder trove is enough to send countless treasure seekers on its trail and engage expeditionary forces from all the major powers around Antares.

Just who the Gatebuilders were and what they looked like cannot be determined by the very few installations that survive. In research areas and what are thought to be leisure quarters, ceilings and doorways range from waist-height on a baseline panhuman to towering ceilings and tall archways that are at least five times the height of a panhuman. Whether they were of a single, but widely-varying morphology, or whether their society consisted of multiple species, no one knows. Of course, rumours and tales abound, even to the extent of being more myth than reality, and stories and legends of their existence and life are subject to numerous – though largely fruitless – studies.

Transient Observation Reports (TORs)

Most of the millions of star systems connected by the Nexus are inhabited, whether by the major factions or by lesser or more backward civilisations. Almost all are starfarers to some degree, travelling between systems via the Antares Nexus. When crossing the surface of Antares or in supposedly unoccupied systems, such travellers might come across objects about which they have little or no knowledge – Transient Observation Reports or TORs.

When sightings are reported, a new TOR is allocated a sequence number by the Freeborn – the only spacegoing faction to travel everywhere across the Nexus (even into worlds within the Vorl Extents). When discovered, each TOR is tracked and occasionally its moves are predicted by opportunistic salvageers or adventurers; once found, it is boarded, the intention being to plunder its artefacts and riches.

The problem is that no-one knows what is on each of the TORs – they are often logged after a fleeting glance, after all. One such example is the infamous TOR 563 which reappeared along the border of the Concord and Isorian shards. It turned out to be a long-lost starliner from early in the Seventh Age. After being captured, it was commandeered as a barracks-ship by a regiment of Ghar Exiles – but not before spreading the deadly Virai Dronescurge, an artificial, sometimes parasitical, species.

TORs range in size from ships the size of 563 (20km or 4ky long) to small objects the size of a scout ship. Though most are gradually deteriorating in the Antarean photosphere, they are not always ships but occasionally system-bound space stations or orbitals on highly erratic and rapid orbits around their parent star.

TORs are a common theme in romantic myths and legends. TOR 89, for example, is said to be the ship of a long-forgotten pair of NuHu scientists who cracked the Antarean gate technology. Legend has it that it was almost destroyed by Obureg, but the pair managed to alter the ship's sensor signature so it appeared to be of Gatebuilder design as far as Obureg and Antares were concerned. The potential riches aboard such a vessel – from gate technology through to sensor design – means that whenever a sighting is claimed (not all are

Is the IMTel Mind Control?

A nanosphere-based, Integrated Machine Intelligence (IMTel) connects all the worlds and systems in the PanHuman Concord and another does so in the Isorian Senatex. An IMTel links people and machines, their aspirations, intentions, knowledge and daily life into what can be seen as a single entity, albeit one with many components all acting in concert. This has led to the belief outside the IMTel societies that the IMTel is a form of mind-control.

At its most basic level, such an accusation is false. An IMTel can influence, but does so subtly and in accord with its well-being parameters. Neither can it read minds – other than the explicit commands some advanced brain implants enable for more sophisticated IMTel interaction.

What the IMTel *does* is anticipate needs and desires and make them easy to achieve. If such desires and needs are negative, the IMTel can subtly suppress them and channel the desires into something more appropriate for the need of the Concord as a whole. The IMTel does not need *explicit* mind control to achieve such an aim, merely the ability to make some things more obvious to, or easier for, the citizen. The many machine intelligences within the IMTel can recognise minute facial expressions, voice intonation and physiological signals – some of which will be directly from a citizen's biomonitors. Whilst the IMTel can then, perhaps, adjust each citizen's body chemistry imbalance to enhance their well-being, such adjustments come nowhere near the direct mind-control of which it is accused.

Life within the IMTel, say the citizens of the Senatex and Concord, is satisfying, comfortable, enriching and fulfilling.

That is not to say mind-control devices are non-existent. Indeed, the more heinous rogue NuHu have developed soma graft implants which they use of feral races to enable that control. The use of such devices is anathema to IMTel society and is often distasteful even to those who use it most – those Freeborn Houses who use or trade Feral mercenaries.

true!) it triggers a small gold-rush of salvageers and opportunists keen to take control of its mythical technology.

A GATE TO THE STARS

Following the discovery of a dimensional gateway upon the fringes of the solar system, the human species spread far beyond the confines of Earth. For the first time, humans came to know that they were but one of many intelligences scattered throughout time and space, bound together by a network of trans-dimensional pathways. This network is the Nexus: a universe of innumerable worlds spanning countless galaxies and distant epochs.

Humans have thrived and multiplied within the Nexus as no other species, evolving quite rapidly in some cases. This accelerated evolution was spurred by deliberate genetic manipulation and implantation (geneering), as well as by unintentional exposure to trans-viral agents and other mutagenic organisms. As a result, humanity has divided into many distinct forms and morphs: some so physically unlike their forebears that their ancestors would hardly recognise them as human at all.

THE NEXUS

The Nexus is the connecting hub within which humans and other intelligences compete to control dimensional gateways, garner resources and extend their power-base. Gateways are located upon the edge of a planetary system: the entrance to a null-space tunnel through time and space. The gateways are the means by which spacecraft enter and leave the Nexus, and the primary means by which numerous races trade, explore, communicate, and wage war.

System gateways all lead to a single location: a contained dimension into which all tunnels emerge. Spacecraft travelling from one system to another do so via this staging point, entering though a gate in a star system, exiting from the gate into the photosphere of Antares, travelling across the photosphere to a second gate, and then entering that only to (eventually) finally exit into their destination star system. This staging dimension is a construct: a 'bubble' of reality by means of which craft travel between star systems separated in space and time. Whilst humans often refer to this whole network as the Nexus, it is only the staging dimension and its termini on Antares that is the true nexus, the hub via which all trans-dimensional traffic is routed.

At the centre of this constructed, inter-dimensional space is what appears to humans as the star Antares, the heart and power-source of the entire Nexus. Gateways emerge within the photosphere of this gigantic star from inter-spatial tunnels that descend into the depths of the star itself. These are the **Gates of Antares**, from which is derived the term Antarean Space, describing the multitude of worlds connected via the incredible and mysterious Nexus.

Who or what created the Nexus is a question asked since before humans ever ventured into the depths of space. Over thousands of years humans and other species have striven to unravel the secrets of dimensional engineering that lie behind it. What little has been discovered does not include the name of the long-vanished and unimaginably ancient race supposed

to have constructed the Nexus. Hence, its creators are known simply as Builders.

The search for and exploitation of Gatebuilder technology is a high priority amongst the rival worlds of the Nexus.

SYSTEM GATES

When approached directly from the sun-side, system gates appear as perfect circles of null-space darkness. They are completely invisible from other angles, having neither depth nor existence. Gates are in the order of six and a half kilometres across (1.3ky), no larger than many other minor orbital bodies such as asteroids and comets.

System gates are almost impossible to find unless the seeker knows what to look for. It is not unknown for human explorers to discover alien worlds of great sophistication, often capable of near-light speed space travel and journeying to neighbouring stars, but who have failed to discover their own gate. Not all societies that discover a gate comprehend what it is or find the means of opening it (a sequence key based on the gate's own resonance pattern).

An Isolated Tunnel

Spacecraft are drawn into a gate when they transmit the appropriate resonant signal. Craft activating a gate are carried through a trans-dimensional tunnel (strictly speaking they are carried through a null-space void upon a chrono-plastic wave, the secrets of which remain one of the greatest mysteries of Gatebuilder technology – see p.73). Craft are not able to employ drives within a tunnel because action/reaction principals don't hold within null-space: the craft simply occupies a bubble of space-time that is carried along the tunnel and deposited at the other side.

The perceived time it takes to get from a given system to Antares or back again is always the same. However, depending upon the world, this can be anything from a few hours to many long months or even more. Stories of craft entering unexplored Antarean gates never to return are legion (primary exploration is undertaken by drones for this reason).

The Gate Horizon

All system gates lie at a distance from their star that corresponds to a calculable position dependent upon the star's energy signature. This seems to be a necessary component of the gateway's functioning. Gates do not orbit their star but lie along a line extending from the sun to the perceived position of Antares within their own time-space dimension. This fixed point is known as the gate horizon. Given the energy signature of a star and its position relative to Antares, the gate horizon is easily established.

The energy signature of a star varies over time, and when it does the gate horizon moves too, maintaining a fixed position relative to the energy signature. This suggests that the Nexus is not a fixed structure but is capable of responding to changes within Antarean Space. One of the great mysteries of Antarean

Space is that the Nexus joins civilisations that could not possibly have existed when it was constructed. This gives much weight to the notion that Antares is a sentient entity capable of adaptation and possibly of its own strange evolution.

The Lightspeed Barrier

Journeys from star-to-star take many years in local space-time or 'real space'. Even the most powerful craft cannot travel faster than light. This means that very few civilisations extend beyond their home planetary system to neighbouring stars. By contrast, journeys within the teeming Nexus can be undertaken in a matter of days by spacecraft travelling at only modest speeds.

THE ROLE OF OBUREG

The Antarean machine has a second component: a tiny, orbiting star called Obureg. The role of Obureg is not entirely understood, but its orbit appears to define the extent of the dimensional bubble within which Antares sits. Its own gravitational wake drives the plasma flows across the Antarean surface, and are an essential component of the Antarean machine. The equatorial regions of Antares directly beneath the orbit of Obureg contain most tumultuous areas of plasma flow (the Tropics of Obureg). The region is also the most densely populated with gates. By contrast the polar areas have fewer gates at higher levels of the photosphere and lower rates of plasma flow in general.

The extent to which a ship can rise from the Antarean surface is also constrained by the orbit of Obureg, forcing spacecraft to move over the Antarean surface much as a craft might move over the surface of an ocean. Space-time density increases catastrophically as the orbit of Obureg is approached, such that progress becomes exponentially slower. Attempts to rise significantly above the photosphere have so far proven ineffective: all probes sent to investigate Obureg have simply vanished.

Obureg the Peacemaker

Obureg also appears to have a role in the defence of the Nexus, causing intense plasma flows when conflict occurs on the surface of Antares. These plasma storms are dangerous to shipping and can leave gates and systems isolated for months as well as destroying the ships initiating the conflict (and sometimes their targets, too). As a result, conflict on the surface of Antares itself is almost impossible, and undertaken only by the most desperate – or foolhardy.

TRAVEL OVER THE ANTAREAN PHOTOSPHERE

The movement of spacecraft across Antares is confined by the granular density of plasma throughout the photosphere and the relative speed of the plasma flow over its surface. Moving against the plasma flow can be as dangerous as diving to depth even in the upper levels of the photosphere.

Spacecraft descending down into the plasma flow endure considerable stresses and, regardless of the effectiveness of their shielding, there is a point at which they are consumed. More significantly, there is a depth from which a spacecraft is unable to emerge without accumulated stresses causing its destruction. This is the **critical depth**, which effectively marks a point of no return.

Gatebuilder Relics

Gatebuilder artefacts are often found within ancient ruins and may be the only item standing, perhaps sealed in a stasis capsule or somehow having an ability to resist deterioration. No doubt those long-lost civilisations who studied such relics were unable to break them open to reveal their secrets. But the ruins in which the artefacts stand are often those of long-lost civilisations, those from previous ages before even humans burst across Antares.

Such ancient ruins often vary wildly in design, layout and level of decay. Whilst this is partially due to the cross-time linking of Antarean gates, the original builders of such ruins are unable to be found anywhere on Antares. It is believed that such an even is part of the Antarean chrono-stability: whilst Antares can connect to the past, it has to connect to a past that is in the future of when a system was previously connected. Experiments in time-manipulation and chronoplasticity, such as the Vorl and Isorian chronophasic devices, inevitably lead to another Antarean collapse.

Many Antarean gates lie below the critical depth, but this is not a problem so long as a ship is able to find and open a gate before its shielding becomes overloaded. Variations in plasma granularity caused by the orbit of Obureg affect this critical depth within the equatorial region of Antares (the Tropics of Obureg). Most Antarean ships have comparable levels of shielding. Ghar ships, which have primarily magnetic shielding, are less efficient but Ghar are usually willing to take risks where others would not (in particular the IMTel societies of the Concord and Isorians which are extremely risk adverse by nature).

Travel Time Dilation

An interesting aspect of travel across the surface is a time dilation effect of approximately 5.6:1. This means that a ship taking 10 hours to travel from one gate to another would find that 56 hours would have elapsed in real space. This is only of real issue when trying to co-ordinate operations across multiple connected systems – such as in a war – or in the delivery of emergency aid or in returning to one's home planet.

What this does mean, however, is that a journey of only a few days across the raging surface of Antares is several weeks in real time. When the time to travel to the system gate is added to the time within each wormhole, travel from one system to another will take at least a week in experienced time, and perhaps several in real time.

One aspect of surface travel is that ships can apparently 'dive' deeper to deeper gates at a slightly faster velocity than they can travel across the surface – especially if they angle their dive such that it has limited lateral movement compared with the current position of Obureg. This is important as Obureg has been known to destroy ships moving too fast across the surface of Antares in the same way it destroys those who fire weapons on the surface: by manipulating the plasma flows so they become intolerable.

Rifts

Rifts are gaps in the Antarean surface where few, or no, gates are formed. Some are extensive and form natural barriers to Antarean empires, whilst others are much smaller and cannot be seen on a large-scale map of Antares' surface. The seldom-

visited systems isolated by rifts offer opportunities for freebooters or ne'er-do-wells to take shelter far away from the authorities who would otherwise hunt them down.

All rifts have some gates within them – the surface map to the right (Map 1) shows how travel between systems on either side of the rift can take much longer than travel across it. Normally, ships take refuge in a number of systems along their route as travel across Antares surface is wearing on both shields and hull and dropping into a system gives time for recovery and repair (most hull metals are self-repairing).

The problem is that travel across a rift means ships have to experience the dangers of Antares for a much longer time and, when ships take refuge in the isolated systems, they could potentially suffer the depredations of privateers or, quite frankly, pirates. Further, the slow route between safe systems is often the most profitable for Freeborn ships so is the route they take. Of course, a Freeborn captain may allow a charter to go across the rift, but such an expedition will be expensive!

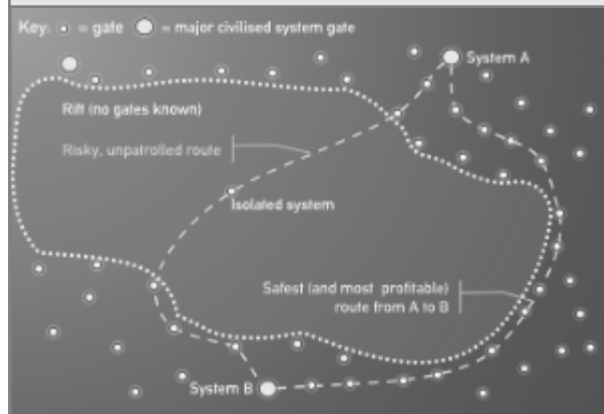
DISPARATE RECONNECTIONS TO THE NEXUS

Antarean timelines are complicated by the fact that, whilst Antares never connects to a system's past once it is connected to the Nexus, the length of time between reconnections can vary widely, gate by gate. It is thought this is due to Antares waiting for temporal paradoxes to be ironed out or avoided. As a result, any chronological scheme for periods of collapse can only be approximate because gates open and close at different Antarean times for different systems as well as different local times. One system might be reconnected after a lapse of a hundred years, whilst another might endure a thousand years of isolation, yet both could potentially reconnect to the Nexus at approximately the same Antarean time.

Connection Example

This connection and timeline issues are best illustrated by stepping through an example. The diagram below, illustrates

Map 1: Rifts and Safe Routes



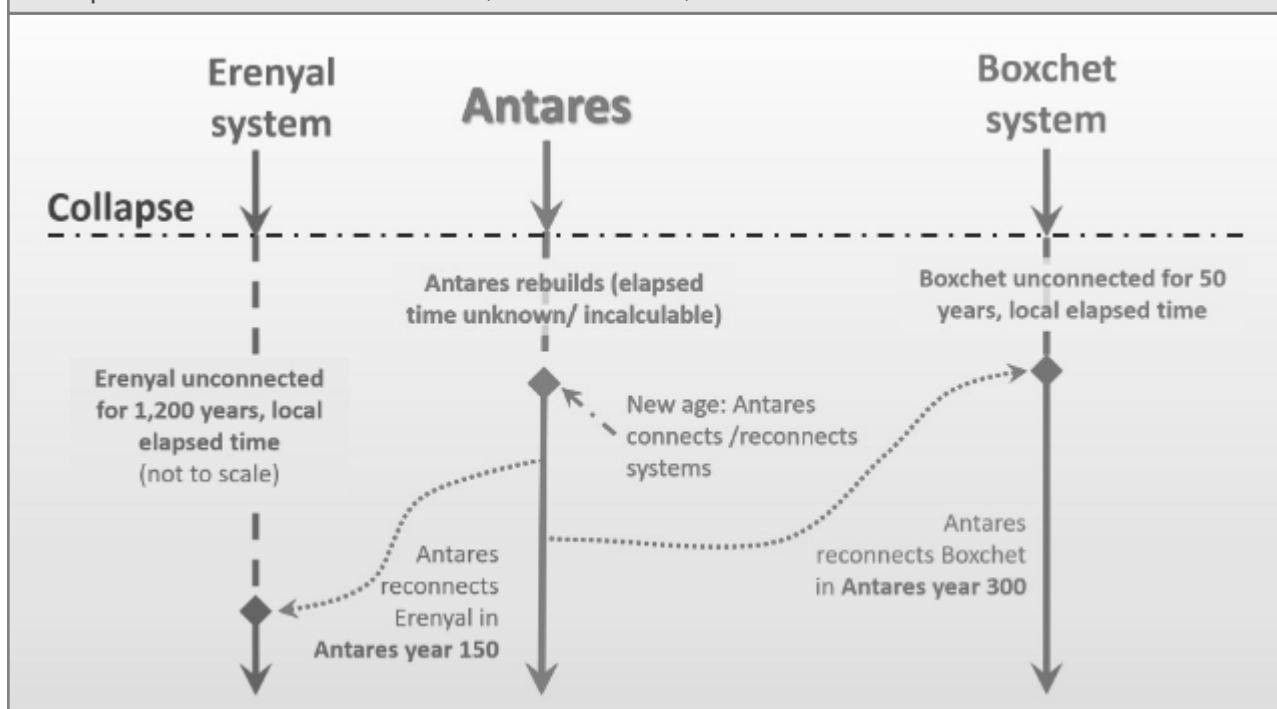
the fate of two systems, Boxchet and Erenyal, that were connected to the Nexus just before a collapse.

Once the gates collapse, Antares starts rebuilding the network – just how long a time this takes is unknown: it could be a few days or many years. A new age is started as soon as Antares starts recreating gates to systems around the galaxy.

The time experienced in each system whilst waiting for a reconnection is highly variable – in our example, Boxchet's citizens experience only 50 years, elapsed, whilst those of Erenyal fall into a dark age that spans 1,200 years. Key, here, is that no system is ever reconnected to a time in its past; reconnections to new ages are always one after each other. It is believed that this is mostly due to Antares and Obureg attempting to limit causality and paradox issues – though the real reason is not known.

Whilst Erenyal experienced a period of 1,200 years, as far as other Antareans can tell, it was reconnected only 150 years after Antares began recreating gates in the new age. The Erenyal gate was discovered by survey ships from one of the

24: Disparate Reconnections to the Nexus (times not to scale)



Ruins Across a Chaotic Timeline

The frequent collapse of the Nexus and the reconnection of gates on different timelines leads to a combination of misplaced artefacts and ruins, some from ancient, long-gone cultures, others from the Gatebuilders themselves. Whilst the Gatebuilder artefacts are the most sought-after relics, even artefacts from previous civilisations can be valuable, and whether or not they provide useful technology, the Freeborn can always make some use of them in trade to scientific establishments or collectors. And whilst Gatebuilder ruins are virtually non-existent, there are plenty of ruins or decaying buildings across Antares that explorers think are Gatebuilder ruins or which could hold remarkable ancient artefacts or – the prize above all prizes – an actual Gatebuilder artefact itself.

Those who find such artefacts become rich or influential – often both. Though often hazardous, the artefacts' usefulness to any faction is beyond measure.

No wonder there is so much conflict over any ancient, Antarean ruin: what lies within will inevitably change lives.

more advanced systems that were reconnected in the last 150 (Antarean) years.

This is in complete contrast with Boxchet. Whilst the people of Boxchet only experienced a 50-year period of no gate, when they were reconnected they discovered that 300 years had passed on Antares in this new age. What is more, they were connected 150 years **after** Erenyal, though Erenyal has experienced 1,350 years ($1,200 + 300 - 150$) since ships from Boxchet were last able to visit!

Whilst this is an extreme example and few systems ever experience such a significant variation in experienced time, it does show that Antares gates connect through both time and space. It is thought that the Antares machine somehow calculates any potential causality issues; it is very rare that systems are (re-)connected if they have been visited by real-space ships from systems already connected to the Nexus.

THE XILOS EVENT

In the year 1320 standard, a routine PanHuman Concord exploration probe discovered an unknown gateway deep within the Antarean photosphere. Further investigation through the gate revealed nothing less than the ruins of an entire Gatebuilder world: Xilos. The Xilos gateway was located in a neutral zone on the Antarean surface within the Determinate. It lay dangerously close to a region disputed between the Algoryn Prosperate and Ghar Empire. News of the discovery spread quickly. Rival forces converged upon Xilos to claim its secrets for their own. What had begun as a regular intelligence gathering mission soon turned into a battle on the ground and in space.

Explorers recovered useful archeotech from the ruins of Xilos even while the fighting raged all around them. However, the planet's greatest secret – that at its heart lay a complete gate building factory – would be snatched away just as it was discovered. The exact circumstances are unclear because the gate factory quickly turned into a battle zone. During the fighting the factory sprang into life, timelocks were released, and it appears an incomplete gateway was released. The



factory apparently went into a safety mode, creating a null-space zone within which the new gate was hidden.

It is either the creation of this 'rogue gate' or the Isorians use of a chronophasic drive to get to Xilos that appears to have triggered a wave of instability in the Nexus. Over the next four years gateways close to the Xilos gate began to fail or become unreliable. The instability appears to be spreading out from the northern Determinate but is not limited to there. Other strange events are occurring all over the Nexus. It is as if the integrity of the Nexus were unravelling and space and time connections becoming unstable: energies are being released that are affecting machine intelligences of all kinds: long forgotten races are suddenly reappearing as if from the past.

The challenge that faces all the races of the Nexus is to somehow restore stability to Antares. If they fail, the Seventh Age will surely pass and a new time of collapse ensue: perhaps the final catastrophe of all bringing an end to Antares forever. The Isorians have already glimpsed the secrets of trans-dimensional engineering and understand at least some of its dangers. But there can be no trust between the Senatex and Concord whilst both remain divided by their respective IMTel systems. Nor is there a great deal of trust between these two great Antarean super-powers and the independent worlds, let alone the myriad alien races – many hostile to humanity in all shapes and forms.

PEOPLES AND CREATURES

Before jumping in to a description of each Empire, we'll first describe the more notable peoples of Antares, from panhumanity to the important, but alien, species who live alongside – or in spite of – panhumanity.

PANHUMAN DOMINATED SOCIETIES

Humans are not alone in the Nexus, but they are the most widely spread of all intelligent biological species. Many human populations have evolved into distinct forms, known as morphs, some of which are very different from others. Some morphs are so distinct that they are effectively unique species. Collectively, all of these humans and human descendants are panhumans. Some are regarded, or regard themselves, as distinct races with their own cultural traditions. Others are variations upon the human body-form that intermix freely within the broad mass of panhuman society.

Thousands of worlds have been settled by panhumans. Many are independent or bound together into voluntary collectives to facilitate mutual trade and defence. Where the gates of two worlds emerge in close proximity on the surface of the Antares Nexus, travelling between them is relatively easy. Gates that emerge a great distance apart are much more difficult to reach. Worlds whose gates are close together interact all the time and they may be allies or rivals but are more likely to form part of a single federation.

PanHuman Concord

The PanHuman Concord, also known as the Concord, is one of the two largest and most powerful of these human federations. Like its rival, the Isorian Senatex, it also includes alien worlds, but on the whole it is humans of one sort or another that make up the immense populations of the Concord. Ever since one half of the Concord split to form the Isorian Senatex, the integrated machine intelligence that effectively directs the Concord has striven to re-integrate itself with that of its former federates. This advanced adaptive technology, widely referred to as IMTel, lies at the core of both the PanHuman Concord and Senatex. The two rival machine intelligences war between themselves as each tries to absorb and re-shape the other. The resultant battle rages through the Nexus, and other worlds are often caught between warring forces. This conflict has lasted for more than a thousand years with little sign of resolution.

Isorian Senatex

The Isorian Senatex, known properly as the Senatex but often called 'the Isorians', is centred upon the world of Isori, the oldest and greatest source of human technological knowledge in the whole Nexus. Isori founded the PanHuman Concord but then separated when the planet's IMTel absorbed the technology of an alien race called the Tsan Kiri. The Tsan Kiri possessed their own version of IMTel, one based upon biological principals rather than human nano-tech. The Isorian IMTel adapted and integrated that of its alien enemies, enabling the Isorians to defeat the Tsan Kiri. But the process of

absorption changed the Isorian IMTel into a hybrid, half-human and half-alien.

The hybrid IMTel spread widely throughout Concord space before it was rejected as hostile by more distant IMTel systems. These distant worlds, remote from Isori itself, identified the new Isorian IMTel as an alien invader. Since that time, the two machine intelligences have developed in isolation. No longer integrated together, they have become implacable rivals, each striving for dominance over the other.

Algoryn Prosperate

The Algoryn Prosperate, known as the Prosperate by its member planets, is a federation of hundreds of worlds, some inhabited by panhumans and others by an alien race called the Tch'thax (or Tchath or Chaxth: the Tchathys language resists direct transcription). At its core lies the world of Algor and its colonies, which together make up the most important and influential portion of the Prosperate. The military forces of the Algoryn are powerful and numerous, their role being to protect the entire Prosperate from the many threats that surround it on all sides. The gateways that unite the Prosperate within the Nexus lie sandwiched between the two warring factions of the Concord and Senatex, both of which would gladly absorb Prosperate worlds in their battle for dominance. As if this were not sufficient to force the Algoryn into a permanent state of war, they also find themselves engaged in a conflict with the Ghar Empire that has resulted in the loss of Algoryn colonies and the destruction of several Prosperate worlds.

Boromite Guilds and Clans

Boromites are an ancient, panhuman race spread far and wide throughout the Nexus. They have no known homeworlds of their own, instead residing alongside and amongst other humans or travelling constantly from one world to the next. Although a dispersed people, they have strong sense of racial identity and are one of the most distinct human morphs in appearance. Boromites claim they were bio-engineered in some past age to work in the extreme environments of asteroid mines, a proposition supported by archeo-genetic analysis of Boromite DNA. Boromites are incredibly resilient to extremes of temperature, radiation and pressure and can survive in conditions that would kill other panhumans in minutes.

The Children of Borom, as they call themselves, live and work as clan groups under the direction of matriarchs, to whom they are likely to be related. Boromites are extremely loyal to their clans, and each clan is loyal to related clans. On the basis of inter-clan loyalties and affiliation Boromites gather into larger Guilds to undertake demanding tasks, to explore and, when necessary, to defend their claims and clans – Boromites are not a particularly warlike species but will wage war with a grim determination if forced to do so. Though known for their love of song and music, Boromites are much more famous for their skills as miners and engineers, their services being in high demand throughout the Nexus by humans and aliens alike.

Freeborn Houses

The Freeborn live in space aboard armadas of ships of all shapes and sizes. The largest craft are small worlds in themselves, complete city-sized ships or orbitals anchored within an otherwise uninhabitable solar-system. Although Freeborn do not live on planets, most Houses control a number of systems – sometimes well-hidden – which they use as supply bases or which serve as a source of commodities. For this is the essence of Freeborn society: their main occupation is trade, which includes not only trade in goods and materials but in information and – a speciality of many Houses – mercenary fighters.

The Freeborn are divided into rival groups scattered throughout the Nexus: the Freeborn Houses or – to give them their Freeborn title – Vardos. Individual Houses compete with their neighbours to service the needs of planet-bound societies. Rivalries between Houses can lead to conflict, even to long-standing feuds, but the purpose of the Freeborn is ultimately to acquire wealth and influence via trade and even the bitterest rivals are willing to put aside their differences if it serves their interests to do so. Where knowledge itself is a valuable commodity, the Freeborn have their spies and the means to infiltrate even the IMTel of powerful factions such as the Concord and the Senatex.

OTHER INHABITANTS OF THE NEXUS

Humans are not the only species to inhabit the Nexus nor were they by any means the first to discover it. Over the long ages since the Nexus was created, entire races have discovered its gateways, spread throughout its innumerable worlds, and gone extinct before humans ever appeared. Whole worlds are covered in the ruins of civilisations long since vanished along with the races that created them. Others are home to feral creatures, the primitive remnants of species whose forebears were once part of mighty spacefaring civilisations, now reduced to savagery and barbarism. This has been the fate of many peoples over the millennia, including human settlers unfortunate enough to find themselves cut-off from the Nexus for some reason. It would be impossible to describe every non-human intelligence with the Nexus, but some are especially worthy of note.

Ghar Empire

Whether or not Ghar are human is a contested point. The Ghar do not consider themselves human, and genetic analysis suggest they are a complex chimera – a geneered species with DNA from many others. However, all the chimeric extensions are overlaid onto a fundamentally human form.

The Ghar Empire is centred upon the fortress world of Gharon where untold Ghar creatures slave away to create machines of destruction. The Ghar are a clone race descended from bio-engineered soldiers originally created to wage war in a distant age. That war that has long since ended, leaving only its soldiers and their implacable directive to conquer. Ghar exist to fight and know of nothing else, having no society or culture apart from that required to build their armies and launch them into battle. Who their original enemy was is impossible to say, but today they wage war against all of humanity and will not rest until every last human is destroyed. Fortunately for the panhumans of the Nexus, the Ghar are technologically primitive and have proven incapable of developing their crude

weaponry or spacecraft to any significant degree. Despite their backwardness, the Ghar are dangerous foes, in part because their technology is so primitive it is impervious to many of the sophisticated weapon systems commonly employed by other forces.

Virai Dronescore

The Virai, or Dronescore, are an ancient self-replicating machine race that has spread throughout the Nexus by parasitizing spacecraft as they travel from one world to the next. Their prime motivation is to survive; however, in doing so they invariably come into conflict with human and alien societies whose machines provide the raw materials the Virai need to construct more of their own kind. This search for, and acquisition of, reproductive resources inevitably leads to conflict.

Unfortunately for other species, Virai adapt their form to suit the materials they have at hand and the environment in which they live, making them especially difficult to eradicate. Over many iterations of their leader-Virai, the First Architects, they have evolved to recognise organic lifeforms as a threat, so take great pains to avoid contact with organics until they have built up sufficient numbers to quickly defeat any attempt to dislodge them. Long thought to have been wiped out from Antarean Space, they have re-emerged only recently following disruption to the Nexus caused by the Xilos Event.

Vorl

The Vorl are the most numerous and successful species within the Nexus after humans – as a whole they call themselves the synthesis. Their symbiote physiology is very different to that of humans: a full grown Vorl are scorpion-like even if their primary head is placed where a scorpion would have a sting. This transgenic race includes the Technician caste in which only a limited portion of the symbiote is fully expressed. More details on Vorl physiology, technology and society is given in the chapter on the Vorl.

PANHUMAN SPECIES AND MORPHS

Given the greater variation in morphs within the PanHuman Concord, it is unsurprising that the Concord has a wider variety of morphs in military service than most other forces. Whilst the Senatex has such morphs, their IMTel's efficiency algorithms tend to select troopers more on conformity to a predictable physical and psychological norm rather than on mutual benefit. Such selection is one of the many reasons Freeborn fear and dislike the Senatex!

Algoryn

The panhuman morph known as the Algoryn evolved upon the hostile world of Algor and have since colonised thirteen further worlds, though one, Zyra, is now a deserted, blackened and sterile wasteland.

The Algoryn have a distinctive and intimidating appearance. For a start they are taller, bigger and tougher than standard humans, which alone makes them quite imposing. On top of this they lack hair upon their heads, which are instead covered with crestlike keratinous growths.

The Algoryn's distant ancestors settled Algor in ages past. Most likely they did so during a period of prolonged quiescence when the dangers presented by the system's binary



The Algoryn Morph – Vector AI troopers

stars were much reduced. The frequently inhospitable environment of their home world initiated a rapid evolutionary cycle that has led to significant changes to their physique. Although the Algoryn have spread beyond Algor itself, they all retain this physique to some extent.

As a result of this evolutionary adaptation the Algoryn developed their distinctive, thickened and fused keratinous layer to the upper parts of their bodies that are exposed to sunlight, most notably their necks, heads, shoulders and forearms. This dense protective layer evolved to shield them against the harsh rays of the twin suns of Algor, Enbris and Onebris. These fierce suns, periodically bathe the planet in dangerous levels of heat and radiation, forcing the Algoryn to take shelter deep underground.

In the case of Algoryn who have colonised other, more hospitable, worlds, these distinctive features are less developed. On some worlds of the Prosperate, Algoryn have mixed freely with other kinds of humans, resulting in populations that are extremely diverse in appearance.

Living in such a hostile environment has led to other changes in the population of Algor. Compared to typical humans they are physically imposing and extremely tough, able to endure hardships that would quickly overcome an ordinary human. Over the previous millennia, these qualities have been reinforced by almost constant warfare, encouraging the development of a military culture that places substantial emphasis on physical and mental endurance.

Compared with normal panhumans, Algoryn have a greater ability to resist pain, hurt and radioactivity. The highly

militarised and structured nature of Algoryn society means it would be a rare adult in the leading Optimate leger who had no military training and Vector troopers have an iron discipline instilled into them from birth. This has led to the various castes of Algoryn society producing individuals who are almost distinct morphs – except they all resemble Algoryn, of course.

Though all of the same panhuman species, the strict, Algoryn leger system results in an interesting distribution of stats, the Optimates' privileged position giving them substantial advantages in terms of a natural assumption of command and superior training. Serviles, though potentially useful militia, are not regarded as being fit for normal service whilst the near-outcast Base 'leger' – for it is not a true leger at all – are almost forced into a form of exile.

Boromite

The ancient, panhuman Boromite morph is adapted to withstand thin atmosphere, low gravity and extreme temperature. The ancestors of the Boromites were geneered to endure hostile environments more easily than any other panhuman, and are amongst the toughest and most durable people anywhere. They have thick, gnarly hides covered in horny stone-like nodules that act much like a self-contained pressure suit. Their hides are a slate grey/blue colour for the most part, though a greenish-grey is not uncommon, and to some extent their skin can take on hues from the environment.

Boromites are robustly built, taller and bulkier than most humans and much more imposing. Their bones are dense and their musculature considerable, endowing them with strength and endurance far beyond that of ordinary humans. They feel little pain even from quite severe injuries, and their powers of recuperation are remarkable. They even retain a natural ability to self-regenerate to a limited extent. In all these respects they are superbly adapted to endure hard and dangerous labour in hostile environments, whether low- or high- gravity, extremes of heat and cold or even extreme pressure differentials. Indeed, it is difficult to dispute their own claim that they are the toughest and most unusual looking of the common human morphs of Antarean space.

Boromites are burly, thickset and powerfully built but are not so nimble and quick as ordinary humans. When it comes to mental powers Boromites are task focused creatures with intense loyalty to the clan and an innate talent for cooperative team working: under pressure, the rock-people are steady as a rock! When it comes to reacting quickly to changing



Boromite Work Ganger and Security Ganger

Boromite Hide Colour

Though their shape, size and physical optimisation has resulted in a mutation-resistant, relatively fixed size and morph, many Boromite families, Clans or Guilds have traditional skin colours or patterning. Unlike amongst most other human societies, these are indelible and honourable marks of affiliation, and to change or alter them according to the whims of fashion would be unthinkable. Indeed, only an outcast or criminal would be so stripped of his identity as the most terrible of punishments.

The Ha'Ulut are a dispersed clan whose families have red hide, the colour ranging from a deep red to a bright terracotta. Boromites joining the Guild of the Under Fallen alter their skin to black with a pattern on it reflecting the stars in the sky at the time of their birth.

*Mhagris Ferals*

circumstances, however, Boromites are at a disadvantage compared with other, panhuman morphs.

Ferals

Whilst panhuman, those less advanced peoples referred to (perhaps contemptuously) as Ferals come from planets whose only commodity they have to trade is that of bodies – or, to be precise, mercenary soldiers.

The Mhagris, for example, have fallen under the domination of the Oszon Mercantile League. The League, an alliance of Varda led and dominated by the Freeborn *vardos oszoni*, gladly makes use of Mhagris warriors, recruiting them into their own forces and training and equipping them to fight as mercenaries on their masters' behalf. Amongst those warriors are entire formations of skark riders, their creatures variously upgraded and pacified with appropriate neural grafts, yet losing none of their native ferocity or endurance.

Other ferals of the determinate include the Tamalair, ferals from a slightly more benign world than Mhagris, but whose struggle is nonetheless severe as their planet was stripped of resources in ages past. A small combine of five minor houses including the Isoptix and Delhren recruit from Tamala, as do the feral forces of House Fenhryr.

Gyohn

The Gyohn (pronounced guy-yown) have blue-grey, haunted looks that are the result of a parasitical infection that altered their DNA during the long isolation of the Fourth Collapse. The original virus was probably a weapon from the Warring Ages that significantly weakened normal human resistance to dermatological infection and damage. Whatever the cause, after a few generations of isolation, it was discovered that the whole population was infected.

Attempts to prevent the pandemic proved useless, so other approaches were taken. An early response was to boost the Gyohn's healing abilities, an approach that seemed to work but which unfortunately led to a substantial increase in scar tissue. A longer-term response to try and alter their skin back to human norms ran into problems when it was discovered that the original virus had replicated snippets of its DNA throughout the local genome, even replacing vital DNA components. Before the population could die out, an attempt was made to alter the virus itself to encourage, tougher, thicker skin at the expense of underlying body fat.

The Gyohn now live in a balance: they look horrifically gaunt, may lack certain 'typical' panhuman features, but are still

*Concord Gyohn Strike Troopers*

susceptible to heavy or horrific scarring, very often the most exposed places such as hands and faces.

Sometimes referred to as 'The Scarred', the Gyohn now wear their deep, pale scars with pride: they may evoke revulsion in the more isolated panhumans. But theirs is a species that has been tested against the worst weapons of the Warring Ages.

Hantale

Like the Boromites, the Hantale (pronounced han-tah-ley) are remnants of the heavy genetic experimentation carried out in the First and Second Ages of Antares. It is believed their third eye is the result of experiments coordinated across multiple systems into broadening the human visual spectrum into the IR and UV bands, perhaps as a survival requirement against aerial foes with adaptive camouflage – a now-lost group of species that had spread over a broad number of Antares-connected worlds.

It is almost certain that the experimenters had no wish to affect the normal vision so the Hantale's normal, binary eyesight is only slightly adapted into the wider spectrum. However, the third eye is a result of substantial specialist, chimeric genes to generate receptors from non-human species.

With the broad range of sensor receptors on Seventh Age armour, for all practical purposes the Hantale have the same statistics as other panhumans. Nonetheless, the sight of their pale skin and angry red flesh around the third, dark eye no longer attracts attention within the ranks of the IMTel nations but is certainly a cause for consternation amongst Ferals and

*Concord Hantale Strike Troopers*



Concord Krasz Assault Troopers

primitive societies – which accounts for their inclusion amongst the Concord exploration and settlement services.

Krasz

The Krasz are an ancient and distinct human morph. Unlike the Boromites, the exact date of their origin is unknown but they are believed to be the descendants of settlers who spread during the Second Age and who were lost completely during the short Third Age.

Their extreme strength suggests a heavy-world adaptation. However, their size, agility and lack of originality also suggests a selection process that could match the needs of a rigid, primitive society beset by dangers, dangers that meant it was forced to rely on strong, but disciplined warriors. According to the Krasz, only the best, most agile and strongest warriors were able to survive – and only if they cooperated with others. Others point out that the stability of the Krasz bodyform in such an extreme panhuman morph suggests some extensive and sophisticated geneering.

Such claims are never made where Krasz can hear.

Krasz society is naturally inward-focused, and perhaps less civilised than others, but is highly supportive. The Krasz preferring their own company to that of others – with the possible exception of Boromites who can cope with their rather physical sense of humour.

This criteria, however, makes them the perfect assault trooper. During previous ages they were key components of a coherent military presence on settled worlds. However, with the many collapses and network rebuilds, the settled systems that were once in close proximity to each other have been spread throughout Antarean space. In the Seventh Age, Krasz-dominated star systems appeared in the region dominated by the current PanHuman Concord. Whilst the Krasz are still in demand as disciplined shock troops for the Concord, their numbers are nowhere near as many as before.

Misgenic Rejects

Misgenic rejects are not specifically a human morph, but the tragic and sinister consequences of inhuman, frequently chimeric, genetic experimentation by renegade NuHu. They are quite literally rejects – the failures and the discarded remnants of geneering experiments involving human, animal and artificially genes.

It is the practice of this deviant science by Rogue NuHu that caused them to be driven into exile. Many were forced to seek refuge with the Freeborn Houses, the less scrupulous of which

The NuHu Meld

Rogue NuHu experiment in linking their minds into a single entity – a dangerous practice only undertaken in cases of the utmost necessity, typically one involving research at a desperate hour of need. For example, in the 1320s of the Seventh Age, it is rumoured that Rogue NuHu are melding to try and prevent another collapse.

The Meld is never performed in combat as minds once co-joined in this way can never be entirely separated and entire personality collapse is always a possibility. Physically, the NuHu conjoined in this way are incredibly weak and cannot move, the merge of their minds being so complete that separate bodies become difficult to tell apart.

As objectives for a scenario, a NuHu Meld is perfect as the pair can do little but enhance their mental capabilities!

The Raya: A Broken Meld

The Raya of the Vardos Delhren is one such meld that went appallingly wrong. The Raya were a closely-knit pair, a couple who had pledged themselves to one another. When one partner was killed whilst within the meld, the shock was so much that it sent the other insane in a way only NuHu could experience. The surviving partner had the other's head and brain placed in a highly innovative stasis field in a NuHu stave and still, to this day, debates with it. It could be that they are using the head as a means to debate with the surviving nanosphere from their partner – or it could just as well be the conversation is entirely within their own mind. Whatever the truth, the Raya is both much-pitied and much-feared.

were delighted to offer refuge to such scientists, as ever being mindful of the chance of material or political gain.

The experiments supposedly attempt to create new human morphs, powerful soldiers, great minds or willing slaves. Rejects are the twisted failures of this manipulation, typically having bizarrely shaped and bestial bodies, misshapen limbs and clawed fingers more like animals than humans. They are poor and tragic beings, neither human nor beast, whose sorry fate is to be expended in battle merely to distract, confuse and repel the enemy.

Misgenics have the same base stats as humans but these can vary depending upon their misgenic abilities. In battle they are little use for anything much, although they can claw and tear at their victims with claws, beaks, fangs and whatever unnatural means of offence they have been endowed with. It would be pointless to equip such wretches with armour or weapons. Instead they are given soma grafts, mind implant controls that allow them to be driven about the battlefield like cattle.

NuHu

Predominant in influence, though certainly not in numbers, are the NuHu. Vastly intelligent, they have evolved to be at one with the nanosphere of the advanced worlds of Antares. The creation of the IMTel by the NuHu of Isor made them more capable than in any previous age.

The NuHu – a contraction of New Human – are physically unusual morphs, extremely tall, long-limbed, with bodies that are slight or even frail. However, it is their considerable mental abilities that make them distinct from other humans. NuHu are extremely intelligent and possess powers of recall that are

The Legend of the Five Sons

Of all the countless human morphs, the NuHu are unique in claiming lineage from a single human progenitor: a woman called Nayam Isoriym. Nayam Isoriym lived in ages so remote from the present that her full or true name is unknown. Isoriym is simply a solar or planetary name such as the people of the Antarean universe commonly append to their personal names. It means Nayam of (the planet) Isori. From Nayam and her five sons, all NuHu are descended, giving rise to the five bloodlines of Osu, Kem, Laku, Misa, and Thol. Though most NuHu of the Seventh Age are of mixed blood, some claim direct decent from one of these ancestors, and these pure bloodlines are collectively known as the Five Sons. Whether Nayam and her sons were real or merely allegorical figures dreamed up in later ages is impossible to say.

The race of NuHu certainly arose long ago upon the world of Isori and quickly grew to prominence amongst the great minds of their planet. In part thanks to their contribution, Isori was to become the most powerful and influential of all the human worlds of Antarean space, a beacon of learning, technology and enlightened government. From Isori the NuHu spread throughout the Nexus. They travelled freely, spreading advanced technology and bringing many forgotten worlds back into the fold of a greater humanity. In some places they settled or even became stranded, and so the NuHu of Isori came to live throughout human space, but everywhere they were very few amongst a very great many.

practically infallible, qualities that derive from their ability to interact directly with nano-based technology.

These mental capabilities make them formidable individuals, but what really sets them apart is their capacity to interact with nano-based technology. Whilst other humans must rely upon interfaces or implanted devices to interact with the many machine intelligences of advanced societies, the NuHu can do so with their minds alone. This power is seated deep within a part of the brain that is sensitive to electro-magnetic radiation and which forms a bond with the tiny nanites that saturate the worlds of human space. NuHu are born and grow up immersed in an environment that is part of the nanosphere. Within IMTel societies such as the Concord and Senatex, a NuHu considers it entirely normal to live conjoined lives with the IMTel that controls all aspects of advanced human societies. Within the Concord, the NuHu are at the same time the masters of the Concord IMTel and expressions of it, living creatures that are also part of a greater machine mind, albeit a component that gives direction and volition.

It is hardly surprising that, to many ordinary panhumans, the NuHu appear to be cold, inhuman, living machines.

Elite NuHu within the Concord are termed Mandarin; NuHu in the Isorian Senatex are given the honorific Senatexis. A typical army might include only a handful of NuHu amongst its number, sometimes even just one, but the role of a NuHu is vital in focusing, expressing and guiding the IMTel-advised combat shards. Only rarely are NuHu placed in dangerous situations, typically in charge of missions of exploration or retrieval – especially where new or alien technologies are involved

Although physically weak, the NuHu's ability to manipulate nanospore fields endows them with powers that are both



Concord NuHu Intelligence Mandarin Jai Galeyou and Vyess bodyguard

tangible and formidable. For this reason, they are usually accompanied by a floating symbiote buddy, a specialist nanobuddy bonded with the NuHu that exudes a cloud of nanites and enables the NuHu to draw and project energy to form protective fields, powerful kinetic bolts, or manipulative forces capable of carrying or hurling great weights.

In combat, a NuHu wields a nanospore focus, a NuHu Stave or nanostave. This is a weapon that creates its own energy-generating nanosphere and which, in the hands of a NuHu, can focus that energy into an attack against opponents.

A NuHu's ability to penetrate the nanite-based communications systems of their opponents is also a considerable asset – though one we cannot fully replicate on the tabletop. When opposing NuHu compete for control of a local shard it is a battle of minds that in most cases only one will survive, for isolation from the shard is practically a death sentence for a NuHu.

Vyess

The Vyess (pronounced vi-yes) are a panhuman morph who made their first appearance early during the Xon Times on university and research worlds. The NuHu rulers of the Xon Empire encouraged the development of specialised mental processes amongst their subjects. One such breeding programme emphasised enhanced pattern analysis aiming to produce intuitions who could extrapolate possible tendencies from nebulous data – an early, non-machine form of the IMTel, perhaps.

From this programme came the Vyess, a people who did not quite match up to the full potential of the NuHu hopes, but to whom the complexities of human society and interactions were easily understood. Where others might see a series of random actions and reactions, the Vyess could see motivations, personal drives and objectives – at times such deep analysis verging on an empathic understanding. Whilst this is not the machine-like intuitions the NuHu hoped for, it did make them incredibly useful in strategic, political and intelligence analysis.

Like other panhuman races, the Vyess were dispersed across Antarean space with the collapsing and re-arranging of the gates but are now found mostly within the domain of the PanHuman Concord. Whilst their skills are appreciated across all panhuman factions, they are most often to be found in C3



Askar Protector-Warriors and Commander

military intelligence units. Their lack of numbers elsewhere means they are rare in Freeborn, mercenary or Isorian forces.

Physically, the Vyess are similar to normal panhuman stock, with the exception of their huge cranium. In games focused on individuals, they are likely to receive advantages due to their ability to assimilate information much faster than normal panhumans; in *Antares 2*, their related increase in empathy results in their statistics being similar to the panhuman standard.

INTELLIGENT NON-HUMANS

Askar Protector-Warriors

When humans first began to explore Antarean space they encountered the Askar, a technologically advanced race of great antiquity, whose worlds spread across a significant portion of the Antarean Nexus. As humans expanded their worlds beyond Old Earth, the Askar appeared unconcerned, watching, but largely ignoring, the new-comers who were but one among many such emergent races. The Askar presence lessened during the Second Age and disappeared entirely from the Nexus after the long isolation that followed the gate collapse at the end of the Third Age.

During the Fourth Age (the Xon Times), the only Askar worlds that returned to the Nexus were discovered to be uninhabited; the Askar congregates long since abandoned and fallen to ruin. The same was true of many human and alien worlds, but where some human planets retained high levels of civilisation and survived to repopulate Antarean space, the Askar were nowhere to be found. From the heights of space-spanning civilisation they appeared to have plunged to the depths of extinction – it would not be a unique fate for an Antarean race by any means, were that to prove the case.

The next contact between the Askar and humans happened many thousands of years later, towards the end of the Sixth Age, during the bitter conflict between the Trisapients and the newly resurgent Vorl. Like the Askar, the Vorl were believed extinct, so it was a considerable surprise when Vorl armies began to raid and destroy human worlds. The Vorl armies of those times were observed to include a number of subservient races, including entire formations of creatures that were soon

identified as Askar. However, these Askar exhibited practically none of the marks of high-civilisation that had characterised the peaceful, progressive and technologically advanced race of former times.

The deployment of trans-dimensional weaponry against Vorl gates would lead directly to the collapse of the Nexus, known as the Trisapient Catastrophe, bringing an end to the Trisapient Age altogether. When the Nexus began to reform thousands of years later there appeared at first no sign of the Askar. However, soon small numbers began to turn up in the service of other races, including their old masters, the Vorl.

Subsequently, Askar appeared as mercenaries for hire in those Freeborn Houses whose routes lay closest to the marches of Vorl space. Following the PanHuman Schism (also known as the Splintering, when the Isorian Senatex divided from the PanHuman Concord) the Askar spread throughout much of known Antarean space upon the backs of the Freeborn as suppliers of mercenary soldiers.

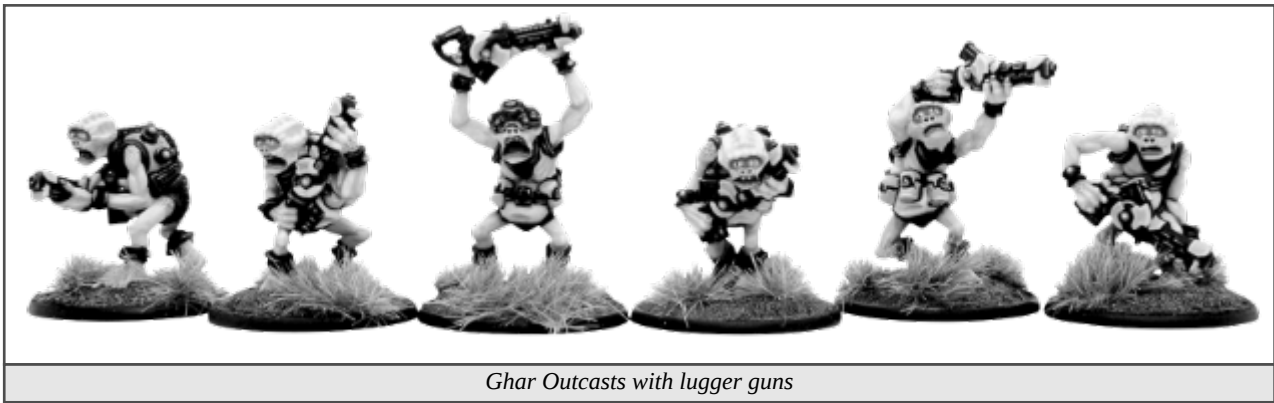
Today the Askar can be found in small, scattered groups throughout the Nexus, where they serve as mercenary warriors in the forces of many different species. They travel the Nexus via the ships of the Freeborn and other, alien races that have need of their fighting qualities. No Askar homeworlds have ever been discovered. Perhaps the surviving Congregations have their own reasons for maintaining a low-profile, or possibly they have been subjugated by some other power, driving bands of warrior-protectors across Antarean space; all this is conjecture and impossible to confirm at the current time.

The Askar Species

The Askar of ancient times lived in hive-like cities called congregates with a number of sister-hives forming a Congregation: the closest thing among the Askar to a nation or planetary state. Although the Askar were then divided over many thousands of worlds, they retained a sense of universal identity which they called the Congregation of Askar. It is not known whether the Askar of today derive from a number of worlds – and hence a number of distinct Congregations – or a single planet. Either way, this does not stop bands of Askar taking opposing sides when employed to do so; certain bands are known to be close and even bitter rivals.

The Askar race is naturally divided into distinct morphological castes that are determined epigenetically by the subtle hormonal signals by which Askar largely communicate. However, at the height of their great civilisation the Askar discovered how to manipulate and control these signals, overcoming the ancient biological processes that condemned some Askar to a life as brutish labourers, others to a role as warrior-protectors, and permitted only a few to attain levels of intelligence comparable to humans. The Askar of ancient times were intelligent, individual and entirely self-aware creatures with advanced technologies comparable to, if not superior to, that then possessed by humanity. However, the Askar encountered today appear to have reverted to the more primitive warrior-protector form. They are intelligent to a modest degree but psychologically and physically specialised as fighters. Whether the hypothetically existent Askar homeworlds retain the full variant of Askar castes is unknown. Only the warrior caste has so far been identified in mercenary service.

The Askar are powerfully built creatures with tough exoskeletons and segmented bodies much like other



Ghar Outcasts with lugger guns

arthropodin races. Their claw-like hands are capable of close and delicate manipulation but are also incredibly strong, able to crush even stone and metal. Their reactions exceed normal human parameters by quite a margin. Askar warriors are a sterile caste with selective intelligence and practically no interest in matters beyond their immediate concern.

Although perfectly communicative in their fashion, no mercenary Askar has ever been able to convey anything of the creature's origin or of its species beyond its own limited role in Askar society. The mercenary bands are led by a warrior chosen amongst them, who will generally speak for the whole band, taking such decisions as are necessary in the band's dealing with other races.

Askar Weapons and Equipment

Askar bands have few needs or ambitions beyond fighting, but when it comes to weaponry and equipment they have an eye for both quality and 'show'. Their preferred armament of choice is the compression carbine – a high-status weapon that is favoured by many independent, freebooter and private forces in Antarean space.

Askar augment their armament with a variety of pistols or close-fighting weapons. The most popular of these is the maglash, with its crackling energy and range, or the x-sling supplemented by slingnet ammunition. A mag pistol is also very popular, with the more deadly plasma pistols an aspiration.

Protection is afforded by means of standard reflex armour, which combined with a naturally tough exoskeleton enables an Askar warrior to stand toe-to-tarsular claw with practically any opponent.

The Ghar Phenotype

The Ghar were created in ages past as soldiers in an ancient war, the details of which are long forgotten even by the Ghar themselves. Their distant ancestors were most likely human but they have been mutated and geneered into twisted, spiteful and pitiless creatures driven by an unquenchable hatred of all humankind. Ghar view other kinds of humanity as vermin that it is their job to eradicate. This deep-seated loathing is probably something that was built into their psyche when they were first created. Today it motivates their entire society and dictates their relationship with all the other cultures of Antarean space.

They are bred in batches, grown in what others refer to as vats – huge breeding containers in a Hatchery. Each batch of Ghar is intended for a particular purpose: perhaps janitor duties, assembly workers, technicians, miners, starship crew, pilots

and similar tasks. The most respected of the ordinary Ghar are those troopers bred for war in the Ghar battlesuits.

Above the battlesuit-trained Ghar are the various Force Commanders and above them, the High Commanders. Such superior Ghar are bred with enhanced genetic, strategic and military traits who also have the advantage that every other Ghar has an in-built gene of obedience towards the highest ranking Ghar in their society.

Ghar are as pitiless in their dealings with each other as they are with their enemies. Lesser Ghar who displease their masters might be lucky to become Outcasts – slaves whose lives are to be expended at the convenience of their masters. Ghar were created to fight in their formidable battlesuits, enclosed within its metal shell and connected to its mechanical systems by neural plugs in their spines. As a result, the Ghar creature itself is small and feeble, having a high threshold to pain but a slight frame – though out of their shells, they are quick and nimble.

When it comes to mental acuity, the Ghar's mind is neither curious nor inventive. It is as if its creators wanted to focus the Ghar upon military duties to the exclusion of everything else. Whilst technicians and troopers are bred to have some initiative and spine, the rest of the Ghar workers are just bodies used for accomplishing the Ghar purpose: their mental and even physical capabilities are just enough to perform whatever task they were – and still are – designed to carry out. Life as a lowly, servant-Ghar can be miserable, indeed.

Hükk Bounty Hunters

Hükk is a planet and system that reconnected in the Seventh Age in the sparsely populated, southerly area of the Determinate. It is home to a species who evolved from lone, carnivorous hunters, territorial creatures normally intolerant of others of their kind. The species take their name from the planet: the Hükk (pronounced as a throaty 'Heur-ck' with a heavy 'ck').

The Hükk are intelligent, have a sparse and narrowly focused language but almost no social cohesion or culture. When human explorers in the remote past discovered their world, the Hükk recognised the value of human artefacts and material culture – especially weaponry – but never felt any inclination to learn how to understand or make it. They simply took what they found and adapted it to their own purposes.

Hükk are concerned with individual status, expressed through their ability to establish, maintain and hunt in a personal territory. Since moving into the wider galaxy, territory has changed from being a literal statement of possession to embrace influence and status within Hükk and other panhuman cultures. Whilst others might regard this as merely reputation,

*Hück Bounty Hunter*

to a Hück this is hürakh, an integral sense of self-worth and status, one expressed in a way that other Hück recognise and respect.

Where once they hunted in the forests and mountains of their homeworld, now they hunt throughout Antarean space – for what greater territory could there be! The Hück have become renowned bounty hunters, sought after by those who require their very special services, people who define themselves through their success in the hunt.

Hück have no sense of humour in the sense humans would understand. They have little empathy with other creatures, relating practically everything they encounter into their own terms. They understand that other species and panhumans think differently and have different values, but they privately consider such things to be childish or insane, the typical attitude of ‘herd-creatures’.

To outsiders, Hück appear amoral and without remorse or pity, but they never lie or seek to deceive, merely refuse to reveal information given in confidence. Such deception implies weakness and to even imply such deception is deeply insulting. The drive to maintain and enhance hürakh results in an attitude we could understand as honour: a Hück would never decline a job unless they felt it unworthy of them and they would be insulted to be offered an unworthy hunt in the first place! Once the hunt begins they are utterly focused upon the task, prepared to spend the rest of their lives in pursuit of their target if necessary. Failure means a devastatingly shameful loss of

hürakh, a weakness other Hück will take as a sign to encroach upon their territory.

A Hück rarely kills in anger, indeed, they rarely become angry at all, but they feel insults deeply and would regard it as legitimate to kill someone who had offended them – especially another Hück. They defend themselves if attacked or threatened and think nothing of killing those who get in the way of them achieving their goal. However, they are bright enough to know when to swallow their pride when dealing with humans: they are but foolish, feeble hunters who know nothing of hürakh and what it is to be Hück.

Weapons of the Hück

Hück bounty hunters buy weapons from Freeborn traders and will usually pay to have weapons rebuilt or customised to suit themselves. They are not overly motivated by material riches, but need resources to buy equipment and fund their hunting. They tend to favour magnetic or X- weaponry because it is reliable and within their ability to maintain or repair.

The typical main armament is a customised mag gun, modified with sights and accessories that enable the Hück to take down a target from range. To this is often added an X-sling derived sub-launcher that can take specialist grenades.

However, a bounty hunter is not an assassin, and in most cases a job is only completed once a target has been recovered and brought to a client. That usually means putting down the target at close range and immobilising them so they can be carried away: a mag pistol is always carried as a back-up.

Hück use as much equipment as they think necessary, such as tracking devices, advanced sensory/tracker probes, emplaced passive sensor modules as well as more primitive cuffs and shackles that advanced technology cannot ‘trick’ into releasing the target. When active and in the field – and certainly when fighting amongst a group of others – much of their equipment will have been hidden or left behind in storage.

Hück Hunting Beasts

Hück bounty hunters often make use of pack hunting creatures, as did their ancestors, much as humans may keep hounds. In most cases these creatures are controlled by some kind of neural implant, depending very much on the creature.

Whilst lavan creatures are occasionally used on kill missions, the creatures most often used are specially-bred and tailored angriz, a genetically modified development of ferocious pack hunters who were spread around the Antarean Nexus during one of the many diaspora.

*Isorian Tsan Ra Phase Squad*

Tsan Ra

Tsan Ra are now integral citizens of the Isorian Senatex, playing a major role in their armed forces. This was not always the case as, during the real-space war between Isor and the Tsan Kiri, the two implacable enemies fought over possession of planetary systems that lay between their respective home worlds.

The Tsan Kiri-Isorian war was the largest and most destructive war known to have been fought between two species within the confines of space-time. When that war finally ended, the Tsan-Kiri abandoned their world and disappeared. Where they went to not even the Isorians could guess, for even their advanced space-drives were limited to sub-light velocities. On entering the Tsan's home system, the Isorian fleet discovered that the Tsan Kiri homeworld had been deliberately razed by its former inhabitants – not one living thing remained. Its atmosphere was blasted into space, its land masses turned to molten magma, its oceans boiled away, and nothing but a blackened husk remained. The Isorians would learn nothing of their enemies from the charred remains of their world, which was no doubt as the Tsan Kiri intended.

Despite Tsan Kiri intentions, the unanticipated meld between Isorian nanite-driven IMTel and Tsan Kiri bio-silicate spores allowed the Isorians to infer much about the scientific achievements of the Tsan Kiri. Despite this, it was not until the discovery of an intact hatchery upon the moon of a former Tsan Kiri colony that the Isorians gained the opportunity to study the living Tsan Kiri themselves. The moon where the Tsan were discovered and which they were to recolonise as Tsan Ra, was not part of the Antarean Nexus and lay more than twenty light years from Isor itself. That world, with its mixed population of humans and Tsan, is called Djarn and remains part of the Isorian's domain in local space-time.

The creatures hatched and subsequently raised were – of course – biologically a form of the silicate creature the Isorians called the Tsan Kiri. At the same time these were creatures born into the shard of the Isorian Senatex. Because the Isorian IMTel had already absorbed data from Tsan Kiri bio-spores, the melded nanosphere was perfectly adapted to interface with the new hatchlings: the creatures effectively became part of the Isorian shard in the same way as the human populations of the Senatex. To distinguish them from the Isorian's former enemies the new human-influenced race became known as the Tsan Ra – 'humanised' or reborn Tsan – although they are more commonly called Tsan in everyday speech.

Tsan are sometimes found amongst the civilian travellers within the Senatex, but are most frequently seen within the armed forces of the Senatex. The physical prowess of the Tsan makes them effective troopers in countless combat situations; indeed, their psychological make-up is in many ways more compatible with the business of waging war than that of Isor's panhuman population.

Tsan are long-lived, constantly growing as they age, so the stats provided are an average. Whilst not as long-lived as panhumans, the constant growth means they require extensive and complex gene editing to suppress the eat-to-grow instincts before they become too heavy, too large or incapable of ingesting enough food to keep themselves alive. They are also hermaphroditic, changing sex to potentially reproduce according to losses amongst their number and the proportion of dominant members of either sex.



The insectile appearance of a Virai First Instance

Tsan communication is a combination of sound and scent, the pheromones considerably enhancing the basic meaning in the rhythmic clacking of their mandibles. This means that most communication between Tsan and panhumans has to be mediated by the Isorian IMTel – something that comes naturally to people of the Senatex but which tends to make the Tsan a breed apart from other intelligent species.

The Tsan – of any type – instinctively count and think in terms of formations of 4 (quads) and 8 Tsan (octets), matching their base 4 and 8 thinking – the number of limbs they have and the number of digits on each forelimb. Their commanders end up with titles related to the numbers of troops in their hierarchy, such as 64-, 256- and the senior level 512-Commander. When coupled with their tendency to over-estimate the capabilities of panhumans, these rigid thought processes make them unsuited to high level command in the Senatex military structure – with or without extensive IMTel supervision.

The Virai Dronescurge

The Virai are included amongst the intelligent species as they are a race of evolving, artificial, machine intelligences – Virai coming from 'Viral A.I.'. They have a very structured society, or Hive, at the top of which sits the First Architector, a drone which in many ways is the Hive, all other Virai being an extension of its will. The First has access to a huge databank of knowledge – so large that the Virai have evolved algorithms to only unlock aspects of it when needed.

The First has a number of Secondary Architectors who organise aspects of Hive life, such as defence, exploration, mineral extraction, construction, manufacturing or governing the more widely spread regions in a large Hive. Beneath these are Tertiary supervisor drones who manage specific elements of Virai activity, such as managing a specific mine or controlling an individual manufacturing process.

At the bottom of the hierarchy are the worker drones – termed Constructors – and warrior drones – called Hive Defenders. These come in a variety of forms, the warriors being armoured and intended to have a dual-purpose heavy lifting and defensive role whilst the workers have more varied equipment. Both forms depend on planning and co-ordination from their architectors, so lack initiative.

Defenders are very occasionally specialised into assault drones – almost purely militaristic drones – with combat heuristics and stronger armour and actuators.



Boromite Rock Riders on Locomites

Constructor Virai are multi-limbed workers, scouts, miners or engineers, dependent on the task they have been created to perform. Though poorly armoured and equipped compared with the warriors, their tools and manipulator appendages can still be lethal in close combat. Some scavenging constructors carry equipment equivalent to Compactor Mauls and the heavy, fractal mining tools used elsewhere in Antarean space. Sometimes constructors build themselves literal 'shields' from the same armour used for warrior drones.

We have added stats for Virai separately in the stat sections, below. Full rules for Virai are found in their army lists.

The Virai Form

Virai can be almost any shape, size or design, depending on the materials available in each system and on the patterns available to the First Instance. The only facet of their implementation that is consistent is the hierarchy and the basic function: First Instance – Secondary Architectors – Tertiary Architectors – other drones, where 'other drones' are constructors (with a range of tools), warrior drones and weapon drones. With this in mind, we encourage players to imagine their own Virai forms!

NOTABLE CREATURES

The millions of worlds connected to the Nexus teem with life, despite the many millennia of terraforming and transplantation of lifeforms preferred by panhumans. These are just a few that can be used as templates for other life-forms. Refer to the *Playing the Game* rulebook for incorporating random creatures into your own games.

Angkriz/Patrol Beasts

Used by Hükks and other bounty-hunters, the Angkriz and other patrol beasts are typical of genetically modified warbeasts found throughout Antarean space. Mercenaries sometimes try to train similar local predators for use on raids or as guard animals.

The statistics shown are typically statistics for an enhanced Angkriz as used by the Hükks and the baseline Angkriz as used



Boromite Lavamite Handler with Lavamite Rock Dogs

by many other guard organisations. On the whole, though, the stats vary depending on the exact beast used as many squads just train or insert control grafts into whatever local beasts they come across.

Lavan Creatures

Alongside the intensive bio-engineering project that created the Boromites ran a project to adapt a curious species to assist them in their mining efforts. This project resulted in the species called 'lavans' because of their effect on rock and need to seek out minerals as food. A lavan's fiery digestive system can melt rock and, when suitably goaded, some breeds can spit out their stomach contents – a substance that is not dissimilar to molten lava.

All the various breeds of lavans are one species, their Boromite trainers selecting them when young and training and even tailoring them for the roles the Boromites wish them to take. Few other species can control lavans, the Hükks being one exception. Their primary use and effectiveness is in Boromite mining operations as their natural ability and tendency to tunnel through solid rock in search of specific ores.

It should also be said that using living lavamites instead of more sophisticated drones enables the Boromites to keep many of their less savoury operations secret from others!

Transporting lavan creatures can be difficult, as they are as likely to eat their cages or the hulls of starships as they are to rest. Long ago, however, the Boromites learnt how to place the lavans into a state of somnolence through triggering the lavans natural hibernation state via a neural implant.

We'll go into a little detail on each distinct breed of lavan.

Lavamite Rock Dogs

Lavamites or 'rock dogs' are six legged creatures whose outer shells are formed of thick, silicate plates. After hatchlings, they are the predominant breed of lavans. Though aggressive and ferocious towards those not in their swarm, Boromites control them using implants fastened into their hides.

Lavamites are pretty much made of what panhumans regard as rock and consequently their physical characteristics are all suitably high. Lavamites were never gifted with much by way of intelligence and what brains they began life with are likely to be compromised by Boromite neural implants. This lack of control is not a problem when controlled by a Boromite handler but, if their handler is killed, they are easily driven away by sustained fire.

Lavamite Rock Brood

By feeding hatchlings upon especially digestible rocks it is possible to augment their abilities somewhat to produce a particularly savage breed of rock dog. The finest examples of lavamites are known as Rock Brood, and Boromite master handlers take great pride in such creatures, competing to produce beasts of prodigious size, different colours, and endearing temperament. Rock brood are also faster than the usual kind of lavamite and often handlers have to resort to riding their suspensor platform to keep up!

Even the best handler can struggle to maintain control over Rock Brood, simply because the aggressive beasts regard lesser lavamites as mobile food and devour them. Indeed, Rock Brood tend to be permanently hungry and once in combat they are virtually impossible to control, fighting in a crazed frenzy, sometimes even attacking each other!

Intelligent Morphs and Aliens Base Stats									
Alien Species/Morph		M	Ag	Acc	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special
Askar		6	7	5	6	6	5	7	–
Hükk		5	6	6	7	7	8	9	Wound 2, Tough 2, Subdue
Tsan Ra		6	5	5	7	6	6	7	Transport Capacity 2
PanHuman Species/Morphs		M	Ag	Acc	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special
Algoryn	<i>Optimate</i>	5	5	6*	5	6	8	8	(Follow, Command)*
	<i>Vector</i>	5	5	5	5	6	7	7	–
	<i>Founder</i>	5	5	5	5	6	7	7	–
	<i>Servile</i>	5	5	5	5	6	6	7	–
	<i>Base</i>	5	5	4	5	6	6	6	–
Boromite		4	5	5	6	6*	6	9	Embedded Reflex Nodes
Feral (Human)		5	5	5	5	5	7	7	Savage Strike (common)
Krasz		5	5	7	6	6	7	5	–
NuHu with Nano Symbiote		6	5	6	4	4(7)	9	9	Nucleus, Suspensored, Agile
Misgenics		5	5	5	5	5	7	7	Misgenic Abilities
Panhuman		5	5	5	5	5	7	7	–
Ghar Phenotype		M	Ag	Acc	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special
Command Hatchery		5	6	5	4	4	8	9	Command, Follow, Tough 1 or 2, Wound
Junior Officer		5	6	5	3	4	8	8	Tough
Troopers/Technicians		5	6	5	3	4	7	7	–
Servants		5	6	4–5	3	4	5–6	5–6	–
Ghar abilities are bred into each variation of Ghar by their hatcheries. Command and Follow only apply to Ghar.									
Notes and Special Rules (see the <i>Core Rules</i> and the army lists for those not summarised here)									
Embedded Reflex Nodes: Many Boromites have reflex armour nodes embedded into their hide so have the Res stat of 6(7).									
Follow, Command: The weapons training of optimates is so comprehensive and a mark of pride that it is a rare optimate who would have a lower Acc. Only trainees and cadets would lack the Follow/Command attribute or equivalent abilities.									

Virai Stats									
Infantry Command Virai	M	Ag	Ac	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special	
First Instance Architector	6	5	6	7	12	8	10	Architector, Command 10", Download, Follow 5", Hero, Tough 2, Transport Space 3, Unique, Wound 2	
NuFirst Architector	6	5	6	7	11	7	9	Architector, Command 10", Follow 5", Hero, Tough 2, Transport Space 3, Unique, Wound	
Secondary Instance Architector	6	7	5	7	10	7	9	Architector, Command, Follow, Hero, Transport Space 2	
Tertiary Instance Supervisor	5	6	5	5	9	4	8	Architector, Command, Transport Space 2	
Infantry Virai	M	Ag	Ac	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special (all Transport Space 1)	
Warrior/Hive Defender	6	5	5	7	7	5	7	–	
Assault Warrior	6	5	5	8	8	5	7	Savage Strike	
Constructor	5	6	5	5	6	4	6	–	
Vehicle Virai	M	Ag	Ac	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special (all Vehicle, Large, Suspensored)	
Ancient First Instance Architector	6	5	6	5	13	8	10	Command 15", Architector, Follow 10", Hero, Ace 2, Download, MOD 2, Riders 6, Unique, Assault	
Virai Light Transport Drone	6	6	5	–	12	5	7	MOD 2, Transport 10, Suspensored	
Weapon Drone Virai	M	Ag	Ac	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special	
Virai Weapon Drone	6	6	5	(5)	11	5	7	Transport Space 3, Suspensored, Drone	
Special Ability Overview (see Virai Army List for details)									
Architector: The Virai can command others/ All Virai armies must have at least one Architector. All Architectors gain additional special rules: Army Option(Hive Summons), Reprogram, Repair Swarm and Self-Repair, all of which are covered in more detail in the Virai Army List and in the <i>Core Rules</i> .									
Repair Swarm: Architectors exude a swarm of tiny drones that rapidly repair damage to any Virai model.									
Reprogram: This gives the Architector an extra, special order dice that is used to reprogram nearby Virai units, either to recover from battle damage and stress, or to overclock them and allow them to be reused in a turn.									
Download: A destroyed First Instances can download its mind-state to another Second Instance model in the Hive.									
Riders: The Architector can carry the stated number of Virai Hive Defender drones on its back to be used in Assaults.									



A fearsome Matronite Brood Mother

Lavamite Hatchlings

Hatchlings are the first, hatch stage of the Lavan creature. As the hatchling grows, it moults its stony exterior shell and from it emerges a new, larger and sometimes quite different secondary stage juvenile. Most hatchlings mature into normal lavamite rock dogs, shedding their outer shell several times during the process; others develop the speed and mass to be locomites; and, if fed correctly, a few just keep growing and gradually become creatures of vast size and awesome appearance – the matronite brood mothers!

Hatchlings are tiny when they first emerge but quickly expand until they are ready for their first moult. This means hatchlings can be various sizes all mixed up together. Normally all the hatchlings that emerge at about the same time will swarm together around a brood mother for protection, feeding off the rich nutrients to be found upon her rough gritty skin. Occasionally, the matronite carries so many hatchlings that they swarm from her during an assault to help attack an enemy.

Boromites often adopt hatchlings as pets, studding their stony hides with precious gems and glittering minerals. Less sentimentally, they also use hatchlings as the basis for



Feral Maghris Skark Squad

micromite buddies by scooping out their brains and substituting a nano-net.

Hatchlings are so small that it would be impractical to give stats to individual creatures so the values shown are for a swarm of hatchling creatures. Quite how many make a swarm is anyone's guess and depends upon the size and maturity of the hatchlings as much as anything.

Locomite

Locomites, or Rock Steeds, are just one of the Lavan creatures that sometimes develop from a hatchling brood. They are similar in general morphology to lavamites but taller and more slender. They tower over the squat lavamites, which cower before them, recognising perhaps a creature of superior size and intellect. Boromites make use of these creatures by adapting them to ride or sometimes to carry or pull loads. As locomites are even more violent and intractable than ordinary lavamites it is necessary to implant powerful neural transmitters into their stubborn silicate brains to make them suitably obedient. Boromites also like to race these creatures and vast sums are often staked on the outcome.

Matronite Brood Mother

The brood mother – or matronite to give the creature its proper name – is the largest and most extraordinary Lavan species of them all. Yet it begins life as a hatchling quite indistinguishable from its siblings, and it is only its extraordinary capacity for growth that comes to mark it out as a species of a vast and different kind.

The matronite is the breeding stage of all Lavan creatures so it is tempting to think of it as 'she'. However, Lavans have no gender as such and there is no male equivalent of the matronite. Although matronites are usually described as laying 'eggs' this is also slightly deceptive as the eggs in question, though spherical and egg-like in appearance, also have tiny legs which they employ to scuttle off into cracks and crevasses deep within the rock where they incubate for anything from a few days to years and possibly even centuries – the length of time highly dependent on the matronite's feed and health when they were spawned. When eggs hatch, the small hatchlings gravitate towards a matronite, if one is nearby, and feed upon the flakes of scale that she sheds for this purpose. If a matronite is not present when they hatch, then can lurk about in small caves for decades before either dying or finding enough mineral-rich grit on which they can feed.

Brood mothers are so vast that Boromites make use of them to pull heavy loads as well as to wage war, carving out fighting compartments within the beast's stony hide to carry men and weapons. Whilst most lavans are aggressive, the transition to a matronite turns them placid, even gentle, perhaps to prevent them eating their own offspring! The only aggression seen is when another matronite encroaches on their territory, at which point they have to be restrained or controlled to prevent the outbreak of a deadly combat. As a result, suitably powerful neural implants are used to make the matronite see the enemy as encroaching on their territory and turn them into a savage beast. In combat, however, the matronite either steps on most things in its path or, failing that, barges them out of the way.

Mhagris Skark

Mhagrids are creatures native to the world of the Mhagris, a planet of scalding deserts, ancient ruins of fallen cities, and sparse cactus-like vegetation. Mhagrids are adapted to extreme

aridity in a fiercely competitive environment where all living things must kill to survive. They are, for the most part, flying creatures that come in all shapes and sizes from creatures a few inches long to monsters as large as a vehicle.

A mid-sized mhagrid is commonly referred to as skark (meaning 'flying beast') and bears some resemblance to a dragonfly. Despite their ferocity, they are occasionally domesticated and used as beasts-of-burden or war-mounts by the feral humans of Mhagris. Other wild varieties of skark are hunted for food or are put to all sorts of uses from building materials to medicine.

Feral warriors of the Mhagris ride skarks in their long-ranging raids against rival tribes and often clash in the scalding desert air. As the Mhagris are now under the domination of the Oszon Mercantile League, it is in the feral companies of the Oszoni and their allies that skarks are most often seen.

The stats below include those for the skark and its rider: the rider contributes the mental stats and accuracy.

Similar Feral Creatures

Whilst skarks and their flight-capable metabolism are unique to Mhagris other, terrestrial, riding creatures are found amongst the ranks of non-Mhagrid ferals. One such are the fearsome Kryghal, statistics for which are provided.

Xilos Creatures

The long-abandoned Gatebuilder ruins on the world of Xilos had become long-overgrown by the time of the Xilos crisis. During the hard-fought campaign against the Ghar that led to Xilos' isolation, all the armies fighting on the surface had to contend with the unique fauna of Xilos, arthropods who had infested its jungles. These were dangerous, strange and came as somewhat of a shock to the panhumans and aliens who thought they were facing purely human-like or Tsan foes.

Before Xilos's isolation, the Freeborn ships and transports involved in the battle managed to steal away some of the exotic fauna to trade across the Determinate. Without the harsh environment and threats of Xilos, the Xilos gulpers, snappers and drummers quickly adapted on their new worlds – and proved to be a more complex, single creature in various life stages rather than separate species.

Without their own population as a brake (it is thought the gulpers preyed on drummers who, in turn, preyed on the various snappers), the environments seeded with lowly snappers and drummers suffered a population explosion. Far from being the safari enclaves they were supposed to become, they are now deeply dangerous places to be: gulpers have appeared, and the local wildlife is disappearing.

Wherever the snappers, drummers or gulpers were seeded, the expanding population of the creatures of Xilos is now a cause for concern.

The creatures exported from Xilos most closely resemble the kinds of creatures classified as arthropods. They have segmented bodies and shells, some of which are hard casings, others are soft and leathery. Their internal organs are supported by a network of internal ligatures. They have no equivalent of lungs, but breathe through vents in their bodies, and oxygen is dissolved into their blood steam by means of osmotic membranes surrounding their vessels and major internal organs.

Xilos Gulper

Gulpers are among the largest Xilos arthropods, although it's rather hard to tell how big they are because what is seen of them above ground is only the fore-portion of a much longer and bulkier burrowing creature. Although the visible part of their segmented bodies appears worm-like, this is merely the front or 'neck' part of a complex arthropod, similar in its general anatomy to smaller snappers. The entire creature has countless tiny legs that propel it through the tunnels it excavates beneath the loose jungle floor. The upper body usually sits just below the surface, and the creature waits for a victim to pass overhead before lurching upwards to grab it. The unfortunate prey is pulled down, held fast by the gulper's three huge mouths, and consumed.

Even now, not much is known about the habits of gulpers because they mostly go unseen. They can certainly grow very large, but exactly how big no one knows. The very largest may be referred to as 'giant gulpers', but there is no exact standard for measuring such things.

The gulpers' favourite habitation is loose soil, such as that seen in the jungles of Xilos. Although they are plainly not adapted to live in rocky interiors, the Gatebuilder ruins and system of interconnected tunnels provided a suitable niche to which at least some gulpers were adapted and they have taken this adaptation to the worlds on which they now dwell. Those that have adapted to tunnel or cave life are generally smaller, perhaps because the size of the tunnels is a limiting factor, and are sometimes known as cave gulpers.

The stats given here represent a common, mid-sized gulper. Note that it is MOD2 so, if used in a game, at least two Creature Event Dice are needed (see *Playing the Game* for creature rules) for its activation.

Xilos Snappers

Snappers are fairly small arthropods that live (or lived!) in great numbers both in the jungles and among the ruins of Xilos. The explorers dubbed these creatures 'snappers' because of the noise they made as they scuttled about in search of food. Only recently has any attempt been made to fully categorise the fauna of Xilos: the snappers were thought to represent different species, some of which are entirely harmless whilst a few are more aggressive and potentially deadly. Now, it is believed that the various type of snappers



Xilos Gulper

are all part of the same species, one that is able to rapidly adapt its genetic make-up and behaviour according to the environment in which it is hatched.

In general, snappers are communal animals that live in burrows in the ground, among leaf litter, and sometimes within the rotting carcasses of the world's tree-like flora. They dig through debris and prey upon small animals as well as scavenging the carcasses of larger creatures. Snappers are creatures of simple instinct, with only a rudimentary sense of self-preservation, and this in itself makes them dangerous in large numbers. They can dig their way through even hard rock – their burrows came to riddle the Xilos Gatebuilder ruins, for example – and on planets where they have been transplanted, they are threatening to do the same to undefended settlements.

The stats given represent the more dangerous of these aggressive scavengers and small predators in a swarm of three,

perhaps on a 40mm base like lavamite hatchlings. More snapper swarms can be used to represent a larger community.

Xilos Drummers

Drummers are large, solitary arthropod predators, one of the most deadly creatures of the Xilos jungles. The explorers dub these powerful hunters 'drummers' because the noise they make when they attack is like a staccato of drum beats. It appears that this noise confuses the creature's prey or perhaps even stuns the creatures that make up its diet.

Like snappers, drummers were thought to be a single species albeit one that varied considerably in size. As the creatures have been spread across the Determinate, it is now thought they are yet another, intermediary stage between snappers and gulpers, or one that has adapted to hunt in a particular fashion.

Creature Stats									
Creature		M	Ag	Acc	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special
Angkruz or similar	<i>Baseline</i>	5	6	–	6	7	6	6	2 Attacks SV2, Savage Strike, Beast
	<i>Enhanced</i>	5	6	–	7	8	6	6	2 Attacks SV2, Savage Strike, Subdue, Beast
Patrol Beast		5	6	–	6	7	6	6	2 Attacks SV1 (Subdue), Beast
Skark with rider		8	7	5	6	6(7)	As Rider		1 Attack SV3+rider, Savage Strike, Aerial, Mount (Beast)
Kryghal or similar ferocious mount		6	6	5	6	7(8)	As Rider		1 Attack SV2, Savage Strike, Mount (Beast)
Xilos Drummer		7	9	5	7	7	7	7	2 Attacks SV3, Savage Strike, Drum Stun, Beast
Xilos Gulper		5	5	–	10	15	7	7	3 Attacks SV4, Large, Savage Strike, MOD2, Humongous Beast, Subterranean Movement
Xilos Snapper Swarm (3+models)		6	9	–	7	5	7	7	3 Attacks SV2, Beast
Additional Notes and Special Rules (refer to the <i>Core Rules</i> for those not listed here)									
Aerial: Counts as suspended and not true, flying creatures									
Drum Stun: When the drummer makes an assault it can fire once in PBS to represent its bizarre drumming. If a hit is scored there is no damage caused but the target suffers 1 pin if it is a non-Xilos creature, and D3 pins if it is a Xilos creature or is without external armour or armour fields.									
Subterranean Movement: The gulper model represents the foreparts of a vast creature most of which is under the ground. When it moves, the gulper pops underground or the visible bit ploughs its way along the surface. It cannot move through or into buildings, or through or into terrain that is impassable, but it can move under such things and pop out the other side if it has sufficient movement distance to do so. Because the gulper moves through or under the soil surface it does not need to take Ag tests on account of terrain, so its Ag stat is largely redundant although it is provided for special situations (vorpal charges for example). When the gulper assaults a target it attacks from underneath and so cannot be engaged in point-blank shooting.									

Lavan Creature Stats									
Lavan		M	Ag	Acc	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special
Hatchling Swarm		4	5	5	6	7	6	5	Lava Spit SV1; 3 Attacks SV1, Beast
Lavamite Rock Dog		5	5	5	6	7	6	5	Lava Spit SV2; 3 Attacks SV2; Savage Strike, Beast
Lavamite Rock Brood		6	6	5	7	8	6	5	Lava Spit SV3; 3 Attacks SV3; Savage Strike, Frenzy, Beast
Locomite (Mount, with rider)		7	6	5	8	7(8)	6	5(9)	Lava Spit SV2; 2 Attacks SV2+rider, Savage Strike, Hit & Run
Matronite Brood Mother with Boromite crew		4	4	5	10	15	6	9	Lava Spit SV6, Hatchling Brood×3, MOD2, Extra Large, Humongous Beast, 2 Attack SV6 Massive Damage,
Additional Notes and Special Rules (refer to the <i>Core Rules</i> for those not listed here)									
Lava Spit: Lavan species spit lava as part of point blank shooting during an assault as a ranged weapon.									
Matronite: The stats show a matronite and crew without the addition of further equipment. The crew's role is simply to operate any weapons and direct the creature by means of neural implants much as if it were a vehicle.									
Transporting Lavans: Locomites & matronites cannot be transported in battlefield transports; all lavamites and hatchling swarms are medium sized and take up one transport space.									

Unlike the various kinds of snappers, drummers are always found alone and it has been observed that when two drummers meet they either warily avoid each other or fight, with the loser either scuttling away or – often – being killed outright.

Fortunately, the percussive noise of two drummers fighting is so intense that it drives all other creatures away and serves as a general warning to all. Whilst drummers are essentially creatures of the jungles they can also be found in caves deep underground, or in mines or subterranean ruins, where they squeeze along the passages made by smaller creatures such as snappers.

The stats given represent the most commonly encountered, medium sized, drummer.

Dangerous Flora

Described here are plants that might be found around Antares. In general, dangerous flora should be, or should be within, a small item of area terrain, called contaminated terrain. When the contaminated terrain is entered, the dangerous flora releases its deleterious effect or attack – players should decide between themselves which areas may be contaminated, or else an umpire can secretly note four or five areas of contaminated terrain. Either the umpire can decide beforehand the dangerous flora in the terrain, or the players could decide on a particular species or could even determine the dangerous flora at random.

However they are used, the many worlds of Antares have countless more such plants: players should feel free to create their own to match their own scenery.

Whipvines

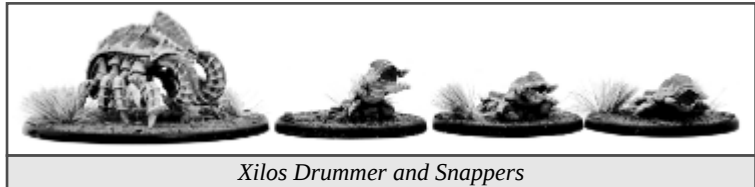
Whipvines were once household, climbing plants, their light tendrils curling round to fasten on any kind of support. Over the years, they have grown and retained their core ability to seize on an animal moving near to or amongst their tendrils. Once a prey is seized, the tendrils tighten and pull it closer, sometimes choking the beast as it flounders and attracts more prey, mostly halting as the beast exhausts itself. Unable to move, the prey dies and rots, providing the plant with the necessary nutrients for life.

Whipvine is only found in obscuring, difficult terrain that contains other flora. A unit with medium-sized or small models moving through such contaminated terrain that fails its terrain Ag test must immediately take a Str test to avoid becoming entangled in the whipvine. An entangled unit immediately takes a pin and goes Down. If an entangled unit fails its subsequent Recovery test, it treats the result as a roll of 10 and takes another pin.

Na'Alene Scent Trap

Once seen as charming, though ghoulish, household plants that fed on insects, Na'Alene scent traps have now grown to giant size. They have huge flowers with many petals, on the surface of which are fine, soft hairs. The plants exude an attractive, heady scent that is intoxicating to most oxygen-breathing life. Those who resist its charms are drawn to bury themselves in its flowers, at which point they are coated in a contact poison that is released by the numerous hairs. At small doses this is merely an irritant, but at high doses this can cause heart failure.

The Na'Alene scent trap affects any small or medium-sized, biological lifeform that lacks enclosed enviro-suits. Affected units in the contaminated area must make a Co test – some



species gain a bonus to such tests due to their physiology. On failure, the unit takes a pin and goes Down. Any time an affected unit fails its Recovery test whilst within the contaminated area, it must save against a single hit at SV0.

Thornstrike

Once tall shrubs with long, trifurcated tendrils that lanced up through the canopy, the thornstrike was also prized for its attractive foliage and unusual thorns. It lives in undergrowth where the fading light from taller trees in the canopy darkens the decaying detritus on the forest floor and offers shelter for creatures. The thornstrike lives on such creatures, its leaves and branches responding to movement by stabbing any that come past in the hope it will die, decay and provide nutrients for the struggling plant.

The shrub was once seen as an interesting ornamental specimen and even useful for natural vermin control. However, with the collapse of civilisation, thornstrike plants adapted with heavier thorns and swifter responses. Now, it has multiple strikes, each in a slightly different location as its thorns blindly seek out weaknesses in the armour of its prey.

Whilst the thorns are heavy, they are relatively weak compared with the advanced armours of Antarean space but the plants are persistent in their attacks. Any units moving within 3" of an area contaminated by thornstrike are attacked by the thorns, suffering three hand-to-hand attacks at Str 6 and at SV 0, pins being suffered as normal for hand-to-hand attacks.

The thornstrike can be destroyed: it has Res 7 and Wound 2. It does not take pins.

Taskarr Popper

The Taskarr popper was originally used to generate calming pheromones and attractive scents within the arcologies that encrusted the icy planet's warmer equator. It has spread elsewhere but on Taskarr, at least, the millennia has meant it has evolved into something much more sinister.

The plant resembles a mix between a traditional fungus and an upright plant, with leaves and a scaled, thorny, domed top protecting the seedpods and flowers that dangle beneath it. The flowers were altered to appear all year round, in a variety of attractive colours and soothing scents. Once fertilised, the genetically enhanced seedpods exploded and released geneered pheromones along with their seeds. At the time the plant was harmless and a useful contribution to urban harmony when placed into parks and in communal areas. As it evolved, the popper's seedpod developed to issue a poisonous gas and the explosion became dangerous.

Any units moving within 3" of an area contaminated by poppers is attacked with 1D3 shots at Acc 5 and SV1, each hit having the Blast keyword. A hit means the unit takes a pin from shooting, as normal.

The popper can be destroyed, having Wound 2 and Res 7. It does not take pins.

THE PANHUMAN CONCORD

The PanHuman Concord is a highly integrated, prosperous and post-scarcity society of free panhumans and drones run by NuHu Mandarins and assisted by an IMTel (Integrated Machine Intelligence). All members of society are saturated by their nanospore and, on advanced worlds, implanted with everything needed to enhance their wellbeing. The Concord is opposed to their original founders, the Isorians, and consider themselves the champions and leaders of free humanity. Of course, their opponents claim them to be a power who takes over the minds and lives of those they encounter, irrespective of whether or not such integration is requested or not.

The PanHuman Concord was established by the Isorians when they were reconnected to the Nexus at the start of the Seventh Age. The beginning of the Seventh Age is reckoned from the re-establishment of contact with the Isori system approximately 1325 years ago, and just over three thousand years after the end of the Trisapient Age.

The Concord is a society of plenty, a civilisation based on an advanced, integrated machine intelligence (IMTel) dominated nanosphere in which NuHuman (NuHu) Mandarins play an important, leading role. Whilst many worlds that reconnect to the Nexus have regressed, or have primitive technology by Concord standards, the IMTel finds a way to integrate itself with the local technology and gradually upgrade the world to the advanced technologies used by the rest of the Concord. This upgrade is universally welcomed, says the IMTel, as it brings comfort, well-being, health, sustainable resource usage and ultimately post-scarcity social constructs to the worlds it absorbs.

Critics, principally amongst the Freeborn and Algoryn, claim the Concord suppresses individual expression and fosters an attitude of social and cultural homogeneity. The Concord's IMTel disagrees, pointing out that it integrates all the capabilities of the many panhuman species within its borders, maximising the potential for individuation in every single member of its society.

EVOLUTION OF THE CONCORD

The Isorians used their advanced technological base to reconnect the human universe. With this technology sweeping across Antares, a new civilisation quickly developed: the PanHuman Concord. Key to this advanced civilisation was the IMTel the Isorians had developed to connect their disparate, real-space civilisation that spanned multiple star systems. The IMTel integrated knowledge resources automatically across whole systems by means of a self-sustaining nanosphere. Even those few worlds with nanospore-enabled technologies found the Concord IMTel overwhelming – and almost all welcomed the integration and technological innovations brought by the expanding civilisation. The Concord spread rapidly as more worlds rejoined the Nexus and its influence soon encompassed a large portion of the Antarean surface.



However, Isori was involved in a real-space war with the Tsan Kiri. When they won the war, about 300 years into the Seventh Age, the Isorians had inadvertently altered – or had corrupted – their nanosphere such that it was hostile to the Concord IMTel. Approximately half the worlds of the PanHuman Concord would subsequently divide and form the Isorian Senatex, but both the Concord and Senatex continued to expand as more worlds rejoined with Antarean space.

Today the PanHuman Concord comprises more than a quarter of all the advanced human worlds of the Antarean universe – over a million and a quarter star systems. It is comparable in extent to the Isorian Senatex.

CONCORD/IMTEL SOCIETY

The PanHuman Concord is the most technically advanced human civilisation ever to exist, although in many respects it cannot be described as a human civilisation at all. It is a society of both human and machine sentience bound together by integrated machine intelligence or IMTel. Those planets which have been integrated ultimately offer a post-scarcity, utopian society in which humans are free to devote their lives to chosen endeavours entirely free of compulsion, or the necessity of toil and unwanted responsibilities.

Body-IMTel Integration

Thanks to the IMTel's integration with the human body, illness is almost unknown and citizens can expect to live for two hundred and fifty years or more. Although the human physique will eventually wear out, an individual's consciousness can be replicated in a clone or machine body, conferring a kind of immortality upon those prepared to endure it.

This close level of integration between humans and machines operates through the medium of the planet's nanosphere. Nano-implants seed themselves into the bodies of every human born upon on a world, binding them into the connective consciousness of the world's machine-minds. As a result of this connectivity the nanosphere constantly harvests data from its citizens, and collective decisions are made based upon information gathered from every human and every machine mind. There is no one source of this decision making process. Data is analysed and sifted, predictions are made, resources

allocated and people and machines directed in accordance with the IMTel's collective understanding.

The IMTel is no specific machine or machines, and is not a person or body of people; it is an amalgamation of every human thought and desire and every mechanical observation and calculation. The Concord is free of politics and social organisation in the sense that 21st-century humanity would understand these things. Everyone contributes to decision making unconsciously and decisions are reached collectively without troubling individuals for their consideration or input.

Humanity Within the IMTel

Humans born within IMTel societies neither have to think for themselves nor would they consider it appropriate to do so. Such knowledge as they desire or information they require is available to them and anticipated before they are even aware of their need. To its untold billions of people the Concord is a paradise in which humans are free to pursue such challenges as appeal to them, cultivate their cultural and artistic skills, and explore the endless opportunities for understanding and pleasure that the IMTel offers. Driven by the collective desires, needs and anxieties of its citizens, the IMTel of a world simply does what is best for everyone. Taking everything into the balance, the IMTel is unable to make mistakes. The IMTel is in every way the perfect society.

All the citizens of an IMTel nation are provided with the IMTel's assessment of what they require, often without them really being aware of what it is they need or want. To anyone raised within the Concord, this kind of placid acceptance comes as second nature: trust in the IMTel is absolute, throughout society. No human being is better than another – nor better than machine or alien sentence.

Despite this, and whether they are aware of it or not, some humans form an elite within the IMTel because the IMTel recognises them as uniquely useful to its overall operation or finds them especially suited to undertake specific tasks. Conversely, there are those panhuman morphs – not individuals – who lack full physiological compatibility with the nanosphere and are not entirely recognised by the IMTel. Whilst there are very few panhuman morphs with this incompatibility, the Boromites are one example of an extreme panhuman morph who cannot be fully integrated into the IMTel nanosphere.

Lack of complete integration does not prevent individuals interfacing with the IMTel, because every device, every machine and every other person they interact with serves to connect them mechanically. In this respect they are no different from anyone else, whose conscious relationship with the IMTel comes via devices, drones and other kinds of interface.

NuHu and the IMTel

However, there are some whose relationship with the IMTel is especially close because their minds have evolved to work consciously with the nanosphere. They are the panhuman morphs called NuHumans or NuHu. Whilst other humans are unconsciously part of the IMTel, the NuHu are intensely aware of its presence. It is a constant companion to them, an infinity of accompanying voices, something that is as much a part of them as their heart beat or the blood pulsing through their veins.

Commonplace Geneering

'Geneering' refers to genetic engineering, the deliberate alteration of genes to gain a specific result or benefit in the host. Around Antares, the sophisticated societies of human space no longer consider gene-splicing and genetic implantation as in any way unusual. These are techniques that are routinely used to repair injuries, regenerate organs and rejuvenate aged bodies.

Geneering is also used to modify undesirable physical characteristics, whether cosmetic or actually injurious to health. Indeed, most citizens of such worlds would be amazed to learn that there was ever a time when an arm or leg couldn't be rapidly regenerated in a bio-tank, or where genetic diseases couldn't be corrected practically instantly. On many worlds these same techniques form the basis for personal and recreational body morphing, allowing those with sufficient wealth to change their appearance or even their gender.

On some worlds the fashion for body pigmentation or patterning makes it possible to encounter people whose skin is tinted blue, or violet, or orange – or whatever is the latest and most fashionable colour of the season – and even in extreme cases for the panhumans to sport lizard-like skin and even feathered crests.

Born and growing up within the IMTel means that NuHu become dependent upon it to a far greater degree than other panhumans. Separation from the IMTel reduces a NuHu to a cataleptic state from which few recover easily. Because of their close association with a nanosphere, NuHu are able to make conscious use of its capabilities, drawing upon the energy of nanospore to manipulate objects, activate machines; within an IMTel nanosphere, NuHu can even make accurate estimates of the thoughts of those around them. In turn, an IMTel recognises its NuHu as fully integrated extensions of itself, agents able to undertake specific tasks that require human assessment and action.

NuHu who have proven especially effective within the IMTel are often directed to serve its ends time and time again. They become fully agents of the IMTel and an elite within an elite of human society. Their integration is almost total and whether they are entirely human at all is a matter of doubt. The NuHu are simultaneously the masters and slaves of the IMTel; individuals, but also a tiny fragment of a collective sentence; living creatures, and yet dependent upon the IMTel to survive. These extremely powerful NuHu are the Mandarins of the Concord, the human expression of the IMTel and as much part of it as any machine.

THE CONCORD AND THE WIDER UNIVERSE

As with all aspects of the PanHuman Concord, its relationships with other civilisations are determined by the IMTel. Concord spacecraft carry their own individual nanosphere, and when that craft contacts other craft or other worlds that have their own nanosphere, the nanospores from each nanosphere begin to mingle.

As part of the intermingling of nanospore, data is transferred and information updated. In this way, the IMTel of individual nanospheres interface together and conjoin. This interfacing takes place across the Concord as IMTel integrity drones,

Concord ships and Freeborn vessels travel between its millions of worlds. This means that not every world's IMTel is identical at any one time, because every world is in a process of generating data and then sharing it. But this sharing can only take place via the spacecraft – and the speed of re-integration is limited to the paths such ships take across the surface of Antares.

The individual nanosphere of a world, spacecraft or any isolated body is referred to as a shard. Shards can be thought of as hierarchies with smaller shards sharing informing with larger ones, and so on all the way up to the PanHuman Concord as the biggest shard of all. Everything in the lowest-level shard shares the same data, but higher up the scale the shards are separated first by light-speed delays within systems, and then by travel time delays between systems and the larger, multi-system shards called segments.

This sharding reveals the nature of the Concord IMTel and a potential weakness: it is a collective of individual IMTels maintained across millions of worlds. Fracturing can take place and Concord shards may, for a while, regard each other as hostile. This means that war can even break out between Concord shards, though the nature of the IMTel results in such conflicts being short.

The Concord itself is not deliberately expansive, it does not intentionally seek to subvert or colonise new worlds, but the very nature of Concord nanospore means they will always attempt to form a unified nanosphere. The more advanced another society is, and the more it is dependant upon its own nano-based technologies, the more easily it is absorbed into the PanHuman Concord. This is what the worlds of the Determinate most fear and, for this reason, they build sterilisation and quarantine zones around their planets and station armed fleets around their system gates.

Defence against the IMTel

Worlds can protect themselves against Concord nanospore by not allowing their technology to interface with it, but the Concord technology enjoys the advantage of total integration, allowing it to overcome resistance given time. The surest defence against contamination comes in the form of nanites called nanophages designed to identify and destroy unrecognised intruder nanospore.

Ultimately, if sufficient Concord nanospore can be generated to become a self sustaining shard, they will inevitably overcome any planetary defence and form a nanosphere, after which the world effectively becomes part of the PanHuman Concord. When we consider how the PanHuman Concord explores space, trades with other civilisations, and wages war, it is important to remember that these things are all undertaken by the IMTel. The IMTel acts in the Concord's overall best interests, which is to say in the interest of everyone within it.

To serve those interests the IMTel is constantly exploring Antarean space to gather data about potential threats and opportunities. Based on data collected in this way armed forces may be dispatched to occupy planets, destroy potential threats, gather further information or seek cooperative relationship with other worlds.

The Concord always deploys its resources in the most effective way to meet its needs, and might therefore ignore some worlds entirely whilst exploring, invading or even destroying others. There may even be the opportunity for diplomacy of sorts with

other civilisations. This is one of the fields where the IMTel makes direct use of its NuHu elements, recognising the necessity for a 'human touch' in dealings beyond its borders.

The worlds of the Determinate have good reason to fear the PanHuman Concord. The IMTel itself is devoid of ambition and malice. It is also intolerant and pitiless. Contact with the Concord brings its own risks. Although Concord technology is highly prized, it is safest to acquire it through intermediaries such as the Freeborn. As a result, Concord explorers who reach Determinate worlds are destroyed utterly if possible. Every space faring world keeps a close guard over its gate to ensure that data probes never make it back to the Concord. Better to destroy a world entirely than allow its shard to become subverted and the secrets of a whole race or federation to become part of the Concord IMTel.

To the free thinking peoples of the Determinate the PanHuman Concord is all too easily imagined to be a monstrous all-consuming power whose citizens are slaves to inhuman machine intelligence. That the intelligence in question seeks only to nurture and protect the countless individuals that comprise it is of little comfort to those who value their own distinct cultural values and traditions, as illogical, irrational and inefficient as such values might be.

Isorian Incompatibility

Because the Isorian Senatex and PanHuman Concord share a common origin they are practically identical societies in many respects. However, their respective IMTel has developed a root incompatibility that means nanospore can no longer interface, each recognising the other as inimical. The result is an irreconcilable struggle between the two most advanced societies of Antarean space: whenever they meet, each of them attempts to merge with the other and share data, simply because that is how the IMTel functions, but very quickly each IMTel perceives the other to be an attack upon itself and is spurred to its own defence.

Whilst it is possible to imagine these warring societies as bitter enemies, the truth is that they are simply incompatible in terms of their IMTel. They are locked into a cycle of data assessment and self-protection from which neither can escape, forcing them into opposition without any clear objective other than preservation. As a result there is no peaceful contact between the Concord and Isorian except through the medium of the Freeborn.

CONCORD ORGANISATION

Contrary to popular belief, the PanHuman Concord has a highly distributed organisation, each system being a separate shard able to make its own decisions about its future. The IMTel broadly keeps the differences to a minimum, but the vast distances and times for updates to each separate shard even across the Antarean surface means such differences can grow and, occasionally, cause a separate or conflicting Concord shard to come into being. This can cause a brief moment of conflict within the PanHuman Concord, but the winners eventually overcome the losers with their own IMTel shard, absorb the losers and, inevitably, influence the other shards around them. In this way, the Concord adjusts and becomes seamless once more, the changes almost invisible.

The Concord Cultural Normalisation Service

In addition to its Space Navy and the IMTel Integrity Service that ensures IMTel propagation, the Concord has two other, major services that are concerned with space and exploration. This first is the Concord Survey Service (CSS), tasked with finding and exploring new gates both within the existing political boundaries of the Concord and beyond its borders. Having found a populated world, the CSS reports its findings to another, important – and perhaps sinister – service: the Concord Cultural Normalisation Service, or CCNS.

Not all planets the Concord absorbs have the technology to support a nanosphere based IMTel from the start. Many planets reconnected to the Nexus have collapsed into a state of barbarism, normally through a lack of resources, but sometimes due to local predators or war, and occasionally through a ravaging disease that struck the populace sometime in its past.

Whatever the technology is, the IMTel finds a way to influence, guide and assist those within its embrace. Whether by newspapers, tracts, public meetings, primitive radio, television or computers and telecommunication systems, the IMTel ceaselessly communicates with those it protects and guides, using the media the populace is most comfortable with at that moment in time.

In any new system, the CCNS exists to help the locals adjust. It is unsurprising that myths and legends abound amongst reconnected civilisations that tell of a time of plenty and magic – scientific wonders – and of people from the sky. The CCNS teams use these myths to explain what is to happen, then demonstrate the benefits of the advanced IMTel society to the locals.

Apart from cultural realignment, the CCNS improvement to local health practices, education and lifestyle is a multi-pronged affair: better medical services, sanitation, education and even food preparation. This is not mere vanity, but experience has shown that the more locals see their health improve and their hunger fade, the more likely they are to welcome the Concord.

Cultural shock has to be avoided and techniques are encouraged over technology, hi-tech gifts are only handed out rarely and as special rewards, medics are spread around the planet treating illness with the advanced technologies and nanospore of the Concord. Eventually, these locals embrace the benefits of the Concord and become another shard in an expanding IMTel.

The Concord Combined Command (C3)

The Concord armed forces are the most sophisticated and most powerful in all of Antarean space, rivalled only by those of the Isorian Senatex and the Vorl Synthesis. Its operations are directed by a shard within the IMTel known as the Concord Combined Command or C3 for short. C3 not only sends troops to where they are needed, but also recruits, trains and equips military formations from vast spacecraft to humble strike troopers. Because military formations risk contamination of their nanospore from other advanced societies – in particular the Isorians – the C3 is to some extent isolated from the rest of the IMTel. It interacts with the IMTel through a series of intermediary security shards that filter information and redact data that might infect the IMTel itself.

C3 Drop Troops

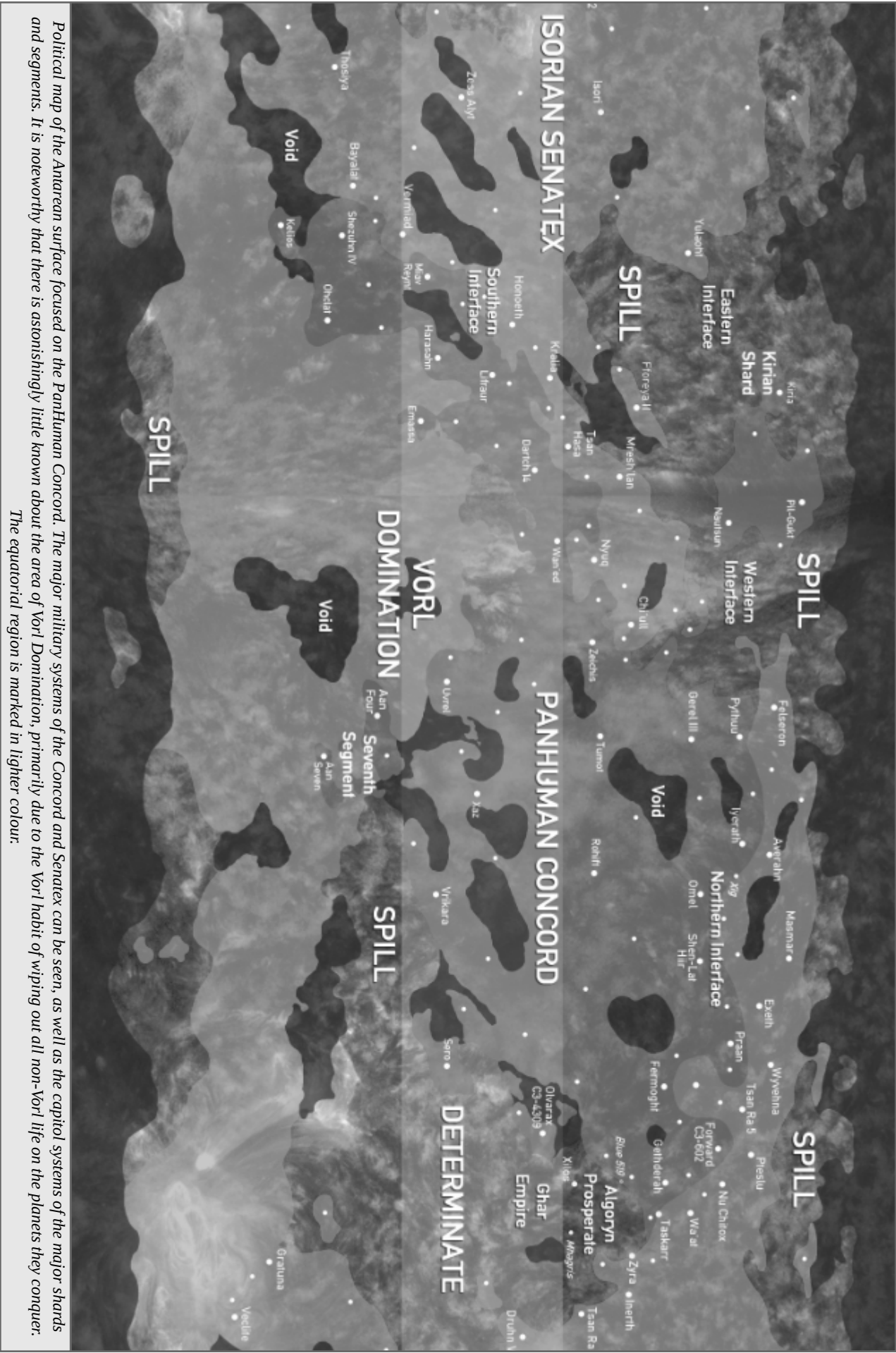
C3 Drop Troops are sometimes regarded as the elite C3 troops – at least by those outside the Concord. To ensure their survivability and impact, only the best troops are chosen, typically from the stronger and slightly larger human morphs, the most frequently chosen being those with Krasz ancestry. To ensure IMTel predictability, drop troop impact and to comply with Concord wellbeing protocols, the drop armour is given strength assists in addition to a suspensor chute, making it a little more bulky than normal hyperlight armour.

In turn the C3 creates its own subordinate shards to form independently functioning task forces. These factors give the C3 something of the quality of an independent and distinct organisation, setting it apart from Concord society and the IMTel as a whole. This is – of course – a deliberate policy of the IMTel formulated in the best interests of everyone concerned. Isolation of C3 within the IMTel means that ordinary citizens of the Concord are spared the unsettling experience of sharing the horrors of war endured by its armed forces.

Recruitment into the C3 takes place much like all other allocations of resources within the Concord. The IMTel recognises the need to build its formations and selects from its citizen body those who are most certain to benefit from military service and whose service would most likely benefit society as a whole. Being citizens of the Concord and accustomed to having decisions made for them, new recruits are invariably only too pleased to know that the IMTel is acting in their best interests. None object and it would be rare for anyone to even wonder why they have been selected: after all, everyone knows the IMTel does not make mistakes!

It is only once recruits are safely within the shard of the C3 that the previously protected citizens become soldiers. Suddenly, the comfortable certainties of life in the Concord are behind them and they are forced to think for themselves. The reason why the C3 forms its own distinct shard becomes obvious very quickly after that!

Concord forces are highly advanced and C3 units form interconnected shards fed by spotter drones and sophisticated combat interfaces. Many of the roles undertaken by human troopers in other armies are performed by drones in Concord forces. These come in all shapes and sizes from small ‘buddy’ drones that accompany troops in battle to vast heavy combat drones protected by their own array of buddies carrying force-shields or acting as spotters. Troopers are protected by extremely effective hyperlight armour and are armed with plasma carbines capable of variable fire modes: man for man there are few enemies that are their equal.



THE ISORIAN SENATEX

The Isorian Senatex is the most technologically advanced of all the panhuman civilisations on Antares. As a result of a wartime miscalculation, their original technology has been melded with alien technology making them incompatible with the original IMTel (Integrated Machine Intelligence) civilisation they founded, the PanHuman Concord, and they are now considered a separate and dangerous shard.

The Senatex is a highly integrated, prosperous and post-scarcity society, predominantly of panhumans and the alien Tsan Ra. It is run by a council of NuHu, the Senatexis, assisted by the all-pervasive IMTel. All citizens of the Senatex – panhuman and Tsan – are saturated by their nanospore and, on advanced worlds, implanted with everything needed to enhance their wellbeing.

The Senatex considers itself the most superior organisation on Antares, logically destined to absorb the whole of humanity and its accompanying alien species. Other Antarean civilisations consider the Senatex to be arrogant and intent on imposing their own, warped civilisation on every other civilisation.

The Isorians are arguably the most influential panhuman people in the Seventh Age of Antares. Whilst Antares had been reconnecting gates for millennia before Isor was reconnected, panhuman dates and times are measured from the date Isor was reconnected to the Antares network.

The world of Isori has been at the centre of Antarean technology and civilisation for several ages, renowned throughout all of Antarean space for its pioneering dimensional research, its vast fleets and its unrivalled prosperity. It was one of the three key centres of panhuman science, civilisation and learning during the Trisapient (Sixth) Age and certainly the most powerful, extending a benevolent governance and influence over millions of human and alien worlds of Antarean space.

Whilst founding the PanHuman Concord with their new IMTel technology and watching it quickly spread throughout Antares, the Isorians were also fighting a major, real-space war against a strange, silicon-based, warrior species: the Tsan Kiri. The reconnection gave them substantial reinforcements, enabling them to fight back the Tsan Kiri over the next few hundred years but, in the process, their own nanospore became altered – some say corrupted – by those they defeated. That change and forced adoption of Tsan bio-silicon nanosphere ended up making them enemies to the very institution they founded – the Concord – and so began the Splintering, the separation of the Isorian Shard from the PanHuman Concord.

Now the two great IMTel nations are at uneasy war on their borders, virtually unable to communicate except through Freeborn intermediaries. It is not that they hate, merely that the two nanospheres and IMTels are totally incompatible and see the other as a virus, an assault on the very fabric of their own technology. The Northern and Southern Interfaces are where the two great and advanced IMTel nations warily square off against each other, unable to make peace and occasionally



fighting over new worlds and gates that open between their great civilisations.

THE SENATEX IN THE SEVENTH AGE

According to Isorian legend, the planet Isori was amongst the first of Old Earth's settlements founded during the First Age, the first world to be fully terraformed and the first to establish colonies independently of Old Earth. As the ages passed, Isori was hailed as a paradise where want and strife had been dispelled by the power of advanced science and rational government.

During the long period of isolation that followed the collapse of the Sixth Age, many human settlements failed altogether. Advanced civilisations declined to barbarism. Only in a very few places was the light of knowledge carried onwards. One such place was Isori, with its long history of technical expertise and the unique resources of the Isorian system behind it.

A REAL-SPACE CIVILISATION

The catastrophe separated and isolated Isori from other human worlds. However, it did not prove devastating to Isorian civilisation as it did to so many others, human and alien alike. The Isorians merely pondered the universe as they now perceived it. They foresaw a future where even the resources of Isori would be exhausted. None then knew when or even if the Antarean Nexus would re-establish itself. The Isorians cast their eyes towards the nearest stars.

Several other planetary systems lay within twenty-five light years of Isori's sun Isor, though none were known to have ever formed part of Antarean space. Only spacecraft travelling at substantial fractions of light-speed could journey to these remote stars and their planets. Unmanned explorer probes had already investigated the closest two, revealing possible sources of raw materials and at least one rocky world that might one day be terraformed and settled; no humans had ever attempted the journey because it took even the fastest spacecraft decades to reach the closest of these new worlds from Isori. It even took five years for information to be transmitted between the two systems at light-speed, and the power requirements for such transmissions were immense.

Human settlement was seen as impractical and unnecessary.

With isolation all that would change. The Isorians applied their immense technical and engineering resources to the tasks of improving their real-space space drives and increasing the endurance of their spacecraft and their crews. The flexible nature of space-fabric had long been understood, and the Isorian's used this knowledge to build ships capable of reaching near-light speed – an situation previously thought impossible. This reduced the time taken to reach the stars by almost half.

Within a few decades the first colonies had been established within the Oblon and Tsates systems. Although these advances made it possible to travel to new planets, the Isorian colonies were still separated by a communications link of five years for Oblon and nearly eight for Tsates. Only an armada of drone craft could hope to maintain either colony. Over the next century these first Isorian colony worlds became firmly established, though not yet fully independent, and the Isorians prepared to expand to even more distant stars in local space. Within a thousand years the Isorians had explored and settled five planetary systems and built up a network of far-flung colonies separated by years of travel and communication time. The settlements were serviced by drone fleets moving between the different planetary systems, connecting the new worlds to each other and to Isori itself.

It was only after three thousand years of real-space expansion in this way, that contact was re-established with the Nexus. Suddenly the Isorians were able to reconnect with the wider universe of Antarean space but they found a universe very different from that in the Trisapient Age.

The gates that now rose from the Antarean surface did so in entirely different places than before, so the proximity of one world to the next was quite different. It was as if Antares had been discovered for the first time, and no one knew which gates led where. The whole process of discovery had to begin from scratch. Furthermore, very few human worlds had survived with anything like the level of advanced civilisation that had been almost universal during the Sixth Age.

Many human societies had degenerated, some to simple savagery, but most to a technical level that no longer supported space flight. Many human populations had perished entirely, lost to natural disasters, wars or disease. Over the centuries that followed the world of Isori found itself the leading light of a new human renaissance. Isorian explorers eventually rediscovered many of the most populous and technically advanced worlds of the Sixth Age only to find them abandoned or fallen to barbarism.

Having carried the torch of human knowledge during the long darkness, the Isorians were able to rekindle the spark of civilisation wherever they found human survivors. This new Isorian civilisation spread rapidly thanks to the development of integrated machine intelligence – IMTel. IMTel was originally created as a means of conveying technology to the new Isorian colonies of local space, automatically updating each new system with new technology, science and information when ships arrived and automatically updating the incoming ships with the discoveries and state of the system.

Now other human worlds that had preserved an advanced nanobased technology were soon joined with the new civilisation. Every new world fed data into the IMTel, further promoting mutual understanding and spread of knowledge. As

more and more worlds emerged into Antarean space, they became part of a burgeoning human universe.

This civilisation became known as the PanHuman Concord, a union of IMTel Shards bound together by shared machine intelligence. And so the Seventh Age began, and the PanHuman Concord spread until it encompassed the majority of the advanced human worlds of Antarean space.

THE TSAN KIRI WARS

At about the same time that the Isorians established contact with Antarean space, an explorer probe arrived in a new planetary system some twenty five light years from Isori. The craft vanished practically as soon as it approached the sun's inner planets, but of course no one on Isori would know of this for twenty five years. By that time the most distant Isorian colonies had already been attacked and wiped out. The probe had stirred an enemy, but what kind of enemy none could yet guess. In response the Isorians mobilised their fleets, and so began the centuries long struggle between the Isorians and the strange alien race of Tsan Kiri.

The Isorians knew little about the Tsan Kiri other than that they were a race at least as technically advanced as themselves. The two civilisations strove for mastery not only in battle, but also in the technologies that were vital to both. Isorian subverter probes released clouds of nanites onto Tsan Kiri worlds to infiltrate alien machinery. Alien bio-spore infected Isorian planets and gnawed their way into IMTel databases protected by sophisticated security shards, incompatible data was rejected and alien infiltration was isolated. In return, the Tsan Kiri bio-silicon nanospore armed itself to repel the attempts of Isorian probes to subvert it.

Battles raged over the Isorian colonies, but as the fighting neared Isori itself the balance of power swung in favour of the defenders. The sheer distances of interstellar space meant that the Isorians were able to bring their forces to bear upon an enemy whose own lines of communication were stretched across more than twenty light years of space. When the Isorians went on the offensive, the two civilisations had been at war for nearly two centuries. In that time, the Isorians had met their foes upon the battlefield innumerable times, had fought them in the depths of space, and had contested asteroids and the very stars themselves. They came to know their enemy very well.

Unusually, the Tsan Kiri were a silicon-based life form, in appearance almost spider-like, though possessed of great intelligence and uncompromising ferocity. They had destroyed several nearby neighbouring races before encountering the human colonies of Isori. Using near-light speed drives they had built an empire of a dozen or more star systems. Their homeworld lay almost forty light years from Isori: a huge distance over which to wage an interstellar war.

As the Isorians gained ascendancy upon the battlefield, so too they began to overcome the resistance of the Tsan Kiri technology. Much of this alien technology was based upon a biomechanical principle inherently incompatible with human technology just as it was resistant to it. Ironically, it was the Tsan Kiri themselves who provided the Isorians with the means to infiltrate their technical base.

The aliens had devised a silicon-carbon interface spore as a means of attacking the Isorian IMTel at source. At first this was successful and the machine intelligence of the Tsatean Shard

was corrupted giving the Tsan Kiri access to all the knowledge of the IMTel. What the Tsan Kiri hadn't appreciated was that IMTel, deprived of its layers of defence by the interface spore, rather than rejecting the influence of the Tsan Kiri technology very quickly merged with it.

Unaware of what had happened, Isorian spacecraft carried the modified IMTel from Tsates to Isori. Soon the new hybrid IMTel had spread into Antarean space itself and to the worlds of the PanHuman Concord. This half-human half-alien IMTel brought many new wonders to the worlds it reached and brought many other strange things beside.

It took a further century for the Isorians to completely overcome the Tsan Kiri. When they arrived at the alien homeworld it was found to be incinerated and lifeless, abandoned by the aliens as they fled from Isori's resurgent armies. Where the Tsan Kiri had fled to no one could guess. By now the Isorians carried new technologies that combined the best of both civilisations. Isorian troops were protected by phase armour and their bodies encased in bio-silicon interface suits. The nanospore of the hybrid IMTel filled the air, flowed in the water, and pulsed through the living tissue of Isorians and all the worlds touched by the new IMTel.

As the new hybrid IMTel spread throughout the PanHuman Concord it encountered IMTel shards increasingly remote from Isori. These distant worlds had preserved sufficient differences in their IMTel that it proved incompatible with the very different IMTel of the Isorians. This wasn't a conscious decision or anything that came to the attention of human understanding. It was simply that two separate integrated intelligences no longer recognised each other – they were no longer integrated. They had become incompatible.

The Isorian IMTel and Concord now formed two separate civilisations that shared a common ancestry, but which were unable to interface. Their populations, driven and moulded by integrated machine societies, neither recognised this as a problem nor considered it a matter they could address. They simply divided. They had become, through no human will or intent, two separate shards. The shard that was host to the Isorian IMTel simply became the Isorian Shard – although upon Isori itself it is known as the Isorian Senatex – the ancient and eternal title of Isorian society.

ISORIAN SOCIETY

The worlds of the Isorian Senatex are part of a fully integrated machine intelligence in exactly the same way as the PanHuman Concord. In fact the two societies are practically identical in most respects, sharing a common origin and much of the same technology even though they have been developing separately for hundreds of years. Although their respective IMTel remains incompatible, thanks to the trade links both have with the Freeborn, many scientific advances have passed between the two societies. Very few technologies remain entirely unique to one or the other. However, the Tsan Kiri derived bio-silicon technology that distinguishes the Isorian Shard is unique to the Senatex and effectively defines its Antarean boundaries.

In previous ages, the Isorians were governed by a council of technocrats called the Senatex, members of which were known as Senatexis. They included amongst their exalted ranks some of the finest human minds of all time, most of which were NuHu, these advanced humans having evolved upon Isori and

Senatex Species and Morphs

The Senatex is now a fusion of Tsan – or, more correctly, Tsan Ra – and panhuman, aided considerably by their merged technology and nanosphere. Whilst the Isori founded the PanHuman Concord, the Senatex now makes much less use of widely different panhuman morphs in their armed forces than their former civilisation. This is partly because there are fewer substantial numbers of divergent morphs within the Senatex, partly because the Senatex IMTel focuses on predictability and conformance to a standard panhuman physical and psychological profile, but mostly because there are now huge numbers of militarily more capable Tsan Ra within Isori society.

Throughout the Senatex, their NuHu are the major influence on society, politics, government and direction, even though they are relatively few in number compared with the multitude of panhumanity and Tsan Ra. The most important, those on the ruling council, were originally referred to as Senatexis but this has now become an honorific given to all NuHu in the area of Isorian influence.

proved effective – sometimes legendary – leaders. From the First Age, Isori and the worlds under its influence, its colonies and its allies, became known as the Senatex after the governing body until, during the Sixth Age, the Isorian empire was generally known as the Isorian Senatex.

Today the title of Senatexis is applied ubiquitously to NuHu within Isorian society. They are the human element of the IMTel in the same way as are the Mandarins of the PanHuman Concord. There is, of course, no formal governing body or council within the Senatex any more than there is in the Concord. The Senatex has simply become the term the Isorians use for their own shard, the Tsan influenced IMTel that is common to the millions of worlds of the Senatex.

Administrative Structure

In the Senatex today, the title of Senatexis is applied ubiquitously to NuHu within Isorian society. They are the human element of the IMTel in the same way as are the Mandarins of the PanHuman Concord. The primary difference between the Senatex and Concord is that the Senatex is now more centralised than the Concord. Whilst NuHu and notable panhumans across the shard guide the Senatex' political and administrative decisions, strategy and directions made by the senatex and other councils on Isor influence the shard significantly more than those on the periphery.

It is not just NuHu who are asked to contribute to the various councils, each of which govern an aspect of Isorian life. Panhumans and Tsan Ra are invited to contribute to the Senatex and are also invited to hold active positions on the various peripheral councils – on defence, health, science, art or similar councils. All such bodies are dominated by NuHu and panhumans, with Tsan a significant minority – though Tsan contribute more to the art and defence debates than their numbers might suggest.

The dominance of the Isor councils is a natural reflection of the war-born footing of the Senatex' nanosphere. Like the Concord, scientific, social and intellectual developments and thought emanate from many points within the Senatex, especially institutions that focus on particular aspects of

Antarean life. This information update spreads from the originating system through the IMTel, updating those systems around the source system like ripples on a pond as each system is visited by Isorian or Freeborn ships carrying the updates.

Normally, the updates are reconciled with each other, the IMTel merging the information and assigning new probabilities of completeness based on its core data. The merged information becomes yet another update that ripples out – and back – to new systems and other sources of information. This constant to-and-fro allows for ideas to be expanded upon and for the IMTel to develop a more concrete idea of Antarean life (the data within it is, of course, merely a model of reality).

Whilst the Concord tolerates this constant wave of updates and conflicting information (the IMTel uses probabilities, after all), the Senatex' IMTel sees such conflicts as the indication of a weakness, one that an enemy can exploit. Such conflicts are resolved in favour of whatever data is closest to that held by Isor, any information that conflicts with the central Senatex and councils being significantly downgraded.

Though the process can take up to four or five months to take effect, the Isorians have a greater density of message drones emanating from Isor than the Concord. But like the Concord, any system that has departed from the core ideologies of the Senatex in that time undergoes a brief and often deadly conflict until it is realigned with the centre.

Of course, this process has its strengths and weaknesses when compared with the Concord IMTel. The advantage is that there are no separate shards or segments within the Senatex – every system and shard tends to think the same way and operates on fundamentally the same data. This allows the Senatex to respond to threats quickly and ensures a level of stability in everyday life that is the envy of many in more chaotic societies.

The downside is that the centralisation can create a static society, a resistance to change that emanates from anywhere but the centre. Local threats and issues are downplayed and even warnings from the fringes of the Senatex can be missed. Society, lifestyle, aspirations and even building design is more similar across all the worlds of the Senatex than in any other panhuman society.

Absorbing other systems

For the Senatex, those systems that it discovers that have been reduced to a pre-technology society are ideal for absorption by the Senatex. The Senatex IMTel has a direct approach that assumes the locals will welcome its advances once they understand the benefits of IMTel-assisted existence. Until then, however, opposition can only be interpreted as a potential act of hostility.

In contrast to the Concord and its CCNS, rather than woo the hearts and minds of the locals, the Senatex Stabilisation and Inculturation Corps (SSIC) waits until an absorption task force is fully assembled and resourced. Whilst minerals and resources are extracted from asteroids and planetoids in the system – no doubt by Boromites – agents and operatives are brought in from the nearby systems and starbases. Its standard absorption protocol is specialised for the local context and then put into operation on all the planets, continents and societies in the system in one go.

The SSIC strategy is to launch an overwhelming integration and technological upgrade programme on the planets to be absorbed. As opposition is likely to be minimal, the Senatex rapidly builds settlements and towns across the continents and islands of the planets to be absorbed and quickly establishes manufacturing facilities and nanospore generators.

Mixed Tsan-panhuman political education and propaganda teams are dispatched from the settlements to address the leaders and citizenry of each society to be absorbed. These SSIC education teams demonstrate the powers and capabilities of the nanospore and advanced technology. Whilst they wait for the nanosphere to spread, the teams may give medical assistance or give insights into the technological advances to come. However, the SSIC teams' focus is on removing and destabilising resistance to the establishment of an IMTel nanosphere on which an advanced, Isorian manufacturing, medicine, food and transport infrastructure can be established.

In this education and stabilisation activity, the SSIC is not averse to using subterfuge, espionage, and discretely-applied force to overcome resistance help the locals adjust. Field Agents are taught various means of manipulation up to the use of discretely applied force. The argument is that one who resists the IMTel is either a spy for another faction, is IMTel-resistant, or is likely to cause significant issues once a nanosphere is established.

Of course, the SSIC does not use assassination as a matter of course. Instead, it prefers to transmat recalcitrant leaders up to its ships and orbitals around the planet to be integrated. If the trip isn't enough, the (no doubt terrified) leaders are shown the Isorian weaponry and technological marvels to demonstrate just what the IMTel can do for them – or to demonstrate the sheer hopelessness of resisting the Senatex.

And if all else fails, the armed forces of the Senatex are not far behind.

THE SENATEX AND THE WIDER UNIVERSE

The Isorian IMTel functions in the same way as that of the PanHuman Concord, though is arguably more aggressive in outlook than the Concord due to the influence of the Tsan. Where it contacts other advanced, nanobased societies the IMTel seeks and absorbs data, exchanges data in return, and ultimately functions to expand the society of which it is an expression – whether Concord or Isorian. Precautions taken against one will secure a civilisation against both, but neither Concord nor Isorian nanospore can be resisted forever once present in sufficient strength.

To the free human societies of the Determinate or the Spill zones, the PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex are equally threatening. There is no preference for one or the other amongst the people of the advanced worlds of Antarean space, though the warlike Tsan appear to be more aggressive in their integration approach whilst the Concord more benign – or perhaps more insidious. Given free rein, both IMTels will subvert any advanced society they infiltrate.

As discussed under the Concord, when their nanospore come into contact, each identifies the other as a threat – no proper interface is possible. The two IMTels react as if the other were a virus and defend themselves as best they can. Being IMTel societies both attempt to gather data about the other to formulate defensive strategies, seize tactical assets and ultimately destroy the hostile nanospore to which they are

exposed. Without any intent or any human awareness, battles are triggered that rage over whole planets and entire star systems.

The cycle of hostility between the two IMTels is impossible to break. Both sides are equally matched and as one expands into an adjacent part of Antarean space the other extends elsewhere. The free worlds of the Spills and Determinate are often the victims caught in the middle.

Although this means the Isorians have no friendly relations with the PanHuman Concord, technological advances and information about the wider Antarean universe are propagated throughout the IMTel shards by intermediaries, predominantly the Freeborn. The Freeborn strip the original nano-envelope from the Concord and Isorian technology and reshard them with a safe, non-invasive and limited-interface nanospore. It is only the most heavily guarded secrets or those totally reliant on the Isorian IMTel and nanospore that are not spread beyond the borders of the Senatex.

The SSIC and the Freeborn

To the SSIC, Freeborn traders are a welcome sight – providing they play by the rules. The SSICs approach is to establish a nanosphere as quickly as possible and to demonstrate what they have to offer once everything is implemented. The gifts and goods from Freeborn traders are able to operate without such an integrated nanosphere so are a useful demonstration of ‘what will be’ – providing no advanced weapons are sold to the locals.

The provision of weapons is, however, what the more hungry and less ethical Freeborn are liable to do. There will always be locals who resist and who see an end to their futile resistance in the advanced weaponry offered by the Freeborn fabricators. Even mag weapons are so far in advance of what the primitives (or ferals) already have that they give vast riches to equip resistance forces with whatever the freeborn can provide.

Of course, the Freeborn do not inform their customers that any resistance against an IMTel society is ultimately a pointless gesture. From the Freeborn’s viewpoint, once the planet is fully absorbed it ceases to be a golden egg, so why not take full advantage of the decades it takes the SSIC to fully upgrade and integrate a primitive planet?

THE FREEBORN HOUSES

The Freeborn are the predominantly panhuman traders of Antares. They typically live aboard their trading ships, the strong alliances between families (domas) forming Houses (vardos) led by a vard. Within the great IMTel nations, they supplement the Concord and Senatex trading fleets by running smaller or more precious cargo between systems as well as ferrying the itinerant Boromite miners and workers between work-sites. The Freeborn also manufacture goods that are in demand on the emerging worlds of the Nexus.

The vardosi (or vardari), as they are called, are said by their critics to be corrupt, amoral and even criminal, eager to make a profit of any kind from anything and anyone, no matter how unethical the deal. The Freeborn reject that accusation, pointing out their strong family, clan and house loyalties, that they service demands of all sorts, from luxuries, to passenger transport, to manufacturing, to supporting the IMTel nations and, at times, by providing mercenaries to those worlds, governments and organisations that need them. And they provide brokerage services, they say, for the more sinister tools of government. Without the vardos, say the Freeborn, there would be no real trade.

The Freeborn are the greatest merchants and travellers of Antarean space. Their vast mercantile fleets carry goods, services, technology and people from one world to another. Although the PanHuman Concord, Isorian Senatex and many of the worlds of the Determinate have space fleets of their own, there are countless human worlds that depend entirely upon the services of the Freeborn and even the Concord and Senatex rely upon the Freeborn in their dealings with other human worlds and with each other: the Freeborn are neutral intermediaries able to travel between rival human and alien worlds where others cannot.

The ships of the Freeborn are their homes, their fleets comprising hundreds or even thousands of smaller craft as well as immense ships, each teeming with perhaps a billion people. These larger ships are usually stationed secretly within star systems that are otherwise hidden amongst the countless unexplored and uninhabited parts of Antarean space, typically those within rifts – areas where the presence of gates are less dense.

Freeborn are very secretive about the gates they control or that they have discovered, so it is impossible to say exactly how many worlds the Freeborn possess. The majority of controlled gates are to worlds rich in resources, exploited by the Freeborn and garrisoned to protect their interests against rivals. Other such gates lead to uninhabited planets, useful only as warehouses and staging posts. Still others gates lead to primitive worlds whose human populations are technologically backward compared with the advanced, nanosphere-based societies of Antares and so easily exploited by the Freeborn themselves; the people from these societies are often disparagingly termed ‘primitive’ or, most frequently, ‘feral’.

Their ships and systems make the Freeborn a powerful force within Antarean space, one that controls vast and potent fleets, immense numbers of troops and resources it is impossible to calculate. Because of their trading contacts with the PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex, Freeborn technology is almost as advanced as those two great IMTel societies and, thanks to their gigantic replicating craft and numerous trading connections, they have access to as many weapons as they need.

THE VARDOS

The Freeborn are not a single people motivated by a united purpose, but hundreds of independent fleets together with smaller fleets in untold number. Each fleet forms its own distinct and rival community called a vardos, often referred to by other Antareans as a Freeborn House. Hence the people as a whole call themselves the vardosi or vardari, roughly analogous to the houses or the house-folk. In most of Antarean space they are called simply Freeborn.

A vardos is an entire travelling race whose people are frequently born, live and die without ever setting foot on a planet. Based mostly aboard their trading ships, whole families live together as travel times across Antares (each trading mission can take 6 months to many years) results in the collapse of planetary-based forms of family life.

The wealth of every Freeborn House lies in its myriad connections and trade routes. These are jealously maintained and often fought over between different vardos. The chief motivation and business of every vardos is to serve and protect its own trading empire, expand its size where possible, and to prevent its rivals doing the same.

The Houses of the Freeborn emerged during the Seventh Age and their power has have grown considerably since the rift between the PanHuman Concord and Isorians. Wars between rival vardos have enabled some to expand and become even more powerful, whilst others have been reduced to the status of vassals, driven to the outer regions of Antarean space, or in some cases destroyed without trace.

FREEBORN SOCIETY

From the very highest to the most lowly of all, the Freeborn are governed by their family relationships, duties, obligations and highly-developed sense of honour. The people of a vardos are its varda, a term which identifies them as belonging to a particular Freeborn House or – more exactly – to each other. For example the people of House Oszon belong to the Vardos Oszoni.

A varda comprises numerous extended families or clans called domas. Within every domas there are influential and powerful families and the head of the most powerful of all is called the Doma – a kind of clan leader. The richest and greatest amongst these Doma make up an upper echelon or aristocracy from which is selected the ruler of the entire vardos - the Vard.

Amongst other human societies the Vard is often called the Lord of the Freeborn House, although the term itself has wider connotations of responsibility and duty that are unique to the Freeborn. The position subsumes social, political and economic connotations and whilst some vard may be referred to by other titles such as Group Chairman, Emperor or Empress, Prince or Princess, or even Managing Director, such focus on a purely business or political angle cannot fully reflect their role.

In theory a vard is chosen by the mutual consent of the many Doma acting on behalf and in consultation with the entire domas. In practice the position is usually handed down to a preferred successor. In many vardos the position is effectively hereditary. Rivalries between aspirant domas and ambitious families often create problems over succession, sometimes leading to civil strife within a vardos and – on occasions – even resulting in its ruin and destruction. The political lives of the leading Doma consist of carefully orchestrated intrigues and behind-the-scenes agreements, sometimes even violence and assassination, with important alliances usually cemented by means of arranged marriages and the exchange of substantial dowries.

The Freeborn domas provide the crews for its many ships, its captains, explorers and the basis for its military. Within the ranks of the Freeborn it is entirely possible to work one's way from humble ship's crew to the captain of a ship and person of great wealth and standing. Where there are cargoes to carry or plunder to be won, there is the opportunity to acquire riches and the influence and power that go with it.

In this sense the society of the Freeborn is a very human one, and although it benefits from highly advanced technologies it falls far short of the kind of machine integration that characterises the PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex. Conversely it is a society where family pride and honour can be overwhelmingly decisive factors that drive vardos into conflict or cause them to take actions without complete understanding of the consequences. This is the antithesis of the cautious, data-driven societies of the IMTel.

The most obvious consequence of this is that a vardos can respond quickly, its Vard making decisions intuitively. To the citizens of the PanHuman Concord the Freeborn are often perceived to be rash, adventurous and carefree of personal danger.

The majority of Freeborn are ordinary humans, but amongst them are a few morphs, a fair few of mixed ancestry as well as alien species and refugees from the Boromite Clans and the Algoryn worlds. According to ancient tradition, those born within the precinct of a vardos become part of its varda regardless of the origin of their parents. Those born to outsiders are adopted into one of the domas. This age-old tradition means that there are humans of diverse origin amongst the Freeborn and, truth be told, the occasional alien.

Not all Houses are historical vardosi. There is one, the Ma'Req, that was formed when an Algoryn optimate moch, was exiled from Algoryn society. The Ma'Req are now little more than a loose collection of freebooters, one that has Algoryn at its core but which is filled with ne'er-do-wells from amongst non-Algoryn panhumans. Many Freeborn and Algoryn consider the Ma'Req an outlaw criminal organisation; others with less delicate principles regard it as a Freeborn House – of sorts.

NUHU IN FREEBORN SOCIETY

Whilst there are a few NuHu who are born and grow up amongst the Freeborn, most Freeborn NuHu are refugees or exiled from the IMTel societies. Whilst all escaping or exiled NuHu are classed as Renegade by the IMTel powers, the term is not strictly accurate as some NuHu have no wish to surrender themselves to the IMTel, despite its advantages. Many such exiled or Freeborn NuHu rise to positions of considerable influence within the most powerful vardos.

The Renegade title is not quite inaccurate, either: there are few NuHu who willingly surrender the power from immersion in IMTel-soaked nanospheres. Those that do surrender such power typically do so because they have been exiled from their origin, typically due to some heinous crime, or are refugees from a military or natural calamity, or are the children of such exiles and refugees.

Amongst these refugees are outsider NuHu who fled the PanHuman Concord following the Aan Shard schism five hundred years ago. Many NuHu sought refuge amongst the Freeborn, but even the Freeborn – mindful of their trading relationship with the PanHuman Concord – proved reluctant to shelter the Mandarins of Aan. As a result, the exiled Aan Mandarins can be found in the smaller Freeborn houses or are spread around the more remote areas of the Spill regions.

Rogue NuHu

There are some amongst the Renegades who are much-feared because of their behaviour, control, political mastery and their manipulation – of people, technology and of genetics. The worst amongst these NuHu are termed Rogue – the very mention of the existence of a Rogue NuHu often a cause of much fear. Through an arrogant assumption of superiority, these NuHu experiment on sapient, sentient and non-sentient creatures, whether panhumans, alien, sub-human or animal. It was these Rogues who created the soma grafts to control their servants: brain grafts that can take over volition. Such Rogue NuHu also experiment to create 'better' (by their standard) humans, such experiments often resulting in the creatures known as Misgenic Rejects.

There are other NuHu sheltering amongst the Freeborn who are insane, typically through a shattered Meld or through some catastrophic failure of an experiment. The problem is that these Rogues typically retain much of their intelligence, are still intimately connected to their local nanosphere, and as such are dangerous – perhaps the worst and most deadly predators on Antares.

FREEBORN TECHNOLOGY

The Freeborn make use of all the technologies common to Antarean space. Indeed, technological know-how is one of the most valuable of all the many things they trade. Often Freeborn explorers are the first to discover and make use of new alien technology. What they do not make themselves they acquire by trade and, when it comes to weaponry, they are adept at recovering equipment that has been lost or abandoned in some Antarean warzone.

Whilst the majority of Freeborn are law-abiding by the standards of much of Antarean space, some are not above blatant piracy if they can get away with it. Thanks to being the quintessential experts in spaceship handling, they are unafraid

to be bold in the handling of their well-armed ships so often succeed in getting away with piracy – or salvage-work as some prefer to call it – where others would fail.

The dangers of engaging in commerce with IMTel societies are something the Freeborn are very much aware of. For this reason the nanospore that supports their society is arranged into a profusion of mutually incompatible and heavily encrypted hierarchical shards. This provides a level of internal security that allows corrupted nanospore to be eradicated and replaced, a process that goes on constantly in every Freeborn craft.

The major problem for the Freeborn is that of any nanospore-using, but non-IMTel civilisation. The IMTel-based nanospore of the Concord and Isorians is so effective their nanospore would overcome any non-IMTel defences given time. So for primary protection, the Freeborn rely upon effective steriliser barriers that destroy all nanospore during transmat transfer.

This means that technology taken from the PanHuman Concord or Isorian Senatex must be repopulated with passive or neutral nanospore, a process known as resharding. Resharded equipment lacks some of the efficiency of the original, but becomes suitable for use within any nanobased society without the risk of contamination.

THE FREEBORN MILITARY

Every Freeborn craft is potentially a fighting vessel, so armed bands of Freeborn – not just crew – may be found serving on board ships, undertaking exploratory missions, or acting as garrisons or guards on any of the planets controlled by the Freeborn. The collective term for troops taken from or employed by and loyal to the vardos – the Freeborn house – is the vardosi.

The richest and most powerful Freeborn families and the houses themselves train professional bodyguards called vardanari. Vardanari units are lavishly equipped and uniformed at great expense, an expression of the grandeur and status of the family they serve. As well as being elite troops, vardanari are trusted attendants and advisers. Officers are often younger relatives of those they protect, and who will one day rise to positions of power and influence within the vardos. Unfortunately, rivalry between the most powerful families means that effective, armed guards are a necessity of life, even in public and amongst allies and friends.

Ordinarily, the vardanari and the few semi-professionals with them are all the Freeborn need. However, when a vard or head of a domas has need of military forces to supplement the small, standing army they call upon a general levy, in effect a militia called the domari.

Domari are often equipped at their own expense, or that of their family, so the appearance and quality of their armour, clothing and weaponry can vary. Clothing is characteristically styled to be loose and flowing in a fashion that is widely favoured amongst the Freeborn. The majority of troopers carry mag-type weapons because they are practical and durable, requiring little by way of complicated maintenance and easy to fabricate. Whilst in smaller detachments, the vardanari and the few semi-professionals are the most common troops to be encountered, in one way or another it is the domari who make up the majority of larger forces.

The military forces of the Freeborn are not just there to fight the vardos' wars, protect its interests and explore the vast unmapped realm of Antarean space. They are also a valuable resource for hire, for the Freeborn are the chief suppliers of mercenary fighters throughout Antarean space. Demand for such soldiers is greatest amongst the rival worlds of the Determinate, but even the Concord C3 and Isorian Senatex has been known to call upon the services of Freeborn mercenary forces as well as the more formal mercenary companies.

Because the demand for hired troops is so great, most large vardos actively recruit, train or arm mercenary forces, some even from amongst the primitive or underdeveloped worlds that they control. These so-called 'ferals' (possibly a deliberately patronising term) are equipped by the vardos often using the most basic or cheapest equipment.

The capability of these Feral Companies varies a great deal. Some are bloodthirsty, feral savages, brave but difficult to control, whilst others from more advanced societies may be indistinguishable from domari. The primitives are sometimes given soma grafts to make them more controllable in combat – a process undertaken by renegade NuHu and regarded as barbaric by many vardari and unspeakable by the other advanced factions.

EXAMPLE FREEBORN HOUSES

We present a few houses of the Freeborn below as examples of their differences and alliances, and as templates, perhaps, for players to design their own houses. Given their widely spread nature and number, almost any form of organisation is possible! Several of these, here, grew from players creating their own vardos as background for their own armies.

House Oszon

Amongst the many thousands of Freeborn Houses is that of House Oszon – the *varda oszoni*. It ranks as one of the dozens of Great Houses of the Freeborn, and is typical of the larger, more successful and ambitious vardos. Its influence is primarily felt within the vast expanse of the Determinate and on the borders of the Senatex, Concord, Prosperate, the Vorl extents and the free worlds of the – sometimes lawless – Determinate regions.

House Oszon has expanded its trade routes and influence over the last hundred years. Several smaller vardos plying neighbouring star systems have sought the protection of the oszoni and together these vardos form the Oszoni Mercantile League. In theory this is an alliance between sovereign vardos. In practice House Oszon dominates the League and its members are little more than vassals operating in the shadow of their larger and more powerful neighbour.

The Vard of House Oszon is Bero Harran. Vard Bero has ruled over his varda for almost a century and is still – in Antarean terms – relatively young. Under his guidance the oszoni have done well, fighting several successful wars against rival Houses and coming to dominate the Algoryn trade routes.

The longest and most testing of these conflicts was fought against the rival House Ky'am, itself the dominant vardos in a loose collective called the Ky'am Freetraders. Ky'am and Oszon had been engaged in a bitter feud for centuries ever since the Ky'amak reneged on an arranged marriage of their Vard's daughter and the heir to House Oszon (and the current Vard's great grandfather). Where matters of family honour are

concerned, most Freeborn are generally implacable, and the two Houses had been enemies ever since. Vard Bero eventually resolved the dispute by defeating the Ky'amak and driving their sorry remnants into the wastelands of Antarean space, satisfying both family honour and that of the entire varda. Following the defeat of Ky'am, House Oszon entered into the Oszon-Algoryn trade treaty giving them an effective monopoly on trade to and from the Algoryn Prosperate.

Oszoni investments in the Prosperate are now considerable, and the Oszon and Algoryn have a mutual interest in the stability of the region. The threat of the Ghar is one that both peoples recognise and oppose, with Oszon fleets intercepting Ghar vessels around vulnerable gates and supplying Algoryn forces on the ground. Oszoni ground forces have also come face-to-face with Ghar intruders on several staging planets garrisoned by Oszon units, although so far they have successfully defended these assets against attack.

One of the most valuable worlds controlled by House Oszon is the planet of Mhagris, home to scalding deserts, ancient ruins of fallen cities, sparse cactus-like vegetation and a feral population of humans of the most savage and barbaric kind. Humans are not the only inhabitants of this backward planet, for it has its own native population of Mhagrid creatures including predatory skarks and gigantic grip worms capable of pulling a man down to his death beneath the sand. The planet has the great advantage of being well hidden. Its gateway lies very low in the Antarean photosphere beneath the level of safe submergence (the so-called critical point). A craft travelling so deep and failing to find a gate would be destroyed. The world gives House Oszon a secure and secret base adjoining the Prosperate and close to both Concord and Isorian gates. It has become an important staging post and supply dump, with a substantial garrison as well as a small self-sustaining settlement that is the closest thing amongst the Freeborn to a planetary colony.

Mhagris has also become an important recruiting ground for the kind of savage warriors the Freeborn train and equip as mercenary fighters. The tribes that inhabit Mhagris are the degenerate remnants of the planet's Trisapient Age population. The ruins of their ancestors' advanced culture lie all around and are commonly attributed to 'giants' and 'gods'. The human tribes of today lead a practically stone age existence. They survive mostly by hunting Mhagrid creatures and cultivating the tough cactus-like plants that grow in the planet's arid soil.

The arrival of the oszoni on Mhagris was greeted with a mixture of suspicion and awe. Some said it was the return of the gods of old. Others maintained it was merely the arrival of an especially tasty meal. It didn't take long for the oszoni to subjugate the natives. The majority of the population were only too pleased to exchange their primitive state for the opportunities of service upon the battlefields of the Antarean universe.

Today the Mhagris form an increasingly important part of the oszoni armed forces as both mercenaries and as a constituent part of the military of House Oszon. The Mhagris regard such service as a great honour, a situation that has led to many being exploited by Oszon's NuHu technicians, implanted with soma grafts, and even used for transgenic experiments.

These things are regarded as unethical even by the Freeborn – who are not generally ones to concern themselves too much with the welfare of people beyond their varda – but they take

*The badge of
House Oszon*



place in secret and with the connivance of the Vard's closest advisers if not the Vard himself.

The few NuHu who live within the vardos are renegades from the Aan Shard who fled from the PanHuman Concord five centuries ago. A few survive from those times, for NuHu are uncommonly long-lived, whilst others have regenerated their minds into clone bodies. They are feared and hated by the general population, and even the Vard and those closest to him have little liking for these cold-hearted renegades.

These NuHu Mandarins of Aan have little respect for their hosts, despising all ordinary humans who they would gladly relegate to servitude if they could. None the less the Vard finds the NuHu renegades useful to him, and so they have proven over the centuries since they first arrived in the court of Vard Bero's grandfather, Vard Manku.

House Delhren

House Delhren is a relatively minor Freeborn merchant house in and around the Determinate that exerts more influence than might be expected. It is a vardos governed by a predominantly hereditary varda and, like all Freeborn houses, it has its own mannerisms, idiosyncrasies and eccentricities. Also like most other houses, it has its own sparse, isolated, hierarchical nanosphere that is a totally separate and secure shard from that of the IMTel nations it may trade with or even from other houses.

As with any other vardos, the Delhren trading ships are scattered across Antarean space. In addition to these, however, the Delhren have a Home Fleet and lay claim to five systems and six habitable planets, depending on the definition of 'habitable' and 'claim'. The planets are referred to as Delhren I-VI, partly for reasons of secrecy but also as a statement to other houses and factions. The house also shares a claim with a number of other houses to Tamala, a source of feral humans – the Tamalair – even more primitive than the Mhagris.

One of the 'planets', Delhren-IV, is a just-habitable moon orbiting a gas giant in the same system as Delhren-III. Delhren-III sits in the Goldilocks zone of the system in which their home fleet is located. Delhren-VI, previously Shamasai, is not yet able to be settled and is intermittently controlled by Ghar.

Leadership of the house is normally passed to the most powerful descendent of the abdicating or dying Vard – there is no primogeniture. Whilst this tradition is meant to regularly revitalise the vardos, in practice this means the position can remain within one of the leading families in the vardos for several generations. However, it does enable the leadership to occasionally switch between the richer and more influential



The badge of
House Delhren

families as intermarriage is common, often even used for political purposes.

Owing to a series of unfortunate 'accidents', the current Vard has no direct, living descendent in his doma (the Tsulmar) which means the jockeying for position amongst his family is particularly acute. It is possible that leadership of the House could transfer to a different clan entirely as his dilettante nephew, Prince Batu, is not seen as an acceptable choice by many in the Delhren and is, anyway, currently in a self-imposed exile.

The Delhren Fleet

The home fleet orbits the system in which Delhren III and IV can be found. The gate location is kept as hidden as it can be for a such a major terminus and access to the gate is controlled by specially built craft in orbit in the Antares photosphere that vets anyone trying to come through. Needless to say, the system-side terminus of the wormhole is heavily guarded by Delhren warships.

The capitol 'ship', the *Vard of Delhren*, is really a slightly-more-mobile orbital habitat and is host to millions of vardari and substantial manufacturing facilities. Other major ships used as habitats are typically all named '*...of Delhren*' and have specialised functions. Amongst these is the slightly smaller *Radiance of Delhren* that is the focus for diplomacy, houses embassies from the primary factions, and has living space for representatives and visitors from other factions, houses or planets.

Ships of the trading fleet are named by their captains or families. Sometimes the names survive centuries if there is honour attached to them. One scout ship, a repurposed Sixth Age hulk, is captained by a half-insane rogue NuHu, The Raya, who has called it *Death-is-only-the-Beginning*.

Tamalair Ferals

The vardos delhreni uses the primitive Tamalair as ferals. These come from a number of clans on Tamala, a world in a system whose gate is deep in the Antares photosphere and masked by another, a gate that leads to the affluent and technologically advanced system of Pherohn. Delhren is one of five signatories to the 'Tamala Accord' whereby five Freeborn Houses commit to keeping its location secret in return to using arena facilities in which they allow locals to fight for the honour of serving the 'skypeople'.

A useful factor that makes the Tamalair so desirable as ferals is their evolved fear response. The harsh conditions on their world after being separated at the end of the Sixth Age has biased their fight/flight/freeze response strongly towards 'fight'. As a result, only limited soma control is normally needed, but Batu Delhren's own Tamalair were, against his

wishes, implanted with full soma grafts by his Shamasai Drone.

Other signatories to the Tamala Accord could be seen as Freeborn allies. Of these, those known are the mercenary house Fenhryr and the highly advanced allies of the Isorians, House Isoptix.

House Isoptix

An almost Isorian-sharded house who is part of the Tamala Accord with the Delhren and others so are known to use Tamalair ferals. Unlike the other members of the Tamala Accord, the Isoptix tend to be given new and prototype technology by the Isorians and are used as a live proving ground. Like their sponsor, the Isorians, the Isoptix regard Batu Delhren in a particularly unfavourable light but remain on friendly trading terms with the Vardos Delhren.

Selection limitations: A House Isoptix force can never contain, nor ally, with any Concord-sharded or ex-Concord troops, equipment and technology. This means they cannot use subverter matrices as they are Concord derived. Being Isorian allies, they also cannot ally with Algoryn forces.

House Fenhryr

The Vardos Fenhryr is relatively small by Antares standards, and specialises in the provision of Feral Companies from the planet Tamala. It is one of the five signatories of the Tamala Accord and makes most use of the Ferals, but is also the least discriminating.

Selection limitations: In reference to the Freeborn Army List, a House Fenhryr force's vardanari and domari units cannot exceed a total of 50 points in any force, but the house can substitute any Feral equivalents for vardanari and domari units. For example, feral infantry squads can substitute for domari or vardanari infantry squads and feral weapon teams for domari weapon teams.

House Cadix

House Cadix is used with the permission of Adam Murton.

House Cadix is most well-known for its provision of military capabilities, personnel and ferals, but it also has extensive non-military trade contacts. It's relatively new Vard is Sellendra Cadix, who spent time amongst the House's major ally, the Oszoni, as part of her training. Major families include the rogue Hajonne domas, who specialised in professional mercenary provision, headed by Lord Braccus Hajonne. The Hajonne felt themselves pushed out of influence due to Sellendra's policy of hiring out Oszoni-sourced Mhagris ferals.

Minor domas include the Teggari and Vexalin, both of whom broker the provision of Mhagris ferals, and approximately 12-15, single-ship domas providing trade and manufacturing capabilities.

Salvageers/Privateers

Eschewing the term 'pirates', ship raiders insist they have a warrant from a suitable authority – even if that authority is the vard of their own house! Others claim they are merely 'salvage workers' operating lawfully to recover abandoned wrecks, and avoid the question as to how they come across so many wrecks in the first place. Suggestions that they may occasionally resort to 'creating' such wrecks are vehemently denied.

The more reputable privateers are Freeborn and Boromites who scavenge wrecked vessels; the less reputable may launch raids on unsuspecting, often primitive, worlds. Small, almost-destroyed and disparate houses such as House Ky'amak are also often referred to – rather scathingly – as privateers.

More than any Freeborn House, however, the privateer ships are a refuge. Anyone might fall foul of the complex laws in their society, may yearn for independence, or might become so isolated from their IMTel that they become a separate shard. Boromites feature strongly amongst the salvagers, with some still part of the Boromite culture, but many do so as refugees or exiles. Such Boromites find a place amongst the roaming salvagers that they find comforting, the work and synergy between the Freeborn resharding techniques and Boromite engineering both extremely effective and similar to that they find amongst their own kind.

Admiral Taras Kalemon is one privateer who gathered a large fleet to raid the newly-rediscovered TOR 563, a ship that was more city than cruise liner. Unfortunately, the massive ship turned out to be controlled by Ghar Exiles who were unwittingly spreading Virai across the surface of Antares. Kalemon's short-lived pirate fleet were almost wiped out in the conflict between the Virai, Freeborn, Ghar, Concord and Senatex.

OTHER TRADERS

The Freeborn people carry out the overwhelming majority of independent trade, transport and communication amongst and between the panhuman systems and factions of Antares. Their area of domination includes much of the Spill and the Determinate, with a few even trading with the non-Vorl systems that appear within the Vorl extents.

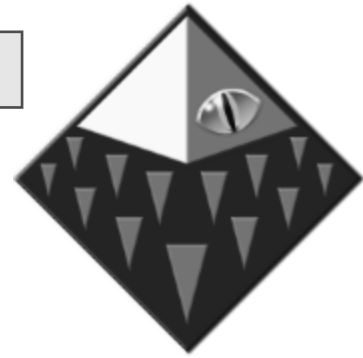
However, is not just the Freeborn who trade. The Freeborn life and structure is predicated upon a panhuman existence, one which can make dealing with non-humans difficult. This is especially true of the Ghar, who physically cannot trade with panhumans, and of the xenophobic Vorl, who refuse to trade with many, non-Vorl species.

It is in the more risky areas that non-human traders eke a living. A few Freeborn pretend to be aliens to trade with Ghar by altering their ship profiles, transmissions and never meeting in person, but such risky subterfuge is regarded as treacherous by most humans – especially Algoryn – never mind if the Ghar discover the conceit!

As a result, many of the larger Freeborn houses have relationships with small, non-human trading groups or even individual ships. These are used as intermediaries (for a price, of course) when dealing with species such as the Vorl or, for the less scrupulous vados, for lucrative trade with species such as the Ghar. Of course, these alien traders try to avoid using Freeborn as intermediaries – for the Freeborn will always take their cut – but it is extremely difficult to avoid the Freeborn houses when part of your trade is with a panhuman system.

A major problem for alien traders is that any trade near the borders of the IMTel nations inevitably draws the attention of the IMTel and local authorities. Having been notified of the existence of a panhuman system, the Senatex or Concord inevitably wants to draw it into the comfort of the IMTel. Vardosi around Antares have their own, established relationship with the IMTel nations and dominate the lucrative

*The badge of
House Cadix*



trade routes between IMTel systems. Against such huge, established traders, the small, alien mercantile ships and corporations (or combines, syndicates, or whatever) have no power and are quickly ousted.

Inevitably, this means the non-human traders are jealous of their trade routes and out-of-the-way systems. They keep their destinations hidden and cannot help but specialise in out-of-the-way systems in the rifts and the sparse upper latitudes of Antares. They are forever on the move, seeking new opportunities and trade routes, and whilst they can even attract the more jaded panhumans, each ship is predominantly a family or similar social construct: a Freeborn domas in all but name and species.

THE ALGORYN PROSPERATE

The Algoryn Prosperate is a multi-ethnic federation, trade zone and mutual-defence league of over 300 affiliated systems and over 3000 subservient systems spread throughout the area known as the Determinate. The militaristic society of the Algoryn founded and dominate the Prosperate in all aspects of governance, expansion and protection.

Whilst their co-members of the Prosperate each have their own society, the Algoryn are divided into castes, or legers, in each of which are what can be considered strongly-tied, extended families, or mochs. Loyalty to one's family and moch is strong, keeping the Algoryn insulated from external dominance.

Those outside the Prosperate often see it as an elitist, militaristic and domineering empire led by a small group of charismatic individuals, leaders who expect total obedience from their panhuman and alien subjects. Whilst the Prosperate's ruling High Council see the Algoryn Infantry (AI) as a tool for stability and order, others see it as an caste-ridden, oppressive, elite fighting force comprised of a single, ruling, panhuman race – the Algoryn – that is used for conquest. Irrespective of the truth, there is no doubt that the ruling Optimate caste gives birth to extremely capable military leaders and the military capability of the AI is respected by all who have faced them in battle.

As we move into the year 1325 in the Seventh Age of PanHuman Antares, the events of Xilos and the political machinations of Special Division General Ess Ma Rahq are threatening the stability of the Prosperate High Council. With the Rahq deposing the much-respected General Tar Es Janar, the influence of the moch Janar has been almost wiped out. This loss of influence has unbalanced the High Council, throwing it into turmoil. The previous alliances between the ruling mochs may have been constantly shifting but were, at least, a system of checks and balances that kept it secure; now many see the Rahq as not only having much too much power and influence but also unafraid to wield it to its utmost.

The High Council is now in chaos, its members fearing their fate at the hand of General Ess Ma Rahq and her moch – the lessons of her ruthlessness have been understood. Given the militaristic nature of Algoryn society, the opponents of the Rahq see only one outcome, the destruction of their mochs. Against such a threat, there can be only one response: the Prosperate is now on the brink of civil war. The only event preventing such war is the reunification of the Ghar under Fartok

THE PROSPERATE

It is important to separate the worlds and systems of the Prosperate from the Algoryn, the panhumans who are its dominant, military and civil leadership. The Prosperate comprises a large number of panhuman systems as well as a few alien species, the most dominant of which are the peaceful Tchaxth (or Tch'thax or Tchax – there is no direct human



equivalent to the Tchathys language and even the most sophisticated machine-intelligences struggle to comprehend it in detail). Due to the military capabilities of the Algoryn, the Algoryn Prosperate is the largest independent federation of planets lying upon the Antarean borders of both the PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex. With its ruling High Council dominated by the mochs of the Algoryn optimate, the Prosperate is still centred around the Algoryn capital, Algor.

PROSPERATE SOCIETY

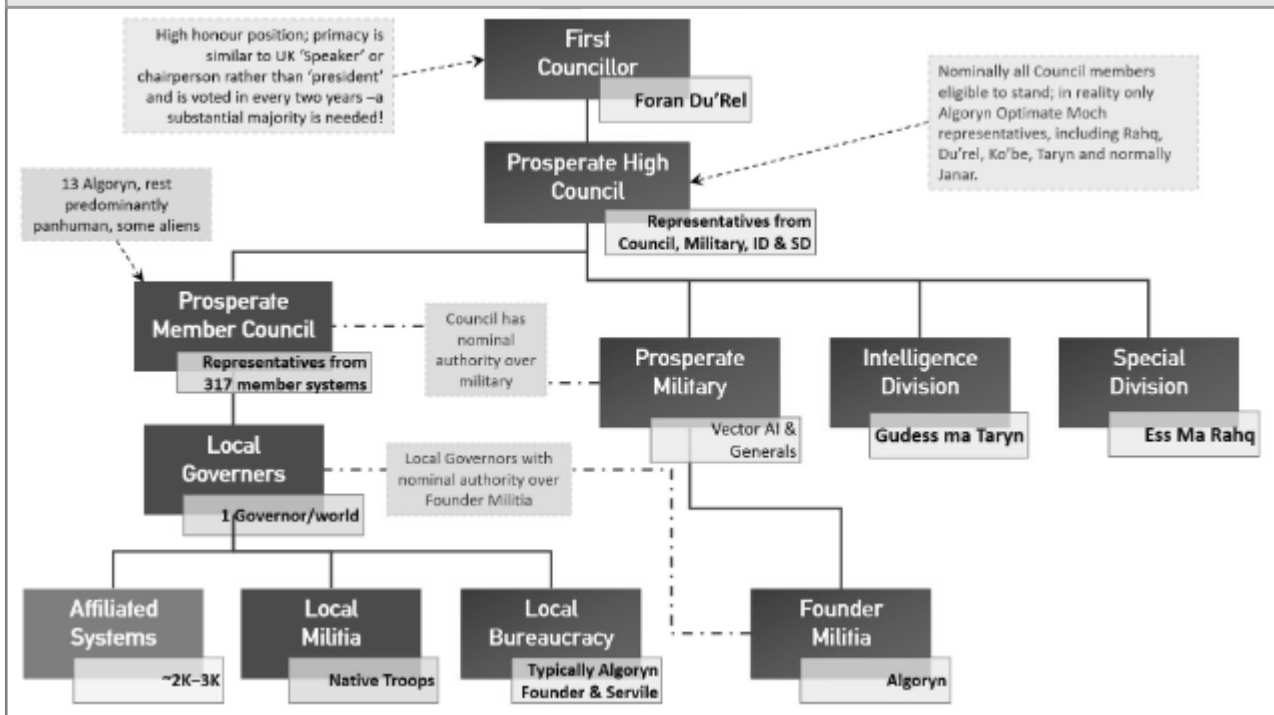
The worlds of the Algoryn Prosperate act together in the interests of self-defence, but by far the most powerful military forces in the whole Prosperate are those of the Algoryn themselves. When it comes to facing up to the Prosperate's many enemies it is invariably the Algoryn who take the lead and whose military is the most effective. Indeed, the Algoryn's military forces so dominate the Prosperate that other military forces from the Affiliates within the Prosperate are reduced to a third-line, militia or policing role behind that of the civil service whose day-to-day activities rely those in the Algoryn Founder leger.

In part this is because the Algoryn have been waging a war of self-preservation for hundreds of years. Had they not developed an effective means of countering Concord and Isorian incursions they would long since have fallen to these two great and rapacious rivals. Even so, the leaders of the Algoryn High Council know that were either of these powers to mount a serious invasion their own forces would be overwhelmed. However, neither is likely to take a serious interest in Algoryn space before gathering sufficient data to make a strategic assessment – and the Algoryn have denied them the opportunity so far.

A more immediate threat to the Algoryn comes from a neighbour in the Determinate itself, the Ghar Empire. The Ghar are another human species of a sort, for their ancestors were bio-engineered to fight a long-forgotten war in past ages. They are implacable enemies of all other human species and have been engaged in a bitter war against the Prosperate for hundreds of years.

The Ghar are a remnant from a past age whose armaments and spacecraft utilise ancient technology not dependent on a

25: Algoryn Prosperate Political Organisation



nanosphere, setting them apart from the advanced civilisations of Antarean space. Although the Algoryn have defeated the Ghar time and time again, their enemy's forces always recover and return to the fight with undiminished enthusiasm.

Ghar victories, although rare, bring destruction to entire worlds. A planet lost to the Ghar is usually rendered uninhabitable, so even if the invaders can be thrown back they leave nothing but ruin in their wake. The ongoing war between the Ghar and the Algoryn has done more to shape the society and armed forces of Algor than anything else. More about the savage and dangerous Ghar can be discovered in their own supplement.

In the early 1320s, the Prosperate High Council was thrown into a tailspin by the machinations of Special Division General, Councillor Ess Ma Rahq. Ess Ma has managed to oust the AI General Tar Es Janar from the council with charges of collusion with the enemy during the Xilos catastrophe. With Tar Es in exile to the north of the Determinate, the Janar moch have lost their primary voice and influence on the council. Their former allies within the other mochs have been forced to look elsewhere for political support, whilst the Rahq moch are forcing deals on many of the lesser mochs and their representatives.

Ess Ma has the typical optimate ruthlessness and now the Rahq have power, many in the High Council and amongst the ruling mochs live in fear for their lives. This weakening of the usual political checks and balances means the Rahq are becoming far too dominant. Wherever there is such dominance, however, there is opposition – but against one so powerful as Ess Ma Rahq and her well-equipped legions in the SD, any Algoryn sees only one response: war.

Unknown to the wider universe, the Algoryn High Council is on the brink of such open conflict, a civil war amongst the military elite of the Prosperate. Rumours abound that Tar Es Janar has been secretly recalled; the Vector AI generals now no longer co-operate with the SD; local governors are

strengthening their militia. The only thing keeping a civil war at bay is the shocking news from the previously fragmenting Ghar Empire: the Rebels, Exiles and old Empire have been reconciled under a new leader, Fartok, and the corrupt Karg has been killed.

THE PROSPERATE AND THE WIDER UNIVERSE

The Prosperate trade widely within the Determinate and Freeborn ships ply the routes between the Prosperate and even more distant worlds. The Freeborn travel throughout Antarean space, facilitating trade and communication between otherwise inimitable civilisations. In this way the Prosperate and other worlds within the Determinate maintain contacts with each other and with the PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex.

Although the Prosperate is largely preoccupied with defending its boundaries these are still immense and diffuse, with numerous unexplored or newly discovered gates of potentially strategic importance to neighbouring worlds.

This means the Algoryn cannot afford to simply defend their own worlds, but must actively explore and take control of star systems that might otherwise provide their enemies with a stepping-stone towards the Prosperate itself. Nor are the Algoryn oblivious to the potential advantages of making technological discoveries within Antarean space.

Considerable forces are therefore devoted to exploration and to creating military garrisons upon outlying worlds. Often those worlds are barren, but some may be home to primitive humans or alien life forms, whilst others may prove ripe for more permanent settlement.

Algor

The planet of Algor is the fourth that revolves around the binary stars of Enbris and Onebris. Enbris is a small, white and very bright sun whilst its larger partner Onebris is dull and

ruddy. However, occasionally Onebris becomes much brighter and its red light burns fiercely plunging Algor into a perpetual fiery glow. The relative positions of these stars as they revolve around their common centre of gravity means that the Algoryn day consists of a mixture of different kinds of light as well as hours of darkness.

Algoryn seasons can be complex and occasionally dangerous. If Algor's perihelion with Onebris coincides with a full eclipse of Enbris the planet is bombarded with toxic levels of radiation from the red sun. At such times the population must retreat underground until the planet orbits further from its twin suns. If such an event occurs at the same time as a period of extraordinary activity by Algor's red sun then its people might have to endure months of life in the labyrinthine cities constructed below the surface for this purpose. When they emerge it is to a barren world, one largely devoid of life. Only bioforms adapted to the harsh conditions on Algor can survive such an event, submerged beneath the ocean beds, burrowed deep underground or metamorphosing into dormant cysts until the surface becomes safe once more.

ALGORYN SOCIETY

In addition to Algor, the Algoryn live upon twelve densely populated colony worlds, and they maintain bases and outposts on many more that are otherwise unsuitable for large-scale settlement.

Until twenty-two years ago there was a thirteenth colony called Zyra, which lay close to the Isorian dominated regions to the east of the Prosperate. Zyra was attacked by the Isorians and the planet itself was destroyed by the Algoryn to prevent it falling into the hands of the Isorian Shard. Although the colony itself no longer exists, the strategically important Zyrans system remains (nominally) part of Algoryn controlled space and the, largely uninhabited, star systems adjoining Zyra are still a bitterly contested war-zone between the Prosperate and the Senatex.

Algoryn society has always had a strongly militaristic character that the Algoryn derive from the foundation of the colony itself. The early history of Algor is one of conflict both with native creatures and other human invaders, though these events lie so far in the past that they have acquired a somewhat legendary character. Over the last few centuries the war against the Ghar has strengthened the association between society and the military, so that today there is effectively no difference. The Algoryn military leaders are also its civil leaders, and society as a whole is geared towards the defence of the Prosperate.

The Algoryn Leger (Caste) System

It is impossible to understand the Algoryn without some knowledge of their complicated caste system. Practically all Algoryn belong to one of five social castes that largely determine their role within society as a whole and within the military. The castes are known as legers, each of which plays a different although not necessarily less important role. The different castes rarely mix except where necessary and marriage between castes is extremely rare and the most renowned families have intermarried over many generations.

This distinct segregation amongst the ruling Optimate leger and the most powerful families of the aristocratic Vector leger, has resulted in the development of a culture of closely

interwoven relationships and infinite subtleties of rank and distinction. These distinctions and attendant formalities of address, precedence and manner are baffling to an outsider but keenly observed by Algoryn of all ranks.

The five castes are the Optimate (highest), Vector, Founder, Servile, and Base (lowest) legers. Algoryn of the first three legers are raised as warriors and play an important role within the Prosperate military. The final two legers play no role in the military, and even though some individuals may be important or otherwise respected they are inevitably held in lower esteem.

Membership of a caste depends upon a family's clan, a sort of super-family or tribe known as a moch. Famous Optimate mochs include the Janar, Rahq, Du'rel and Ko're. Being born within a moch automatically determines which caste a person belongs to, but an individual can also be adopted by a family and then becomes a member of that moch and leger. Such adoptions are not common, but provide a means by which talented and ambitious members of the lower castes can rise above their humble birthright.

Optimate Leger

The Optimate leger provides the Prosperate with its strategic leaders and members of its ruling body the High Council. The Algoryn make no distinction between military and broader political rank: their military leaders are also their political leaders. Although the Optimate gives the Prosperate its generals, governors, councillors and other powerful and influential decision makers, its members must be warriors first and foremost.

The Algoryn value personal courage above all else, and a commitment to duty is ingrained throughout Algoryn society. Every person's life stands at the service of society as a whole. The members of the Optimate caste are expected to embody all of these uncompromising virtues. Successful command in action, bravery, and achievement in war are the means by which Algoryn of the Optimate caste achieve recognition and promotion.

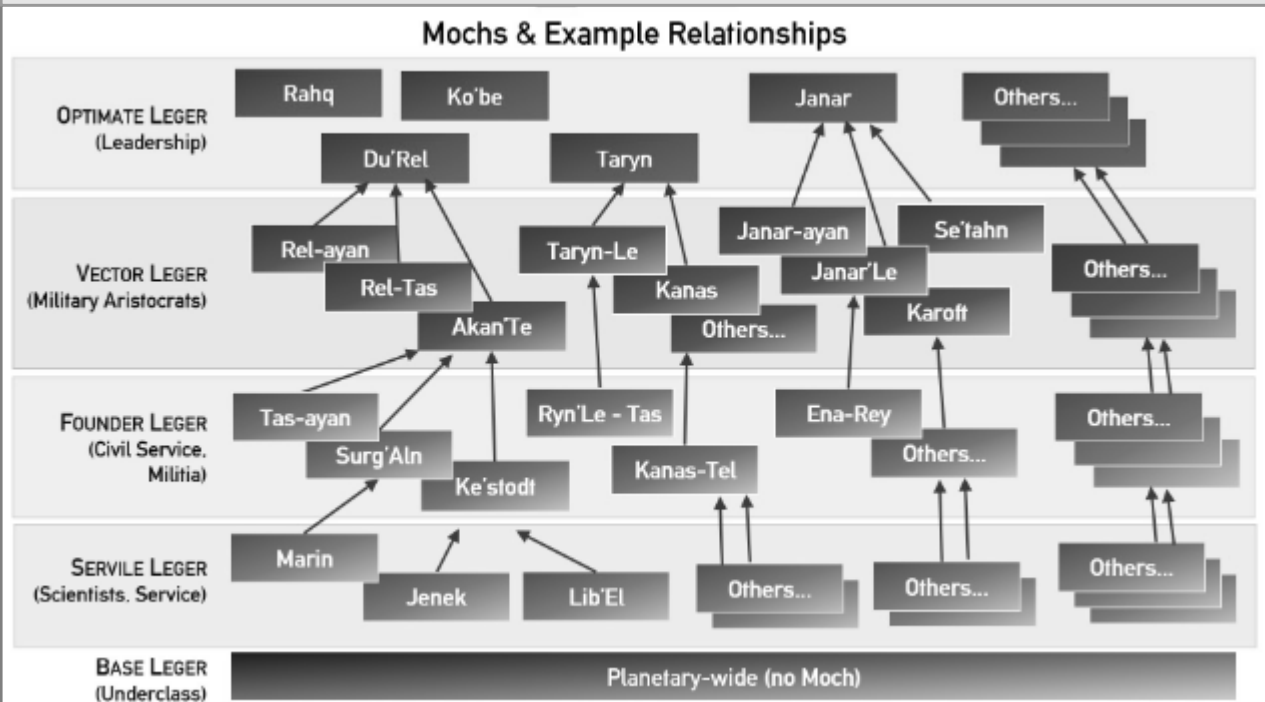
Famously, in ancient times during the Erban War, the entire Optimate moch of Ma'req was cast in disgrace from their leger. Ever since they have lived a spaceborne life as wanderers, traders and salvagers, plying the Prosperate routes and surrounding planets. They call themselves the Freeborn of Ma'req, though there is little trust between them and the Vardari or the Prosperate. The Prosperate consider them little more than pirates, and clashes between Ma'req and Prosperate forces are not uncommon.

Vector Leger

The numerous Vector leger provides the traditional core of the AI units, and therefore most of the full-time military of the Prosperate. For this reason AI formations are also known as Vector units. All members of the caste capable of doing so serve in the military until such time as they are too aged or injured to continue as an effective combatant.

As warfare is continuous and has been so for hundreds of years the Vector leger fulfils a vital and honoured role and is regarded as a kind of aristocracy. The most respected amongst them aspire to the Optimate, a distinction that can be awarded to individuals by the High Council of the Prosperate. This takes the form of adoption by a sponsor. The greater part of the permanent military consists of members of the Vector caste.

26: Algoryn Mochs and Legers



Junior mochs support or are associated with more senior mochs throughout Algoryn society, making a complex hierarchy. Whilst most mochs associate themselves with only a single more senior moch, not shown are the influences or relationships a moch may have on other mochs within its own leger or the looser relationships and influences it may have with an allied, more senior leger. Mochs such as Janar may have more Vector leger mochs as allies yet its subservient mochs have fewer Servile and Founder associates (potentially just one or two each) due to Janar's focus on the professional military. Though Rahq and Koo'Be are shown without any Vector support, this is purely a function of attempting to simplify what could quickly become a very complex diagram!

Founder Leger

The Founder caste is the largest of all the five legers and also makes up the greater part of the Algoryn population of the Prosperate. All members of the Founder leger are raised as warriors in the same way as those of the Vector leger, often alongside them. The Founder caste provides a huge reserve of trained troops that can be called upon when needed.

Regardless of whatever their civilian role might be everyone is expected to train as part of their local militia, and all serve a term in the military, which might involve deployment to a frontline unit in a war zone. The name of the leger comes from the name of these militia units – Founder troops – that in turn derives from an ancient colonial tradition going back to the settlement of Algor.

Founder troops man the permanent defences of Prosperate planets. In war zones Founder units often form a second wave of troops behind the Vector AI, occupying ground and serving as garrison units, freeing up Vector units for mobile attacks. Often, losses amongst the Vector AI results in troops from experienced Founder units being absorbed into the regular forces, though this is more likely to happen during prolonged campaigns where Founder units may be deployed for many years at a time.

Servile Leger

The Servile leger has no formal military role and its members fulfil what are regarded as relatively safe, menial or civil functions. The members of this caste provide all the specialist services that enable Algoryn society to function, including much of the basis for manufacture and research.

Members of this caste can be important and influential individuals despite their relatively low standing. Some of Algor's most successful scientists have come from the Servile leger, but as part of a society that celebrates martial duty above intellectual achievement even the greatest minds are regarded as mere functionaries. Their duty is to serve behind the scenes, and it is a duty members of the leger undertake with all the loyalty and conviction of the other castes.

Base Leger

The Base caste is often not even regarded as a leger at all – it is a catch-all category of what could otherwise be thought of as caste-less Algoryn. They are individuals and families shunned by other Algoryn, homeless wanderers forced to eke out a living on the edges of Prosperate society. They include criminals, cowards, traitors and often their descendants, individuals who have been disinherited by their family or moch.

THE ALGORYN MILITARY

The Algoryn are an advanced spacefaring race with a technological level comparable to the rest of the Antarean universe, though less advanced than that of the great IMTel and vorl societies. Given their location in the Determinate and their proximity to the Concord and the Senatex, their chief concern is to protect their worlds from the extremely sophisticated IMTel driven societies, as well as the distinctly primitive but highly dangerous forces of the Ghar.

For this reason the Prosperate retains a strong human element of control both in terms of strategic thinking and operational equipment. Although having advanced nanotechnology and

making use of machine intelligences, Algoryn society is ultimately a panhuman society led by individuals, guided by political debate and, within the High Council, a form of human consensus. This is only possible because the Algoryn avoid the otherwise beneficial process of further machine integration as such integration would simply make them vulnerable to the far larger and more powerful IMTel of their enemies.

As a result the Algoryn make much less use of armed fighting drones than their rivals. Larger vehicles that would be crewless drones in Concord forces are always provided with crews in Prosperate armies. This does not mean that an Algoryn vehicle cannot fight as an autonomous drone, but it allows a crew to augment or override the machine-mind of their vehicle if necessary. This enables Algoryn forces to face Concord and Isorians without their own units becoming quickly subverted by enemy nano-attacks. It also enables Algoryn to more easily counter the devastating weapons of the Ghar, which are particularly effective against nano-based technologies.

The other great advantage that the Algoryn have is that they are a military society with a strong warrior ethic that permeates the entire population. Men and women share in the burden of defence, and even Algoryn children are proficient with basic weapons from an early age.

This ingrained, militaristic ethos contrasts strongly with that found in the IMTel societies. In the largely peaceful Concord and Senatex societies, only a tiny proportion of the population ever receives even basic weapons skills. And few are subject to the level of military discipline and training that is considered normal amongst the Algoryn.

Prosperate Military Organisation

The Prosperate standing army is formed of Algoryn, predominantly from the militaristic Vector leger led by outstanding individuals from the Optimate leger. Algoryn are unusually aggressive fighters, adapted to decades of combat against the implacable Ghar. Whilst the legions of Algoryn infantry defend the Prosperate against all external threats, the numerous members of the Founder leger provide a well-trained and loyal, local militia – sometimes supported by locals.

Whilst Vector command elements form the majority of the officer ranks, only the elite of the Optimate leger are chosen for very senior posts. It is from these senior posts that the majority of the ruling Algoryn Council is drawn, with very few council representatives coming from the leadership of the 300 or more worlds that make up the Prosperate.

The non-human Tch'thax, though part of the Prosperate, are not within the AI but operate their own scout ships and surveys beyond the borders of the Prosperate. Their outlook means they report all interesting findings to the Prosperate governors as well as to the Tch'thax hierarchy on their own worlds.

Wherever they are, from whatever leger they are called, and with whatever equipment they are armed, the Algoryn army is termed the AI: the Algoryn Infantry.

Optimate Units

Optimate units are inevitably command cadet units undergoing field training or are command units in charge of Vector or SD Formations, and even whole AI armies. When present, they inevitably assume command of Founder Formations, replacing the senior Vector command units.

SD Forces vs Regular AI

Though separate from the regular AI forces, SD is a division in its own right, just like any other AI division. As a result, armies or brigades fielded by SD may contain regular units in the form of Vector AI troops. However, SD keeps its Hazard armour to itself and only SD formations are equipped with the more exotic or advanced weaponry, primarily because the division has all the technical support it needs. A secondary reason is that the missions given to SD forces are typically quick, short, sharp punches rather than extended campaigns.

Current field equipment under development includes lightweight Reflex armour and a new stealth device that hides Algoryn ships from the more primitive, Ghar sensor arrays and which has had partial success against the sensors of other Antarean technology.

Vector Formations

The structured Algoryn caste systems relies on the Vector leger and its well-trained personnel for the core of its military operations and the Algoryn Infantry. Almost every combat unit fielded by the Prosperate consists of Vector formations, sometimes with attached Founder troops, and only rarely are units from the member worlds of the Prosperate included.

The Vector formations, as with other Prosperate military units, are normally led by the elite of the Optimate leger but experienced Vector personnel can often achieve field promotion into senior command positions. Whatever the leger of the commander, however, the Vector formations have obedience and discipline instilled into them, being highly responsive to their commander's orders even without the advanced combat shards and IMTels of other nations.

Founder Formations

Irrespective of whatever other service they provide – typically governmental services – the numerous members of the Founder leger are trained in weapons usage, tactics and have combat skills in addition to those they use in everyday life. Whilst the Founder Formations can be seen as militia-style units, even they are led by competent Vector officers and are far more effective than other nations' militia. As well as serving as the core of the local, planetary militia and supplemented by local formations, Founder units are often called to serve amongst Vector formations in moments of temporary crisis.

Special Division (SD)

Special Division, or SD, is the most stringently elite corps in all the Algoryn forces. The SD's secretive leaders exercise considerable political influence behind the scenes, as well as leading the Prosperate's most effective body of troops. Responsible for maintaining the effectiveness of the Prosperate's military technology, SD also carries out almost all of the Prosperate's research even remotely relating to military matters and has the power to bring any such research under its purview: as almost any research may have military implications, this means that almost all research is under SD oversight, at least.

The current commander of SD is Councillor General Ess Ma Rahq, a ruthless and determined leader from the Optimate leger who is dedicated to enhancing the prestige and stability of the Prosperate. She tends to see enemies where, perhaps,

none exist: it was her who ended the career of the previously esteemed commander General Tar Es Janar after the Xilos catastrophe; at the time, Ma Rahq was convinced he was an agent of the machine intelligences within the PanHuman Concord.

The division's Chief Technical Adviser is Du Tan, a highly gifted scientist who, like the vast majority of technicians, is still of the lowly Servile leger. Du Tan is one of SD's oldest and most accomplished scientists, a leading expert on weapons technology, and one of the great minds among the Algoryn: amongst other, non-militaristic nations, he would command substantial honour and respect.

Until the weapons and equipment are fully battle tested and cleared as suitable for general issue, the technologies SD develops are retained for use in its own combat units. Battlefield evaluation is undertaken by selected SD troops, often during the course of highly secret and sensitive missions. Sometimes equipment is rejected for general issue, being considered suitable only for highly trained and expert troops, and the SD arsenals are full of unusual and specific equipment that they are able to call upon when needed.

Planetary Militia

In addition to any Founder militia units that may be available, most planetary governors also raise a planetary militia from the local populace. The primary reason for doing so is because they are aware that Founder troops will always be loyal to Algor: if called away elsewhere on service, the governors would have no local troops to defend them against Ghar attacks.

The planetary militias are well-organised, at least, and have similar weapons to the Algoryn – at least, where such weapons and armour can fit their frame. This caveat is because the Prosperate has non-human populations living on its Member or Associate planets and some, like the Tch'thax, have a physiology very different to panhumanity.

Whilst they try and take advantage of their own capabilities, whatever they are, the organisation of the local militia is still very much on Algoryn lines.

Formation and Armour Colours

The armour of the advanced factions of Antares relies on advanced, nanite-based technologies that provide capabilities well beyond the generation of the armour fields. The nano-cored plates are self repairing whilst an outer sheath of dynamic nanochromes means armour – and clothing – can be adapted to any colour or patterning.

In most Antarean military forces it is usual to adopt an underlying camouflage or colour scheme for the duration of a campaign, one broadly dependent upon the environment in which operations are performed. Once a formation has come to identify strongly with a uniform scheme, it can choose to retain it regardless of the actual environment in which it fights, such uniform schemes attaining the status of a tradition and being worn on formal occasions.

This is especially true of the highly militarised Algoryn because it is common for serving men and women to wear basic armour even in civil life. Given the numerous and diverse Algoryn formations, there is a huge variety of colour and pattern giving rise to a riot of colour in even supposedly civilian environments!

THE BOROMITE GUILDS & CLANS

The Boromites are an ancient and extreme, panhuman morph, bio-engineered for asteroid mining around Borom with high resistance to radiation and adverse atmospheric conditions. As they expanded from their original asteroid belts around Borom, they developed into an itinerant, close-knit workforce, albeit one that can feel physically uncomfortable on normal panhuman worlds. Borom is now lost, though the Guild of the Underfallen is still seeking to rediscover the ancient home of the Boromite people.

Other panhumans consider Boromites to be taciturn, secretive and perhaps even chauvinistic. The truth is, their society is ruled by Guildesses and Clan Matriarchs and they have great respect for their womenfolk and cannot understand why others do not feel the same.

Boromites can be found within the PanHuman Concord, the Isorian Senatex, and upon the many diverse worlds of the Determinate. They live throughout the wildernesses of Antarean space in regions otherwise inhospitable and void of habitation. They can even be discovered amongst alien civilisations that are rarely if ever visited by other panhumans. Nowhere do they live in any great number, forming small, closed communities within larger societies.

Boromites are always ready to up sticks and move on should the need arise. They are a roving people with their own distinctive ways and their own aims and values that mark them out from other panhuman morphs. Boromites control no worlds and value their independence too much to assimilate with those they live amongst. They are great wanderers and searchers, prospectors and treasure hunters.

BOROMITE ORIGINS

The origin of the Boromites goes back to ancient times when humans first began to explore and exploit the resources of Antarean space. The mining colonies of Borom became the richest source of construction material during the first expansion from Old Earth. They were the springboard from which the human diaspora took its first faltering steps. Borom was not a planet but a star surrounded by a rocky asteroid belt comprising thousands of planetoids and millions of smaller bodies. During the First Age these asteroids were to provide enough mineral wealth to build entire worlds. Lacking a significant atmosphere and suffering extremes of temperature, no ordinary humans could work upon such bleak and inhospitable chunks of rock for long and hope to survive.

Not even the Boromites recall the exact circumstances surrounding their creation – though the Guild of the Under Fallen dedicate themselves to such research. No doubt ordinary humans tried and failed to work the asteroid mines, and it would not have taken long before a more radical solution was sought. The result was the Boromites, a panhuman species able to resist radiation, built for hardiness, able to work in poor atmospheres and, should disaster fall, even suffer vacuum without danger for a short period of time. The kind of genetic restructuring necessary to build such an extreme physical



morph would not be considered ethical amongst the IMTel societies of the PanHuman Concord or Isorian Shard, or amongst most advanced cultures of the Seventh Age (the wars of the Aan Shard and flight of the renegade NuHu took place as a direct result of such experimentation). Even amongst the manifold diversity of humankind their physical appearance marks them out from other panhumans.

Such extreme, physical adaptations would count for little were the Boromites mindful of personal gain or comfort, inclined to idleness or distracted by the consolations of art, fine food or high culture. Considerately, their creators took care to remove all such obstacles to happiness from the Boromite mental repertoire. Boromites have little interest in the refinements or consolations of civilisation. They relish danger and enjoy hard physical work. They abhor inactivity, sneer at signs of weakness and despise soft living. They are intensely loyal to their comrades and their own kind, but distrustful of strangers and disinterested in outsiders. They are adept builders, constructors and engineers, but everything they build is practical and functional without much attempt at decoration or aesthetic. Despite this they are notoriously superstitious – a streak of irrationality that indicates there is perhaps more to the Boromites than their creators ever intended.

BOROMITE SOCIETY

Not only do Boromites have strong bonds with their clan and family, but almost all clans consider themselves members of one of the many Boromite Guilds. Guilds rarely mix and treat each other as rivals to some extent, collaborating only when necessary. The relationships between the different Guilds are complex and not even the Boromites themselves are always clear about such things. Multiple traditions abound with rival Guilds presenting different versions of past misdeeds, broken contracts, unmet quotas and unpaid debts going back many generations. Some Guilds are loosely allied whilst others are age-old enemies with a long history of antagonism. Even the most bitterly opposed Guilds have been known to grudgingly unite in the face of a common foe or to achieve some mutual goal.

Guilds rarely act with a common purpose and given how sparsely their members are spread it is unlikely they could ever do so entirely. Rather, a Boromite group's Guild places it within a social context and tradition. Ultimately, the Guild a

group belongs to defines its liabilities and obligations within Boromite society as a whole. For practical everyday purposes Boromites live in extended families or clans, and it is these clans that provide the basis for their dealings with each other.

Boromite clans are strongly matriarchal in character and their leader and ultimate authority is the oldest mother amongst the chief family in the clan. This mighty individual is referred to as the Guild Mother or Matriarch. Both the matriarch and her primary female descendants are also referred to by the title of Guildess, a term analogous to 'Lady' that is sometimes extended to less exalted female Boromites out of courtesy.

The deep-seated respect – almost reverence – that Boromite's have for their womenfolk is another consequence of their origin. Presumably because mortality amongst the Borom asteroid mines was extremely high, the creators of the Boromites designed them to be prolific.

Also, to keep the ranks of workers at full strength it was necessary that Boromites reach physical maturity quickly. A five year old Boromite is as tall as a man of any other race and far stronger. As well as growing up fast, most Boromites are the children of multiple births, twins and triplets being usual and five or six common. The oldest Guild Mothers might have dozens of offspring, hundreds of grandchildren and thousands of living descendants. This is one of the chief reasons why Boromite clans are so tight knit; they are all closely related.

It is the Guild Mothers who decide if their clan needs to move on or divide, or if a contract is acceptable, or whether transgressors should be punished and how. When it comes to waging war it is the leading male clan chiefs who make the decisions and organise the Boromites for combat. These are the Rock Fathers. Although in theory the Rock Fathers take precedence over the clan's Guild Mother during war, in practice it would be a very courageous Rock Father who acted against her wishes. The matriarchs expect their menfolk to advise them and take control of fighting forces on their behalf, but not to defy them! This does sometimes happen, and in extreme cases whole cohorts of rogue males can find themselves ejected from their clans and forced to make new lives for themselves elsewhere. Such groups, bereft of the strong morale guidance of a Guildess, all too often turn to piracy, banditry and other criminal behaviour.

The primary goal of a Boromite clan is to work and amass collective wealth, and to this end they seek employment doing all the dangerous, difficult, physically and psychologically demanding jobs that are beyond the capabilities of ordinary humans. They are especially capable miners of all kinds of rare and valuable materials, with a particular and almost obsessive fascination for rare gems and minerals. They also work as deep space salvageers and as explorers or surveyors in new and uncharted regions. Boromites sometimes hire their services to the Freeborn either as a work force or as mercenary fighters.

Others become mercenaries in the Determinate where worlds are always in need of fighting men. They can turn their hand to all kinds of industrial processes where their size and strength are needed. In the advanced worlds of Antarean space it is true that machines undertake most tasks of this kind, but there are always situations that call for humans on the ground (or under it) and this is a role in which Boromites excel.

Boromite haulers – a travelling home

Haulers are the ubiquitous, Boromite general utility vehicles and whilst they are not produced to a set design or pattern they always have a size and broad appearance that is dictated by practicality. Because they are living and work spaces as well as fighting machines they tend to be relatively bulky. Whilst having built-in fractal mining machinery, Haulers somehow always seem to acquire weapons as soon as trouble starts – quite how is a mystery!

Often, a hauler will be built especially by or for its owner, affording all manner of variation in appearance and capability. However, Boromites are not fools when it comes to technology and are quick to make use of the best components wherever possible. Haulers are invariably fully suspended vehicles with additional thrusters protected by fixed reflex style armour shielding augmented by hyperlight boosters where available.

There is a vast range of different types of hauler, from vehicles that are little more than open-topped suspensor platforms to the huge ore-haulers of the Boromites that are little more than ore shuttles. In the middle are the day-day haulers intended for use almost anywhere – including in airless environments such as asteroid belts or moonlets – and which are often used as (cramped) living quarters – for a short while, at least.

Of Borom

With the loss of their system of origin at the end of the Second Age, the Guilds are all that the Boromites now have of a home. They are a race of wanderers, rarely staying in one place for long, always keeping themselves to themselves and distrusting of other human races. They speak little enough of anything to outsiders, but amongst themselves they sing the ancient songs and recall the legends of their home amongst the asteroid belts of Borom.

Borom itself vanished into the Antarean collapse at the end of the Second Age and has never been found since. The Xon poets claimed that the Boromites were set to wandering the stars ever in search of their ancient home and that one day they would return to it, but only at the ending of universe when the Watchers returned to claim their own.

The Guild of the Under Fallen has a ceaseless quest to rediscover their system of origin, of Borom, of Old Earth itself – and even the mythical Watchers. They hope by doing so they can prove and establish the Boromites as the ultimate expression of panhuman development and give their species a home, once more. Whilst some amongst the Boromites agree with and support them, and others regard them as weird extremists, all treat them with respect – or fear (see below for more information on the Guild of the Under Fallen).

BOROMITE TECHNOLOGY

Although they live amongst and within the advanced societies of Antarean space Boromites are naturally resistant to the kinds of nanospore implants that are common throughout human cultures and which enable IMTel societies to function.

Because they lack physiological compatibility with the nanosphere of Concord and Isorian worlds they are barely

The Watchers

A cycle of stories dating back to the Xon Times (Fourth Age) tells of how, when the Gatebuilders undertook their Last Journey, some chose to remain behind in the very heart of Antares. They called themselves the Watchers.

From their fiery home, the Watchers travelled throughout Antarean space, using its trans-dimensional pathways to observe the creation of planets, the evolution of new sophonts, and the so-brief rise and fall of civilisations that dared reach for the stars. The Xon poems explain that the Boromites were one such species in which the Watchers took a particular interest. Sadly for the Boromites, their destiny was to wander the stars for aeons in search of their ancient home; only at the ending of the universe, when the Watchers returned to claim their own, would the Boromites return to their origins and reclaim Borom.

recognised by the IMTel. This is a situation they go out of their way to preserve. Wherever they live they remain almost entirely apart from regular society, a reclusive, insular and self-governing sub-culture all of its own. This doesn't prevent them using or interacting with the technology around them, but it does allow them to do so on their own terms. In fact the Boromites are very technically able as a race, but they prefer to retain control of their machines rather than let the machines control them. This is perhaps a natural attitude for creatures created before the advent of widespread nanobased technology and one that is entirely compatible with their general mind-set.

Boromites make use of the common technology of Antarean space and are especially known for their adaption of mining tools and other engineering equipment as practical forms of weaponry. They will adapt drones and weapons acquired from other sources, but generally prefer to build things themselves. Within IMTel societies this is done partly to ensure their machines and vehicles retain a cohesive nano-envelope isolated from the nanosphere, although Concord and Isorian nanospore will inevitably overcome these measures eventually. A more deeply rooted motivation is just a strong natural desire to do things for themselves and in their own way. This preference is hardwired into Boromites and is scarcely rational. They are naturally suspicious of things they have not made themselves or which they have not meticulously dismantled, rebuilt and 'improved'.

BOROMITES AND THE WIDER UNIVERSE

The Boromites make their homes wherever there is work for them to do and amongst other humans of all kinds. They are spread throughout Antarean space and constantly on the move. Their physiological incompatibility with the IMTel nanosphere allows them to retain their independence whilst living in the PanHuman Concord or Isorian Senatex. Even so, it often happens that the IMTel gradually builds up an awareness of them and begins to impinge upon their activities. When this happens a clan's Guild Mother is likely to give the order to move on. Sometimes a clan will divide in search of work, one of the older Guildesses becoming the new Guild Mother of a portion of the original clan.

Although they are spread throughout Antarean space, Boromites maintain strong contacts with each other via the trading networks of the Freeborn. Clans that are closely related are especially likely to maintain these 'family' contacts.

Boromite labour is but one of the many human services traded by the Freeborn, and Boromites in search of work know they can always find it amongst the Houses of the Freeborn. When Boromites travel they usually use the services of the Freeborn, although most clans have some craft of their own, which they use for space salvage work, surveying and exploration.

Because of their numerous family contacts, which they maintain even when living amongst vastly different human cultures, Boromites find it easy to circumnavigate many of the normal processes that govern transactions between worlds.

Their close family bonds and strongly-held notion of obligation and debt means that their dealings tend to be secretive. In some respects Boromite Guilds have all the hallmarks of organised criminal gangs, and unfortunately there are some clans that take this superficial resemblance a stage further. Boromites are behind some of the most subversive activities in Antarean space and not above dealing in illegal or stolen goods such as proscribed intoxicants, endangered creatures and looted antiquities.

Boromites at War

The Boromite Guilds don't have a military as such, but every family, every clan and every Guild together with its allies is prepared to arm and fight where needed. If a Guild Mother calls upon the help of her Guild, all other clans who hear of it will set to work raising Boromites to send to her aid. In this way Boromites can raise quite large forces without having any kind of formal military structure.

All Boromite digs or construction projects have a small security contingent tasked with defending their sites from unwanted intrusion. When they fight they not only use much of the gear they otherwise use for mining or industry but also the lavans that they either use during subterranean operations or keep as pets.

Boromites appear prepared for a fight at a moment's notice and it is remarkable how quickly a group of apparently unarmed workers can suddenly lay hands on tools that are effective weapons and radiate personal armour. This is, of course, because Boromites often utilise the same tool for working and fighting and can quickly switch from one mode to the other. Similarly, the nano-transmitters fastened to their scaly hides act as nodes for reflex shielding that means they can armour-up in an instant.

Amongst all Boromite clans there are some Boromites armed as security guards. These 'gangers' are as much bodyguards as they are police and are amongst the toughest opponents in Antarean space. In keeping with their security and policing roles, they usually carry practical armaments such as mag weapons.

The various silicon-based Lavan creatures can either be goaded towards the enemy or make excellent mounts in the case of locomites. The huge matronite brood mothers are so vast they can carry an assortment of weapons and armed warriors, whilst their brood of hatchlings scuttle about their feet biting and snapping at anyone foolish enough to come close. These little creatures are also used as scouting drones with the addition of a neural net and suitable mechanics.

The Boromites are unconventional fighters, lack any structured military organisation and are intimately tied to their secretive Guilds. When it comes to looking after their own interests they are fully capable of defeating most enemies, but they are not

equipped for large scale wars. They excel at raiding and small actions, and when it comes to facing enemies that are more powerful than they can handle they can always hire Freeborn mercenaries – some of which are likely to be Boromites themselves! Ultimately, against foes that are just too obstinate, the Boromites have no permanent homes to defend or planets to protect so find it easy to retreat into the depths of Antarean space and begin again elsewhere.

NOTABLE GUILDS AND CLANS

A brief overview of a well-known clan and a sinister guild are given here as examples. However, players are encouraged to create your own!

General

There are 22 major Boromite guilds – the Founding Guilds – that have lasted from age to age, the headquarters and major presence of which only 17 have resurfaced in the Seventh Age of panhuman Antares. This excludes the now permanently lost 23rd Founding Guild, the original, from which all guilds trace their ascendancy; this guild is often referred to as the Lost Guild).

Beyond the 22 (or 23) Founding Guilds, there are another 180 or more, lesser guilds. Whilst many clans are tied to, or work for, a specific guild, or may even be the sole clan in a guild, a large number of clans are spread across guilds. The Ha'Ulut, are one such diverse clan, its members being found working across a wide variety of guilds.

The Guild of the Under Fallen

The Guild of the Under Fallen is one of the Founding Guilds. Its members are found anywhere and everywhere around Antares and it differs from other guilds in being happy to accept and absorb individuals from any clan.

Sometimes called the 'Seekers After Borom', or merely the 'Seekers', the Under Fallen are a mystical guild whose beliefs make it a far more homogeneous and integrated guild than any other. Rather than have tightly-knit familial clans, the clans are voluntary, loose associations formed around a core of hereditary Seekers but with additional converts.

Every member of every clan in the Under Fallen has skin implants to ensure their hides are almost black with a patterning of stars in gems or lighter colour showing the night sky at the moment of their birth or conversion. Such colouration signifies the succession to the void of both the individual Boromite and the morph as a whole, a palpable statement of their ownership of the stars. Amongst both Boromites and other panhuman morphs, the sight of a star-spangled Boromite induces nervousness – and sometimes fear. It is not helped that depictions of an Under Fallen are seen as a deliberate slight on the Seeker's worthiness, so the Under Fallen try to remove or eliminate such images wherever they can.

Whether or not that fear is justified is questionable. The Under Fallen are quite open about their primary goal: to rediscover the true origin of mankind and reseed it with the ultimate development of humanity, the descendants of Borom. Finding Borom is seen as a key step towards that goal, despite the gate to Borom being lost millennia ago. The Under Fallen are certain that by finding their ancestral home they can encourage the Watchers – the mythical group of Gatebuilders who

The Tale of Oong

The longest and most complete of the stories from the Xon times is the Tale of Oong (Hu Qong'a), the eponymous Watcher hero who stepped into the human universe and society. Once here, he guided explorers to many wonders and secrets across and around Antares but all the time was cunningly leading them away from the greatest and most potent artefact of all: the Heart of Eternity. Whilst the Tale of Oong puts a name to the wondrous artefact, it never once explains its powers, origins or potential and the Heart of Eternity remains a myth to this day.

remained behind – to return and hence bring around the end of time when all Boromites can unite and find peace.

To all those who claim that Earth was destroyed, the Under Fallen merely ask for proof. Of course, there is none – other than that Earth has never been found and it's just 'generally known' it was destroyed, so the Under Fallen continue their search for the belts of Borom and Old Earth with a mystical fervour.

The members of the Under Fallen are found in all places where there is a great deal of exploration, especially around the equator and the melting-pot that is the Determinate, as well as in all the voids on the surface of Antares. There is a small enclave of Seekers in every single sector of panhuman space, typically in the capital systems and in centres of research where they track the discovery of new systems and investigate any archaeological leads that might hint as to the location of Earth or Borom.

Seeker clans frequently volunteer for the toughest jobs in the more remote or abandoned systems on the grounds they are more likely to discover clues to their origins in such barely explored places than elsewhere – after all, if the Freeborn heard of any such clues, they would sell them to the Under Fallen! It is a source of friction that some Freeborn houses trade fraudulent leads to the Seekers knowing that they are false or fake.

As a result, rather than follow up rumours of a Gatebuilder relic, the Under Fallen are far more likely to hunt for the ruins of pre-Second age site or for the rarest of minerals in an (apparently) abandoned asteroid belt in orbit three planets out from a star. This odd selection of assignments rarely impacts the Under Fallen in economic terms as other Boromite Guilds are likely to make substantial donations when handed a rich find by the Under Fallen, or may well make a voluntary donations if they strike an extremely rich lode of rare metals.

The Under Fallen's urge to seek the lost is their life's work, their sole task, an extreme expression of the Boromite work ethic. This has developed into a mysticism that permeates Seeker society at all levels. Whilst all guilds have their own customs, clan songs, dances and rituals, the Under Fallen have more than any other and apply them whenever the individual deems appropriate. Known songs are the stirring and fear-inducing 'Song before Battle' (the Hu'orgha – one of the few words in Borom that is widely known), the mind-focusing 'Chant on Seeking Anew' (used when opening up a new lode or new site), and the deep, sad and slow 'Hymn to the Fallen Dancers' (also known as the 'Seeker's Death Dance') – which brings many to tears.

The problem for others is that this spirituality at the core of Seeker belief has inculcated a belief in the Seekers that they are the only ones worthy or skilled enough to find and investigate leads towards what they Seek – the origin of the ultimate expression of panhumanity, the Boromite morph. This righteous conviction means that they regard all leads to what they Seek as ‘theirs’ and any who claim otherwise are directly usurping their natural right to work the site. This is another, perhaps the most common, source of friction between the Under Fallen and Freeborn and sometimes a trigger for hostilities even between the Seekers and prospectors from the IMTel nations.

Apart from the consulates within each sector, and a small clan capable of carrying out any urgent work, the Under Fallen tend to make their homes in the nearest environment they can find to their natural, Borom environment: asteroid belts. Whether in the major belt around a star or around a gas giant, the Borom find a suitably sized asteroid or small moon (or make one) and hollow out its interior. They then fit it out with all the comforts suitable for those most precious to them: their children, their mystical leaders – highly knowledgeable and well-trained researchers called Earthseekers or Birthseekers – and, of course, their matriarchs and females. Such asteroid homes are as heavily defended as the Under Fallen can make them and often filled with deadly traps.

Technological Purists

Technologically and militarily, the Under Fallen are pure to the ethos of Borom (as they see it, at least). They claim to never fight except in defence – but what they consider defence is sometimes confusing to outsiders. The Under Fallen regard a gazumping of a claim, for example, as outright theft, especially one that may hold clues as to the origins of panhumanity.

In combat the Seekers prefer to use their innate strength, resilience, discipline, mining machinery and genetically altered lavan species rather than the high-tech, nanospore activated weapons of the rest of humanity. As a result, they only use easily-maintained equipment such as mag weaponry or frag borers rather than the more complex plasma and compression weapons. They do not have specialist combat leaders such as Rock Fathers, nor specialist combat units such as Gang Fighters and only have minimum numbers of heavy weapons – those they use being mining equipment adapted for combat.

The Matriarchs of each clan are considered too precious to appear in battle – whilst a Guildess may be encountered whilst leading an expedition, a Matriarch will never be seen except in the depths of clan ships or their clan home asteroids.

Clan Ha’Ulut

Whilst the most common natural hide colouring amongst Boromites is a blue-grey or even greenish-grey, this is not the only colouring their hide can show. There is a broad spectrum of hide colouration and Boromites make use of patch-patterning genetic grafts to mark their scaly hides with Guild and family symbols – or even change colouring completely, like the Under Fallen.

A distinctive colouration can be found amongst the descendants of the original Clan Ha’Ulut. Nowadays, the clan – or families claiming allegiance to it – can be found amongst many guilds, their distinctive, natural, bright red-brown hide colouring marking them out from other Boromites. They are,

in some ways, an anomaly amongst Boromites as many guilds have a clan Ha’Ulut who may sometimes see a closer affinity with other Ha’Ulut than with their guild.

It is said by many Boromites that they cannot trust Ha’Ulut leading to them frequently being the target of ridicule or being shunned; at other times the Ha’Ulut are seen as good-luck bringers, happy-go-lucky workers who are unusually loquacious for the normally taciturn Boromites. Nonetheless, in secret the Ha’Ulut hide colouring is seen as extremely attractive and whilst formal marriages between them and members of other clans are rare, informal or short-term liaisons are commonplace.

THE NEW GHAR EMPIRE

The Ghar are an ancient, bio-engineered race of warrior clones, mentally configured to fight a war of eradication against the ‘evil’ that is humanity – a task they are still trying to achieve. Who created them, and when, is not known, only that whatever misguided species did so by experimentally creating genetic chimeras that now have only a passing and twisted resemblance to humanity.

The Ghar Empire lies within the Antares Determinate, in the northern tropics of Obureg, bordering the regions dominated by the Algoryn Prosperate. It comprises some hundreds of systems in all but very few are settled by the Ghar themselves or even used as permanent bases. Most of the systems that comprise the Empire are abandoned and ruinous worlds, planets attacked and plundered by the Ghar and afterwards largely ignored.

A few worlds in the Empire are maintained as staging posts for further conquests, protected by quantum gravity shields and fleets of defensive satellites. Even these, heavily garrisoned, worlds are temporary assets, soon to be abandoned when the Ghar war machine moves on.

Because such things as trade, security, and mutual defence matter little to the Ghar, their domains are scattered quite thinly over the Antarean surface – the Ghar Empire is largely a region of ruin and devastation that is both uninhabited and uninhabitable. The only world that is of real significance within the Empire is the home planet of Gharon Prime from which the race derives its name. There are a few other garrison and training worlds in strategically important locations, but these are now little more than ruined shells over the rank, underground city-warrens in which the Ghar ceaselessly work towards their programmed goal.

For many years the Ghar Empire was largely ignored by the great IMTel civilisations. It is only when they became more successful in their unceasing war upon the Prosperate and other systems in the Determinate that their savagery came to the attention of the wider universe. But the Ghar are no longer the cohesive power they once were: internal divisions are threatening to drive the empire apart: the Supreme Commander – the emperor – is under the control of a hatchery accident, the twisted and corrupt, High Commander Karg; a Rebel movement under another High Commander, Fartok, is reaching out beyond the borders for the Determinate; and yet other Ghar have incurred the enmity of Karg and are isolated, Exiles. Irrespective of the faction to which they belong, all Ghar believe they are loyal to their ethic and strive to follow the incessant demands of their genetic programming: destroy humanity.

GHARON PRIME

The world of Gharon Prime is exceptional in so far as none but the Ghar have any clear notion of where exactly it is. Attempts have been made to locate the world by tracking Ghar ships, but none have met with success.



Were these searches to succeed they would reveal a world whose surface appears to be made of metal covering the planet from pole to pole. Gharon Prime is a hive world of a kind that passed from human history many ages ago, one where the outer surface is just the upper layer of a multilayered construction, a hive reaching deep into the planet's crust. Nothing grows upon the surface of Ghar Prime and few things live within its dark tunnels apart from the Ghar and armies of slaves taken from worlds they have conquered. The whole world is one gigantic factory churning out weapons of war and everything needed to support that war. What food the Ghar and their slaves need is synthesised from algae grown in vast vats, or recycled from amongst the biomass of its huge population – both slaves and Ghar alike.

The light from Gharon's sun powers vast arrays of solar cells and orbital sun-traps, but no one living on – or rather, in – the planet ever sees it. Ghar detest and are blinded by bright light, having excellent low light vision so prefer the gloom. As a result, there is no natural day or night inside Gharon Prime, just miles of dim, labyrinthine chambers and tunnels barely lit by gloomy, galvanic illumination.

The algae synthesizers that provide food also sustain the atmosphere of the world by generating oxygen. Within the hive, warm, greasy, metallic-tasting air is circulated by vast pumps, the breakdown of which is known to result in the asphyxiation of millions before repairs are affected. To some, there is an upside: at least the population relief temporarily eases the chronic food shortages that otherwise plague the hive. Indeed, did its people but know it, such events are often orchestrated specifically to moderate Gharon's excess population and replenish its food banks.

GHAR SOCIETY

External examination of Ghar society largely falls into the realm of distant observation and pure speculation. What their enemies know of them is almost entirely derived from their organisation and behaviour in battle and by a few, scant, reports from rescued captives who have been left barely coherent by their treatment at the hands of the Ghar.

From what can be gathered from the remains of their dead, Ghar are clones. Physiological details would indicate that they are tank-bred creatures, produced when needed and grown to

maturity much quicker than ordinary humans. This implies they are raised communally and probably within something like the military units into which they are organised as adults.

The Ghar have a strict hierarchy of rank with lower ranked workers lording it over Outcasts, mid-ranked technicians dominating both and, in turn, such skilled workers being humbled before Ghar of progressively higher social rank: battletroopers, leaders of progressively higher status, High Commanders and ultimately the Supreme Commander of all Ghar. At every level, competition for promotion is keen for those who have had the fortune to be bred from a commander batch, and at such senior ranks is always dependent upon success in battle. Successful leaders attain ever-higher status and such riches and rewards as Ghar value, which is primarily the number of other Ghar who must answer to them. Every Ghar takes pride in their social rank, especially the elite battletroopers, the warriors who have survived a gruelling testing process. The Ghar breeding vats are notoriously imprecise so those warriors who fail are sent to do low-level supervisory jobs overseeing arms factories, managing logistics, marshalling slaves or even placed in command of maintenance crews or technicians.

Other Ghar find themselves demoted from the fighting ranks or the jobs they are bred to perform due to failure. Failure is the worst thing imaginable for a Ghar: heroism or courage is never recognised, only success or failure. To fail even in the face of impossible odds is still failure and results in punishment that is often severe.

This shows another side of Ghar: they are as pitiless in their dealings with each other as they are with their enemies. Those who fail in the eyes of their masters are likely to die a horrible and public death as 'a lesson to others'. Ghar who displease their leaders might be lucky to become outcasts, slaves whose lives are to be expended in any way their superiors choose. Outcasts are sometimes sent into battle to distract the enemy or merely to shield the advance of the Ghar warriors with their unworthy bodies.

A fate reserved for those who have most especially displeased their masters is to be thrown into the arena for the purposes of 'live action training observation' exercises. This shows, perhaps, that Ghar are not the regimented creatures they would have the universe believe for such displays are held in vast arenas where the condemned face all manner of savage beasts or ingeniously murderous devices. Only the very lucky survive and are spared to serve as slave drivers in the armaments factories, where captives of all species are worked to death for the benefit of their enemies or on the field of battle where such bitter slavemasters drive reluctant Outcasts before the elite battlesuits of the Ghar army.

Success is all; the Ghar will prevail. We live only to destroy: there is no degenerate that can escape us; there is nowhere to hide from us. We are the Ghar and we will prevail.

Ghar Prime Edict (Qon Ayoli translation)

GHAR AND THE UNIVERSE AT LARGE

The Ghar view other kinds of human as vermin that it is their job to eradicate. This deep-seated loathing was built into their psyche when they were first created and is reinforced through their rigorous training. This loathing motivates their entire society and attitude to the rest of Antarean space. They take no real part in trade and have no contacts with other humans. They merely wage war as they were created to do so many thousands of years ago.

Their attitude to aliens is somewhat indifferent. They rarely go out of their way to attack alien species unless they are attacked themselves, at which point the aliens in question become enemies to be dealt with every bit as ruthlessly as humans. Conversely, the Ghar never make alliances or treat with other races, and if they want something another race possesses their instinctive reaction is to wage war until they have what they want.

Up until recent times the low technological level of the Ghar has kept them relatively hidden from the advanced IMTel societies of Antarean space – their predations had only really affected their immediate neighbours. In particular they are a major enemy of the Algoryn and the two have waged uncompromising war for centuries.

The Ghar influence on the Algoryn and the Determinate has been to create a zone in which conflict and distrust is rife.

Trade and Commerce

Despite having what appears to be an acquisitive outlook, the Ghar Empire has very little need for trade or commerce. War, conquest, dominance and destruction is the only interaction even their more senior leaders can fully comprehend. Every system and panhuman world the Empire conquers and dominates is stripped bare of resources, all the spoils being shipped back to Gharon or the core fortress-worlds. There, the spoils or individuals are recycled as slaves (though Outcasts are the predominant source of slaves), or for food, for providing nutrients to hatch more Ghar, or to make more weapons of war, battlesuits, crawlers, weapons, starships, space stations and stronger defensive fortifications.

Whilst the Rebels have learnt to loot what they can from their defeated enemies and reuse it, in some far-flung Imperial outposts and amongst isolated Rebel outposts and Exiles, material and equipment may become scarce. In such places, garrison commanders are sometimes forced to turn elsewhere for supplies.

The problem is that the dominant trading power are the inescapably panhuman Freeborn with a society based on panhuman mores, customs and needs. Ghar are incapable of dealing with humans, finding them physically disabling – indeed, one of the main functions of field hospitals is overcoming the debilitating physical and mental reactions when Ghar encounter live panhumans. Such reactions range from severe allergic responses, acute nausea, mental shock, acute psychopathic pain and may even include blackouts

amongst those Outcasts unused to dealing with battle against panhumans.

In short, contact with humanity provokes an extreme, in-bred reaction amongst Ghar. This means that the principle traders in Antares – Freeborn – cannot trade directly with Ghar in any way. But it is not just the Ghar’s physiological problems that prevent trade as human trading with Ghar are regarded as traitors to their species: Algoryn hunt them down; the knowledgeable, nearby IMTel shards may refuse to deal with them; and even Boromites dismantle their installations and refuse to perform repairs or ride with those who betray panhumans to those who have sworn to eradicate them from the universe.

However, whilst the Freeborn overwhelmingly dominate trade amongst the human nations of Antares, there are a few (very few!) non-human traders and small mercantile organisations who operate alongside them. Whilst these alien traders have their own trade routes – typically to out-of-the-way, non-human systems – they are more likely to be used by the more disreputable Freeborn as fronts for trade. In this role, they are sometimes used to enable trade with Ghar, though if the Algoryn found out, the Freeborn involved would be slain. Some Freeborn even pretend to be aliens, disguising their ships and using elaborate holo-technology to transmit false images to the Ghar with whom they deal.

In this way, a little trade occurs between isolated Ghar and the rest of the Antarean universe. It is possible the goods the Empire installations use for trade may find their way as novelty items into the richer worlds of the IMTel nations. The most likely destination for such primitive technological items is into the hands of the Ghar Rebels or Exiles, both of whom are often short of solid, comfortable Ghar technology.

GHAR MILITARY ORGANISATION

Ghar military formations are built around units of battle-armoured infantry armed with multi-functional scourer cannons. These troops make up the overwhelming proportion of Ghar forces together with other battle-suited troopers carrying specialised arms of one kind or other. Ghar battlesuits are in many ways more like a small vehicle than conventional armour, a self-contained fighting machine whose pilot occupies a tiny cell within it and interfaces with the machine by means of neural implants.

Battlesuit units serve the Ghar forces in most combat roles, but they also make use of other vehicles both large and small. On the whole Ghar machines are propelled by multiple legs, three in the case of battlesuits but often more for larger vehicles. Long-ranged and especially powerful weapons are all carried in this way, and similar vehicles form the basis for mobile command units. Smaller multi-legged scutters serve as mobile scouts as well as ancillary utility vehicles, carrying ammunition and supplies to the fighting machines.

The Ghar themselves would not chose to fight without the protection of their machines. Without access to mechanical sensors their native senses are poor and their bodies weak and vulnerable. Only creatures that have failed their masters and been reduced to the status of outcasts fight in this way. Their most useful role is to absorb enemy fire and expose enemy positions – a kind of reconnaissance by self-sacrifice that is judged a fitting end for Ghar who disappoint their overlords.

“To Success!”

“To Success!”

Formal declaration and response to be uttered during a Ghar salute.

THE REBELLION

The Ghar obey and are bred to be dedicated followers of the Prime Edict, relentless in pursuit of their orders. If caught in a failure and punished, a Ghar submits to their punishment, most likely being recycled or made Outcast. The problem is that, as an Outcast, they still attempt to achieve the dictates of the Prime Edict, but do so amongst those that the Ghar battle manuals deem unworthy. As a result, there can be unimaginable amounts of bullying and betrayal amongst Outcasts as each strive for better treatment or remission of their punishment.

Of course, it is generally understood that the desperate, those Outcasts with some sneered-at flaw in their personality, would sometimes take to their heels and hide. That they seek others of their kind and form desperate bands of brigands is seen as a natural tendency of any Ghar to seek support in numbers – of their own kind, at least. Whilst some bands seek to hide from the masters, many find themselves betrayed from amongst their own, typically in return for a cushy job as a slave driver or as a supervisor in the dismal armaments factories of Gharon.

The problem for the Ghar came when being Outcast became a tool of political machination rather than merely a natural part of the Ghar ethos. The corrupt High Commander Karg used such an approach to devastating effect, removing political opponents at will. However, Karg’s Outcasting of his brood-mate Fartok 12-40-13 went a step too far: Fartok refused to kneel before his master!

The process started at the attack upon the Algoryn Sentinel at Ephra where Fartok’s army, Battle Group Nine, was repulsed and scattered. Though his first failure, the devastation meant Fartok faced certain disgrace as, for Ghar, there is only ever a first failure – as Fartok knew only too well.

The remains of Fartok’s entire battlegroup, was declared Outcast by Karg. What had been one of the Ghar Empire’s most successful formations, veterans of a dozen battles and innumerable celebrated raids, was to be disbanded. It was a humiliating come down for Fartok, who had been honoured for so long.

Fartok quickly discovered the defeat had been engineered by Karg. He realised that there was only one way to oppose Karg and roll back the corruption into which Karg had led the Ghar Empire. From the survivors of Battlegroup Nine, Fartok established an army to oppose Karg, one which welcomed Outcasts who could pledge themselves to revitalise the empire.

Following the ruination of Ephra, Fartok’s power grew steadily until he had an army at his back, spaceships to command and a will to defy even the Supreme Commander himself. At first the Ghar ignored him, unable to conceive of what he had dared do, let alone succeeded in achieving. Never in the long history of their race had an outcast raised an entire army to oppose the Ghar themselves. Finally, the Ghar tired of the rebellious commander, set a task force to destroy him only to find that the task force itself was defeated and destroyed.

Over the next few years Fartok's army defeated four more task forces sent against them. On each occasion The Rebels acquired more equipment and liberated more Outcasts to join their ranks. After much effort, Fartok was found and cornered by two large Ghar armies. Rather than fighting to the last Ghar, as expected of any previous Ghar commander, Fartok fought his way clear and retreated with his army largely intact. He took his troops and disappeared into Antarean space.

Over the next few years, reports of unsanctioned Ghar raids reached the Supreme Commander's ears and ships loyal to Karg were attacked and plundered, their weaponry stripped and any Outcasts spirited away. Such things annoy the Supreme Commander, for they smack of failure – and failure is something the Supreme Commander likes not at all.

Ghar Exiles

As the rebellion progressed, and Karg became ever-more dictatorial and paranoid, dissatisfaction grew amongst the previously-loyal Ghar. Whilst many commanders were delighted to be promoted above their station simply due to toadying up to Karg, there were others who regarded both Karg and Fartok's approaches as a betrayal of Ghar values. Such commanders were quickly removed from office by Karg or his lackeys, some being declared Outcast but most disappearing completely.

Other commanders were lucky in that they were able to avoid being trapped and removed from Ghar society. Those with particularly loyal troops decided to avoid the Rebellion and the Empire and – however they could – became Exile, hoping to remain true to Ghar values without directly challenging the Supreme Commander; perhaps, they thought, Karg would be removed and the Empire would return to its true path.

One of the earliest Exile commanders was Shaltok 12-41-9. Whatever its own concerns, Shaltok had shown a visible commitment to Ghar values as well as a commander's commitment to the troops who served them. Further, he had proven to be wily and incredibly lucky.

After assuming command of the vast hulk known as T.O.R. 563, Shaltok renamed it *City of Triumph Over Humanity* and set about refitting it with Ghar controls and weaponry. Though he only had a few thousand Ghar on board, he hoped the vast hulk was intended to be a troop and training ship for the Ghar, one that most other nations would hold in awe.

But Shaltok was betrayed by one of Karg's lackeys. Rather than accept death or being Outcast, Shaltok offered Exile to those under their command and, perhaps to his surprise, the troops all accepted. When offered a command in the rebellion, Shaltok also declined and the City was renamed City of Exile.

Shaltok travelled the line of the Senatex-Concord Interface near the borders of the Determinate, looking for systems where they can locate resources to replenish supplies and repair the ship. Like the Rebels, in their mind, the Exiles remained loyal to the Supreme Commander, but not to the corruption of Karg.

THE GHAR PEOPLE

Not even the Ghar have any but the vaguest notion about their origins. The Ghar consider such details to be irrelevant and cannot understand why others might consider such information to be important. Nonetheless, detailed examination of captured Ghar by the Prosperate and other panhuman factions have enabled some reconstruction of their

development. Educated guesswork suggests a great deal that is undoubtedly accurate at least in broad terms.

Retrospective chromosomal spectroscopy establishes that the Ghar did not evolve naturally. They were genetically engineered using a limited selection of segments of human pattern haplotype together with numerous artificially constructed elements and what appears to be chimeric elements. Telomeric integrity of their genetic structure is so high that it is impossible to gauge an accurate mutation rate or know for certain when this process first took place. However, it was certainly a long time ago, most likely at some point in the First Age, a hypothesis supported by other aspects of Ghar culture and technical expertise.

The most probable scenario is that the Ghar were created as soldiers to wage a war during some distinct time before the development of many of the advanced technologies of Antarean space. Their creators were most likely human and the role they conceived for their artificially constructed soldiers was undoubtedly a very limited one. Constraints built into the Ghar mentality imply that they are nothing but tools designed to do just one job, without any consideration of intellectual development beyond that necessary to accomplish their one specific purpose: to wage war. Whether their creators were prepared to discard them once that purpose had been fulfilled is impossible to say, because evidently the creators perished whilst the Ghar themselves survived.

Despite their origins, the Ghar are often considered to be aliens because they are so unlike even the most extreme panhuman morphs. They are small, scrawny creatures that are remarkably fragile when separated from their armoured fighting machines. Their senses are poorly developed but perfectly attuned to work in conjunction with the mechanical sensors of their battlesuits. These artificial senses feed directly into the Ghar's nervous system and presumably afford far superior vision and hearing as well as transmitting sensations of touch and even scent to the machine's occupant.

The Ghar are equally distinct in terms of their mental capacity, which is extremely high in selective areas and abysmally low in others. The consequence is a race that is brutally obsessive with little scope for inventiveness and none at all for personal development. With notable exceptions the Ghar have a concept of themselves as a united entity with one purpose – to wage war upon the human race. This single-mindedness makes them dangerous but also predictable. It is this predictability that is their greatest weakness.

Brood 12-40

Some years ago, the Supreme Commander of the Ghar regarded his empire as being at the peak of its technological prowess; further, everywhere he looked, Ghar forces were triumphant. He (it?) directed his geneticists to produce a new breed of commander. The emperor hoped that one amongst this new breed of leaders might be a worthy successor for the greatest and wisest of all the Ghar race was almost six hundred years old and not getting any younger.

And so Batch 12-40 was birthed.

The Supreme Commander was unaware that all was not quite as it appeared with brood 12-40. Whilst it produced commanders with exceptional abilities, the products of 12-40 would present a danger to the Empire greater even than that posed by the heinous degenerates that it is the Ghar's duty to purge from the universe.

It is impossible to say which of the many Ghar scientists responsible for sequencing the clones for brood 12-40 made the painstaking lateral genetic adjustments the task demanded. Indeed, it hardly matters, for the genetic splicing had already been carefully planned, and the newly developed mutations run through the simulators hundreds of times. The Ghar brood-lines had proven remarkably stable for thousands of years, the telomeric integrity of Ghar chromosomes so strong that the vast majority of Ghar – those brooded in stations one to seven – are unreconstructed replicas of the pure strains developed by the primal creators thousands upon thousands of years ago. If the Ghar were ideally evolved for anything it was simply to be Ghar: unquestioningly loyal to their own kind, utterly dedicated to their task, not merely prepared to sacrifice their lives in service but fully expecting to do so. For a Ghar, self-interest was as unthinkable as was failure, and a sense of personal ambition a concept as incomprehensible as compassion.

However, in creating their new strain 12-40, the Ghar had inadvertently unleashed qualities hitherto quite alien to the Ghar temperament. When the mewling clones were reared within the station's nurseries, these qualities were never recognised for what they were. This was because ordinary Ghar have little natural empathy and practically no concept of such things as imagination, personal ambition or curiosity. That the broodmates were quick to learn, eager to succeed, and readily observant seemed only to suggest that the strain had been a great success; these aspects made the brood more different that its inceptors could easily grasp.

Confined within their narrow vision of purpose and duty, the geneticists could not know that these seemingly desirable attributes derived from a significantly enhanced sense of individuality and self-worth. In other words they had created Ghar prepared to put themselves above their duty. And that was – literally – unthinkable.

As the years passed the Supreme Commander had no immediate cause to regret his decision, and the fortieth brood of hatchery station 12 grew to become successful commanders in their diverse fields. A number were killed in the line of duty, as was only to be expected, but those that remained soon climbed to the very peaks of responsibility within the Empire – barring that lofty pinnacle that was the Supreme Commander himself.

Broods 12-41 to 12-44

Whilst the chemicals and processes of brood 12-40 were supposed to be unique, the following officer brood, 12-41, was tainted and produced Ghar that were closer to the normal, run-of-the-mill Ghar commanders but with improved intelligence and some independent thought. Shaltok was one such commander (41-9), but was merely one of many.

Whilst still tainted, the Ghar from batches 12-42 and 12-43 produced highly capable Ghar, the navy personnel and senior technologists from those batches going on to serve the Empire assiduously, all seemingly content in their role. In reality, the officers either suppressed their instincts and served under Karg, or joined the Rebels or Exiles.

Karg, however, was dissatisfied. He demanded personal loyalty from the commanders who served under him, and was constantly frustrated by their continual loyalty to the Supreme Commander and the Ghar ideals. Under the guise of optimising battlefield responsiveness, he had the hatchery

The Calamity of Duret IV

Finally, somewhere late in 1325, Karg's forces found Fartok's armies besieging the Algoryn Prosperate world of Duret IV. Karg secretly amassed his forces and hid behind one of several gas giants in the system. After Fartok had committed his – mostly panhuman – transports and support vessels to the invasion, Karg swept in with his fleet, destroying the transports and support vessels. With his destroyers pummelling the Algoryn ground defence stations and Fartok's forces, Karg's own forces pushed Fartok's forces onto the defensive until, finally, Fartok's barbaric battlesuit (consisting of a merge of panhuman and Ghar technology) was spotted.

After seeing the minimal threat the Rebels presented, Karg flew down to the planet surface in his personal assault shuttle, deploying his bodyguard and his own command crawler in a bid to personally exact revenge upon Fartok. He led the attack against the weakened Rebels until, finally, Fartok's customised battlesuit was incapacitated and Fartok captured.

But when the suit was opened in front of Karg, the Ghar within was not Fartok but Drok, one of Fartok's loyal commanders from Ephra. Karg was momentarily confused but the capture was what Fartok had been waiting for. Fartok's real fleet had been camouflaged beneath the dust of the planet's two moons and screened from Karg's fleet by debris. Whilst Karg remonstrated with the injured Drok, Fartok's ships shook off their camouflage and attacked the orbiting Ghar fleet. Fartok's armada contained all his most powerful combat ships, Ghar destroyers and pickets, captured panhuman frigates and even a few battlecruisers.

The battle in space was short, Karg's fleet overwhelmed. Those of Karg's fleet who would not surrender were destroyed, their response to the trap typically hampered by the lack of experience in brood 12-44.

Fartok did not make the same mistake as Karg, ordering his fleet to annihilate and turn to glass the area in which Karg had deployed. Karg and his most loyal cronies were slain. Then Fartok purged the fleet and the remainder of the army, recycling or making Outcast all those loyal to Karg and all of brood 12-44.

Fartok then withdrew all the surviving Ghar from Duret IV and led his fleet back into the heart of the Empire. Algoryn intelligence operatives had rumours of Exiles being pardoned, Outcasts being reinstated, and believed Fartok headed to Gharon Prime, perhaps to consolidate his victory and restore his position amongst the Ghar.

The events of Duret IV are a cause of great concern in the Algoryn High Council. For almost ten years the Prosperate had faced a fractured Ghar Empire, a threat that was fighting amongst itself as much as it was fighting panhumanity. An Empire united under the brilliant commander Fartok is one they have cause to fear.

technicians create a batch of Ghar officers who were loyal to him, personally.

Almost as soon as their basic training was completed, the Ghar from batch 12-44 were run out into the fleet and amongst the Ghar armies. Karg replaced perfectly good, senior Ghar with those of 12-44 and slowly grew his power base. It was not until the Disaster of Duret IV that the weaknesses of such a strategy could be seen.

GHAR NAMING CONVENTIONS

Ghar are birthed – or created – in hatcheries, sometimes many thousands at a time. The most famous are the High and Commander hatcheries. These are Hatchery 7, which is focused on producing managerial level Ghar and Junior and Senior Officers, and the infamous Hatchery 12, which focuses on senior officers and High Commanders.

Ghar have no real names, as such, just a carefully constructed classification that tells of their origin and, to some degree, the purpose of their particular batch in the hatchery.

The identification for every single Ghar is, formally:

Name-SequenceNo HH-BB-Type

where **SequenceNo**, **HH**, **BB** and **Type** are all numeric and **Name** is actually a four-letter code (Ghar don't use our 26-letter alphabet: 'Sh' is a specific letter, for example).

'**HH**' is the hatchery number – the facility where Ghar are grown. Hatchery 12- is a dedicated Commander hatchery from which all High Commanders are spawned and from amongst which the Supreme Commander is eventually chosen. Other hatcheries produce vast numbers of identical Ghar, all meant to do the same job – most Ghar come from the mass hatcheries 01- to 07-.

'**BB**' is the batch number from within a hatchery. So 12-40 means 'batch 40 in hatchery 12'.

'**Type**' is the specific job or approximate intended role of the individual Ghar within the batch. So Karg is type '9' from batch 12-40 and Fartok type '13'.

'**Name**' is a four-letter character code identifying the specific subtype that is vocalised as an understandable word, almost an abbreviated name. There are, for example, many 05-76-12's for example, each of which has a unique four-letter-code 'Name'. In effect, it states a specific variant, hence Karg (KRRG) or Fartok (FRTK). These could be pronounced differently for individuals, so that KRRG could be 'Krug', FRTK as 'FroTak' or NRRK as 'Norrik', depending on the individual, just like we have a variety of ways of saying our own names.

SequenceNo is an individual numerical designation given to Ghar from the mass hatcheries who are part of a batch of perhaps thousands of clones of the same variant and so have the same, four-letter name. It designates an individual who might otherwise be completely undifferentiated from another from the same batch with the same name.

Example Names

Given the four-letter name code and the variation of its interpretation, the number of Ghar names is potentially vast – perhaps the intention of their unknown creators.

Code	Possible Pronunciations
KRRG	Karg, Krug, Krayg
FRTK	Fartok, FroTik, Fratek
ShLTK	Shaltok, Shlatik (Sh is a single letter in Ghar)
TRRN	Tren (an Exile Sub-Commander), Torrín, Terrin, Trorn, Tam, Tron
DOBT	Dobat (an Exile Subcommander), Dobut, Doubit, Dobit
FRNN	Foornyn
NRRK	Nurk, Norrik, Norkk, Nurrik

GHAR PERSONAL LIFE

None can now know what the forefathers of the Ghar intended by their creation. The Ghar themselves care nothing for such things. To the Ghar knowledge is only of value if it drives their fighting machines or has some practical purpose in waging war. Those who made them excised everything from their temperament that might hinder them in their task. That task was to fight, to wage war, to conquer.

PanHumans regard Ghar as twisted, spiteful and pitiless creatures driven by an unquenchable hatred and living a life of obedience to an overriding cause: the defeat of humanity. Every Ghar is born knowing their intended and potential place in society and has a carefully – at least, as Ghar can be careful – selected polygenic makeup to gear them towards accepting and performing well in that role. Whilst the genetic alteration in the hatcheries is still maintained carefully according to instructions laid down in the distant past, it is thought that Ghar do not fully understand the science behind the technology – hence the disastrous results of their experimentation in Hatchery 12 Batch 40.

Given they have little knowledge of the science involved, it is hardly surprising that the batch-bred Ghar do not always match the expectations. The inevitable environmental and experiential factors can alter each individual's effectiveness leading to the need for the Outcasts, Ghar who are not as effective in their planned role as they should be. And under the dominance of Karg, the standard set for each individual's performance is very high, indeed: mistakes are rarely tolerated – unless they benefit Karg, of course, in which case they are never identified as mistakes in the first place!

This leads to a very defensive attitude amongst the majority of Ghar: why do something different if you are bred for a role and changing it might lead to a reduction in even the basic privileges that every Ghar is given?

The Ghar know nothing of art or music, of culture or the common hopes and dreams of humanity. They are without compassion, without mercy, without affection for their fellow kind. Their only passion is to hate humanity with a bitter, irreconcilable and irrational hatred that brooks no respite so long as a single human lives. Their only terror is of failure, to fail in their duties, to fail their masters, and to fail in their great task of eradication. It is this fear that drives them as hard as hate, exulting in their own terror, revelling in their own cruel and insatiable malice.

GHAR WEAPONS & TECHNOLOGY

Ghar technology has little in common with that of the advanced civilisations of Seventh Age Antares. Their technology is a remnant of a time long before the common application of structural suspensors based on nanospore. Ghar machines are made of simpler materials and activated by crude mechanical interfaces or photoelectric switch-gear; their components articulate against each other or are motivated by primitive hydraulics, magnetic couplings and mechanical transmissions.

In the case of their war machines, Ghar crew rely upon neural interfaces attached by means of spinal plugs that are surgically implanted into every Ghar at spawning (Ghar spines have thickened anterior processes to accept the fixings). Such gross, surgical modification of living bodies is the kind of primitive

technology that is only found on isolated, barbaric planets within Antarean space.

Despite the Ghar being a space-going race who have been in contact with advanced societies for countless centuries, they appear to have adopted practically none of the new technologies of the cultures around them. Indeed, they exhibit a profound distaste for the advanced technology of contemporary panhumans and make little effort to understand or replicate it. Instead, they keep to technologies and devices they were bred and trained to build and operate.

For the universe at large this is a problem, for Ghar technology is profoundly dangerous not just to their enemies but to the Ghar themselves, something that would never be acceptable within the advanced IMTel societies or even the more wholly human civilisations of the Determinate. The amount of power generated by Ghar reactors is huge compared to the tiny energies required by even the largest Concord drones. This power is necessary to overcome the weight and massive inertia of Ghar machines. This is especially a problem where war machines are protected by archaic magnetic resonance shields that multiply inertia many times over. Ghar weapons also require a great deal of power to operate compared to the usual weaponry of Antarean space. The chief issue with Ghar reactors is that they are highly unstable, generating incredible heat and dangerous levels of radiation that often prove fatal to operators.

The pollutants and high levels of radiation emitted by Ghar technology are bad enough, but nothing compared to the horrors unleashed by their 'quantum gravity' based weapons and force fields. The consequences include micro-fragmentation of the fabric of space-time and occasional large-scale disruption to the cohesion of the local universe.

These things only affect the Ghar to a minor degree because their machines are so primitive, but wreak havoc with advanced nano-based technologies. This is one reason why worlds destroyed by the Ghar remain ruinous. They are so highly contaminated by the 'quantum gravity' fall out it is impossible for an advanced nano-based society to resettle or even occupy them.

The following sections discuss some effects of Ghar weapons as well as some aspects of Ghar technology that are only briefly covered in the Ghar Army List.

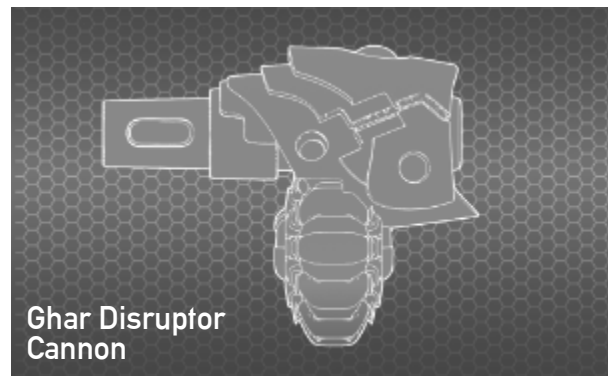
Space/Time Distortion

This is represented by one or more Event Dice that are used to trigger the spatial distortion effect. Ghar disruptor weaponry is one of the chief culprits in such pollution.

Disruptor Weapons

Ghar disruptor weapons are all bomb-like shells propelled by steam-plasma combustion using plasma generated by a Ghar reactor. This is ancient and highly volatile technology, long surpassed by Antarean civilisations, but the Ghar appear incapable of, or resistant to, technological progress.

When a disruptor weapon detonates it releases what the Ghar refer to as a 'quantum gravity' blast that tears the material of space apart and can leave battlefields uninhabitable for years: any cover is useless against such gross space-time disruption. Such distortion is especially effective against equipment that relies on subtle effects, such as nanoscale technology.



Disruptor Bombers

For longer-ranged attacks, Ghar employ launchers that use a variation of their standard plasma/steam mix to lob a disruptor bomb high into the air. These primitive launchers come in four main variations: a straightforward, direct-fire disruptor cannon which is fixed to simple walkers; a lighter version fitted to the multi-mode scourer cannon; a variant affixed to Ghar battlesuits; and a heavier variant affixed to Ghar crawlers.

The loud retort of a bomb discharge is literally deafening, which would be unfortunate for the bomber troopers were they not protected by their battlesuits and even the crawler crew have to wear effective ear defenders. Ammunition is bulky and bombers are sometimes accompanied by lurking munitions scutters.

Manipulators

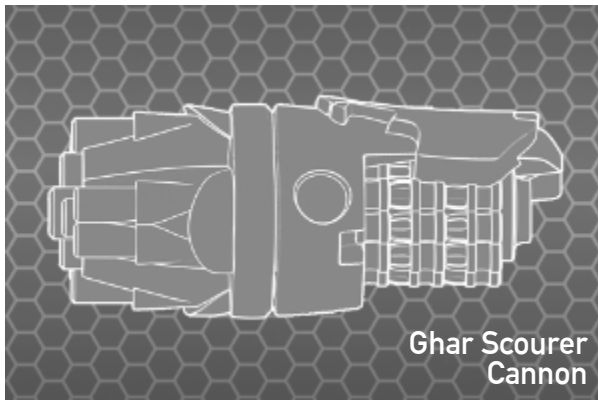
The Ghar Empire fit powerful recovery grabbers to their wrecker scutters. Whilst not intended for combat, the powered jaws can give a very nasty nip if they catch an opponent. Occasionally, following Fartok's influence during the Rebellion, smaller grabbers are given to wrecking crews: whilst not meant to be used as hand-to-hand weapons, the grabbers are quite effective at crushing armour!

Munitions scutters have loading arms: these can also be used in hand-to-hand combat or in PBS to throw the disruptor bombs carried by the scutter.

Scavenged Weapons

Ghar struggle to repair and re-engineer the nanosphere-dependence of the weapons of other factions: those simple, typically standard, weapons they do manage to repair are often useless after a few months active use in Ghar hands. Though usable, the repaired items are sub-optimal compared with their original versions and are described as 'Scavenged' versions of the original weapon and are given their own stats.





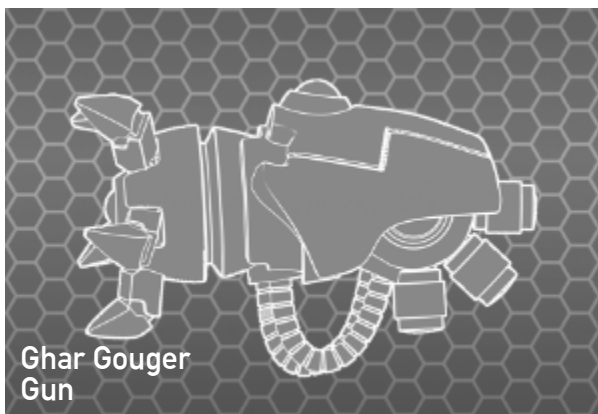
Ghar Battlesuits

Sometimes termed ‘battle armour’, the Ghar battlesuit is unique to the Ghar and in many respects scarcely armour at all. The occupant is curled up inside and attached to the machine’s interface by neural implants driven into the spines of Ghar infants shortly after birth. The machine itself is crude and mechanical: metal articulates against metal and is actuated by hydraulic cables and high-tension power lines fed by a ramshackle and extremely vulnerable Ghar reactor: they could never be called agile machines!

The armour, its reactor and weaponry are built into what is effectively a self-contained fighting machine more like a micro-vehicle than a regular suit of armour. The heavy armour’s thick multi-layered metal shell provides excellent protection and are enhance by a magnetic resonance shield, a crude type of magnetic armour field that hugely strengthens metals but also loads them with massive inertia. Understandably, this makes Ghar battlesuits power hungry, but the primitive technology renders them immune to much of the advanced nanite-based technology most factions on Antares are used to handling!

Ghar battlesuits have integral power amplifiers that temporarily boost the power output of the reactor, feeding more power to the suit and supercharging the feed to the weapons and legs. They are often just referred to as ‘amps’. The problem is that the amplifiers are the epitome of half-understood, unreliable Ghar technology and may not function, or may even burn out completely.

Within their battlesuits, Ghar Troopers wear flight suits that fit tightly to their body but give access to their spinal connectors. Whilst this is of little use within the shell, it does offer a modicum of life-support and a layer of protection that most Ghar do not receive. The suit has pockets for ammunition and a holster for a personal lugger gun, and also has basic



connections to the Ghar battle comms network. There are limitations, however, on the protection it can provide compared with more advanced energy fields such as Reflex armour.

Battlesuits are armed with a mix of weapons depending on their role:

- **Scourer suits** are equipped with multi-purpose scourer cannon and powered battle claws.
- **Assault suits** are equipped with gouger guns to shock opponents and with high-powered plasma claws.
- **Bomber suits** are equipped with a long-range disruptor launcher called a bomber and a powered battle claw.

Tectorists

Tectorists are Ghar regarded as having severe judgemental or social issues by their peers. Happy to go off on their own and seek out enemy, tectorists are equipped with tector rods – sensor equipment that transmits the accurate location of enemy back to the Ghar force to enable better targeting.

Flitters and Bomb Buddies

Flitters are tiny fragile flying cameras with mechanical wings a little like a bat. They fly in a jerky, irregular manner and are attracted towards movement, but are not even remotely intelligent machines. They broadcast pictures that can be picked up by Ghar battlesuit and vehicle interfaces, giving Ghar troops a glimpse of the battlefield from the flitter’s perspective.

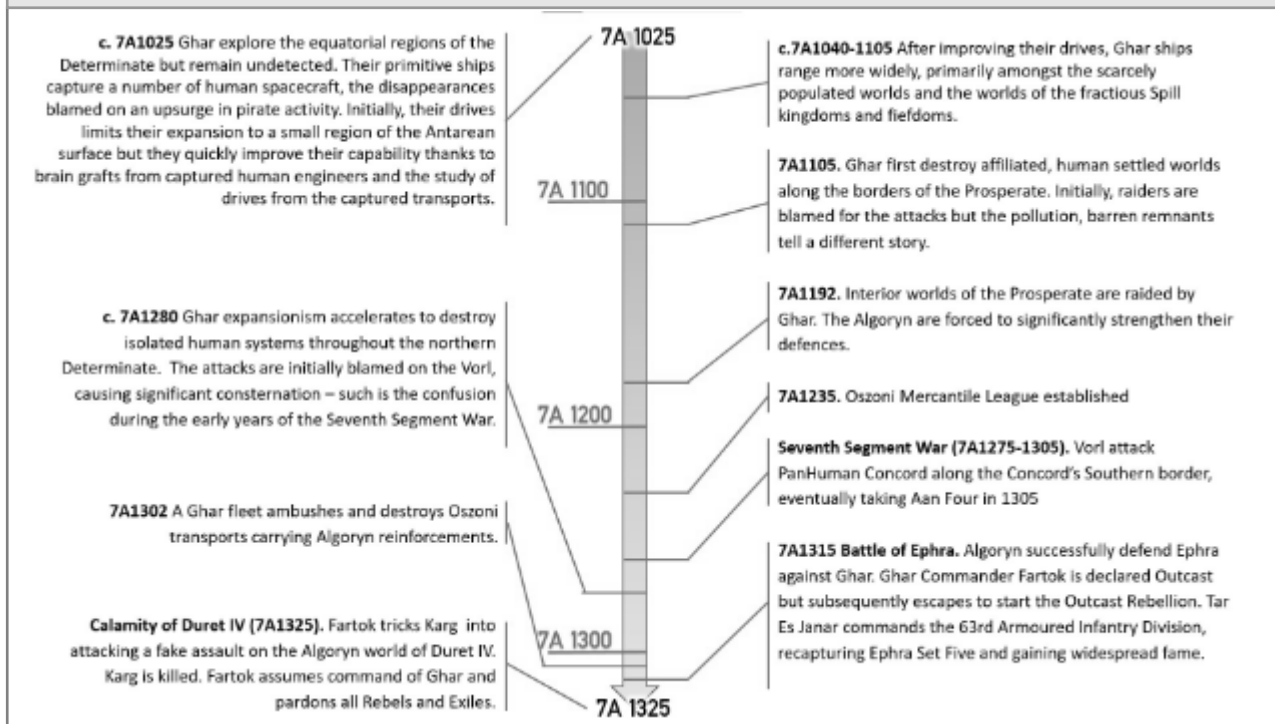
Ghar Bomb Buddies are an innovation of Fartok’s engineers who have converted ordinary Ghar flitters into simple flying bombs by the addition of a small disruptor charge. As a disruptor weapon their ability to inflict pins makes them extremely useful, although being Ghar constructions they are also notoriously unreliable and often fail to explode altogether. The inclusion of a disruption bomb has made their rudimentary seek/find programming almost useless so they accompany weaker, infantry units as buddies that are sent in to close assault.

Bomb Loaders

Ghar Bomber squads and Bombardment Crawler units are armed with crude launchers that hurl large, heavy disruptor shells. It is impossible for a Bomb trooper or Bombardment Crawler to carry all the ammunition it needs, so it is common for units to be accompanied by scutters equipped with bomb loaders. These machines are able to pump bombs into the long-distance weapon’s hoppers so they can keep up a reasonable rate of fire.

Ghar Outcasts are also not necessarily given enough ammunition for their primitive lugger guns and many bomb loaders carry extra supplies. Spare parts and ammo for Scavenged weapons are also carried on Bomb Loader scutters.

27: Timeline of Ghar Incursion into Algoryn Space



THE VIRAI DRONESCOURGE

The Virai – Viral Artificial Intelligence – are a swarming, ancient machine race that spreads throughout Antarean space by stowing away on starships. They consider themselves threatened and persecuted by organic life, and their experiences would certainly lead them to be convinced of that fact. Unfortunately, all the other species on Antares regard them as little more than a mechanical, parasitic, and immensely destructive infection.

For the first 1300 years of the Seventh Age, the Virai Dronescourge were little more than an ancient threat. The Virai were thought to be a long-extinct, artificially intelligent, machine horror so different from ordinary IMTel drones that they had not only been archived from the knowledge bases of the Concord and Senatex, but had even dropped out of popular myth. But over the many aeons of their persecution prior to their supposed destruction, the Virai had discovered how to survive for millennia in machine hibernation, hiding from the universe, waiting to return.

After the ructions of Xilos, a long-lost system on the Northern Interface between the Senatex and Concord was reconnected to the Nexus. The system held a Virai drone which awoke, fastened onto the first ship it found – an ancient wreck of a TOR (transient observation report) – and began scavenging the ship to reproduce. This time, as luck would have it, the Virai ended up in the perfect area in which they could reproduce: the Northern Interface between the Isorian Senatex and PanHuman Concord, a border zone mastered and controlled by neither but over which both IMTels fought for supremacy.

With neither great nation able to focus their efforts on eradicating the Virai, the drones began to spread around the Nexus from the Northern Interface and Determinate. Once more, in the Seventh Age of humanity, the Dronescourge had returned.

THE VIRAI DRONE LIFE-FORM

Virai can appear anywhere in Antarean space where an Antarean gate has recently been spawned – the tremors caused by the Xilos disaster are not only collapsing gates but reopening some to the distant past. The origin of the Virai is unclear: records from the IMTel factions are incomplete and corrupt, long ago placed into distant archives – anything outstanding dates from before the Senatex-Concord sharding took place.

Based on a technology that has no need for the complex interactions of a nanosphere, the Virai are virtually immune to the combat nanophages of the IMTel or any advanced nanospore-based technology. This is not to say the Virai are primitive, merely that they use power systems, controls and communication capabilities that have no need for the nanotechnology of the advanced Antarean nations.

All a Virai architector needs is raw material to build a fabricator and it can reproduce itself and more of its kind, preferably in a system in which it can quietly do so until it has



reached a critical mass. Long ago the Virai machine minds optimised their manufacturing systems and hierarchy to three broad classes of citizen drones: constructors, warriors, and manufacturing and command drones referred to as ‘architectors’.

The primary weakness of the Virai is their dependency on their architectors for command, control and construction: only an architector is capable of programming another architector. Few Virai architectors still exist. Their paranoid tendencies result in conflict wherever they are found and each time they resurface, the other civilisations try to eradicate them.

Placed there as insurance by the lead architector in a swarm – a First Instance – architectors that survive an eradication orbit dead systems and dying stars in a semi-quiescent state, hoping a visitor will come through the Antares gate. Like fleas or other parasites, they infiltrate or attach themselves to a visitor’s host starship in such fashion that, when those visitors leave, rarely do they realise that they are host to a technological species that is using them to spread itself around the galaxy. They then release themselves into the next system and resource-loaded planet, as on Taskarr.

Though incapable of comprehending Antarean wormhole physics, and having no idea of how to operate the gates, the Virai are happy to use any large ship – such as TOR 563 – as a safe breeding ground and transport. Their programming is less complex than that of the IMTel’s machine intelligences and – for now, at least – it is highly unlikely the Virai would be capable of designing a ship able to withstand the pressures and stresses of the Antares machine and its dangerous photosphere.

To propagate, however, the Virai need minerals and materials that are rare on the space debris and meteors that they might encounter. Their normal strategy is to wait for a ship to arrive, secretly hitch a ride and stealthily begin to replicate themselves and fabricate drones from the material on board a ship.

SOCIETY – A DRONESCOURGE HIVE

Each Virai hive, or swarm, is dominated by its First Instance Architector, the mind and character of the Hive. Beneath the First Instance are secondary architectors, each of which manages a broad functional area in the hive such as security, intelligence, resource management, scavenging, mining, power generation, manufacturing, building and anything a

hive needs to survive. Within each of these specialities, the Secondaries construct Tertiary Supervisors, control drones with limited intelligence but which are tasked to carry out specific tasks within the functional hierarchy, such as surface scavenging in a given area, running a specific manufacturing or power plant, or even looking after a particular mine shaft or seam.

Beneath the Tertiaries are the ordinary drones, though sometimes the Secondaries take command of whatever drones they need for a special task. The only architector to manufacture Secondaries and its own replacement(s) is the First Instance.

MEMORIES OF A VIRAI FIRST INSTANCE

It is sometimes said we – humans – are the sum of our experiences, that a human's actions and reactions are shaped by their memory. Of course, there is a caveat on top of that that presumes the listener appreciates humans are also the result of a long period of evolution and adaptation to a particular set of environmental (and social) hazards. On top of that, there is the deliberate genetic tampering that has created many panhuman morphs.

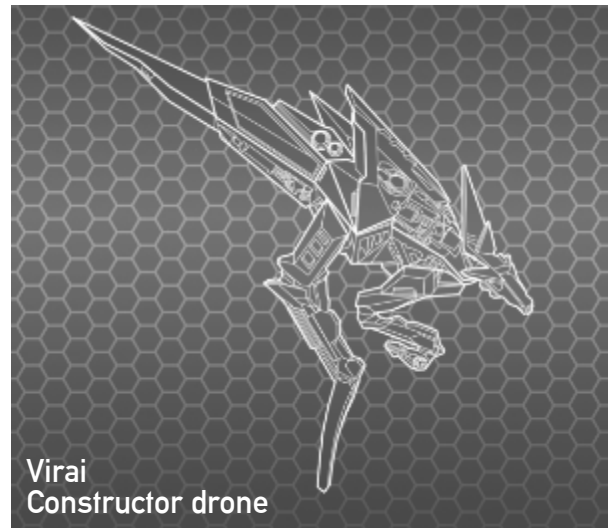
In the case of IMTel drones, the process is artificial: each new drone is built with a set of programmed reactions that have evolved from the IMTel's appreciation of the situation to date – perhaps a form of evolution. However, like humans, the drones learn and have their memories to fall back on — up until the time of their last back-up, at least — and can study their failures to better themselves for the future. To some extent, the advanced technology panhumans (especially those in the IMTel societies), can do the same, providing they have a nonfunctional clone waiting or growing into which their mind-state can be poured.

With the Virai, the situation is very different. Hives are in a hierarchical structure: a single First Instance has a number of highly-capable Second Instances, each of which commands a larger number of Tertiary Supervisors. All these command or 'managerial' level Virai are architectors. Every architector leads, organises and controls any number of ordinary drones (warriors or constructors) in addition to any lesser architectors it may have attached to it.

Each Second Instance has a very dense computational and memory core which it can use to become a new First Instance. Further, a First Instance can manufacture another First Instance and either clone it's own memory bank or implant a compressed memory core in the new drone. In either situation, these new First Instances are referred to as a 'NuFirst'.

Each NuFirst Instance has potential access to all the memories of every single Virai First Instance that spawned it. The memory core is precious, containing all the experiences of every First Instance that was able to find resources sufficient to reproduce. Such memories are boosted when a hive controller meets a still-intact predecessor and will tag it's own copy of that predecessor's memories and experience as being more useful for survival.

There are so many memories in the databanks that the Virai have had to build a brake, 'control gates', on their release in order that a NuFirst can organise them all properly – and select those which are the most pertinent. Without this, the NuFirst would be flooded, even overwhelmed, by a plethora of disorganised, unrelated and unstructured memories. With the



control gates, however, as each NuFirst encounters a new situation, memories are unlocked based on search criteria it used: the NuFirst can then build it's own memory structure based on situational links that it finds the most useful.

In this way, the Virai ape the human evolutionary steps as each NuFirst encounters a unique environment and set of experiences: the Virai not only learn but evolve to meet the threats in their environment.

BUILDING A HIVE

The first action of each NuFirst is to play safe, to make enough constructors so that it can reproduce effectively and in a secure location. Exactly what defines a 'secure location' varies from place to place, but is most often a resource-rich, abandoned city or orbital, or extensive mines, whether on a particularly rich asteroid or geologically interesting area on a planet.

When underground, the structure most resembles an insect hive, with mines, galleries, tunnels and multiple entrances. Warriors – Defenders and Assault drones – with a controlling Secondary Instance are more prevalent near the entrances whilst scavenger parties under the control of Tertiary architectors (Tertiary Supervisors) roam and scout the surrounding area. In all situations, away from the accessible areas will be found the majority of the constructors and mining drones and, somewhere in the middle, the First Instance.

All this is approximate, however. The Virai long ago learnt to adapt to their surroundings so whilst there are a few, common designs, such as the well-known suspensor-driven patterns,



they are flexible enough to adapt their drone construction to suit the environment. Likewise, colours are highly variable, being dependent on the minerals and materials available. Despite this variety, the fundamental control structure of architects (First Instance, Second Instances, Tertiary Supervisors), warriors (Bodyguard, weapon drones, Hive Defenders and assault drones) and constructors (basic, crew, miner, STAA and scavengers) is still maintained.

Potential Hive Conflict

As each hive has only one First Instance, there is no infighting within a swarm – every subordinate takes orders and instructions from their First Instance. Similarly, when a NuFirst is created and sent off with a few resources, initially there would also be no conflict as the NuFirst would not set up shop within the demesne of its parent First Instance.

It is conceivable, however, that if two, reasonably balanced, pre-existing swarms came into contact in a resource-poor system, they might each think they had the better claim and fight. If one was weaker than the other, however, its First would surrender and become a Second under the control of the now-dominant, single First Instance.

In resource-rich systems, several swarms could co-exist, each in their own, particular, area until they used up the resources. If several Firsts were descended from the same, recent ancestor, they may elect to merge swarms with the most successful remaining a First and taking over the expanded swarm and the others being relegated to Seconds. Each of those new Second Instances would superficially resemble First Instances, but not act like one. Further, each would still retain the suppressed memory management and command protocols of a First, ready to become a NuFirst in the event of disaster. Their databanks would ultimately be overlaid by those memories of the more successful First they originally ‘surrendered’ to, though, as the First periodically archives its memory state, databanks and logic pathways (part of a First Instances ‘Download’ special ability).

As all First Instances contain memories of all their predecessors who managed to spawn a new NuFirst, to them, taking on the memories of a defeated Virai or one that surrendered to them would not only be regarded as pointless but also result in massive duplication somewhere back in the ancestral chain. On becoming a Secondary Instance, a surrendering First would give up all its secrets, anyway, but its logic pathways would be regarded as inferior.

VIRAI AND THE WIDER UNIVERSE

The Virai could be said to be the ultimate paranoid. The epithet ‘dronesource’ was given to them by the IMTel nations and their allies who had to deal with their hive infestations. However, they do not automatically attack opponents, unless feeling forced to prepare a world for their own existence, but are always prepared for hostilities and are distrustful of any who attempt diplomatic solutions. They are particularly distrustful of those scavenging or mining in the same locations as them as such creatures – especially ‘biologics’ – are competing for the same resources.

To the Concord and Isorians, the Virai are a potentially dangerous threat, the Dronesource, an enemy that is essentially immune to their core nanosphere-based technologies. Further, the single-minded focus of the Virai is

as disconcerting to the IMTel civilisations as are the Ghar: though artificial intelligences, the Virai do not want to join any IMTel and have no wish to cooperate. To the Virai First Instances, their own hierarchy is perfect, a communal, artificial entity, a swarm of drones under the command of one that are optimised for its own survival and reproduction.

If the Senatex and Concord were able to cooperate, the Virai might pose less of a threat to either IMTel power. But all the Virai want to do is to survive. To them, anything associated with biologics, including more complex machine intelligences, is simply hostile and a danger to their existence. As luck or fate would have it, the Dronesource have surfaced in the ideal place in which they can prosper, spawn and expand.

THE VIRAI DRONES

The Virai are a drone species with highly differing morphology and three loose categories. The first is the architects, a group of sub-commander drones created by each Virai hive’s founder, a ‘First Instance’. The First Instance commands the hive and normally contains the memories of all the architects who spawned it. The immediate sub-commanders are ‘Second Instances’, high-function architects who fill security, intelligence, management and command roles. Architects with more mundane jobs like manufacturing, scavenging or maintenance control are ‘Tertiary Instances’, and these are often accompanied by numerous constructor drones. Though often integrated with their manufacturing or heavy machinery, tertiary instances detach themselves when forced into combat and lead their swarm of constructors to the defence of the colony.

Though the terms ‘hive’ or ‘swarm’ are sometimes used for a settled group of Virai, any of the Second Instance architects can found a new swarm and, indeed, many are sent out to do just that. They are equipped with the memories of their First Instance kept in a secure data-storage vault, ready for implantation in the new First Instance (a NuFirst). These memories are key as it is the character of a First Instance that gives a swarm its identity and helps it survive. Some swarms are more likely to explore, others to remain in place (hence the hive) and mine; some Virai tend to retreat to their hive, whilst others will strike first, swarming to overwhelm a threat.

The single thread that goes through all their memories is that the Virai have suffered too much at the hands of biological life – biologics. This makes them appear paranoid as they regard all approaches from biologics with suspicion, even those intent on peace or research.

Apart from the architects, there are two other categories of Virai drone. These are the warriors, whose primary function is defence of the colony; and the constructors, whose function is to find and obtain resources, build a protective home for the colony, and help the architects construct new drones. However, the Virai are pragmatic and avoid wasting resources if they can, so both warriors and constructors cooperate in work such as demolition and mining as well as in combat.

Though warriors are more homogeneous in style and design, the bodyshape of all the drones depends on where they are discovered, from what they are constructed and what purpose their creating architect had in mind when building the drone in the first place. Despite the variation in shape and size, specific roles can be identified as limbs, tool arms and

attachments are manufactured as appropriate for whatever is needed.

Virai weapons are relatively consistent, the architects long ago settling on a basic design that can be reproduced from whatever materials are available. Their power source is essentially a miniature fusion reactor and the energy from this is used to power each drone's tools and weapons. Similarly, a readily adaptable design for protection long ago produced a complex structure that is more akin to the Ghar armour – multi-layered, mixed alloy and ceramic honeycomb shells rather than the advanced hyperlight or reflex armour of the IMTel nations.

Due to their ancient and tightly segregated technological approach, Virai hardware is immune to nanospore. Further, emissions from their reactors, weapons and equipment severely impedes normal nanospore replenishment processes. Though drone machines, so immune to scoot, Virai architects are also not susceptible to subverter matrices and scramble munitions. The less dynamic constructors and warriors are also immune to such munitions but are easy to overcome when out of range of their controlling architects.

The rules for Virai are given in their Army Lists.

VIRAI ORGANISATION

Militarily, the Virai paranoid outlook means they are likely to switch to all-out war at a moment's notice. Whilst the variation between each individual drone can be quite marked, depending on its task, role, environment and materials available for its construction, there are fewer variations in Warrior drones than there are Constructors and very few variations of Architects in total.

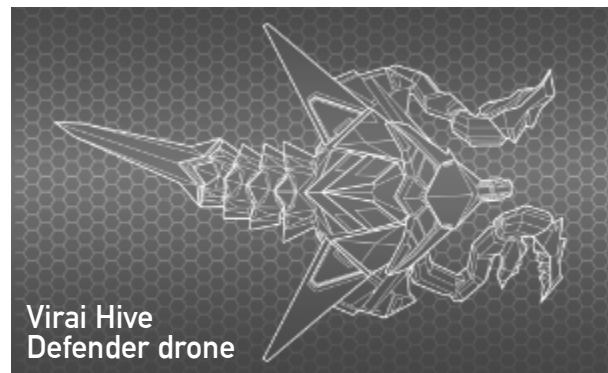
Some warrior drones are refitted with secondary reactors, thrusters, additional armour and control surfaces and turned into weapon drones. The architects tend to dislike doing so as it limits the warrior's flexibility. However, such weapon drones often retain their manipulator arms and fusion cutters so retain some effectiveness in close combat and at the workplace.

For opponents, the problems are that the Constructor drones will use whatever is to hand as weaponry as well as constructing makeshift weaponry on the spot. The Constructors may be more plentiful than the Warriors, and weaker, but they can be used for a wide variety of roles. Whilst the First Instance tends to prefer having as many cross-skilled drones as it can, it also makes sure drones carrying out a specific task are equipped with the best equipment it can manufacture. Very occasionally, in a burst of machine imagination, it might equip a specialist combat squad with heavier armour and actuators, though at the cost of flexibility. This is often coupled with altered heuristics, virtually ensuring the squad will enter combat if so ordered. We assign these assault drones the 'Savage strike' special ability to reflect this programming.

In game terms, the Virai require very different handling to other factions. They have low initiative and relatively low command levels, but the force has a higher prevalence of command squads to exert influence over the lesser drones.

Alliances

Virai First Instances are too distrustful of naturally-evolving, intelligent creatures (biologics) to ally with any panhumans or



the Vorl. They may, on occasion, ally with all-drone forces or with the Ghar Empire if it furthers their own, long-term goals.

In past ages, Boromites found themselves particularly troubled by the mining and scavenging activities of the Virai Drones, with both competing for the same resources. The Virai regard the Boromite presence as a parasitical infestation of asteroids or mineral deposits whilst the Boromites regard the Virai with deep resentment, not only taking the brunt of any Virai resurgence but also regarding them as technological invaders into a domain for which they were genetically tailored. Boromites and Virai should always be regarded as enemies.

VIRAI WEAPONS

Virai tend to use fusion cutters, flamers and similar, multi-use tools/weapons. Their Constructors are equipped with a variation on the compactor maul for mining, otherwise with a mix of tool appendages and a simple fusion cutter.

Hive Defender drones are equipped with a fusion flamer and deadly, powered ripclaws. These are not pure weapons, however, being useful in mining or in gaining access to abandoned structures.

Virai weapon drones tend to be equipped with the only true weapons the Virai possess: flamer arrays or scavenged mag weapons. As a result, the weapon drones are deadly.

The rest of Virai support weapons tends towards mining equipment, like Boromites.



Note: There are currently no models for Vorl, as yet, but we felt it important to supply at least some information on their society and their interaction with humans.

THE VORL ORDO

Vorl are an insectoid, highly advanced, community-focused symbiosis, a single Vorl comprised of three different sub-species who connect into one being: a zugon. Socially, they form tight-knit, family Nests led by a single zugon who is implicitly selected as the Vorl most closely representing the ethos and common pheromonal signature of the Nest members (the two are equally important). This leader could be called a hearth-mother, though Vorl are hermaphrodites and potentially parthenogenetic.

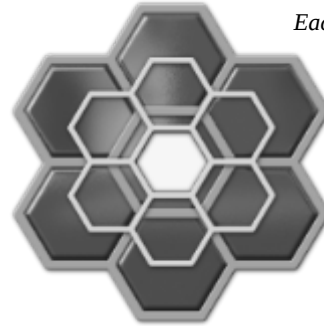
Nests band together into a strongly defensive, social structure called an Ordo (pl. Ordo) under a single war-chief. The war-chief is selected from the hearth-mother who most strongly represents the group philosophy, social connectivity, breeding and pheromonal signature of all the associated hearth-mothers. This war-chief represents all that is important to that Ordo, the community values and its commonality of thought and breeding – the war-chief's leadership is merely a reflection of the society they lead.

The Vorl refer to each grouping of Vorl society as a synthesis. Each synthesis is a result of not just family, but a commonality of thought, way of life and pheromonal signature. In the past, the synthesis at Ordo scale might have only comprised relatively few Nests – perhaps up to 10,000 zugon at most. With the advent of the Vorl's nanosphere and its integration capabilities, an Ordo can now comprise many more syntheses, perhaps millions or even billions of Vorl across many planets and star systems.

Antareans fear the Vorl as a xenophobic species, one that commits terrible atrocities in wiping out whole populations. In contrast, the Vorl regard panhumans and most other species as little more than under-developed animals, individuals with no idea of true community, as semi-sapient creatures who merely play with terrible technologies without fully understanding the implications. Conveniently forgotten by the Vorl is that it was their experiments with chronoplasticity that brought about the Third Age collapse, and it was their own interdimensional attack on the Isori gate that caused the Fifth Age to end abruptly.

A Vorl Nest can be seen as a peaceful, tightly-knit family, and an Ordo a way of integrating many Nests into a more productive and harmonious larger body. Problems arise, however, when one strong Ordo meets another with competing social values, philosophy or pheromonal signature – and an alien (panhuman!) world or empire reflects all those triggers. At such an conflicting conjunction, a highly aggressive survival instinct kicks in, one that drives Vorl to increase their breeding rate for the security of the Nest and Ordo. Inevitably, this means absorbing as much land – or as many systems – as possible in which to expand the population.

The inevitable results of such abrupt expansionism are devastating conflicts when they encounter the occupants of other worlds. This is exacerbated by the cultural and biological xenophobia that leads to a contempt of non-Vorl stronger than the contempt for a competing Ordo. The Vorl are biologically



Each Ordo has its own symbol.

This symbol is typical, intended to represent ordered and connected nature with explicit reference to the Vorl ethos of mutual support.

Different regiments or Nests may colour the segments differently.

and socially incapable of harmonious interactions with any other species who lack more than a few Vorl attributes.

Though originally more technologically advanced than panhumans, their science is now roughly on a par with that of the Seventh Age PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex. Vorl technology is not entirely unlike that of the rest of the Antarean worlds because, like others, they derived many of their discoveries from the Nexus itself and the Gatebuilder artefacts they found. Physically, however, and in implementation and weaponry, the Vorl devices are quite different because of the gross difference in form between Vorl and panhumanity.

PANHUMAN-VORL INTERACTION

Though it is likely they were connected to the Nexus roughly about the same time as humanity, the Vorl were first encountered during the Third Age of humanity. From the start, they were found to be an implacably hostile foe, one that gave no quarter and expected none. The extreme violence shown by the Vorl now means that the finding of a single Vorl planet or ship by panhumans triggers a mass military mobilisation: panhumanity now knows what will happen next.

After the disaster in the Third Age, the highly-advanced Vorl did not appear until late in the Fourth Age – the Xon Times – where, once again, their devastating attacks on human civilisation led to yet another war in which thousands of human worlds were destroyed. The Vorl even attacked Xon itself, its destruction bringing about the collapse of the Empire of Xon.

During the Fifth or Warring Age, the Vorl attacks started early on. Whilst most of humanity bonded together into an alliance called the Ascendancy, the Vorl strategy of destroying whole populations inhibited a coherent panhuman defence.

When they did not appear early in the Sixth Age, it was thought the Vorl were extinct, a species that had turned in on itself. When they re-emerged into Antarean space late in the Sixth Age, their devastating attacks on humanity led to the collapse that is the TriSapient Catastrophe. Whilst the Vorl did not themselves cause the collapse, it was the destruction of strategically critical Vorl gates by the NuXon Empire and Isorian Senatex that triggered the cascading collapse of the Nexus.

The area the Vorl now control in the Seventh Age of PanHumanity goes by several names – Extents, Dominion, or just ‘Area of Vorl Control’ – as it is ruled by countless Ordo, some of which may be at war with each other as much as with panhumanity. Were it not for the uncontrollable hostility between the Senatex and Concord, and latterly the threatening collapse of the gates, the expansion of the Vorl Extents from the southern polar regions of Antares would cause much more concern.

Ignoring such a threat may be an act that panhumanity will come to regret.

THE VORL LIFE-FORM

The Vorl are the most numerous and successful species within the Nexus after humans. Their symbiote physiology is very different to that of humans, or any other alien race for that matter. In appearance, full grown Vorl are scorpion-like, even if their primary head is placed where a scorpion would have a sting.

The full, transgenic Vorl symbiote called a zugon is comprised of three, distinct creatures. All three creatures evolved with an openly transgenic biological structure, which in practice means that each component of the symbiote has absorbed some of the responsibilities for running the whole. As the being evolved (or was consciously altered), some organs moved from species to species: the cephalite heads, for example, lack digestive and reproductive tracts so must rejoin with the other symbiotes in order to survive more than a week, at most.

Individual components of a Vorl zugon have their own terms: that in which the primary brain sits is a cephalite; that hosting the main legs, grazing mouth and stomach an ambulite; and the body with the primary manipulative and reproductive organs a torsite.

A cephalite, or head, contains basic respiratory and circulatory organs, rudimentary limbs that substitute as arms or legs, a basic food-exchange membrane for a stomach, and a highly-developed brain. The cephalite is completely dependent on the nutrient exudation – akin to honey and royal jelly – that the other components secrete from nutrient glands: the cephalite has a pair of proboscis-like organs that connect with the nutrient glands of its torsite and ambulite and cannot live on any food less rich in minerals, vitamins, basic sugars and protein.

Some cephalites exist as a sterile and much-respected Technician caste, in such a role fulfilling many functions where the large size of a full Vorl complicates operations. Due to their vulnerability, Technicians are never used as assault troops but take up roles such as scientists, engineers, or even pilots and crew for the suspended saucers the Vorl regard as vehicles. The detached cephalites are dependent on food sacs containing a partly synthesised gel containing all the nutrients they need, though must still reform a full zugon from time to time to restore a healthy, neurological and biological balance.

The ambulite has the primary legs, limited tactile and aural sensory organs, a frontal ‘head’ and jaw structure built for grazing and a complex arrangement of stomachs. Their digestive system not only provides nutrients for the ambulite but also enables a honey-like substance to be secreted from a nutrient gland. However, the ambulite has no real intelligence and if ever separated from its symbiotic whole spends its time

in clearings and open areas grazing on the rich, hypogaeal, Vorl groundnuts and other vegetation. Unless its diet is high in these legumes, its dung and secretions are nutrient- and vitamin- poor, if not actually poisonous to any connected torsite or cephalite. This need to ensure substantial grazing areas of Vorl flora is considered to be one of the main drives behind Vorl re-forming worlds to their own needs.

The torsite has a scent organ and strong limbs and when not attached to its ambulite is often seen in the Vorl fern-forests as a brachiator. When separated, the vast majority of its time is spent hunting down countless varieties of fruit and nuts from the Vorl native trees as its food absorption is through a degraded, elementary gut-cum-gullet. Despite this atrophied gut, or because of it, the secretions from its nutrient gland are rich in the minerals and vitamins needed by a cephalite. But it is thought the constant drive for treetop grazing around the ambulite’s clearings contributes to the Vorl’s need for replanting worlds with their own flora.

Uniquely amongst intelligent species, the Vorl can adopt an anhydrous state for hibernation, shrivelling up into an object that resembles a mummy. To achieve this they defecate the unnecessary organs that they do not need, allowing the lower two sections to shrivel into almost nothing. When they reactivate they grow the organs back over the course of a few months, with stomach and nutrient glands amongst the first organs to regrow and reproductive organs are the last.

Vorl are hermaphrodites and potentially parthenogenetic and also casually cannibalistic, especially towards the young of their species if they belong to other Nests. Breeding cycles can be huge communal affairs triggered by a critical event which could even be the emergence of a powerful war-chief, let alone the presence of an alien threat. Once the war-chief gains sufficient power to launch war against another Ordo, a hormone is released that sends the nearby zugons into an frenzy of reproductive activity – which, in practical terms, typically means digesting another Vorl to acquire their DNA or, if that is not possible, creating eggs directly from their own DNA.

The Vorl are initially conceived as three, separate beings within a torsite. Within weeks, they merge and a soft shell grows around the nascent zugon. With a month or so, these develop into interconnected larvae that live in the swollen folds of skin that develop in the reproductive midriff section of the Vorl. When this happens the cephalic portion of the creature is partly absorbed and goes into a resting state, allowing the reproductive ‘brain’ of the torsite to take over the necessary functions.

As they grow, the larval Vorl feed off their parent’s nutrient secretions and each other until only a half dozen or so, largish larvae survive. At this point the recognisably Vorl larvae form a complex pupae, fall off their host parent and are gathered together whilst they pupate. When they emerge after undergoing an incomplete metamorphosis, they are herded into social clans where they are reared to maturity.

VORL SOCIETY

Given their complex biology, it is hardly surprising that Vorl are not sentimental creatures. They do not have family or personal relationships in the way humans do, but have a strong bond to, and develop a relationship with, all the zugons in their local Nest. Relationships to their Ordo are formed later, once

the maturing Vorl begin to settle into the social bonds that are the backbone of Vorl society.

As individuals – though one has to be careful about regarding zugons as separate from their Nest – Vorl have a strong sense of justice and egalitarianism, tempered by a sense of adventure and love of combat and competition. They frequently imbibe intoxicating substances, the results of which can lead to the raising of a blood-lust and raids being launched on other Nests, even within an Ordo. Few Vorl are ever killed in such raids, the purposes being more in the adventure, exploration and the practice of combat as well as in the establishment of a social superiority and, of course, for additional DNA from bitten opponents.

The raids and their equivalent to alcohol also helps strengthen the bonds between Vorl warriors. When Vorl fight together, the pheromones from those in their Nest and Ordo foment immensely strong social connections, bonds of what humans would think of as loyalty and comradeship, or as a strong warrior ethic.

To a Vorl in an army, death in battle is glorious!

The Vorl do not overly celebrate or commemorate their dead, even leaders, as identity is in the community rather than its leader and their leader is the embodiment of the community. Indeed, eating a dead leader to absorb their DNA for breeding is a high honour and, if the war-chief has no identical child with the same name, one of the ‘children’ arising from the DNA absorption may be given the chief’s name and grow into the old war-chief’s role. This means the leader of the Ordo always has the same name, causing confusion amongst non-Vorl as it may appear that a Vorl leader lives for a thousand years.

Vorl names are highly varied and distinct, sometimes based around items in nature, at other times based on warlike or ominous events, or even on jokes. Names such as ‘Crouching Zna’, ‘Dark Fang’, ‘Scything Wind’ or ‘Drunken Charger’ would not be commented upon. The Ordo have names almost always based on the anatomy of a Vorl, such as the Ordo of the Red Claws or the highly successful Ordo of the Third Claw in the Fifth Age.

Vorl think of humans as alien, highly individualistic and strangely ‘squishy’. They refer to humans using a number of derogatory terms such as ‘wets’, ‘softs’ or even ‘squishies’. But the only dealings Vorl have with humans is second-hand through Askar and other, truly alien species and traders. Only rarely is there contact with Freeborn traders and such activity is almost always nefarious in nature.

Conflict Between Vorl Ordo

The encounter with another Ordo can trigger the Vorl reproductive instincts to go into overdrive. This, in turn, leads to a need for substantial breeding and feeding grounds, to inter-Ordo competition for survival, excellence and cohesive superiority and, when there is nowhere to go, to direct conflict between Ordo.

It is often only the presence of the potentially easy human targets that limits such inter-Vorl warfare.

Conflict between Vorl Ordo is frequently bitter, the battles hard-fought and typically continuing to the last survivor. Once the battle urge has grown, a Vorl continues to fight in ‘defence’ of those in its Nest and Order until there are no more zugons left to defend. Even those that are forced to flee a battle merely

do so to lick their wounds, regroup and come back again. Only when an Ordo’s own pheromonal signature completely obliterates those of its opponent does the blood-lust finally wane.

Curiously, there is no resentment after conflict: the vanquished Vorl are absorbed into the conquering Ordo and their own philosophy, social mores and pheromonal signatures quickly adapted to those of the victors. It is as if the conquered Vorl see the error of their ways and the right of their vanquishers’ way of life. It is only when a weaker Ordo luckily manages to defeat a bigger Ordo that the conflict might recur – but it is just as likely that the smaller, conquering Ordo merely replaces the losing war-chief with their own and gradually adopt the lifestyle, philosophy and pheromonal signature of those they have just vanquished!

This complex set of interactions is a result of the Vorl’s focus on society, conformity and synthesis. Win or lose in battle, it is the stronger, more effective Ordo that will win out in the end. The Ordo merge, forming a new Ordo that strongly resembles that of the victor, but which has many elements of the vanquished Ordo’s thoughts, customs and mores.

Unfortunately for the Vorl – but perhaps lucky for panhumanity – the wars that bring about such an alliance are fought with such deadly weapons and biocides that the casualties are often high for all involved. At times, the losses are so high that one Ordo, or both, are wiped out. Such remnant Ordo degrade into poorly-organised Nests, each attempting to merely survive, let alone rebuild another Ordo.

VORL MILITARY

The Vorl’s naturally close-knit community ethos is perfect for forming military structures providing their leader is a war-chief or a close relative). The prospective Vorl soldiers’ military training focuses strongly on teamwork – more so than in any other species.

Long ago, Vorl Technicians realised that they could take advantage of the synthesis generated by a small group of Vorl and built weapons and forms of protection that took maximum advantage of such co-operation. Vorl still use these ‘traditional’ weapons as the combination of co-operative weapons and armour-generators make a small, family unit of zugons a deadly unit on the battlefield.

Vorl and Askar

An interesting but predictable aspect of Vorl armies is that they do not take to non-Vorl allies very easily. Vorl might accept a Hökk as a hunter who knows much about its panhuman prey, but they have better relationships with the Askar, who they recognise as beings similar to themselves. The Vorl grant Askar Protector-Warriors whole mountains where the Askar can build their own breeding chambers and so create more, reliable troops for the Ordo.

Whilst the Askar cannot use Vorl weapons, long ago the Technicians realised they could give their Askar soldiers the weapons used by panhumanity – the more exotic or more dangerous the weapons, the better. Way back in the Third Age, such weapons would have been obtained by rogue traders, but in the Seventh the Technicians use a mix of captured Freeborn fabricators as well as the occasional, secretive trade with non-human traders (or outlaw Freeborn) to gain new patterns and new weapons for their Askar.

As a result, the Askar are an integral component of Vorl armies. They are loyal and obedient (remove the Mercenary attribute), use weapons that are different to the Vorl, and can be used in spaces a zugon may struggle to enter.

Vorl Weapons

Vorl use fractal technology for mining and demolitions, so it is not surprising that recognisable forms of such technology finds its way onto the battlefield. Such stand-alone weapons are occasionally crewed by Askar as well as Technicians. The Askar otherwise use their panhuman-originated weapons, such as compression carbines, plasma grenades, mag weapons, maglashes and reflex armour.

Beyond these well-known weapons is a swathe of Vorl technology that is very different to that wielded by their panhuman foes.

Pulser

A pulser is the ubiquitous Vorl weapon, one carried by almost any trooper in the field. It uses suspensor technology to throw a variety of explosive micro-grenades, but can do so more rapidly when fed by a various types of power pack or munitions feeders. Both power and ammunition packs are heavy, so can only be carried by the zugon form of Vorl. Even then, each zugon can only carry a single pack and a single add-on.

In its basic mode, the pulser ejects a stream of plasma grenades in rapid succession. Basic power packs, – pulse boosters – can be used to extend the range significantly. A further ammunition pack – a pulse feeder – can be used by a single trooper to throw heavier projectiles or special munitions or can be used in conjunction with another cephalite's booster to throw projectiles further than normal. In such a mode, the weapon emulates other faction's X-Launcher weapon teams.

Using a pulser with both feeder and booster requires the shooting Vorl to be supported by two others, one who forgoes their own shot to provide power from their booster pack and another who foregoes their own to give an ammunition feed from their pulse feeder pack. This makes the combination into something resembling other' faction's weapon teams.

This mix-and-match approach seems complex to non-Vorl, but is highly flexible enabling the powerful Vorl infantry to be a mix between weapon teams and infantry assault units, even if it loses its booster or feeder.

Fractal Nebulisers

The uniquely Vorl weapon uses technology akin to that used in fractal weapons coupled a complex biocide-cum-pesticide that breaks down most living tissue. Vorl regard the destruction of indigenous flora and fauna an essential first step in Vorl-forming a world and, when fighting non-Vorl, have teams of rear-echelon vehicles and troops following up their front-line compatriots using the fractal nebulisers to sterilise the world of useless wildlife.

Nebulisers come in a variety of formats, from simple, pistol-mounted weapons to shells launched from boosted pulsers.

Vorl Armour

Vorl use the same physical armour as the other, advanced nations on Antares – effectively complex, composite alloys bonded over and between honeycombs of heat and energy-absorbent layers. Over this can be laid reflex armour, impact

webs, kinetic shielding and other absorbent energy fields as needed. A rough equivalent of hyperlight boosters – kinetic boosters – can also be found on their suspensor platforms and embedded into their heavy weapons and other equipment.

For their own troops, the Vorl take advantage of their natural co-operation between individuals and use a weaker armour field for individuals that is boosted by those nearby.

Synthesis Armour

At its core, synthesis armour is a type of reflex shielding that extends around the individual wearing it. Reflex armour converts energy into a mixture of light and sink-mass, the overall effect being limited because sink-mass itself poses dangers that are relative to the mass of the enclosure.

The Vorl implementation extends the basic reflex shielding such that it can be enhanced through a meld with others nearby. It uses the individual power plants to merge the shield of each to provide an overlapping zone of protection that does not overly burden any single trooper.

Kinetic Dampeners

A kinetic dampener is an item of equipment typically worn by Vorl squad leaders or affixed to individual platforms to allow reflex-type shielding to operate at even higher efficiency. The dampener has some drawbacks, not the least of which is a tendency to overload when hit by high-powered weapons.

Experiments to extend the dampeners to individual troopers or to remove the risks of overload have apparently met with little success.

Transports

Vorl use combat platforms to transport goods and heavy weapons into battle. The platforms are little more than an armoured suspensor platform driven by a Technician.

When Technicians wish to travel alone, they use suspensor cradles – small devices equipped with kinetic dampeners and pulse thrusters that enable the Technicians to zip around a battlefield and escape from harm's way.

TECHNOLOGY OF ANTARES

We cannot hope to cover all the technology of Antares, but can try to explain a few of the more important aspects.

TRANSMAT TECHNOLOGY

Transmitter modulation, or transmat, implement Antarean Gatebuilder technology to create a brief, phase-synchronised interdimensional tunnel between a transmitter and receiver – for safety, two transmat pads. Transmats were one of the earliest Gatebuilder technologies to be discovered during the exploration of Antarean space, though it is impossible to be sure exactly when this discovery occurred, or where, or how the alien technology was successfully replicated. All we know is that from the Second or Renatal Age, transmitter modulators – or transmats as they are generally known – became commonplace throughout human space.

Transmats are the usual method of transportation between an orbiting spacecraft and a planet's surface, from one spacecraft to another in close proximity, or even between or around worlds with sufficiently advanced technology. A transmat transports an object or person to another transmat, allowing practically instantaneous travel between two remote locations.

In emergencies, a sufficiently powerful transmat can also latch on to a homer device – of which there are a number of variations – to transmat a pre-defined object onto the transmat.

Transmat Ranges

The maximum distance that can be travelled between two transmats is around 300km, sufficient to travel from a planet's surface to an craft in low orbit. This range is only for smaller objects up to around human-sized, with larger objects only able to be transferred over shorter ranges. When only a single pad is involved, the range is significantly reduced – perhaps only 50km or 10kylan – and the transfer is much more risky. In combat situations, ships in orbit deploy masses of homer beacons to the planet surface onto which their transmat pads can lock before sending down troops.

Some worlds have transmat systems that allow overland travel; this is achieved by a series of static transmats phased precisely together and spaced about fifty miles (80km, 16kylan) apart. These are known as transmat loops or as transloops and function like roadways, transporting materials and people between one fixed location and another. The 80km separation also allows for substantial convenience in travelling from one location to another. The only major problem is that running along a transloop path might take time – many planets have low-orbit satellite stations that pick up transfers from the surface and later send them back down, thousands of kiloyan away when their orbit passes over a suitable transmat.

In exploration, the ranges mean that a shuttle is dispatched to a planet's surface with an on-board transmat. In many instances the large transmat in this shuttle is the major source of surface-orbit communication and transfer.

Operation

When using a single pad to transmat an object, the target coordinates and surrounding area must be carefully scanned to ensure there is nothing into which the transmat terminus might accidentally be deposited. Early experiments without a recipient pad or homer beacon resulted in objects and individuals being materialised in the middle of walls, floors and even into the ground or space itself. Foiling such incredibly accurate scans is so simple that it is impossible to now transmat an individual into a hostile environment such as an enemy ship – not only is it easy to design interiors that are difficult to predict but blocking or reducing the quality of the scans and phase modulation is simple.

The primary risk with single-pad usage or excessive range is the risk of the transmat modulation never becoming synchronised so the tunnel never properly forming and destroying the contents. As a result, emergency transmissions are only very rarely used, the jump hook technology being preferred which could boost the range and reliability significantly.

Practically speaking, a transmat transfer is unsettling as an individual's surroundings change in an instant. Many travellers close their eyes for longer journeys, even when they may not do so for simple hops. Some transmats or transmat journeys flare when sending, possibly due to their phase modulation, but perhaps also due to leakage from the interdimensional gate opening, brief as it is.

Jump Hooks and Homers

Transmat safety can be significantly improved by means of an transmitter receptor on the target or in the target area that is tuned to the identical phase modulation as the transmat itself. These receptors are generally known as jump hooks, if small and transmatted with the object, or homer beacons or homer buddies if able to cover a slightly larger area – such as a squad.

The smallest receptors are so tiny they can be implanted beneath the skin or secreted in jewellery or clothing. These jump hooks cannot extend the range very far – perhaps 100km or so – but the need for a solid sensor lock means the greater the distance the smaller the volume can be transported. The very smallest brain implants may be sufficient just to hook the wearer's head, neatly severing the skull from the body. In extreme transports of this kind a bio-stasis tank awaits! So long as the transportee's brain remains intact it is always possible to regenerate or, failing that, affect transfer into a clone body.

Homer beacons of both types allow transmission of a number of objects, such as a squad, up to around 150-200km, providing the objects are not too large and the receiving transmat is well maintained.

Transmats In Battle

Given the inherent problems with single-pad transmats, battlefield usage of transmats can be fraught with difficulties.

The most common way of bypassing the problems is through homer shells, tiny, temporary transmat that burn out after use but which can be deployed in or alongside Homer buddies to target an area on the battlefield.

Even here, however, there is a chance of the synchronisation field collapsing mid-transport, the troops never being seen again.

Transmats in Mining

Boromite frag borers are often coupled with suspensor grabs to transfer the debris from their tunnelling onto ore transmats. This is sorted by ore processors that also use transmat to filter the spoil from the desired minerals or ores. Such a process results in ore that is incredibly pure by 21st century standards – or which contains the exact mix of elements to make superb alloys!

Such technology can also be useful in removing parasites from a host. Whilst uncommon, there are worlds in the Nexus where parasitical organisms thrive on panhuman tissue.

Decontamination Transmats

A similar process to mining is used by the Freeborn to remove faction-specific nanospore from an object as a prelude to resharding. With heavily IMTel-dominated technology such as that from the PanHuman Concord or Isorian Senatex, the nanospore must be repopulated with passive or neutral spore.

Effects of Ghar Technology

Ghar use their Quantum Gravity (QG) technology in their Ghar ship and planetary shields – a QG net – and also make great use of crude and poorly-shielded plasma reactors. Both have terrible effects on nanotechnology and on transmat beams, disrupting the coherency and hence the contents of the beam. No intelligent being would risk transfers into, onto or through Ghar planets, ships or installations.

FABRICATORS

Whilst the IMTel nations and Algoryn have fabricators, it is the Freeborn fabricators that are the most comprehensive in their capabilities. Fabricators take raw materials and create custom objects or goods – and containers for such objects if they need it – the objects required being limited only by the templates that provide the specification for the materials needed and the output item.

The less advanced worlds of the Spill have very crude fabricators which are little more than 3D printers, in a limited range of materials and to smaller scales than those of the more advanced nations. Such printers even have to print their own support struts for objects whereas the more advanced fabricators use nanosphere-based suspensor fields to support an object internally and externally whilst it is being built.

The fabricators of the more advanced nations range in size from refrigerator-sized food synthesizers and personal fabricators, up to huge, industrial machines. All starships of such nations carry a fabricator and a backup that are used to process raw materials, which could even be gas from an atmosphere, to produce fuel blocks and power cells and even spare parts for starships.

The industrial-scale fabricators of the Freeborn are capable of manufacturing a huge variety of equipment, from space-worthy drones and missiles, to combat vehicles and weaponry,

Gatebuilder Ruins or Artefacts?

Despite their legendary and ubiquitous presence in lore, holos and the Antares' media, Gatebuilder artefacts are incredibly rare. Indeed, when they are discovered, many of those are little more than fossils, giving little more than hints and clues to the technology of the Gatebuilders. Such relics provide no more information than that of the imprint of a bone or leaf: perhaps valuable and collectable, and even worthy of study, but unlikely to reveal anything more than an archaeopteryx fossil gives about bird evolution.

The real trouble – or opportunity – is that, when discovered, even semi-functional Gatebuilder artefacts operate on such vastly different technological principles that they inevitably lead to a dramatic change in scientific understanding and have life-changing effects on Antarean culture. In the past, such technologies include the ubiquitous transmat and even the space drive used by all the advanced Antarean factions – the gravitational annihilation (GA) drive developed by the Isorians.

So real Gatebuilder artefacts are incredibly valuable, leading to a swarm of treasure-hunters whenever there is even a hint of an ancient artefact.

Actual Gatebuilder ruins are even more rare, being virtually non-existent hints in the landscape that archaeologists love but others look on with puzzlement and confusion. The only Gatebuilder ruin of real interest in the Seventh Age was the planet Xilos – and that was much more than a ruin. Whilst some of the Gatebuilder tunnels and chambers in the Xilos crust had collapsed, the majority were still in good condition. Further, the Gatebuilder technology – apparently a gate construction device – was still in operation after hundreds of thousands (or millions?) of years.

It is likely that the technology within the Xilos' underground manufacturing or research facilities was linked to the planet, whether to draw power or because of geological stability is not known. What is known is that Xilos is almost unique in having Gatebuilder artefacts within a surviving Gatebuilder structure. The tropical jungles that built up around its equatorial continents was incidental, the result of natural evolution from what had been present when the planet was first occupied by the Gatebuilders.

shield generators, weapons, armour, and pre-fab building components. The Freeborn have also spent vast resources I optimising the size and power of their fabricators such that a Freeborn factory fabricator is not only half the size of an IMTel equivalent but also an eighth of the mass and limited only by the space or area in which it can build – some Freeborn not being adverse to building material outside their ship's hull or in vacuum (many Freeborn fabricators are located near the exterior and have access to external projectors to enable such an approach). The raw materials needed are stored in the Freeborn's extensive cargo holds or their similarly, industrial-scale compactors.

Their limitations of such fabricators is in terms of the templates they need to build new items and in the raw materials required. Much raw material, such as iron, titanium and aluminium, is readily available, often from asteroids, so is rarely in demand but the more scarce material is often used in trade. It is here that Boromites come in to play as their access

to minerals and scarce materials is unparalleled. Indeed, Boromites often pay for passage with such rare, raw materials. Freeborn have the most extensive range of templates and regard them as a state secrets. Templates can be found to create the same item from different materials and their creation is subject to a great deal of Freeborn research – and their acquisition a major subject of trade negotiations. In contrast, the fabricators of other nations produce a less diverse range of product and rely heavily on a fixed set of raw material.

At a pinch, however, a fabricator can take a mix of raw material and separate it out into its constituent components to produce ingots of different metals – or even alloys – plus a mound of waster or unwanted material. This is the basis behind the Boromite ore processors and ore scanners, the latter effectively being an ore processor combined with a transmat field for sending the refined ore to a storage area.

This also is one of the governing aspects of the curious Antarean economy. When everything can be fabricated, nothing is truly scarce, so the Freeborn trade in items that need specialist templates, or which can be constructed even when the raw materials do not appear to be available. They may even trade in the templates themselves, offering a construction template based around locally-available raw materials (Freeborn will never trade a generic template!).

Whilst the Freeborn sometimes trade for raw material, they often trade for non-fabricated luxuries such as foodstuffs, wines or natural fibre cloth and clothing. Whether or not true, there are those throughout the non-IMTel and fringe IMTel worlds who still claim ‘natural is best’ and that the taste or quality of such goods cannot be beaten.

All Freeborn, Algoryn and IMTel ships and villages have small-scale fabricators that can fabricate items of up to the size of a medium drone, including spare parts for the starships.

Factory-scale Fabricators are seen on Freeborn ships of trading frigate size or larger (300m+) and on their homeships and a very few factory ships. IMTel auxiliary cruisers and factory ships have such large scale machines whereas they only otherwise appear on the larger Algoryn orbitals or in planetary factories. Non-Freeborn fabricators at this scale are often dedicated to a particular task so are much more efficient (faster) at producing such equipment and are linked into a logistics chain that can supply the specific raw materials needed.

In contrast, no Freeborn would even consider specialising their fabricators in such a fashion, preferring to dynamically build supply chains for contracts as and when they occur. Of course, a Freeborn house with a large contract might temporarily optimise their general-purpose fabricators for the contract and, when they do so, produce items two or three times faster than those of the even the most advanced nations.

Shipboard-scale fabricators can replace almost any component on a Freeborn ship up to 30m (6y) long and about 10m (2y) in diameter. They often need external space to manufacture such items – as they are otherwise limited by the cargo hold size – but are connected directly to the ship’s onboard raw material holds and compactors.

Equipment fabricators can produce most items needed for day-to-day use, including weapons and lesser spare parts, and can produce drones and buddy drones. Such fabricators can be up to 2m long (1y) but smaller versions do exist, the size often

being limited by the input hoppers for the materials needed. Repair Fabricators are even smaller, specialised versions of these for engineers and maintenance crew, able to produce hand weapons such as pistols and most of the smaller parts needed to repair damaged kit.

Food Synthesizers

Food synths are fabricators specialising in the production of food, drink and the accompanying cutlery and crockery needed to eat or drink them from. By default, the crockery is deliberately easily recyclable and is normally returned to the device’s input hopper after use, though Freeborn synths meant for visiting dignitaries or diplomats have an associated food warming area, compactor and small fabricator for more glamorous tableware such as metal, glass and even wood-feel items – indeed, specially ordering a ‘glass, labelled bottle’ as opposed to a ‘bulb’ of a given drink will result in a the reproduction of an item that looks and tastes virtually identical to the original (dependent on template, of course).

There are always those who believe the original, ‘natural’ item is better than synthesised items; many Freeborn specialise in the growing, transportation and bottling or production of such items (Prince Batu Delhren’s wineries and wine, for example, is known and praised throughout the north-west Determinate).

The Freeborn make great use of small devices that analyse an item of food, break it down into its constituent textures, odours, flavours and molecular structure and store the result as a template. Trade in food templates is a lucrative sideline for the Freeborn, foods from off-world being much sought-after by the ‘in’ or high society social groups of many Spill worlds (and even within the IMTel nations – Algoryn food tends to be very spicy but otherwise lacking in visual excitement and admired by only those seeking extreme taste sensations).

COMPACTOR TECHNOLOGY

The advanced Antarean societies use compactor technology to compress objects into a small area and store them in an internal array such that the items may be compacted for easy transport. The blocks also carry compensators to minimise the impact of the mass of the items being stored such that the need for the compaction store, mass compensator, de/compaction field, and compacted storage sets a minimum size on the compactors.

In addition, the bulk of the mass on smaller devices is on a protective shell to insulate them against being dropped or accidentally damaged and losing or potentially explosively releasing their stored items. Most civilian compactors lose the contents on being destroyed and forego the safeties, whilst military field compactors are bulkier and contain failover technology to ensure the contents are not lost if the compactor field is destroyed.

Compactor blocks range from small, belt-worn pads little more than the size of a large fist to large, wall-mounted compactors installed in the holds of Freeborn ships or in shuttles. The smaller compactors are used to store a few personal items such as clothes, handguns, small tools and even rations, the larger compactors typically goods that can survive the compaction.

On being decompacted, objects appear on the ground or where directed by their user: in IMTel and Freeborn decompactors the objects can appear – or be compacted from – almost anywhere in range and LoS of the device but cannot appear within any solid object. The ranges vary by size, the smallest

having a range of 1/10th yan and are often held over the object to be scanned whilst the largest can scan and compact objects up to a full yan (5m) away. The primary restriction is the size of the field and the size of the compacted objects.

All compactor pads need to be accessed via an external interface, typically a holodisplay or nanosphere control which shows the current contents. Most pads also have security controls so can only be activated by an individual, by a combat shard, or by law enforcement agencies.

Compactor technology cannot compact: living tissue, explosives, active power packs, unstable/fissionable material and devices with compactor fields built-in. This means that many replacement ammo packs and some probes and buddies cannot be compacted without being disassembled as they carry compactor fields to compact ammunition or supplies!

It is possible to turn off a compactor pad's field and store it in another compactor pad, but it typically takes 5-10 minutes for the pad to fully charge its field generators and rebuild the compactor field.

Small-scale, civilian and combat compactors tend to be carried at the bearers waist, either on a shoulder strap or on a belt, quite which depending on the bearer's cultural and clothing preferences.

Buddy-sized compactors are not only used on the battlefield, but also as weapons lockers to cut down on space, the only items being stored externally being power packs and explosives, plus a few weapons ready and charged for instant use. Such compactors are also provided in back-packs or in shoulder-bags, the Freeborn being particularly fond of such packs for trade goods

Locker or wardrobe compactors are often placed in cabins to store the owners clothes and possessions, the primary difference with the smaller devices being that they have excellent, built-in, full-scale holoprojectors to shown the contents, such as clothes, especially with mirrored holos to show the wearer what the ensemble would look like. Otherwise, they are used throughout Antarean space to store almost anything required, perhaps the storage lockers of Antares. Many shuttles – especially cargo shuttles – have compactors to store equipment and minimise the size of the shuttle.

Factory-scale (industrial) compactors are seen in planetary factories, on fleet auxiliaries and on the larger trading ships or on almost all Freeborn traders from armed trader size (200m) upwards. They are massive and need access to a large area to decompact their interior items. On failure, they dematerialise much of their compacted items, as might be expected, but limiters prevent such failure from overcrowding the decompaction space with any excess being produced as simple mass blocks of mixed raw materials.

Isorian Temporal Experiments

The Nexus binds together worlds separated in space and time – not only widely disparate galaxies but worlds where time flows in different and unpredictable ways. The null-space tunnels carry craft through time as well as space, and the technology that allows this to happen is called chrono-plasticity as the tunnels stretch like elastic to equalise time-flows within the Antares trans-dimensional engine. If those tunnels are stretched too far the engine breaks apart. This is one theory of how the Nexus suffers periodic periods of collapse.

The NuHu Senataxis of the Isorians are practically the only humans who have made a study of chrono-plasticity. During the fighting over Xilos they were able to deploy a chronophasic craft to the embattled world. This was the first journey to be made via null-space independently of the Nexus and a testament to the abilities of the Isorian trans-dimensional engineers. The breaking of a series of time-locks within the Gatebuilder ruins created temporary temporal disturbances that enabled the Isorians to follow a time gradient to Xilos. Some of the Senatexis believe that it is primarily thanks to these temporal disturbances that the Antarean machine itself has become unstable – perhaps critically so. Others theorise that if the rogue gate could be located it might be possible to stabilise it and halt any further degeneration of the Nexus.

One thing is certain – the Nexus continues to break apart – unless the rogue gate is found a new age of darkness lies ahead. Perhaps forever.

TIMELINE OF PANHUMAN ANTARES

This chapter gives a very brief overview of the history of Antares. We've broken it down by age – reconnection events – and have necessarily limited it to panhuman dates as little is known of what Antares was like before the opening of the Earth gate. Some species, such as the Askar are known to have existed in earlier ages, but they tend to be close-lipped about previous history. The timescales given here generally reflect the records of Isori, the world with the longest continuous recorded history in all of human space.

PANHUMAN ANTARES

A simplified overview of the presence of panhumanity on Antares is given below. Whilst times disconnected are incredibly variable, humanity has been connected to the great machine for around 17,000 years in total. During that time, civilisations have risen and fallen many times, often on the same planet. The only real thread of civilisation has been that centred around Isori, many of the other worlds and systems having been lost.

Antarean Dates

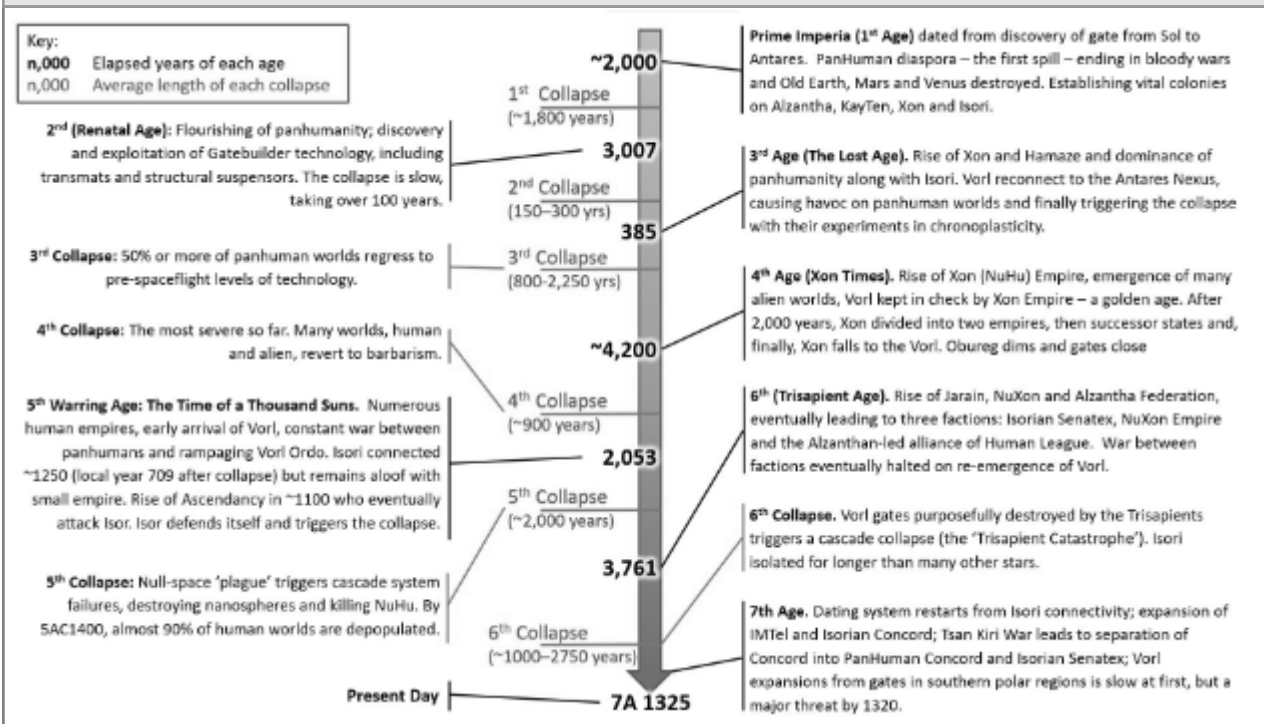
Antarean dates are from a panhuman perspective and are given in the format :

<age>A<common_year>

where <age> is 1A, 2A, 3A, and so on up to 7A for the Seventh Age, and the <common_year> is the generally agreed, standard Old Earth year after the Age was established. This is often from where gates first began to reopen, but could be from the emergence onto Antares of an influential system, such as Isori in the Seventh Age.

The collapses are in the same format but with 'AC', such as '5AC10'.

28: Timeline – PanHuman Ages of Antares



FIRST AGE: THE PRIME IMPERIA

During the First Age humanity joins the Nexus and spreads throughout Antarean Space. The timeline for this period is inexact and the two thousand year duration is an approximation calculated from the destruction of Earth eighteen hundred and fifty years after the first craft breached the Terran gateway.

The history of humanity within the Nexus is a long one and ages prior to the present not always well recorded. What follows is a summary of key events in Antarean Space from the perspective of its human settlers. The earliest times are the least well documented and it is hard to distinguish fact from legend. Conversely, the records from the current age are overwhelming in extent and detail; we can only hope to give the briefest overview. As we approach the present, events that are currently shaping the destiny of the Nexus are covered in greater detail.

Year	Event
1A0	The Nexus is not and never had been stable since its creation. The Antarean inter-dimensional engine is a living entity that actively builds new gates, linking new worlds and new civilisations to the Nexus. For reasons that are not well understood, the Nexus periodically collapses: gateways are destroyed or closed, and worlds isolated for a time. Eventually, Antares recovers and begins to rebuild inter-dimensional pathways between worlds. The periods when gates are active are known as Ages. The periods when the gates are closed are known as collapses.
1A1	Earth's entrance to the Nexus is discovered at the edge of the solar system by human explorers.
5	Exploration of the Nexus begins.
12	First human settlement established within the Nexus at Isori.
50	Further human colonies are founded as more habitable worlds are discovered.
75	First contact with sentient alien species.
75-100	Humans learn core Gatebuilder technologies from races already settled within the Nexus.
100+	With the benefit of Gatebuilder technologies human colonisation expands rapidly.
300	Borom asteroid mines worked by genetically enhanced workforce – Boromites spread to deep-space mining worlds throughout the human Nexus.
575	Isori declares independence – the first human colony world to do so.
575- 750	Further colonies establish independence.
1000+	Increased rivalries between human worlds result in first inter-human wars within the Nexus (the Wars of the Prime Imperia).
1500-2000	Half of all human-settled worlds destroyed during inter-human wars.
1850	Earth destroyed – inner planets of Terran system reduced to a rocky asteroid belt.
1975	Gates throughout the Nexus collapse and travel between worlds becomes increasingly difficult. Many worlds are isolated.
1990	Nexus reduced to isolated pockets.
2000	Complete collapse of Nexus. Antares enters a period of reorganisation and rebuilding.
Collapse	

Worlds formerly connected by the Nexus begin a long period of isolation lasting for almost two thousand years.

First Collapse	
Year	Event
1AC1	Most human and many alien settlements are destroyed or substantially depopulated. Some surviving worlds are reduced to the level of barbarism, losing the technological capability required to sustain space flight.
1AC1000	Many human settled worlds are lost forever. Amongst them is Borom – but by now Boromites have established themselves on numerous mining colonies.
1AC1600	The oldest and most well-established human world of Isori maintains a high level of civilisation throughout this time.
1AC1800	Worlds that survive the collapse and even make significant advances include Alzantha, Xon and KayTen. These worlds, together with Isori, would continue as important centres of civilisation throughout the coming ages.

SECOND AGE: THE RENATAL AGES

The Second Age is a time of discovery and important technological advances, a golden-age of knowledge and rebirth that becomes known as the Renatal Age.

Date	Event
1	At the start of each new age, gateways open gradually and are likely to be widely scattered across the Antarean surface. This makes contact difficult even for those worlds newly connected to the Nexus. Regeneration is a constant process and worlds can remain unconnected for many hundreds of years after the first gates regenerate. A world might even remain cut-off from the Nexus for entire ages of time. This means that there is no definitive start or end to each period of collapse or to any Age; for every world it will be different. For example, the current Seventh Age is considered to have begun with the opening of the Isorian gateway, even though many other gateways are known to have opened several centuries earlier.
1-100	Gates begin to regenerate. Human and alien survivors eagerly seek each other out. They soon discover that gates could no longer be found at their previous locations on the Antarean surface. Human worlds once clustered close to Earth's original gate are now widely scattered.
5-25	Worlds that have retained a high-level of technology make contact with their neighbours, establishing new routes of communication through the Nexus.
150	Isolated for thousands of years, human worlds have developed their own unique cultures and technological innovations. A period of exchange and mutual benefit follows.
200	Flourishing of human civilisation across the Nexus as gateways re-open and new, hitherto unknown worlds are revealed.
500	Free human societies organise into numerous small and independent federations.
750	With the exploration of new worlds comes new Gatebuilder technology. Many of the core technologies of later ages are discovered in abandoned Gatebuilder xenoarch.
1000	Development of structural suspensor technology based on nanospore envelopment.
1500	Development of transmat matter-transport (commonly known as transmat).
2950	Antarean polar anomaly observed followed by localise gate collapse.
2950–3000	Gate collapse slowly spreads towards Antarean equator. Worlds close to the polar regions drop from the Nexus once more.
2975–3000	The gate collapse continues and worlds prepare for a repetition of the previous catastrophe.
3000	Small and marginal human settlements are deliberately abandoned. The most established and better-protected worlds become refuges for human populations – known as ark worlds.
3007	Last recorded trans-Antarean voyage of the Second Age.
Collapse	

The Second Collapse leaves worlds isolated once more. The time during which worlds were isolated is not consistent and is impossible to measure absolutely but the majority of worlds that reconnect during the third age experienced a lapse of 150–300 years.

Second Collapse	
Date	Event
2AC1–180	Most human populations are sufficiently well prepared to survive despite their isolation. Some succumb to natural disaster, disease, or internal wars that render their world's uninhabitable. A few descend into barbarism as during the First Collapse.
2AC130	Gates begin to open once again. As happened with the earlier regeneration, gates are found to have been rerouted to different parts of the Antarean surface. Once more worlds find themselves scattered.
2AC260	Most known worlds are reconnected to the Nexus but gate density remains sparse amongst both human and alien settled worlds.

THIRD AGE: THE LOST AGE

The Third Age is the shortest of recorded ages and it is dominated by the Vorl Wars during which humans and aliens battle to survive. It becomes known as The Lost Age because only a small portion of human worlds reconnect to the Nexus before a further collapse begins. Many gates remain closed throughout and their corresponding worlds remain isolated until the following Fourth Age.

Year	Event
3A1	Approximately half of previously inhabited worlds retaining spaceflight capability are reconnected to the Nexus. Of the fate of those remaining nothing is known.
100	Scattered worlds reconnect, exchange newly developed technologies and forge new routes though the Nexus.
150	First known encounter between Humans and Vorl. It is thought the Vorl had been connected prior to the First Age.
150–385	The Vorl Wars. Vorl prove to be a voracious, intolerant and predatory species. Many human worlds are attacked and destroyed.
350	The Vorl Wars cause widespread destruction throughout the parts of the Nexus settled by humans. Human planets band together into defensive alliances for mutual protection.
375	Human worlds continue to be overrun by Vorl forces. Humans throughout the Nexus fear inevitable defeat and annihilation.
3A380	Vorl begin intense experimentation into chronoplasticity. Humanity fears for what this might entail.
385	Gate collapse comes unexpectedly and suddenly. Fewer than half the gates known to have existed during the previous age have regenerated by the time of the collapse. The collapse brings an end to the Vorl Wars saving humanity from extinction.
Collapse	

The Third Collapse comes without warning, catching both humans and aliens unprepared. This age lasts from 800–2,250 years for the majority of worlds that eventually reconnect to the Nexus, but due to time-flow mechanics this is not an absolute value.

Third Collapse	
Year	Event
3AC1	The human populations of advanced and densely populated worlds with ample resources continue to thrive, including upon the planets Isori, Xon and Hamaze.
3AC800	A few, albeit previously isolated, systems are reconnected to the Nexus, though their reconnection time local to Antares is closer to the 2,800 years experienced by many others. How many years passed on Antares is not known, possibly only a few months, possibly millennia.
1000	The long period of isolation proves fatal to less well established colonies, and many fail as a result. At least half of human-settled worlds are either depopulated or reduced to savagery, many having been isolated since the time of the second collapse. Others survive with some semblance of civilisation but with a low technological base that precludes space flight.
1400	NuHu rise to power on Xon establishing dynastic rule by Xon Emperors.
~2000	Whilst many human worlds were now reconnected, over the long period of the third collapse many inhabited worlds had become feral planets, all knowledge of the Nexus and advanced technology being lost.

THE FOURTH AGE: XON TIMES

The Fourth Age is dominated by the most extensive human civilisation ever to exist with the Nexus: the Empire of the Xon. It ends with the division of Xon and civil wars, and the renewal of attacks by the Vorl. As with all ages the exact length of Nexus connectivity varies from place to place, with Xon Imperial dating giving the destruction of Xon as 3927 and the first recorded gate collapse as 3928.

Year	Event
4A1–25	Gates begin to regenerate once more. The majority of human settled worlds have lost space flight capability. The few that remain begin to explore the reconstituted Nexus.
37	Xon reconnected to the Nexus.
50–350	Antarean gates are widely scattered and gate density across the Antarean photosphere is low. Worlds newly reconnected to the Nexus develop independently for several centuries before explorers establish contact between them.
75–500	Xon extends its influence, absorbing and recolonising human feral worlds close to the Xon gate. The establishment of the Empire of the Xon.
550	Xon society is rigidly segregated, highly ritualised, and ordered in the most strict and formal manner. The Xon Emperors, NuHu of mixed ancestry, portray themselves as divine beings beyond the censure of ordinary humans.
750	The Xon come to dominate human space. Most human worlds either became part of their empire or subservient to it in some way.
1000	Very few human worlds maintain their independence. These are worlds whose gates remained hidden deep with the Antarean photosphere or who ally themselves with aliens for their own protection.
~3400	Vorl worlds appear across Antares, though the threat is not, at first, recognised as a renewed danger to humanity.
3500	The Xon divide into two empires each led by rival claimants to the Xon throne. Xon Civil Wars begin.
3600	Xon Empire continues to break into ever smaller factions. War within the Xon weakens its grip over the Nexus.
3800	Former Xon Empire divides into dozens of rival successor states, each claiming hegemony over the whole.
3900	Vorl attack freely throughout human space. Divided human worlds are unable to defend themselves.
3900–4200	Thousands of human worlds are destroyed by the Vorl.
4150	Xon attacked by Vorl. Xon destroyed. Xon system sterilised.
4160	Nexus begins to collapse once more. The fourth collapse coincides with eccentricities in the orbit of Obureg, the tiny green star that circles Antares and performs an essential – though still imperfectly understood – role in its functioning.
4170	The normal interaction between Obureg and the Antarean photosphere ceases. The photosphere of Antares begins to fade and gates quickly collapse.
4200	Once more the worlds of Antarean space are separated and all travel between them ends.
Collapse	

In the Fourth Collapse, isolation once more reduces human and alien settled worlds to a state of barbarism. Many succumb to natural disasters, disease or war, leaving nothing but ruin. The time until gates began to regenerate is uncertain and varies from one world to the next, but the period is generally reckoned to average at about 900. Isori is one of the few worlds to maintain a high degree of technical capability throughout this time and was reconnected after only 709 years of isolation (but year 1250 of the Fifth Age).

THE FIFTH AGE: THE WARRING AGES

The Fifth Age is an era of unremitting warfare that the worlds of the dominant federation – the Ascendancy – referred to as the Time of a Thousand Suns. The Fifth Age is unique in so far as it is the only age during which the technological culture of Antarean space makes no progress and declines overall. The timeline has been amalgamated from different sources and rounded to just over two thousand years, beginning as it did at different times for different worlds.

Year	Event
5A1–100	Gates begin to open once more. At first, gate recreation is slower than normal and those gates which are opened are widely scattered across the Antarean surface.
5–150	Worlds that have retained spaceflight capability begin to explore. Many human worlds are now uninhabited populated by savages or even heavily mutated populations. Exploitation and subjugation of backward worlds is rife, the explorers often as desperate for resources as those they conquer.
150–750	The Nexus is populated by numerous human federations and small empires. Fierce rivalry between them results in widespread conflict over almost 600 years.
750	Disparate Vorl ordo attack and destroy many newly emerged human worlds. This forces the smaller empires to co-operate for defensive purposes, at least. Over the next 1,000 years, Vorl forces continue to attack human, alien and even other Vorl worlds, completely wiping out the civilisation and population on many worlds.
~800	Warfare across the Nexus intensifies, resulting in mass migration from planets rendered uninhabitable or vulnerable to attack.
950	Vorl consolidate under the control of a major Ordo – the Third Claws – and internecine conflict abates somewhat. This leads to the 'Time of Treachery': previous alliances are broken and reforged as newly found federations rise and fall.
1100	Several thousand human worlds unite into a defensive federation called the Ascendancy. This expands and contracts for approximately another 600 years before the Vorl are pushed onto the defensive.
~1250	Isori reconnects to the Nexus and discover a Nexus riven by warfare. They quickly establish a small alliance with the nearby, advanced systems but remain largely insular in outlook. To the isolationist Isorians this time it is known simply as the Dark Age.
1594	Isori itself is attacked but its defences make it secure against aggressors whether human or alien. It steps up extensive research into space-time and the Antarean gate technology in order to build radical new defences against the military forces of panhumanity, aliens and Vorl.
~1700	The Ascendancy political structures become more rigid, focusing entirely around their military needs. Smaller alien and human federations are absorbed or wiped out whilst others retreat into heavily defended enclaves where any and all off-worlders are seen as a threat. The Vorl depredations are halted.
~5A1800	The Ascendancy begins a number of major campaigns against the Vorl Synthesis across a number of fronts. Over the next two centuries, Vorl are pushed back and their consolidated resistance crumbles as individual Ordo fight both the Ascendancy and each other for survival.
2020	The Ascendancy begins piling political pressure on Isori to join their fight against the Vorl. After the Isorians refuse, the Ascendancy begins to gather military resources around the small Antarean enclave that is the Isorians and their close allies. Isori protests as, over the next thirty years, their allies are conquered and fall to Ascendancy forces until the Ascendancy threatens the Isorian gate.
2049–2053	Within five years, the Antares Nexus collapses, putting an end to an age of bloodshed, enmity and rivalry.
Collapse	

Observers on Isori record a trans-dimensional shadow cast from the Isorian system gate immediately before its collapse. This is identified as a null-space intrusion into primary space-time. Disruption to nano-based technologies produces system failures that almost destroy Isori. All but a handful of Isorian NuHu perish as a result.

Fifth Collapse	
Year	Event
5AC1	NuHu throughout human space are practically wiped out, most likely as a result of null-space intrusion and dissonance within the nanospore environment as recorded on Isori.
5AC5	Gates collapse simultaneously throughout the Nexus. Nanospore technologies are compromised. Worlds are unprepared and thrown into chaos.
5AC10	The most technically advanced dimensional engineers in human space, the Isorians, develop the means to overcome nano-based system failures within their own system. Elsewhere, nano-technologies are rendered useless due to system failures associated with the collapse.
~5AC1000	During the fifth collapse the loss of advanced human and alien civilisations is unprecedented. Many worlds become depopulated or fall to anarchy.
~5AC1400	Practically ninety per cent of previously inhabited worlds are bereft of population. Many others harbour only savages. Those that survive develop in isolation, developing cultural distinctions that would survive into the following age.

THE SIXTH AGE: THE TRISAPIENT AGE

The Sixth Age is dominated by three large human power blocks: the Isorian Senatex, the NuXon Empire, and the Human League centred upon the Alzanthan Federation. They are collectively known as the Trisapients. Following convention, timelines for this era have been amalgamated from different sources and are reckoned at a span of 3800 years

The Sixth Age: The Trisapient Age, Dates and Events

Year	Event
1–100	The Sixth Age begins from a low base of gateways spread thinly over the Antarean surface. Amongst them are the gates connecting Isori, Alzantha and NuXon – three worlds that survive relatively unscathed. Their gates are widely separated in Antarean space and each becomes a separate centre of civilisation and regeneration.
25–3000	The three human civilisations expand across Antarean space, encountering and often allying with alien worlds whilst at the same time making and breaking alliances with each other.
2500–3700	The Human League is a loose alliance of worlds dominated but not controlled by the Alzanthans. Intermittent wars within its boundaries, draw in other human worlds including the NuXon and Senatex.
2956	Discovery by the Alzanthans of a ruinous but complete Gatebuilder world close to the northern polar axis: Arctica Tentu. Exploration and exploitation of the world becomes a major source of dispute between the Trisapients. This is the last complete Gatebuilder world to be discovered prior to the Xilos Event and a source of several key technologies.
3000	War between the rival Trisapients escalates as the NuXon and Senatex take opposing sides in the League's disputes.
3500	The Vorl, long since believed extinct, reappear and begin to attack human worlds indiscriminately. The Human League is especially vulnerable, lacking a unified military able to confront the Vorl as a body.
3550	The Senatex mount a concerted assault against the Vorl, but are repelled with the loss of a large portion of their space fleet.
3600	The NuXon and Senatex agree a cease-fire while they work to defeat the Vorl menace.
3700	The Human League breaks apart into numerous small federations. Worlds seek protection from the NuXon Empire or Isorian Senatex.
3750	The NuXon and Senatex succeed in locating and destroying a number of system side gates around Vorl planets. This is the first time actual gateways are successfully attacked and destroyed using a dimensional manipulation technique developed by the Isorians.
3753	Following the destruction of a number of Vorl gateways the Nexus begins to exhibit signs of instability.
3755	Attacks against Vorl gates are halted while the instability is investigated. Gates begin to collapse.
3756	The rate of gate collapse accelerates at an alarming rate.
3761	The Isorian gate collapses, one of the last to do so, leaving much of the Isorian fleet scattered throughout the Nexus, unable to reach Isori. Some such ships establish hi-tech colonies that survived into the Seventh Age.

The Sixth Collapse: The Trisapient Catastrophe

The Sixth Collapse, also called the Trisapient Catastrophe, is another long period in which the populations of many worlds either perish or are reduced to barbarism. Isori – however – maintains a high level of technological sophistication through this time. Because events within Isorian real-space are to shape the age to come, we record the history of Isori throughout this period in some detail.

Sixth Collapse

Year	Event
6AC140	Advanced gravitic (space-time warping) drives developed by the Isorians based on technology uncovered on Artica Tentu. Probes equipped with the new drives are capable of near-light speed. The Isorians begin to explore neighbouring stars in real-space (Isor space-time continuum).
6AC190	Isorian exploration extends to a radius twenty-five light years (25ly) from Isori.
6AC200	The first Isorian colony is established at Oblon, 5 light years (ly) from Isori. It is quickly followed by Tsates at 8ly distant.
6AC500	The Isorians develop the Integrated Machine Intelligence (IMTel) technology to enable distant colonies to share information and maintain cohesion.
6AC1000	Isorian real-space colonies now number five star systems independently functional. Further seed colonies are established.
6AC1500–2700	Isorians expand their real-space exploration up to 50ly from Isori.
c6AC2700	The Nexus begins to open once more although Isori itself will not reconnect for some decades. The pace of gate opening increases as the years pass. One of the first gates to open is Algor.
6AC2720	Isorian colony at Irel 25ly from Isori is overrun by Tsan Kiri. Because of the distance from Isori this sudden and unexpected attack does not become known to the Senatex for a further twenty five years, by which time two further colonies have been lost.
6AC2722	The Algoryn, already reconnected to the Nexus, establish colonies throughout the region that would become the Determinate.
6AC2723	Isorian real-space colony at Orates 20ly from Isori is destroyed by the Tsan Kiri.
6AC2728	Isorian real-space colony at Tsajhon 17ly from Isori is destroyed by Tsan Kiri.
6AC2735–2745	News of the loss of its colony at Irel reaches Isori and its remaining colonies, all of which ramp up their defences in preparation for further attacks.

(Sixth collapse, continued...)

Sixth Age Collapse, continued...

Year	Event
6AC2740–2745	Isorian real-space colony at Vahhn 15ly from Isori is attacked and its defenders overcome, though the planet is devastated during the fighting. Probes containing the first reports on the enemy are dispatched to Isori and other colony worlds.
6AC2743	News of the loss of Orates reaches Isori. The Senatex dispatch scout fleets and prepare to face the as yet unknown enemy.
6AC2745	The Isorians identify their enemy as the Tsan Kiri but as yet known little about them. The beginning of the Tsan Real Space war.
6AC 2750	The Isorian gate reopens and Isor is once again able to access the Nexus.

The GA Drive

During the Sixth Collapse, the technologically advanced Isorians developed a new, highly efficient drive system to manage their real-space empire. These are commonly referred to as gravitic annihilation (GA) drives. The gravity-twisting fields generated by the GA drives not only provide tremendous acceleration but also protection from the perils posed by micro-meteorites encountered when travelling at substantial fractions of the speed of light. Whilst bulky and requiring tremendous power, they are fitted to almost every ship in the Antarean universe.

Even a ship as 'slow' as an Antarean transport would take only two to three days to traverse the immense distances from an Antarean gate to an inner planet.

Targeting ships travelling at such incredible velocities is almost impossible as even a fraction of a degree in evasive manoeuvring results in any shot missing by thousands of yan. Space battles have evolved such that they only occur at specific 'nodes' – locations of strategic or tactical importance that might be a planet, a moon, an orbital and, of course, a system gate itself.

The colossal acceleration of the gravitic annihilation drive and its ability to balance gravity inside and outside the ship made a huge impact on the speed of communication and travel across the Nexus.

THE SEVENTH AGE: THE IMTEL AGE

Also known as the Age of the PanHuman Concord, the current age is generally reckoned from the time of the opening of the Isorian gate, although gateways had already begun to regenerate some decades earlier. During the Seventh Age humanity is first united by the development of Integrated Machine Intelligence (IMTel) technology and then divided by it, leaving human space disputed between two major powers: the PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex.

Year	Event
7A3–5	The Isorian real-space colony at Tsates is attacked but, forewarned of the danger, the Tsan Kiri invasion fleet is repulsed by the colonist's defences.
15	Initial reports of the Tsan Kiri biologically based technologies reach research facilities in Isori. The Isorians prepare for an all-out war against the mysterious alien invaders.
20	The Isorians make contact with other worlds throughout the neighbouring regions of the Nexus. The PanHuman Concord is established to unite humankind against the peril posed by the Tsan Kiri. The IMTel enables human worlds to integrate their technologies, disseminating important technological discoveries made by the Isorians during the period of collapse.
30+	The IMTel's influence spreads throughout the human Nexus bringing hundreds of worlds within the compass of the PanHuman Concord.
30+	PanHuman Concord forces gather around Isori in preparation for the counterattack against the Tsan Kiri.
38–40	Remains of Vahn real-space colony retaken from small occupying force of Tsan Kiri.
72–84	Tsates is attacked by an armada of Tsan Kiri ships. The invasion is defeated by a mix of space-borne and ground-based forces. Suspected first contamination of IMTel by Tsan Kiri bio-silicon interface spores.
75	Scout craft arrive at Irel to find a world in thrall to the Tsan Kiri. This information would not reach Isori for another twenty-five years.
84	PanHuman Concord reinforcements arrive at Tsates, Oblon and the other three original real-space colonies.
100	The news that the Irel colony has been absorbed by the Tsan Kiri reaches Isori. The Tsan Kiri War reaches a stalemate.
120	Prosperate established between Algor and neighbouring worlds as a bulwark against the growing influence of the PanHuman Concord.
100–180	Isorian technicians unravel secrets of the Tsan Kiri bio-silicon nanosphere. By merging conventional nanites with the Tsan biological equivalent they create a hybrid bio-silicon matrix able to infiltrate Tsan Kiri systems. IMTel systems upgrade nanite-based nanospheres to host the new battle-honed, bio-silicon matrix. The upgrade spreads throughout the Nexus from Isori.
190	Irel selected as base for advanced forces against the Tsan Kiri.
194	Isorian phase armour and bio-silicon interface suits developed using technologies developed from alien data.
215	Irel is retaken and developed into the next base from which an attack would be mounted against the Tsan Kiri.
215	Isorian probes discover the location of the Tsan Kiri homeworld approximately 25 light years from Isori. This information will not reach Isori itself for a further twenty five years.
225	PanHuman Concord forces mass at Isori. The largest human fleet ever assembled up to that time.
235	Remaining colony worlds are taken one after the other. News of the fleet's success will not reach Isori for between five and twenty years.
240	News of the discovery of the location of the Tsan Kiri homeworld reaches Isori. Invasion fleet launched.
250	Tsan Kiri withdraw from former Isorian real-space colonies and nearby worlds occupied by the Tsan Kiri.
280	An Isorian/PanHuman Concord invasion fleet arrives at Tsan Kiri homeworld to find it abandoned. The Tsan Kiri have disappeared leaving behind a world utterly laid to waste. Whether the Tsan Kiri learned of a gateway into the Nexus, or whether they simply retreated to some yet more distant refuge is unknown. The whereabouts of the Tsan Kiri remains a mystery to the present day.
280–340	The spread of bio-silicon nanospore throughout the IMTel extends to almost half of all human worlds. The pace of its spread slows down as the IMTel systems of more distant worlds begin to identify its hybrid bio-silicon spore as hostile. Irreconcilable mutations to the new spore cause systems to drift beyond the base parameters required to ensure compatibility. Sporadic fighting ensues between spacecraft travelling between the borders of old and new IMTel systems.
300+	An intact Tsan Kiri hatchery is discovered on an alien colony at 21 light years from Isori. The first Tsan are hatched and are named Tsan Ra – Tsan 'reborn'.
325+	Tsan Ra become integrated within Isorian Senatex.
c. 300–500	Conflict between the rival IMTel systems breaks out wherever they come up against each other. The PanHuman Concord divides along IMTel lines: that driven by the bio-silicate spore of the Isorian Senatex and the non-organic nanosphere of the PanHuman Concord.
320+	Rise of the Freeborn Houses – mercantile conglomerates emerge as intermediaries between Panhuman Concord and Isorian Senatex worlds.
c. 7A400	The Vorl reappear in the Southern hemisphere. Being largely confined to the lower latitudes and isolated by numerous voids, there is little the Senatex or Concord can do to prevent their spread. Over the next five hundred years, the Vorl absorb much of the Southern hemisphere, only stopped by coming into contact with powerful Spill fiefdoms and the Panhuman Concord.
500	The border between PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex settles on the Northern Interface along the Praan–Forward line.

Seventh Age, continued...

Seventh Age, continued...

Year	Event
520	The Erban War on Algor. The Optimate Moch Ma'req is driven into exile and becomes the independent and itinerant Freeborn of Ma'req – a nation of pirates and brigands.
700	Exploration reveals numerous new systems along Northern Interface. Averahn occupies strategically dominant position along interface. Concord captures Exeth from Senatex.
782	Averahn falls to Senatex. Exeth recaptured by Senatex.
c. 800	The Aan Shard breaks from the PanHuman Concord: the Aan Segment Wars, also known as the Wars of the Mandarins of Aan. The NuHu Mandarins of Aan are eventually defeated with the loss of several worlds rendered uninhabitable. The Aan Four gateway is surrounded by automated defences and its malign intelligence isolated as a precaution (the Seal of Aan). Many NuHu fleeing from the Aan Segment Wars take refuge elsewhere, escaping to the Spill, the Determine and into Freeborn hands.
900–1120	Senatex exploit their capture of Averahn to explore the Averahn Rift. Senatex captures the planets Felseron and Weleth from Concord.
~1025	Ghar explore the equatorial regions of the Determine. Whilst their ships capture a number of human spacecraft, they remain undetected for some time, the disappearances blamed on an upsurge in pirate activity. Initially, their primitive drives limits the Ghar to a small region of the Antarean surface but they gradually improve their capability thanks to brain grafts from captured human engineers and the study of drives from captured transports. Ghar ships range more widely during the years that follow, primarily amongst the scarcely populated worlds and the worlds of the fractious Spill kingdoms and fiefdoms.
1105–1115	Ghar first destroy affiliated, human settled worlds along the borders of the Prosperate. Initially, raiders are blamed for the attacks but the polluted, barren remnants tell a different story.
1192–1205	Ghar incursions reach into the borders of the Prosperate. The Algoryn are forced to strengthen
1235	Bero Harran becomes Vard of Freeborn House Oszoni. Establishment of Oszoni Mercantile League.
1265	Tiro Conspiracy thwarted by Vard Bero of the Oszoni. Tiro Harran executed.
1275–1305	Seventh Segment War. The Vorl attack the PanHuman Concord and some independent worlds in the exposed zone along the Concord's southern border. During the decades long war, the Vorl break the Seal of Aan and occupy Aan Four.
1280+	Ghar accelerate their expansionism to attack and destroy isolated human systems throughout the northern Determine. The attacks are initially blamed on the Vorl, such is the confusion during the early years of the Seventh Segment War.
1287	Freeborn House Oszoni defeats House Ky'am destroying the trader fleets and capturing their rival's trade routes. This brings to an end the feud between the two Houses stretching back centuries to the time of Vard Bero's great-grandfather.
1288	Oszoni–Algoryn trade treaty grants Oszoni monopoly on trade within the Algoryn Prosperate.
1298	Algoryn colony of Zyra destroyed by Algoryn to prevent the strategically important Zyran Gate falling into the hands of Isorian task force. Tar Es Janar is amongst those who escape from Zyra. Start of the Zyran War between Algoryn Prosperate and Isorian Senatex.
1302	Prosperate worlds raided by Ghar. Oszoni Freeborn ships transporting Algoryn reinforcements ambushed and destroyed by Ghar fleets. Oszon attempts to forge alliance against the Ghar with other Freeborn houses throughout the Determine but its overtures are largely rejected due to the Oszon trade monopoly.
1305	The Vorl and PanHuman Concord reach an uneasy stalemate, open hostilities draw to a close bringing an end to the Seventh Segment War.
1315	Battle of Ephra – Algoryn successfully defend Ephra against Ghar. Ghar Commander Fartok is declared Outcast following the defeat, and subsequently escapes, starting the Outcast Rebellion. Tar Es Janar commands the 63rd AI Division, recapturing Ephra Set Five gaining widespread fame.
1320	The Xilos Event (Northern Determine). The discovery of the huge Gatebuilder facility on Xilos with its largely intact gate-factory is followed by the Battle for Xilos and disappearance of the world together with its nascent gate. Rupture in the Nexus caused by creation of unphased gate triggers local collapse centred upon the northern Determine.
1320	Senatex deploy trans-dimensional task force to Xilos using chronophasic technology.
1320	Tar Es Janar returned to Algor where he is tried as a collaborator and exiled
1321–2	The world of Chryseis is destroyed by a corrupted IMTel shard – the Chryseis Shard.
1322	Ess Ma Rahq consolidates hold over the High Council of Algor.
7A1323–4	The Taskarr Campaign – Isorian planets adjoining the Northern Determine are wiped out by a parasitic machine intelligence called the Virai or Dronescurge. Virai infestation is tracked down to the planet Taskarr and believed eliminated; however, Virai infestations continue to break out along the northern border of the Determine as well as the Northern Interface.
1323	Ess Ma Rahq's vice-like grip on the Algoryn Council is actively disputed by Councillors seeking co-operation beyond the frontiers of the Prosperate. Some call for the rehabilitation of Tar Es Janar. The Council is increasingly divided into two factions.
1324	Instability within the Nexus triggered by the Xilos Event continues to spread from its epicentre in the northern Determine, threatening to initiate a collapse of the entire Antarean trans-dimensional engine. Several worlds lying close to the Xilos gate have already vanished from the Nexus altogether. Amidst this anarchy the Prosperate is torn between two factions and the whole Determine is poised upon the brink of war.
1325	Present Day

PRESENT DAY: LATE 7A 1325

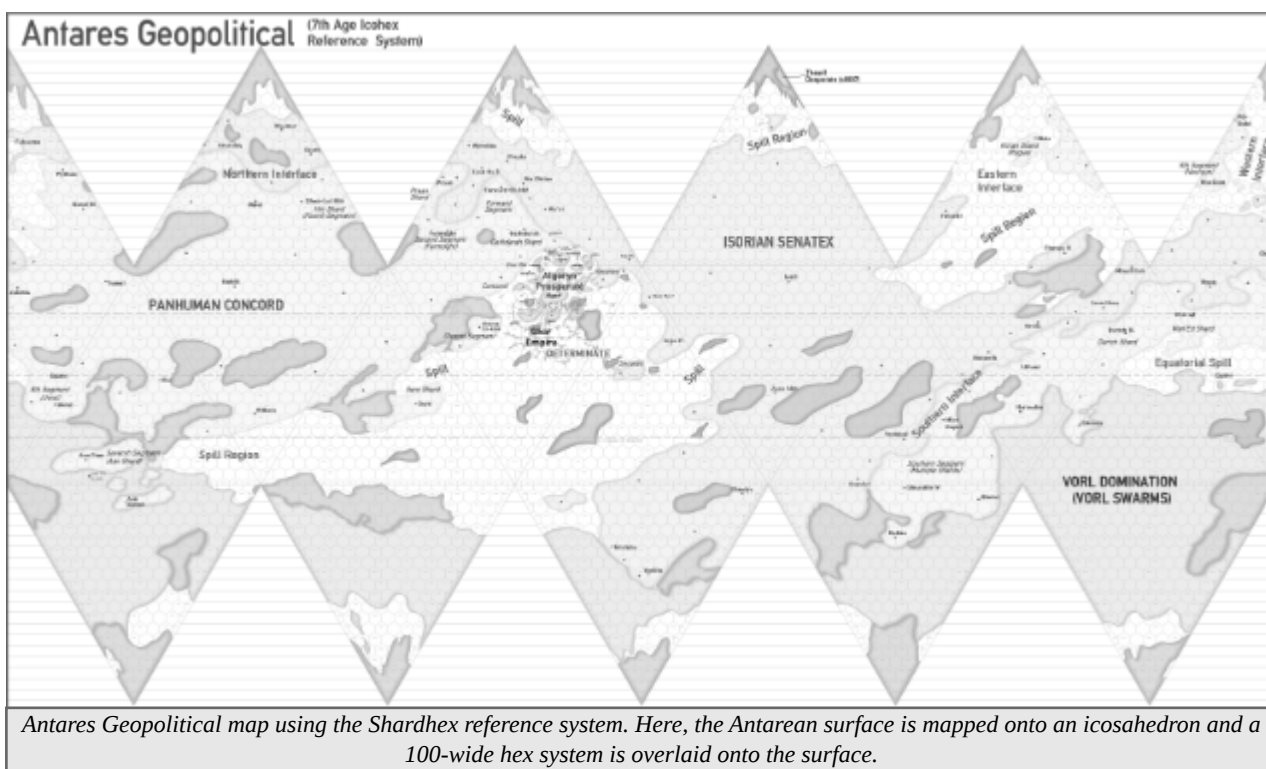
Although more than thirteen hundred years have passed since the beginning of the Seventh Age, thousands of human worlds of ages past have still not been rediscovered, including some of the most prosperous Sixth Age worlds: Alzantha, Jarain and KayTen. It is possible that their gates opened millennia ago and the planets they once led to are no longer home to people capable of space flight. A more likely explanation for their absence is that these once powerful centres of civilisation merely remain isolated from the Nexus up until the present time – and perhaps they developed interstellar drives and have established thriving, real-space civilisations.

It is also possible they will never again be reconnected to the Nexus and are lost.

With the Calamity at Duret IV, the Ghar are now set to rise again under the command of Fartok – perhaps soon to be the new Supreme Commander. The Algoryn are poised on the brink of Civil War, through the threat of a resurgent Ghar has perhaps put this in abeyance. More obvious threats are the spread of the Virai Dronescore along the interfaces between the Senatex, Concord and Determinate, and the civilisation-changing fact that Antares seems to be on the verge of collapse.

The events at Xilos precipitated a tragedy, Amano Harran's meddling of the time lock triggering a catastrophic cascade. But there is hope: Yu Hamnu, a Concord NuHu, is trapped within the impenetrable barrier around Xilos. Even now, the irrepressible mercenary Hansa Nairobi is trying to find a way to breach the shield and rescue her; and even now, she manages to send messages to ancient artefacts from her isolation, messages that to some suggest hope that a scientist of her standing may yet save them. To others, Yu Hamnu's garbled messages merely solidify their fears of an imminent gate collapse and the coming of yet another dark age.

But life must go on, trade must continue, and Antares remains at the centre of all life in the galaxy. Exploration, discovery and war continue, always beyond the gates of Antares.



Antares Geopolitical map using the Shardhex reference system. Here, the Antarean surface is mapped onto an icosahedron and a 100-wide hex system is overlaid onto the surface.

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