



The World  
of the  
Gates of  
Doom

The true vastness of space is a thing no being can truly comprehend. Though empires spread across planets, systems, and sectors, they are merely a tiny fraction of the entire galaxy. The age of the galaxy then is even more incomprehensible. Planets have existed for billions of years, and the time of humanity is but a footnote in that grand history. And yet that footnote encompasses millions of years of innovation, construction, and destruction. Uncountable numbers of civilisations have risen and fallen, the dust of millennia is thick indeed.

So much has been created, so much has been lost. In the mind-bending depths of history lurk humanity's greatest achievements: gems sparkling in the shadows of their greatest nightmares. Many would risk much to find these treasures, braving the strange, the unimaginable, the horrific. Others retreat into their own worlds, seeking security above freedom, creating order out of chaos, and safety out of danger. Yet this is all just an illusion, for under the relentless march of the years, all things will one day crumble, and become the ashes upon which a new generation of explorers will set up their colonies.

No one knows exactly how long humanity has existed, but its traces are far-reaching indeed. So much has changed, and so much time has passed that it is impossible to tell if any other life ever existed in the galaxy. Maybe the myriad fauna and flora that inhabit the galaxy were there long before humanity. Maybe they are its result.

The only constant in the galaxy are the gates. There since time began- or so some say- giant portals connect points in the galaxy separated by millions of light-years to each other. These gates are the only known way to traverse the incredible distances of space. Some are found on planets, others in space. Some say they were built by the humanity of old, others claim them as evidence of alien life. No one knows how they work, or what keeps them going.

The gates have certainly been integral to humanity's history, for it is said that humanity started on but a single planet, and only after discovering their first gate were they able to reach the stars. This so-called Golden Age of exploration is known about only in stories and myths. A time when all humanity was united as one, and all corners of science and history were known about. A time when every person lived in luxury and peace, when people were as gods, able to reshape worlds, and fulfil their every whim. But such times are long past, and many do not believe in them.

For one day all the gates across the galaxy simply shut down, dead. Travel between systems became impossible, and societies collapsed overnight. Trillions perished as shipments didn't arrive, and even more would die as resources couldn't be replaced, and living standards deteriorated. Only a handful of planets managed to cling to a vestige of their former glory, some descended into increasingly primitive levels of technology and society, and on most planets, humans simply went extinct. Slowly the past and its secrets were forgotten, and the surviving humans forgot there had ever been other planets. The dead gates became little more than curiosities.

The Great Closing as it came to be known would last for thousands of years- no one is sure how long exactly. And no one knows why the gates re-opened when they did, but re-open they did, and in doing so ushered in a period of the most brutal bloodshed and suffering ever seen, as wars were fought on a galactic scale.

And now it has been two centuries since the Great Re-Opening, and some parts of the galaxy have settled into a semblance of stability. Great empires and nations span hundreds of star systems, but even now, most of the galaxy is at war- nay, most of the galaxy remains devoid of any human life at all, merely its ruins.

But one thing is for sure: the gates are objects of desire, for control over gates gives one control over entire planets. Some build empires, tightening their control over sectors of space, crushing millions under their regimes. Others flee, braving the depths of wild-space to roam freely. Still others have other, loftier goals, while some seek merely to destroy, or fulfil centuries old aims they have long since forgotten the reasons for. Most seek merely to survive.

In the far future, the galaxy is in a state of chaos. Armies clash daily on millions of planets. So much has been lost that many armies use only primitive weapons and call out to gods and spirits to aid them in battle. Others use highly advanced weapons, and are accompanied by robots and sophisticated machines.

From urban mega-complexes to primitive huts, vast space stations and ancient ruins, humans live in a million different ways, on a million different worlds. Many can barely even be called human, either because the relentless forces of evolution have altered them beyond recognition, or because surgeries, cosmetics, and genetic engineering have done so.

The sun disappears as a fleet of spacecraft approach the surface for landing. Legions of infantry march alongside battalions of tanks, and the ground shakes to the steps of enormous machines. Mountains are levelled in volleys of fire, and the sky darkens with smoke, lit up by flashes of explosions. Some flee in terror. Others grit their teeth, and ready their weapons. War has come.

## The Galaxy

**“The age of reason is dead. That is not the age we live in any more”**

The gates are the single most important feature of the galaxy. They remain the only way to reach other stars in any reasonable amount of time: from time to time, a starship thousands of years old will be found, carrying people who had once had the hope of reaching another star by traditional means, either by preserving themselves in hibernation, or by living out their lives in the empty void, and hoping their ancestors would live to see the awaited day. Invariably though, such ships contain nothing but ancient corpses, that is, if they contain anything at all.

Gates are found in a variety of shapes and sizes, some being only a dozen metres across, while others are hundreds. Most planets contain two gates, while a handful contain just one, and the most prized worlds contain three or sometimes even four. Each gate maintains a connection to an identical gate found on the closest star-system in real space. What happens when the slow movement of stars around the galactic centre causes gates to drift further apart is not known, and the source of much debate. It has been suggested, rather tentatively, that the Great Closing was in fact a massive re-alignment of the gate system, and that connections are now different to how they used to be. Such theories are difficult to prove however.

The gates are made of an unknown material that defies any examination as to its chemical composition. They are nearly indestructible, able to survive even small atomic blasts, and are incredibly old. Since the Great Re-Opening, the connections between gates has not been entirely stable: sometimes gates will flicker out of life for seconds, days, or years before switching back on, and other times, people traversing gates in seemingly perfect working order will never reach their destinations, occasionally ending up in completely different parts of the galaxy – or at least so the tales told in near-gate bars claim. Such events are one in a billion, and most of the time, gate travel is safe and instantaneous. But the number of gates across the galaxy, and the number of journeys being made means that some such incidents are reported. The galaxy is, after all, an enormous place.

Some gates are located on the surfaces of planets or moons, while others orbit them, or drift through space, often with giant space stations built up around them. Although space ships cannot travel between stars on their own, they are therefore frequently used to access such gates, and many worlds were completely unaware they were a part of the gate system until decades after the Great Re-Opening, when a foreign ship arrived in their orbit via a space-borne gate that had long since been forgotten. Maps of the gate system – or rather, sections of it – are in high demand, although once past the commonly travelled areas, such maps are often highly unreliable, and even dangerous, as the unlucky traveller finds themselves

stepping through onto a planet with no atmosphere, or into a lake of magma.

The exact year is, at least in relation to any earlier period of human history, not known. It has been thousands of years since humanity colonised the stars, and about two-hundred average planetary years since the Great Re-Opening. A wide variety of dating systems are used across the galaxy, and to align them takes more maths than most people are willing to deal with. The concept of an “average planetary year” is based around an estimate for the average time it takes for a habitable planet to make a full orbit of its star, but since in reality, a year can be of wildly different lengths on different worlds, this system is not widely used. Other attempts to standardise chronology include systems based on the orbit of stars around the galactic centre, or the growing and falling mass of giant stars, but these are also too specific, and difficult to grasp for people used to measuring time by seasons on their own planet. In short, there will not be, for the foreseeable future, any easy way to get an exact timeline of events across the galaxy.

In the broadest sense, humanity’s history can be divided into five distinct eras, each of which spans thousands of years. The first three are shrouded in mystery, and exceedingly little is known about them – most of the stories told about them are just stories, and are not based on any real sources. The first era is the Pre-Gate Era. This covers the span of time during which humans first evolved, created civilisations, and first started exploring space. It ends with the discovery of the first gate, although the circumstances surrounding this event have been lost to time. In this era, humanity was restricted to just its home star system – a system now lost – and was mostly confined to its home planet.

Once the gate system was discovered, the Age of Exploration began, in which humans spread across the galaxy, colonising all of its worlds, and exploring it. It is perhaps this era about which the lack of knowledge is most lamentable, since it is not known whether humans encountered any alien life in their exploration. In the present day, pretty much every corner of the galaxy has, at one point or another, been inhabited by humans, who have brought technology, architecture, and biological traces with them. It is not known if the trillions of plant and animal species found across the galaxy are the ancestors of specimens brought by humans in the Age of Exploration, or if they were native. It is also not known if certain ancient ruins are alien in origin, or simply extremely old human works. The question of whether humanity and the life that evolved alongside it on its home planet is truly alone in the universe, or if the galaxy was actually teeming with life, is of great importance to many in the galaxy, but it is a question that will now never be answered.

After the Age of Exploration began the so-called Golden Age. This is the most hotly contested era in historical circles, since many are of the opinion that there was nothing actually particularly “golden” about it. This era is defined as the period where the galaxy had already been

fully explored, and humanity was essentially resting on its laurels. Most of the myths and legends told about the past are set in this era, and tell of a wondrous time of peace, luxury, and incredible power. Many though, looking at their present day, believe that such an idyllic time could not possibly have existed, and that this era must have been closer to the chaos of the present day. Whatever the case, the Golden Age ended abruptly.

When the Great Closing happened, and all the gates stopped working, the fourth era of human history began – the Dark Age. Towards the end of this era, when those societies who survived had stabilised somewhat, there is much more historical information available, and it is possible to piece together the histories of many different worlds during this period. On those where the human population went extinct however, historians are forced to rely on archaeology and guesswork.

Humanity emerged from the Dark Age, and into the era of the Great Re-Opening – the current era – a shattered species, most knowledge from ages past lost, and any sense of unity gone forever. In the early decades of this era, many parts of the galaxy saw widespread warfare, and there was huge amounts of expansion into systems now devoid of life. In the present day, much more stable cultures and empires exist that cover vast regions of space, whose borders are more securely drawn. Exploration still happens, and most of the galaxy is still a mystery, but there are many systems and worlds that are simply avoided by travellers for their dark reputations.

#### Language, Culture, and Religion

Beyond the use of gates and a shared genetic ancestry in the distant past, there is nothing uniting the disparate elements of humanity across the galaxy. The majority of inhabited worlds all have completely unique languages, cultures, and traditions that date back to the Great Closing. Although when a world is invaded, it may take on elements of its conqueror's culture – whether willingly or not – and planets that are centres of trade or outposts of civilisation in the Wild Sector see mingling of a wide variety of peoples, there is no uniformity or standardisation. Even in highly organised empires like the UNE, it is impossible to get by without speaking dozens of different languages, and encountering a wide variety of beliefs and ways of life.

It is also important to remember that a planet is not made up of exclusively one biome or culture. Although the nature of the gate system has meant that most worlds are politically single entities, and not split into separate nations, they still contain myriad cultures within themselves. A single planet can have wildly varying climates depending on the landmass, and each region, even each city, may have different histories, cultures, and languages. A traveller trying to pass through a world just to get to another will often have to travel to the other side of the planet to find the next gate, and if there is insufficient infrastructure to make this journey quick and easy, they may spend months travelling across a single

planet, encountering hundreds of unique cultures along the way.

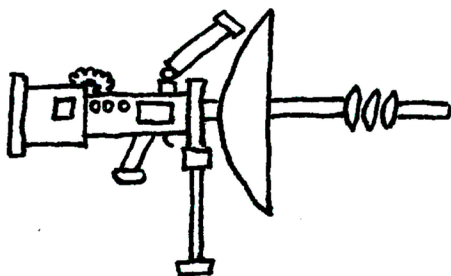
## Technology

**“Just link the fuel rods directly into the thrusters, and redirect those wires to the central unit. Then just twiddle this dial until it makes a nice humming noise. Safe? Of course it’s safe – I’ve done this hundreds of times before!”**

Throughout humanity’s history, a wide variety of technologies have been developed. Many of these have existed for hundreds of years, many have been lost and rediscovered or re-invented many times over. Different cultures in different parts of the galaxy have knowledge of and access to varying levels of technology, but most connected peoples- that is, those who live on worlds with gates, and interact with other planets through trade, exploration or warfare- will at least recognise most of the common types of technology presented here.

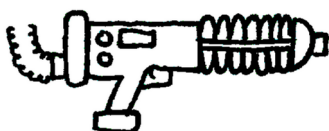
### Lasers

Lasers are extremely precise beams of light that can cut through most solids with ease. They are used for manufacturing, construction, and of course as weapons. Lasers are deadly on the battlefield, able to slice through enemies with ease, but they have their downsides. Lasers are extremely expensive to make, and difficult to maintain, meaning that the cost of keeping one operational is tremendous. They are difficult to repair, and the components must be aligned extremely precisely for it to function properly. These are not generally problems in peace-time applications, where lasers can be used in controlled conditions and kept in good working order, but in a military campaign with dwindling resources and experts, difficulties arise. Another problem with lasers in battle is their reaction to energy shields. When a laser hits an energy shield, the vibrations cause the laser beam to refract away at unpredictable angles, leaving the target unharmed, but doing massive damage to anything hit, including, potentially, the source. Despite these negatives, most armies field lasers, since in specific situations, they can be absolutely deadly.



### Plasma

Plasma is an extremely high energy form of matter that can melt and burn through most solids. Where lasers are precise, plasma is extremely wild, burning in an uncontrolled, large blast. The energy required to generate

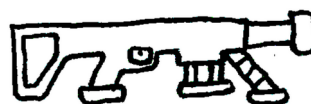


plasma is huge, meaning that weapons generally require large generators to function, unless the army has access to very advanced forms of energy generation. It also means that pulses of plasma don’t last very long, giving plasma weapons a very short range. Up close however, plasma is absolutely devastating. Another use of plasma, other than unleashing blasts of it in short range attacks, is to continuously generate it around a solid blade, creating an extremely powerful melee weapon. Such weapons require even more energy, meaning that most such weapons are restricted to maces and such, where less plasma is required, although when possible, various blade shapes such as swords and axes are also used, and plasma-based melee weapons are generally regarded as the best option when it comes to hand-to-hand combat- that is, if one can afford the advanced tech required to keep it running.



### Mag Launchers

Mag weapons are the most common, widespread type of weapon in the galaxy. They use a series of electromagnets to propel solid projectiles at great speeds. This is naturally not as effective as plasma or laser weapons, but the energy required is tiny, and manufacturing costs are also minimal. Due to their simple design, mag weapons are easy to repair, and very reliable. Additionally, since the projectiles such weapons fire are essentially just lumps of metal, it is incredibly easy to produce them, even without access to factories or advanced tools. These factors make mag weapons the ideal choice for armies without advanced supply chains, or travellers in the wild sector, where they have to repair and maintain their weapons themselves. Most hand-held mag weapons fire very small projectiles, meaning a single magazine can keep being used for a long time when compared to alternatives, although larger artillery pieces that utilise the same technology, often referred to as rail guns, fire larger projectiles.



### Gyro Guns

Universally feared by combatants on their receiving end for their brutality, and universally hated by weapon-smiths and logistics organisers for their complexity, gyro guns are not nearly as widely used as alternatives, but many veterans will swear by them. A gyro gun gets its name from the fact that its ammunition- a miniature rocket-propelled explosive- is stabilised along its flight path by a gyroscopic spin. These weapons turn flesh into a messy pulp, and can get through lighter armour with ease, whilst also having excellent ranges. However, because of the complexities of its operation, maintaining such a weapon, and producing large amounts of ammunition for it, is a very expensive



process. There are also no standardisations for gyro guns as there are for many other firearms, meaning that in most cases, ammo must be made slightly differently for each and every gun. Additionally, the size of the ammunition required means that a single magazine cannot contain many shots- each must be used carefully.

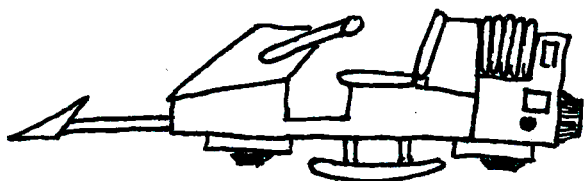
### Slug Guns

The term “slug gun” is a highly misleading term, since many weapons fire “slugs”- that is, solid pieces of ammunition. But what the term has come to refer to are weapons that fire bullets using gunpowder. Such weapons are cheap and easy to manufacture, but are also not as effective as other alternatives, and are generally only used by armies with excellent production capabilities and comparatively little technological advancement behind them. The one advantage such weapons have over mag alternatives is that though less powerful, they can achieve higher rates of fire, and as such as effective anti-infantry and suppression weapons.



### Jet Cycles

Jet cycles, also known as jet scooters, are a common mode of transport in the galaxy, and they are also used frequently in battle. Methods of propulsion vary, with plasma engines being the most common, but jet engines are also used on more primitive worlds, as are more advanced methods in some cases. Jet cycles are dangerous machines, and most settlements prohibit their use, at least at high speeds, but this does not of course stop people! Jet cycle races are a common form of entertainment in many parts of the galaxy. Often these are illegal, due to the high risk to both participants and spectators, but they are highly attended in all cases anyway. Jet cycles do of course also have military applications, used in a variety of ways to provide fast moving support to an army.



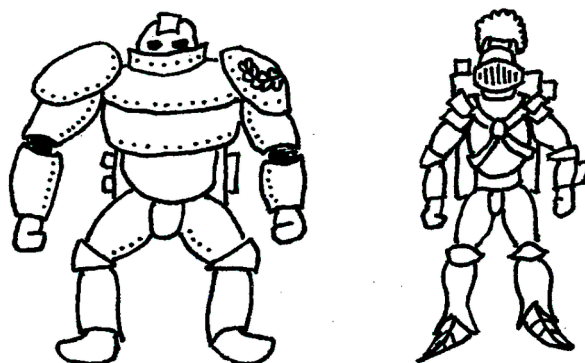
### Jet Packs

Not as widely used as jet cycles, jet packs work on essentially the same principle, and the same way, but are worn on the back instead of ridden. This makes them smaller and cheaper, but also even more dangerous. Using one requires huge amounts of skill and practice, as well as often a good dose of luck, and the galaxy is full of once-foolhardy youths, now consigned to wheelchairs or sporting prosthetics, simply because they forgot to keep their legs straight while using a jet pack. Versions with

massively reduced thrust are standard issue for zero- or low-gravity work however, and these are much safer too.

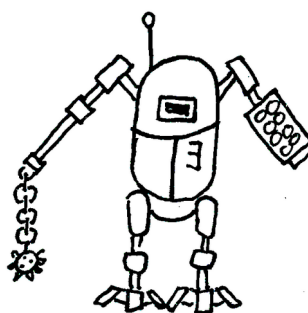
### Power Armour

Although considered an outdated technology in some parts of the galaxy, power armour is still widely used, and can be devastatingly effective in the right scenario. Many variants exist, of varying quality, but all power armour is essentially just a motorised exoskeleton clad in heavy armour plating. The exoskeleton gives the wearer greatly enhanced strength, and also allows much heavier armour to be supported, than the wearer would otherwise be able to move in. Some variants feature lighter armour, designed more for mobility, while others transform



soldiers into walking tanks- slow, but virtually immune to all but the heaviest fire. Heavy infantry wearing power armour were once the core of a gate assault, although many armies have since switched to using lighter, more mobile infantry. In parts of the galaxy where more advanced materials can be produced however, power armour is still widely used, their armour not weighing them down nearly as much as the bulky steel of old.

### Battlesuits



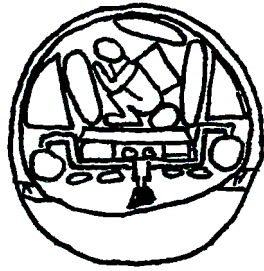
An emerging technology, not widely used, battlesuits are large, roughly humanoid robotic constructs, piloted by a person inside. They are far larger than power armour suits, and also work differently, being more of a vehicle than a suit of armour. Battlesuits require lots of fine-tuning, and

their pilots require lots of practice- the controls often not being very intuitive. For these reasons, many larger armies cannot field them, but for smaller ones, they are a great asset, able to make each individual soldier count for far more.

### Rapid Deployment Gear

Often referred to more simply as “RDGs”, rapid deployment gear is a broad term applied to a wide variety of technologies that allow their user to drop from aircraft,

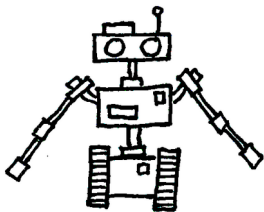
or in some cases even low orbit, to land on a planet's surface without any kind of vehicle. This is used as a method of escape for smaller spacecraft and other vehicles, as well as a military strategy, whereby troops drop in from on high to sow chaos in enemy ranks. This is of course very dangerous, and



only a small number have the mental strength (or lack of self-preservation instinct) to perform such a "jump". A wide variety of methods can be used to carry out this process, ranging from simple parachutes, to rocket thrusters and advanced gravity-nets. When jumping from orbit, a person will often even start their journey encased in a cocoon of ablative shielding to help them withstand the heat of re-entry.

## Robots

True artificial intelligence, in the sense of actual sentience, does not exist anywhere in the galaxy, except for the possible exception of some of the entities in the data-sphere, but simple AIs, and robots of all kinds can be found on most planets in the gate system. Robots have a wide variety of uses from manufacturing, labour, and battlefield roles. Many robots are not advanced enough to replace anything but the most menial of jobs, and they also require frequent maintenance and repairs, so on a lot of worlds, most work is still done by humans. In battle, AIs can be useful in that they are reliable, and don't fear



or question orders, but they are inflexible, and can generally not fight as effectively as an experienced soldier. It is therefore common for battlefield robots to actually be remote-controlled by a human operator, although this still has its limitations.

## The Alliance and the Old Sector

**“While they argue, we shall watch: we will not interfere. While they fight, we shall watch: we will not interfere. While they die, we shall watch: we will not interfere. We shall keep our watch until the day their fight ends, and on that day they shall join us in our watch.”**

The Old Sector refers to a small region of the galaxy, speculated to surround the Earth of old, although that ancient planet has long been lost. This region is home to the most advanced civilisations in the entire galaxy, the most significant of which is the Alliance.

The Alliance is a relatively small number of planets that make up the most advanced civilisation in the galaxy. During the Great Closing, the oldest human colonies were the most secure, and kept a lot of the technology and knowledge that others lost. Over the centuries, many of these worlds developed the technology to travel at near-light speeds, utilising complex space-bending technology to do so. Even with this technology however, it still took decades if not centuries to travel to the nearest star systems, and centuries to further ones. As technology developed further, it became possible to send information, in the form of time-space distortions, at much faster speeds, meaning it took only days for messages to reach other stars. Using this, the advanced worlds that would eventually make up the Alliance made contact with each other, and slowly worked together to progress, and began planning for ways to reach the rest of humanity, without the use of the gates.

But then the gates re-opened, and the Alliance eagerly made use of them. Not only were they able to now instantly travel to each other, making the spread and development of technology and ideas even faster, but they were also excited to finally reconnect with the rest of their race, and help them climb back up to their previous levels of society. But what the Alliance found was far from the perfect future they had imagined. Of the handful of worlds that had managed to retain human life at all, most were barbaric societies, often without even the knowledge of basic metal-working. Not deterred however, the Alliance began the long process of teaching their fellow humans their secrets, and slowly nurturing them to higher states of society and technology. It was obvious that this process could not be rushed, and that it would take some time to bring humanity together again. But the Alliance was patient, and optimistic, and their plan seemed to be working. But then something happened the Alliance was completely unprepared for. On the planet Alog, explorers discovered a strange, ape-like race of creatures, living very primitive lives. Scientific analysis revealed that these creatures had somehow evolved from humans during the great closing, and the great minds of the Alliance turned their efforts to discovering how this had happened. Explorers penetrated deeper and deeper into the wild, unexplored regions of space, until they found the planet of Simius. This gave the creatures their modern name “Simioids”, since archaeology revealed that this was the planet of their origin.

But before the Alliance could conduct serious research into the strange temporal phenomena that seemed to have affected the planet, disaster struck. The Simioids, having been studied and observed for some time now, had enough, and rose up against the Alliance. It was never clear what the creatures’ motivation was, or how they managed to unite in such large numbers, but they began attacking the Alliance wherever they found them, following them through gates, and chasing them away. It has been speculated that darker and more powerful forces were at play at this time, and that the Simioid disturbance was simply an outward manifestation of this greater force. If this was indeed the case, then it seems the Alliance managed to defeat this enemy, or at least contain it, as the Simioids have never again acted like this- at least not on the same scale.

Spread thinly across large parts of the galaxy, the Alliance was slow to respond to this alarmingly quickly growing threat, and many colonies were lost to the simioid hordes. The Alliance was not completely unused to violence- expeditions had had to defend themselves many times from primitive cultures, and intimidation had proven to be an effective first step in developing a culture. But the scale of the Simioid attack was greater than any they had previously faced. The only thing the Alliance could do was to withdraw their forces from everywhere, and defend their own, more easily defensible planets. They were forced to abandon their exploration, and plans of developing and helping others, and although they tried to evacuate primitive people from worlds the simioids were ravaging, most were left behind to fend for themselves.

In the end, the Simioids were unable to break through the defences of the Alliance. Even when they used scavenged technology from past ages, or stole from the Alliance, they were simply no match for the scientific superiority of the Alliance, and the invading hordes retreated to the wild sector, their single-minded aim of destruction seemingly forgotten. But the attack would have a lasting impact on the thinking of the Alliance, and on the galaxy as a whole. It was not only the Alliance that had suffered from the attack: countless worlds, many that the Alliance had previously nurtured, had been forced to fight too, and they had adapted to this life of war. They had used the technological skills the Alliance had taught them to defend themselves, becoming militaristic and aggressive. And once the simioid threat was gone, these people used their technology against each other.

When the Alliance returned to these planets, they were devastated by what they found. The secrets the Alliance had revealed were now being used for mass destruction. On many planets, the Alliance were no longer welcome, the people angry at their abandonment. On others, the people looked on the Alliance now as gods, not teachers. With a heavy heart, the Alliance accepted that the time had not yet come for humanity to reconnect and rebuild, and they swore never to interfere with the affairs of other planets ever again, except in the gravest of circumstances. Now the Alliance keeps to itself, occasionally meeting with other factions, and still exploring space, anxious to

find and preserve any scraps of the past. But they have become secretive and lofty, not trusting of other peoples.

It is very rare for the Alliance to go to war, but when they do, it is with sorrow for the lives that are being lost. Where possible, the Alliance will employ non-lethal methods, such as de-activating a planet's gates- a difficult process, but one the Alliance has been able to achieve a handful of times in the past- trapping the dangerous population within, or on a smaller scale, stunning rather than killing enemy soldiers. They know that such methods will have little effect, and that ultimately their efforts are largely pointless, but they still see all human life as sacred, and aim to preserve it wherever possible. When necessary however, the Alliance will fight battles with every advantage. Drones with near-human intelligence fire volleys of deadly fire, giant mechs move with uncanny grace, and the very battlefield is reshaped to their advantage, by technology that is as magic to lesser minds.

#### The World of Mineesh

Mineesh is a system near the centre of the Alliance. It contains a single star, which is nearly entirely encased within an artificial sphere that collects all of the energy emitted by it. The surface of this sphere is the main centre of habitation in the system, with enormous cities covering its surface in a society of truly staggering size. The gates themselves are located on different planets within the system – one in a closer orbit, on a planet with a large population, the other on the furthest planet in the system from the star. This second planet has begun to be terraformed, turning it into a habitable world, with a breathable atmosphere, although for now it is still dangerous to go out onto the surface without breathing apparatus. Since the star is almost completely covered up, every inhabited planet in the system is orbited by a number of artificial suns that create a day/night cycle for the population below.

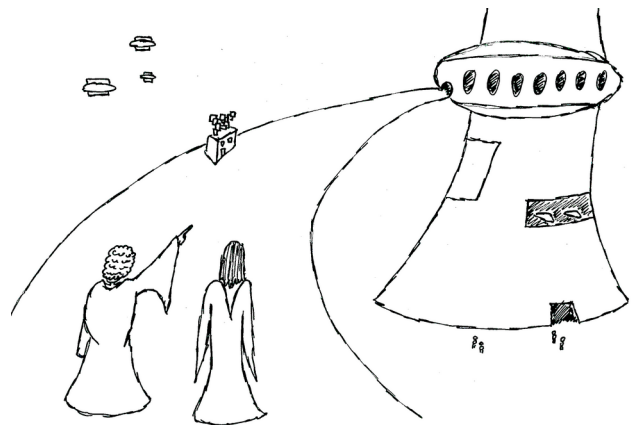
#### Politics and Society

The Alliance is not structured like any other human society in the galaxy. It has no leader or leading group- rather decisions are made by a huge collective, with the help of enormously powerful computers that can predict future events. Individuals are free to live as they choose, and in theory, no person in the Alliance would need to work, such is the level of automation and technological luxury. Still, many decide to pursue careers in scientific research, the arts, or politics. Some even believe so strongly in the Alliance, that they choose to become soldiers, to defend its interests.

The politics of the Alliance are governed by the factions within it. These factions function sort of like political parties, but this is an over-simplification: they are also complex, philosophical, cultural, and historical theories, and they represent different views on the human race as a whole. There are many factions, but the biggest three are the Technologists, the Culturalists, and the Chaosists. The

technologists believe that technological advancement leads to cultural and social development, and that the only way to rise beyond primitive societal structures such as class or intolerances is to develop technologically. The culturalists believe the opposite: that technological development is possible only through societal and cultural development, and that this is in fact the driving force of civilisation. The chaosists are a relatively new, and smaller faction, who believe that humans operate on a fundamentally chaotic principle, and that societies are constantly in flux, able to shift in any direction at any minute, regardless of what development they have achieved in any field previously.

These are very much simplifications of the beliefs of these factions- they are far more complex in reality, and many people dedicate their entire lives (and life expectancies in the Alliance are very long indeed) to researching and developing these theories, studying societies all over the galaxy. Ultimately, the goal of the Alliance is to re-unite humanity, and bring the entire species up to the same dizzying heights of civilisation and technology as them. These different factions merely represent different ideas on how to achieve this.



#### The Data-Sphere and Gods

In the distant past of humanity, a technology was developed that soon spread all over the galaxy. Composed of microscopic machines that saturate all organisms, objects, and environments in their trillions, the connected system is known as the Data-Sphere. Each machine can do very little on its own, merely storing and sending small amounts of data, and power. Yet together, these machines make up a vast web of connection across the entire galaxy, with a dizzying amount of computing power. In fact, stored in the Data-Sphere is a vast, virtual world, which is inhabited by virtual creatures and can sometimes be accessed by physical ones.

The Data-Sphere seems to have survived the Great Closing unscathed. It is impossible that the nano machines are so great in number that they can saturate the empty reaches of interstellar space- there is no chance all the disparate elements stayed connected during that time. But when the gates re-opened, it was able to start functioning again in the same way as before, in defiance of any logic.

Of the various beings that inhabit the virtual world of the Data-Sphere, the data-gods are the most significant. Most, though not all, experts in the Alliance agree that the data-gods are not actually truly sentient beings, merely extremely advanced programmes that behave in a relatively predictable pattern. Whatever the case, the data-gods are incredibly powerful, and fight with each other in the Data-Sphere for influence and space. Through a number of ways, they can be accessed by people in the real world for advice or assistance, although they are fickle and unreliable. One of the ways data-gods compete is through data-ghosts. These are much simpler beings, who serve gods in their fights. Some speculate that both gods and ghosts are the eroded remnants of real personalities uploaded to the data-sphere millennia ago, while others believe they are a natural creation of its own.

Across the galaxy, ancient machines known as terminals can be used to access the Data-Sphere. In many cases, these are used as oracles by the local population. The data-sphere is impossible to access except through highly advanced machines such as these terminals, although the Alliance, and a number of nearby independent factions can access it with their own devices. In these cases, the data-sphere generally functions as a way to access functionally infinite computing power, as well as limitless depths of information. Delving too deep into the Data-Sphere for information can however lead one into conflict with beings such as data-gods, who rarely look kindly on intruders to their realm. As such, accessing the Data-Sphere is a dangerous process that involves making pacts or agreements with the beings that inhabit it.

The machines that make up the Data-Sphere can also be used however to influence the real world. Since each machine can only have an imperceptible effect on the world, coordinating them to, for instance, re-shape a wall, carry one through the air as though flying, or form invisible barriers, requires a lot of power. In fact, programming such actions through traditional means is generally avoided. However, certain individuals are born with the right genetics, allowing their bodies to accept implants that make use of the vast computational power of the human brain to access the Data-Sphere with their thoughts. Such individuals are known by many names- data-priests and seers among them, and are tasked with placating data-gods, gathering intel on enemies, and helping their armies in battle, as well as a wide variety of non-military roles, some as common as construction.

These individuals, at least the successful ones, are even more lofty and mysterious than others in the Alliance. They are also generally extremely creative, emotional individuals, many using their powers to realise colossal architectural visions, while others often retreat into the Data-Sphere for days at a time, exploring its depths, and creating digital worlds of their own within it.

The Alliance also occasionally makes use of “possession”. Many believe this is far too fanciful a term for the process, but the data-gods are often very vain and grand, and using such terms helps with convincing them to take

part. Essentially, an aspect of a data-god can be downloaded into a robot - often a very powerful one - to aid Alliance armies in battle. The seamless connection between software and hardware in this case makes such robots far better than other AI alternatives, and their natural connection to the Data-Sphere also allows them to make use of the magical-seeming abilities of data-priests, making them truly fearsome combatants on the battlefield.

In addition to such brute strength, the Alliance makes use of extraordinary stealth technology that allows operatives to become invisible, and even when not, a mix of telepathic and electronic signals to make them extremely difficult to focus on and track. There are also a wide variety of individuals in the Alliance who by genetics or augmentations- or both- possess other powers, and some of these also have battlefield roles. Such is the case with psionic operatives, who are able to use the power of their minds to unleash devastating blasts against their foes.

The standard weapons and troops of the Alliance wield such advanced technology that they are a match for the most elite soldiers of other factions. Common soldiers carry compression weapons, set only to low power to enable their users to stun and damage enemy combatants, rather than kill them where possible. Troops trusted with more dangerous weapons use a wider variety of devastating gear, such as anti-matter weapons, or distortion rifles that punch brief holes in the skin of reality to annihilate targets.

It is common for armour and equipment in the Alliance to be left simply as the colour of its materials, although many soldiers do paint their armour, either for practical reasons, or as a way to creatively express themselves. Some paint their armour in camouflage colours as a precaution for their stealth technology failing, while others choose to use a variety of bright colours, precisely because their stealth technology means that it doesn't matter what colour the armour actually is, as the enemy will never see it. Because in practice the Alliance's technology is basically infallible, this is not discouraged, and there is rarely any standardisation. Unlike many other factions, people in the Alliance see no glory, or indeed anything positive in war, and so they see it as morbid and distasteful to take trophies or commemorate achievements on the battlefield. Alliance soldiers do not generally take any pleasure in their job- they fight only because they believe in their cause.

### The Rest of the Old Sector

As with each sector, the old sector does not have clearly defined borders, and it is a matter of some debate where some societies belong. Nevertheless, the Alliance is not the only organisation in this region of space, nor the only one to possess the technology it does. There are many smaller societies, often composed of just a handful of planets, that enjoy the same (or similar) levels of technological luxury, but are independent from the philosophies and traditions of the Alliance. Some use their technology to raid less-advanced planets, gathering plundered resources, but these are few in number, and are

shunned if not outright opposed by others in the old sector.

Others travel the galaxy and interact with other humans far more freely than the Alliance, engaging in trade and charity missions all over space, while others still stick exclusively to their own worlds, reclusive to the extreme, and jealously guarding their secrets while living lives of luxury.

## The Middle Sector

**“Exports have risen by 27%, crime’s down by 9%,  
and the last protest was stopped in record time!  
Surely, we are living in the future!”**

The Middle Sector is the region of space where most stable civilisations exist. Beyond the borders of the Alliance, but before the Wild Sector, a place of great mystery and danger, the Middle Sector is (mostly) a safe haven. Certain parts are more built up than others, and a huge variety of different cultures and peoples exist in this region of space, some restricted to their own planets, while others are members of inter-planetary empires or kingdoms. The Middle Sector can be further subdivided into two major areas: the Upper and Lower sectors. These, though displaying great variety within them, are culturally distinct areas whose histories have been shaped by dramatically different forces. The Upper Middle Sector is roughly the region of space where the Alliance settled during the early days of the re-opening, although certain parts of that area have since been swallowed up by the Wild Sector, and it has expanded in other places. The Lower Middle Sector meanwhile, is much less technologically advanced, having never had much influence from the Alliance. Instead, this region is broadly defined as the region of space that was once ruled by the Empire, but has long since divided into numerous new powers.



Trade is common all over the Middle Sector, and millions of people travel between its different worlds. These planets are also well connected, and diplomatic links connect them even in times of war. Larger empires often bully smaller ones, or “protect” them, but many worlds are completely independent, having their own unique culture and ways of life. Many such worlds use more antiquated technology, and maintain highly traditional customs and social structures, but some are also more progressive, free worlds.

### The Irtos Legion

For three-hundred Irtosian years after the Great Re-Opening, the sector’s Border Legion was the most famous fighting force in the entire galaxy, and the defences they manned were legendary. The Irtosian sub-sector is a small area of space on the edges of the Middle Sector, centred around the Irtos system, from which it gets its name. The entire region, consisting of eight systems, was unified, and grew extremely rich and powerful due to its abundant resources. The sub-sector was also blessed by a quirk of the gate system, which meant it was only accessible via a single gate. The Border Legion was set up to defend this gate, and the world it was linked to, which was an enormous trade

hub, selling Irtosian commodities for great profit.

The defence consisted of a dizzying array of weapons and fortresses consisting of defence missiles, orbital bunker-stations, and of course the soldiers of the Legion itself, who were trained to incredibly high standards from a young age, and equipped with the best weapons money could buy. For centuries, hundreds of armies were broken by the Legion as they attempted to invade the sub-sector to plunder it, and the pride of the Legion grew great.

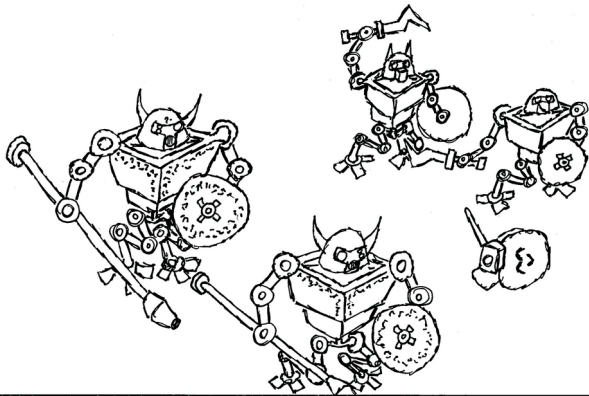
By the time of the seventeenth council of Irtos however, the Legion had reached a crisis point. The foreign world that had supplied it with most of its equipment had been attacked and destroyed a few years previously, and the increasingly corrupt bureaucracy of the sub-sector meant the Legion was receiving less and less funding. Many of its famed defences were left unmanned, nothing more than bluffs. The standards of training had also declined, and large numbers of troops were actually mercenaries from different sectors.

The Legion would finally be defeated by the warlord Sansa Diamond-Shot. Exactly how she achieved this has been forgotten, but many suspect bribery and mutiny within the Legion itself was a deciding factor. Whatever the cause, the Irtosian sector was invaded, and one by one, its worlds fell to the invaders, their resources plundered, and cities levelled. The sub-sector now stands mostly uninhabited, full only of ruins and corpses. Many ageing mercenaries can be found in various bars around the galaxy claiming to be surviving members of the Border Legion, staring into their drinks, reflecting on past glories while they cannot find an employer willing to pay their high prices.

## The Delian League of Planets

**"I sing of gods and of men. I sing of fields and of cities.  
I sing of battle and glory. I sing of the deeds of  
Mactalus, master of the spear. And I sing of the  
destruction that he wrought upon his enemies, and the  
destruction the gods wrought upon him."**

The Delian League is a collection of planets in the Upper Middle Sector, who all have a similar level of technology, and similar cultures. This being a highly hierarchical, honour and glory based system, where the prowess of an individual is in high regard. These planets are also united in their use of battlesuits in war- a developing technology that is not seen in many other areas of the galaxy. The planets in the league, or at least the planets in the heart of the league, were all once Alliance colonies, where the Alliance had begun to teach the populations about technology, but had had to abandon them when the great Simioid invasion came. This history had led to mixed views towards the Alliance in the league, and these differences are often a source of conflict.



The league is made up of hundreds of planets, and they are all in a loose alliance with each other: regularly banding together to face outside threats such as Simioids. When this is not needed however, there is frequent fighting between the planets of the league, and a complex web of alliances, oaths, and marriages between families keeps the whole system in balance. Though similar, different planets and micro-empires in the league still vary greatly, with the famed jungle-warriors of the Jade Dynasty for instance being very different from the Pharaonic Order's temple guardians.

### The Akropolos

The greatest power in the Delian sector is the Akropolos. While most kingdoms are made up of one, maybe a handful of planets, the Akropolos has dozens of planets under its direct control, with many others allied or under its protection. With their characteristic terracotta red armour, Akropolos forces are among the most common in Delian space, and their forces are always feared.

### The Ulfkin

The second greatest power in the Delian sector is the Ulfkin realm. Culturally distinct, and ideologically

opposed to the Akropolos, the Ulfkin pride themselves on their prowess in battle. What makes them so different from the Akropolos is their hatred of the Alliance. Whereas the Akropolos sees them as gods, the Ulfkin see them as manipulators, and liars. They have not forgotten how the Alliance abandoned the Delian sector in the great Simioid invasion, and they have made it their mission to hunt down and destroy these false gods. This thinking makes them fundamentally opposed to the other major power in the Delian sector- the Akropolos. Indeed, the two peoples have a long history of conflict with each other, and their wars have been a constant factor in the politics of the Delian sector. Of course, they have also banded together before numerous times, and both put honour and glory before strategic victory or gain. The Ulfkin do not hate the Akropolos in the same way that they hate the Alliance, they are just competitors in the politics of the league.

### The War of the Wolf

In the year 109 of Delian reckoning, there would be a clash between the Akropolos and the Ulfkin that would be remembered for generations to come. Tensions had been high between the two for months, with armies massing on border planets. The trigger however, would be a small incident on the planet Coprys V. King Madolon, master of the Coprys system had agreed to mediate negotiations between the two great powers in his neutral territory. All the leaders of both sides met, and proceedings were going well. But then a chance discovery by a servant ruined everything. It was discovered that the daughter of King Minous, leader of an Akropolos protectorate planet, had been having an affair with the son of the Ulfkin king. Outraged, the Akropolos king, Alexos, demanded tribute from Minous, and when this was not received, he sent an army to take it. Minous appealed to the Ulfkin for protection, who, bound by honour, accepted, and likewise deployed an army.

The negotiations however still looked like they might succeed, until in the battle against Minous and the Ulfkin, the son of Alexos was killed. Enraged, Alexos stormed from the meeting hall, and ordered an immediate attack on the Ulfkin.

The resulting war would see all the allied planets of both powers clash in a titanic conflict involving hundreds of worlds, and hundreds of thousands of warriors. Many glorious battles were fought, and many legends were born in that great war. But after five years of fighting, it seemed like it might finally all come to an end. King Alexos met the Ulfkin king in battle, on a planet on the edge of the Delian sector. The scale of the battle was truly enormous, even by the standards of the war, and at its height, the two kings met in combat. The warriors looked on in awe as these two heroes of legend duelled. But just then, an explosion knocked both combatants off their feet.

An exploratory fleet from the UNF had also arrived at the planet, and hoping to take advantage of the struggle, they had attacked, in an effort to quickly destroy both armies. However the UNF had misunderstood the Delians. Both

the Akropolis and Ulfkin armies immediately stopped their fighting, and launched an attack on the UNF, absolutely enraged that they had dared to interrupt such a glorious battle. The UNF fleet was pursued through over a dozen systems of wild space, before it was finally defeated completely by a combined force of Akropolis and Ulfkin.

After that, the two sides agreed to a peace, both feeling that the war had lost all honour by the UNF intervention. And thus ended the greatest war in the history of the Delian sector. It had considerably weakened both the Akropolis and the Ulfkin, and the coming decades would see the emergence of many smaller powers, and the decline of these two powers' influence. But the war, and the insult by the UNF would never be forgotten.

The War of the Wolf is preserved in the epic poem *The Mactalad*, composed by an unknown poet. It tells the story of the eponymous hero Mactalus, who fought on the side of the Akropolis, and died one year before the end of the war. Another account of the war survives in another great piece of literature, *The Saga of Vjarl Ironbane*, written by the great sage Imkir. The saga, told from the Ulfkin perspective, differs from the *Mactalad* in many crucial points, which has led many scholars to doubt the historical accuracy of both.

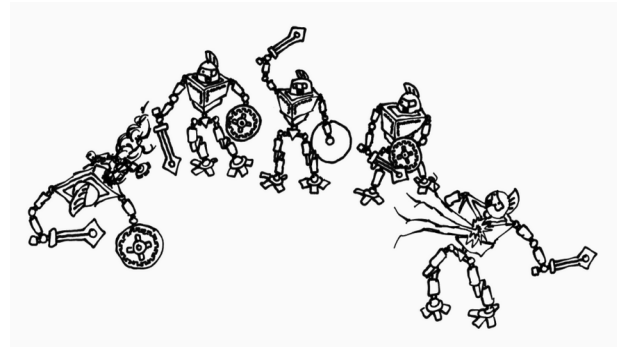
## Technology

The planets of the league all have access to fairly advanced technology, having been taught by the Alliance many generations ago. Although their knowledge is advanced, their understanding of the underlying scientific principles is rather lacking, and since their societies use a very traditional form of apprenticeships to pass on knowledge, the transmission of learning is both limited and slow. All this means that the league is slow to adapt new technologies, and rarely develops its own. The most recent innovation of the league has been the adoption of plasma-based technologies, copied from Avalonian armies. This has allowed the league to field far more effective melee weapons, as well as much more efficient and powerful flight systems- the previous generation of propeller-based drones had rather limited use, and until recently, battlesuits capable of flight were unheard of.

The communities on planets in the Delian sector are rather small agrarian societies, often made up of a handful of villages, or city-states. This means that they are incapable of fielding as many troops as other factions. They make up for this partially through the use of autonomous or remote controlled squadrons of drones, but mostly by equipping their warriors with powerful battlesuits, making a single person the equivalent of many. These battlesuits are in many ways rather primitive, but they are built with thick, tank-like armour, and can carry weapons normally reserved for artillery teams or vehicles in other armies. Such a brute-force solution is typical of Delian thinking. Most warriors wear relatively small battlesuits, with those of higher status having access to better built, and more ornate variants. Every battlesuit is unique, and hand made- the concept of production lines

or factories is either unknown, or looked down on by these craftsmen, who only trust technology they have made with their own hands. Some armies may field larger battlesuits, but these are not widely used, since they require much more maintenance, as well as power. The younger, and more reckless warriors of a planet's army may wear battlesuits equipped with plasma-based propulsion systems, allowing them to soar over battlefields, and strike suddenly from the sky. This technology has not been met with approval by the older, more experienced generation of warriors however, so the majority of Delian armies remain on the ground.

Traditionally, battlesuits are equipped primarily with mag weaponry, typically in the form of long range, precision weapons. The adoption of plasma technology has allowed the league to expand its arsenal with more powerful, short range weaponry, as well as an array of deadly melee weapons. The melee weapons of the past- though used- were very limited in what they could penetrate. Blades with a focused sheath of plasma on the other hand are capable of slicing through just about any material with ease, and this new technology is one of the few the commanders have eagerly adopted. Plasma weapons of course require huge amounts of energy to function however, so the use of such weapons is still fairly limited.



Drones accompany Delian armies in great numbers, serving a variety of roles. With highly efficient plasma propulsion systems, drones can fly for extended periods of time, making them perfect scouts and harrying units. Some drones are equipped with light mag throwers, or even pulse blasters- although these latter ones drain the drones' batteries quickly, meaning they can't be used too much. Other drones have advanced sensors and optics, acting as spies or targetting aids, while others still track heavier incoming fire, and take hits for battlesuits, sacrificing themselves for them. Drones have also begun to see use in every day life in the Delian sector, helping out on farms, or in various menial tasks. The use of drones is probably inspired by the Alliance, with their advanced machines. The drones of Delian armies are of course not even close to the uncanny agility and near-sentience of Alliance robots, but they are nonetheless an important aspect of a commander's force.

## Armies of the League

There is little standardisation across the League when it comes to how armies are structured. This is due to the enormous cultural and social differences that exist, and

though they essentially use much the same equipment and technology, battlefield tactics and organisation vary wildly. Battlesuits almost always form the core of an army, with larger battlesuits and drones forming the support sections. Some planets keep permanent armies of professional soldiers, while others call on their warriors only when they are needed. Most generally have a core of elite warriors, in service to the leader of the planet, that forms the main fighting force, supported by less elite warriors.

It is also the case that armies of the League are very often made up of a patchwork of units from a variety of different planets, as alliances and oaths mean different planets support each other in times of war, committing different numbers of troops depending on the strength of the alliance. In fact very few planets have large enough populations, and enough resources to be able to raise an army of significant size all on their own. Instead, when a planet goes to war, it will call on debtors and allies to each contribute small numbers of troops, ending up with a final army composed of many different fighters, each with different languages, appearances, and styles of warfare. A final army is therefore often a colourful mix of different heraldries by the end, and competition between troops of different planets is great motivation.

Among many of the cultures of the League, it is common practice to commemorate impressive achievements on the battlefield- in many cases on the armour of battlesuits themselves. Since these mighty machines are passed down the generations, many are a patchwork of different eras, and hundreds of repairs and modifications, as well as a record of all their past pilots and their achievements. Many display trophies taken from their mightiest opponents, or feature gilded carvings depicting duels they have fought. Others still are covered in dense writing listing their achievements, with extra cloth pennants added when space runs out on the armour itself.

## Avalonia

**“I may have the body of a feeble old man, but my heart burns with fire! All our hearts burn with fire! Release that flame, and scorch the enemy with it! For Queen Johilda, third of her name, let us ride!”**

Avalonia is another region of space in the upper middle sector, and alongside the Delian league makes up the main political and cultural power in the region. It was once home to some kind of factory system, producing items on a galactic scale, with entire planets hollowed out, and filled with enormous, semi-sentient factory complexes, producing anything that was required. This was many thousands of years ago though, and after the great closing, the entrances to the interiors of these planets was slowly forgotten, and the people on the surface rapidly fell into a much more primitive state of existence, relying on basic tools, and developing feudal societies, with kings and knights.

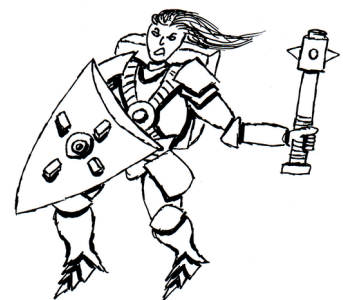
Eventually, a few discovered access points to the factory cores, and those that survived trips down into them came back with wondrous items of great power. The monarchies were quick to seize these access points for their own, and in the space of just a few years, the technological level of Avalonia shot up. Access to new technologies was restricted however, so the majority of people continued to use medieval levels of technology, with only the upper classes having more and more advanced weapons, and more and more secure castles. On some worlds, the process happened slightly differently, since only the Alliance managed to discover the access points. But after the withdrawal of the Alliance in the great Simioid attack, the factories still fell into the hands of the local population, their cultures just developed a little differently to their neighbours.

When the gates re-opened, these planets were quick to expand, and wage wars on each other, and over time planet, and system wide alliances and kingdoms were created. To this day, the technology produced by the factories of Avalonia are second only in quality and advancement to that of the Alliance, but since the people of Avalonia have no idea how any of it works, they are prevented from advancing any further at present.

Technology does of course need repairing however, and though Avalonians have no understanding of even basic scientific principles, there are a handful of individuals, known as forge masters, who understand the technology, and maintain their armies' equipment when deployed away from their home planet. They do not learn their skills in any conventional or even safe way though: forge masters are chosen by the factory complexes at the centre of planets, where they receive implants in their brains to allow them to interface with the factory and act as a bridge between humans and machines. This process leaves them with little personality remaining, taxing as the calculations are on the mind. Many in fact do not survive the process at all, and those that do sacrifice their humanity for their skills. Forge masters are employed by royalty to produce their technology, and repair it on the

field, and they can also be powerful warriors themselves, incapable of feeling pain or fear, and having a seamless connection with their armour and weapons.

Avalonian society is ruled by noble families, and most of the population are serfs who work the land for them. Most planets of Avalonian space are made up primarily of verdant plains, broad rivers, and soaring mountains, although they are not all such pleasant worlds. The extraordinarily good climate is almost certainly artificial, presumably made millennia ago to counterbalance the harsh mechanical jungles at their cores. Dotted throughout the landscape are enormous castle-complexes, structures which evolved from the traditional siege-and-defence tactics employed before the discovery of the factory cores. With the new technologies however, the early castles were able to grow to enormous sizes, with sophisticated defence systems. In the current day, most fighting done by Avalonian armies is done outside of Avalonia itself, and so these castle-complexes tend to be built as more of a statement of power and prestige, designed to impress, rather than be actually useful.



Legends speak of a time when the whole of Avalonia was united under a single king, although the veracity of such tales is up for debate. As it stands, a complex web of alliances and feuds connect the worlds of Avalonia, and they unite against larger outside threats as frequently as they fight amongst themselves. Due to the exclusivity of technology, the upper classes serve the important social function of acting as their society's warriors and defenders. Royals are clad in ornate, heavy power armour, while minor nobles wear lighter suits, but all act according to strict rules of chivalry and honour, protecting their homes, friends, and kin.

### The World of Frakia

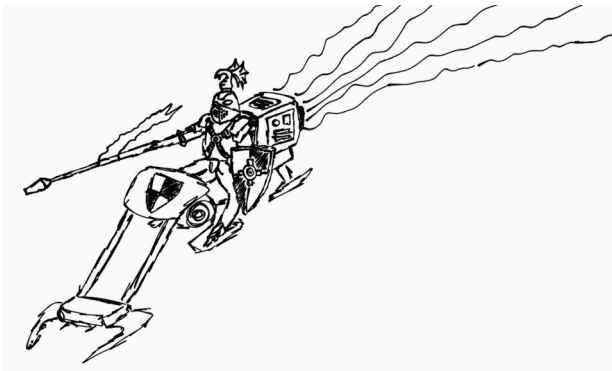
Frakia is a planet in the Avalonian sub-sector that has a factory core, as is typical in the region. Its climate is not quite as idyllic as many other worlds in Avalonia, being generally wetter and colder, but only its poles are inhospitable. For decades after the Great Re-Opening, Frakia was a province of the Rolon Empire: a highly militaristic state that quickly expanded to cover dozens of systems in the sub-sector.

Rolon would eventually collapse due to both internal and external pressures, and the nobles of Frakia fought their way to independence, establishing a planet-wide government independent from other systems. Frakia adopted many of the systems and traditions of Rolon, and as such it has seen great success militarily against its neighbours, and has a somewhat unique culture.

Frakia is ruled by a senate, elected from members of the aristocracy, and maintains large, professional armies at all times. Although at present such armies are used mostly for defence, and punitive expeditions, there is a growing number of voices in the senate for Frakia to start invading its neighbours and establishing an empire of its own.

### Armies of Avalonia

Avalonian armies do not have one unified structure or way of organisation for their armies: each planet has its own system for raising and equipping troops, and organising them on the battlefield. However, most kingdoms will have a class of nobles, who are called upon to serve as knights- both the leaders, and best fighters of an army. Each noble is then also expected to raise a number of troops from their own subordinates, who they are expected to provide equipment for. This is not just in the interests of the (generally) royal organising an army, but also a matter of prestige and honour for the nobles, as well as a way to protect themselves on the battlefield.



Both nobles and royals also generally keep a permanent force of more elite fighters, known as men-at-arms, who act as an honour guard for them, while the rest of the soldiery is raised from the serf class, and given weapons and armour only for the duration of a campaign. Larger artillery pieces are generally only kept by the kingdom's armoury, although it is not unheard of for richer nobles to do so too. The technology of Avalonia means that even its most common troops are quite elite by the standards of many other armies, which relieves rulers of having to raise and equip quite so many soldiers.

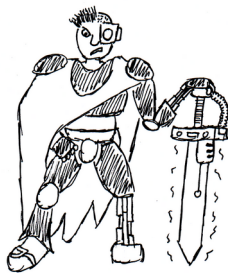
Heraldry is an important aspect of Avalonian armies, as troops' colours display their allegiances. Armour itself is often left unpainted, instead polished to a bright gleam, but cloaks, banners, tabards, and pennants all display clearly the homelands and loyalties of the troops that wear them- at least to those who have a good knowledge of the complex system of colours and symbols used. The available flat surfaces of shields are also often painted, but given the optical distortion caused by energy shields, especially near the generator itself, this is not generally used as the primary canvas for heraldry, as it will often not be visible.

Avalonian armies tend to use few vehicles, as their heavy power armour makes tanks somewhat redundant, and their tactics tend to revolve around infantry slowly advancing forwards, well defended by their energy shields and armour. However, the nobility and men-at-arms often ride into battle on jet-cycles, giving the army a highly mobile element. This kind of fighting is a reminder of the horse-riding knights of old, before the factory cores were discovered. Many planets did initially attempt to continue to use real horses, often equipped with power armour themselves to be able to bear the tremendous weight of the rider's armour, but jet-cycles have largely replaced them. Horses- and other planet's equivalent animals- can still be found on many Avalonian planets, used both by serfs in their day to day lives, and by the nobility for ceremonial purposes. Jousting is also a popular form of both entertainment and resolution for personal conflict, and this is also often done with horses, as jousts on jet-cycles, though not unheard of, are incredibly dangerous, and almost always end in at least one fatality, even when only non-lethal weapons are used.

## The Early Lower Middle Sector, and the Birth of the Empire

**“When the warriors came, we didn’t even know if they were human. They looked so big in their armour, and they kept coming no matter what we did. There was so much smoke the only thing I could see properly was that standard of theirs – that fist. That’s their symbol. That’s who they are. They burn and destroy, and then squash the survivors in their fists.”**

At the time of the great re-opening, the worlds in what is now the lower middle sector were much like any other in the rest of the galaxy: most had relatively primitive populations, that is, if the human population had survived at all. Some worlds had developed their own technology, bringing them to a variety of levels from an iron age level, to steam power, and internal combustion. Most planets were not united at all, but split into hundreds of different nations. Over time, this would change, as nations who now had access to working gates were able to trade with other worlds, or bring back resources. These nations grew more powerful, eventually dominating the rest of the planet, and over many decades, most planets became united under a single ruler or government. Once they had united their planets however, such societies looked outwards, onto their neighbours.



And thus began warfare on an enormous scale. Planets mobilised their entire militaries to attack other planets, and a rapid arms race began to develop better weapons and armour. The nature of gate warfare meant that only relatively small numbers of troops could

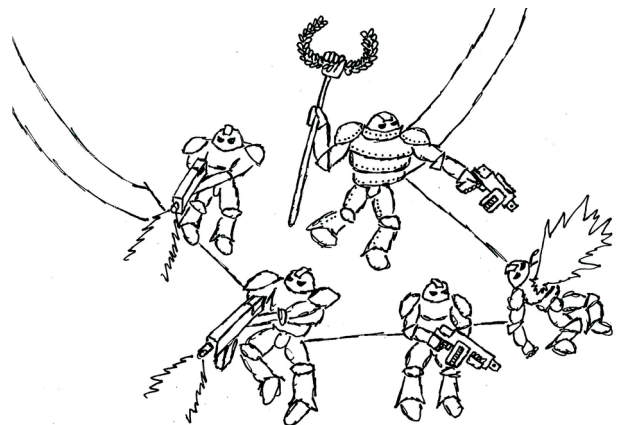
attack a planet, and a gate would be relatively easy to defend, since one could simply surround the gate with an overwhelmingly large force. Tactics in this period varied, from the Atallan league's use of enormous, building-sized battle tanks, to the Morria's use of atomic missiles to simply devastate the surrounding area, and then storm the gate with rad-suit equipped soldiers. All these tactics however proved to be ineffective in the long term, as planets developed counter-measures. The tactic that ultimately developed as the most effective was the deployment of heavily armoured infantry, with heavy weaponry, to storm a gate's defences, and obliterate the enemy. Casualties in such attacks were still enormously high, but the tactic was widely adopted, and soon power armour was being produced in huge quantities.

### The Age of the Empire

From the hundreds of conflicts at this time, eventually, the Empire would emerge as the dominant power of the middle sector, ruling over almost the entire region that is now split between the UNF and ATL, as well as many planets outside these. The Empire began on the planet Oscia, a planet with abundant resources, and a huge population. During the great closing, it had developed to a

higher technological level than most other planets because of these factors, which put it in a perfect position for the great war. The main advantage of Oscia was its companies- the planet had developed to an advanced stage of capitalism, allowing it to produce armaments on a massive scale. It was very successful, and grew to take over a large region of space. The companies that supplied weapons, and often even fought the battles, gained enormous profits, coming to control most of Oscia's territory. But after four decades of expansion and growth, things changed. The companies, in their success, had grown arrogant, and naive, and the president of Oscia saw an opportunity. She summoned a loyal group of soldiers, and marched into the headquarters of the biggest companies, arresting their owners, and declaring the companies state property. She then marched back to the senate, arresting (and executing) anyone who opposed her, and declared herself empress.

After this, the Empire, as it was now known, would expand rapidly. With power massively centralised, and all the production efforts coordinated by the state, hundreds of planets were conquered, and the power-armoured warriors of the Empire seemed unstoppable. When the first empress died, her child inherited the title, and through the reigns of several emperors, the Empire would evolve. A state-controlled belief system would emerge, known as imperialism. This venerated the emperor as a practically god-like being, and emphasised placing the interests of the Empire before your own. The army would also develop, from a professional, mercenary organisation to more of a social class, as serving the Empire became an honour rather than a commitment. The surviving warriors of a campaign (who would generally be few) were often given sections of the planets they conquered to rule as a reward, and towards the frontiers of the Empire, regulations on how a planet should be run were few. As long as governors delivered their tithes to the Empire, they were basically allowed to rule however they wanted. This led to increasingly harsh rulers, who oppressed their people, and resentment towards the Empire grew on the frontiers.



Rebellions and uprisings were crushed quickly and brutally, and the Empire's main solution to most of its problems was simply deploying an overwhelmingly large army. But resistance to the Empire didn't only come from dissatisfied citizens on the frontier. The senate still existed, as an advisory body to the Emperor, and many of

its members believed they deserved more power, resenting the supreme authority of the emperor. Additionally, the major companies, who were now under imperial control, resented the iron grip the emperors had over them. They were convinced that given more free reign, they could be more efficient and successful. But for a while, the Empire continued, growing to enormous size, much larger than any other empire throughout history.

#### The Fate of the *Ceres*

The *Ceres* was a cargo hauling spaceship that transported raw ore from a mining colony on the moon Cafik V to its home planet. The voyage would take about three months each way, and the vessel was crewed by only a small number of personnel to watch over the mostly automated systems. Imperial records show that on one of its returns, the *Ceres* did not respond to any transmissions, nor did it break to enter orbit as was procedure. The ship was towed into its usual course before being boarded. After a thorough exploration of the vessel, its crew were found dead, torn apart limb from limb. They had been dead for some weeks. The *Ceres'* large crates of ore were transported down to the planet, and the vessel was decommissioned after it was discovered extensive damage had been dealt to its navigational and stabilising systems – seemingly on purpose.

A later study in the time of the UNF found that the planet in question has an unusually high murder-rate, and that this statistical anomaly began two days after the crates of ore were unloaded and released by imperial officials.

#### The Fall of the Empire

This was not to last however, and a number of factors would see the Empire crumble, and fall. On the frontiers, the Empire reached the world of Markaz. On this planet, the great closing had seen the population retain much of their technology, but they eventually abandoned most of it, choosing instead to dedicate themselves to honing their bodies and skills to perfection. A religion developed on this world, which taught that God had created humans as perfect beings, and that humans could achieve anything with enough training. When the Empire attacked this planet, its inhabitants defended themselves fiercely. Their warriors moved with unnatural grace and agility, able to dodge bullets, and slide blades into the smallest chinks in power armour. They could seemingly appear from nowhere, and the imperial forces, used to fighting in gate assaults, could not cope. Indeed, the empire never conquered Markaz, and news spread around the nearby frontier worlds of this mysterious planet, which seemed to contradict all the Empire's teachings of imperial supremacy.

Soon daring rebels snuck through gates, dodging imperial forces, risking their lives to get to Markaz. When they arrived, the locals taught them about their beliefs, and the

falsehood of imperialism. The rebels returned to their home planets- some even made it back alive. Those that did spread what they had learned, and soon, a revolutionary cult, based roughly on the beliefs of Markaz, spread across the frontier worlds. These cultists grew more and more daring, attacking, and sabotaging imperial forces. For the most part, the Empire managed to suppress this movement, but they never managed to extinguish it, and every time the imperial army descended on a cultist stronghold, they would flee into the underground, and the movement survived every time.

During this period of growing unrest, trouble stirred on the inner worlds too. The senate and the companies became increasingly agitated, and as the Empire started losing control over the frontier worlds, the emperor lost popularity. The only way they could keep control, was to use increasingly repressive measures, which in turn only fuelled further resentment. Eventually, the senior members of the senate met with the leaders of the biggest companies, and planned their actions. The companies started subversively defying imperial orders, strengthening their control over the inner worlds. Loyal imperialists were silently replaced by mercenaries loyal to the companies, and courtiers in the palace were slowly bought and made loyal to the senate. The fledgeling revolution almost failed when a member of the senate was discovered to be an imperialist spy, but a quick assassination solved the problem. When they were ready, troops loyal to the senate marched into the palace, to arrest the emperor. There was a small amount of fighting in the palace, but there were hardly any troops still loyal to the emperor, and he was arrested, and forced to abdicate, signing off all his power to the senate.

The senate then set about restructuring the empire. They decided that each planet should elect a representative, to serve in a parliament, that would make the decisions. The new empire would be founded on the basis of personal freedom, giving every single citizen the chance to make their own way in society- a stark contrast from the rigid hierarchy of the old empire. Companies would be given almost complete freedom, and the ability to run themselves. All this sounded great to the senate, but it proved difficult to bring about. The majority of frontier worlds distrusted this new system, and instead used the chaos and division as a chance to declare independence from the empire. Many wars were fought in the frontier between the remaining imperialist forces, and revolutionary groups, and ultimately lack of organisation and coordination meant that the majority of planets in the frontier succeeded in gaining independence, with many eventually forming mini-empires of their own, or dividing further into a number of nations on the same planet. On planets where the religion of Markaz had spread, this came to be a unifying force, and from the ashes of the empire rose the ATL- rejecting technology in favour of faith and strength.

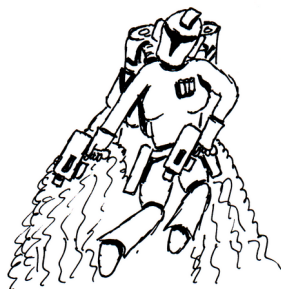
The senate and fledgeling parliament could not take back these worlds, since they quickly became divided. The senate was made up of elected representatives from Oscia, whereas the members of parliament were from all over

the empire. They disagreed on just about everything, from where the capital world would be, to how to keep the disintegrating empire together. Eventually, the capital world problem was settled by simply placing the parliament on a new world- Unasca, and keeping the senate on Oscia. This would prove to be a mistake- with a greater distance between them, the two just disagreed even more, eventually just passing contradictory laws, with no regard for the actions of the other. It eventually got to the point where both senate and parliament simultaneously voted to dissolve the other, and from there it was clear that cooperation was impossible.

A civil war began between the supporters of the senate, and parliament, which weakened the Empire even further. Hundreds more planets, even from the inner worlds, declared independence, and battles raged across imperial space. The senate was supported by most of the large companies, since they had already worked together in overthrowing the emperor. But the parliament was much more popular with the majority of the empire's remaining population, and one of the major companies also sided with them. The war lasted only a few years, but in that time, massive amounts of destruction were suffered, and millions died. In the end, the general population did not support the senate, viewing them as a continuation of imperial rule, and the parliament was victorious. The companies that had supported the senate were destroyed, and their assets given to the one company that had supported the parliament. Now in control of pretty much every business in the empire, it adopted the name "General manufacturing corporation", or GMC. Meanwhile, the parliament declared itself the "new senate", as well as an end to the empire. Instead, the remaining worlds of the empire would become the United Nations of Freedom, or UNF.

#### After the Empire

The area of space that used to be the Empire became known simply as the middle sector of the galaxy. The worlds where the religion of Markaz had spread became united as the Anti-Technology League, fundamentally opposed to the beliefs and economic systems of the Empire (and UNF). Meanwhile, the UNF became an extremely capitalistic society, with the GMC having enormous amounts of power. The new senate



strengthened its power, its members also becoming very rich. It took decades for the UNF to properly stabilise, and gain complete control over the planets that were supposed to be in its territory. Monuments to imperial power were torn down, and rebels clashed with the new army on countless worlds.

Warfare had evolved from the time of the early empire. Gate assaults were becoming increasingly rare, and territorial expansion was less desired, as the focus of empires moved towards securing existing territories, and

extracting resources more efficiently from already controlled worlds. Power armour was becoming increasingly expensive to produce and maintain, and it was also becoming far less useful, as battles began to be fought in cities, and other environments with much cover, so heavy armour became less useful. The new senate of the UNF commissioned a new army. Made up of large numbers of light infantry carried into battle by armoured vehicles, and supported by new, robotic systems. It proved very effective in gaining control of rebellious worlds, and defending gates from enemy invaders. The military would eventually become a powerful force in the politics of the UNF, and a vicious competitor of the GMC. The ATL adopted similar tactics, although due to their beliefs, as well as limited access to resources, and technologies, they do not field any robots, and their vehicles are far simpler in design.

#### The Fate of Markaz

The planet which triggered the collapse of the Empire would come to play a significant role in the aftermath too. In its last breaths, the Empire tried to hang onto stability by vowing to obliterate the inhabitants. A three-week bombardment campaign was followed by one of the largest invasion forces in history, as the Empire tried to overwhelm Markaz through sheer force. The invasion was, eventually, successful: the main temple was sacked, the priests executed, and nearly everything else reduced to radioactive rubble. But as a piece of propaganda, the campaign was a disaster. The cost of the venture outraged the nobility, and the treatment of the populace sparked a fresh wave of uprisings across the Empire. Meanwhile, the planet itself had been ruined so badly, that the victorious soldiers who were given it to rule over could do exceedingly little with it, and so were themselves discontent.

Markaz was one of the first planets to be abandoned when the Empire started to collapse, and it was quick to be reclaimed by believers. Since then, it has become a religiously extremely important, but strategically weak planet in the ATL, being right on the border of the UNF. The invasion left the planet scarred beyond recognition, such that it is now a nearly lifeless husk, filled with radiation. The small population of humans and animals suffers from a wide variety of mutations, which they see as blessings or messages from God.

## The United Nations of Freedom

**“Status report for complex 27-A, timestamp: 11/56/208. Report commences: more strikes across advertising. Estimated cost of pay rise: -3%. Recommendation: removal of ringleaders (profiles attached), pay dock to protestors. Deployment of GMCC may be necessary. Estimated deployment costs: -1.4%. Summary: deployment = net profit.”**

The UNF is now the second largest single empire in the galaxy, occupying roughly a quarter of the original Empire’s territory, although it does frequently expand, just not at the rate that the Empire once did. Most planets in the UNF are highly urbanised and developed, with only the frontier worlds being less so. Unasca is still the capital, where the Senate sits. Every five years, a president is elected, whose power varies- some presidents are authoritative figures, whose personalities and ambitions can bring enormous success or ruin to the UNF, while others are weaker-willed, and act as little more than puppets for the Senate, and eventually, a scapegoat when things inevitably go wrong.

The GMC is, legally, the only company in the entire UNF, and controls production of every product, and service. It is illegal to work for, or own a business not owned by the GMC, although this does not of course stop people doing so, and even the inner planets of the UNF are full of back-alley private businesses, generally selling things not produced by the GMC. On the frontiers, the GMC has even less power, as it simply does not have the resources to meet the requirements of every single world, and so even many common items can only be bought from independent businesses there.

Nevertheless, the GMC remains enormously powerful and influential. It owns many entire planets across the UNF, and sections of many others. Indeed, on many planets, cities are split into UNF and GMC zones, regulations being different in each. The GMC also has its own private army and police force, known as the GMC Corps, or GMCC, which it uses to brutally protect its business interests. All standard military equipment used by the UNF is manufactured by the GMC.

The GMC is controlled by a board of directors, with sectorial, system, planetary, and regional managers beneath them. Apart from the military, other government employees, and the small number of families rich enough not to have to work (often through owning large shares in the GMC), almost every single citizen is employed by the GMC, almost exclusively in low-paid and menial factory work. Most of these people live in enormous hab-blocks, each containing thousands of people, squashed into tiny apartments. Often, each hab-block will have its own mini-society inside, with so-called “law enforcement” carried out by thugs who collect “taxes” in return for keeping order.

Real law enforcement in the UNF is carried out by the various police forces of each planet, although often this work is outsourced to the GMC, who will then make use

of GMCC troopers. Cyborg officers, engineered to be more resilient and obedient than normal officers, are also widely used, often made from recently deceased or badly wounded officers, as are large, military-grade robots when the situation calls for it. It is common for police forces (whoever their employers) to be extremely brutal, and it is rare for criminal cases to go all the way to a court, most often being settled on the streets. Gangs are also common in the UNF, often clashing with police, and each other, in violent bouts of warfare. Protests are also common, although participants put themselves at great risk, since their involvement will be noted on their government records, and demonstrations often end in bloodshed.

The economy of the UNF is a mystery to people not living in it, as well as many who do, since the majority of monetary circulation is just within the GMC itself: the company pays workers, who then use their pay to buy products and services from the same company. The single legal separate economic entity, and the only one of any major significance, is the government, so the only real trade is between the government, which can only grow through military conquest, and the GMC, although small amounts of trade do happen with organisations outside of the UNF. Even with these sources though, it is not really enough for actual economic growth, and the truth is that most signs of this are artificial, if not actual lies, and created to please less aware share holders.

### The Armies of the UNF

Each major area of UNF space has its own army- there are around fifty or so of these. Each army is split into planetary corps, as well as a reserve corps. Each planetary corps is assigned to its own planet, from the population of which its soldiers are drawn. These corps act as the garrison and defence of the planet, and may even act to aid police and intelligence units if needed. The reserve corps is not assigned to any one planet, although they may spend extended periods of time stationed on one. Otherwise, they move around the area, re-enforcing other corps, where more units are needed. The reserve corps is often split up, and spread across multiple planets.

When the army is mobilised, most of the soldiers of each corps will be sent off to the mustering point, and in large-scale battles, multiple corps will be deployed alongside each other. Each corps is further split into around 10 divisions, although this number can vary. Each division is assigned a number of support artillery, battle tanks, and is often accompanied by a number of support units such as engineers and medical staff. Each division is split into 12-15 brigades, which are themselves split into about a hundred platoons. A platoon consists of around three squads. A squad is composed of ten soldiers, although a platoon may also include weapons teams which consist of only about two or three soldiers manning heavy weapons. A platoon will also normally have enough vehicles to transport itself, but will rarely act independently unless fighting in very small scale battles. Platoons may be general-purpose, including a variety of troops and equipment, or may be specialised for certain types of

combat or situations, and multiple platoons may be grouped into companies or battalions.

Each army has its own insignia, colours, and traditions, although armour and uniforms may change colour to suit the environment. An army is tasked with defending and keeping order in its region of space, but parts of it, or sometimes the whole army may be mobilised to temporarily fight in a different area, to support other areas, or to take part in invasions.

The commander in chief of the army is the president, although most decisions are made by a council of generals. Due to the size of the UNF however, commanders of individual armies have a lot of independence, and often make decisions themselves. The Aerospace force has its own generals, who work together with the army generals, although they do not have as much influence, and are in practice generally subordinate to them.

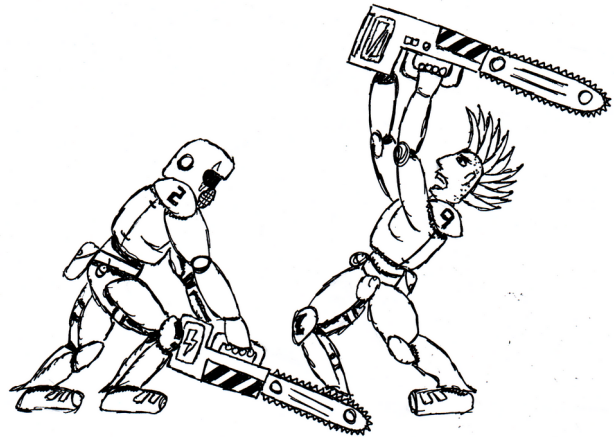
The Aerospace force is, in theory, centrally organised—that is, no part of it is tied to a specific place, as armies are. In practice however, sections of the Aerospace force are generally assigned to army units, and move along with them. The Aerospace force's biggest ships are the *Victory* and *Domination* class cruisers. Both are space ships of large size, incapable of atmospheric flight. Victory cruisers act as transports, able to carry around 500,000 troops, and able to land about 10-20,000 in a single wave. They also carry and land the ground vehicles of the army, as well as a number of fighter squadrons. Victory cruisers can also provide moderate bombardment support, and are capable of orbital combat.

Domination class cruisers are slightly smaller than their Victory equivalents, and carry considerably fewer troops and vehicles. These spaceships are designed primarily for combat and bombardment, being equipped with a variety of weapons for both ship-to-ship and ground combat. Domination cruisers are generally deployed only in support roles, and used as intimidation more than actual attack, since it is generally the aim of the UNF to capture territories, not obliterate them completely.

In addition to cruisers, the Aerospace force boasts a wide range of vehicles. Of these, some are capable only of space-based roles, while some are optimised for atmospheric tasks. Most however are dual-purpose, and are deployed from space, to descend down to a planet.

Space marines are the most fearsome soldiers of the UNF, but they do not fit into the structure of the UNF's armies very neatly. They technically belong to the Aerospace force, hence their name, since they deploy almost exclusively from flying vehicles, and specialise in orbital deployments, and zero-gravity combat, but once deployed, they align more closely with the ground army, and their insertions are coordinated with them. However, they are created and supplied by the intelligence arm, which has been known to programme extra objectives and missions into them, unbeknownst to the Aerospace Force and Army. They are thus a bit of a grey zone in logistics,

and many commanders will make their plans so that they do not have to rely on space marines, lest they show up late, in the wrong place, or worst: ignore their commands entirely.



The space marines themselves do not care much for strategies and plans, having been turned into little more than raging psychopaths by a steady diet of drugs and conditioning. Being turned into a space marine is a standard punishment for a variety of crimes in the UNF - the criminal is subjected to weeks of conditioning, until little of their original personality remains, and they are left with a mad desire for violence. Space marines are often suicidally brave, and enjoy tempting fate any way they can. It is normal to see the armour of marines painted in garish hues (often covered in expletives), as a big middle finger to the concept of camouflage. Marines often compete with each other over dangerous deployments, and will always pick the biggest, loudest, and most brutal weapons available. Casualty rates among marines are staggeringly high, but so are crime rates in the UNF, so these rates are considered acceptable. And many a victory has been won by the insanity of these warriors.

#### The Soron Expedition

An incident which has since been mostly forgotten by UNF leaders, as memories of the event are overshadowed by more pressing matters, the Soron Expedition was a small exploratory force sent to a planet just outside of the UNF's territory called Soron. Imperial maps had recorded it as a conquered territory, but no administrative records from the planet, or indeed any information about it could be found. This was not overly surprising as a large amount of data had been lost during the collapse of the Empire and the ensuing events, and a small force from the 5<sup>th</sup> Fooloonian corps was ordered to assess the planet's suitability for subjugation.

Three days before the expedition was scheduled to return, the gate connecting Soron to the UNF suddenly closed, leaving no way to contact the expedition. The gate would only open eight months later, when a single survivor stumbled through, gibbering and completely mad. Her claims of dead soldiers coming back to life, and strange creatures in the night were dismissed as hallucinations, and drone sweeps of the planet revealed

it was empty of life, with only a handful of small ruins within eight months' travel of the gate.

Soron was hastily marked as unimportant, as the Fooloonian army was suddenly mobilised to defend against an invasion by the neighbouring Haltian Conglomerate, and plans for a second expedition have been buried under paperwork for many years now.

## The Anti-Technology League

**“Lord God you who have made us in your image, give us the strength to fight for you. Lord God you who have given us our minds, let us not question you. Lord God, you who have given us our lives, let us die for you.”**

Larger in terms of territory and population than the UNF, the Anti-Technology League, or ATL, is the second remnant of the old Empire. It is however completely different, and follows radically different systems to both it, and the UNF.

During the collapse of the Empire, there was a desire among believers in the cult of Markaz for a nation of their own. The believers being scattered across the Empire however, a rallying point was needed. The planet Markaz was an obvious candidate, and many of the most devout pilgrims did indeed make their way there in what would come to be known as the Doomed Migration, since most of the pilgrims would soon perish to the hazardous conditions on the planet. The migration there did not therefore lead to a centralised leadership for the new religion, and for the rest of the life of the Empire, and the early days of the UNF, the cult would remain an underground religion, with believers persecuted with almost the same intensity as imperialists by the UNF.

It would be in the late days of the Civil War that a centralised leadership would actually emerge. An outpost of imperialists on the planet Abahan was overthrown in a coup led by Markazian officials, and the system was declared a safe haven and new homeland for all followers of the religion. This led to the second, much more successful, great migration, as millions of people moved from all over the scattered planets of the Empire of old to the Abahan system. Many pilgrims were young and fit, as well as spirited, and eager to build a new home. A disorganised new army was quickly assembled, and many neighbouring planets were quickly assimilated. At this stage, the leadership of this new nation had only a semblance of control over its population, and remained in power purely through popular support. The religion itself was scattered and full of contradictions, with the only figures of authority being thousands of minor priests with mere handfuls of followers, all preaching different, if at this stage compatible, doctrines.

The nation was kept together by a common desire for stability, and it survived by being small and far enough from any other major powers to be considered a threat. It also helped that the primary aim of the Markazians was to provide living space and food for their rapidly growing population, and so most planets they attacked were poor in deposits of minerals and precious resources. But this state of affairs could not last, and as their size grew, both independent planets and smaller empires started to get more aggressive. In this period, the poor defences and equipment available to the Markazians meant thousands perished in raids and border wars. With little to no resources at their disposal, the government, made up of the original officials who had made the declaration so

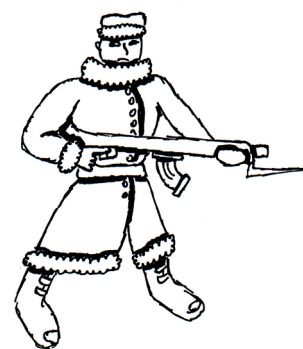
long ago, convened a meeting of hundreds of the most influential priests and preachers.

This first Synod as it would come to be known, was viewed with pessimism and distrust by many. The religion was so fractured that it was impossible to fairly represent all the beliefs of the people, and most of the priests present were simply those for whom it was convenient to make the journey. On the other hand, even like this there were many hundreds, and it was thought impossible that they would come to any form of agreement.

For months, matters of religion were debated. Many members left in anger, and it seemed the synod would fail. But then a preacher by the name of Mark Vandaea started to gain influence. What Vandaea argued was that matters like holy days, ritual, and theological theory should be put aside, and that all believers should unite to defend their territory. This was not a particularly radical idea- many already agreed. What gave Vandaea's arguments traction was that he went further, and argued that defence would not be enough, and that Markazians would only be safe when Markaz itself was captured into the fold. There, he preached, all the answers would be revealed, and unity would be achieved by the word of God himself.

Slowly, Vandaea won over the remaining members of the Synod, and with huge enthusiasm from the people, a jihad was declared to reclaim Markaz. Logistically, the war was a catastrophe. Armies were poorly trained, if trained at all, made up mostly of enthusiastic volunteers, and were equipped even worse.

Markaz was located dozens of gates away, and was held by the UNF. The planet itself had only the vaguest semblance of defences, or indeed infrastructure of any kind, but the surrounding planets were heavily defended, and the Jihad became a war of attrition in which millions of faithful perished.



In his last sermon to the people, Vandaea urged a retreat, and renewed offensive only once the proper preparations had been made, but this was not widely circulated, and Vandaea himself disappeared soon after. Much of his later writings would never be published openly, and the original copies are now locked away in the holy vaults. The jihad continued, and through millions of sacrifices, the UNF was pushed back planet by planet. The invasion of Markaz itself, hailed in sermons and literature as the climax of the holy war, was actually just a simple matter of disabling a handful of old automatic defence systems that had been deemed too antiquated to warrant removal to another UNF planet.

But once Markaz had been captured, unity did not follow. The planet was found to be a nuclear wasteland, inhabited

only by gibbering mutants, and filled with empty ruins. Little of the invasion force could be persuaded to stay on the planet for extensive exploration, and the synod quickly disintegrated into bickering again. The only reason forces were not pushed back at this point, was that the UNF was distracted by a war against the Sunga league, and Markaz was deemed a low priority.

### The Church of Alkhaliq

Only a few hundred of the most devout soldiers stayed on Markaz, their health quickly deteriorating under the conditions, and many dying daily. The priest leading them, a man whose name has since been lost, preached a march into the irradiated desert, declaring that God would protect the worthy. Most of the soldiers were too ill to make the journey by this point, and they stayed behind in the relative safety of the ruin complexes, which provided a measure of protection from the radiation. All but one of the group who marched out would perish, succumbing to radiation poisoning one by one. The man who returned to the survivors in the ruins claimed to have been called Gough Hildor, although none of his comrades recognised him.

He wore black armour that covered every part of his body, his face hidden by the smooth mask of the helmet. He told of the march out into the desert, and how everyone had perished until he was the only one left. And crawling forward, racked in pain, God had spoken to him, revealing to him the path to the old temple of the original Markazians, where he had given himself completely to God. Now, he claimed, he was no longer a man, but a vessel for God's power, his will made manifest. No one he spoke to doubted this, for he spoke with an other-worldly authority, and his mere presence awed all present. It is said that all the suffering survivors were healed of their afflictions, and were able to walk in the desert unharmed. Soon Hildor, now calling himself simply the Yad Alkhaliq, or Hand of God, led his followers through the gate, back to the other planets of the Markazians.

Word spread of the Hand, and many flocked to see him. Many sects refused to acknowledge his divinity, but all who met him were at once convinced. Eventually, some out of genuine belief, others out of political shrewdness, the surviving members of the Synod declared him to be true, and his word to be holy. As time passed, all Markazians came to follow the Hand, even if not all were convinced he was real, and the religion finally had a strong, powerful leader.

During the time of the first Hand, the foundations of what is now the ATL would be formed. Later scripture credits all reforms to the Hand himself, but most outsider experts agree that most if not all of them were probably introduced by other officials. What is definite is that the Hand was an effective leader, whose authority saved the fledgeling nation in its time of need. During this time, the Synod was formalised as the main ruling body, and planets were organised better, with tithes being paid to the Synod, which remained located on Abahan, although Markaz was still the spiritual centre of the religion. From

all of this, the Church of Alkhaliq would be formed, with the Hand as its head, the Synod as the main administrative body, and countless orders of priests below them. The Hand also took on twelve of the most faithful soldiers who had been with him on Markaz, who would become his disciples- his most trusted confidants and representatives.

The first Hand predicted his own death four years before it happened, down to the exact day, and made careful preparations for it. It was explained that the "death" in this case was merely the mortal shell of the human he had once been expiring, but the foremost disciple would take his place, giving up their own personality to be filled by the will of God, just like the first Hand had done. When the day came, the ceremony was performed on Markaz, with only the disciples present. The body of the first Hand was never seen by anyone but them, and the rest of the disciples were also never seen again. When the new Hand emerged from the holy desert after three days, there were celebrations all around the Church's territory.

The second Hand would continue to act in much the same way as the first, taking on twelve disciples, and committing his meditations to paper, continuing the Kitab Alkhaliq, begun by his predecessor. But after the second Hand's death, things changed. Shortly after donning the black armour, the third hand announced he would be retreating to the depths of the desert to meditate on God's will for a long time. The people saw this as a perfectly natural course of action, such decisions being common among devout believers. But the members of the Synod recognised the political instability the Hand's absence would cause. Some saw it as an opportunity to increase their own status and influence, a chance to suppress rival sects, and promote their own.

The next decade would see a silent, but brutal power struggle among the upper echelons of the Church. As the years passed, new decrees were announced, limiting, and eventually banning the creation of new sects, and suppressing smaller, existing ones. The Hand, thought to be aware of these events, stayed in isolation. It was also during this time that the UNF renewed its war on the Church, having annihilated the Sunga League after a brutally long campaign. This war would not really lead to any major shift in the balance of power, but for the Church, it was a massive drain on resources, and Synod voted to increase the import of robotic systems and advanced computers to both civilian and military sectors to increase efficiency. The general population of the Church, being used to leading simple lives, distrusted these new machines, and many lower-ranking priests voiced their distaste at these changes. Many of them were soon never heard from again.

It was at this point that the third Hand re-emerged to once again directly run the Church. In his first sermon, later preserved in the book of the third Hand, he denounced the use of "thinking machines", explaining that God had created humans as perfect beings, and that any imitations of or claims to have improved upon his work was heresy. The senior members of the Synod, taken by surprise at

this announcement, rushed to put the blame for the recent influx of technology on anyone else, but the Hand was prepared. Those responsible were burnt alive after having their sins personally forgiven by the Hand himself. After this, the Hand organised a new Synod, picked from lower ranking members of the Church, but also took away much of its administrative functions, instead forming a new, separate government that was elected by the people. Groups of planets chose representatives, and these would sit in a council to decide on military and economic matters, while it was the Synod's role to interpret the teachings of the Hands, relay these teachings to the people, and administer justice based on religious law.

To emphasise the importance of his teachings, the Hand named the new system the Anti-Technology League. The Church still existed, headed by the Synod, but it was no longer the governing body over the people, who were now ruled instead by the League. The third Hand would die soon after these reforms were finished, in the same manner as his predecessors.

### The Question of Mutants

It was in the time of the eighth Hand that Simioids began to appear in the lower middle sector in large numbers. They were not new to the area, small numbers having arrived there before, but what came now were not individuals, but raiding parties and invasion forces. The ones that reached the ATL were fairly small groups, and not nearly as dangerous as those fought by the UNF, at least initially. The ATL was quite able to repel these initial attacks, and militarily, the League was secure. But the increasing numbers of Simioids raised an important theological question for many: should they be considered human?

After all, the basis for the Church's teachings centred around the idea that humans were the ultimate and perfect creations of God, and it was common for soldiers to pray for the souls of enemy combatants, and give them proper burial rites where possible, since though misguided, they were still fellow humans. The eighth Hand would give a seemingly clear answer to this, in the "Sermon on Humanity", in which it was clearly explained that Simioids were no longer human, and thus were not favoured by God.

This sermon would, in retrospect be very politically useful to the ATL, since when the second wave of Simioid invasions arrived in the lower middle sector, they primarily attacked ATL planets, and the populations fought with a hatred and ferocity that gave them great strength against these foes. On some planets where UNF and ATL forces allied against the Simioid hordes, many UNF soldiers would vividly remember the mad conviction with which their ATL counterparts fought, gladdened and unsettled in equal measure.

But some in the Synod saw this as an opportunity to increase their own power. Since the devastation of Markaz, there had remained there a small population of humans, wracked by mutations, often grotesque to look at

and physically weak. Since the planet's conquest, these locals had been seen as blessed by God, and revered as holy creatures, who were closer to him. Some migrated to other planets and started families, and as the generations had passed, their descendants, though still clearly marked by their heritage, were better able to fit into society. Such was the influence of these "touched" that some had even gotten into the Synod, something many of their fellow members resented.

And so following the decree on Humanity, and the renewed absence of the Hand, some started preaching an interpretation of this decree that argued the touched were also no longer human. This was not universally accepted by the population, but in many communities, people turned on them, and widespread persecution began, often aided by church authorities. More importantly for the members of the Synod, it gave them a way to get rid of rivals, and soon even members who had no touched ancestry were being accused, and burnt at the stake.

This would come to an end when the Hand re-emerged, and declared the touched were in fact holy, but even with a second purge of the Synod carried out, the damage had been done, and on many ATL worlds, the touched are still a shunned and persecuted people.

### The ATL Today

With an aggressively expansionist (and to planets who join willingly, welcoming) policy, the ATL has grown to a huge size, and has an enormous population. However, most worlds are poor in resources, and due to a lack of advanced technology, those resources are not well exploited. Most people live simple, short lives with bad infrastructure. They are kept under control by the church, which has presence everywhere. Every individual professes to believe, and the majority really do, with most families owning a set of the books of the Hands: the ever expanding holy texts of the Church containing the collected teachings of each Hand.

The beliefs of people in the ATL, and the teachings of the Church now have little to do with the original beliefs of the Markazians from so long ago, although they are revered as the founders of the religion, despite having had nothing to do with it. The Church is extremely bureaucratic and hierarchical, and there are constant power struggles in the upper echelons.

The Hands themselves vary, with some being relatively active, and strong leaders, while others are reclusive, and let the Synod be more independent. The true nature of the Hands is a matter of great debate by non-believers, but the truth may never be known.

The ATL is almost constantly at war, with most troops-janniserries- being poorly equipped and trained, but zealous and available in large numbers. Purification squads support army units, and are raised by the Church rather than the government. The Asliha likewise belong to the Church, although they are not answerable to common priests, as they are reclusive warrior-monks, who only

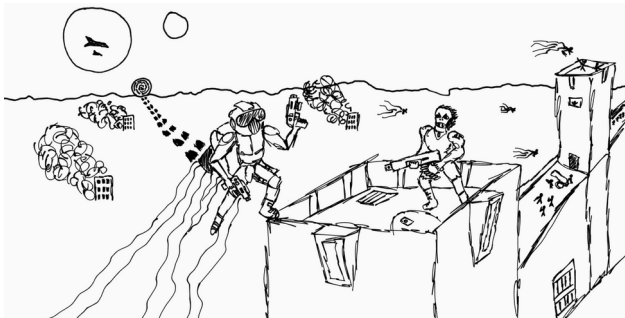
join armies when they feel called by God to do so themselves. They are led by senior Asliha, called Silah, although they lead primarily by example, as it is believed each warrior has their own path to take. Armies invariably carry large numbers of religious icons and holy relics into battle, and are led by battle priests who pray and chant hymns as much as they strategise and command troops.

Individual soldiers, squads, and sometimes even entire armies can be sentenced to flagellation if they do not demonstrate proper obedience or spirit. Soldiers serving as flagellants undergo hours of conditioning and purifying torture by priests to turn them mad zealots who rush at the enemy in battle, with no regard for their safety. On the rare occasion that a flagellant survives a battle or campaign, they are usually declared absolved of their sins, and re-integrated into normal army units, although few are lucky enough to be so favoured by God.

## The Wild Sector

**“No, don’t step there – that would have taken your leg off. Oh and don’t look into that for too long – you’ll go funny in the head. No, don’t pull that lever there... oh never mind.”**

Most of the galaxy is what is known as the wild sector. Although most planets in the gate system have at one point or another in their history been inhabited by humans, most such colonies died out and disappeared during the great closing. The wild sector is not uninhabited: many peoples make their home in this sector, but large areas of it are devoid of human life, or indeed life in general. Many planets are no longer capable of supporting life at all, while others have become deadly environments. Only small empires and societies exist in the wild sector, and most of these do not last long. It is a lawless sector where outcasts, pirates, mutants, and horrors from the depths of history make their home. It is a place which explorers brave to uncover ancient technology and secrets, and a place many fear as the source of countless raiding parties.



The ruins and remains of countless ancient societies can be found on the planets of the wild sector, from the old age of humanity, to the time of the Great Closing, and even since the re-opening of the gates. These ruins of course hold much information about the cultures and histories of their builders, but the motivation of most people who explore them is the possibility of finding ancient technology of great power, which can either be put to good use, or sold on for great profit.

### The Tablets of Urk-Hagar

The planet of Urk-Hagar was found decades ago in the Wild Sector as a lifeless husk full of ruins. Ancient, corroded computer systems were found in plenty, but no information could be retrieved from them. However, millions of metal tablets, covered in microscopic inscriptions, have also been found, and it has been speculated that the civilisation of the planet recorded all their knowledge on these in case of just such an eventuality, where their computers failed. The tablets are now scattered all over the galaxy in the collections of hundreds of states and private collectors, and the few sections which have thus far been translated reveal chemical formulae of a very advanced nature.

The study of Urk-Hagar tablets suffered a terrible

tragedy in 251, Psoxorian reckoning, when during the Psoxorian uprising, thousands of tablets were destroyed, their information lost forever. Across the galaxy, a small number of researchers continue to work on the tablets, slowly revealing more information about the civilisation that made them, and brave explorers continue to delve into the planet’s depths in an effort to uncover more.

## The Simioids

**“Kommo’s clan? Oh they’re a right mean bunch – you can’t play digi-cards with them without losing a finger or two! But if you can afford their prices... well, they’ll deal with any problems you have for sure.”**

During the great closing, a great many terrible and tragic events took place, most of which have since been long forgotten. But perhaps the strangest, and most impactful on the future of the rest of the galaxy, was the strange case of the planet Simius. Much like the majority of planets in the gate system, Simius had two functional gates, and a breathable atmosphere, and was, like all planets of this kind, colonised by humans. But during the great closing, the planet became trapped in a mysterious temporal bubble that caused the planet to experience far more time than the rest of the galaxy. No one knows what caused this phenomenon: some say it was caused by the gates, though they cannot explain why this didn’t happen elsewhere, while others maintain it was some grand experiment by the humanity of old which went horribly wrong. Whatever the case, it had an enormous impact.

As on many such planets, society on Simius collapsed, as supplies of materials and expertise were cut off. The inhabitants developed to a more and more technologically primitive society as the generations went on. This was the same as on many other worlds, but because of the time distortions, it continued for much longer. Never a very mineral-rich, or pleasant world, Simius quickly became nearly inhospitable, destroying any last traces of human society. The people meanwhile forgot everything of their past, and the small number who remained became hunter-gatherers, using stone tools, and fighting daily to stay alive. But the climate worsened even more, potentially due to industry from the past, and the people’s rugged lifestyle wasn’t enough to keep them alive.

Evolution took over, and as the generations passed, the people grew long fur, sharp claws, and thicker muscles. Their forearms became longer, their skulls thicker. As the humans evolved so did the other animals on the planet, each becoming more and more deadly. The people remained the apex predator because they evolved to be more resilient, faster, and stronger in turn. It is estimated around ten million years passed in total for the planet Simius, during which the creatures now known as simioids developed from their human ancestors.

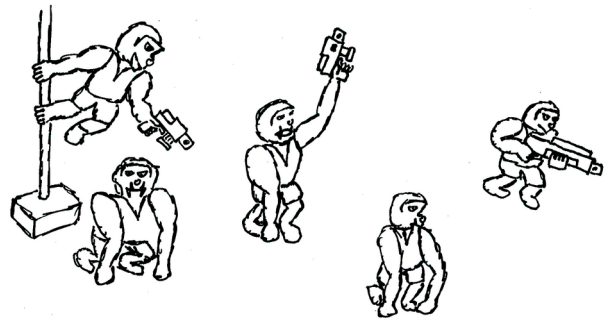
When the gates re-opened, the simioids were slow to realise their significance, but the curious groups that did go through, quickly went through more, and within a generation, had colonised many neighbouring worlds. Being situated in the wild sector, the simioids faced little to no organised efforts against them, fighting plenty of skirmishes against humans, but no large scale wars. Over time, simioids had spread to hundreds of planets, sometimes out-competing the human population, sometimes co-existing with them.

The creatures proved extremely resilient to harsh climates and conditions, and many planets colonised exclusively

by simioids were just such worlds. In these circumstances, simioids remained little more than wild animals, living in caves, with no understanding of even basic metal-working. However, on worlds where they came into contact with humans, they proved quick to learn languages, and skills, mastering the use of technologies, and able to integrate themselves into human societies, or otherwise take the technologies, and use them to overpower and displace human populations.

Simioid communities on different planets vary wildly, with some living very primitive lives, worshipping idols and gods, while others work any jobs humans might. Their natural strength and toughness makes them ideal mercenaries, labourers, and even engineers, but they are also fully capable of any other task humans might be. Although on many worlds the two species do co-exist, there are almost always still tensions between them, and it is not uncommon for fights to break out regularly.

In many cases, the human population will have a deep distrust or even hatred of Simioids, and there are many communities around the galaxy where they are not welcome. Simioids generally like to live with their own kind, forming separate communities when they live alongside humans.



Simioids generally live in tight-knit communities, where members of the community help each other out with day to day tasks. Simioid diets consist of large amounts of meat and other protein, so animal farming is a popular occupation, as is hunting where feasible. Communities generally police themselves, and there is little need for any central authority, although when called to war, the strongest Simioid in the group will assume command, often advised and supported by the eldest and wisest members.

There have been many occasions since the great re-opening when huge numbers of Simioids have banded together to ravage human-controlled areas, until their forces are eventually scattered and dissipate. It is always possible to find logical (if, to humans at least, not always very reasonable) motives for individual Simioid leaders and soldiers to fight in these wars, but there are many who believe there is a more mysterious, sinister reason for this behaviour, which causes not just individual communities, but many planets’ worth of completely unconnected Simioids to go on the warpath at the same time. Examples of such uprisings include the war which caused the Alliance to abandon its new colonies in the early re-opening, as well as the Great Invasion that ravaged the

UNF and ATL less than a century after the fall of the Empire, and brought Simioids to the lower middle sector in large numbers for the first time.

Outside of such terrible occasions, simioids can still be found fighting frequently. Many sell their services as mercenaries to anyone able to pay, be they human or not, while others will fight for their chieftains to defend their homes, or expand their territories. Simioids can be found fighting each other frequently, in just the same way that humans fight amongst themselves.

Although many simioids live on human worlds, the majority of them still inhabit the worlds of the Wild sector, often on especially harsh worlds. Many of the terrifying monsters that evolved alongside the simioids on their home planet, such as the Tyranivore, or Phagomole have since been tamed and exported in large numbers by simioids to other worlds, where they make fearsome mounts and pets.

Simioid armies are often a ramshackle affair, although some are more professional than others. An army will generally consist of whatever troops and equipment its leader can muster, and leaders are picked based on who is the strongest. There are many races of Simioids that evolved slightly differently back on Simius, or have developed differently since. The most common sub-species is larger and tougher than an average human, and extremely strong, and these make excellent soldiers when they can be convinced to work together. Smaller, more agile sub-species, often referred to as grunts in armies, make great engineers and guerrilla troops due to their dexterity.

There is also a third type of Simioid, who are referred to as aberrations, “mad ones”, “weird lads”, and a whole host of similar names. These are not a sub-species as such, instead, every generation of Simioids will produce some aberrations- simioids whose minds are not right, and cannot be taught to take part in normal society. In addition to the mental differences, such creatures will also grow larger than their relatives, and sport bigger claws and teeth. Aberrations are generally seen as a nuisance by simioids in times of peace, but in battle, they are cajoled into charging the enemy in large packs, their ferocity terrifying as well as deadly, and their apparent disregard for pain and injury, as well as natural toughness helping them to survive long enough to get to the enemy lines.

Why aberrations appear is not known, but it is a consistent fact at least some will be born alongside their “normal” siblings. When abandoned by their communities, aberrations will live as wild animals, with no interest in the comforts and ways of either human or simioid civilisation.

Other simioids meanwhile will grow to huge sizes without any of the mental characteristics of aberrations, and these are known as brutes. Although generally slower and less intelligent, brutes still possess enough of their mental faculties, to contribute to society, and are often well

respected and loved by their communities as their great strength is a huge asset in times of both peace and war.

## The Cyber Nomads

**“The cursed flesh must be removed. I must be perfect.  
The cursed flesh must be removed. I must be perfect.  
The c...ed fle.. must be r...ved. I... ..moved... ..rfect.”**

In the depths of humanity's long history, there are many things best left undiscovered. Atrocities, crimes, and areas of science best left alone are all chapters of the past. Veteran explorers in the wild sector know when to leave an artefact alone, and when an abandoned ruin is not worth going into. But sometimes the horrors of the past come of their own accord.

Humanity's past is long indeed, and there is much that has been forgotten. From the depths of time before the great closing, to the long centuries of silence during it, the histories of hundreds of planets and peoples is a complete mystery. There emerge from time to time therefore, armies from the wild sector wielding strange weapons, and with customs and languages never seen before. Sometimes, such armies have some success, overwhelming defences, and raiding boundary outposts. But they are always defeated eventually by their better-supplied victims, and are little more than a nuisance in the grand scheme of things. But there is one group of raiders who inspire terror throughout the galaxy, and can never be stopped. These are the cyber-nomads: hideous creatures with no concept of mercy or fairness. When they descend on a planet, the defences will be annihilated, cities reduced to rubble, and the population slaughtered or taken away.

No one knows how or where the Cyber Nomads started: perhaps they began during the chaos and anarchy of the great closing. Perhaps they are older: the remnants of experiments or weapons from the old days of humanity. As their name suggests, they are a nomadic race of cyborgs, travelling from gate to gate, raiding settlements in the vicinity. They raid and scavenge for technology and resources, like any other army, but what is truly disturbing is that the cyber nomads also take a harvest of living people when they launch their attacks. For their numbers decline after each battle, and even the best preserved flesh will eventually rot.

Some of these unfortunate victims will be dissected for parts, used to repair warriors, treated as no more than a box of spare parts. The even more unfortunate will be granted the “honour” of joining the cyber nomads, being given augmentations and implants, until they are driven utterly insane by the pain, and any vestige of their original personality has been extinguished, replaced by a depraved, chattering abomination. Such creatures are known as “sinners of the flesh”, since despite their augmentations, they are still mostly creatures of flesh and blood, and it is not until they are converted even further into more machine than man that they will become known as “saints” or “angels”.

The cyber nomads do have a culture, and even a religion of sorts, but very little has been learned of it, for on the rare occasions that it is possible to interrogate one of

them, the garbled mess of binary code that they speak in is incredibly difficult to interpret. Essentially, what they seek is not territory, land, or knowledge. It is simply beauty. Their minds are so twisted, that they see human flesh as a tainted, unclean thing, that needs to be replaced with metal and plastic. Their goal therefore is to make themselves perfect- by augmenting themselves to the point they are no longer human. But they also extend this goal to freeing other humans of their cursed flesh, thus they consider their captives to be privileged, and the surgeries performed on them to be acts of kindness, letting them take their first steps towards perfection.

Cyber Nomads are organised into clans, comprised of anything from a few dozen to thousands of members. These are led by an individual designated as “controller” who gains complete control over the other members of the clan. Who this controller is though matters little, as cyber nomads have little to no individuality, and their goals always align. If the controller is damaged beyond repair, a new individual will assume the role, being automatically granted their powers through a download of the previous controller's data. Under the controller, there are a number of other individuals, with more autonomy than average. Although a wide variety of types exist, the most common ones on the battlefield are prophets and saviours.



Prophets are leader units built for battle, generally leading units of saints, and equipped with heavy armour plating and weapons. They are programmed to be methodical, and tactically minded, working out the optimal battle strategies to achieve the aims of the controller. They are also fierce opponents in combat, relentless and merciless. Saviours meanwhile are battlefield surgeons and technicians (there is little difference between the two for the cyber nomads). It is their job to repair and heal damaged units, but also to recruit new followers. They do this through a combination of drug-injections, and quick brain implants, that turn soldiers into mindless automatons, slaves to the will of their saviour. For such unfortunate victims, this is the first step to becoming a sinner of the flesh- if they survive the battle, the saviour will perform their first surgeries and give them their first prosthetics soon after, and their minds will be moulded to fit the cyber nomad cause.

Within clans, it is also common to find various cults, who serve the controller like everyone else, but seem to

believe in slightly different ideas of what true beauty is to their fellow nomads. The most common cult is the sound-cult, which instead of seeking perfection through even more augmentations seems to focus on achieving the perfect sound. The warriors of these cults use sonic weapons, and mod themselves with dozens of speakers and amplifiers to better experiment and get closer to the perfection they seek. The “music” they produce is to human ears an unbearable, ear-splitting cacophony, but these cults take great pride in their work. How cults such as these fit into the broader clans, and indeed what they actually are is impossible to tell, since these warriors are even harder to interrogate than normal nomads.

Some believe the Cyber-Nomads seek a higher goal, and all their attacks and raids are part of some kind of grand strategy that will one day be revealed to the rest of the galaxy. Others argue that despite their professed machine-like logic, there is in fact no sense to the Nomads at all, and their actions are driven entirely by the ravings of the maddened remains of their humanity, only slightly tempered by their computer brains. Whatever the truth, the Cyber-Nomads never seem to be disappear entirely, and always return in greater numbers. Where they originate from, and what drives them as a people may never be known, but it seems these terrifying monsters may never be wiped out entirely.