

## **INTRODUCTION TO MANIFEST DESTINY**

Bill Straight

I always wanted to try a story featuring the deep-future history of human expansion into the universe. Having been an evolutionary paleobiologist for roughly 20 years, I have a fully non-Trekkian perspective: while I anticipate broad success on the part of Mankind in their eventual radiation to the stars, I look at it as the spread of a plague. The rationale for this somewhat unflattering view is that Man has evolved with the potential (and the extreme likelihood) for not only distributing himself across the universe, but also for acting as a vector for Earth's viruses, fungi, weeds, spiders, roaches, rodents, pigeons, and dogs. In short, our biosphere is invasive and never takes no for an answer; Man is ideally poised to spread Earth's biosphere like wildfire through the galaxy.

In addition, humans are deeply imperfect, a character flaw I don't see ever evolving out or changing, even as we speciate on hundreds of non-Earth worlds—in fact, natural selection wouldn't have it any other way. So intrigue, assassination, corruption, honesty, heroism, creativity, viciousness, insanity, and fellowship all get to go with us, along with humor, music, literature, drugs, poverty, art, and every other trapping of (now) 15000 years of civilization. This story is set so far into the future that while Earth is still pretty much the center of things, they know as much about our civilization as we know about the early Egyptians, 4000 years ago. The only real holdover I used were city names—on the assumption that, while nations come and go, big cities stay pretty much the same (e.g. Athens). But they're not going to know about us, or care that they don't know.

I also wanted to explore technological advancement without doing a technopunk game—it works, but I don't have to know how. Nevertheless, I still see spacecraft as dirty, cramped, rapidly aging vessels in a never-ending quest for repairs and salvage. I have provided a few pages on technological development, common alien life, and a simple 1400 year chronology to get you started. I also offer as an initial setting the Thunder Moon, a small mercenary craft with a marginally ethical crew. This set-up is provided in order to give characters a humble beginning—you'll note the ship already has an accomplished captain and officers, so your heroes have to begin as new crew at the bottom of the roster. I also provide the launching adventures and plot for the first short arc.

This game was run, alas relatively unsuccessfully, for my group (at that time featuring Alan Coulson, Todd Yoho, Rick Cecil, and Carlton Hwa) during the summer of 2002. The campaign never took off, for several reasons that had mostly to do with schedule conflicts, rules disintegration, and the intervention of mundane real life. However, one of our problems you can avoid: Our story repeated stalled because players suddenly needed to resolve whether their character actually breathed, ate, slept, had a pulse, was warm, etc. I urge GMs not to let your players create new life forms for this adventure without a serious species study and at least a simple evaluation of their planetary history and biology.

One other note—these NPCs are set up in an older format than the one I use in the manual. You will probably find them actually a little more complete here than in my GM section (whenever I finally write the silly thing); I left them this way in order to help you understand who they are a little better.

## CREW OF THE THUNDER MOON

**Thunder Moon** 8/12/14 q+6  
ops cannons fXPDR3 forw 3<sup>rd</sup>, wing cannons ffXOD4 forw half, wing turrets 20 vXD1 side half  
plating adamantine coating, high sheen ffXXBDDH12; light net force field XXO  
parabolic superlight .12 fusion engine  
Hatchet-class corsair built on Fontana 7427A/D for personal escort vessel, hijacked by Jess Maryne 7429F.

**Magal Warenga**, Captain Human, 43 9/8/11 q16,8 x24  
6 Kata 4 navigate 7 pilot/TM point-jab TTW\*OPH2; suit-jam ffOD6  
4 command 4 network 4 organize performe fXP3  
fatigue Kata for action; pick 1 immunity per round  
joined 7435B, became 4<sup>th</sup> pirate captain 7443M on death of Bridger Gaines.

**Guilleghh**, Mate/MOCmdr Fetid, 28 14/6/4 q12 x16  
7 Wilderkin 5 zap 6 drive/Cav eps fXDR2; bite UKBP7; juice UXXH9  
5 pilot/TM 4 command 4 resolve Cav XBD3; hide B1; mind ORR1  
extra graze each failed attack, effects in tricks as 1<sup>st</sup> -3 (ouch!)  
joined 7439D as deck labor, replaced Trok as Mate 7444A.

**Nara Yoshison**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate/WOCmdr Human, 31 7/9/5 q8 x12  
5 pilot/TM 6 pilot/raptor 5 navigate  
4 converse 3 Xenotech 3 sneak Raptor  
may reduce damage to vehicle at 1hit:1XP, doubles on pilot give 2XP.  
joined 7438I as comtech, took 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate 7448A.

**Lindy Harker**, sentech/electech Human, 24 5/10/5 q9 x12  
6 design/elec\* 5 Psychescape\* 4 Cybernetics\* usually no weapon  
4 archive 3 navigate 3 charm jumper XP1  
constructs: neural link, augmented left hand/forearm with sensor kit  
3 skills\*, no crash; E from mental restores 1 skill to full  
stowaway from Catal Strip 7440G, befriended by Bleys; injuries repaired with cyber 7444A.

**Jonyvan**, steward/MO Talithan, 16 8/5/6 q8 x10  
5 create/cooking 4 drive/Cav 4 zap  
3 negotiate 3 Sorcery 3 design Cav XBD3  
finesses on create x1, each w/ free roll  
Jonyvan brought on for anti-Hive weapons 7445F, plan failed, Jonyvan made steward 7445I; Jonyvan given special Cav after  
encounter with Imperium corvette 7446G.

**Vvp**, deck labor/MOCp Dziban, 104 5/4/9 q9 x8  
5 Ghostway 4 Wilderkin 4 heave small cannon fXPDR3  
3 zap 3 believe 3 Faith carapace fXBPR5 (X2 at 2,3 only)  
glows faintly in low light, partial cover  
joined crew as deck labor 7437K, heavy gunner 7439E.

**Ash Bergill**, deck labor/MO Human, 18 6/6/5 q7 x6  
4 drive/Cav 3 heave 3 grapple en. missiles 20 vXD1  
3 zap 3 launch 2 design Cav XBD3  
free roll on launch; one free roll for improvised, two rolls for practiced  
hired as new deck labor 7448B

**Trochter "Trok" Kammond**, deck labor/WO Human, 58 5/7/11 q4 x6  
7 pilot/Raptor 6 design/Cav 4 command Raptor  
4 organize 4 design/e-wpn 4 X-hotwire  
last original hijacker 7429F; served as gunner, 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate, Mate until Bleys' death, retired from command 7443M.

# **MANIFEST DESTINY**

**BILL STRAIGHT**

## **WHO'S WHO**

### **Solar Domain**

Earth, Mars, and Venus are a three-planet triumvirate ruling over an expansionistic human race. The humans from Earth represent the most prolific biosphere in this spiral arm and the reigning interplanetary government, the Dominion, run by the Superintendent and his Cabinet of Ministers on a decadal electorate, has mandated a colonization of every green-class planet in this spiral arm of the Milky Way. Several indigenous populations, including a few intelligent ones, have been uprooted or overrun by the colonial expansion. The humans are not always directly responsible for deaths, nor particularly bent on extermination, but elements from Earth's biosphere are highly invasive, and viruses, mold, weeds, roaches, and rats have followed the humans wherever they have settled, displacing and disrupting extant ecosystems on every world they have encountered.

Colonial aspiration has led the Solar Domain into direct confrontation with the Imperium, whose quarantined planets are frequently ripe for settlement. The Scaelian Hives find that green-class planets typically have the highest bounty of the raw materials they seek for survival. By contrast, the metallic Nihal find the human's colonial operation highly useful in tracing metallic ores in otherwise useless planets and asteroid fields. Talitha is generally neutral toward the SD but fiercely protective of the few worlds it retains following the Scaelian Scourge. The Solar Domain's largest competitor is actually rival humans of the Marsik system.

### **Republic of Lakertya**

Only 7 light years (2.2 parsecs) from Earth, Lakertya is a small green-class planet with a large blue-class moon and a ten-hour diurnal rotation orbiting the star *iota Draconis*. Humans found Lakertya during the early days of space exploration and colonized it some 700 years ago—it is now a fully Earthlike planet, with any vestiges of its original biosphere (including a race of stong-age natives) long since extinct. Guilt over planetary xenocide has infused the populace of Lakertya with a love of native populations and an interest in compelling the Solar Domain to protect indigenous life forms. While not opposed to colonization, the Lakertyan Republic prides itself on the best planetary analysis and appraisal operation in the solar system, and once even retreated from a planet inhabited only by primitive leafless plants. The Lakertyans frequently interfere with Solar Domain colonists, colonial transports, shipments of supplies, and so on, in an effort to drive out settlers; however, they have also been known to rush in to rescue settlements under Scaelian attack. While not possessing a fleet the size of the Imperium or the Domain, RL ships have been known to engage a lone Imperium vessel or side with the Talithans against a Hive. They will not attack SD ships and cannot afford to sabotage their official standing with the SD government, but covertly fund all sorts of anti-SD operations, including several piracy operations aimed at Domain shipping lanes.

### **Imperium**

Two sentient races emerged on a large blue+ red-class planet orbiting a binary star registered to humans as GC beta-3414d. The master race, known officially as Janids by the humans, is roughly humanoid, bipedal, mineral endoskeleton, tissues, respire on diatomic nitrogen gas. Each limb has one more joint than humans, and knees and elbows seem bent backwards, and while encephalized the sensory array has nothing familiar—a vertical multiramus mouth splits the face, giving the race the slang name Slitface, and six small opaque bulbs, three on each side of the mouth, are light, chemical, and magnetic receptors similar to eyes and nose. The Janids have art, music, cuisine, technology, entertainment, and religion—none of which seems all that alien to human ears or taste buds. Even their jokes are funny. The secondary race, less well known but occasionally encountered by SD marines, are officially referred to as the Morloc, a routinely used term for any enslaved race (it's

origins in HG Wells classic have been lost). Similar to Janids in general appearance, the Morlocs appear to be a more primitive version of the Janid, with a short tail spine, longer forearms, deeper chest, smaller cranium, heavy dentition, weaker vision, and demonstrably reduced mental faculties. Morlocs are used for two purposes: physical labor, and as living incubators for Janid larvae, a task which terrifies Morlocs because the emergence of the juvenile Janid kills the host.

The Janids lead the Imperium through the stars in a holy crusade to find their gods; failing that, they expect to follow in their footsteps. Any world with relics of past inhabitation can be regarded by the Imperial Senechal as a holy site, requiring immediate quarantine. Thus sequestered, the planet is off limits to alien invasion. Unfortunately, many of the quarantined planets are part of the Solar Domain's colonization plan, and some have already been settled. At present an official state of war exists between the two empires, resulting from the forcible expulsion of nearly 10000 SD settlers from an 82-year-old settlement on the planet Hadriaca; the eviction came without warning and resulted in a surface shooting match, prisoners being taken and lost in space, and some 3100 human deaths. The Janid ambassador was supposed to be expelled from SD space, but someone failed to get the message and the diplomat was murdered. That was nine solar years ago.

### **Nihal**

Highly fluid formless creatures come from a massive yellow-class gas giant orbiting Nihal, a binary pair of blue-white stars 113 light years (35 parsecs) from Earth. The Nihalianians are built of very simple metallic and silica crystals suspended in an ammonia/methane slush, with organization similar to that of a terrestrial sponge. Like sponges, a Nihalian can pass through a strainer with little damage, and can sustain a few moments longer than a human in a vacuum. Although allies and very cordial with most humans, the conditions that humans live under will kill a Nihalian—raw oxygen and comfortable “human” temperatures are not survivable. Hence the rare Nihalian visitors to human ships wear pressure suits, often those belonging to humans.

Nihal, a gas giant, has a vast supply of hydrogen gas, deuterium, water, and other types of materials, which the natives trade as fuel for fusion reactors for the opportunity to accompany or follow terrestrial colonization lanes in an effort to find planets rich in metallic ores. Nihalianians have highly advanced alchemical and arcane skills but like everyone else requires raw materials to work with. A contract with the Nihalianians for sulfur compounds resulted in the fifteen-year terraforming of Venus, completed nearly 200 years ago. Since then, Nihal and Earth have been fast friends.

While Nihal has no particular problem with the Imperium or the Scaelians, they are aware of the limitation on their own expansion should their allies from Earth be inhibited. However, with metal being scarce for the Nihalianians a large fleet of interstellar starcraft is impossible to field; hence Nihalianians make small sleek raider craft, provide an essentially limitless fuel source for human ships, and are experts at processing metal into forms without high temperatures.

### **Scaelians**

Mineral creatures, based on clay, salts, and organic hydrocarbons, emerged into sentience on a long-forgotten white-class planet. Each Scaelyn is assembled from a varying number of four-limbed segments, each with a hook-shaped crown and disk-shaped base. Additional segments, in fact whole additional creatures, can be strung together to form large chains and cables, while components replicated on some individuals are combined to form new ones. Each segment contains facets of a personality, which combine to form a complete, usually stable psyche. They are not susceptible to cold or mild heat, and atmospheres do not inhibit them. However, they rapidly disaggregate in liquid water, and even high humidity is a risk for them.

These creatures left their home world stripped of its meager mineral resources, traveling as a fleet in which the ships were made of the bodies of members of the Hive itself. They journeyed through space to a nearby green-class planet, stripped it of its mineral and organic resources, reassembled a now larger hive, and moved on. The planet stripping has become their mode of operation, with few settlements or permanent structures being left behind.

When the Scaelian Hives strayed into Imperium space, their encounter was brief and brutal, leaving both sides with heavy losses. The Imperium however recognized an asset in the Hive once

the war began with Solar Domain and set the Hive loose stripping planets in the Domain's arm of the galaxy, after carefully making certain that the Hive understood the relics were not to be consumed or disturbed. The Scaelians failed to understand that settlers did not constitute organic resources, and a few colonies of the humans were stripped along with their biospheres. The SD declared war on the Scaelians as well.

The Hive veered into Talithan space and nearly eradicated their population, stripping several fully inhabited worlds within a few parsecs of Talitha before a hastily cobbled fleet (mostly bought from or donated by RL merchants) managed to turn them back. Talithan persecution of the Hive has scattered nests all over near-space, making it harder for SD and RL factions to fight them.

### **Talitha**

The intelligent race from Talitha are thickset humanoid three-toed facultative quadrupeds with a great deal of functional similarity to humans, particularly in the face where they feature recognizable if distorted eyes, nose, mouth, and ears in a face resembling a cross between a bulldog, sheep, and bird. Eyes are laterally offset and bulging on the sides of a long wrinkled face, with multilobate pupils in lavender-colored eyes, a wide flaring nose, and a black or brown keratin beak over a flat-toothed herbivorous dentition. They tend to be mellow creatures, are relative newcomers to the space-race, and are as eager to explore space as they are prone to blundering through a delicate situation with a blaster. Low manual dexterity inhibits use of all but the simplest machines; however, they are renown as musicians, painters, writers, and cooks, among other duties, and do well in concert with humankind.

The great contradiction, then, is the Talithan colonization of near-space around their yellow star (iota Ursae majoris, 49 light years (15 parsecs) from Earth). Even the Talithans don't know how or when it was accomplished but somehow the Talithans connected several nearby worlds with a series of surface wormhole gates. Five nearby planets were settled before the Talithans invented gunpowder; ten more have followed at various intervals. The pastoral Talithans were beginning an information revolution and nascent space exploration when the Scaelian Hives arrived.

Several worlds with minor Talithan populations were exterminated by the Hives before anyone on Talitha learned there was a problem; when the first large-population world of Mettelis was attacked, the raid took several days and Talitha cried out for help. A Republic of Lakertya fleet was close by and responded. Talithans bartered for sufficient technology to fight the invaders and were jerked almost a 1000 years into technological future virtually overnight. After several unsuccessful attempts and a second planetary demolition, this time of Carrandis under Scaelian asteroid mass drivers, the Talithans found a weapon that would damage the Hive creatures—high-pressure hot water jets, trivially simple to manufacture but difficult to keep from freezing in space. The nature of the Talithan weapons, liquid water at space temperatures, is still not understood, not even by most Talithans.

Talitha vowed xenocide on the Hive and has seriously damaged the Hives in the area; however, the Talithan lack of technology and minimal resources is holding them back. The Republic of Lakertya is strongly backing the Talitha while pressuring them to allow the Hive to leave if they will.

### **Istdzib**

The race known as the Dzibans hail from a red giant star at the distal end of Earth's spiral arm and are one of the first races contacted by human explorers, even in the days prior to the Solar Domain. The Dzibans are not numerous because planets suitable to their form of life are rare. The creature ancestral to the modern Dziban resembled a terrestrial cephalopod, with an elastic ten-fold symmetry and non-skeletal morphology. Emerging onto land, these ancestors developed an inert organic jointed exoskeleton, chest-vents for lungs, and reduced the number of functional limbs to six, retaining two horn-like vestigial limbs beneath the chin and two jointed plate-like sheets crowning the head. Slightly larger than an average human, they can walk on two or four limbs, each with two slender hoof-like toes, depending on load and inclination, and the remaining, lighter pair of limbs developed palms and five digits, each outer digit opposable. In addition to manual dexterity, language, art, and science, Dzibans developed a keen telekinetic power; this power derives from their

own native biosphere, which does not transplant well and is the only known biosphere to successfully resist invasion by terrestrial life. Humans have made Istdzib a favorite tourism spot—a world vastly different from Earth—and learned that visiting Istdzib imparted, for some, the same telekinetic abilities possessed by the Dzibans.

The Dzibans are excellent merchants, with no particular agenda in the present conflict. They find the best deals, sell the best goods, and always know where the business opportunities lie, largely because of their ability to read minds. Their history lacks large global conflicts, and Dziban politics is generally perfunctory and boring. Nevertheless, the Dzibans are capable fighters, and best of all their natural exoskeleton is rigid enough to provide them with hardsuit-equivalent protection, even against medium intensity energy beams.

However, someone has developed a strong dislike for the Dzibans lately. Many of their ships turn up adrift in space. Many of the Dzibans retreated home, only to discover that the population has grown there (and on the two other worlds on which their biosphere has been successfully if tenuously transplanted) to the point that many Dzibans are crowded out and homeless. Dzibans cannot breed outside their own environment, gradually lose their psychic abilities without frequent home visits, and are gradually being drawn into the conflict simply by the need to have a place to call home.

### **Uuillgyanids (Fetids)**

The Fetids get their name from their ability to eat anything—and the vile smell of their homeworld and their personal lifestyle. Fetids are roughly humanoid endoskeletal bipeds with blue-gray to green-gray skin that on close inspection is lightly pebbled with translucent keratinous scales. Their small domed skulls are heavy-boned in the face and lack a nose—respiration occurs through small pits in the corners of each eye, probably explaining the Fetid's almost complete lack of a sense of smell. Their jaw has no articulation with the skull, instead linking to a thick band of muscles ringing the back and base of the skull and around the throat; their mouth stretches half way around their head and can be made to gape up to 75 cm on some adult males. Their lantern jaw is laced with rolls of rapidly replaced teeth similar to those of terrestrial sharks but made of naturally-growing microcrystalline titanium and tungsten. Their lips are thin and do not cover their teeth; the upper lip is dotted with pale chemosensory pits that provide Fetids the ability to 'taste' the air or whatever else is placed into the pits. Their digestive bile, which can be ejected as an attack, is a highly corrosive combination of formic and hydrofluoric acid; they can digest raw metal.

Their homeworld of Uuillgyana is an Earth-sized green+ blue world with less than 8% real land surface, all covered with thick jungle-like plant life evolved in an oxygen-rich atmosphere of natural hydrocarbons. The other 92% are oceans completely covered with up to 30 meters of growing and decomposing algae-like plant material, turning the entire planet into a gigantic smoggy mire. Emerging from a lineage of shallow marine predators driven to subaerial existence by the overgrowth of the oceans, the Fetids managed to develop a sophisticated technical society but retained their most basic ability to survive on whatever organic sustenance was available. However, until their encounter with humans, their lack of resources limited their expansion.

The SD found Uuillgyana almost 600 years ago, aided their space exploration goals, and thereafter regarded the Fetids as pests; wherever the humans went, Fetids found a foothold as scavengers, colonizing human trash dumps. One of the first Lakertyan crusades was the recognition of the Fetids, who had demonstrated their utility by rendering bilge containers and waste removal systems on starships unnecessary. In addition, Fetids are willing and capable of routine hard physical labor or heavy combat, are impossible to poison, gas, or choke, and are able to survive on miniscule resources, making them a strategic benefit. Fetids for their part have found association with humans lucrative both from a financial standpoint as well as an evolutionary one—the Fetid population has exploded to more than 50 times its pre-contact size, making them one of the most common alien types. In addition, their culture and language have been entirely discarded for integration into the human archetype as a willing brute labor force.

## **XUVs**

These strangest aliens of all are still unrecognized by organic life. The XUVs are energy creatures residing in any extensive void space, usually dark matter clouds between the galactic arms. Without corporeal form, they register as diffuse clouds of luminescence, usually x-ray, ultraviolet, and hard-particle radiation. They have seldom strayed into physical space because energy outwash from the stars causes them physical discomfort and even death. They have over the last 500 years become increasingly disturbed by interstellar traffic, because the gating and superlight engine technology distorts space around them, disincorporating them and causing untold demise and suffering. They are aware that their environment has changed and regarded it as a natural phenomenon until they encountered the Dzibans.

The XUVs do not recognize organic life—to them, solid objects are all rocks. However, the Dziban telepathic perception put them nominally on the XUVs' wavelength, permitting the semi-eternal, non-individual XUVs to discover that other radically different forms of life did in fact exist in the universe and were at the root of their suffering. The XUVs, feeling attacked, have begun their reprisals, attacking Dziban ships in order to shut off their interfering voices—and their attacks work, although not for the reasons they think. Ironically, Dziban merchants do not use terrestrial or imperial technology often, and their engine systems, though much slower, cause no harm to the XUVs.

The XUVs are not stupid, however; they have recognized a change in strategy of their foe, parasiting on a new type of object. Some of the scholarly mentalities among them believe that other life-forms even more alien than the Dzibans are protecting them, and the attacks on other ships have begun. Their first attack on a Republican vessel seems to have confirmed it—the XUVs discovered weak “metapsychic” emanations from the destruction of the objects around the lone Dziban merchant on their last mission.

## WHAT'S WHERE

### Catal

An asteroid cluster at the tipward end of the Logryne Nebula has been turned into a bizarre sight; seven massive asteroid blocks with enough collective gravitation to retain a thin atmosphere, warmly lit by the light of over a dozen protostars in the surrounding nebula. Catal is actually the largest of the so-called Seven Sisters (not to be confused with the Cataline Sisterhood, a group of feminine mystics occupying one of the smaller bodies) but the area has become the heaviest trade port within ten parsecs.

The Catal Strip is a domed city filled with high- and low-class casinos, hotels, restaurants, sex shops, arcades, hospitals, saloons, and nightclubs. On it, you will find some notable landmarks: Theater of War, a casino/arcade run by a militant feminist and arms dealer named Vinjo K'hay; The Dice Box, a high-profile casino owned by millionaire playboy and Republican Montigo Decrier, is not as lavish as his solar yacht, a floating craps game called the *Filthy Lucre*; Warlock's Tattoos; Pony Express, a nightclub/sex shop with a fixer/informer named Rabin Getherman; The Fountains of Catal, a four-star resort hotel and casino run by an elderly dove, fence, and card sharp known as Grandma; and Fthoggli's Credit Exchange, a money-laundering haven owned by a Fetid. A newspaper (printed and net) called the *Catal Flagship* is managed by a Talithan, Sepagani, who always seems to know what is happening in the area.

An outer asteroid known as the Flatrock is a lozenge shaped slab with a massive set of plantations on the habitable if stormy Warm Side—also a labor camp for captured Imperium Morlocs—and a fully functional star port under the thin atmosphere of the Cold Side. The Catal Starbase includes several services: Bretco's Repair and Salvage supplies parts and labor for ship repair, and is even capable of manufacturing new ships to specifications, boasting three Nihal on their permanent staff; TechStar provides comtech, sentech, and nettech equipment for ships of all types; Kessel Memorial Clinic provides both emergency medical treatment, including cybernetic surgery, and medical supplies for shipping; the Catal Port Authority provides low-gravity mooring slips, round-the-clock monitoring, and intraship security for visitors; and Coldhouse Plus offers cold storage in zero-temperature warehouses. Almost all of these operations are used to customers paying in cash who don't like a lot of questions or paperwork.

The second largest asteroid is blocked from direct sun—alpine low-gravity downhill skiing is enjoyed by visitors to the Nevershine resort. Low gravity mountain climbing is possible on Mount Aerie, and it is possible to parasail from the mountain top to other asteroids. One asteroid has a sharp ridge known as the Edge of the World, in which a trick of the local gravity causes rivers to fall over the edge and tumble nearly a mile along the surface until reaching the edge of Lake Gravitation, oriented parallel to the fall direction. One asteroid has a permanent coalescing rainstorm and sports a lush tropical rainforest; two have parched desert-like sides.

## IMMEDIATE HISTORY

<6000	Discovery of Grint; First contact with Dziban race; Solar Domain established.
6715B	Lakertya discovered.
6733D	First settlers arrive on Lakertya.
6799F	Widespread colonization of Lakertya results in decimation of indigenous biosphere.
6808F	SD exploration ship <i>Palermo</i> visits the Fetid homeworld Uuillgyana for the first time.
6812A	First Fetid colonists join human exploration of space.
6878M	Death of last Lakertyan native.
6922G	Formation of Lakertyan Republic.
6954J	Manifest of Lakertya: xenophile mandate.
6999F	First contact with the Nihal.
7006C	Lakertyan recognition of Fetid race.
7044A	Nihal and Fetid alliance, based on unusual trade agreement.
7233K	Invitation of Nihal to terraform Venus by SD.
7235I	Initiation of Nihal terraforming of Venus.
7250D	Completion of Nihal terraforming on Venus.
7285D	Exploration of Logryne Nebula, discovery of Amberia.
7288E	Discovery of Vitek, founding of Vitek Station.
7297J	Construction of Catal Mining Station.
7301J	First Scaelian attacks on Imperium worlds result in heavy Janid casualties.
7306C	Imperium forces destroy several Scaelian Hives, divert fleet.
7311H	Catal mining booms, pays for local shipping port.
7338B	Catal mining boomtown thrives as spaceport even as mining operation closes.
7344A	Plans laid for atmodome over Catal Strip.
7348K	Partially completed Catal Strip dome breached by meteorite, atmosphere retained.
7350C	Atmosphere envelope engineering completed at Catal; weather patterns form.
7352F	Lake Gravitation begins filling on Catal.
7361E	First ski lift started at Nevershine Resort on Catal.
7377A	First encounter with the Janid Imperium.
7388I	Fountains of Catal casino and hotel opens its doors.
7402L	Discovery of Talithan civilization by Lakertyans, quarantined by Republic.
7427A	<i>Construction begins at Forten on privately-ordered Hatchet-class escort vessel.</i>
7427D	<i>Escort vessel christened the Kitty Hawk.</i>
7429F	<i>Kitty Hawk hijacked by Jess Maryne, Trok Kammond, and others.</i>
7429H	<i>Jess Maryne raids Nogal Colony, identifies ship as Thunder Moon.</i>
7430A	<i>Janid Darasig joins TM crew to escape religious persecution on Imperium starship.</i>
7430E	<i>Thunder Moon raid on SD cargo freighter nets several Cav hardsuits.</i>
7430G	<i>Bleys Ordain hired as mech ops specialist by Jess Maryne.</i>
7431A	<i>Romance blossoms between Bleys Ordain and Trok Kammond.</i>
7433E	<i>Mysterious casualty among the Dziban mercantile fleet; ship adrift near Wessel.</i>
7433M	<i>Bleys Ordain agrees to wed Trok Kammond; ceremony at Catal.</i>
7434A	<i>Trok reassigned from 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate to Tactician; Darasig fills 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate.</i>
7434F	<i>Jess Maryne retires, departs Thunder Moon; Will Chantry becomes captain.</i>
7435B	<i>Magal Warenga joins Thunder Moon as navigator, hardsuit operator.</i>
7437K	<i>Vvp hired as deck labor for Thunder Moon.</i>
7438D	<i>Vvp's natural luminosity, hard armor, and strength make him valuable on assaults.</i>
7438H	<i>Janid eviction of SD colonists on Hadriaca results in 3100 dead in surface fighting.</i>
7438I	<i>Nara Yoshison hired as comtech.</i>
7439A	<i>Janid ambassador murdered on Earth.</i>
7439D	<i>Fetid Guilleggh hired as deck labor for Thunder Moon.</i>
7439E	<i>Formal declaration of war between Imperium and Solar Domain.</i>

7439E *Guilleggh and Vvp team against opposing corsair, Vvp uses special heavy artillery.*  
 7439G *SD/Imperium skirmish at Vangetto Outpost; Nihal join war against Imperium.*  
 7439L *Will Chantry, others injured, 2 KIA in clash with Imperium cruiser; Chantry turns command over to Bridger Gaines; crew relations degrade due to infighting between Chantry and Darasig.*

7439M *SD/Imperium skirmish at Fyrbolog Station.*  
 7440A *Will Chantry forced off Thunder Moon; Gaines retains command; Trok made Mate.*  
 7440B *First attempt by Imperium to involve Scaelians in war, skirmish with SD at Zhexian.*  
 7440B *Darasig bitter about Trok's promotion, sabotages ship during crisis.*  
 7440C *Imperium attack on colonists on Forten.*  
 7440C11 *Dziban tanker disaster at Kamhata.*  
 7440C *Magal Warenga promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate after ejection of Darasig.*  
 7440E *Nihal/Imperium skirmish near Lahar Nebula, Imperium lose flagship Iridine.*  
 7440G *Sixteen-year-old Catal Strip sex toy Lindy Harker stows away on Thunder Moon.*  
 7440H *Lindy Harker befriended by Bleys Ordain, provides TM crew with prodigal electech.*  
 7440L *Imperium and Scaelian Hives assault Hays Utopia, scour planet of organic life.*  
 7440M *SD attack on Scaelian Hive near Hays Utopia, SD take heavy loses.*  
 7441A *Scaelians ravage Hoyamishi Farm, driven off by SD battleship Tokyo.*  
 7441E *First appearance of large numbers of Scaelian Hives in SD galactic arm.*  
 7441E *Vvp attends Dziban Shrine at Catal for first time.*  
 7441G *SD Homeworld Patrol begun.*  
 7441H *Scaelian Scourge of Talithan homeworlds begins; Mettelis destroyed.*  
 7441I *Republic contacts Talithans, offers assistance; Carrandis destroyed by Hives.*  
 7441K *SD/Imperium fleets clash near Carrandis, with Republic corvettes aiding SD forces.*  
 7442A *Talithans discover Hive weakness, assault Hives.*  
 7442D *Imperium trap destroys SD cruisers, battleships Byblos, Jericho, and Berlin.*  
 7442J *SD battleship Washington assists Republic cruisers to destroy Hive near Anali.*  
 7443D *Talithan persecution of Scaelians disperses last Hive; Dziban space fleet casualties at all time high--space travel restrictions imposed on Istdzib.*

7443F *Talithan explore local space, assisted by Republic ships, technology.*  
 7443G *Nihal/Scaelian engagement at Venin Station; Hives stray into Nihal space.*  
 7443L *Gaines learns of abandoned mining operation in Pandoris Field near Rostho.*  
 7443M *Imperium assault on Nihal's Yookul Mineral Operation destroys base.*  
 7443M08 *Exploration of abandoned mine triggers assault by drone SD Cavs; Bleys Ordain and Bridger Gaines KIA, Trok Kammond, Lindy Harker injured; Guilleggh and Magal Warenga defeat SD Cav suit barehanded.*

7443M21 *Trok resigns from command operations but remains with Thunder Moon.*  
 7444A *SD fleet demolishes Imperium force at Yookul.*  
 7444A01 *Magal Warenga assumes command of Thunder Moon, Guilleggh promoted to Mate.*  
 7444A *Lindy Harker's injuries repaired with cybersystems for electech work.*  
 7444B *Imperium declares holy war against the human infestation.*  
 7444D *Imperium use Hive mass drivers on Gibson Farm; planet wrecked, SD rescue fleet driven back, battleships Paris, Warsaw lost.*

7444F *Imperium fleet harried by Republic frigates, dreadnought Jueline disabled.*  
 7444F21 *Jueline Battle: SD, Nihal, Republic forces assault Jueline and support fleet, massive engagement results in 18 SD, 14 Imperium, 4 Nihal, and 3 Republic ships lost, Jueline rescued by gate; Imperium fleet withdraws from SD space.*

7444L *Trok's health declining.*  
 7445A *Scaelians bombard Algol Station, send platform crashing to planet.*  
 7445D *Small Scaelian Hive attacked, captured near Mars; Dziban refugees appeal to Republic for sanctuary, unable to return home due to travel restrictions.*

7445E *Probes by SD of perimeter of Imperium space reveal outer worlds empty.*  
 7445E22 *Thunder Moon duels with small Scaelian Hive near Tupol.*

7445F *Magal Warenga hires Talithan Jonyvan with knowledge of ant-Scaelian weaponry.*  
7445G Talithan diplomat vessel collides with invisible ship near Alpha Centauri; SD battleship *Washington* responds to distress, discovers wrecked Imperium shadeship.

7445H SD Homeworld Patrol engages deep scan of Earth system, routs several Imperium shadeecraft.

7445I SD/Nihal fleet masses near Alpha Centauri.  
7445J *Jonyvan demonstrates cooking artistry, abandons unworkable weapons.*  
7445I16 Imperium superfleet gates into attack; AC planetary batteries pound Imperium, Talithans engage Scaelian mass drivers; Imperium gates home; SD fleet crippled, short by 24 more ships, including *Washington*.

7445K Construction of replacement ships begins at Earth, Moon, Ganymede.  
7445K03 Republic liner *Aurora* transporting Dziban caravan lost after reporting odd energy storm; search turns up debris but no corpses.

7445L Imperium shadetech compromised through Catal underground.  
7446B Diplomatic overtures by Republic rebuffed by Imperium on Janid homeworld.  
7446D SD battleship *Washington* found adrift, attacked by unknown weaponry.  
7446E Terran viruses discovered ravaging Janid homeworld biosphere.  
7446F Janid blame Republic for biological attack; SD new flagship christened *Philadelphia*.  
7446G Biowar scandal topples Republic administration; Janid include Republic in crusade.  
7446G *Imperium corvette duels Thunder Moon; Jonyvan offers to take up mech ops.*  
7446H *Warenga has special Cav built for Jonyvan.*  
7446I First encounter between Republic and Janid warships results in Lakertyan rout.  
7446J New government of Republic officially joins war on side of SD.  
7446L Imperium destroyers, flagship *Zieradine* assault Lakertyan colony on Viceroy.  
7447A Talithan ships rescue Lakertyan settlers from Xenogorod.  
7447B Imperium and Scaelian Hives assault Xenogorod, engaged by Nihal warships.  
7447B09 Scaelian Hives diverted by Talithan wet-cruisers; *Philadelphia* engages *Zieradine* near Xenogorod without backup, *Zieradine* unexpectedly destroyed, *Philadelphia* disabled.

7447B15 RL tugs attacked by Imperium destroyers while towing *Philadelphia* to Crystal Station; RL tugs and free-trader corsairs defend *Philadelphia*.

7447D *Philadelphia* returns to service after refit completed, returns to Earth as heroes.  
7447E High-level diplomacy between SD and RL cordial but inconclusive; Dziban diplomats to RL turned away.

7447G SD fleets disrupt numerous quarantines without Imperium opposition.  
7447J Battleship *Djakarta* and fleet radio distress, vanish without further signal.  
7447K Investigation near Imperium world GC 7443B34 finds *Djakarta* adrift, lifeless.  
7447L19 Attack by Imperium ships on Doyle Station announces new weapon; Doyle Station lost after describing galactic snowstorm; Imperium announce that a God has joined their crusade; also announce ecological collapse on homeworld.

7447M Fleets under battleships *Byzantium*, *Calgary*, and *Canton* attacked by cloud of crystalline lifeforms; only cruiser *Texarkana* escapes.

7448A *Nara Yoshison made 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate.*  
7448A Two fleets (41 ships) destroyed inside Imperium space; SD forces withdraw.  
7448A First RL fleet leaves dry dock led by destroyer *Quasar 1*; joined by SD *Philadelphia*.  
7448A28 Encounter at Last Station: planetary batteries, new harmonic weapons, and mass drivers of SD/RL against Hive, Imperium frigates, and Black Ice; Last Station destroyed, RL weapons successful but BI too numerous.

7448B *Ash Bergill signs on as deck labor.*  
7448B Imperium and BI destroy Nihal outposts on Eribos.  
7448B09 *Texarkana*, *Philadelphia*, *Quasar 1* return to Alecetia (RL lunar dock).  
7448C SD confirm BI cannot move at superlight; RL shadeecraft use pulse grenades on BI.

- 7448C Dziban dignitaries on Alecetia plead for investigation, citing initial loss of merchant craft followed by non-native (RL) shipping transporting merchants.
- 7448D BI slows near Aratu Nebula after sustaining one-fifth losses; RL shadecraft detect crystal growth and reproduction, but pulse weapons ineffective in nebula.
- 7448E *Jueline* unexpectedly gates into Alecetia; planetary batteries disabled, *Philadelphia* damaged again, *Quasar 1* destroyed before *Jueline* retreats, but harmonic weapons devastating against Imperium support craft.
- 7448F BI repeatedly attacked by harmonic weapons, swarm halted at nebula.
- 7448I27 BI swarm abruptly departs Aratu Nebula, bound for Vomisa, most populated SD planet on inner perimeter.
- 7448J10 Shuttle between Earth and Lakertya attacked, destroyed by unknown agents, one survivor speaks of lights intent on dismembering a lone Dziban passenger.
- 7448J *Quasar 2*, *Prominence* deployed by Alecetia Dockyards.
- 7448K RL investigation into Dziban “curse” finally commences.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Hardsuits

Heavy duty battle armor is essentially ubiquitous these days, usually in the form of hardsuits. There are several levels of hardsuits, from lightweight full-gravity atmospheric body armor (usually referred to as a Nitesuit after its resemblance to old Earth's medieval armored knights) to pressurized zero-g battlesuits with mounted weapons called DNs (or dreadnoughts) for interspace combat and boarding. An all-purpose intermediate suit, wearable inside or outside of ships, are called Cavs (short for cavalier). The Cav is not as bulky as a DN and unlike the larger version is useful on moderate gravity worlds; it unlike the Nitesuit also holds a self-contained gas and fluid recycling system, capable of sustaining a passenger for a few hours of deep space or boarding details.

#### *Typical Cav*

plating 6, maneuver 6, energy 6                      q+0  
armor KOXBDD6  
modification difficulty 69

A special note about pressurized suits—Bleed effects [B] dealt to the hardsuits mean loss of atmospheric integrity, a.k.a. an air leak. The machine can take [B] conditions, but the damage dealt by each [B] on the vehicle is inflicted on the wearer instead. This happens even if the wearer does not need to breathe; rapid depressurization is highly disruptive to organized tissue.

Another type of hardsuit is designed for the high-speed flight-and-fight. The Raptor is the zero-gravity pressurized version, and the Drake is the atmospheric version.

#### *Typical Raptor*

plating 4, maneuver 6, energy 6                      q+2  
armor OXBDD5  
small cannon fXPDR3 (separate unit)  
modification difficulty 62

### Weapons

Energy beam and pulse weapons are the standard of this period, although good old fashioned projectile weapons, particularly the group called slingers (small mass drivers, requiring no explosive discharge), can be very effective. Handheld blasters, rifles, and shotguns are covered by the Cychosys manual, but ship-level weapons are sadly lacking.

energy pistol	15 fXDR	mod dif 21
energy rifle	17 zfXDR	28
small energy cannon	16 fXPDR3	32
medium energy cannon	18 ffXOD4	47
large energy cannon	20 vffKXD5	61
spitfire ("machine" energy weapon)	22 zzfXXB6	78
small energy missile	20 vXD1	20
medium energy missile	30 vXDD1	28
large energy missile	50 vvffKP2	56

Although energy weapons are typically rapid-pulse firing, a cutting or sweep attack is useful in some situations for collecting extra targets. Unfortunately, energy weapons expend a tremendous amount of power doing such attacks; at any time, a user may perform a sweep attack by fatiguing 1 effect (damage or combat) on the weapon in exchange for a Z effect, which adds 1 target to the attack. Z effects cannot be bought with increased difficulties and they are an ability limited to energy

weapons only, some of which (like the spitfire) have a few built in. Effect fatigued by Z effects can be regained by recharging the weapon.

### Navigation and Travel

The parsec is the basic unit of distance, equaling 3.2 light years; a good ship can go a parsec in a day or so by overlight drive (converts to about 220 million miles a second or 350 million kilometers a second). Bigger ships are outfitted with gating technology, which allows them to wormhole space to connect departure with destination and drift over enormous distances in moments. Directions are computed relative to the hub of the galaxy and are referred to by a three-letter code with a distance.

In = toward the hub, Out = away from the hub

Dorsal = upward from the galactic plane, Ventral = downward from the galactic plane

Shoulder = toward the galactic arm shoulders (with rotation), Tip = toward the arm tips

So, OVS x3 would be away from the hub, downward from the galactic plane, toward the shoulder by 3 parsecs. Generally the letters can be put in any order.

Planets are described by a color-scheme associated with their visual appearance from space. This is easy enough because many of the sentient races see colors in approximately the same wavelength band, so a blue (water covered) planet looks blue to just about everyone. Green (biosphere-bearing) are typically covered with life. Brown (barren land, usually hot), white (ice covered), and red (iron-rich surface) are generally less desirable worlds but have their uses. Gray (dead, usually without atmosphere) are used only if strategically important, and yellow and purple (gas giant, color depends on types of gases) are mined for hydrogen as fuel for fusion reactors.

A slang using more than one color effectively describes worlds. Our solar system features, from the sun outward, a gray, a yellow+ brown, a green+ blue, a white+ red, a large yellow, a small ring+ yellow, a ring+ purple, a purple, and a twin gray erratic. Moons would be described independently: Earth and Moon, green+ blue, satellite gray. Jupiter and major moons, large yellow, satellites brown, white, gray, gray+ white.

### Money

The only sensible basic unit of currency for sprawling interstellar industry is an hour of labor (H). Electronic currency via credit cards or account codes is the typical form most exchanges take place, although some systems still use paper currency or checks universally referred to as **scrip**. In either case, the price of an object or service is modified by its **grade**:

grade 1 = physical labor	common goods / simple foodstuff
grade 2 = servitor / machine tech	simple tools / fine food / clothing
grade 3 = tutor / electech / sentech / navigator	complex tools / small luxuries
grade 4 = analyst / lawyer / deputy / nurse	specialized clothing / unusual items
grade 5 = captain / psychic / diplomat / marshal	specialized equipment / rare items
grade 6 = admiral / councilman / physician	one-of-a-kind items

Higher grades and fractional grades are possible, both due to local inflation and to legitimate enhancements, such as duration of previous service. Thus a navigator on a ship for eight years might be earning grade 3.80, while even a cup of water at an asteroid-mine bar might run grade 5 or 6, simply due to the expense of importing it.

The cost of a service is generally recompensed by H equal to the number of hours the task requires times the grade agreed upon by contract. In system terms, an object's base cost is its modification difficulty times the grade required to produce it. That price may then be inflated with a local mark-up.



## **SY 7448K17: TRADE AT CATAL**

### *First Appearances*

Thunder Moon returns to offload the windfall from the Reiersvlei at Catal, and Warenga decides to offer a bit of shore leave once the property has been stored at Coldhouse Plus.

### Typical docking procedure:

- Approach under guidance of Catal Port Authority Control (CPAC)—given berth.
- Automated attachment of mooring fields.
- Debark crew/passengers on CPAC shuttles.
- Dock junks approach cargo ports to remove cargo.
- Junkers (usually just the forman) meet captains in CPAC terminal to tender receipts, storage information, and collect tips for fast/excellent/unusual work.

### Typical piracy procedure:

- Get goods evaluated by Exchange agent/bonded appraiser/factory inspector.
- Find buyer for goods; convince buyer to purchase.

#### Typical buyer stalls/tricks:

- plays up the “don’t need it” angle
- wants to have it reappraised
- offers trade goods, payment plans, or for services
- wants to cover paperwork with signatures

#### Acceptable remuneration:

- scrip
- credit cards
- cash = hard currency of universal value, such as metal, gems, food, drugs, etc.

Warenga sets up watch schedule for next three days—two on board each day. The rest of the crew gets shore leave, with the caveat to hunt for leads.

Guilleggh sent to find appraiser for mining equipment (his brother Reggokili works on Catal with a local exchange).

Vvp, the Dziban deck hand, is given permission to contact the Dziban potentate and arrange for the return (for a price), of the iron icon. Warenga wants someone else to go along to oversee the negotiations—he anticipates a rather impoverished temple, so he’s willing to deal in trade or extended pay.

Warenga and Yoshison will plan to meet with local fixers, including Grandma at the Fountains of Catal, to start selling components of the haul. They will welcome company.

Jonyvan and Lindy Harker opt to stay shipbound, the former to restock the galley and prepare some meals in advance and the latter to catch up on her technical reading through the local Vspace. Jonyvan is also hoping to entertain a female companion on board.

#### Three opportunities emerge:

At Fthoggli’s Credit Exchange, a hero can learn that the Catal Port Authority is looking for a transport for a ship to collect a cargo of processed advantite, a translucent semiconductor used in manufacturing energy weapons. Deeper investigation will learn that the cargo has been stranded due to ship damage on the SD planet Wessel, and the CPA is paying half again the cargo value if it can be delivered in a week. Given a nearly three day trip (IDT x2.5) to Wessel, the seven-day deadline will be hard to meet even with an immediate departure; however, another free trader captain Ailine Durelle seems to be interested and is planning on contacting the CPA agent, Rishi Calfein, in charge of the shipment. Any commander contacting Calfein will be given appropriate clearance to pick up the shipment. And of course Durelle has to return this way after picking her cargo up...

At the Theater of War, Vinjo K'hay has gotten a rumor of a [derelict spacecraft adrift between Amberia and Anali](#) (OR x2). She has several long-range images of the spacecraft which are blurry but suggest a craft of good size and with enough battle damage to suggest it is a frigate of some kind. While she would prefer a female captain, she will provide the exact coordinates, salvage rights to all non-armament components, and a 30% cut (negotiable to 50%) of the proceeds from the sale of the armaments to any crew willing to help her catch the ship and strip it.

Rabin Getherman at the Pony Express has a muddled story about tiny [convoy of ships bound for Rostho](#) (OV x5). Two transports, an SD cruiser, and a yacht departed separately for Rostho at different times on K14, but formed up the convoy less than a parsec from Catal. The yacht, which is outfitted with heavy shields and a cloaking field, is rumored to belong to SD Legate Vandry's Baris, a senior member of the Cabinet and former Fleet Admiral. According to Vspace news, the Legate has not attended Cabinet session for nearly three weeks; what brings a Legate out to the Colonies with a meager cruiser for protection is secret, valuable, and probably represents an opportunity. If nothing else, the yacht is incredibly valuable and poorly protected.

*Arc Elements:*

Vvp is heartily rewarded by the Dziban potentate Tet, who cannot imagine how the relic could have been removed from the Dziban homeworld; however, the potentate's adjutant Vre seems both alarmed and angry that the icon has returned. He contacts Mallon, who turns to Warlock of the tattoo parlor/black ops agency to request a hit on a crewman from the Thunder Moon.

The assassin, one of Warlock's average hitters, is a Fetid; not only is the hit supposed to be obvious, but the victim is supposed to be thoroughly messed up—killed when something he disagreed with ate him. First, the assassin is sent out against the captain of the Reiersvlei, who is back in town complaining about the loss of his load and the strange nature of the cargo. In each case, the victim appears to be approached by someone familiar, who stands by helplessly while the victim is butchered—this is the effect of a personal image projection field (IPF), and expensive toy that leaves a whiff of ozone behind it.

Before the hit is carried out, the grapevine at Catal gets wind of the hit and someone tattles—probably offering the secret for a price. They don't know who the target is, but they know what the assassin is. If Guilleggh can be contacted before the hit is carried out, he might be able to find the assassin and intercede—otherwise, it'll come down to a fight at an opportune moment.

<b>fetid assassin</b>	13/6/6	q12
4 Wilderkin	4 zap	4 anticipate
3 sneak	3 network	
	sprattle ffKX3	IP field R1
	bite UB3	hide/work clothing BD3
	juice UXH5	

### *Story Arc One*

The SD are nurturing a massive Trojan Horse; the Scaelian Hive captured in the solar system (7445D) has been hidden in the massive Pandoris asteroid field between Anali and Rostho and slowly grown by SD agents. They've taken great pains to hide it; including booby-trapping old mining stations, rigging magnetic warheads in force-fields among the rocks, and other dirty tricks. Now the Hive has reached a critical stage in which it needs a green-class planet to feed on, and Anali is the best candidate. In addition, the Lakertyans on Anali have suddenly become a problem by trying to mine minerals from the same asteroid field. Given the fragile relations between the Lakertyans and the SD, they did not want to evicting Lakertyan civilians from Anali. Instead, they planned to plant the Dziban icon on the planet, lure the Imperium to Anali, allow them to find the relic, and have them evict the Lakertyans for their religious quarantine. The SD people have also abandoned the captured hulk of the Imperium flagship *Iridine* into space near Anali to draw out an Imperium fleet. The plan is that once the Imperium arrives, the Domain's Hive moves out of the asteroid, attacks and strips Anali, convincing the Imperium of its loyalty, then follows the fleet home. At that point, the SD vessels hidden inside the Hive stages a massive surprise attack on the homeworld of the Imperium.

The bait is working. A cloaked shadecraft has arrived to investigate and found a bunch of humans looting the blessed flagship of the Imperium, and therefore appears to be attacking its own ship. The fleet is on its way, but is suspicious, wary, hanging back—hence the recon by the shadecraft.

## **SY 7448K22: GATEWAKE FIELD**

### *First Appearances*

Vinjo K'Hay and her guest, Jess Maryne, follow the *Thunder Moon* from Catal in her 18,000 metric ton barge *Wiccan*. The 101-year-old barge does not have superlight engines, but rather a modified HR sublight drive. Fortunately, this means that the *Thunder Moon* is ticking along at 60% LS when something weird happens.

A chilling wave seems to sweep through the ship like a flash of light, and the TM suddenly pivots and starts to tumble. The engines fail, sections of the ship go dark, and in spite of the heavy-duty artificial gravity crewmembers go flying; several are hurt. As the dampening fields kick on, the ship passes through at least one more such wave before stopping with yet a third passing through the ship.

The wave appears light a thin veil of scintillating air, through which inanimate objects may pass with only deep chilling but organic tissue burns with frostbite (XXXPP3). In addition, it appears to be slowly vacuuming air from the ship's interior. It has no sensor ghost but can be seen, both in light and magnetically, as a sheet passing obliquely through the ship.

Injuries both mundane and peculiar require the doctor's attention, while the ship itself needs the ministrations of the engineer. That leaves tacticians and navigators to figure out what happened and how to escape it. Anyone examining the rippling surface outside the ship finds that it reaches out into space like some sort of ethereal stained-glass window. Through it, the *Wiccan* is visible directly astern of the TM; but the *Wiccan* is also visible dorsally some distance away, along with half of the TM. Vinjo's anxious communications are garbled by echoes, navigational sensors can't make anything out of the star pattern, and the space in the immediate vicinity of the TM is littered with similar windows. Clever pilots may think these features resemble a supposedly short-lived space-travel phenomenon called a *gatewake*—a spatial distortion left behind by the passage of ships using gating engines. They're supposed to shrink in minutes as locally disrupted space repairs itself. Although these promise to last for hours, they are getting smaller—and who knows what happens to a solid object stuck in one when they do.

### *Arc Elements*

Solar Domain gating technology is “good enough” in that although the gatewakes do not dissipate as they are supposed to, they are largely irrelevant to the successful functioning of the engines. Fleets always gate in stepwise series to avoid collisions with gatewakes from other ships in the fleet. Several SD ships came through this area a very short time ago, on their way to hide in the Rostho asteroid field and its surprise package.

Incidentally, this type of gatewake distortion causes agony to nearby XUVs. This sort of thing (gating technology from most races does this to some extent) is the reason they are trying to wipe out their version of “alien” races.

## **SY 7448K27: DERELICT DREADNOUGHT**

### *First Appearances*

The floating derelict isn't where it was, but that's no surprise—space junk drifts, so they have to find it. And find it they do, a large craft drifting Inward, Shoulderward, and slightly Dorsally. Large is actually an understatement, which they realize as they close with the ship. It is huge: just under 1,000,000 metric tons, 3000 meters in length, it is the largest ship the crew has ever seen—even Vinjo hasn't seen its like before. It has a long axis segment with two wide flat four-deck gangways from which sprout 24 wing bays on each side. The central axis ends in a cluster of seven hexagonal engine nacelles. The forward convergence of the axial gangways meets in a columnar three-deck ops center and two aft-curving dual-axis radial arms carrying weapon batteries: 30 rail-mounted graviton beam cannons, fusion mines, and reflective hull plating. Several of these are damaged or destroyed but some are still active and a few even still have power reserves.

Most of its 48 wing bays are blown out, but a few are still usable. The TM and Corona fit easily inside one bay, but the barge is too large to enter. In order to climb into the ship, a team will have to rig a dock, but the craft, in spite of its damage is holding atmosphere in some parts of the ship, including the bridge. When they search for an access port, they will find a convenient docking mechanism that fits the TM airlink.

The ship is badly damaged and the heroes note a near absence of corpses. When they do find one, they get a shock: a Janid. There are a number of corpses piled in side corridors, almost as if they've been dumped there. A trip to the bridge reveals several interesting details. The sensor systems, mainframe, and tactical control are still operational (communications are totally destroyed, however), driven by juice in ops batteries—this is also maintaining life support, an atmosphere of 79% N<sub>2</sub>, 21% O<sub>2</sub> (very different than the 88% N<sub>2</sub>, 8% CO<sub>2</sub> on the Janid homeworld). The bridge log includes information gained by prowling slyly around local sectors for eight years, unable to gate home due to irreparable damage to the gravitation generators; surveys of outer SD worlds include information about relics (that look surprisingly Dziban in design) in a crater on Anali, then details extensive dissent and mutiny among the crew—evidently, they found something on Anali and wanted to stay. In addition, local and general navigational charts are available. The registry lists the ship's identity as the dreadnought *Iridine*, an Imperium flagship supposedly lost during a contest in the Rowling Nebula in 7440E.

The medical bay is cluttered with the dead, but one creature remains curiously alive in the mess; inside a small dome-shaped cover hovers a dark red crystalline disc that faintly radiates light, and will attack like a flying saw blade the first organic creature to release it from stasis. It is capable of passing through most metallic objects (reduces attack by F), hence the Cavs offer little protection. If anyone examines the corpses, they will find telltale signs of cellular degradation caused by exposure to the vacuum of space, incurred well after death; some of the corpses are still frozen. In addition, an observant individual might find a package of cheap earthly cigarettes lying around here.

If they haven't noticed already, the sensors on the ship will be registering at least two sensor ghosts. One is a second ship—a recently damaged Dziban merchant galleon, which if investigated turns out to be another pirate ship, once manned entirely by a (now dead) human crew, and torn to pieces adrift in space. The second is at even greater range, in the direction of Anali, and seems to move periodically. If investigated, the ghost might yield a SD shadowcraft, but only if they're very clever approaching it. A third sensor ghost is registering practically on top of them, and that's the one that starts causing a problem.

They'd rather not reveal their presence, so they'll wait until it is obvious the newcomers want to strip the ship. Then, they attack the Wiccan, targeting its engines, and at least disable her. They can't get at the TM or the Corona, but they'll cloak, so it doesn't matter. It ends up being a duel between the TM, the Corona, and the Iridine (if they can figure out how to make it work) against a small cloaked Imperium shadowcraft.

When it's all over, Vinjo announces that her ship needs serious repair and will take weeks to make Catal—she needs the haven of the nearest space station, and there is one in orbit (paltry though it might be) around Anali.

**Shardeon** (Imperium shadowcraft)      8/10/16      q+8  
armor ffXXXBDH10; cloak (adds ff to defense)  
weapons graviton beam zFKBB9; ice-chaff fW7 (reduces effective maneuver by 2).  
crew skill:      pilot 3@4      tactical 2@3

**Corona** (scout) *Rey Wheeler*      6/8/12      q+6  
armor fXXBHH8  
weapons energy missiles 20 vXD1  
crew skill:      pilot 2@6      tactical 2@3

**Janid crewman**      5/6/7      q6  
tech 3      zap 3      dodge 3  
armor BD1; weapon gravarc fKBP3

**Janid officer**      6/7/9      q7  
tech 4      zap 4      dodge 4  
command 3      negotiate 3  
armor BD1; weapon gravarc fKBP3

**Morloc**      12/3/3      q10  
grapple 4      dodge 3  
armor B1; weapon improvised DD3

**BI disc**      2/3/3      q18  
fly 5 (+2R)      hack 3  
armor (X,B no effect) fPD2

*Arc Elements*

The SD were here, obviously—atmosphere, adjusted airlocks, cigarettes, bad data in mainframe—but to do what? They left valuable weapons, systems, and technology behind. Where are the crew? Where are the fighter drones? The *Iridine* hasn't been operational all this time behind enemy lines (lost in 40E, more than eight years ago). This looks like a clumsy trap, but why would they aim the Imperium at Anali so hard?

Anali: offered a deal by local residents—60 tons refined iron. Two Dziban statues crashed on the surface of the planet.

Arc Elements: Dziban government duped into allowing SD to replace icons with duplicates on homeworld in exchange for free passage of Dziban merchant marine. Effort disguised as temple beautification process, Istdzib government knows but populace doesn't.