

INTRODUCTION
WELCOME TO INFINITY

Infinity is epic science fiction. The Second Great Space Race swept humanity out among the stars. We have emerged from the womb of our homeworld and scattered ourselves across the galaxy, only to find ourselves balanced on the brink. Society has fractured into powerful factions sharing a tense truce in the wake of colonial wars. Beneath the delicate peace they've wrought, a seething turmoil of covert operations constantly test interstellar relations. Direct action military operations explode in flash conflicts. Remote dronbots dart between bioengineered super-soldiers. Hackers dance through the invisible tactical maelstrom of hellfire military cybersystems. Titanic TAGs — Tactical Armoured Gears — tower above infantry wearing military-grade exoskeletons.

Infinity is a wonderland of technological marvels. The quantronics revolution remodelled a society which was already heavily dependent on its electronics. Humanity now lives in a true symbiosis between tool and toolmaker. Pervasive domotics have automated virtually every aspect of modern life. Comlogs implanted into the forearm provide a link to local holoprojectors, mesh nets, and the interstellar Maya network. Augmented reality technologies mean that the physical world is no longer the limit of the human experience. Social

clouds broadcast by every individual — made up of meme-tags and patina cues — allow simultaneous physical and digital interactions between people, rooms, buildings, streets, and even entire communities.

Infinity is an adventure on the frontiers of space. Alien warriors seek victory on the battlefields of broken worlds. Space pirates cruise through the shattered planetoids of Human Edge. Scientist adventurers delve the oceans of Varuna. Mysterious assassins dance among the desert sands of Bourak. Deep in the jungle battlefields war correspondents dash amidst gunfire and bounty hunters pursue rogue AIs through the shadowy corridors of Nomad motherships.

Infinity is the destiny of mankind. Our bodies are pushed to the transhuman cusp through bioengineering and cybertechnology. Our memories are recorded in quantronic Cubes and hosted in artificial Lhost bodies. The creation of ALEPH, humanity's first true Artificial Intelligence, is an enigma which promises either the great hope of human civilization, its greatest existential crisis, or both. And, from beyond the borders of our space, the alien Combined Army has invaded, threatening to destroy everything which we have built.


ARTWORK IN PROGRESS

Three key technologies have propelled mankind into the vast voids of the Milky Way, expanding the scope and power of the Human Sphere while transforming the very definition of humanity in their wake: The discovery of wormholes and their transformation into gateways to other solar systems. The discovery of neomaterials and the quantronics revolution they unleashed. And the discovery of Silk, which has revolutionized biotechnology and the meaning of what it is to be human.

THE GATEWAY TO THE STARS

Following the discovery of GA6037283, the first viable wormhole, as its turbulence tore through the misty outer reaches of the rings of Saturn in the early 21st century there was a general upheaval in the academic halls of physics. The unique and unanticipated properties of the wormhole, as observed by the rapidly retasked Cassandra probe, were radically inconsistent with the so-called "Standard+ Model" of particle physics which had become the accepted view of reality over the previous twenty or thirty years. As the Brazilian physicist Leandro Rocha famously remarked, "The storm around Saturn was Einstein's guillotine. It lopped the head off of physics."

Saturn's Storm raged for ten years before the Sorel sisters — Cécile and Émeline — realized that within the spatial topography of the wormhole it was possible to derive a partial theory of quantum gravity based around what would later become known as Sorel fields. More importantly, they were able to hypothesize how these fields could be manipulated in order to "smooth" the unstable topography of the wormhole.

Without Sorel field manipulators, ships encountering one end of a wormhole would simultaneously become refracted throughout the total volume of the wormhole and tidal forces would rip the vessel apart into degenerate matter. But with a field manipulator, the wormhole could be contained and stabilized, allowing for safe passage. As Cécile Sorel would later commemorate it while receiving the Nobel Prize with her sister, the wormhole had been transformed from a violent enigma into a Gateway to the Stars.

By this time several other wormholes had been found in the outer reaches of the solar system. The earliest Sorel manipulators only allowed for the transit of small probes (followed by short bursts of information before the field channel collapsed), but these probes were diligently sent through the wormholes, giving mankind their first close-up peek at alien star systems.

As the first reports from the probes captivated the solar system, new technology was granting superior control over the Sorel fields. The larger field channels they created raised the possibility of sending manned ships through the 'holes. The result was Project DAWN: A joint effort between NASA, the European Space Agency, and the Russian Cosmonautical Agency to establish an extrasolar colony. The early Lapérouse probe had already identified the system on the far side of Saturn's Storm as Delta-Pavonis, and, using the new Sorel field manipulators, Project DAWN launched Lewis & Clark, a pair of probes designed to survey the system and ascertain the potential for terraforming.

The biophysical reports were even more promising than had been hoped: The fourth planet of the system was actually capable of supporting human life. Named Dawn, this planet became a symbol for the dawning of a new age for Humanity. Huge colony ships were constructed and colonists were recruited from across the European Union, United States, and Russia.

Sadly, however, Project DAWN ended in tragedy. During the wormhole transit of the Aurora, the second colony ship sent to Delta-Pavonis, there was a catastrophic failure of the ship's field manipulators. Not only did the ship's channel rupture (almost certainly resulting in the instant death of everyone onboard), but the entire wormhole collapsed and vanished. Saturn's Storm had at last been calmed, and the entire human race mourned its loss.

For most of the world, the failure of Project DAWN clearly spelled the end of humanity's extrasolar ambitions. The rising superpower of PanOceania, however, saw opportunity. Under the auspices of the Cretan Enterprise, perhaps the greatest of the PanOceanic empresas, a team of military physicists and engineers created a theoretical breakthrough: Instead of directly manipulating the Sorel fields at the mouth of the wormhole, they could use revolutionary quantronic nanomachinery to create an energy lens near the wormhole that would bring it into "focus". The result was the Minotaur Motor.

On the cusp of the 22nd century, PanOceania launched the Mandella. Powered by the Minotaur Experimental Compact Model Series 1 and built by Giffard Industrial Motors, the Mandella was the first manned vessel to use a Minotaur Motor. Punching through a trans-Plutonian 'hole, the Mandella discovered the lush and vibrant world which would become known as Neoterra, the future heart of humanity.

The fuse of the new space race had been lit.

THE HUMAN SPHERE

Earth: The cradle of Humanity. A place of natural and cultural treasures. The cities here are full of history, but sparsely inhabited as a result of the Star Tide. The Sol System in general, however, remains more highly developed than any other system of the Human Sphere.

Neoterra: The first system to be discovered and colonised by PanOceanian explorers, Neoterra is now the capital of PanOceania and the seat of the Christian Church. It is home to the most important technology companies of the Sphere and is a daily destination for business travellers and tourists alike.

Acontecimento: PanOceania's breadbasket and the second planet to be added to the Sphere (not counting Dawn), Acontecimento saw massive colonisation by Latinos. Famous for its *garotas*, particularly the spectacular women from the city of Portobelo, Acontecimento is a planet of contrasts. Endless crop fields and pastures alternate with vast, sprawling factory compounds that meet most of the agricultural and industrial needs of PanOceania. Acontecimento also has one of the largest Natural Parks in the Sphere, the Great Arboreal Reserve, the last remnant of the planet's original biome.

Varuna: The ocean planet. The fourth extra-terrestrial planet found and the first populated with a semi-intelligent native species, the amphibian Helots. Home to the water gods, Varuna is a planet of small islands and soil is scarce. Visitors will be amazed by the sea platforms, subaquatic buildings, and artificial islands. Varuna harnesses the full potential of its oceans in the form of biotechnological research and sea factories and farms that employ numerous Helots. The quiet charm of the planet is disrupted, however, by the violent acts of Libertos, a group of Helot insurgents.

Shentang and Yutang: Two tidally-locked planets within the habitable zone of their star, first discovered and claimed by Yu Jing as they struggled to catch up with PanOceania's deep space capabilities. The two planets were colonised at a rapid pace and Yutang now serves as the capital of Yu Jing.

Bourak: A harsh world dominated by deserts, discovered by the prophets of Haqqislam and named after the Prophet's Horse. In struggling to master its harsh realities, the Bourak Academy of Planetology has become the leading authority on terraforming technologies. Their goal is to transform their sun-blasted world into the gardens of Al-Andalus, or of lost Nineveh and Babylon. But that reality lies far in the future.

Concilium: Claimed by O-12, the international and pan-planetary organization which theoretically has ultimate jurisdiction over the totality of the Human Sphere, Concilium is lightly populated. However, it is also home to the O-12 Senate and the various O-12 bureau headquarters.

Svalarheima: Discovered by PanOceania, Svalarheima has become a snowball of discord. It is so distant from its star that freezing

temperatures make life nigh impossible save between its tropics. Despite its extreme climate, Svalarheima is coveted due to its abundance of resources, particularly Teseum. During its early settlement, despite PanOceania's initial claim, Yu Jing established a competing colony here. PanOceania now controls roughly two-thirds of the planet and Yu Jing one-third. Svalarheima is not a popular tourist destination due to its drab, snow-covered landscapes, its functional, industrial-looking towns, and its status as a contested land always on the brink of an open confrontation between superpowers.

Human Edge: Also referred to as the Edge of Humanity, this shattered system of asteroids and gas giants orbits at the furthest reaches of human exploration. Human Edge is studded with zero-g factories, deep space bases, and small orbital fortresses laying claim to the rich resources which have whetted the mining appetite of every power and corporation in the Sphere.

Paradiso: The emerald jungle. When it was discovered, Paradiso was almost immediately fiercely contested between the Great Powers, becoming a triggering point for the NeoColonial Wars. Its wounds had scarcely had time to heal when the Combined Army invaded, turning its jungles into an endless battlefield and the testing ground of humanity.

Dawn: Nearly two centuries after the Project DAWN colony had been lost, it was rediscovered by the PanOceanian scout ship *POS Nirriti* and, much to the surprise of the rest of the Human Sphere, the colonists had survived and even thrived. A conservative people, driven behind defensive walls by the assaults of the native Antipodes, the Ariadnans now strive to stave off the iconoclastic assaults of the advanced societies they have fallen out of step with.

THE QUANTRONICS REVOLUTION

Teseum was first discovered as an impurity in the atmosphere of Jupiter by hydrogen skimmers in the mid-21st century. Ironically, it was originally considered an industrial nuisance, frequently causing shorts in the magnetic skim-filters. Carol Arnold was the first researcher to study the metallic accretion in any detail, and she quickly realized that it defied conventional explanations. She referred to it as a “neomaterial” and named it after Teseu (the Portugese name for the Greek hero Theseus), describing its subatomic structure as “maze-like”.

Teseum’s unique properties allowed for the construction of sophisticated nanomolecular interfaces, which made possible the first true molecular assemblers and revolutionized the manufacturing industry. But of even greater importance was the ability for Teseum-based processors to perform complex and precise computation using quantum-mechanical phenomenon. The resulting quantronics remodelled a society which was already heavily dependent on its electronics and moulded it into a true symbiosis between tool and toolmaker.

Comlogs, quantronic processors often implanted into the forearm, have become the common interface between a citizen and the world around them. Wrist-worn link bracelets provide a firewalled connection between the comlog and various networks (local holoprojectors and mesh nets, as well as the global Maya network) while simultaneously providing a limited haptic interface. The primary interface, however, is through augmented reality which is generally projected directly into the user’s retina by means of special contact lenses or inconspicuous eye implants. These AR interfaces often take the form of complex radial designs combined with heuristic interfaces that use a combination of physical input and eye focus for selection and manipulation.

These AR technologies also mean that the physical world is no longer the limit of the human experience. Instead, the world is made up of overlapping digital patinas, delivered through Maya, the data network of the Human Sphere. Named after the first ubiquitous standard for augmented reality, Maya not only delivers content (either by specific request or subscription) to the individual user in the fashion of the outdated internet, it also pervades the user’s perception. Every individual broadcasts a social cloud, made up of meme-tags and patina cues, allowing them to automatically share in the augmented perceptions of those around them while simultaneously interacting both physically and digitally. The same

is true of rooms, buildings, streets, and entire communities.

This comprehensive reweaving of the social fabric only set the stage, however, as the second phase of the quantronics revolution unfurled: Quantum programming allowed for major breakthroughs in artificial intelligence and the creation of incredibly intelligent microminds. Shockingly sophisticated heuristic systems allowed microminds to be almost instantly retasked for any purpose and they quickly permeated Maya, serving as personal assistants in the digital world and robotic servants in the physical.

The result is what experts refer to as pervasive domotics, the intense automation of virtually every aspect of modern life: Alarms that are keyed to personal sleep cycles. Showers that turn on at precisely the moment you need to step into them. Kitchens that prepare meals before you become hungry. Personal agents can often anticipate the desires of their users so that, for example, their automated car will arrive to pick them up at precisely the moment they decide to walk out of the restaurant (where, it goes without saying, their bill has been automatically attended to).

And all of that was before the creation of ALEPH, the first (and only) true artificial intelligence.

The extreme networking demands created by the combination of social clouds and pervasive domotics – on top of the ever-rising computational needs of the major governments, scientific projects, and corporations – began to outstrip the existing Maya infrastructure. Localized network collapses known as whiteouts became increasingly frequent and, in a world accelerating its dependence on the network, increasingly dangerous.

Project: Toth was established to solve the problem. Initially an effort to link supercomputers into a geographically distributed mega-processor that could be trivially expanded by adding additional computers to the cluster in order to sustain “essential services” during whiteouts, the project eventually became focused on developing an AI to manage the massive amounts of data in the network, discriminating the packets and prioritizing difficulties and emergencies as they arose.

As Project: Toth grew in importance, however, it also grew in quantity of hardware and complexity of software. And it became apparent that the system’s AI was rapidly evolving towards what had been theorized as Artificial Life: An intelligence that not only mimicked human learning and adapted to new circumstances, but which was also self-conscious and capable of evolving noticeably beyond human control.

NEOMATERIALS

Neomaterials are possessed of subatomic properties which defy traditional chemistry. Some of these are the result of unanticipated complexities in the behaviour of elementary particles, but some materials also appear to include dark matter admixtures (particularly those found in the VoodooTech of the Combined Army).

ENGINES OF CREATION

In the late 20th century, the futurist Eric Drexler predicted amazing, self-replicating nanomachines which would become universal assemblers – the Philosopher’s Stone of the engineering world – and usher in an age of post-scarcity economics. This vision of the future never came to pass. Even with the advent of fractal Teseum assemblers, it still ended up being cheaper to design dedicated nanoassemblers for specific tasks in huge, robotic assembly lines. Given the proper raw materials, the creation of bespoke items in Universal Teseum Cradles (UTCs) is possible, but incredibly expensive and relatively rare outside of R&D prototyping.

MONEY

The vast majority of commercial transactions are handled digitally via a citizen’s comlog. In a few cases, flextabs and flashbills – cardboard or paper chits preloaded with credits and a solar cell that shows the current balance – are used. Some of these ‘tabs are locked to specific accounts, but most are “burners” which don’t care who’s carrying or using them.



THE ARACHNE COUNTERCULTURE

Not everyone has accepted the Big Brother culture of ALEPH's watchful eye. The counterculture of the Nomads strongly resists ALEPH's attempts to infiltrate their Motherships and they've developed the dark-net named Arachne as an alternative to the ALEPH-controlled Maya network. Protected (some would say hampered) by layers of firewalls and security systems, it has the appeal of complete and utter autonomy from ALEPH systems. The Nomad Nation uses their commercial activities across the Sphere to spread and conceal furtive Arachne nodes throughout the totality of explored space.

TESEUM CLAWS

In addition to nanotechnology and quantronics, Teseum is also often used for weapons development. (And this has become even more common as large, extrasolar supplies of the neomaterial have become available.) The Antipodes of Ariadna are even known to coat their claws with it.

The reason for this is that the same sub-atomic structure which allows Teseum to be used for atomic manipulation also allows for magnetically-aligned Teseum to interact with other materials monomolecularly. Teseum weapons, therefore, can cut through most armour like a knife through hot butter. (And the purer the magnetic alignment, the more effective the Teseum is.)

The Project: Toth AI became ALEPH, named after the first letter of the Kabbalah that symbolizes the place from which all other places in the universe can be seen. Today it permeates every layer of society. It has not only been given control over macro-systems (like traffic control, surveillance networks, communications systems, terraforming platforms, electoral processes, life support, and social programs), but aspects of ALEPH frequently replace many of the roles formerly filled by dedicated microminds.

ALEPH has been so successful in fractally sub-dividing its attention that there is simply no need for additional AIs. ALEPH is more than capable of addressing all of the human needs that can be serviced by an AI. It would, in fact, be dangerous to allow the creation of additional AIs: Where ALEPH has proven itself loyal to humanity, each additional AI would carry with it the risk of creating a powerful, unbridled AI hostile to its creators. As a result, the Sole AI Law, passed by the O-12 Senate and fiercely enforced, prohibits the development of self-aware Artificial Intelligences.

SILKEN IMMORTALITY

The colonisation of Bourak by Haqqislam was immediately followed by the building of a whole network of *bimaristans* – research hospitals which simultaneously covered the healthcare needs of settlers while also researching new technologies, healing protocols, and pharmacological patents. Certain eminent names, such as Qasim Azmi and Khalaf al-Attebâ, earned unmeasurable prestige in the scientific community with their advances in the cultivation and preservation of organic tissue. No other scientist of the time, however, has become a

household name to the degree of Qayyim Zaman, the inventor of the method to synthesize Silk.

Originally developed and sold as a gene therapy courier, Silk invisibly weaves its way through a host's body (like silken threads through a tapestry), creating a non-disruptive network which can interact with individual cells down to a genetic level while being controlled and monitored remotely. This allowed for unprecedented precision in gene delivery and activation, utterly dwarfing the precision capable with the previous retroviral techniques. Radical new gene therapies and anti-agathic techniques began pouring out of medical laboratories from across the Human Sphere.

But it was the Silk 2.3 software updates that were delivered twelve years later that were the true revolution. These allowed a Silk network to be manipulated in heretofore unimaginable ways: Selective stem cell reversion. Replacement organs grown *in situ*. Programmable immune responses. Nerve regeneration.

Of course, Silk's applications weren't limited to merely therapeutic treatments. Cosmetic applications like targeted fat flushing and 24-hour face morphs casually re-sculpted humanity into seasonal beauty fads (or their counter-culture equivalents) while military augmentations like bone-lacing and lactic-acid cleansers supercharged the planetary battlefields.

Nothing more fundamentally altered the human condition, however, than Silk's ability to track neuronal synapses and record perfect digital images of the brain using the specially designed quantronic implant known as the Cube. The first

MONOPOLY DEFENCE

When Qayyim Zaman first discovered Silk, the leaders of Haqqislam were quick to realize that it represented one of the greatest technological revolutions in human history. It was the key to a brighter future, and if they were not careful it would be stolen from them by the rapacious hyper-corporations, aided and abetted by the empire-hungry governments of PanOceania and Yu Jing.

Instead of allowing the sale of Silk on the open market, Haqqislam created the Silk Route. Carefully regulated trade companies transport Silk to individual buyers using courier ships guarded by the Haqqislamite Armada. In addition, each limited batch of Silk requires a unique catalysing agent, thwarting efforts to reverse engineer it. (PanOceanian and Yu Jing specialists have only

managed to conclude that Silk is a biogenic substance operating on chemical principles apparently derived from the new theories of physics spinning off from the Teseum revolution. Its sheer, unprecedented complexity leads some to believe that it's based on some organism native to Bourak, although the identity, nature, and even existence of such an organism is purely speculative.)

The secured patent rights on Silk have long since ended, of course, but the cult of secrecy surrounding it continues. In addition to its many miraculous powers, Silk has also become a political weapon. The Silk monopoly is used as the ultimate bargaining chip in Haqqislamite international trade, with the threat of Silk embargoes quickly bringing foreign powers to heel.

Cubes offered the promise of true immortality, and these promises were fulfilled when the consciousness of Annie Xanthopoulos was successfully transferred into a Lhost – a clone-like biosynthetic body rapidly grown onto an artificial skeletal structure using overlapping Silk networks.

The Lhosts, in turn, opened new doors. Under the auspices of Project: Maid of Orleans, a PanOceania initiative, ALEPH developed a lesser artificial intelligence (LAI) to serve as a military leader capable of inspiring modern troops. The personality of the Recreation was modelled on Joan of Arc, a French saint and heroine of the 15th century. Once Joan was in the field, however, it quickly became apparent that ALEPH had delivered more than the symbolic propaganda personality that PanOceania had requested: Joan was possessed of a keen strategic and tactical insight, and once she was in

the field she quickly rose through the ranks.

PanOceania was also surprised when ALEPH immediately followed up on Joan's success by developing Project Counsellor – a Re-creation of the legendary Sun Tze – for Yu Jing.

Spearheaded by the huge propaganda successes of the early military Recreations, ALEPH began developing additional personalities to serve as diplomats, soldiers, spokespeople, and artists for any nation or corporation capable of justifying and financing their creation. Criticized by historians as being nothing more than glorified caricatures, the extremely charismatic and talented Recreations have nevertheless proven extremely popular on Maya and ALEPH is riding the wave of their celebrity to continue wedging them into every facet of society.

THE RESURRECTION INDUSTRY

Once the secret of Resurrection had been unlocked, the scarcity of Silk drove costs high enough that only the richest of the rich could afford it. The inevitable result was widespread unrest that rapidly threatened to become outright class warfare. Fortunately, O-12 intervened before a crisis point could be reached and passed laws regulating access to Resurrections, requiring anyone receiving a Resurrection to be authorized through official organizations appointed by the national governments.

Today, most people live with implanted Cubes that keep an up-to-date recording of their brain state. (Responsible people who can afford the procedure will also regularly have their brain state backed up.) Resurrection licenses are primarily obtained through the national bureaus – managed by the

Party in Yu Jing, the Church in PanOceania, and so forth – on the basis of merit, although some licenses can also be won in the Resurrection Lotteries.

Unlicensed deceased are stored in Cube Banks. It is possible, for some minor expense, to temporarily load the stored personalities and converse with them through simulations. But otherwise, the deceased simply wait for their turn in the almost impossibly long licensure queues.

Of course, if you're particularly wealthy and unscrupulous, you can seek a reincarnation through the black markets of the Nomad's Vaudeville. But unless you know what you're doing, you won't always get what you expect in that sort of place.

ARTIFICIAL WOMBS AND THE BIG BABY BOOM

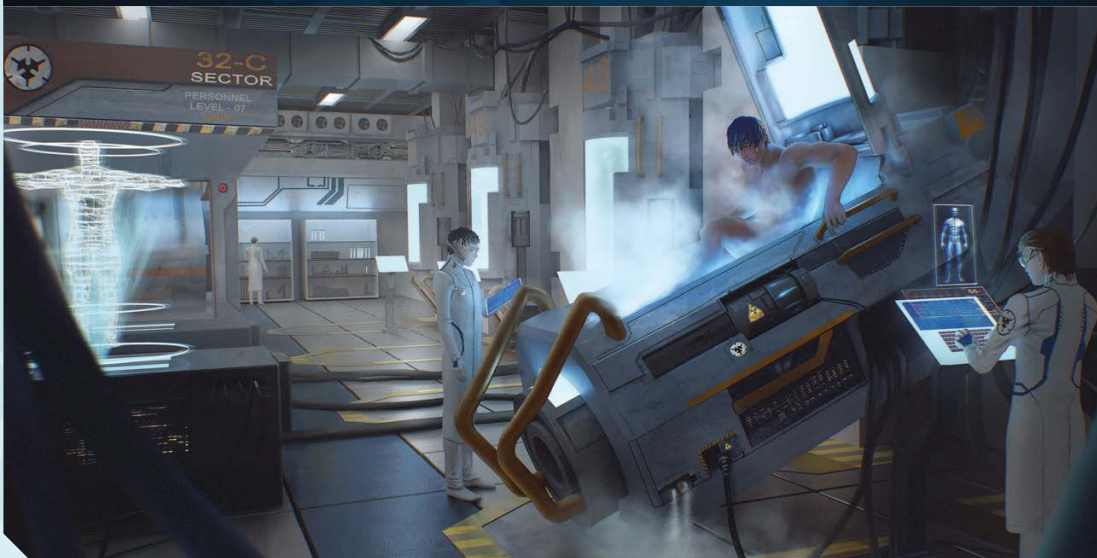
The first artificial womb was developed by the Natalya Corporation from the intersection of quantronic controllers and molecular assemblers. The freeing of women from the literal labour of childbirth, the glorious sense of excess arising from the iota-scarcity economy of Teseum assemblers, and the advent of micromind nanny-bots reversed the long-standing trend of declining birth rates in the first world. Yu Jing referred to this as the "star tide" (星際嬰兒潮) echoing the "child tide" of the 20th century baby boom and the "grey tide" of the aging workforce which followed.

The population explosion of the star tide radically increased tensions on Earth, creating the pressure front that gave rise to the planetary exodus of the Second Great Space Race.

THE DARK SIDE OF SILK

The unparalleled control Silk grants over the human body has created medical miracles, but that kind of control also offers opportunities for those who would exploit and abuse it. For example, the Silk-derived drug nitrocaine directly binds itself to the user's synapses, resulting in a long-term, mood-tailored high that can also be directly controlled through custom hacks installed on the user's Cube. The synaptic-binding, however, also makes the drug incredibly addictive and, despite its great expense, it is being massively abused by more and more youth of the PanOceania elite.

There are also fears of future "nightmare technologies", like the so-called "Silk drones" in which implanted Silk-networks are used to physically control a person's body as if it were a puppet. Authorities, of course, are quick to point out that, given how expensive Silk is, these are urban legends without any tie to reality.



INTRODUCTION

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HUMAN SPHERE

A decade before GA6037283 was discovered, the world had already begun to change. China's so-called Jingji Imperialism saw the economic powerhouse gobble up a half dozen ASEAN nations, transitioning them rapidly from economic satellites to politically annexed provinces. In response, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, and Malaysia formed the Neo-ASEAN alliance to counter China's economy hegemony.

Few realized it at the time, but the seeds of the new superpowers had been planted.

ENERGY CRISIS

Meanwhile, the old world was beginning to crumble away.

The transition from fossil fuels and other legacy sources of energy was badly mismanaged at a global level and the damage wrought was complicated by the devastating consequences of unchecked climate change. This was particularly true in the United States and Project DAWN was, in many ways, the last great work of a dying superpower. When the post-service economy Stock Market Crunch arrived, the bloated North American economy collapsed, dealing a crippling blow to the already receding European markets.

PANASIAN ALLIANCE

On the other side of the planet, in response to increasing Chinese belligerence, additional nations were flocking to the Neo-ASEAN banner. This notably included the Philippines and, shortly thereafter, India. These brought the critical mass of manpower necessary to keep pace with China's immense population and the resulting motley assortment of nations supplemented their economic ties with a series of mutual defence treaties which rapidly developed into a centralized military command known as the PanAsian Alliance.

Japan and South Korea were left as the only two independent nations in the region. The economies of both countries had been wrecked by the Stock Market Crunch, however, and were perched on the brink of complete collapse. Although they, too, might have sought support from the PanAsian Alliance, unfortunate diplomatic mistakes had alienated Japan while South Korea's leaders

believed that the PanAsian Alliance would not be strong enough to defend them against the military might of China (which had already occupied North Korea and were perched on their border). As a result, both nations decided to tie their futures to China's.

BIRTH OF THE STATE EMPIRE

The cultural transition of Japan, however, proved more difficult than the political one. It quickly became apparent that the majority of Japanese citizens felt that their national pride had been sold out, and China's early attempts to apply their homogenization programs only inflamed the problem.

And the truth was that Japan, although the fiercest centre of resistance, was not alone in its protests. Similar movements were gaining strength across China's imperial acquisitions. At the same time, under a corrosive barrage of Western influences, the cultural cohesion of China itself was also eroding.

To solve both problems simultaneously, the Party decided that the nation needed a new identity which could blunt the inflamed passions both at home and abroad. The result was a new Cultural Revolution, creating a collective identity which would aggregate of the best virtues from the entirety of the Far East: Koreans, Vietnamese, Mongols, Thai, and all the rest could sustain their unique cultures while also being citizens of the new nation.

Although they remained the central authority of the new nation, it was recognized that the Party had also become inherently alienating to the new mass of foreign citizens and young dissidents. In order to find a unifying symbol of power around which the new nation could coalesce, therefore, the Party reached into the past and restored the Emperor.

Instilled with immense opulence and reinforced through pomp and protocol drawn primarily from the ancient Chinese Imperial court but also influenced by the royal traditions of many Asian nations, a powerful mythology of power was woven around the Emperors and their Jade Throne, forging them into the focal point for a new nation which was itself baptized Yu Jing (literally the Jade Capital).

CAUCASUS CONFLICTS

Typical of the era were the Caucasus Conflicts — a motley array of ignoble and mostly forgettable wars on the border between Europe and Asia fought by local warlords in a squabble over the dwindling energy resources of the region.

DAWN OF THE HYPERPOWER

As China was reinventing itself as Yu Jing, the PanAsian Alliance was also transforming itself. Reaching across the Pacific Ocean, the PAA successfully drew Chile and Brazil into the fold. The new treaties formally reorganized the economic and military alliance into a unified nation state, which christened itself PanOceania.

With the collapse of the United States and the European Union continuing apace, it rapidly became clear that these two new nations were the global superpowers of tomorrow. But whereas Yu Jing unified itself by looking to the past and trumpeting economic surety, PanOceania – with its global and transcontinental reach – became gripped by the *Destino Tecnológico* (Technological Destiny): The belief that technology was the road to the future and that the destiny of mankind would belong to the nation which relentlessly pursued that technology. This philosophy would drive much of PanOceania's foreign and domestic policy for decades to come, and remains an indelible part of its national character.

EQUATORIAL SURGE

The catalyst for the recovery of the still struggling global economy was, much to the surprise of economists everywhere, the orbital elevator. A

private research consortium perfected the material science required to construct the prodigious cable for the elevator and then promptly open-sourced the technology. Construction almost immediately began on a chain of orbital elevators all along the equatorial girth of the world.

Even before they reached orbit, constructing the elevators required a vast infrastructure on the ground. A massive influx of would-be employees, for both the orbital construction companies and the support industries surrounding them, flooded the regions around the elevators. This demographic ground swell became known as the Equatorial Surge, and while some of the nations involved handled it well (smoothly rolling out infrastructure and capitalizing on the economic boom), many did not. This was particularly true in the so-called “host companies” allowing foreign nations to build elevators on their soil: Inadequate, underfunded reception camps were almost immediately overwhelmed, triggering a humanitarian catastrophe which destabilized many of the governments involved. (It was during this time that Ecuador, for example, became functionally a client state of PanOceania.)

As the orbital elevators were completed, the Equatorial Surge only grew in size as the population of the planet was funnelled into the heavens. The Lunar Colonies became a waystation to the solar system, the population of Yu Jing's Martian colonies boomed, and the number of orbitals reaping the wealth of the asteroid belt and outer system multiplied.

UNITY, COOPERATION, SUPPORT, PROGRESS

The loss of the United States, the transformation of China, the decline of Europe, and the emergence of PanOceania finally broke the doddering institutions of the United Nations. The death blow was its replacement, the new pan-national organization of O-12, founded upon the four Pillars of Unity, Cooperation, Support, and Progress. Yu Jing and PanOceania, eager to realign global politics around themselves, strongly backed the formation of O-12, little realizing that they were creating a perpetual thorn in their own sides.

CORREGIDOR

When violence from narco-gangs collaterally crushed an international school bus carrying kids from the political and social elite of the Americas, a conglomerate of South American nations responded by creating a high-security prison in Earth orbit where the most dangerous criminals could be sentenced to “death-in-life”. Despite the outcry from numerous human rights organizations, the inmates were held in states of induced sleep, kept alive through intravenous nutrition and periodically awakened in order to be psychologically afflicted by their plight.

Funding dwindled, however, after the Stock Market Crunch, and the transnational bureaucratic apparatus running the prison was dealt an additional blow when Chile and Brazil joined PanOceania and withdrew from the project. Corregidor became starved for resources and conditions worsened.

Seeking an exit strategy, the remaining nations decided to kill two birds with one stone and initiated the Lazareto Expansion: A pardon program was set up, and Corregidor inmates were used to rapidly

expand the station with new habitat and hydroponic modules. Once these were ostensibly self-sustaining, the “surplus population” of the Equatorial Surge were moved in. (The character of Corregidor was not notably improved: These displaced masses included rebel guerrillas, veterans of tribal wars, ethnic genocide survivors, and head hunters.)

The Corregidor Foundation, insufficiently funded with the remaining capital confiscated from convicts, was then “privatized” (i.e., cut loose and left to fend for itself). Even basic survival was a struggle for many years, but eventually the Corregidorans were able to carve out a living for themselves by trading manpower – the one resource they possessed in excess – for supplies and spare parts. In the process, the Corregidoran meteor heads became the best damn zero-G workers you can find. Corregidor itself has been transformed into a massive Mothership, sailing across the Human Sphere and bringing the expertise of its tough, pragmatic workers wherever they may be needed.

RELIGION CRISIS

The roots of what came to be known as the Religion Crisis were laid decades earlier: The collapse of the heart of the Muslim world during the Energy Crisis. The fervour of transnational digital revivalist movements fuelled by economic collapse. PanOceania's growing global influence stirring a turbulent Pan-Pacific cultural mix. The vast population migrations of the Equatorial Surge.

All of these contributed to a profound destabilization of global religions, particularly the two largest in Christianity and Islam, and set the stage for the radical transformations of those religions which were to come. But when historians speak of the beginning of the Religion Crisis, they are almost always referring to the Roman Apocalypse.

ROMAN APOCALYPSE

During a papal conclave, a biological weapon was detonated in Vatican City. Most of the upper leadership of the Catholic Church was killed (either immediately or over the next five years from the lingering effects). Vatican City itself (along with part of Rome) was lost for a generation, inflicting a substantial economic blow to the Church as well.

The images of the Church being led by frail figures behind plastic sheets emblazoned with biohazard sigils haunted the world for years to come. Christianity was left reeling.

BIRTH OF A NEW ISLAM

The Muslim world was simultaneously undergoing a schism into seemingly endless chaos. The economic collapse of the Middle East in a post-oil world was almost complete, and the power vacuum left behind was echoed in Islam by a fractious theological tumult of would-be prophets, micro-sects, and extremist cults.

In the midst of this tumult, the religious leader Farhad Khadivar spoke of the need to seek the True Islam described by the Koran; an Islam that was built upon the central tenet of the Search for Knowledge. The result was Haqqislam – a populist movement which was, importantly, also successful in reaching out to the Muslim elite who saw a return to prosperity in its scientific and technological idealism.

SECOND GREAT SPACE RACE

While wars of religion and deprivation still raged back on Earth, in the depths of space at the opposite end of the human experience PanOceania discovered the Earth-like world of Neoterra. It was the ultimate realization of *Destino Tecnológico* and PanOceania enthusiastically concluded that colonisation – expansion on a grand, interstellar scale – was literally written in their stars.



It wasn't hard to find colonial volunteers eager to escape the hellholes back home and these, mixed with young PanOceania patriots eager to participate in their nation's hegemonic rise, form a veritable tide of immigrants to the new world.

Six years after first sighting Neoterra, and as the first colonies were being established there, PanOceania's Space Exploration Division discovered Acontecimento. Additional colonies were soon being established there, too, and the remarkable economic benefits quickly began to accrue back on Earth: PanOceania unemployment, which had been soaring, abruptly plummeted as population pressures were eased. This resulted in a significant economic stimulus even before the raw wealth of two virgin planets began flowing back into PanOceania's coffers.

NANOTECH WARS

The discovery of Teseum's unique properties caused the nascent field of nanotechnology to explode and unlocked undreamt of possibilities. As is human wont, however, these wonders were quickly turned to the practice of war. The military arsenals of the world were soon stocked with devastator swarms, genome plagues, microscopic drones, nano-poisons, monofilament munitions, and other heretofore unknown horrors.

The United States had spent half a century attempting to recover its glory: After the expensive boondoggle of Project DAWN, their SDK destroyer program (which they had hoped to use to ensure U.S. interests in the inner solar system) had also failed. Now they doubled down on nanotechnology, but their laboratories — no longer at the cutting edge — couldn't keep pace.

A failed attempt by the CIA at industrial espionage in the labs of Harris NanoSciences in Canberra resulted in a nanocatastrophe with casualties in the hundreds. The scandal rapidly escalated into a casus belli between the once and future hyperpowers.

PACIFIC CAMPAIGN

When the First Nanotech War broke out, PanOceania's naval fleet quickly won the Battle of Hawaii and then erected a blockade of the United States' west coast. As the blockade took its toll, the United States, in a desperate effort, attempted to release an experimental nanodevourer from a secret lab near Monterey. Unfortunately, the nanomachines were unstable and another nanocatastrophe resulted.

AD ASTRA PILGRIMAGE

When Neoterra was discovered, Pope Pius XIII — ruling over a wounded Church from the Cathedral of Brasília — was seeking a way to unify his fractured flock and turn their gaze from the wounds of the past to the promise of the future. He seized the opportunity by declaring the Ad Astra Pilgrimage: As Adam and Eve had journeyed forth from the Garden of Eden, so it was the destiny of God's children to emerge from the flames of their homeworld to be reborn as citizens of the galaxy. In addition to becoming a key ideological component of the PanOceania colonial drive — the Church's message of holy responsibility reinforcing the idealism of destiny and vice versa — the Ad Astra Pilgrimage also succeeded beyond Pope Pius' wildest dreams. It spread like a fire around the globe and captured the imagination of all Christians.

As the faithful rushed to the stars, the bureaucratic organs which the Church had established to facilitate the Pilgrimage exploded in size and importance. PanOceania, for its part, took advantage of the burgeoning infrastructure by incorporating it directly into the Colonial Administration (which further fuelled the Pilgrimage's growth). At the demand of other Christian denominations, the Pilgrimage opened its doors to include them. And once the Pilgrimage served all denominations, it grew larger than any of them. Shockingly, in its journey to the stars, the Church itself was reborn: The new Christian Church, reversing centuries of division, was the union of numerous denominations brought together by the holy act of the Pilgrimage.

Unsurprisingly, the new Church soon made Neoterra its Holy See and journeyed forth among the stars.

At the request of O-12, the PanOceania blockade fleet landed to lend humanitarian assistance. Uncontrolled elements within the U.S. Army refused to stand down and a series of guerrilla confrontations ensued, but eventually the war was brought to an end with the San Diego Truce.

ATLANTIC CAMPAIGN

In the Battle of the Bloody Gulf, the American and PanOceania surface fleets fought to a devastating stalemate. Neither fleet would fully recover before the end of the war, and the Atlantic Campaign became a quiet-yet-deadly struggle of submarines beneath the waves.

FIFTH RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Russia, like the United States, had seen its prestige fade. It attempted to force its way back to being a superpower by creating a massive military machine. The weak central bureaucracy was unable to directly control the military monster they had created, however, and attempted to keep it in check by factionalizing the army under a number of largely independent generals. All they succeeded in doing was creating a series of rebel generals seeking to aggrandize power to themselves as brutal warlords armed with tactical nukes (often several at a time).

THE GREAT NOSTALGIA

The expansion away from a "dying" Earth was the greatest diaspora in human history. It was almost immediately followed by the Great Nostalgia — a sort of pan-cultural reflex that found interstellar society reaching back to Old Earth history for inspiration. The result is known as Hiraeth Culture. (Hiraeth is a Welsh word with no direct English translation. It's a yearning ache that's a mix of homesickness, grief, wistfulness, and nostalgia.) You can see evidence of Hiraeth Culture throughout the Human Sphere — from ALEPH's Recreations to official organizations like the Knights Hospitaller to cultural movements like the Bōsōzoku street gangs. Names, imagery, concepts, and even ideologies are plucked from across history and reimagined for a new age.



CONVENTIONAL AUTHORITY

Among the agreements contained in the Concilium Convention was a statement of basic human rights. Although originally intended as an additional guide to the proper treatment of foreign civilians during a time of war, the O-12 Courts have ruled that it applies to all citizens of the Human Sphere. Therefore, the enforcement powers granted to O-12 under the Concilium Convention also allow them to uphold those basic human rights anywhere and at any time. This is what, ultimately, grants O-12 the majority of its authority.

RAPID URBAN CONSTRUCTION (RUC)

Chinese Communists in the 20th century had originated the practice of building entire metropolises *en masse*, but it was PanOceania which perfected these techniques during the Second Great Space Race. A combination of nanotechnology and AI labour allowed entire cities to be erected on alien worlds seemingly overnight, ready and waiting for the arrival of new colonists. The rapid construction naturally lent itself to the bloc settlement policies which resulted in cultural groups arriving as largely intact communities, particularly in Yu Jing where maintaining cultural divisions was Party policy.

Although most RUC construction was conservative in predictably state-controlled ways, in some places it also allowed extreme experimentation with the basic form of the city. (Although, of course, many of those experiments were ultimately failures.)

SECOND NANOTECH WAR

At the end of the First Nanotech War, a cabal of American nanotech engineers (many guilty of war crimes) fled and took refuge in Russia's Siberian provinces. With Moscow's central control weakened by the Fifth Revolution, these provinces became concerned by Yu Jing expansionism and launched an assault using the terrible weapons developed in their secret nanotech labs.

The war, although relatively brief, descended into a hellish broil of technological terrors and uncontrolled nanoweapons unleashed upon fellow soldiers and innocent civilians alike. Yu Jing eventually won a clear victory against the dysfunctional provincial governments, but only at the cost of the *Jishù de Bēi'āi* (the Technology Sorrow).

CONCILIUM CONVENTIONS

The world had looked on in seemingly helpless horror at the atrocities of the Fifth Revolution and the Second Nanotech War, but as the wars came to an end it was clear that action needed to be taken.

At the end of the First Nanotech War, O-12 has been instrumental in negotiating the Nanotech Limitation Protocols and it had then accrued the muscle necessary to make sure the Protocols were enforced on both Earth and beyond. It took the opportunity to expand its power and prestige even further by negotiating the Concilium Conventions – a comprehensive treaty governing the rules of war and, particularly, the weapons which nations are allowed to use in its prosecution whether internally or abroad.

The implicit legal authority of both the Protocols and the Convention, combined with the hefty, interstellar enforcement powers granted to O-12, made the pan-national group a *de facto* government of humanity, possessed of far greater independence, authority, and practical strength than the League of Nations or the UN had ever dreamed of.

BIRTH OF ALEPH

Another technological upheaval, however, awaited humanity when Project: Toth created ALEPH. The disparate Neo-Luddite movements which took root during the Nanotech Wars reacted poorly to what the most deranged panic-mongers referred to as a “posthuman Baal” and a “digital Antichrist”, but as ALEPH permeated itself throughout the Maya datasphere as a pervasive, helpful presence that proved – repeatedly and *en masse* – that it had nothing but altruistic intentions towards the Human Sphere, these fears were quickly lampooned as ludicrous.

Where the ideology of the Neo-Luddites did find mainstream credence, however, was the fear that the *next* AI might prove less beneficent. In response, O-12 passed the Sole AI Law (which banned the research or creation of self-aware AIs) and the Utgard Accords (also known as the Non-AI Proliferation Treaty, which notably authorized the creation of the Special Situations Section for enforcing the Sole AI Law throughout the Human Sphere).

EXODUS

As the influence of ALEPH spread, the rivalry between Yu Jing and PanOceania had not dimmed due to their independent struggles in the Nanotech Wars. PanOceania's success on Neoterra made it clear to Yu Jing that they had miscalculated in dismissing the search for exoplanets as a foolhardy fad. Yu Jing's economists had considered deep space investment a black hole capable of consuming federal budgets and destabilizing entire economies. While they had invested heavily in developing colonies in the inner system (particularly on Mars), they had allowed PanOceania to effectively leapfrog past them to Jupiter and Saturn, using them as launching pads for exploiting the trans-Plutonian wormholes.

The StateEmpire was at least a decade behind the Hyperpower, but their centralized economy turned on a dime. Research funds were redistributed and entire universities were repurposed in concert with private industry to close the gap.

The effort, with a little bit of luck, paid off when a Yu Jing probe discovered a pair of binary planets orbiting each other in the habitable zone of their star. In a blaze of propaganda, the new worlds were christened Shentang and Yutang, and all of Yu Jing celebrated that the “gap had been closed”.

INTERSTELLAR EMPIRES

In reality, of course, the gap remained. Yu Jing may have discovered two habitable worlds to match PanOceania's, but the Hyperpower's development of their colonies still outstripped Yu Jing's efforts.

In fact, PanOceania's confidence and investment in their colonial worlds was about to be dramatically demonstrated. The activation of Russia's nuclear arsenal had terrified world leaders: Earth had become too small a playground and, as existential threats proliferated during the Nanotech Wars, it became clear that even the mightiest of nations could no longer protect their capitals. PanOceania decided to solve the problem by literally putting their government on a different planet and declared that San Pietro, on Neoterra, would be the new capital.

This was somewhat easier for PanOceania to achieve because it had never really invested strongly in an Earth-side capital due to its amalgamation of formerly national interests. But once the precedent had been set, Yu Jing (perhaps fearing that PanOceania would exploit the strategic strength of their new position) followed suit within just a few years. (This required some muscling from the StateEmpire's strong central control, but it was also consistent with their cultural imperatives of investing Yu Jing in an identity separate from its member states.)

IMPERIAL TRIAD WAR

Although PanOceania quickly embraced the full integration of ALEPH into their society, military, and government, other nations were more cautious in accepting the “foreign” AI. One by one, however, they fell like dominos as the overwhelming advantages of ALEPH's assistance became undeniable. Unsurprisingly, one of the largest hurdles came in the form of Yu Jing, where the Party felt that the AI represented an incorrigible danger to their central control. The door which finally opened Yu Jing to ALEPH was the Imperial Triad War.

The aggressive acceleration of Yu Jing's colonisation efforts had created a social disorder ripe for the criminal activities of the Triads and their dark influence over the StateEmpire's society had waxed to its greatest heights. In their pride, however, they had aggrandized not only power but arrogance. The pinnacle of their presumption came when the Golden Dagger Society mounted an assault on the StateEmpire Courthouse in order to liberate one of their members during his trial. One hundred people died in the attack, most of them civil servants of the Empire.

Under immense public pressure, the Party demanded that the Emperor — a kind and even-tempered man named Shao Ming — resolve the situation: The Emperor's job was to control the Yu Jing system of justice. And if the Emperor could no longer accomplish that, then the Imperial Service had become redundant and would be eliminated.

An old Chinese proverb advises “beware the wrath of a gentle man.” Emperor Shao Ming seized the *carte blanche* authorization being offered by the Party and issued an internal memorandum: “Hostile situations demand vigorous action. We must cease our hollow words and indirect approaches. The time has come to send a clear message.”

By Imperial Edict, the Imperial Service was restructured. The first Imperial Agents were recruited, the first Special Reclusion Units (Invisible Prisons) were built, and, crucially, a strategic

alliance was formed with ALEPH and the Special Situations Section in order to analyse the Triad's criminal enterprises and cut them off from off-world safe havens.

A curtain of silence was drawn over the early stages of the Triad War. The Police Organized Crime Department simply started losing track of Triad leaders and lieutenants. Thousands of low-level agents were simply never seen again. The Imperial Service was wielding Orwellian powers to track them down and eliminate them (either through secret arrest or summary execution). Journalists making inquiries found them turned aside.

Despite the full weight of the Empire being brought to bear, the Triads didn't simply surrender. The war boiled out onto the streets of the Three Nations. There were assassinations and shoot-outs. People were caught in the crossfire.

The resolution of the Triad War, however, was as quiet as its beginning: In a show of realpolitik, the new bossmen realized the true goal of the Emperor: It had never been to eliminate the Triad entirely. Such a thing would be impossible, for the Triads were entwined into the very fabric of Yu Jing society. He simply wanted them to resume the invisible — and tolerable — presence they had once possessed. One by one, the Triad societies swore oaths to the Emperor and vanished back into the underworld.

In addition to opening Yu Jing to ALEPH and breaking the pride of the Triads, the Triad War was also an important cornerstone in increasing the real power of the Imperial System. Even the strongest Emperors prior to Shao Ming had been kept on a leash by the Party. After Shao Ming, the Emperors had enough power to stand on their own (albeit within the strictures of Party doctrine).

WATER WORLD

Within a few years of moving the national capital to Neoterra, PanOceania discovered and established its third exoplanet colony (although the term “exoplanet” was dropping out of popular use for much the same reason that America was no longer referred to as the “New World”). Varuna was an aquatic planet, which posed certain unique challenges for the colonial effort. It was also home to the Helots, the first alien sentients encountered by humanity (at least, as far as they knew).

FATE OF THE GOLDEN DAGGERS

Although the Emperor made peace with most of the Triads, the grand exception was the Golden Dagger Society itself. Shunned as a public enemy, they were ruthlessly obliterated by Imperial Edict — a warning to all others of what happened when the authority of the Emperor was affronted. (Rumours persist, however, that members of the secret society survived, swearing to destroy the Imperial System.)

ICE WORLD

Midgard, a PanOceanian exploration vessel, discovered the icy world of Svalarheima. Although most of the surface was only barely habitable, it was yet another jewel in PanOceania's colonial crown. Frustrated by the continued failures of their own planetary searches, Yu Jing sent a massive fleet to the planet two years after its initial colonisation and claimed the Niflheim region for itself (renaming the region to Huangdi).



THE THIRD NATION

To the surprise of many, it was Haqqislam which became the third interstellar nation.

In the destabilized Middle East, Haqqislam's *khaniqahs* — social service and educational centres — had expanded in scope until they were providing a network of essential social services. They were the foundation on which Haqqislam had established itself as a stateless nation.

In time, however, it became clear that this state of affairs could not continue indefinitely: Haqqislam needed a land to call its own, and there was no space for them on Earth. Instead of turning to war in order to carve out a place for themselves, however, Haqqislam turned to the stars. Following a mixture of science and prophecy, they used the wealth of their religion to purchase or hire the mothballed remnants of NASA and began a search for a new homeworld.

They were not immediately successful, but eventually a stable wormhole was located and the *Nailah* probe was sent through. On the far side they found Bourak, which was named after the mystical creature which had transported the Prophets to Heaven.

CONCILIUM

In the wake of the Concilium Conventions, O-12 launched Project Odisseia. The goal of the project was to find a location beyond Earth on which O-12 could establish their headquarters — a truly neutral location that would isolate O-12 from the corruptive legacies of Earth and embrace the new, galactic legacy of mankind.

It was the height of the Second Great Space Race and it seemed as if success were assured. But while PanOceania, Yu Jing, and even Haqqislam discovered new worlds, Project Odisseia dragged on for decades without success. When a suitable planet was finally discovered, it was named Concilium Prima in honour of the diplomatic treaties which had brought O-12 to such prominence a generation earlier. O-12, however, lacked the resources necessary to directly develop a full-scale colony.

The G-3 interstellar nations all competed fiercely to get a toehold on the new world, further delaying the colonisation effort. Eventually a compromise was struck in which Haqqislam withdrew from the dispute (in exchange for diplomatic concessions granted to its *caravanserai*), and the Tripartite Colonisation Accords would ensure that both PanOceania and Yu Jing interests were equally

represented in the development of the planet under O-12 control.

Thirteen years after its initial discovery, O-12 finally moved its central bureaucracy to Concilium Prima. The heart of humanity had finally left Mother Earth.

RISE OF THE NOMADS (1 NC)

The transition of humanity into an interstellar species also saw the emergence of robust counter-culture movements embracing the newfound liberties made possible by the rapid advance of technology and space travel. Of these, two were most significant.

First, a collective of anti-establishment groups which considered themselves oppressed by ALEPH issued the 1st Radical Bakunin Manifesto (named after the influential anarchist Mikhail Bakunin). Following the precepts of the Manifesto, they bought a military surplus transport, loaded it to the brim with habitation modules, and paid for the entire enterprise by selling space to a variety of spherewide cults and political movements that were being harassed by various authorities.

The movement captured a seething zeitgeist of resentment and their anarchist ship-building project bloomed to truly mammoth proportions. They called the bulging monstrosity a Mothership and they named it the *Bakunin*. Then they issued the 2nd Radical Bakunin Manifesto, which launched the Legal Entity Establishment Campaign and declared them to be an extra-national territory subject to the laws of no nation.

The other was *Tunguska*. A group of crooked investors specializing in tax exploitation, ghost companies, leveraged buyouts, the transfer of extra-official goods to licit soil, and other forms of money laundering created a Mothership of their own to serve as a financial safe harbour. Their need was great: With the aid of ALEPH — which was rapidly burrowing into every computer system and transaction — the governments of the Human Sphere were cracking down on their activities.

All of this might have been largely irrelevant (just another criminal enterprise), except that the need to keep their financial escapades free from ALEPH's ever-grasping CLAWs caused them to ally with several groups of cryptohackers (including the Zone of Truth and the mythical Deep Divers). The cryptohackers transformed the ideological core of the *Tunguska* project and drastically expanded its scope by creating a mobile, independent, data crypt

FIRST CUBE UPLOAD

After Silk was invented in the *bimaristans* of Bourak, the first true personality upload came less than two decades later. The brain waves of a Haqqislamite nurse named Hafizah Shammās were read, recorded, and the retention of her identity confirmed by ALEPH.

CENTRAL AMERICAN CAMPAIGN

The battlefields of the Central American Campaign are remembered chiefly for the first use of Tactical Armoured Gears (TAGs): Single-manned armoured weapon platforms usually humanoid in appearance, but arachnoid and bird-like shapes are also used for all-terrain designs. Using these new weapons platforms, PanOceania expanded from the axis of Chile and Brazil, pushing up the Central American isthmus as far as Mexico City.

Caravanserai, p. XXX:

Haqqislamite outposts where anyone can do business. The Winter Hall at the centre of each *caravanserai* is a place to buy and sell, rest and resupply, in as much comfort and luxury as local conditions allow.

CLAW, p. XXX: Control program used in offensive infowar attacks.

— the largest ever built. Their goal was nothing less than to solve the underlying faults in the socio-economic systems of the Sphere by freeing them from the whims of the State and the stifling control of ALEPH.

NOMAD NATION (6 NC)

Even as Bakunin and Tunguska grew, however, ALEPH was using a variety of guises — cracking down on rogue AIs, eliminating illegal nanotechnology, responding to national security threats — to put relentless pressure on the plethora of extra-national entities which had taken advantage of the limitless infinities of space to carve out independent fiefdoms for themselves free from State (and AI) control.

The leaders of Tunguska proposed a third way: Instead of facing a choice between destruction and kowtowing to ALEPH, a strong coalition could petition O-12 to recognize them as a legitimate nation state, with all the protections that came with it.

Initial scepticism at Tunguska's proposal was swept away when Corregidor enthusiastically endorsed it. The venerable Mothership of hardened meteor heads brought much-needed industrial weight to the coalition, and they had political and corporate connections forged from a century of "building the Human Sphere".

It was more difficult to convince the Bakunin to come onboard, but no less important. The cryptohackers of the Tunguska knew how to protect data, but the techno-anarchists of Bakunin knew how to use it. They were the ones who coined the name "Nomad Nation", and they seized the attention of the Human Sphere when the 4th Radical Bakunin Manifesto — signed by the Praxis Revolutionary Intervention Committee — was broadcast throughout Maya in the form of an instant message virus.

The vigorous campaign which followed was one-part ruthless, backroom political dealing and one-part grassroots guerrilla meme-slinging. But in the end they were not only recognized by O-12 as an independent nation but, with the unexpected aid of Haqqislam, they were placed on the G-4 council (on the basis that the three Motherships constituted a legitimate interstellar power).

EQUILIBRIUM PHASE

The Equilibrium Phase of the Nomad Nation dates from the founding of Bakunin in 1 NC. The first half of the Equilibrium Phase was characterized by the vicious conflicts which erupted within the Mothership as the number of habitation units rapidly rose, creating unpredictable, multidimensional ideological conflicts. The 1st Radical Manifesto had triumphed the manifold heterogeneity of the Bakunin ideal, but the reality proved more problematic.

FIRST RESURRECTION

Just eight years after Hafizah Shammah's personality was uploaded into a Cube, PanOceanian scientists succeeded in transferring the stored consciousness of Annie Xanthopoulos into a Lhost. Human resurrection was now a reality.

NEW CALENDAR

O-12 also instituted the New Calendar (NC), with the year 0 NC being set to O-12's arrival on Concilium Prima. While retaining many features of the traditional Western calendar (days, weeks, months, and so forth), the substructure of the New Calendar was designed for AI-enhancement, making it easier for people moving between planets with different day-night cycles, different relativity frames, or ships with disparate clocks. On most planetary surfaces these features are fairly straight-forward but in many deep space scenarios they can become incredibly complex (with the AI algorithms using social clouds to try to keep people on similar schedules). These features of the New Calendar were deliberately designed to be as transparent as possible, however, and most people can simply go about their daily routines without ever worrying about it. (Which has undoubtedly assisted in the widespread adoption of the system.)

ARTWORK IN PROGRESS





THE NINETY-NINE

The exact number and identity of people killed by the *Bakunin* hull breach was never positively determined. Despite this, they have become known as the Ninety-Nine and are honoured as a sad reminder of the difficulties of the Equilibrium Phase and the shame which many Bakunians still feel to this day.

BLIND EYE MILITARISM

The passivity of other governments in responding to the Violent Intermission demonstrated the viability of using untraceable military forces, particularly outside of their normal area of influence, in order to achieve foreign policy aims. In addition to precipitating the Phantom Conflict, this also caused a methodological shift the relations between PanOceania and Yu Jing.

DEATH OF A WORLD

The Lunar Colony Revolts was the setting and subject of this long-running Maya drama, which is still much-loved and held up as a classic example of Hiraeth Culture. Although the title is hyperbolic, Lunar civilization is a pale reflection of what it once was.

A resolution was reached, referred to as the Simple Law, which banned radical behaviour in the ship's common areas: Each ideological faction could do whatever they wanted within their own habitation units, but a code of "mundane conduct" would be honoured in those spaces (both physical and digital) where those ideologies were forced to interface with each other.

Despite the law's simplicity, conflicts continued to erupt. After a disastrous flash mob conflict degenerated into a common riot which ended in a hull breach that killed nearly one hundred people, the leaders of Bakunin – in order to "seek equilibrium" – founded the Moderator Corps to enforce the Simple Law and govern the ideological interfaces of the Bakunin.

The second half of the Equilibrium Phase is generally understood to date from either the Mothership's decision to join Tunguska's political alliance or from the first announcement of their identity as the Nomad Nation. Bakunin's struggles continued (with harsh punishments being meted out by the Moderators and the expulsion of several groups), but the Nomad Nation as a whole recognize the Equilibrium Phase as being a time of slow cultural cohesion between the three Motherships.

It was during the latter end of the Equilibrium Phase that Arachne was first created. Originally meant as a common, secure data network for the three Motherships, the Nomads quickly realized the opportunity for it to be something more. Using their commercial contacts and the new powers of diplomatic immunity granted to them by O-12, they began spreading Arachne nodes throughout the Human Sphere, creating a completely alternative datasphere immune to ALEPH's interference.

VIOLENT INTERMISSION (10 NC)

It is likely that the proliferation of Arachne was a primary instigator of the Violent Intermission. Although no "valid proof" ever substantiated of ALEPH's direct involvement, and despite the alternative theory promulgated by ALEPH-aligned agents that it was the action of disaffected elements alienated by the tyrannical actions of the Moderator Corps, no Nomad has any doubt about the truth of what happened: During the tenth anniversary celebration of the founding of *Bakunin*, ALEPH infiltrated SSS commandos onto the Mothership with the goal of crippling the Nomad Nation.

Disparate Bakunian militia forces managed to repel the assault, but not before multiple Praxis modules were destroyed and thousands of Bakunians were killed.

PHANTOM CONFLICT (14 NC)

In the wake of the Violent Intermission, the Nomad Nation enjoyed a peaceful lull of sorts, although they suspected it wouldn't last for long. The Bakunian militias, brought together by the Violent Intermission, formalized their relationship into the Nomad Military Force and began coordinating with the other Motherships to assure mutual defence.

The neophyte NMF was still being put through its paces when the first skirmishes of the Phantom Conflict broke out. The failure of the Violent Intermission had convinced ALEPH that the threat of the Nomad Nation could only be eliminated by all-out assault, but rather than formally declared hostility Yu Jing and PanOceania launched a secret, undercover war.

The Nomads, of course, were a mobile and disparate nation. They were spread across the Human Sphere, and the major powers pursued them wherever they went (with a particular focus on major Arachne node in an effort to disrupt the Nomad datasphere). Although the Phantom Conflict was never officially acknowledged, it boiled away just beneath the surface on every planet and in every system of the Human Sphere.

The Phantom Conflict was a very real threat to the existence of the Nomad Nation, nor would they have any hope of winning a full-scale war. Nevertheless, the military leaders of the NMF realized that the only possible solution was to relentlessly escalate the scale and severity of the conflict: PanOceania and Yu Jing, unwilling to declare open warfare, stepped down in an impasse which ultimately bolstered the Nomad Nation's legitimacy as an interstellar power.

CRISIS DECADE (21 NC)

The Nomads were not the only extra-national newcomers to wormhole diving. A number of the larger hypercorps funded small exploration corps to seek out exotic resources in alien solar systems. It was expensive work, but – as neomaterials and a vast wealth of bio-resources had already amply demonstrated – the rewards that could be reaped were equally large.

It was a corporate probe which first discovered the Human Edge system in 10 NC. It contained no human habitable worlds (and therefore held little initial importance for the colonial interests of PanOceania or Yu Jing), but its shattered planetary accretion disc was overflowing with asteroids rich in resources. The wormholes in the

system were also discovered to be in a particularly advantageous alignment, effectively trimming weeks off of a key trade route. This meant that a Circular was scheduled to pass through the system, making transportation into and out of Human Edge incredibly cheap.

HUMAN EDGE CORPORATE CRISES

Hypercorps and megacorps from PanOceania, Yu Jing, Haqqislam, and a multitude of minor nations flooded in, eager to exploit the virgin territory. Dozens of orbitals became hundreds. Claim-jumping and piracy grew common. The corps called in mercenaries to protect their interests. The mercenary forces grew, clashing with both each other and the pirates. The major powers became involved, using covert military teams to further the interests of their favoured corporations.

Many predicted that the Corporate Crises would escalate into full-scale war, but they never did. Instead, they made “crisis” the watchword of the decade – complex conflicts that confusingly mixed corporate and national interests into a potent mix of brushfire militarism, mercenary actions, and *politiole acties*.

INNER SOL CRISES

The long-suffering Negotiation Phase of the Solar System Inner Free Trade Accords proved to be a slow-burning powder keg which directly or indirectly triggered the cascading Inner Sol Crises when the various major powers involved began taking what were referred to as “coercive actions”. (The ironic use of the term “negotiation phase” to refer to intelligence operations and special ops missions dates to this time period.)

Perhaps the most significant of the Inner Sol Crises were the Lunar Colony Revolts. These were the last gasp of the Dome Cities which had been bypassed and rendered obsolete by modern transportation technology, and the damage wrought by the conflicts only served to seal their fate.

JOVIAN CRISES

Further out in the Sol system, the Jovian Crises were a struggle for industrial primacy, with various corporate interests serving as a proxy for Yu Jing’s desire to dislodge PanOceania’s influence over Jupiter and its moons.

DISCOVERY OF PARADISO (29 NC)

The Crisis Decade came to a close with the discovery of Paradiso in 29 NC. The cynical, but probably accurate, assessment is that the fractious

conflicts which had previously been scattered across the galaxy instead became solely focused on the new colonial prize.

PanOceania was once again responsible for the discovery but, as with Svalarheima (and despite PanOceania’s best efforts to keep the planet’s location classified), Yu Jing soon arrived with their own colonisation ships. Unlike Svalarheima, however, Paradiso was the best colonial prospect since Acontecimento. That meant the stakes were higher and over the next decade tensions in the Paradiso system slowly ratcheted up. Although open warfare had not yet broken out, it will perhaps never be known how much blood was shed beneath the jungle canopy during the first decade of colonisation.

Ironically, the quiet conflict between PanOceania and Yu Jing was an opportunity for Haqqislam. As a “neutral” party they were able to lay claim to several equatorial regions in the name of building an uncontested space elevator (which also expanded the reach of their mercantile empire).

ROAD TO THE NEOCOLONIAL WARS

Tensions in the Paradiso system were growing, but the first flares of violence were found elsewhere.

BLIZZARD SKIRMISHES (35 NC)

Occurring mostly along the borders of Huangdi (the province Yu Jing claimed on Svalarheima), with the exception of a few minor naval engagements and the significant Submarine War in 39 NC, the Blizzard Skirmishes were a prelude of the wars to come. Collectively, their outcome had little impact on the political borders of the planet, but the propaganda teams of both nations painted the major incidents as nationalist triumphs.

HELOT REBELLION (40 NC)

In 40 NC, there was a major uprising of the native Helot population on Varuna. Minor uprisings had occurred before, but this rapidly proved to be something different: A coordinated, global organization calling itself Libertos claimed credit for the attacks. Although the PanOceanian Military Complex was able to quickly quash the Rebellion, the Hexahedron discovered that Yu Jing had been secretly funding and supporting the Helot terrorist group.

SILK REVOLTS

In 30 NC, dissident Silk Lords, seduced in their greed by the immense riches generated by the Silk trade, sought to overthrow the government of Hachib Mudassar. The Silk Revolts raged up and down the Haqqislam trade routes, reaching into every system of the Human Sphere and seemingly turning every caravanserai into a battlefield. One of the crucial turning points early in the conflict was when the Sekban – the volunteer naval corps of Haqqislam – refused to join the plutocrats. A small Sekban fleet was able to come to the Hachib’s relief and ferry him back to Bourak, where he was able to rally support.

JOAN OF ARC

Joan of Arc, the first Recreation, was delivered to PanOceania in 32 NC. She entered the Hospitaller Order as a publicity stunt, but was able to rise in rank and fame quickly during the Blizzard Skirmishes. Blazing a trail through the NeoColonial Wars, her numerous successes were a major influence on the cult-like popularity enjoyed by Recreations today.

Circulars, p. XXX: Immense craft which circulate through the wormholes of the Human Sphere on fixed routes. Smaller ships can attach to them in order to traverse the ‘holes.

Hexahedron, p. XXX: Headquarters of the PanOceanian intelligence service.



NEOCOLONIAL WARS (42 NC)

A rapid intervention by O-12 managed to avert immediate war, but it was only a temporarily delay. The sabres were rattling and both PanOceania and Yu Jing, frustrated and bellicose, were merely waiting for a clear-cut *casus belli*.

An April 3rd, 42 NC, the PanOceanian cargo ship *Wink of the Rohini* was destroyed above Svalarheima. Despite protestations of innocence, PanOceania blamed the StateEmpire Armada. It was an act of war and would be answered in kind.

INITIAL STAGE (FIRST NEOCOLONIAL WAR)

The war erupted simultaneously on several fronts. Although the First NeoColonial War was largely restricted to Svalarheima, Paradiso (which became known as the "Meat Grinder"), and Human Edge, theatres of operation were spread out across entire star systems.

It was the first total war of the interstellar era. Humanity had never seen anything like it before, and thanks to Maya images and experiences from the front lines it could often be viewed in real time (particularly when civilian population centres were involved). Public opposition to the conflict swelled, and O-12 was able to capitalize upon it to force PanOceania and Yu Jing to agree to a ceasefire in the neutral city of Accra.

CENTRAL STAGE (SECOND NEOCOLONIAL WAR)

But the ceasefire only lasted ten months. PanOceania discovered that Yu Jing was continuing to supply the Libertos terrorists on Varuna with weapons and gear, a direct violation of the Accra Truce. O-12's diplomatic teams might have been able to resolve the situation except for the Libertos bombing of a Tidal BioResearch facility. One hundred and eight people died, half of them Helots (Libertos condemning them as collaborators), inflaming PanOceania's citizenry and abruptly swinging popular opinion in favour of the war.

In the beginning, however, the Central Stage of the NeoColonial Wars proved a struggle for PanOceania. During the Initial Stage, Yu Jing's old military paradigm of fielding massive quantities of barely-trained infantry soldiers was exposed as inadequate for the realities of modern warfare. Tseng Huan, their Minister of Defence, authorized an aggressive overhaul of their military paradigm, investing heavily in the development of servo-powered armours. The result was the Invincibles – flexible, mobile, and well-protected troops which amply demonstrated their effectiveness during the Shé (Snake) Offensive.

Yu Jing simultaneously used their superior naval power to force the war to the Sol, Varuna, and Acontecimento systems. PanOceania was reeling. The war had been unexpectedly carried to their homeworlds and there were some who felt the Hyperpower's dominance of the Human Sphere were coming to an end.

BATTLE OF THE DIVIDING LINE

The deadliest engagement of the NeoColonial Wars was the Battle of the Dividing Line. During the Second Siege of Acontecimento, Yu Jing mounted an assault on the Nomad Orbital Commercial Delegation at Acontecimento-3 and secretly seized Nomad intra-system vessels. These were used as Trojan horses to penetrate the defences of the Neoterra system, bringing the war to the doorstep of the Hyperpower. PanOceania had also become overconfident in the advantages of their Metatron systems: Yu Jing EVOs used reverse-engineered Dărăo transponders to launch surprise attacks which killed hundreds of PanOceanian infowarriors.

PanOceania held, but only at the highest of costs. And with the defences of their capital badly damaged, they were forced to pull troops back from other fronts.



That's when PanOceania launched the Mahisa Total Offensive. Hexahedron's top secret military research programs had perfected the Metatron transponders, allowing them to launch inter-system infowar attacks. Now they used them, launching more than three hundred simultaneous attacks on Yu Jing positions across the Human Sphere. With its civilian and military dataspheres crippled, Yu Jing was caught completely off guard, and the Total Offensive eventually culminated in bombing Yutang itself. This was the beginning of total quantronic war, and it forced Yu Jing to sign the Peace of Río Negro.

TERMINAL STAGE (FINAL NEOCOLONIAL WAR)

A new conflict was sparked when a PanOceanian research team discovered a pair of pre-human ruins on Paradiso. At the behest of the other G-4 nations, O-12 attempted to arrange an international group to study them, but PanOceania refused their overtures and claimed sole ownership of the site (dubbed ZuluPoint). Yu Jing launched an assault on the site in an effort to claim it, triggering the bloodiest (and last) stage of the NeoColonial Wars.

Several factors contributed to bring an end to the slaughter: A Haqqislamite-Nomad alliance formed within O-12 to stage a direct intervention. The Yu Jing Emperor died unexpectedly. In response to social and media pressure, key PanOceanian lobbies withdrew their support.

The NeoColonial Wars ended with the Peace of Concilium. The final, negotiated balance of power closely resembled the pre-war situation, with the exception that the area around the ZuluPoint ruins became an O-12 protectorate known as the NiemandZone. PanOceania and Yu Jing both agreed to share colonisation of Paradiso, and their naval presence in the system was severely limited to ensure the peace.

RETURN TO DAWN (52 NC)

One year after the Peace of Concilium, the PanOceanian scout ship POS Nirriti jumped through a previously unexplored wormhole and found itself in the long-lost Ariadna system. And much to the surprise of the entire Human Sphere, the original colonists on the planet Dawn had not died out. Overcoming tremendous odds, in fact, they had conquered a large swath of the planet.

Ariadnan Commercial Conflicts (53 NC)
Two months after the rediscovery of Ariadna, the Yu Jing military ship Lei Feng arrived in the system

in order to "secure the interests of the StateEmpire and to ensure PanOceanian compliance with international law". Fearing the outbreak of another war, Haqqislam and the Nomad Nation moved quickly to have O-12 declare the Ariadnan government a major power.

The action stalled out for several months, however, until the StateEmpire proposed the Yu Jing Compromise: The Ariadnans would be declared a major power, but they would only be able to claim ownership over the portion of the planet which they actually controlled. The Ariadnans considered this a travesty, but they literally had no say in the matter.

Unfortunately, even with Ariadna added to the G-5, the situation on Ariadna was not resolved: The Colonial Commission was almost instantly corrupt and favoured Yu Jing land claims. PanOceania continued operating under the legal pretense that the planet actually belonged to the native Antipodes. Haqqislam and the Nomads bought deeds from the Ariadnan government. All of these claims conflicted with each other, and megacorps with conflicting leases or purchases began fighting by proxy: Mercenaries would be hired by the corporations, the Ariadnan government would attempt to disarm the mercenaries, and one of the other G-5 nations would use the confrontation as a pretext (or would be forced by their corporate interests) to intervene.

After half a decade of fighting, Bureau Aegis dispatched troops to lock down the situation. O-12 took possession of the border areas originally covered by the Yu Jing Compromise, establishing an Exclusion Zone around the Ariadnan sovereignties. The economic and logistic damage wrought on Ariadna, however, left the local government in a weakened position from which they have never fully recovered.

LOCAL WARS

After the end of the Ariadnan Commercial Conflicts, there were several years in which the great powers were each primarily dealing with small, localized conflicts. These included the Outer Mercantile Crisis between PanOceania and Haqqislam, the Union Revolts of the Jupiter-Pluto Circuit, and the Fourth Antipode Offensive on Ariadna.

This, however, was merely the calm before the storm.

SECOND PHANTOM CRISIS

During the Ariadnan Commercial Conflicts, ALEPH took advantage of the increased discretionary powers it had been granted into order to peacekeep on Dawn in order to divert SSS forces to covertly attack the Nomad Nation. Although not as protracted or violent as the original Phantom Crisis, in many ways it was even more insidious, featuring a number of infowar operations aimed at allowing ALEPH to permanently subvert the Arachne datasphere (instead of merely destroying it).

ZULUPOINT

The only thing more shocking than the discovery of pre-human ruins on Paradiso was that one of them actually was human: The Aurora colony ship, thought lost on its journey to the doomed colony of Ariadna, had apparently crashed on Paradiso. (The ultimate fate of the original colonists remains uncertain.)

The other ruins, however, were definitely alien in origin. Known as the cosmoliths, they are stone structures. They contained no signs of technology (except, possibly, for some decayed biotech) except for the Ur-Probe: A single, unmanned military vehicle of some sort. The Ur-Probe contained signs of nanite activity, although its ultimate purpose would not be discovered for several years.



INVASION

At the height of the Terminal Stage of the NeoColonial Wars, PanOceania abruptly lost all contact with the ZuluPoint Research Centre. The security team sent to investigate discovered the staff dead and the lab almost totally destroyed. PanOceanian High Command attributed the incident to a Yǎnjīng intelligence operation, although even after the war Yu Jing denied all involvement.

At roughly the same time that the ZuluPoint Research Centre was being destroyed, several ships throughout the Paradiso system detected a strange stellar phenomena moving at astounding speeds.

Only years later, and with the benefit of hindsight, did anyone in the Human Sphere piece together what had happened: The Ur-Probe, the only technological alien artefact found at ZuluPoint, had somehow been activated by the research team. Its advanced nanotechnology had infected the ZRC's systems and used them to create a drone rigged with an impulsion engine and a trans-system emitter. The drone had then travelled to the wormhole that Ur-Probe had originally used to enter Paradiso and sent a signal back to its master: The Evolved Intelligence and its Combined Army.

FIRST PARADISO OFFENSIVE (60 NC)

The Combined Army arrived in the Paradiso system through a previously unknown wormhole. The POS Terpsichore, POS Olhada do Bom Jesus, and the Yu Jing frigate Long Qi were obliterated as soon as they attempted to greet the unidentified fleet, and the small naval presence in the system allowed by the Peace of Concilium could do nothing as the invaders landed at ZuluPoint and established a beachhead.

Humanity was caught completely off-guard. All of their defensive efforts were focused on guarding against each other, leaving them unprepared for an existential threat and incapable of coordinating their actions. Things might have gone much worse if not for the heroic actions of the Paradiso Control Force. The PCF was the PanOceanian planetary army and, by virtue of where the aliens had staged their invasion, they were on the front lines. Although they were ill-equipped and to deal with the fearsome Morat legions, they fought hard and bought precious weeks of time during which millions of civilians were evacuated from threatened areas and the reeling Human Sphere rallied its forces.

When the end came for the short-lived ZuluPoint Campaign, it came fast and hard. The exhausted PCF, already buckling and running out of room for

their strategic retreats, suddenly collapsed into complete chaos. Only later was it discovered that the PCF had become the first victims of the sinister, shapeshifting Shasvastii. They had infiltrated the PCF and systematically dismantled it from the inside.

The PCF was functionally extinct, but they'd bought precious weeks of time during which millions of civilians were evacuated from threatened areas and the reeling Human Sphere had rallied its forces. The First Paradiso Offensive ground on, with the conflict also spreading to the Septentria Continent.

SECOND PARADISO OFFENSIVE (64 NC)

The end of the First Paradiso Offensive wasn't the result of the ground battle, however. Instead, it was the naval forces of humanity, pouring in through the wormholes leading to the rest of the Sphere, which won decisive victories – first at the Second Battle of the Outer Orbit and then again in the Acheron Attrition – and established the Paradiso Blockades which cut off Combined Army reinforcements.

Once the Blockades were raised, the Combined Army forces on Paradiso pulled back from their hyper-aggressive campaign and settled into a quiescent period during which they reinforced the gains they had made during the First Offensive.

Paradiso Coordinated Command realized, of course, that this would only be a temporary respite. Despite their best efforts to prepare, however, they nevertheless struggled to contain the Combined Army when it boiled out of its strongholds eighteen months later. Multiple cities fell across the Norstralia and Septentria Fronts before their advances could be slowed.

COMING OF THE TOHAA

On August 9th, 66 NC, a massive spaceship of clearly alien design docked with the EveningStar Orbital, the Paradiso headquarters of O-12. It was impossible to hide. Aurelia Cardoso, a freelance journalist with the Maya investigative aggregate Eye on the Sky, was the first to break the story, but soon the orbital space around the EveningStar was swarming with reporters while others focused powerful telescopic lenses skywards from Damburg and Horselberg.

Panic began to spread as rumours flew that O-12 was negotiating a surrender with the Combined Army. All the worst horror stories of how badly things were going on the front began to circulate

Yǎnjīng, p. XXX: The Eyes. The Yu Jing intelligence agency.

ARIADNAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS

Paradiso had once again become the Meat Grinder. O-12, having formed the Paradiso Coordinated Command, was vitally aware that they needed more boots on the ground. They agreed to assist the Ariadnan government with territorial reclamation on the frontiers of Dawn in exchange for troops.

The result was the Ariadnan Exploration Corps, which thrust the backwater Ariadnan youth – still adjusting to the culture shock of recontact – directly into the middle of modern warfare. Their first action was in relief of Yu Jing's Green Banner Army at the Siege of Bái Hai. From the mouth of the Longxi River, they engaged in a series of vicious battles with Morat forces and successfully forced them to withdraw.

anew. For a long, horrible moment a terrible reality began to be accepted as the truth: Humanity had lost the war.

Ninety minutes later, O-12's Paradiso High Commissioner Natalia Hesse issued a public address. The alien vessel was not from the Combined Army. It belonged to the Tohaa Trinomial. They, too, were at war with the Evolved Intelligence. Humanity had just gained a powerful ally. "This is a new time," Commissioner Hesse announced. "Full of opportunities."

PARADISO AFFAIRS (65 NC)

In a series of events referred to as the Paradiso Affairs, O-12 came into possession of an alien device known as the "Black Box." Efforts to fully decrypt and interpret the contents of the Black Box continue even today, but among the earliest information obtained from the Box was the knowledge that there was another race at war with the EI, a race named the Tohaa. The Black Box also yielded coordinates leading to a new wormhole in the Paradiso system which apparently led to star systems controlled by the Tohaa. This information was turned over to the O-12 Oberhaus and, following a series of tense, secret debate, the Oberhaus ultimately decided that, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Or, as Senator Eduardo Baez infamously declared as the vote was called, "In the darkness, even the unknown light is welcome." Humanity needed an ally.

Construction began almost immediately on the facilities required to open a portal through the wormhole. The portal, now codenamed Daedalus, was opened. A message probe was sent. The Tohaa responded.

TOHAA CONTACT TREATY (66 NC)

After three weeks of intense negotiation on the EveningStar Orbital, the Tohaa Contact Treaty was signed on August 30th, 66 NC. This was only the beginning, with the Alliance Summit which would hash out the exact operational parameters and responsibilities of the agreement scheduled to last for at least several more weeks.

A sneak attack on the EveningStar by Combined Army forces, however, destroyed the orbital before the Summit could be completed. Despite the catastrophe, the cowardly attack only stiffened the resolve of the Tohaa, and humanity's new allies poured onto the battlefields of Paradiso. It was the end of the Second Offensive.

TODAY (67 NC)

The battlefield on Paradiso has stabilized, but the Combined Army still controls vast swaths of territory and the Acheron Blockade is constantly tested. There is no peace to be found here, and analysts are certain that this is merely the prelude to an inevitable Third Offensive.

Elsewhere, while the Paradiso Offensives have created an apparent calm throughout the Human Sphere, tensions are arguably higher than they have ever been. Secret operations, fast missions, infiltrations, exfiltrations, and special actions have proliferated. The G-5 nations inflict murder, theft, aggressive espionage, sabotage, and kidnappings upon each other.

In some circles, Paradiso seems far away and pales in comparison to the dangers of a Sphere in a position every bit as precarious as the days leading up to the NeoColonial Wars.

And through it all, O-12 struggles to keep the peace.

QINGDAO REPORT

The Qingdao Report was originally created by Bureau Hermes. Named after the city where the Bureau's investigation started, it revealed that Yu Jing was engaged in a Spherewide infiltration campaign using a consortium of Yutang companies, agents of the Yǎnjīng, and Triads. Through indirect means, the StateEmpire had taken control of multiple corporations with key strategic relevance and was positioning itself to directly manipulate the PanOceanian economy (with indications that they were planning to do the same with Haqqislam).

Concerned that the contents of the report could prove destabilizing during a time of war, Bureau Noir buried it (while taking quiet action to defuse the ticking Yu Jing time bomb). The report was leaked, however, and published by Truth Pills, a show produced by the PanOceanian Maya channel Autofocus in 64 NC. The resulting scandal – which also implicated O-12 by association – has contributed materially to tensions across the Human Sphere ratcheting up.

EXRAH AFFAIR

The Combined Army is made up of many different alien races, all fighting for the Evolved Intelligence. In the Paradiso system, this included the Exrah Concordat. In 67 NC, however, the Concordat betrayed the EI by channeling weaponry away from the Paradiso front for later resale. The EI responded by completely wiping out the Concordat. The Exrah are now ruled by the Commissariat business group, which is currently abstaining from direct military actions.

INTRODUCTION
ADVENTURES IN A
WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS**CODE INFINITY
(O-12 TIERED
RESPONSE CODE)**

A CODE INFINITY is one of the alert states which exists immediately prior to full-scale war. It is one of the worst possible situations which can exist during peacetime: A complicated, interlocking network of extreme political tension suspended between mutually contradictory astropolitical concerns. In a CODE INFINITY, attempting to defuse one area of tension can directly result in the eruption of another crisis or a complete collapse into violent catastrophe.

PanOceanian intelligence analysts refer to long-term INFINITY situations as the "Chinese Curse" (and dread the announcement that Interesting Times may be upon them). Yu Jing analysts, on the other hand, refer to them as the Dog Days. ("Better to be a dog in peaceful times than to be a man in a time of chaos.") Bureau Noir has inherited a little bit of both espionage cultures, with their operatives often referring to missions as the "dog pound" while sarcastically signing off with the saying, "May you live in interesting times." But Noir agents know that unravelling the Interesting Times is their *raison d'être*.

The Infinity roleplaying game gives you all the tools you need to create an exciting campaign set anywhere within the Human Sphere: Play as Hassassin Govads seeking to recover the lost Cubes of their former brothers from the Equinox terrorists who stole them. Join the crew of the Go-Go Marlene! Show as location scouts. Journey into the depths of Acontecimiento's oceans in aquatic Apsara Lhosts. Hunt Shasvastii Speculo Killers through the shattered planetoids of Human Edge. Sign up for a PanOceanian mercenary company fighting Libertos rebels on Varuna, then steal a spaceship and become Haqqislamite privateers!

The default mode of play for the game, however, assumes that you are agents working for Bureau Noir, O-12's Secret Service. Bureau Noir's operative teams are flexibly liaised through the other O-12 Bureaus, which means that their duties can effectively take them anywhere in the Human Sphere.

NEW TITLE HERE

Theoretically, Bureau Noir – like O-12 itself – is a neutral agency and its agents are impartial and unaligned. In reality, the Human Sphere is wracked with factions and every PC will belong to one of them. Their loyalties will be divided and their true

agendas will be hidden.

We call this the Wilderness of Mirrors.

In addition to their primary mission objective, scenarios for the Infinity roleplaying game are designed with multiple faction goals. (For example, the primary mission objective might be to protect media tycoon Charles Angleton from threats made by the criminal AI Svengali. Yu Jing agents, however, have a faction goal to insert an eavesdropping virus onto Angleton's comlog, and Nomad agents have a faction goal to retrieve intel on Angleton's suspected collaboration with Svengali.)

Player characters who are assigned a classified objective by their faction handler will feel the weight of the increased stakes in every action that they take, and the conflicting agendas will heighten the dramatic tension of every decision. The Wilderness of Mirrors will bring the broken alliances and fraught tensions of the Infinity universe to burning life at your gaming table.

Gamemasters looking to implement the Wilderness of Mirrors in their own campaigns will find more information on creating and integrating classified objectives in Part V: Game Mastering, starting on p. XXX.



FACTIONS OF THE FUTURE

Ariadna: Long years of bloody war — against both each other and the native Antipodes — forced the four nations of the lost colony world together through the imperfect weld violence. These disparate national factions are united, however, in their struggle to catch up with the rest of humanity. Their agents seek technological advantage and astropolitical leverage.

Haqqislam: The neo-Muslim renaissance of Haqqislam followed their Search for Knowledge to the hostile alien world of Bourak, but their economy has become dominated by the byzantine Merchant Guilds. Their commercial interests extend throughout the Human Sphere along the trade routes which they founded. And, above all, they strive to protect the secrets of Silk.

Nomads: The Nomads have no planet to call their own, instead being primarily a coalition of three colossal Motherships — the Bakunin, Corregidor, and Tunguska. Some applaud their fierce advocacy for personal liberty, while others name them dangerous anarchists who threaten to weaken the Human Sphere when its strength is most needed. Some see their resistance to the insidious, tyrannical control of ALEPH as a bastion defence of humanity's identity, but others point to their illegal gene-experimentation and radical body modifications as a relentless drive towards an incomprehensible post-humanity. Regardless of your point of view, the Nomads stand apart from the rest of human society, even while their far-flung Commercial Missions — which serve as embassies and trade delegations — insinuate their presence throughout the Human Sphere.

PanOceania: The Hyperpower. Larger, richer, and stronger than any of the other Great Powers. The people of PanOceania put more trust in ALEPH than anyone else in the Human Sphere, and as a result, life in their lush, garden-like Living Cities is automated, comfortable, and luxurious. Unsurprisingly, they champion a defensive astropolitical agenda which strives to sustain the status quo which they currently dominate.

Yu Jing: PanOceania's largest rival is Yu Jing, the Pan-Asian alliance which has forged its diverse cultural groups beneath the unified banner of the new Imperial System. The StateEmpire of Yu Jing has been rapidly closing the gap with PanOceania by aggressively seeking out every possible advantage and ruthlessly exploiting it.

Corporations: The chartered companies used by PanOceania to rapidly develop its colonial prospects, the Merchant Guilds of Haqqislam which blazed the trade routes of the starways, and the keiretsu spun-off from the centrally-controlled economy of Yu Jing's StateEmpire became the seeds of the new hyper-corporations. Corporate agents seek technological revelations, trade secrets, unique access to natural resources, and anything else that might yield a profit.

Mercenaries: In an era of interstellar war, the free mercenary companies (FMCs) and private military corporations (PMCs) have flourished. In the employ of state armies, O-12, and private corporations alike they can be found almost anywhere: Capitals

and colonies, orbital stations and deep space patrols, the battlefields of Paradiso and the security of corporate compounds. Their services are traded on the well-regulated War Market, a mercenary stock exchange in which employers can find companies available for hire and the mercenary companies can find individual soldiers or squadrons ready for recruitment. Characters receiving classified objectives from a mercenary faction may be loyal to a specific Warmonger, or they may be an independent freelancer with multiple markets for the information they have to sell.

Submondo: Petty and violent crimes obviously have not vanished in the wake of interstellar flight, but if you're talking about criminals as a faction, then you're talking about organized crime. Some of these organizations have become incredibly large, spanning not only planets, but the entire breadth of the Human Sphere. O-12 uses the codename Submondo (meaning Underworld in Esperanto) to refer to these criminal syndicates, which include mob families (like the Acontecimiento Mafia), criminal brotherhoods (like the Triads), pirate consortiums (like the Grey Band of Human Edge), terrorist groups (like Eko-Aktion), and Maya clusters (like Aug-Neon).

O-12: As an international and pan-planetary organization, O-12 strives to hold humanity together. O-12 is functionally a "neutral" faction, but in practice that often means the faction goal of characters loyal to O-12 is playing spoiler to the faction goals of the other player characters.



INTRODUCTION

HOW TO PLAY INFINITY

Grab your CombiRifle, hop on your mag-bike, check your MediKit, and tell your comlog to load the soundtrack of your life: The universe of *Infinity* is waiting for you.

Because the *Infinity* roleplaying game is a game of the imagination, you and your friends can play it almost anywhere. Most games are played around a table, but it's just as easy to play the game using e-mail, a message board, or a chat room. Playing *Infinity* requires at least two players and can comfortably include up to six (or more).

One player is the Game Master (GM). The GM is responsible for describing the universe of *Infinity*:

Peeling back the thick, purplish growth of the Paradiso jungle, you peer down into the ravine. You can see a Morat patrol down there. There are three of the huge, red-skinned aliens walking alongside what appears to be some kind of dronbot. You can see a weird, elongated parabolic dish perched on top of the dronbot, and it's skittering back and forth along a scanning arc of some sort.

The other players must now tell the GM what they're going to do: Will you ambush the Morat with your CombiRifles? Throw a gas grenade and hope to knock them out? Try to follow them and figure out what they're doing? Hack the dronbot?

Attempt to take one of them alive for questioning? Or will you try something else entirely? The decision is up to you!

WHAT YOU NEED

In addition to a Game Master and a group of players, you'll also want:

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Each player will either want to create a character using the Lifepath system (starting on p. XXX) or select one of the pregenerated characters (starting on p. XXX).

DICE: Two d20s per player, a few d6s, and a dozen or more Combat Dice for the group. (You can also use additional d6s in place of the custom Combat Dice.)



PAPER & PENCIL: To draw maps, track conditions, and keep notes on important clues, events, and characters you meet during your adventures.

TOKENS OR BEADS: Five per player to track Infinity Points, a dozen or more for the Game Master's Heat pool, and an optional third set to track Momentum.

ROLLING THE DICE

You'll often need to roll one or more dice while playing *Infinity*. This will be indicated in the text with the notation XdY , where X indicates the number of dice to roll and Y indicates the type of dice to roll. For example, $3d20$ would mean to roll three twenty-sided dice and $5d6$ would mean that you roll five six-sided dice.

COMBAT DICE:

Combat Dice, or , are a particular way of rolling a $d6$. They are used for determining damage and governing special effects. When rolling a , ignore any results of three, four, or five. Results of one and two are counted normally, while sixes are referred to as Effects, which trigger certain special abilities.

REROLLS:

A number of circumstances and abilities will allow a character to reroll one or more dice. When a reroll is allowed, the player chooses which dice from the original roll to reroll (up to the number of dice listed, if any). The new result of rerolled dice replaces the original result entirely (even if they're worse than the original results).

CHARACTERS

Of course, you won't be playing as yourself looking down at those Morat soldiers. Instead, you'll use the Lifepath system (starting on p. XXX) to create a character by simulating their life story. Starting from the moment of their birth, you'll walk a few miles in their shoes (or their Tesseum-laced combat boots, whatever the case may be): Perhaps you'll be an investigative journalist for a Maya media aggregate, journeying to the far corners of the Human Sphere to get your exclusive stories. Or maybe you'll be a member of a Güiláng special forces unit, trekking across the icy fields of Svalarheima in service of Yu Jing. Or a bounty hunter tracking dangerous criminals through the colonial domes of Mars. Or a fearsome dogface athlete who suffered a career-ending injury while playing Dog-Bowl on Ariadna.

ATTRIBUTES

Each character is defined by a collection of seven attributes. These attributes indicate a character's inherent abilities, and their physical and mental limitations. Most attributes for player characters have values from six to twelve, with eight

representing the human average. Higher attribute ratings represent greater ability.

ATTRIBUTE LIST

- **Agility:** Physical and manual dexterity, sense of balance, body control, and reflexes.
- **Awareness:** Perceptions, sensory acuity, gut feelings, and instincts.
- **Brawn:** Strength, toughness, endurance, and the ability to apply physical force.
- **Coordination:** Hand-eye coordination and spatial awareness.
- **Intelligence:** Wit, intellect, logic, reason, and the ability to apply knowledge or interact with technology.
- **Personality:** Charisma, comfort in social situations, and the ability to be threatening or charming as required.
- **Willpower:** Grit, determination, and psychological resilience.

SKILLS

Skills represent a character's specialised training within a particular field — knowledge, proficiency in tools or devices, conditioning, special techniques, and so forth. Each skill is tied to a particular attribute, representing the most common association between that skill and the character's basic capabilities. (For example, Education and Tech are skills based on Intelligence.)

Skill Expertise: A character's Expertise in a skill is their mastery of the subject. Expertise with a skill increases the likelihood of success.

Skill Focus: A character's Focus in a skill is achieved through constant practice, superior discipline, and deeper insight. Focus with a skill improves the quality of success.

SKILL TESTS

A skill test is required whenever a character attempts a task and the outcome is in doubt, where there are consequences for failure, or when the character is distracted or threatened. Outside of these circumstances, it's easier to assume that the character simply succeeds — player characters in *Infinity* are assumed to be competent and capable individuals, who are unlikely to fail at routine tasks.

When asked to perform a skill test, the player rolls $2d20$. Each die that rolls equal to or less than that skill's **Target Number** scores a single success. The greater the number of successes scores, across the entire dice pool, the better the test's result.

EXAMPLE

EXPERTISE VS. FOCUS:

A fast, sloppy mechanic with years of experience might have a high Expertise in Tech, but a low Focus: When you bring your half-slugged TAG to them, they will almost certainly get it working again... but it will be slathered in duct tape. On the other hand, a gifted amateur might have a lower Expertise than the old-hand, but a higher Focus: They won't always be able to get your TAG running again, but when they do it's more likely that they'll also figure out a way to optimize the engine or add extra armour to it.

SKILL LIST

Acrobatics
Analysis
Animal Handling
Athletics
Ballistics
Close Combat
Command
Discipline
Education
Extraterrestrial
Hacking
Lifestyle
Medicine
Persuade
Pilot
Psychology
Resistance
Science
Spacecraft
Stealth
Survival
Tech
Thievery

PLAYTEST TIP ROUTINE TASKS

Characters in *Infinity* are competent professionals and unlikely to fail at routine tasks. If they aren't threatened or distracted and if there is no consequence for failure, it's usually better to simply assume that they succeed instead of calling for a test. If the roll doesn't matter, don't roll!



EXAMPLE

BASIC SKILL TEST:

Roberta is making a Tech check with an Intelligence of 8, an Expertise of 3, and a Focus of 2. Her target number is 11 (8 + 3) and when she rolls 2d20 she gets results of 13 and 1. The result of 13 generates no successes, but the result of 1 generates two successes: One for being lower than the target number and a second for being lower than the character's Focus in the skill.

HEAT AS COMPLICATION

If the GM has difficulty thinking up a good Complication in the moment, he can choose to add two Heat to his pool instead. If a non-player character suffers a Complication, the players may similarly choose to have the GM remove two Heat from his pool.

If multiple Complications are generated, then their effects are resolved individually at the GM's discretion, so some could be turned into Heat while others have an immediate effect.

The skill's **Target Number** is equal to the Attribute for that skill, plus any ranks in Expertise the character possesses for that skill. Further, the character's Focus ranks create the possibility to score extra successes — each d20 that rolls equal to or less than the character's Focus for that skill, scores two successes instead of one.

Skill tests have a **Difficulty** rating, a value from zero to five, which determines the minimum number of successes required to succeed at the task. Successes scored beyond that minimum become Momentum, which can be spent to gain additional benefits and bonuses, and which is a key part of the 2d20 system.

In order to increase a character's chances of success, there are a number of ways in which to obtain additional d20s to roll during a skill test. These are described in full later in this section, but under no circumstances is a character allowed to use more than three bonus d20s on a skill test.

GAINING MOMENTUM

When the number of successes scored on a skill test is greater than the difficulty rating, the excess successes become Momentum. Momentum can be spent immediately to perform the task faster or more effectively, or it can be saved and applied to subsequent actions (with one success paving the way to the next). For more details on using your Momentum effectively, see *Momentum* on p. XXX.

COMPLICATIONS

Whenever a 20 is rolled on any d20 in a skill test, the GM creates an impediment or problem called

a Complication immediately. One Complication is created for each 20 rolled.

Complications are an inconvenient change of circumstances. A Complication could present an obstacle to further progress, requiring a new approach (like a route of escape being blocked, requiring a new path), a loss of personal resources (such as using up ammunition or medical supplies), or something that hinders the character temporarily (a twisted ankle, a social faux pas, or a problem with a piece of technology).

It is important to remember that a Complication is independent of success or failure; it is entirely possible to succeed at a skill test while simultaneously generating a Complication. Complications should only take effect after the skill test's results have been applied.

If a character rolls multiple 20s, he will suffer multiple Complications. These can be resolved separately, or the GM may choose to group them together into a bigger problem.

Heat is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, and in **Chapter 5: Game Mastering**.

UNTRAINED SKILL TESTS

Sometimes a character may be required to attempt a skill test using a skill that he doesn't have any Expertise or Focus ranks in. These tests are said to be untrained. Untrained tests are resolved exactly like any other skill test, except the character will generate a Complication for each 19 or 20 rolled on any d20 in an untrained test.

DIFFICULTY TABLE

NAME	SUCCESSSES	EXAMPLES
Simple (D0)	0	Opening a slightly stuck door. Researching a widely known subject. Hitting a target at a shooting range with a bullet.
Average (D1)	1	Overcoming a simple lock. Researching a specialized subject. Shooting an enemy at optimal range.
Challenging (D2)	2	Overcoming a complex lock. Researching obscure information. Shooting an enemy at optimal range in poor light.
Daunting (D3)	3	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry. Researching restricted information. Shooting an enemy at long range in poor light.
Dire (D4)	4	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry, without the proper tools. Researching classified information. Shooting an enemy at long range, in poor light and heavy rain.
Epic (D5)	5	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry, without the proper tools, and in the middle of a firefight. Researching a subject where the facts have been thoroughly redacted from official records. Shooting an enemy at extreme range in poor light and heavy rain.

TEST FOR CONSEQUENCES

At times, a failed skill test may cause an interesting situation to grind to a halt, or the consequences of failure may not be particularly noteworthy. In such situations, the GM may permit a character to succeed in spite of a failed skill test, but with some additional cost.

In this case, the character succeeds at the task attempted, but they fail to prevent some additional problem from arising as well – the character immediately suffers a Complication as well, as if he had rolled a 20 on one of his dice. This Complication is in addition to any generated by the test itself, so if the character rolls a 20 on the failed test, and the GM permits him to succeed at cost, then he counts as having two Complications.

Any success gained at a cost is gained without Momentum, even bonus Momentum, or Momentum taken from the group's pool – the character only gains the most basic level of success. A character may not use Failsafe (see below) when he Tests for Consequences.

FACE-TO-FACE TESTS

When two characters are in direct opposition to each other, each character involved in the task performs a skill test. The character who achieves the greatest quantity of Momentum succeeds, achieving their goal. In the case of a tie, the character with the highest Expertise in their skill wins.

If there are no other factors involved, the difficulty of a face-to-face test is usually Simple (D0). For example, if two characters are running a race the winner will simply be whichever character has the better skill test.

Face-to-Face tests with higher difficulties represent situations in which it is possible for everyone participating in the task to fail. For example, if two characters are both trying to be the first person to solve a Challenging (D2) puzzle, it is possible that neither of them will be able to solve the puzzle.

If either side has some circumstance which would make the test more challenging for them than for their opponent, simply adjust the difficulty of their check.

TEAMWORK

If the situation, time, and GM allow, several characters can work together as a team while attempting to perform a task. One character is designated as the leader, and the other characters are designated as assistants. In order to assist with a skill test, each player must describe how their character is assisting the test's leader. If the GM approves, each assistant rolls 1d20, using their own attributes and skills to determine if any successes are scored. Individual assistants may use different skills than the leader, representing a group effort in which each character contributes different knowledge or proficiency.

If the leader scores at least one success, then any successes generated by the assistants are added to the leader's total. If the leader fails, then any successes scored by the assistants are lost.

Complications rolled by the leader and their assistants are all totalled and take effect regardless of the leader's outcome.

Assistants may not roll additional dice bought with Momentum, Heat, or Infinity Points, although the leader can do so normally.

FAILSAFE

There may be some situations where a player feels it may be better to fail than spend an Infinity point or pay Heat to the GM for bonus dice. This may be the case with a skill test using a skill the player's character has no training with, or where the difficulty is high enough that success is unlikely to begin with.

With agreement from the GM, the player may choose to have his character fail a skill test automatically, where there are meaningful consequences for failure (such as being pursued, attempting to perform a complex task under pressure, avoiding an attack, etc.). To fail a skill test voluntarily, the player pays the GM one Heat. In exchange, the character immediately gains one Infinity point (up to the normal maximum). A character may never choose voluntary failure for a Simple D0 skill test.

Infinity points are discussed in more detail on page XXX.

DIFFICULTY ZERO TESTS

A task may be so simple that it does not require a test in the first place. These are also Simple D0 tests. If a test is Simple D0, it does not require a test to be made – it is automatically successful with zero successes, requiring no effort whatsoever, and with no risk of Complications (see below), and without any dice being rolled. However, because no test is made, it can generate no Momentum, not even bonus Momentum from talents, gear, or particularly advantageous situations.

A character can still choose to make a test for a Simple D0 task, but this takes the normal amount of time, and can generate Momentum as normal, this comes with the risk of Complications as well.

IMPROVING THE ODDS

While succeeding at most common tasks is a straightforward matter, even the most proficient character cannot succeed at the most difficult tasks without effort, opportunity, or assistance.

Infinity provides a number of ways to do this, and most of those methods are fairly similar – providing additional d20s for a character to roll on a skill test. Extra dice allow a character to score more successes, and thus hit higher difficulties or simply generate more Momentum. These extra dice come from Momentum (page XXX), or Heat (page XXX), from spending Infinity Points (page XXX), or from using Resources (see Chapter 4: Equipment).

There are a few different ways to improve the odds. These are described in detail elsewhere in this book, and can be mixed-and-matched as the characters require. Regardless of the methods used, a character can never gain more than three additional d20s on any skill test.



THE HEAT-MOMENTUM CYCLE

Generally speaking, getting yourself out of the trouble generated through Heat creates Momentum that will propel you forward to your next set of actions. Taking those actions will cause Heat to grow again as you pay for additional dice to bolster the chance of success, take Reactions to survive, and the like. And then it will shrink once more as the GM's NPCs are forced to react or activate powerful weapons and abilities. In this way, the amount of "pressure" the player characters apply to a situation provides NPCs with the means to push back commensurately, ensuring that situations remain challenging and adjust themselves to the players' choices (and vice versa).

MOMENTUM FROM OTHER SOURCES

Some talents, items, or circumstances can grant a character bonus Momentum. This bonus Momentum is added to any applicable skill test that results in success (as specified by the source of the bonus). A failed skill test cannot benefit from bonus Momentum.

PLAYTEST TIP TRACKING MOMENTUM

We recommend setting aside a distinctive d6 or using a pool of tokens to track the amount of saved Momentum for the group. Try to keep your Momentum tracker visible to everyone at the table to make coordinating your actions easier!

MOMENTUM

When the number of successes scored on a skill test is greater than the difficulty rating, the excess successes become Momentum. Momentum can be spent immediately to perform the task more effectively, or it can be saved and applied to actions taken later.

Momentum, beyond simply serving as a reward for characters that succeed spectacularly well, can represent the benefits of cooperation, group dynamics, leadership, coordinated actions, and other forms of teamwork. Momentum is of benefit to the entire group, not merely the player character that generated it, and it can be an extremely powerful tool if used skilfully.

Players are encouraged to be creative in their uses of Momentum, allowing them to build new successes upon the foundation of past victories.

GENERATING MOMENTUM

As already noted, successes scored beyond the difficulty rating of a skill test become Momentum. Each success scored above that minimum threshold becomes a single point of Momentum.

Upon succeeding at a skill test, the player should take note of the amount of Momentum generated. Those points can then be used while the character is resolving his current task, or saved for later use, as described later. Importantly, you do not have to determine what you are using the Momentum for until you choose to spend it.

SPENDING MOMENTUM

As noted before, a character does not have to declare what he is using his Momentum for until he chooses to spend it. Momentum spends can be made as soon as the need for them becomes apparent, and there's no chance of wasting Momentum because you spent it on a benefit you didn't need.

Most Momentum spends can only be used once on any given skill test or effect. In action scenes (described later), a character can only use a Momentum spend once in any round. However, some Momentum spends are described as **Repeatable**. This means they can be used as frequently as the character likes and has the Momentum to spend upon them.

Once the character's task has been resolved (or at the end of his turn, in an action scene), any unspent Momentum is lost. However, characters have the option to save Momentum for later use if they wish.

SAVING MOMENTUM

As noted above, characters have the option of saving Momentum, rather than letting unspent

Momentum go to waste. This saved Momentum goes into a group pool, which can be added to or drawn from by any character in the group, representing the benefits of their collective successes. No more than six points of Momentum may be saved into this pool at any one time.

During any successful skill test, any member of the group may draw as many or as few points from the group Momentum pool as he wishes, adding those points to any he has generated on the skill test. He may subsequently spend that Momentum as he wishes, as if it had been generated from the skill test. As normal, Momentum only needs to be spent as needed, so a character does not have to choose how much Momentum he is drawing from the group pool until he actually needs it, nor does he have to draw it all at once.

At the end of each scene, or each full round in an action scene, the pool diminishes and one point of Momentum in the pool is lost.

IMMEDIATE MOMENTUM SPENDS

Some Momentum spends are not tied to a specific test; rather, they can be used freely as soon as they are required, spending points directly from the group's Momentum pool rather than waiting for a successful skill test. These spends are referred to as Immediate. Immediate Momentum spends typically have some other restrictions on how and when they can be used, but those restrictions are specific to the individual spends.

Immediate Momentum spends can also be paid for with Heat, which will be described in depth later. A single point of Heat paid to the GM provides the same benefits as a single point of Momentum spent. When paying for an Immediate Momentum spend, the cost can be split, paid partly in Momentum and partly in Heat, if the character desires.

COMMON USES FOR MOMENTUM

The most common uses for Momentum are listed below. However, players are also encouraged to be creative in their use of Momentum. When you score an exceptional success, think outside of the box in terms of how that superb performance can be reflected in either the result of the immediate task or in how the outcome of that task can impact what happens next.

Regardless of how it is used, Momentum spends must make a degree of narrative sense — that is, the benefit gained from Momentum must make sense from the perspective of the characters — and the GM may veto Momentum spends that do not support or reflect the fiction.

Create Opportunity: (Immediate, Repeatable). One of the most straightforward uses of Momentum is to add an additional d20 to a skill test. The decision to purchase bonus dice must be made before any dice are rolled on that test. No more than three bonus d20s may be used on a single skill test.

Obtain Information: (Repeatable). Momentum allows a character to learn more about a situation. Each point of Momentum spent can be used to ask the GM a single question about the current situation, or an item, object, structure, creature, or character present in or relevant to the scene at hand. The GM must answer this question truthfully, but the GM does not have to give complete information – a partial or brief answer that leaves room for further questions is more common. The information provided must be relevant to the skill test attempted, and it must be the kind of information that a character using that skill would be able to determine – a character could use Observation to discern general details about a scene, or Medicine to diagnose an illness, or Ballistics to identify a particular form of ranged weapon or projectile. The more specific or specialised the skill, the more in-depth information that skill can provide about that particular field, but the less useful it is in other fields.

Improve Quality of Success: (Often Repeatable). Momentum can allow a character to succeed stylishly, or to immediately capitalise upon or follow-up on his success. The effects of this are broadly left to the GM's discretion, as is the cost, but some specific examples of this are described elsewhere in the rules. Some examples of this kind of spend may be Repeatable, such as inflicting more damage, or helping a patient recover from serious injuries.

Increase Scope of Success: (Often Repeatable). With Momentum, you can affect additional targets, increase the area affected by your successful task, or otherwise enlarge the extent of your accomplishment. The precise effects of this, and the cost, are left to the GM's discretion. Under some circumstances, this may be Repeatable, such as affecting additional people within a group.

Reduce Time Required: The GM reduces the amount of in-game time that a task requires to complete. A task that might take a whole day, or several hours may now only take a single hour, for example. The precise effects of this, and the cost, are left to the GM's discretion.

HEAT

In some cases, a player will want the benefits of an Immediate Momentum spend, but won't have

enough to spend. When that happens, they can choose to pay Heat instead. Heat works exactly like Momentum in this regard – and it can be combined with normal Immediate Momentum spends – but when player characters pay Heat, those points are added to the GM's Heat pool. The normal limits on each Immediate Momentum spend – such as the maximum of +3d20 from Create Opportunity – still apply, even if part or all of the cost is paid in Heat rather than Momentum.

Using Heat is discussed fully in **Chapter 5: Game Mastering**.

GAINING HEAT

In addition to players paying Heat and NPCs converting Momentum into Heat, there are a few specific conditions which can cause the Heat pool to grow:

- **Complications:** When a character rolls a complication on a skill test, the GM may choose to add two Heat to their pool instead of immediately using the complication.
- **Reactions:** As described in Chapter 1: Playing the Game, a player character attempting a Reaction adds to Heat; one for the first Reaction attempted each round, two for the second, and so forth.
- **Threatening Circumstances:** Certain strange or dangerous environments might naturally generate a point or two of Heat, representing the innate peril of the location. Some foes may also bring with them a few points of Heat, representing the threat that the foe represents.

SPENDING HEAT

Broadly, the GM uses Heat in to make the lives of the player characters interesting and challenging. This is done in two ways – Complications, and mechanical effects.

A complication is an inconvenient change of circumstances. It is a new obstacle to overcome (like an explosion or collapse that cuts off a route of escape), a loss of resources (such as a Reload), something that impairs the character in the short term (a sprained ankle), or an embarrassing situation (like a social faux pas).

Beyond complications, the GM can use Heat in a wide range of ways that interact with the game mechanics. In a way, it can be thought of as the GM's counterpart to banked Momentum and to Infinity Points, providing similar benefits both for NPC actions and for shaping the challenges and dramatic events of an adventure. The ways that a GM can spend Heat are described in detail in **Chapter 5: Game Mastering**.

EXAMPLE

CREATE OPPORTUNITY:

Cassandra generates Momentum while picking the lock on the door of an illegal Nomad gene-lab. She might use that Momentum to add a d20 to the Stealth check for slipping past the guard inside because she was able to open the door quickly and silently. Or she might spend that Momentum later while opening another door, relying on the familiarity she gained with the first.

TABLE XXX

DIFFICULTY INCREASE	MOMENTUM COST
+1 difficulty	1 Momentum
+2 difficulty	3 Momentum
+3 difficulty	6 Momentum

EXAMPLE

CREATE OBSTACLE:

While infiltrating the gene-lab, Cassandra is spotted by one of the guards. As the guard pulls his sidearm, Cassandra spends three Momentum and shoots her own pistol to knock out some of the lights. The sudden darkness increases the difficulty of the guard's Ballistics test by two steps (one Momentum for the first increase in difficulty, then two Momentum for the second step).



EXAMPLE TRIGGERING A TRAIT:

Kline has the character trait of Paranoia. While negotiating with an arms dealer on Bourak, he can't shake the feeling that he's about to be ambushed. Despite the incredible risk it poses, he tells his geist to hack the arms dealer's comlog and eavesdrop on his communication. Kline's player says that he's triggering his Paranoia trait and, with the GM's approval, pays one Heat to gain an Infinity Point.

INFINITY POINTS

Player characters have access to a special type of resource called Infinity points. This reflects the fact that the player characters have ambition, and determination above and beyond most people, and such individuals shape their own fortune. Whether or not they are viewed as heroes, the player characters are destined for greatness.

A player character begins each session with two, three, or four Infinity points, and he cannot have more than five Infinity points at any point.

As character's pool of available Infinity points refreshes at the beginning of each session, players are encouraged to spend Infinity points to influence the story and perform heroic actions. Since players should be rewarded with additional Infinity points during play, they are encouraged to use this resource often enough that they can benefit from bonus points awarded by the GM.

Here are just a few of the ways Infinity points can be spent during play:

- **Add a Bonus d20 to a Skill Test:** A player can add a bonus d20 to any skill test for one Infinity point. The extra die is assumed to have already rolled a '1', and automatically generates successes as if it were rolled as part of the skill test. Bonus d20s gained by spending Infinity points still count towards the normal limit of three bonus d20s.
- **Perform an Additional Standard Action:** During combat, a character can usually only perform one Standard Action on their turn. By spending an Infinity point, they can perform a second Standard Action on their turn. Each character may gain only one additional Standard Action in this way each round.
- **Second Wind:** A character can catch his breath and restore one of his Damage Capacities to full by spending an Infinity point.
- **Overcome a Weakness:** A character may spend an Infinity point to ignore the effects of all instances of a single type of Harm (physical, mental, etc) until the end of the current scene, or to end a status effect.
- **Influence the Story:** A player may spend an Infinity point to introduce a fact, or add a detail, to the current scene. Story declarations can have both narrative and mechanical effects. Story declarations should be plausible, and the GM has the final say over whether or not a suggested fact or detail is valid. The GM may also declare that particularly large or significant declarations may require more than one Infinity point.

GAINING INFINITY POINTS

Beyond starting with new Infinity points at the start of each session, there are a number of ways for player characters to gain Infinity points in play. As already stated, under no circumstances can a player character have more than five Infinity points at once.

- **GM Award:** Infinity points may be awarded by the GM during a session to reward players for good roleplaying, clever plans, successfully overcoming difficult challenges, or using teamwork. Players may have other opportunities to gain Infinity points by achieving certain goals within an encounter, reaching a milestone in the story, or choosing to be the one to suffer the consequences of some dire event. As a general guideline, there should be two to three opportunities for players to gain Infinity points per hour of play.
- **Failsafe:** As on page XXX, characters may choose to fail some skill tests voluntarily, at the GM's discretion. This adds a point of Heat to the GM's pool, and the player character immediately gains an Infinity point in return.
- **Triggering a Trait:** Once per Scene, a player may choose to have a character trait or agenda come into play, creating an immediate Complication for themselves as a result, in exchange for gaining an Infinity point. The GM may suggest instances where these traits and agendas could easily come into play, but the final decision always comes down to the player.