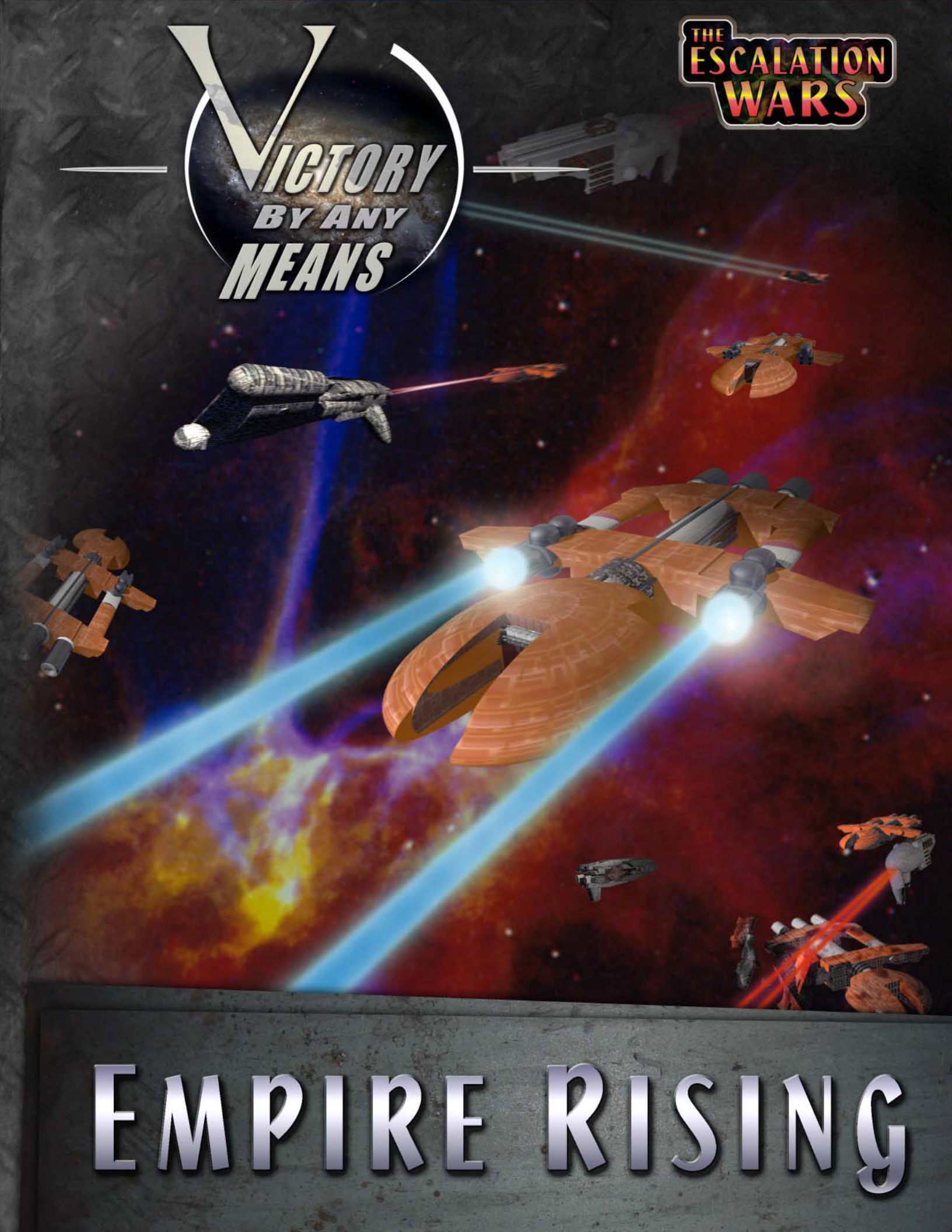
THE ESCALATION WARS
VICTORY BY ANY MEANS
EMPIRE RISING

THE ESCALATION WARS

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The Last Flight of the Solukar

Captain Ralon Tazeel gripped the arms of his command chair, his knuckles turning white as his grip continued to tighten. His body bucked, his grav harness the only thing keeping him in his command chair.

The tactical video screen on the forward wall of the bridge was filled with a frantic swarm of lights and symbols. Tazeel watched as swarms of blue and red blips moved across the display, individual lights growing brighter for an instant before fading and disappearing. One symbol, then another, and then another disappeared before his eyes. Some belonged to the enemy, but many of them—too many of them—were Circasian.

A solid blow rocked Tazeel's ship, the *Solukar*. Ralon Tazeel gritted his teeth. His Kolanis Cruiser had come under fire from one of the Chouka's heavy cruisers and all of the *Solukar's* escort and fighter support had already been scattered and dispersed by the enemy fleet's counterstrike. The attempt to beat back the enemy flanking fleet had failed, and now the *Solukar* and her crew were to pay the price for this failure.

"Damage to all decks," reported Lt. Nalun Lasucir, Tazeel's tactical officer. "Damage repair crews report that the port structure has taken substantial damage from the last shot. Chouka plasma weapons have melted through the cargo bays and that entire section of the ship has been depressurized."

"Give me a firing solution on the Chouka heavy cruiser," commanded Tazeel.

"Firing solution acquired, Captain."

"Fire, Lieutenant."

The *Solukar's* four forward plasma cannons came alive, firing volley after volley of super-heated plasma at the Chouka cruiser as it continued to close on the *Solukar's* position. Several shots went wide of their target, but most managed to hit the oncoming behemoth, causing visible explosions upon impact. Despite the damage the ship showed no signs of breaking off its attack run and continued to lumber slowly towards the *Solukar*.

"Minor damage to target's forward hull," Lt. Lasucir reported.

The *Solukar* was rocked again by weapons fire, this time coming from a wing of enemy fighters that had joined in the attack on the wracked *Solukar*. The sound of metal upon metal and the echo of explosions filled the bridge. Tazeel thought that he could hear the screams of his crew as each new girder gave way, collapsing and crumpling like foil under the intense bombardment.

The tactical officer turned his head and looked Tazeel in the eyes. Tazeel could see the look of anguish upon her face and demanded, "Report!"

"Captain, another one of our particle cannons has gone offline. Remaining weapons still have a lock on the enemy cruiser. I don't know how much longer we can hold out, sir."

Tazeel nodded gravely and replied, "Continue with the attack." Swiveling his chair, Tazeel turned to the communications station and asked, "Communications, try to signal other nearby ships and fighters and request immediate assistance."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the communications officer.

Tazeel returned his attention to the primary tactical display, manipulating the display through his chair's control pad so as to zoom in and take a closer look at the immediate threat. Although the *Solukar* continued to fire a hail of weapons fire at the Chouka cruiser it seemed as though nothing could slow it down. Tazeel growled and his hands dug deeper into the arms of his chair. Tazeel didn't notice the pain that now shot through his fingers. His total attention was devoted fully to the battle that unfolded all around him. The life of his crew, as well as his own, hinged on how the next few moments would play out.

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The *Solukar* fired another wave of chemical-reaction rockets towards the target while the ship's remaining particle cannons and plasma cannons continued to pummel the enemy's hull. The weapons fire lashed out across the dark void seeking their prey in the dark shadow of the enemy homeworld. Plasma and rocket volleys found their target, exploding violently upon impact with the hull while particle cannons raked slowly and surely across the enemy's hull. Explosions and fire dotted the cruiser's hull, followed by an even larger explosion that shattered the cruiser's side. Huge sheets of metal were pushed outward from the breach by escaping gases. Wraith-like tendrils of flame emitted from the gaping rents in the Chouka vessel's side.

Tazeel turned his head and demanded, "What happened to the cruiser?"

Lt. Lasucir answered, "One of our rockets punctured the primary plasma intake valve on their reactor. Sensors indicate that their reactor's power levels are fluctuating wildly – sir, their reactor is going to go critical at any moment!"

As the words escaped the officer's mouth, the view of the enemy Apostle Holy Cruiser disappeared in a blinding flash of light. As Tazeel's eyes readjusted he tried to look to see what remained of the enemy cruiser. All that remained was a burned out black hulk spiralling out of control into the darkness and a field of debris that lay scattered across the view screen. They had done it. They had destroyed an Apostle...

Tazeel nodded. "Good work, people! Now fall back to support the fleet..."

Tazeel was interrupted as Lasucir announced, "Captain! Three Revelation War Barges are moving in on attack vector. They are entering missile range...." Her voice trailed off as the data appeared on her screen. After a pause she continued, "Sir, we have eighteen missile volleys incoming."

Tazeel sighed and resigned himself to his fate. "Begin evacuation procedures, get everyone off the ship!"

1.0 Introduction

Welcome to **The Escalation Wars: Empire Rising**, the first of the supplements set in **The Escalation Wars** universe. What are the Escalation Wars and the universe that surrounds them? Quite simply put, they are the fateful wars of supremacy fought between the Circasian Empire and the Courata Imperium between the years 2004 and 2025. This series of wars would engulf the whole of known space and bring it to the brink of destruction. The Escalation Wars universe is an epic setting covering thousands of years of history and dozens of alien races, each a thread in the dazzling tapestry that is the Escalation Wars saga.

The Chouka War details the Circasian's first major interstellar conflict. In their war with the fanatical Chouka, the Circasians took the first step towards dominance in their region of space. This pivotal moment in history would lead to the rise to power of the Circasian Empire, an ascension that would ultimately cost hundreds of millions of sentients their lives.

1.1 Campaign Rules

This section of Empire Rising includes all of the additional and optional rules required to play a campaign in the Escalation Wars universe. Some of the rules contained hereafter supercede rules found in the Victory by Any Means Campaign Guide. In most cases, rule numbers from the campaign guide (preceded by "CG" and then the rule number) are included for easy reference.

1.2 General Rule Modifications

Wartime Economies

The CG 4.1 Wartime Economies should be used for all Escalation Wars campaigns.

Production Times

Ship construction in the Escalation Wars universe takes considerable time and effort. As such, the CG 4.10 Extended Construction rules are in force.

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Colonization

In our own history, a large percentage of those who colonized far distant lands were members of the disenfranchised, persecuted, or criminal segments of society. The same holds true for the Escalation Wars universe. All colonists sent to new worlds are not drawn from the "productive" local populace. Use CG 4.8 Quick Expansion Colony Fleets rule to simulate this fact.

Non-Atmospheric & Atmospheric-Only Flights

Some of the flights in the Escalation Wars universe are capable of either only non-atmospheric or atmospheric operations. Non-atmospheric flights may not be based on planets, but instead must rely on space-based basing. Atmospheric-only flights are the opposite. They are only capable of being based at planetary sites and can never be based by space units nor participate in combat encounters. Because of this, atmospheric-only flights have very limited usefulness in a campaign. Their primary application is in ground combat, where they can either function directly as ground combat units or else provide CG 3.6.5.3 Tactical Support for other friendly ground units.

The only way to transfer atmospheric-only flights between systems is by transporting them aboard either military supply ships or Transport Fleets. Atmospheric-only flights have a cargo size equal to their DV for this purpose.

Basing

Under the standard rules, units are given a single Basing Capacity statistic (often referred to simply as *Basing*), which is equal to the number of flights the unit can operate. In this book, Basing is broken down into two types: Standard Basing Capacity (BS-s) and Heavy Basing Capacity (BS-h). Both types of Basing are governed by the standard basing rules as outlined in the Campaign Guide. For that matter, Standard Basing operates exactly like traditional Basing. All types of flights can be based from Standard Basing.

Heavy Basing on the other hand is reserved for use by larger craft. Shuttles, assault shuttles, breaching pods, and super-heavy fighters are the only flight types that can make use of Heavy Basing. Shuttles, assault shuttles, and breaching pods (but not super-heavy fighters) may also make use of Standard Basing, but Heavy Basing is designed explicitly for their use.

This supplement contains several ships that are restricted to Heavy Basing Capacity. Such ships are incapable of basing fighter flights but are fully capable and in fact designed to operate shuttles and other auxiliary small craft (for example, the Chouka Covenant Minelayer and its Ark Minelaying Shuttles). Future supplements will make greater use of this differentiation, including older Lleskath destroyers that based large super-heavy fighters on a catapult-launch assembly.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Although rarely employed, most ships in the Escalation Wars universe are capable of being equipped with weapons of mass destruction. This category of weaponry includes nuclear weapons, mass drivers, and any more exotic forms of weapons capable of causing widespread planetary destruction. Weapons of mass destruction cost 2 economic points each.

Refer to the updated bombardment chart listed in this source material's appendices to determine the maximum number of weapons of mass destruction each class of ship can operate at any one time.

Listening Post

Many governments operate Listening Posts along their borders. These posts are used to gather vital intelligence information about fleet movements in their own system as well as to coordinate offensive Intel missions into surrounding systems. If used properly, Listening Posts can increase the security along an empire's borders.

Listening Posts are treated like ground-based Supply Depots (see CG 3.6.1.2 Supply Depots) for purposes of transport and purchasing. Instead of providing supply benefits, Listening Posts instead provide benefits to Intel operations performed from the system in which the Listening Post is located.

There are two benefits to establishing a Listening Post at a planet or system. Firstly, the

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2.0 History of the Chouka War

State of the Galaxy, Pre-War

The history of the familiar region of the galaxy, called 'known space' by those that dwell there, is a rich one. Much is remembered about the region's past through the texts, stories, memories, and ruins scattered across a hundred worlds. Songs, poems, articles, treatises, and artifacts betray the sometimes-mysterious history of known space.

The earliest recorded information of the inhabitation of known space dates back to the Hastan Empire in 8100 B.C.E., a great power that stretched forth its hand into what is now known space long before many of today's powers had discovered fire or agriculture. It is still unknown what caused the downfall of such a megalithic empire as that carved out by the Hastan, we only know that the Hastan disappeared from this region of space long ago leaving behind marvelous ruins and glimpses of a time before recorded history.

The rebirth of interstellar civilization within known space began roughly 500 years before the outbreak of the Chouka War. It was during this time that many of the races took to the stars in search of their destinies. The Ukal, Kholran, and Vendrizzi are perhaps the most well known races to have arisen during this period, founding great empires that would endure for centuries to come.

During this early period of native exploration and expansion, the elder races experienced a renaissance of technology and culture not seen before or since. With no outward threats, their people were free to live their lives in peace and work towards whatever ends they found appealing or worthy of their time.

As Prometheus brought fire to man, so to these elder races brought technology and space travel to the developing civilizations they encountered along their borders. The Ukal are largely responsible for the formation of the modern jump gate network. In addition to their own exploratory programs, the Ukal spread jump technology to the other younger races that they encountered, providing these races new technologies in exchange for raw materials and/or basing rights in their system.

While the elder races were exploring and expanding, the northern frontier of known space was changing. Long controlled by the Lossoleguul and their star empire, the

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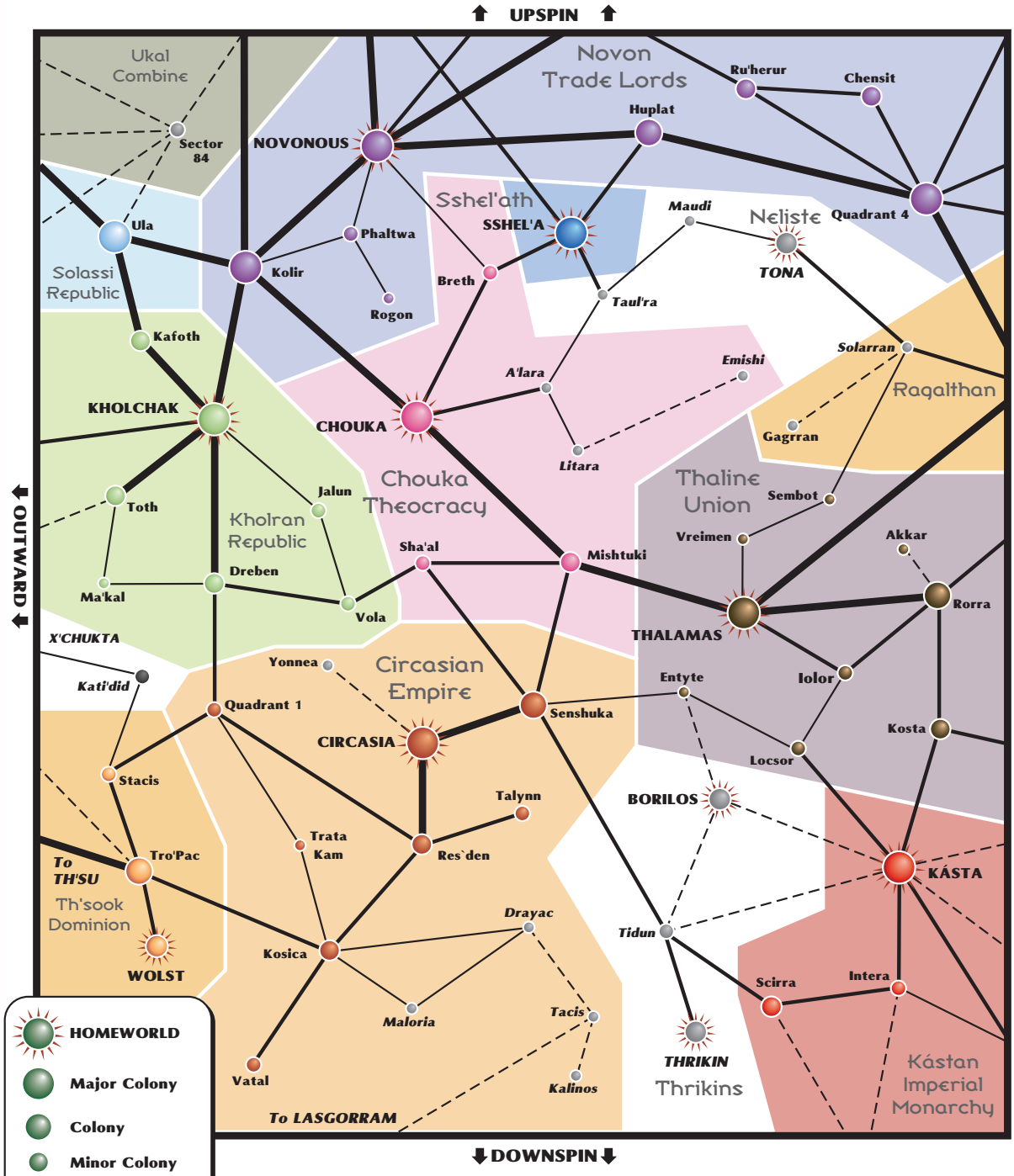
Systems of the Chouka War



This map shows the general extent of the Circasian Empire's knowledge of surrounding territories circa the Earth year 1970. The Circasian Empire was fairly isolated prior to the Chouka War, limiting their contact with the outside galaxy. In contrast, the Chouka were located near the rich Solassi Corridor and the opulent commerce meccas belonging to the Novon Trade Lords.

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homeworlds of the Lossoleguul had come under attack by wave after wave of barbarian races from outside their borders. Weakened by years of war in the previous decade against the neighboring Gammaks, the Lossoleguul homeworlds eventually fell to the new invaders. With the destruction of their capital the Lossoleguul Star Empire began to collapse. The imperial provinces bordering known space were thrown into chaos, a chaos that they would not escape for hundreds of years.

The fall of the Lossoleguul in 1600 C.E. occurred while the races of known space were at their height. The Ukal Combine controlled much of known space, with its borders reaching from Yulonn to Khalir and Vinatra to Toss. The hordes that attacked the Lossoleguul would never enter the borders of known space, but the pressure they put on other races in the region led to a series of brutal wars on the northern frontier. It was the Ukal's war with one such provincial power, the Takaarans, which ultimately led to the Ukal abandoning many of their territories.

The recession of the Ukal and the beginning of their eventual decline as a major interstellar power marks the beginning of the Second Age of interstellar history. Younger races emerged all across known space and began establishing their own presence across the stars. The Ukal's former protectorates, including most of the races that would later form the ak-Tai Hegemony, began exploiting the outward sectors of space while races such as the Courata and Ragaltha appeared coreward.

The 19th Century would prove to be a crucible for those races fortunate to survive them. Great wars raged across the entirety of known space. In the outward sectors, a genocidal race known as the E'chekri had begun their campaign of destruction, destroying entire worlds and killing billions upon billions of sentients in the process. Along the Vendrizzi border, raids by the mysterious Ingalli led to the outbreak of the Ingalli War. It was as if a fire had swept over known space and the future looked bleak indeed. Somehow these threats were put down and order restored, but not without fundamentally changing the survivors.

The Circasian Empire at the beginning of the Chouka War was a relatively minor power controlling a handful of systems in a relatively uninteresting and untouched region of known space. The area of space that the Circasians controlled lays nested between the "dead zone", an area cleansed of life by the malevolent E'chekri during the Great War of the early 19th Century, and the heavily populated coreward sectors. Few (if any) alien explorers had previously journeyed into the Circasians region of hyperspace. This left the Circasians in a good position for future expansion, something that they took full advantage of.

Outward of the Circasians another race, the Th'sook, had also started to cut out an empire for themselves in the abandoned systems of the E'chekri dead zone.

The Great War

The Great War, fought between the Earth years 1817 and 1833, enveloped the outward sectors and left the region in ruins. The invasion of the genocidal E'chekri would lead to the formation of a mighty alliance of worlds, including the Kholran, ak-Tai, Lleskath, Ghotekhen, and Solassi. This alliance and the remnants of the battered worlds left in the wake of the E'chekri advance fought valiantly against the invading E'chekri hordes, eventually managing to turn the tide and defeat their enemy.

The E'chekri earned a vile reputation that lives on today for their total disregard for sentient life. The E'chekri did not take prisoners, nor did they occupy alien worlds. Instead, the E'chekri went out of their way to destroy enemy worlds from orbit using mass drivers, fusion bombs, and biological weapons. Very rarely did E'chekri ground troops set foot on alliance worlds.

Following the war and the extermination of the E'chekri, the allies formed a strong defense pact that would lead to the formation of the ak-Tai Hegemony. The Kholran were not a part of this new compact, instead retreating back to their homeworld and largely withdrawing from the galactic milieu.

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History of the Chouka War

The Kholran and Ukal, two major powers upspin of the Circasians, had begun contracting their borders and pulling away from the galactic scene. The Ukal found themselves occupied defending their northern borders from the marauding races of the northern wastes, while the Kholran had simply become disenfranchised with galactic affairs. Both remained major military forces in the time period, but neither was overly active in the affairs of the "lesser races" that surrounded them.

Coreward of the Circasians lies a heavily populated region of known space. The Kástan Imperial Monarchy controlled a region of space separated from much of known space by virtue of the volatile and unpredictable nature of local hyperspace in the region. The Thaline Union stood on the border of the Circasian's worldview, a gateway leading to the unknown territories and powers further coreward.

Outward of the Circasian Empire sprawl the former Ukal protectorates, worlds formerly defended by the Ukal before their departure from the region. The war torn region is home to the ak-Tai Hegemony and its member states.

The Circasian Empire is in many ways a contradiction in terms. The government is generally republican in nature, with an elected body overseeing the domestic affairs and policy of the Circasian people. At the same time, the military-staffed oversight and control body, known as the Circasian War Council, controls all aspects of the Circasian military machine. In times of national crisis, the War Council has full authority to take control of the government in order to persevere. Law delineates the situations in which these actions are warranted and the decision to activate the War Council's war powers is in the hands of the democratically elected ruling body. This has not stopped the War Council from pressing the issue in situations where they feel decisive action is needed, and the Council often acts as a guiding hand even during times of peace.

In contrast, the Chouka Theocracy is ruled by the religious elite of their world. The Chouka Circle of Elders, the organization descended from the members of their order's first convocation, rule Chouka and her colonies with an iron fist. Edicts of law, as well as faith, are handed out equally by the Circle and neither one is challenged by the common man. The totality of the Theocracy's hold over its people is amazing in that it has endured for hundreds of years.

The Circasians never held any great love for the Chouka. Social as well as physical differences helped to drive a wedge between the two races early on. Still, the Circasians were open to developing a peaceful, mutually beneficial relationship with the Chouka. The Circasians were still relatively new to space and wished to befriend as many alien cultures as they could in hopes of procuring advanced alien technologies. The Chouka on the other hand were interested less in trade than they were in converting the Circasians to their one true faith. The Chouka knew that the Circasians were a more primitive people technologically than their own and had no use for Circasian trinkets. Without an economic justification for relations, the Chouka were uninterested in establishing relations with such a barbaric, heathen state.

The Circasian government continued to make overtures to the Chouka, but the members of the War Council could see that the Chouka would not budge. They had no reason to open up relations or favorable trade routes with the Circasians, as they had nothing to gain in return. What few concessions the civilian government could acquire with the Chouka were one-sided and nearly pointless. A border treaty and non-aggression pact were negotiated and ratified in 1961, but the Chouka were not interested in discussing provisions that would cover future territorial claim issues.

As additional intelligence information became available, the War Council began actively entertaining the idea of war with the Chouka. It was true that the Chouka military was more advanced than that of the Circasians, but what the Circasians lacked in quality they made up for in quantity. The Circasian Empire had been harassed by pirates and foreign raiding vessels for years and the result of these "raider wars" was a larger than average fleet, although not yet powerful enough to counter the Chouka fleet. However, the rewards of pursuing a war with the Chouka were evident. Not only did several Chouka systems have access to major and lucrative trade routes, they also had access to new territories into which the Circasian Empire

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5.0 The Sshel'ath Alliance

Background

A race of insect-like aliens, the Sshel'ath are amazing in that they are able to reshape their bodies at will. The secret behind this ability is the fact that a Sshel'ath's body is made up of an intertwined mass of rope-like elastic fibers which allow for limited rearrangement of the body's form. Some of these fiber segments contain the equivalent of major body organs that serve normal life functions. These sections are larger, thicker, and more durable than the secondary fibril structures that comprise most of the Sshel'ath body. Each fiber section has a thick exoskeleton that protects the soft, fleshy cartilage within. The only section of the Sshel'ath not rearrangeable is the face. Akin to a large fibroid cyst, the Sshel'ath face contains visual sensory and highly sensitive motion detection organs. All other senses are distributed throughout the body. Sshel'ath have a fast metabolism and can easily regenerate entire sections of their body given time. They are also highly resistant to radiation.

The Cold War

The Sshel'ath race for space began in the late 19th Century in the midst of a cold war involving the two most powerful planetary coalitions on Sshel'a. These two powers, the A'hel'is and the Mst'as, had both reached superpower status during their wars of expansion fought during the previous century. The A'hel'is and Mst'as were the largest and most powerful planetary powers on Sshel'a, yet neither power ever came into direct conflict with the other. Instead, each controlled its own cadre of satellite states that acted as proxies. As the cold war escalated and tensions increased it was not uncommon for one power to direct one of its client states to attack the other's client who would then return in kind. Like a game, the power brokers on either side willfully sacrificed their 'pawns' for the greater good. Hundreds of thousands of Sshel'ath were killed in the first ten years of the 20th Century as a result of these proxy wars.

Shortly after satellite technology had become available, both powers began to develop orbital defense platforms. Both possessed nuclear capabilities and hoped that their network of satellites would be able to successfully intercept any incoming enemy ICBMs *and* provide orbital launch capabilities for their own nuclear weapons.

Construction of new satellites came at a frenzied pace, the A'hel'is matching Mst'as production and vice versa. Whenever one nation would launch a new satellite the other would quickly follow in kind. By 1918, the orbit of Sshel'a was riddled with an intricately woven web of defense and communications satellites. A handful of "orbital fortresses" were also established; these large military stations allowed small crews of twenty to thirty officers to serve in space for extended periods. The fortresses acted as command nodes, keeping tabs on the operational status of other nearby satellites. Such installations were seen as a necessity for maintaining control of orbital assets should a total nuclear war destroy ground based command and control facilities.

In 1922, a Mst'as geologic probe sent to investigate a large proto-planetary object in the dense outer asteroid belt relayed news of an

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navy to spread itself thinly across the populated regions of the Sshel'a system.

The Novon attack on Sshel'a came as expected, and with deadly consequences. The fleet jumped out near the Sshel'ath asteroid belt and began moving to attack any and all nearby settlements in the region. What few defense ships were present tried to slow the Novon advance, but all failed.

After destroying five asteroid colonies and murdering over fifty thousand civilians, Lord Tlalac communicated a warning to the Sshel'ath people: do not attempt to do battle with the Novon trade lords again, or it would be their undoing. With that Tlacal and his fleet exited the system and returned to Huplat. The Sshel'ath pulled their remaining naval units back to Sshel'a and proceeded to bide their time and rebuild their shattered forces and colonies.

A New Opportunity

When the Circasians attacked the Chouka in 1971, the Sshel'ath were quite pleased. They had dreamed of expanding into new systems, but the Chouka and Novon had always blocked available avenues of expansion in the past. Both neighbors possessed a technological advantage over the comparatively primitive Sshel'ath, and the Sshel'ath couldn't afford to maintain an expensive exploratory program, eliminating that alternative.

The Sshel'ath realized that the Chouka's defeat was imminent by the end of 1972. The Sshel'ath military received a dramatic increase in defense funding to help them take advantage of the Chouka's increasingly bleak situation. The construction of several new warship hulls was ordered in anticipation of an invasion of Chouka space. Resources were also invested into several languishing design projects in an attempt to get them readied for possible use against the Chouka.

The conquest of the Chouka colonies in Breth gave the Sshel'ath their first chance to practice empire building. The Sshel'ath now had another system under their control and a number

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The Blood Swords

The Kástan raiders known as the Blood Swords were one of the most fearsome raider bands to rear their heads in known space in recent memory. The Blood Swords were formed and financed by Brahaen Ghaira, a member of the Kástan nobility whose family's ties to the lines of succession had been cut a century before due to scandal. Brahaen Ghaira was the second child of his house and a playboy in his youth, winning great favor among the women of the Imperial Court.

As a young man, Brahaen Ghaira took great interest in space warfare. Unwilling to enter the Kástan imperial navy and give up his autonomy, Brahaen instead purchased his own ship and gathered a group of cutthroats, convicts, and social outcasts to serve as the ship's crew. This first ship, called *Raining Thunder*, gave Brahaen an outlet for his dubious desire to earn himself a name as a great military commander – on his own terms.

The *Raining Thunder* started its service as a mercenary vessel, escorting freighters in and out of the Rapids of Rodirra and guarding them from attack. These routine escort missions did not satisfy Brahaen, however, and he began to look for other opportunities for adventure.

After conversations with several members of his crew that had served aboard raider vessels elsewhere, Brahaen decided that profit and excitement lay in swashbuckling. Instead of escorting freighters as they had previously done the *Raining Thunder* would raid them!

Using those family resources at his disposal Brahaen purchased several more rundown warships and outfitted them for raiding operations. A freighter and two small frigates soon joined the Blood Sword fleet alongside the *Raining Thunder*.

The first seven months of operations as raiders proved less successful than Brahaen had hoped. Battles against slow moving freighters didn't excite him in the least, and the few run ins with military vessels often left his small raider fleet badly beaten and in retreat. Their successful raids had netted them enough money to continue operations, but the Blood Swords were definitely not making money, nor was Bahaen enjoying the rogue's life he had imagined.

All of that was about to change. In the spring of 1942, Brahaen's contacts funneled him information on a substantial Thaline terrentium shipment being routed through Chouka space bound for the Novon trading junction at Kolir. As soon as Brahaen received the information his fleet was rerouted to intercept and capture the terrentium. The raid on the Thaline convoy was a success and the Blood Swords got away

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with most of their cargo. What they left behind, however, would help to cement the name of their raiding clan. The crews of the Thaline freighters were cruelly tortured and then slaughtered by the Blood Swords. The Chouka crews that answered the ships' distress calls found body parts and fluids strewn throughout the ship.

Brahaen Ghaira reveled in his catch and quickly returned to Kásta to sell his ill-gotten terrentium. More than a few buyers were willing to look the other way to purchase some terrentium on the cheap (compared to the prices they normally paid for the rare element). Brahaen netted enough credits to fully refit his fleet with the latest in hardware and still have credits leftover.

Ghaira didn't sell all of the terrentium he netted from the raid on the Thaline freighter, however. Instead he hoarded it and waited until, after several more years of successful raiding of alien shipping, he had saved up enough money to purchase a larger, more powerful hull to act as his flagship. He then used this secret stash of terrentium in the construction and installation of a small jump engine aboard the new cruiser, which he fondly named *The Lady of Dark Souls*.

It was around this time that his family and other members of the Kástan elite took notice of Brahaen's good fortune and began to question where—and how—he had acquired his newfound wealth. His family began to distance themselves from him, but Brahaen didn't care about what others thought about him or his occupation. In the taverns and brothels he boasted of his accomplishments, knowing that no security force could ever touch him due to his family name. He had everything that he ever wanted: he was in command of his own starship, leading his forces into battle, and enjoying the riches that the spoils brought him.

Brahaen moved his flag to the *Lady of Dark Souls* upon its completion, leaving his second in command to assume the captaincy of the *Raining Thunder*. No expense was spared on the construction of the *Lady of Dark Souls* and it did not take long for it to earn a reputation of its own far surpassing that of the *Raining Thunder*. The *Lady's* jump engine eliminated any predictability from the attack and no ship could rest safely knowing that at any time they could be targeted by a surprise Blood Sword attack.

The *Lady* also made Brahaen much bolder in his attacks and the types of targets he was willing to do battle with. Before he had stuck to fairly standard raids on lone freighters or small, undefended convoys. With the *Lady* under his control he began choosing to strike at any convoy of his choosing knowing full well that the fleet's escorts were no match for the *Lady* in combat. Brahaen and the *Lady* had many close calls where the ship was obviously in over its head fighting a superior opponent, but somehow Brahaen's luck never failed him and his ship always survived such engagements.

As the years marched on the strength of the Blood Swords grew. Their identity and that of their (in)famous leader was common knowledge to most that stayed abreast of such things. The Blood Swords foolishly flaunted their strength and their ability to strike quickly and without notice. The Kástan authorities did nothing to interfere with Ghaira's forces for the same reason that he himself was not arrested or detained; his family had status, albeit waning, and a move by the military or government could result in unnecessary (not to mention unwanted) political ramifications. The safety of Kástan space and the Rapids of Rodirra provided the Blood Swords with a fallback point in which they could always hide from authorities. Few non-Kástan were familiar enough with the Rapids to safely navigate them, something that the Blood Swords fully exploited to protect themselves and their stolen cargoes.

Perhaps one of the most famous encounters with the Blood Swords was in 1950 when their forces ambushed and massacred a Circasian patrol fleet. Circasian authorities had been harrying Blood Sword vessels operating in the Senshuka system for some time, but recent Circasian policing actions had been successful, costing the Blood Swords three out of the last five raids. Brahaen Ghaira knew that something had to be done to silence the Circasian threat or, at the very least, to relieve the pressure on his raiding forces.

Brahaen formulated a plan wherein he would use his recently acquired second Dark Soul Battlecruiser to lure the local Circasian patrol fleet into a trap. Brahaen knew from the

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scuttlebutt in port that the Circasian military was desperately trying to counter raider operations in their territory in order to make it safe for merchant vessels passing through the region. The desperation of the Circasian authorities made Brahaen reasonably sure that they would take the bait.

The Circasians didn't disappoint. After two weeks of making its presence known in Senshuka, the Dark Soul Battlecruiser waited patiently for the Circasian fleet to find and intercept it. The fleet could have easily retreated at any time to prevent capture, but Brahaen hoped that the Circasians would overlook this obvious tell in their haste to capture or destroy the raider vessels. The Circasians obviously did not consider this, as their fleet walked right into the trap that had been set for them.

Bringing the *Lady of Dark Souls* out of hyperspace and using it to encircle the Circasian forces, the Blood Swords were successful in destroying the Circasian patrol fleet to the last ship. In the short-term the attack had the desired effect of giving the Blood Swords the freedom to continue their reign of terror in the area. However, in the long-term, Brahaen's trap would lead to the ultimate destruction and dispersal of the Blood Swords.

That destruction came in 1955 when, after gathering their forces in preparation for a raid on a major terrentium convoy, the Blood Swords were themselves ambushed by a fleet of Circasian Xandar Lancer Frigates. The Blood Sword fleet present at the staging area was taken offguard by the surprise attack and most of their ships were destroyed before they could retreat. Once again, Brahaen Ghaira and the *Lady of Dark Souls* managed to escape disaster and flee back to Kástan, but the Circasian attack left the Blood Swords in shambles. Fully one-third of their raiding fleet, including the only other Dark Soul Battlecruiser, was destroyed in the attack.

The Blood Swords could have rebounded from this loss but, unfortunately for Brahaen, this was not destined to happen. Many members of the Blood Swords saw the writing on the wall and fled the area, taking their ships with them. The loyal followers that stuck by Brahaen were too few to allow the Blood Swords the striking power they had once enjoyed. After three more years of intermittent raiding, Brahaen retired from the raiding business and took up permanent residence on Kásta where he involved himself in other projects and returned to the life that he had lived before his career as a raider had begun. He took with him into retirement the *Lady of Dark Souls* which remained his personal transport for decades to come.

With Ghaira out of the picture, the Blood Swords slowly broke apart. Without a strong and charismatic leader to hold them together the clan could not find the proper direction to sustain itself. Eventually the Blood Swords simply ceased to exist as a viable raider organization.

Blood Sword Crews

Blood Sword ships were crewed primarily by Kástan nationals and as such benefited from the Kástan's almost natural navigational abilities. All Blood Sword fleets gain a +1 to their surprise rolls. This is in addition to any other surprise roll bonuses the fleet may be benefiting from.

In addition to their surprise roll bonus, the crews of Blood Sword craft were often very experienced and excelled in the art of raiding. Many of the Blood Sword ships historically had an Elite Officer or Elite Crew aboard. 9.3.3 Blood Sword Elite Officers contains information on the Elite Officers available to the Blood Swords in a campaign environment. Units with an Elite Crew receive a +1 bonus to their DV, AS, and AF values. Units noted as having Elite Crews in their descriptions have this bonus already calculated into their base statistics.

Starships

Dark Soul Battlecruiser

Base Hull (Rare)

These rare raiding cruisers were the pinnacle of Blood Sword technology and the ultimate expression of Blood Sword power. Dark Soul Battlecruisers are equipped almost solely for combat, foregoing extensive cargo facilities in favor of more weapons and, perhaps more importantly, a jump engine. These warships are

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9.0 Campaign Setup

9.1 Historical Campaign Scenario

The historical Chouka War campaign begins in January of 1972, nearly two months after the Circasians failed first strike into the Mishtuki system. The Chouka and Circasians have both been staring over the border at one another, waiting for a full war to commence.

Setup

9.1.1 Affiliation Selection

At this step in the campaign setup, players should choose which of the three factions to play in the campaign. There are three playable factions in the historical campaign scenario: the Circasian Empire, the Chouka Theocracy, and the Sshel'ath Alliance. The Circasian raider wars were long ago resolved, so all raider and/or civilian ships will only be included when CG 3.6.2.2 Raiding occurs.

9.1.2 Player Starting Locations

Refer to the system information included in the source materials for a list of each empire's territories as they exist at the start of the campaign. Refer to the Chouka War era map for the location of these systems. 9.5 Systems of the Chouka War includes additional background and information on these systems.

9.1.3 Starting Assets

Starting Turn: 1972.1

Circasian Empire

The Circasians are ready for war. Their military gear up is complete, meaning the Circasians begin the campaign at a Wartime Economy. This will give the Circasian player an early edge in his or her war against the Chouka.

Starting Income:

78 (system income) + 8 (trade income) = 86 economic points

Starting Military Forces:

300 economic points. At least 50 economic points must be spent on units with an in-service date prior to 1940, and at least 100 economic points must be spent on units with an in-service date of 1960 or later.

Starting Shipyards:

2 Shipyards at Circasia

Starting Fleets:

2 Transport Fleets
2 Trade Fleets

Chouka Theocracy

The Chouka have known about the Circasian military buildup for some time and have answered in kind. The Chouka economy is Gearing Up at the start of the campaign. Four turns of the Gear Up have already been completed as of 1972.1. The Chouka economy will hit full Wartime Economy status in 1972.3.

Starting Income:

67 (system income) + 25 (trade income) = 92 economic points

Starting Military Forces:

400 economic points. At least 100 economic points must be spent on units with an in-service date prior to 1940.

Starting Shipyards:

2 Shipyards at Chouka

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Starting Fleets:
2 Transport Fleets
2 Trade Fleets

Sshel'ath Alliance

The Sshel'ath begin the campaign in a Peacetime Economy, waiting and watching as the Chouka War begins to unfold. They may begin their Economic Gear Up at any time, though all the normal penalties apply should they not declare hostilities/war against an opponent within the allotted time.

Starting Income:
54 (system income) + 5 (trade income) = 59 economic points

Starting Military Forces:
200 economic points. At least 100 economic points must be spent on units with an in-service date prior to 1965.

Starting Shipyards:
2 Shipyards at Sshel'a

Starting Fleets:
1 Transport Fleet
1 Trade Fleet

9.1.4 Purchasing Starting Forces

Each player begins the campaign with a certain number of economic points to spend on starting military forces. These points can be used to purchase military units, not for purchasing Productivity increases or civilian fleet units (e.g., Colony, Transport, and Trade Fleets). The points are intended to be spent on such things as space units, ground troops, and Intel that will be used in the coming war.

9.1.5 Placing Starting Forces

Before the historical campaign begins, players must place their starting forces in systems under their empire's control. With the exception of one-system powers, no power may place more than 50% of their forces (by economic cost) in any one system. This is to help prevent players from starting with their full military force on the borders in preparation of a first-turn blitzkrieg, something that would have been historically impossible.

Players may choose to start with any amount of their starting forces in mothballs at any planet possessing one or more shipyards. This can be especially useful for the Chouka player who may not be able to support the maintenance expense of their full military forces until after economic gear up has been completed.

9.1.6 Jump Gate Placement

In the historical scenario, refer to the 9.5 Systems of the Chouka War for information on the number and type of jump gates in each of the systems on the map.

9.1.7 External Trade Routes

The Chouka maintained several lucrative trade routes moving through their space. Similarly, the Circasians benefited from some valuable trade routes of their own, though none as rich as those passing through Chouka space. Both the Circasians and Chouka begin play with these trade routes and associated Trade Fleets in place. Each of the routes connects to a single Chouka- or Circasian-controlled system, which acts as a *trade node* for that route. The Trade Fleets operating these routes are not controlled by either power and do not count account their starting Trade Fleet allotments. Rather, they are neutral, off-map assets which perform commerce operations as long as the trade route is not suspended.

If during the course of the campaign an enemy force captures or blockades a trade node, the external trade route connecting to that node will be temporarily suspended and the owning player will cease to receive the route's normal commerce income. If the system remains in one player's control for six consecutive turns, then the external trade route will be reactivated and the player controlling the trade node will receive the income from the route.

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Thaline Trade Fleet
(Mishtuki → Thalamas → Rorra)
Income: 82 x 10% = 8 economic points

Novon Trade Fleet
(Chouka → Kolir → Novonous)
Income: 179 x 10% = 17 economic points

Thrikin Trade Fleet
(Senshuka → Tidun → Thrikin)
Income: 36 x 10% = 3 economic points

Th'sook Trade Fleet
(Kosica → Tro'Pac → Th'su)
Income: 59 x 10% = 5 economic points

9.1.8 Victory Conditions

The campaign will end once a state of peace has existed between all remaining empires for six consecutive turns. Once this milestone is met, the historical campaign is over and the Chouka War scenario is considered complete.

Victory in the scenario is determined by which power earned the most *victory points (VP)* over the course of the scenario. Victory points are calculated as follows:

- 5 VP per Homeworld
- 1 VP per System
- 2 VP per Census
- 1 VP per Economic Point of System Output
- 1 VP per 10 Economic Points of Military Units, Intel (round up)
- 10 VP per Tech Advancement

The empire with the most victory points at the end of the campaign wins. In the event of a tie, the player with the largest military (by economic cost) wins.

Example 1: A homeworld has 10 Census, 5 RAW, and 7 Productivity at the end of the campaign. The player earns 5 VP from holding the homeworld system, 20 VP from Census, and 35 VP from System Output for a total of 60 VP.

Example 2: At the end of the campaign, the Circasian fleet has been reduced to just 7 destroyers, each with an original construction cost of 4 economic points. This gives the Circasians a military economic cost of 28 points. This number is divided by 10 (rounding up), giving the Circasians a scant 3 VP for their military forces.

Example 3: During the course of the campaign, the Chouka managed to make three Tech Advances, increasing their Tech Year from 1972 to 1975. This tech advancement garners the Chouka 30 VP.

9.2 Freeform Campaign Scenario

The Choukar War was not a very large-scale military campaign and it would have been considered little more than a brush war if not for its ramifications within a greater historical context. As a result, players may be more interested in playing a freeform campaign set during the Chouka War time period.

In this freeform campaign scenario, all of the systems are considered neutral and players begin the game from a single system, their homeworld, from which they explore and expand in search of dominance.

Setup

9.2.1 Affiliation Selection

Each player first selects his or her empire's affiliation. The playable factions included in these source materials include: the Circasian Empire, Chouka Theocracy, Sshel'ath Alliance, Unsheathed Claw, Blood Swords, Chouka Pirates, Other Raiders, and Civilians. Of these factions, the first three possess the largest and most balanced force lists. However, the raider/civilian factions can still best them, given the right combination of skill and luck.

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History: The A'lara system was once a colony of the Chouka Theocracy. Established in 1912, the A'lara colony, christened Ulham'a D'e'nzall by its inhabitants, soon grew into a flourishing, and by all outside impressions model, colony world. Unfortunately for the colony, a strong secessionary movement began to gain support on A'lara circa 1920. A group of dissidents within the colonial leadership began actively trying to divorce the colony from the Theocracy, claiming that the Theocracy had twisted scripture to suit their own devices. The Circle responded violently and destroyed the colony from orbit. The Circle forbade any further colonization outward from Chouka, going so far as to abandon the Litara colony as well. The Theocracy never re-colonized the system, opting instead to leave it fallow. The system would remain largely vacant until a second wave of Chouka colonists began arriving in 2029 during one of many mass exoduses that took place at the end of the Escalation Wars.

System: Akkar

Affiliation: Thaline Union
Importance: Minor Colony
Jump Gate(s): 1 Temporary
Notable Settlements: Memtramo Colony (destroyed)
History: Akkar was at one time a burgeoning Thaline colony world. The planet of Memtramo in the Akkar system contained a world perfect for Thaline colonization. Unfortunately for its inhabitants, the Ingalli knew of the system's location and attacked and destroyed the colony following the destruction of the First Rorra Colony in 1834.

System: Borilos

Affiliation: Neutral (Borillian Governments)
Importance: Homeworld
Jump Gate(s): 3 Temporary
Notable Settlements: Borilos
History: The Borilos system contains the titular planet of Borilos, homeworld of the Borillian species. At the time of the Chouka War, the Borillians were a high-industrial civilization with only modest space travel capabilities. The system had been contacted and charted by several neighboring species, but the extreme xenophobia of the Borillians kept the system from falling into any one empire's hands.

System: Breth

Affiliation: Chouka Theocracy
Importance: Outpost
Jump Gate(s): 2 Standard, 1 Small
Notable Settlements: P'entae, Saltoreste
History: A former Novon-held system, Breth was ultimately abandoned by the Trade Lords and absorbed into the Chouka Theocracy. The Chouka established over a dozen colonies in the Breth system after its acquisition, the first major reversal in the Circle's tight emigration restrictions in over thirty years. Many of the system's colonies were placed on the moons of the third planet, a gas giant known as Sair'ven. Sair'ven's innermost moon, Saltoreste, had previously been home to a major trade lord base. The moon's atmosphere was barely breathable by the Chouka, but still better than most other worlds they had found in other systems. Saltoreste also boasted basic plant life, all of which were Novon flora which had been genetically engineered to live on the moon.

System: Chensit

Affiliation: Novon Trade Lords
Importance: Minor Colony
Jump Gate(s): 2 Standard
Notable Settlements: None
History: Chensit is a minor Novon system. Chensit is of little strategic importance to the Novon Trade Lords, though some use the system to conduct under the table negotiations or black market dealings. The out of the way location of Chensit helps to ensure that such matters have a better chance to remain secret.

System: Chouka

Affiliation: Chouka Theocracy
Importance: Homeworld
Jump Gate(s): 2 Large Jump Gates, 2 Standard Jump Gates
Notable Settlements: Chouka, Mastouka, Partika, Frotella
History:

The Chouka home system was more than the center of the Chouka's universe, to them it was the center of the universe itself. They believed fervently that the motherland was the

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Chouka

source of all life, a "well of souls" from which all other life had sprung. And those born of the waters of Chouka were by definition purer people, more in-tune with the universe and its mysterious inner workings.

Despite their draconian laws, the Chouka Circle of Elders allowed and even encouraged colonization of their home star system. This continued even after the A'lara rebellion led to a crackdown on extra-solar colonization. Major colonies in the system, besides the homeworld itself, included a retreat on the Chouka sister world, Mastouka; an outer system mining colony at Partika; and a small research outpost on the icy gas giant moon of Frotella. Of these colonies, all remained in place during the Circasian administration of the system from 1973-2013. After the system's conquest by the Courata Imperium, the Frotella colony was laid waste to and the Mastouka colony became an internment camp. The Chouka system remained under the Courata yoke until the end of the Escalation Wars in 2025, at which point Chouka once more emerged as an independent, sovereign nation.

System: Circasia

Affiliation: Circasian Empire
Importance: Homeworld
Jump Gates: 2 Large, 2 Standard
Notable Settlements: Circasia, Jenholen Station
History: The orange star of Circasia (known as *Lhonshfar* in Circasia) is circled by ten planets, of which the planet of Circasia itself is the third from the sun. The system is heavily utilized and is home to scores of Circasian settlements.

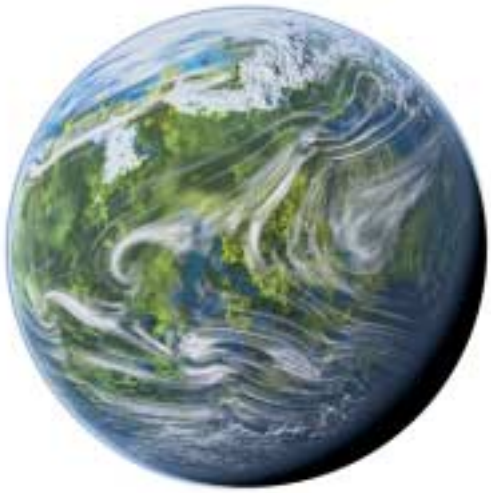
As the heart of the Circasian Empire, the Circasia system was the source of most military construction during the Chouka War. A continuous stream of warships and auxiliary vessels streamed out of Circasia and into Senshuka throughout the conflict.

System: Drayac

Affiliation: Neutral
Importance: Colony
Jump Gate(s): 1 Standard, 1 Small
Notable Settlements: None
History: As with Maloria, the Circasians had not yet colonized Drayac before hostilities erupted with the Chouka. Unlike Maloria, Drayac contained a verdant world almost perfectly habitable for Circasian life. This world rivaled even Senshuka II in its natural affinity for supporting the Circasian species. By 1972 several small research and test colonies had been established in the northern hemisphere of the planet, Dalain, but no substantial inhabitation had yet taken place.

System: Dreben

Affiliation: Kholran Republic
Importance: Minor Colony
Jump Gate(s): 3 Standard, 1 Small
Notable Settlements: None
History: Dreben was once a heavily populated world which connected Kholchak to the outer colony worlds. As the Great War engulfed the



Circasia

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Prelude to Fire and Sorrow...

Thirty years before the outbreak of the Escalation Wars, the Circasian Empire was a small, largely insignificant power located on the edge of known space. However, the Circasians were not weak. Decades of brutal anti-raider warfare forced the Circasian Star Forces to learn and adapt to the hostile universe which surrounded them.

The lessons learned in the Raider Wars would be put to the test when, after years of thinly veiled hostility over the negotiating table, the actions of the Chouka Theocracy finally forced the Circasian Empire to make a fateful decision. By order of the War Council, a fleet was dispatched to begin a pre-emptive invasion of Chouka space. The Chouka War had begun.

The Escalation Wars: Empire Rising details both the history of the Chouka War and the powers involved in the conflict. All of the materials and special rules needed to play out the war are provided within the pages of this supplement. Unit lists are provided for the Circasian Empire, Chouka Theocracy, Sshel'ath Alliance, various raiders, and civilians.

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