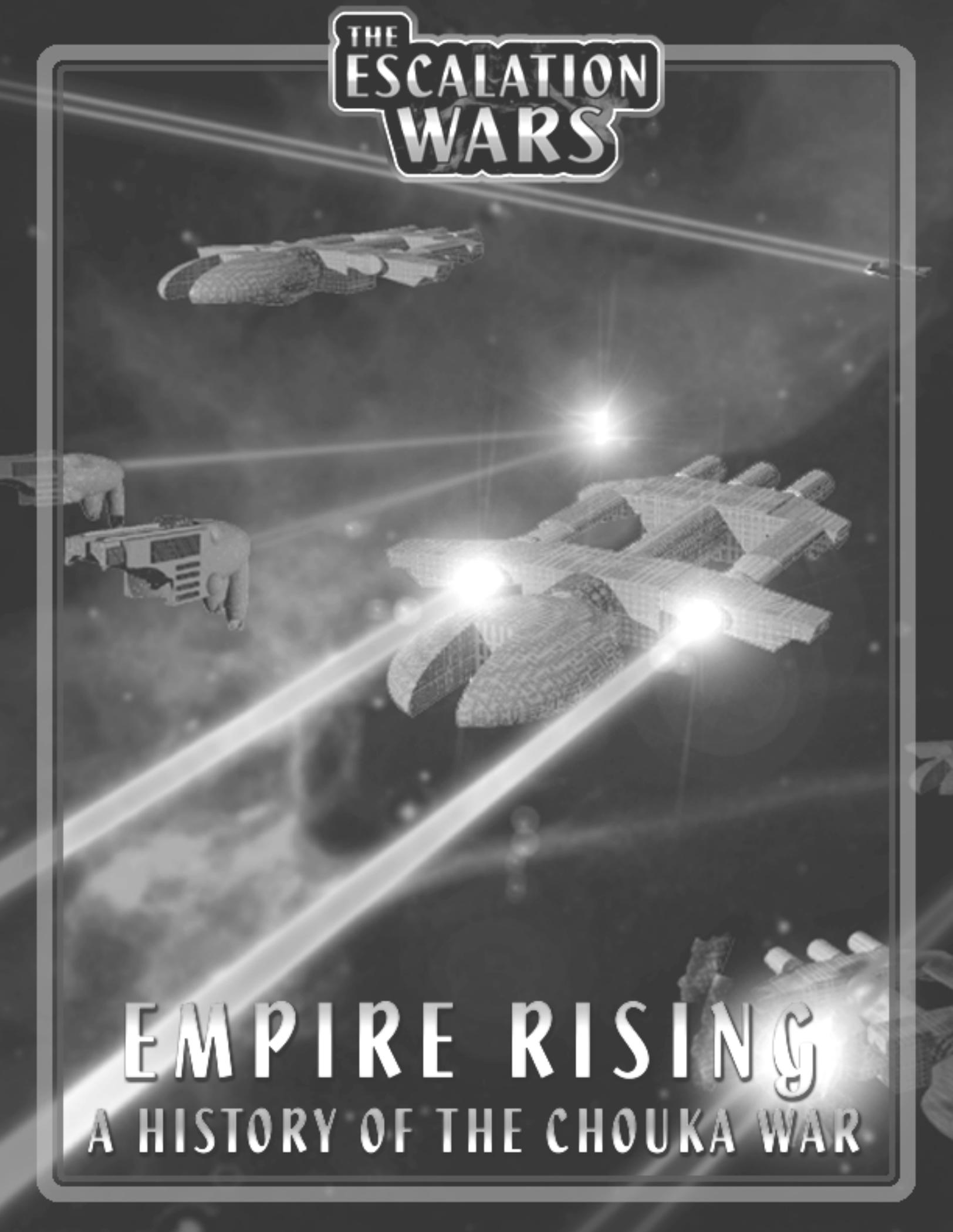


THE ESCALATION WARS



EMPIRE RISING

A HISTORY OF THE CHOUKA WAR

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Version 2.0

Introduction

Introduction

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, scraping metal upon metal before finally 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, 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 down the enemy ship. 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.

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 being pushed outward from the breach by escaping gases.

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 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 was left of the cruiser was a burned out black hulk flailing 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 missiles incoming."

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



Welcome to **Empire Rising: A History of the Chouka War**, 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 amazing 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, a rise that would ultimately cost hundreds of millions of sentients their lives.

Chapter 2: The 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 homeworlds of the Lossoleguul had come under attack by wave after wave of barbarian

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.

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 population coreward sectors. Few (if any) alien explorers had previously journeyed into the Circasians region of hyperspace. This point 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 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

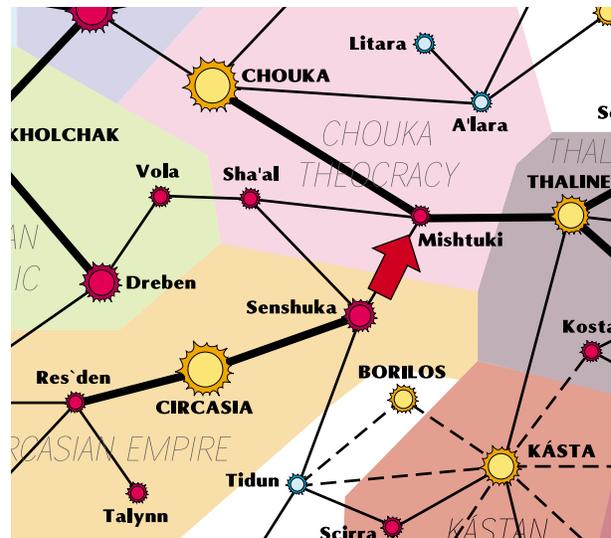
History of the Chouka War

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 through a given crisis. 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 could expand. After carefully weighing their options, the War Council members decided to go ahead with their mandate to prepare for a war with the Chouka.

Beginning in the Earth year 1963, the Circasian War Council began slowly planting operatives in Chouka space. Whether posing as diplomats, traders, converts, or true-

seekers, these Circasian operatives started infiltrating Chouka space. Because of the nature of the Chouka Theocracy, none of these operatives could hope to infiltrate the Chouka government itself, but the information that they returned with was valuable nonetheless. Reports from these spies included such information as Chouka fleet movements and composition, planetary population sizes, and hyperspace travel networks. All of which would prove invaluable in the long-term. The War Council was astonished when one of their operatives posing as a civilian passenger was able to collect scans and imaging details on a dozen different classes of Chouka warships operating in and around the Chouka homeworld. Although the information was rudimentary at best it provided the Circasians with their first real information on the makeup and potential capabilities of the Chouka fleet.

By 1967, more information had come in from Circasian operatives stationed in Chouka space. The most startling revelation concerned the loyalty of the Chouka people to the Theocracy. Circasian agents had managed to uncover information about several religious inquisitions and purges that had occurred throughout the Theocracy over the past fifty years. In many cases these purges were carried out by way of the mass execution of dissidents and their families by a special, secret police force controlled from the highest echelons of the Circle. New information concerning the Chouka space fleet also seemed to indicate that the Chouka Theocratic Guard Forces were significantly weaker than previously thought.

The Circasians, however, were not the only ones with secret operatives operating covertly in the opposition's territories. The Chouka were distrustful of the upstart Circasians and feared (rightly so) that the Circasian Empire could one day threaten them. The Circasian military build up during the 1950's had concerned them and forced them to redouble their own ship construction efforts. Because of this distrust, the Chouka made sure to place loyal citizens of the Theocracy in positions where they could spy

on Circasian interests and keep the Circle apprised of Circasian activities. Many of these spies took the guise of Chouka missionaries on missions to convert Circasian heathens. Few Circasians were open to alien religious beliefs and generally ignored the proselytizing of these Chouka missionaries. Being ignored by the general population allowed the Chouka to position themselves where they wanted to collect valuable intelligence information.

These Chouka spies were able to ascertain that the Chouka distrust of the Circasians was mutual. Much of the Circasian population disliked the Chouka and felt that the Chouka Theocracy was a threat to the Circasian Empire, a threat that needed to be countered in one way or another. The Chouka agents also reported that Circasian war production efforts had gradually begun to rise. The intent behind this production increase went without saying as far as the Theocracy was concerned. As the Circasians prepared themselves for war the Chouka reacted in kind, laying down new hulls in their shipyards and constructing hidden military bases in the Sha'al and Mishtuki systems to act as secret re-supply points and listening stations to monitor activity in the system.

This new military construction by the Chouka didn't go unnoticed either, and by the summer of 1971 the Circasian War Council knew that the Chouka Theocracy was also headed to war. They did not know whether their hand had been tipped or not, but they couldn't wait for the Chouka to further prepare themselves for the inevitable. It was time to strike, and it was time to strike hard.

1971

The first battle of the Chouka War came on November 8, 1971 when a Circasian strike force was dispatched to Mishtuki to attempt to gain a foothold in the system. Mishtuki was a strategically important system that connected the Chouka Theocracy to several other alien governments, including their major trading partners, the Thaline. The Circasian strike force was a small one,

History of the Chouka War

comprised of several Kolanis and Tormin cruisers and Moshesta frigates. The force was ill prepared for what awaited them on the other side of the Mishtuki jump gate.

Unbeknownst to the Circasian strike force the Chouka had full knowledge of the impending military strike against them, down to the exact time and place they were to arrive. The Chouka took advantage of this knowledge and had established an ad hoc defense perimeter around the local jump gate. Waiting for the Circasian fleet was several heavy orbital satellites, freshly towed into position, as well as a strong support fleet to back them up.

The battle was little more than a massacre as the Circasians fought while trying to recover from the shock of the ambush. The only thing that saved the Circasians from being destroyed early in the battle was the fact that some of the Chouka OSAT's had not yet been activated and did not join the battle until after it had already begun.

In the end, the Circasians managed to escape with only a single ship and several shuttles. The rest of the task force lay on the battlefield in ruin.

This staggering defeat forced the Circasians to reevaluate their strategy for the upcoming war and take stock of the facts that surrounded them. There was no denying that the Chouka had somehow acquired full data on the mission into their territories, and this worried the War Council. They had long believed that Chouka agents were operating within Circasian space, and had previously attributed the Chouka military build up as an in-kind response to their own fleet build up. This one incident, however, indicated that there had been at least one breach of security concerning the military campaign.

Quickly the War Council established committees to review personnel and attempt to determine where such a security breach could have originated. Meanwhile, the Council could no longer rely on their previous strategies to be secure, and began working on a new timetable and plan of attack. The legitimacy of intelligence data acquired over the past several years was also called into question. Many members of the War Council

voiced the opinion that if the Chouka could infiltrate the chain of command and steal top-secret military information on the upcoming offensive, they may well have planted data with known Circasian agents as part of a misinformation campaign.

This turn of events stalled the Circasian Empire's planned offensive, giving the Chouka Theocracy a reprieve from further attacks. The Chouka however did not take advantage of this time. Following the battle in Mishtuki, the Chouka military leadership found basis to reaffirm their belief that the Circasians were simply too primitive to be a threat, and passed this belief on to the clerics and high priests of the Circle. Despite intelligence reports to the contrary, the Chouka military arrogantly believed they were beyond reproach from such futile enemy forces. They would be proven wrong.

1972

Despite the setbacks and repercussions of the strike into Mishtuki, the Circasians remained dedicated to the path they had chosen. After a period of internal review the War Council devised a new plan that they believed could be successful. They also implemented new security policies and procedures to help keep massive information leaks like the one that had affected them before from happening again.

The new Circasian plan called for a second strike into Mishtuki, but this time the Circasians would not rely on the fixed jump gates in the system for entry. Their previous encounter had taught them the importance of flexible, strategic jump capabilities, something that their young fleet had still not integrated. Although research and development resources were immediately allocated to solve this problem, the War Council knew that the fruits of these labors would not be at their disposal during this war. Instead, the plan called for the use of one of the Circasian's Kiralina Jump Ship, a large class of explorer ship, to accompany the task force into Chouka space and use its jump engine to deposit the fleet into Mishtuki. Once there, the Kiralina Jump Ship would serve as a supply base.

Such explorer ships were designed to operate in the field for over a year without resupply and had the cargo capacity to carry all the supplies the task force would need to operate in the short-term.

Upon arrival in Mishtuki, the Circasian task force took up position in orbit of the barren world of Mishtuki IV. Mishtuki IV held little inherent value, but its position put the Circasian fleet between the heavily fortified Chouka colony world at Mishtuki VII and one of the system's fixed jump gates. The Circasian fleet began running patrols, harrying Chouka forces and scouting the system in an attempt to gain as much data as possible before making their move against the Mishtuki VII colony. One such patrol group had the luck of discovering a group of minelayers attempting to lay minefields in the system. When spotted the minelayers panicked, resulting in many of them running into their newly deployed mines and destroying themselves in their rush to flee the scene.

Additional Circasian ships arrived daily, the jump ship retrieving them from hyperspace to join the growing garrison force at Mishtuki IV as they prepared for an assault on Mishtuki VII. Soon a fleet of nearly fifty ships stood ready and waiting for the word to be handed down from the War Council for the attack to begin.

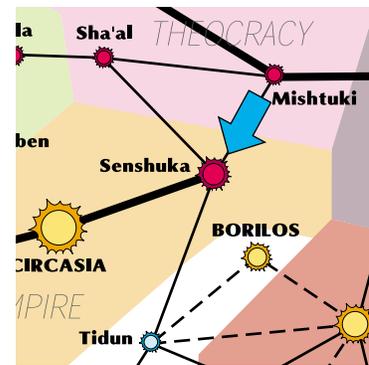
The Chouka response to the second violation of their territories by Circasian forces came two weeks later when a major Chouka fleet attacked the Circasian forces at Mishtuki IV. Early warning systems managed to detect the Chouka fleet as it passed the orbit of Mishtuki V, but this still gave the Circasians little time to prepare themselves for battle. Both sides were nearly evenly matched, but the Circasians underestimated the ferocity of the Chouka counterattack. Many within the Chouka military were outraged that the Circasians would once again invade their territory.

The Battle of Mishtuki IV was hard fought on both sides, and neither side escaped unscathed. The fleets were so evenly matched that by battle's end neither side could claim victory. The Chouka had lost all of their capital ships, the few remnants of their fleet

ultimately retreating back to the defenses of Mishtuki VII. The Circasians fared little better, with most of their fleet in ruins and only one-third of their forces intact, and most of those were no longer able to fight. The Kiralina Jump Ship *Thantir* suffered heavy damage in the battle and was nearly destroyed when the Chouka flagship, an Apostle Holy Cruiser, rammed the explorer mid-ships.

The surviving Circasian ships were once again forced to withdraw from the system back to the safety of Senshuka. The loss of so many warships cut deep into the Circasian Empire's military strength and representatives of the elected government began questioning the War Council's actions of instigating conflict with a race as strong as the Chouka. The War Council even began to fracture over this second loss in Mishtuki. Some of their number believed it was a poor omen for things to come while others pointed to the destruction of the Chouka war force as a sign that the war was not yet lost. In either case, it would take five months of continuous construction in the fleet yards to replace the losses suffered in Mishtuki.

The Chouka, however, were no longer content to sit by while the Circasians continued to attack their positions in Mishtuki. In the past, a show of force in enemy territory was all it took to persuade the enemy that war was not in their best interests. It had worked years earlier with the Sshel'ath and Kástan when they had



attempted similar attacks against the Chouka.

The Ninth Fleet, under the direction of First Hand Marzuula Tien, was ordered to begin preparations for an attack into the Senshuka system itself. The Circle and leaders of the Theocratic Guard believed that an appropriate display of force against the major Circasian colony in Senshuka would be

History of the Chouka War

enough to put an end to the Circasian threat for the time being.

Upon arriving in Senshuka, the fleet proceeded towards Senshuka II, the site of the Circasian's largest extra-solar colony. They met little resistance on approach to the colony world and, as they approached the colony, Marzuula felt confident that the Circasians had fled in the wake of his fleet.

So it was that the Chouka Ninth Fleet was caught entirely off guard when, all of a sudden, a jump point formed near their fleet's position and began to disgorge wave after wave of warships. The Circasian long-range hyperspace probes had detected the Chouka fleet in transit to the Senshuka system, and the military command had decided that the best way to counter the Chouka fleet was through a risky surprise ambush. With a Kiralina Jump Ship in hyperspace maintaining the jump point, the Circasian defense forces emerged from hyperspace to combat the Chouka fleet.

Marzuula's fleet was left in state of shock by this turn of events. Such an ambush was entirely unconventional and, although his fleet's weapons were charged and online, it took them precious time to reorient and adapt to the reality of the combat situation. By the time the fleet had fully recovered from their surprise groups of small Circasian frigates were already darting amongst the large Chouka cruisers, firing wildly in an attempt to disable the Chouka fleet. The close quarters combat was not something that Marzuula and his ship commanders were accustomed to, and many volleys meant for the Circasian frigates slammed instead into friendly ships. Early return fire from the Chouka managed to do significant damage to the Circasian attack force, but the effect of the Chouka's slow initial response was their undoing. First one, then another and then another Chouka ship exploded into balls of gas, metal, and flame. Marzuula ordered the fleet to fall back and the surviving Chouka ships fought their way back to the local jump gate and retreated to Mishtuki.

Marzuula's homecoming was not as he had planned. What was going to be a simple

demonstration of force had turned into a rout for his forces. This defeat had to be accounted for and Marzuula Tien was forced to answer for his actions, actions that the Theocratic Guard labeled as gross incompetence. Marzuula Tien was derided and humiliated before being reassigned to the homeworld defense forces, but the Chouka had more pressing matters to attend to. In the span of two months the Theocracy had lost two fleets to the Circasians, a race that they had regarded as nothing more than primitive barbarians. Although they had increased their construction output of new warships during the years before the beginning of open hostilities, such construction had slowed following the first battle in which the Chouka had handily massacred the Circasian fleet. Neither the Circle nor the Theocratic Guard had believed that the Circasians could ever be the kind of threat that they had now proven themselves to be.

Construction efforts were redoubled at the shipyards at Chouka to replace recent combat losses. The Chouka would need this new construction if they hoped to launch any more expeditionary forces into Senshuka. The fleet losses to this point had drained the Chouka fleet to the point that few ships could be spared without stripping garrison fleets of their numbers. The Chouka Theocracy was forced to assume a defensive footing until new fleet assets could become available.

The Battle of Senshuka had a similar effect on the Circasian Empire. The Senshuka defense fleet had taken unacceptable losses in the battle and required bracing before any new offensive action could be taken. Political pressure at home also threatened the continuation of the campaign. As popular opinion shifted, the War Council found itself unifying behind a pro-war stance. Early dissenters had realized after the Battle of Senshuka that the Chouka were in fact not unassailable enemies and that, although the Chouka had superior technology, the Circasians had more ships, better crews, and arguably better tactics.

It was during this extended stalemate that the Circasian War Council began drawing

up their “Mishtuki Plan”, a detailed outline of how to successfully execute the war against the Chouka based off of information to date. The grand strategic document would act as a roadmap for the rest of the Circasian campaign and is heralded by historians as one of the most important military documents ever written.

The central component to the Mishtuki Plan was an all-out attack on Mishtuki requiring a large percentage of the Circasian fleet elements. Fleet intelligence reported that the Mishtuki VII colony was heavily fortified with a strong defense satellite network in place, in addition to a small starbase and garrison fleet. If Mishtuki could be brought to its knees, the War Council speculated, then it would be relatively easy to sweep through Sha'al and proceed to heavily fortify the Mishtuki System to defend against Chouka reprisals and counterattacks. It is interesting to note that the Mishtuki Plan did not go into specifics on contingencies should the Mishtuki offensive succeed, but the plan contained numerous, detailed contingency plans that could be enacted should it fail.

Circasian military planners again realized how limited they were by the lack of jump-capable cruisers in their fleet. Although the military project charged with developing just such a ship was ahead of schedule, the War Council could not hope to have even a prototype of this next generation warship for several years. This left the Circasians relying on their large, expensive explorer class vessels that were ill suited for the job of glorified mobile jump engines due to the cost of building such units. Because of this limitation the War Council knew that any strike they made had to count, because they would likely only get one chance to succeed or fail.

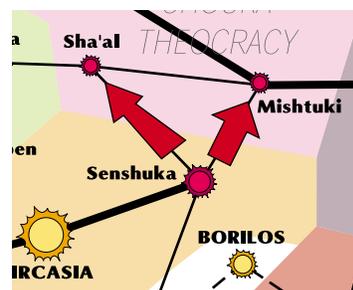
Although the war had paused for a time, both sides continued harassing the other, sending raiding parties through to disrupt supply lines and to keep their opponent off guard. Circasian raids into the Sha'al system met with little resistance early on, but after a string of successful raids the Chouka reinforced the system patrol fleets and began

laying heavy minefields around the principal bases.

During the pause in the war, an up and coming commander, First Hand Shcuizkho Yular, proposed a daring mission to the Circle of Elders: find an alternate route into Circasian space and strike at their flanks. The idea intrigued the members of the Circle. Although it was known that there was at least one route into Circasian space through Kástan space, it was unknown whether any other routes existed. Given recent events, the promise of a quick resolution to the war was welcomed and Shcuizkho's mission was approved.

Unfortunately for the Chouka, Shcuizkho's mission was cut short when his fleet encountered an especially turbulent area of hyperspace while en route to Kásta. Shcuizkho's fleet had been traversing hyperspace rapids when a sudden gravitational incline shift pushed them into proximity of a massive hyperspace whirlpool. Shcuizkho's ship survived the encounter, but three support ships were not so fortunate. The fleet was forced to turn back in shame and no further attempts to find alternate routes to Circasian territory were undertaken.

In the fall of the Earth year 1972, the Circasian Mishtuki Plan went into action. With the primary strike fleet in position to depart for Mishtuki, the Circasians began launching several attacks into Sha'al as a feint to make the



Chouka believe that a larger invasion force would be moving into the system soon. It was believed that this would prompt the Chouka to strip ships from the Mishtuki defensive fleets to shore up Sha'al. These raids were a success, and several warships that would otherwise have been present at Mishtuki VII were instead redeployed to Sha'al to prepare for an expected Circasian attack there.

As the Chouka waited for battle in Sha'al, the Circasian fleet moved to the Mishtuki system and, once again using a jump

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ship located in hyperspace, jumped their fleet in just outside the range of the Mishtuki VII defense perimeter. The Chouka defense satellite network was slow to activate, the defender's combat reaction times having atrophied over the six months since the system was last threatened. It took nearly five minutes for the full defense grid to activate and turn their weapons towards the invaders. A single Temple Starbase, located in geo-synchronous orbit above the primary Mishtuki colony complex, came alive, delivering orders to the defense fleet, the satellite network, and to military craft on long-range patrols throughout the system.

The first wave of Circasian ships, made up primarily of Moshesta Frigates, rushed the still-activating defense satellites, punching holes in the planetary defense network. The Chouka retaliated, leaving the frigates on fire and bleeding atmosphere.

As the Circasian ships came around for another pass, the Chouka defensive fleet took position around the Temple Starbase. The fleet, including no less than five Apostle Holy Cruisers, stood at the ready to engage their enemy.

Not long after the second and third wave of Circasian ships had transited to real space the entire battlefield fell into chaos. Weapons fire and explosions surrounded every ship. Ships shook and buckled underneath the destructive force of laser, plasma, and particle weaponry. Others spouted flames as slender missiles impacted upon their hulls. Amongst this chaos waves upon waves of fighters engaged the enemy.

As the battle spread in a thin line around Mishtuki VII's planetary defense network, a final wave of Circasian ships emerged from the jump point, the vortex closing behind them. Two large warships, similar in shape to the ubiquitous Kolanis cruisers, moved slowly into the maelstrom ahead, six frigate escorts following them into the fray.

Within seconds the raw power of these new combatants was painfully demonstrated to the Chouka. Both ships opened fire on the Chouka starbase from long-range, the two

enormous particle beams that each of them mounted shooting forth. The wide, bluish flares quickly traversed the distance, three of them connecting with the station. One of these struck the bottom tier of an Apostle cruiser on its way to the target, simply tearing through the ship undeterred as it continued to beat into the side of the Chouka base. The three wide beams cut in long strokes along the starbase's hull. Metal creaked, curled, and melted under the onslaught, the pressure of erupting atmosphere causing them to be explosively ejected into space. The beams continued to cut deeper into the structure. Two of the beams raked across the habitat section, one ripping a deep gash into the hull while the second cut the hole even deeper, in some places punching entirely through the base. The other beam ran vertically, ripping from the upper sensor cluster down to the reactor housing. Suddenly a great flash of light bathed the battlefield. Seconds later, as the flare diminished, a ball of fiery detritus hung lifeless in space, the sole remnants of the Chouka starbase.

The destruction of Mishtuki Station worked the Chouka into a religious fervor. These unidentified warships had demonstrated capabilities that the Chouka had not fathomed the Circasians to possess, and soon a mixture of fear and hatred washed over the Chouka fleet. Suddenly the battle transformed from a planetary defense action to a battle of desperation. Many Chouka support ships fled the battle to save themselves, but most remained on the battlefield determined to exact holy retribution against their enemies. The Chouka commanders would give no quarter and vowed to make the ultimate sacrifice to make sure the Circasians paid the price for their actions.

From this point on, the Battle of Mishtuki took on a new tone, a tone of fanatical desperation. Chouka warships fought until destroyed, resorting to ramming once their weapons no longer served them. The Chouka fleet flagship was destroyed when it rammed one of the bombardment vessels that had previously destroyed the station in an act of

sheer spite. Slowly the Chouka fleet's numbers dwindled until the last ship, an Acolyte Patrol Frigate, falling out of control into the planet's atmosphere, exploded.

A final wave of ships was deposited into Mishtuki upon relay of the battle's success. Assault ships loaded with Circasian infantry and armor divisions landed on the Mishtuki colony. Combat between Circasian and Chouka ground units was short lived, as orbital bombardment support proved effective at countering the larger Chouka army, and the use of general bombardment of the civilian population helped force a surrender of the colony within a day of losing the battle in the sky. Within a week the colony was firmly under Circasian military control.

The Circasians had managed to successfully capture the Mishtuki colony, and at a loss ratio that was less than what military analysts had projected. The mission to take control of the rest of the Mishtuki system and begin the construction of fortifications was the immediate goal of the occupation forces. The Circasians had reason to believe that the Chouka were operating at least one secret outpost—possibly more—in Mishtuki, their configuration and strength unknown. Before being destroyed, Mishtuki Station had sent coded transmissions to several unknown locations in the system, tipping off the Circasians to the bases' presence. Several of these unknowns had been identified as ships that had been on long-range patrols in the system but had later retreated via a local fixed jump gate back to Chouka space. Other transmission destinations could not be identified as such and were classified as potential locations of this hidden Chouka military base. It was ultimately determined that this outpost was likely located on the far side of the solar system, but the exact location could not be established.

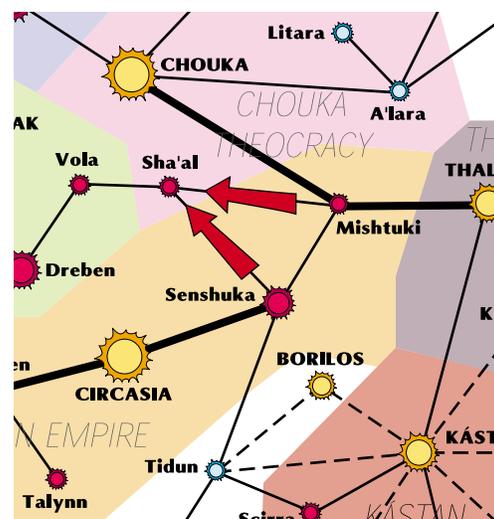
The base was eventually located and destroyed after an ambush by Chouka guerilla forces operating from the base unwittingly gave up its position. With one known base neutralized the Circasians continued to sweep the system in search of other hidden bases or supply caches that the Chouka could have

placed in the system. No others were ever found, but it did distract the Circasians long enough to allow the Chouka the reprieve they needed to organize and regroup.

While the Circasian forces in Mishtuki were beginning the cleanup process following the attack, another force based out of Senshuka was preparing for an attack on Sha'al. The Sha'al system was the location of a series of Chouka space stations that acted as religious retreats for pilgrims and revelers. Of the bases in the Sha'al system, only one—the Taera Shrine—was of suitable size to be a threat to an invasion force, and as such was the primary target of the planned attack into the system. The Circasians knew that the position was well fortified, with a series of defense satellites and an extensive minefield providing protection to the base in addition to any other ships that might be defending the base.

The strike into Sha'al called for the capture of the three other secondary religious retreats before confronting the Taera Shrine. The Circasian fleet easily captured the three smaller bases in the system, destroying the Chouka patrol vessels in the area and depositing marines to secure the bases. The Chouka pilgrims protested the Circasian capture of the bases, but amazingly no violence was reported on these bases.

The Battle of Taera Shrine was a bloody confrontation, despite the fact that the Circasians outnumbered the Chouka defenders nearly two to one. The Circasians



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had underestimated the potency of the Chouka minefield and took heavy losses from hits. Once the defending fleet and OSAT's were neutralized, the Circasians proceeded to sweep the minefield and began depositing troops on the station to take control of it. Unlike the other stations, the inhabitants of Taera Shrine fought back alongside the station security personnel. With their marines being continually beaten back by the Chouka defenders, Circasian Captain Larha Karrn ordered the troops to fall back and evacuate the station. After the last surviving marine party had returned to base, Karrn ordered the destruction of the station. The Taera Shrine was destroyed along with its entire 5,000 inhabitants.

Captain Karrn proceeded to complete her proscribed orders, clearing the Sha'al system of any Chouka presence. The fleet then abandoned the system and jumped to Mishtuki to hook up with the forces there to assist in system defense.

The taking of Mishtuki and Sha'al did not come without political repercussions. The Thaline Union filed an official protest after word of the destruction of the Taera Shrine reached Thaline space. The Thaline lodged allegations

that the Circasians were carrying out crimes against sentients and demanded that Thaline observers be allowed access to the systems to ensure the fair treatment of the conquered populations. The War Council was skeptical of the Thaline claims of neutrality due to their trade relationship with the Chouka, but despite their objections the Circasian Empire accepted the Thaline terms. By the end of the year Thaline observers were present in both systems monitoring the situation. Their early reports showed that, though the destruction of the Taera Shrine was unwarranted, the treatment of Chouka detainees was adequate and that no wide scale alien rights abuses could be found.

1973

With Mishtuki and Sha'al conquered by the Circasians, the Circle of Elders began to awaken to the realization that Chouka could very well be the next Circasian conquest. The Circle had long held the belief that the Faith would defend them forever and their technological advantage would deter any real attack. Now the Circle was being forced to decide on a course of action that would keep them safe from invasion.

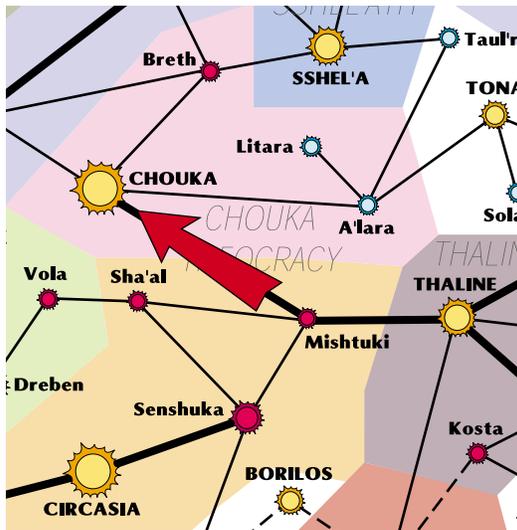
In a situation where cool, calculated decisiveness would have aided them most the Circle instead fell into a fanatical fervor. They refused to entertain the idea of negotiating with the Circasians but they knew that the Theocratic Guard could not provide the necessary fleet strength to protect the homeworld and all of her colonies in the Chouka system, too. The Chouka ordered their colonies abandoned, their populations relocated to homeworld.

By order of the Circle, the Theocratic Guard seized all craft capable of operating in space. These vessels were pressed into military service, being converted into auxiliary warships. Even small pleasure yachts were confiscated, with small fighter guns being jury rigged onto the hull. The Theocracy was desperate for every single ship, fighter, or shuttle they could muster. The Circle believed their only hope was to make

The Lights of Taera

A sacred astronomic event located in the Sha'al system, the Lights of Taera attract a great many pilgrims every years. The Lights of Taera are believed to be the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy that proclaimed that 'the lights of the world are the doorway to god'.

There is little else of use in the Sha'al system and the only Chouka colonies in the system are the many shrines that monitor the Lights of Taera and allow believers to seek spiritual fulfillment in their presence. Aphrodisiacs and other herbs are often used to allow the pilgrim to reach a state of enlightenment while viewing the Lights of Taera. Aphrodisiacs of substantial quality are one of the very few export industries that exists in Sha'al.



Chouka's defenses impregnable, lest it be overrun like Mishtuki.

Meanwhile, the Circasian War Council was left to debate on how to proceed with their war. The Mishtuki Plan had guided them to this juncture, but it did not provide anything more than a cursory outline of how to proceed in the war should the Mishtuki offensive succeed.

The Circasian people had become tired after a year of war and the civilian authorities were starting to buckle under the pressure put on them by their constituents. From their perspective, the defense network at Mishtuki had been partially rebuilt and the Empire more or less protected from the threat of Chouka retaliation. The War Council looked at the bigger picture, however, and they knew that if the Chouka were not eliminated as a future threat they would be forced to fight a stronger, even more determined enemy at a later date.

As the War Council tried to point out to government leaders on several occasions, Chouka was the last system keeping the Circasians from gaining access to several lucrative markets and trade hubs, not to mention new territories for expansion. These leaders wanted the commercial wealth and territory that such actions would allow, but were unwilling to pay the cost in ships and manpower to do so. But ultimately, it was no

longer their decision, and the War Council was determined to finish the war once and for all.

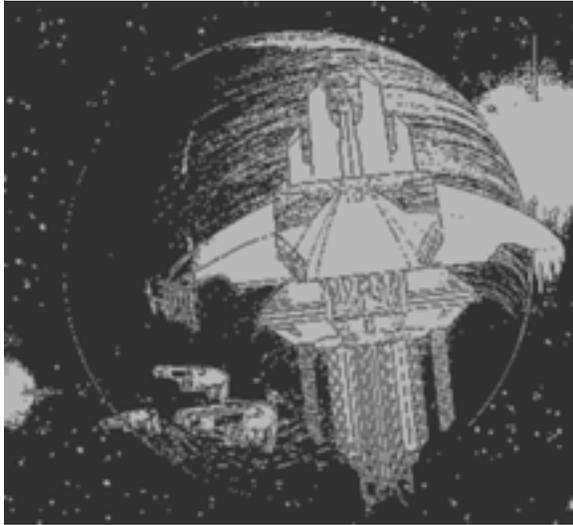
The decision to mount a full-scale assault on Chouka using the majority of the Circasian fleet was very controversial. The War Council explained that anything less would give the Chouka the chance they needed to repel the Circasians from their space and possibly launch a counteroffensive to take advantage of the downturn in Circasian luck. The civilian authorities protested, citing planetary defense concerns. However, as they well knew, it was ultimately the War Council's decision and they were going to take the fleet into Chouka.

The final assault against the Chouka homeworld was one of the bloodiest battles that known space had seen for over a hundred years. More than half of the Circasian fleet and most of the surviving Chouka fleet were on hand for the final, cataclysmic battle between the two rival powers. The Chouka Theocracy had expected the assault, but they had still held out hope that they would have more time to prepare and bolster their defenses before the final confrontation.

Multiple rings of defense satellites, some two hundred in total, surrounded the planet. Dozens of starbases, including the powerful Citadel Star Fortress, were nestled within the satellites. Linchpins of the defense network, each of these bases was heavily guarded by their own defense fleets. Easily a thousand ships and fighters stood against the Circasians in the final defense of their world.

In the battle that ensued, the Chouka put up a glorious defense, their selfless (and some would say suicidal) ship commanders trading their lives for a down payment on their race's salvation. The Chouka fought with true religious zeal and it has been said that few of the Chouka that held the line that day felt any remorse for their actions. They took solace in the defense of their god and their world. After taking any real, substantial damage, most Chouka ships would target the nearest enemy vessel and attempt to ram them. More often than not they would find their target, destroying both ships in a fiery explosion.

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First Hand Marzuula Tein, the once proud warrior of the Theocratic Guard Forces, was killed in the final battle when a small Circasian Moshesta Frigate inadvertently rammed the Apostle Holy Cruiser under his command. The Circasian frigate had taken a blast to its engines and was out of control when it slammed into the forward section of the Apostle, gutting the ship's bridge.

Also killed during the battle was First Hand Shcuizkho Yular. Unlike Marzuula, Shcuizkho was killed while trying to reach his ship at one of the shipyard complexes orbiting Chouka.

The battle had as devastating an effect on the Circasians as it did on the Chouka. Many of their ships survived, but that was only by virtue of the sheer number of ships that the War Council had mobilized for the final assault on Chouka. As it had been during the rest of the war, the Circasians had used numbers to overwhelm the Chouka. However, like many of the battles of the war, the Circasian numbers could do nothing to keep them from taking heavy losses.

With the battle in orbit won, the Circasians delivered an ultimatum to the Chouka Theocracy: immediate and unconditional surrender. The Circle scoffed at the Circasian demands and swore to resist the Circasians until the last man, woman, and child on Chouka lay dead. The Theocracy began transmitting religious dogma and

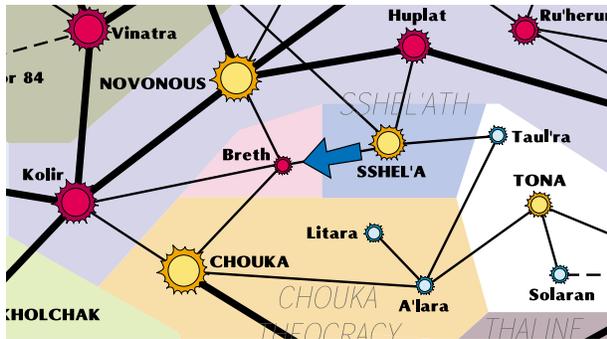
propaganda promising vengeance against the Circasians and calling for the people of Chouka to unite to resist the alien threat.

The Circasians answered by beginning the systematic bombardment of the Chouka homeworld, striking military and government complexes across the planet's surface. Two hours later, a group of surviving clerics of the Circle communicated the unconditional surrender of the Chouka Theocracy. The Chouka War was finally over.

Circasian occupation forces took only a short period of time to weed out what guerilla loyalists remained active on the planet. Many went underground and resorted to domestic terror attacks, but most Chouka were simply tired of the war. They resented the Circasians for their actions and for the destruction that they had wrought upon their race, but just as many found themselves filled with spiritual doubts. Periodic riots and revolts forced the Circasians to contract Kástan mercenaries to bolster the Imperial military presence on the planet long enough to locate and suppress rabble-rousers and militant dissidents.

The highest-ranking members of the Circle of Elders were located and detained during the early occupation of Chouka. Many were tried for war crimes and either imprisoned or executed. The Circasians installed a puppet government in place of the Circle comprised of collaborators and disillusioned clerics that had been slighted or passed over by the former Circle members. This new Circle oversaw the religious mollification of the Chouka people, becoming little more than a glorified mouthpiece for Circasian-sponsored propaganda. The Chouka people, however, had always relied upon the Circle as its moral authority and soon the Chouka accepted that their conquest was part of a divine plan for their people.

Although Chouka had fallen, the Chouka maintained control of their colonies in the Breth system. Many military ships that had been on outer system patrols during the fall of Chouka had managed to flee to Breth where they met up with other survivors and waited for the inevitable.



The Circasians, however, never would dispatch a force to invade Breth and finalize the defeat of the Chouka military. The battle to take Chouka had destroyed too many of their ships and the Circasian naval forces were already overextended. As such the Circasians did not pursue the Chouka forces any deeper into their old territory.

If history would have gone in the Chouka's favor they may have been able to fight an extended guerilla war to liberate Chouka from Circasian domination, but unfortunately it was not to be. The Sshel'ath Alliance had been watching the events of the Chouka War with great interest. The Sshel'ath had attempted to capture Breth on several other occasions, each time being repulsed by the Chouka forces in the system. Now, with the Chouka in disarray and their fleets fractured, the Sshel'ath had the opportunity to finally capture the system. The Sshel'ath had long planned to eventually make a power play for Breth, and in fact had been preparing to do just that before the Circasian/Chouka conflict had begun!

With the means and opportunity available, the Sshel'ath dispatched a war force to Breth with orders to capture the system at any cost. The Sshel'ath squadron arrived in the system and encountered no immediate opposition. The Sshel'ath fleet commander was rightly unnerved by this turn of events and proceeded with caution as they moved into position to begin the invasion of the Chouka colony worlds in system. The Sshel'ath knew that the Circasians had not pressed their advantage into Breth, but did not know the particulars of why they had not done so. This

fact made the commander even more cautious.

When arriving at the gas giant moon of P'entae, the Sshel'ath were greeted with open arms by the Chouka colony there. The Chouka were quite receptive to the Sshel'ath military presence in the system and communicated their wish to become a Sshel'ath protectorate. This behavior was far from the Chouka norm as the Sshel'ath knew it, and the Sshel'ath commander became even more wary of the situation.

The distrust proved to be well founded. Not long after the Sshel'ath completed "negotiations" with the colony at P'entae, the Sshel'ath expedition found itself surrounded by Chouka warships closing on attack vectors. The Chouka had evidently hoped that the Sshel'ath would be lulled into a state of false security by their political mirage, or perhaps they did not believe that Sshel'ath sensors would be unable to detect their fleet before it was too late. In either case, it was a poor assumption for the Chouka to have made.

Despite being surrounded, the Sshel'ath managed to easily defeat the fifteen ships of the Chouka fleet to the loss of only two of their own. The Sshel'ath commander was outraged by the Chouka deception and promptly ordered the destruction of the P'entae colony as a lesson to the other Chouka colonies remaining in the system.

The Sshel'ath increased their fleet presence in Breth after the incident and began moving colonists into the system as fast as colony ships and personnel transports could carry them. By the end of 1973 the Sshel'ath population in Breth had swelled to nearly 10,000, not including the 5,000 peacekeeping troops deployed at the Chouka colonies. Early attempts at revolt by the Chouka were met with zero tolerance by their new Sshel'ath masters, and two Chouka colonies were destroyed by the Sshel'ath after especially violent uprisings. The domed colonies were depressurized, the Sshel'ath leaving the rebels to die at the hands of the hostile planetary elements.

The Sshel'ath half expected the Circasian Empire to eventually make a strike

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into the Breth system, but an attack never came. Sshel'ath paranoia about an impending attack paid off in spades, however, as the rapid fortification and colonization of Breth turned it into a major Sshel'ath system quite capable of defending itself from invasion.

the Circasians reveled in the peace and prosperity that fleetingly offered itself to them.

Post-War

With the Chouka War over, the process of rebuilding was underway. The War Council reluctantly turned over control of the government back to the democratically elected government and began the process of rebuilding the Circasian armed forces. The Circasian's first real war amongst the stars had taught them a great deal about space warfare and they took these lessons to heart. A new generation of highly trained officers would come out of the Circasian military academies over the next decade helping to create one of the most elite fighting forces in known space.

The Chouka slowly settled into their new role as a conquered population. For most their day-to-day life remained unchanged and, as time went on, they began questioning whether anything had really changed for good or bad at the end of the war. The Circle of Elders still handed down their edicts and judgments on Chouka morality and the transit shuttles ran on time in the great cities of Chouka. To the common person life under the Circasian yoke was little different than life under the Circle.

The Sshel'ath, meanwhile, had started down the path to their future place as an important minor power in the region. Trade flourished with the opening of Breth as a free port. Trade from the outward and downspin sectors flowed into Breth, profiting the Sshel'ath Alliance both financially and politically.

The relative peace that followed the Chouka War would not last, however. Peace rarely lasts for long, its duration determined only by the loss and pain with which it was born from the wars that proceeded it. The rise of the Circasian Empire would lead it into greater conflicts in the future. But, for a time,

Chapter 3: The Circasian Empire

Background

The planet of Circasia is a relatively diminutive world lacking in anything of interest to other races. The bluish-green oceans of Circasia dominate the planet's surface, only broken up by two super continents interconnected by series of narrow land bridges. There are some limited archipelago formations in close proximity to these two super continents, but none very large or important. Because of the geography of Circasia, a single species could easily spread to every corner of the two continents and this was a common occurrence over the course of Circasian evolutionary history. As a result, differentiation within individual species is not as pronounced as that of other worlds where greater geographic separation exists.

The lifeform that rose to dominance on Circasia was the descendant of a cat-like creature that roamed the savannas and hill lands in the central corridor between the two super-continents in an area dominated by a vast freshwater lake. The Circasians retained the keen eyesight, hearing, and reflexes of their wild ancestors and, as their people developed civilization, they applied these inherited skills not to agriculture or science, but to war. Warfare between early Circasian tribes was common and actually acted as a catalyst for the future development of Circasian civilization. As clans and tribes fought for territory and dominance in the grasslands of Circasia it became progressively more common for them to settle down along the fertile banks of the inland sea, fortifying themselves within tall-walled valleys and cavernous cliff formations. Where these natural defensive barriers did not exist, the early Circasians built massive mud and clay walls similar in design to step pyramids. These early Circasian cultures would



eventually expand their control across their respective regions, defeating and ultimately absorbing the remaining bands of nomads and hunter/gatherers into their own societies.

As empires waxed and waned, the cultures on Circasia began to slowly unify. In the beginning, the unification of Circasia was the result of military aggression as warlords and dictators seized and incorporated the territories of their defeated enemies into their own empire. This in turn led to the formation of nations unified by common political or social ties. Later, alliances of nation states led to the amalgamation of multiple powers into a single force with which to combat enemies who threatened their sovereignty.

Finally, in the Earth year 1748, the five major powers of Circasia clashed in a bloody and costly war. Barely industrialized, and with their infrastructure still feeling the growing pains of their changing world, each power was interested only in improving their position of power through the influx of funds and slaves that could be made possible through conquest. The six-year conflict ended with none of the major powers any longer in existence. Instead, a coalition of weaker powers rose to seize total power over all of Circasia. These nations, devastated by the

war, were charged with the unenviable job of rebuilding their world. It took nearly twenty years to repair the damage caused by the war and finally establish a stable planetary government. Several bush wars were fought, especially on the periphery of the two continents, but ultimately the new empire managed to assert its control over the entire planet.

Taking to Space

The first permanent orbital facilities were erected in orbit of Circasia in 1805, marking the beginning of the Circasian interplanetary period. Early steps into space were cautious, Circasian scientists carefully collecting data and developing and testing new space technologies before launching more substantial space-based initiatives. The construction of the first shipyard in 1821 led to an explosion of expansion and exploration in the Circasian home system. In the years to come the Circasian would grow from a fledgling one-planet power to boasting more than twenty individual settlements spread throughout their solar system.

The Circasians thrived during the early years of space expansion, but it would not last. The interplanetary expansion and outward growth of the previous two decades had filled investors and corporations with a euphoria that was not justified by the bottom line. An economic downturn on Circasia in 1842 caused the bottom to fall out of the space-based business sector. The subsequent depression wracked the still young space economy and stalled development of new space technologies. Cut backs in ship construction and technology sectors, coupled with the collapse of key high profile corporations, caused many investors to get out of the market. This in turn led to more economic problems, including the abandonment of several solar colonies. The Circasian Empire had taken several steps back and erased much of the progress they had made in the previous years.

It would take another quarter of a century before the Circasians would again move appreciably back into space. The slow but steady increase in activity was nothing compared to the space race that had proceeded it. Unlike that economic disaster in the making, this re-emergence was calculated, profitable and, perhaps most importantly, learned from the mistakes of the past.

Then came an unexpected windfall. On the sixth planet of their home system an expedition dispatched to drill for core samples discovered a mysterious wreck buried beneath the regolith and fine particles of the planetary surface. The scarred hull dated back thousands of years in age and, though much of the wreck was destroyed, the engineering section of the hulk was still intact. A massive archaeological program was quickly assembled for the extraction and research of the artifact, the effort financed entirely by the Circasian government. Excavation of the derelict took nearly a month, at which point it was towed to Jenholen Station, a military controlled research station orbiting the inner gas giant of Jenholen, for further study.

The results of the find were nothing less than spectacular. Not only were the Circasians able to make giant leaps in starship construction, drive and power systems, and other technologies, they had actually managed to salvage a functional jump engine. Physicists worked for years attempting to comprehend the inner workings and functionality of the arcane piece of technology, relying on linguistic specialists to decipher the alien runes that covered the artifact. With rudimentary translations of the alien language in hand, these linguists then worked hand in hand with computer specialists to access vital data from the alien computer system in order to put together the pieces of the mysterious puzzle. The alien writing continually noted that the device was some sort of a “portal to the stars”, or a “doorway to the gods”. Scientists interpreted this to mean it was some sort of interstellar travel device. Though the attempts to understand why the jump engine worked failed, the teams were ultimately able to come up with schematics for a crude jump device of their own.

Construction of the first Circasian jump ship prototype was a grueling and expensive undertaking. The Circasian home system was poor in Quantum 40, the element essential for the construction and maintenance of jump engines. Small quantities of the material were extractable from the local asteroid belt, though at immense cost, but finding suitable deposits required intense scouring of the denser regions of the asteroid field to find viable mining candidates. After expending great amounts of resources deciphering and reverse engineering the jump drive, the Circasians were now ready to make their first attempt at using the technology.

The initial results were nothing short of disastrous. Having no knowledge of jump engine mechanics and operations, let alone hyperspace, the first several jump craft prototypes were destroyed when their jump engines overloaded upon activation. This design problem was eventually corrected after referring to alien diagrams, but little more could be gleaned from the alien database.

After seven years of research and dozens of failed experimental models, the first functional Circasian jump engine was successfully tested in the Earth year 1881. The formation of the brilliant red jump point was an awesome sight to see. The doorway had been opened.

After the first successful test of the Circasian jump engine prototype, a request for proposals was submitted to the leading ship construction agencies for a large, independent explorer ship that could mount a jump engine and be able to make long duration exploratory missions into hyperspace.

As designs were submitted and construction on these designs began, hyperspace probes launched from the Jenholen test zone, which had become the de facto site for advanced technology research, began investigating the mysteries and oddities of hyperspace, gathering enough data to allow Circasian vessels to safely navigate the parallel dimension. These probes discovered a vast array of beacons in a grid like formation, some intersecting at stellar locations, other seemingly endless or severed unexpectedly.

The Circasian instruments of the day could not truly grasp the hyperspace jump gate network, but they had an idea of what to expect. Using data from the alien libraries, a fixed jump gate was built in orbit of Jenholen. Unlike other jump gate designs, the Circasian built theirs using a five-girder array in order to more evenly distribute the power strain on their less advanced reactor systems.

It took roughly three years each to construct the first four Kiralina class jump ships. These explorer vessels, named after the mythological goddess of light, were then dispatched upon routes that hyperspace probes had indicated were possible links to other star systems. None of the explorer ships were expected back for two years after their departure.

Three of the ships made it back within their two-year window, one returning with a report of finding nothing at the end of their beacon trail—a simple starless nexus. The *Mishila* and *Thantir* both returned with knowledge of other star systems. The *Mishila* had visited and catalogued the Senshuka system, discovering a wealth of exploitable natural resources including large Quantum 40 deposits. The *Thantir* returned with knowledge of the Res'den system, which contained little of interest but did have leftover beacon trails leading to other possible system locations. They had followed one of these trails, managing to reach the Talynn System, when their stores had started running low, requiring them to double back for resupply. Talynn, a trinary star system, looked promising for future inhabitation and as a site for stellar research from the preliminary data the *Thantir* collected.

The *Kiralina*, however, had vanished. The *Mishila* was sent on a futile quest to follow the *Kiralina*'s intended route of travel through hyperspace but turned back when they hit turbulent hyperspace rapids. The large ship barely managed to escape the fiery maelstrom without it, too, being lost. No one has seen the *Kiralina* since, the ship becoming the equivalent of the Flying Dutchman to the Circasians. Many believe that the *Kiralina* will return one day after it has finally completed its mission, and sightings of the ship are still

The Mystery of the *Kiralina*

What did happen to the lost Circasian explorer ship? Very little is known about the *Kiralina*'s fateful mission of exploration. The data that the *Mishila* returned with upon following the *Kiralina*'s intended course have led scholars to believe that the *Kiralina* may have ended up in the Rapids of Rodirra, a particularly foreboding and deadly region of hyperspace near Kástan space known for unpredictable hyperspace conditions. Kástan records from that period do note a long-range encounter with a vessel of unknown origin, but very few records of this encounter exist.

If the *Kiralina* did end up in the Rapids of Rodirra then it may have foundered along the edge of a hyperspace whirlpool or else been drawn off the beacon by a particularly violent shift in hyperspace currents.

This explanation, however, does not explain the strange encounters that craft throughout the region have had with the ghost ship identified by many as none other than the *Kiralina*. It is very unlikely that these sightings are true, but there are still believers that say that the *Kiralina* is still trying to find its way home through the reddish hell of hyperspace.

As with many mysteries the loss of the *Kiralina* and its final whereabouts remain an enigma for the ages that will never be completely solved.

reported by crews passing through especially rough and treacherous areas of hyperspace.

As the Circasians continued with their policy of outward expansion, it became necessary to rotate explorer ships from exploratory duty to courier missions in intervals so that workers and supplies could be moved to newly discovered systems. The Circasians simply did not have enough jump capable craft available for use as dedicated jump couriers.

Upon arrival at new colonies, workers would typically develop an initial permanent settlement at the intended colony site and begin assembly of a prefabricated fixed jump gate. The deployment of fixed jump gates in new systems allowed for faster, permanent hyperspace routes to be established between the new system and other existing systems. This increased the accessibility of newly explored territories, facilitating the migration of colonists and corporate interests into these systems.

Corporate and government investments in extra solar colonial properties surged noticeably in the late 1920's and early 1930's with thirty separate expeditions chartered by private and/or federal institutions.

The largest concentration of extra solar colonization was in the Senshuka System as mining companies, claim miners, and other entrepreneurs purchased passage on liners and cargo ships headed into the system in search of their fortune. Senshuka, specifically the massive colony on the mineral rich world of Senshuka II, would become the largest of Circasia's colony worlds and the most heavily populated system other than Circasia.

The Talynn system also received a large influx of colonists, but enjoyed nowhere near the volume of Senshuka. While miners flocked to Senshuka, scientists found Talynn to be a paradise for pure research. A swampy, overcast world, Talynn Prime was quickly colonized by those wishing to explore the wonders of a new world. The atmosphere was toxic to Circasian physiology, yet many found the balmy world comfortable and a string of domes and facilities began emerging among the cycad-like growth of Talynn Prime's young forests. Many pharmaceutical companies established a presence on the world in order to study the local flora in hopes of discovering new drugs.

In addition to these two major systems, the Circasians also established colonies or

outposts in the Res'den, Kosica, and Vatal systems. Res'den was found to be lacking in exploitable resources, but the system served as a hub for early Circasian exploration and soon became the site of a trading and military post that protected the system while providing a place of commerce for travelers from the frontier worlds.

The settlements in the Kosica and Vatal colonies had fewer ties to corporate interests than other early Circasian colonies. These colonies were instead populated by those Circasians with a true pioneer spirit that wished to carve out a new life for themselves away from the influences of Circasia. Kosica, colonized in 1929, boasts a small earth-like world that is the site of a small agricultural colony. The residents of the Kosica colony tended to be more puritanical than traditional Circasians, and used their agricultural colony as a place to get back to their roots. The far frontier world of Vatal, colonized in 1943, became home to enterprising individuals looking to build something new. Many of those that colonized Vatal did so for the thrill of homesteading and so that they could find something beyond the hustle and bustle of the city life they had known on Circasia.

First Contact

The Circasians had learned long ago that they were not alone in the universe, the alien derelict discovered in the Circasia system was proof of that. Through all of their exploratory and colonization missions they had yet to meet any other intelligent life. Some began to believe that the 'giants among the stars' had destroyed one another in a great cataclysm, leaving the younger races in the region to pick up the pieces. Speculation was not needed following the fateful events of March 19, 1934. The *Mishila*, on long range patrol upspin of Circasia, jumped into a system that they had located a day's journey off of the established beacon path. A cursory examination of the system, designation Quadrant 1, had already begun with several of the ship's shuttles being dispatched to begin mapping nearby system bodies.

Out of nowhere, a small fleet of three alien ships appeared on an intercept course for the *Mishila*. The Circasian vessel tried desperately to initiate contact with these unidentified vessels, flooding the broadcast channels with greetings, translation matrices, and other data that it was hoped would communicate their peaceful intentions. The alien craft did not reply to the message, each continuing on course to intercept the *Mishila*. The ship's shuttles seemed to go unnoticed by the alien ships and they made no indication that they had been detected. Each shuttle immediately altered its flight path in an attempt to double back and rendezvous with the *Mishila*.

The patience of the alien vessels, however, seemed to have run out. The lead craft opened fire on the *Mishila*, the firing vessel's first blow shattering a section of the *Mishila*'s gravity-positive habitat section. The crew, reacting with admirable speed, powered their light array of weapons and prepared the ship for an immediate retreat into hyperspace. More weapons fire connected with the explorer ship and, as the damage to ship systems mounted, it became obvious that if the *Mishila* waited for the shuttles to return it may not survive long enough to escape. With a heavy heart, the ship's commander ordered his ship's retreat, abandoning the shuttles and their crews to inevitable death in the alien system. The hostile alien craft did not appear to be in pursuit of the *Mishila*. Nonetheless, the *Mishila*'s commander made sure to watch for sensor echoes in hyperspace as it retreated back towards Circasian space.

Upon returning to Circasia the crew of the jump ship was debriefed by the military command. The government and military were both shocked by the news of the confrontation in the system. The War Council felt that this was a sign that they had to militarize quickly or risk a full invasion from this new alien threat. Paranoid that their forces may have been followed back to homeworld, a state of planetary emergency was declared at Circasia and the colonies with all military installations placed under high alert. Production centers were activated to begin immediate

construction of warships and defense stations to help defend Circasia. At that point in time the Circasian space fleet was little more than a police force suitable for countering little more than the occasional homegrown pirate vessel. The Circasians knew that none of their defensive systems could possibly counter an enemy the likes of that encountered in the alien star system.

They did not have to wait long for their worst fears to be realized. Within a week of the *Mishila's* return to Circasia a jump point formed in the outer regions of the Circasian home system, spewing forth a single behemoth. This massive battleship was almost half the size of one of the Circasian's own jump ships and several orders of magnitude larger than the Circasian's largest warship. The Circasians thought that their worst nightmares had come true, and every Circasian held their breath.

Needless to say it was a complete and utter surprise when the ship signaled the nearest Circasian base *in Circasian!* The vessel identified itself as a Kholran battleship dispatched as courier and first contact vessel. The Kholran explained that the three destroyers encountered in Quadrant 1 had interpreted the Circasian's first contact signals as primitive attempts to jam their communications. The Kholran emissary apologized for the incident and surprised the Circasian Empire when he informed them that the shuttle crews were not only still alive but onboard the battleship and ready for transfer back into Circasian hands.

The Kholran ship stayed in Circasian space for several weeks as the Kholran diplomats met with Circasian planetary represents to establish normalized relations between their races. First and foremost on the Circasian agenda was procuring astronomical data and securing an amicable border treating with the Kholran. The Kholran were not an expansionistic race, their empire actually contracting over the previous century, and as such they welcomed a border treaty with the Circasians. The Kholran were also more than happy to transfer a map of nearby jump routes to the Circasians. This map

included several jump links identified as routes leading into the territories or numerous alien governments.

Circasians quickly made contact with the other alien powers in the region using the map given to them by the Kholran emissaries. The Circasians found that several powers bordered them, including the Kholran, Chouka, and Th'sook. The Chouka were the most powerful of their neighbors (besides the Kholran, of course), and the Th'sook were a newly emerged interstellar power in a situation not unlike the Circasian's own. The Kholran maps indicated that several large, powerful empires existed upspin of the Kholran Republic, but the Circasians were content to slowly open relations with their immediate neighbors and gradually ease themselves onto the galactic scene.

Of those races contacted by the Circasians early on, the Chouka wanted little do with the upstart Circasians and made this known to them during their first meeting. The Th'sook, meanwhile, were quite the opposite. After only a few short meetings it became obvious to the Circasians and Th'sook that both were more alike than they were different. The Th'sook admired the warrior past of the Circasians while the Circasians found the Th'sook's mythological dramas breathtakingly elegant and provocative. The two nations became stolid trading partners, the Circasians trading Th'sook starship technologies in return for raw materials and other domestic goods.

As trade relations were opened with their neighbors the Circasians came into contact with several other alien races that they had previously known only through secondhand information brought into Circasian space by other visiting races. The races of the ak-Tai Hegemony had little interest in the affairs of the downspin races (the Circasian Empire included) and were remote enough that the Circasians did not attempt to form a lasting relationship until years later. Several other small nations were discovered coreward of Circasia, including the Thrikin, Kástan, and Thaline. All of these races proved to be friendly to one degree or another and trade treaties were secured with all of them.

The newfound wealth that came from foreign trade and commercial enterprises did not come without its price. In fact, the opening of Circasian space to the rest of known space would lead to the Circasian Empire's first major conflict in space. As merchant vessels and traders entered Circasian space they were soon followed by pirates, raiders, and brigands. Raider organizations from throughout the region, including those based out of Chouka, Sshel'ath, ak-Tai, and Kástan space, had begun moving operations into the lucrative and virtually undefended regions of the Circasian Empire, specifically the trade route hub at Res'den and the trade lanes of the Senshuka system. Losses to raiders increased with every passing year. As the casualty rates of freighters heading through the sector increased, the pilots' unions and various guilds connected to interstellar commerce activities began to demand that the Circasian Empire do something to curb the raider activity.

The existing Circasian patrol ships remained little changed since the time of contact with the Kholran, and the antiquated technologies these vessels boasted were no match for even the rundown secondhand ships operated by the raider bands. The Circasians needed a modern navy to deal with this very real problem and they needed it fast.

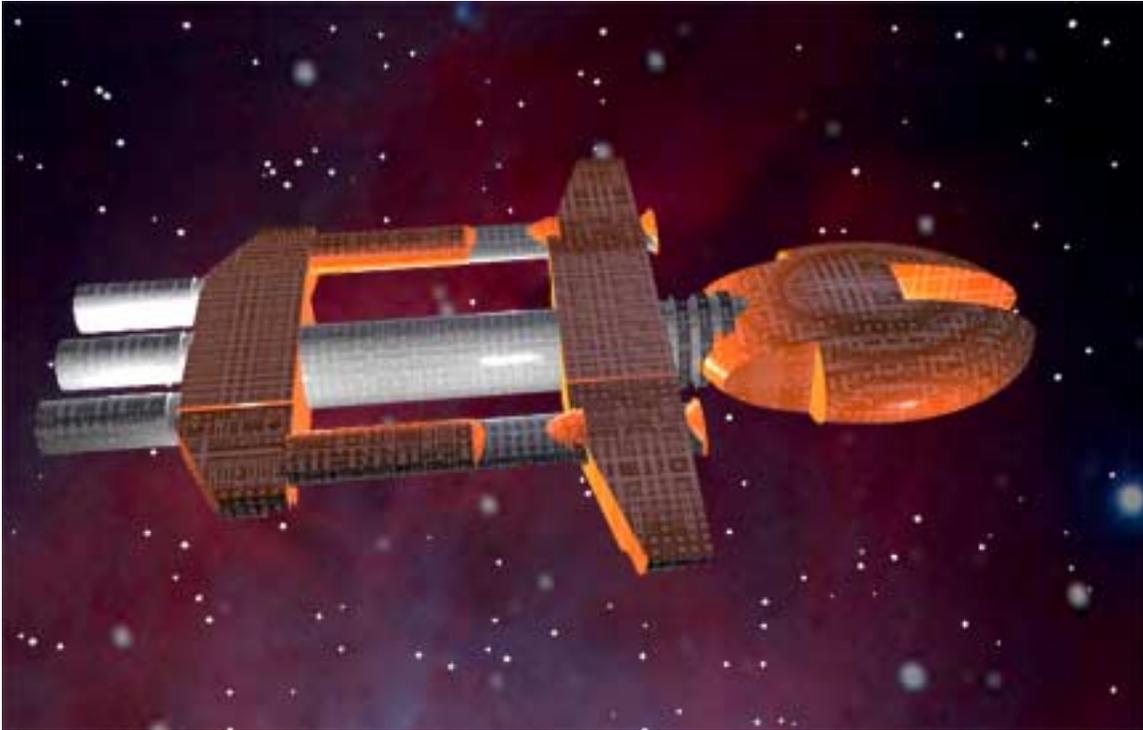
With pressure increasing, the Circasians began construction on a new generation of frigates to help in the battle against the raider threat. However, as the Circasians waited for new warships to be completed in shipyards at Circasia, the raiders were becoming bolder in their actions, and more deadly. A raider strike by a Ghotekhen raider band called the Unsheathed Claw on the Res'den transfer point left the station nearly destroyed and hundreds of innocent civilians murdered. The Unsheathed Claw boarded the station and began pillaging, stealing everything that they could carry. Eventually a small flotilla of Rotarra Police Cutters arrived and managed to drive the raiders off but not before the damage to the transfer point had been done. Such attacks were still uncommon, but were becoming less so with each passing day.

In 1944, the first in a series of new construction warships left the Circasian shipyards. Reformed into ten patrol fleets, these ships were charged with the defense of the space lanes. They were able to cut down on raider activity, forcing many of the smaller operators out of the area. The vessels were still no match for the command ships of the major raider powers, several of which had taken up residence on the edge of Circasian space. Of these the Unsheathed Claw near Th'sook space proved a major threat to both civilian and military traffic in that region. Coreward of Circasia, the Kástan Blood Sword raiders had begun harassing miners and ore haulers in the Senshuka System. The attacks on Senshuka earned the Blood Swords a grave reputation among the asteroid miners, a reputation noted for their ferocity and merciless slaughter of civilians.

The Blood Swords were exceptionally good at what they did. Their raiding activities in the region had earned them hefty profits, the kind of money that could purchase the best in black market ships and equipment. The Blood Sword command vessel, a modified Flameblade cruiser named the *Lady of Dark Souls*, roamed hyperspace waiting to jump out and attack unsuspecting cargo ships. Blood Sword pilots had become accustomed to the treacherous hyperspace formations native to Kástan space and could easily escape capture by going where other ships wouldn't dare.

Circasian intelligence agents managed to secure information on the whereabouts of the *Lady of Dark Souls* in 1950 and the Circasian War Council authorized a strike against the raider command vessel and its escorts. The Circasians dispatched the 6th Fleet, under the command of Admiral Haelitis Xan, to intercept the *Lady of Dark Souls* and destroy her.

What followed was a military disaster. Admiral Xan was haughty and arrogant, something that was well known by everyone that knew him. Xan looked upon the mission as nothing more than a standard raider suppression mission and, despite reviewing intelligence files on the Blood Swords, did not



believe them to be anywhere near as large a threat as others made them out to be.

The Admiral's fleet intercepted the Blood Sword raider fleet as expected and proceeded to make a grave miscalculation. He ordered two of his small police frigates to move into close range and order the raider ships to stand down. When the frigates entered the Blood Swords' weapon range they were instantly blown out of the sky.

Admiral Xan was furious. He ordered his fleet to move into range and attack. As his fleet closed it became obvious that, though this was indeed a Blood Sword fleet and it was a *Lady of Dark Souls* type command ship, it was not in fact the *Lady*. Xan's fleet had already entered engagement range before he put two and two together, and by then it was too late. The true *Lady of Dark Souls* jumped in behind the Circasian fleet, encircling them. Caught in the crossfire the entire Circasian 6th Fleet was destroyed to the last ship by the raiders.

This inexcusable lack of command ability rattled the War Council and caused a major review of its personnel. It quickly became evident that many of those in command positions were not actually qualified

to lead their fleets into battle. More importantly, though, this attack proved that the Circasian fleet, even with its new construction units, was still not able to meaningfully combat the raider threat.

In answer to this problem a new frigate design using a new and powerful weapon was constructed and put into service. This ship, the Xandar Lancer Frigate, would revolutionize Circasian ship construction and represent a new way of looking at military engineering. The Circasian Empire kept the Xandar frigates a closely guarded secret and reserved them for homeworld defense, lest the raiders learn about their new secret weapon. The War Council had a plan that would, if successful, eradicate the raider threat completely. Using intelligence data gathered by covert operatives working from within ranks of each of the three largest raider bands, the War Council's plan called for a series of strikes that would hit all three raider groups simultaneously, giving them no time to respond. Using their inside operatives, each band would receive false information about a major Quantum 40 shipment moving through their respective sectors. Using this as bait, the Circasians would be waiting for them with a fleet of

Xandar Lancer Frigates. Production of Xandars was redoubled in order to get enough craft produced by the deadline.

These surgical strikes by the Xandar Lancer Frigates in 1955 largely ended the raider threat. Even the venerable Blood Swords found themselves in shambles after the attack. The raider wars ended with the destruction or dispersion of the three major raider bands hit in the attacks. Some disparate bands of raiders still remained active in the region, but none had the organization or resources to effect the same level of terror as those groups dispersed by the 1955 attack.

The Circasian Empire was tested both diplomatically and militarily early on after entering the galactic scene. The raider wars tempered the Circasian military machine and the Circasian military learned much about tactics and space combat during this period. They would later put this information to good use during their conflicts with other nearby powers, most notably the Chouka during the Circasian/Chouka War of 1971-1973. More commonly known as the Chouka War, this war established the Circasians as a true military power in the region.

Circasian Technology

The Circasians have developed their military infrastructure and technology very rapidly in the past forty years since entering the galactic scene. Initially relying on weak ballistic weapons for military applications, the Circasians quickly branched into other fields, including laser, particle, and plasma weaponry. Many of these technologies were still in their infancy during the Chouka War, but information was gathered during and after that conflict allowed the Circasians to develop more advanced technologies, particularly in the field of plasma weaponry.

Light Laser Cannon

Class: Laser **Mode: Raking**

The precursor to almost every laser weapon known today, the Circasians used the

light laser cannon earlier in their history, operating the weapon as an anti-shipping weapon on their hulls. Light laser cannons would later be replaced by the light particle cannon, a weapon that the Circasians viewed as being markedly superior to the light laser cannon because of its enhanced damage and fire control abilities.

Light Particle Cannon

Class: Particle **Mode: Raking**

Developed during the period between their expansion into space and the raider wars, the light particle was adapted as the primary offensive weapon on Circasian ships. This mid-sized particle weapon was the “heavy weapon” of the Circasian fleet during this period and was a common sight on new construction hulls.

Particle Lance

Class: Particle **Mode: Raking**

During the period of time covered by the raider wars, Circasian scientists and engineers began work to develop a heavier version of the light particle cannon. The light particle cannon had proved ineffective against some of the more heavily armed raider vessels that had moved into the Circasian Empire and a new weapon was needed.

The particle lance is a large mount composed of two separate light particle cannon systems integrated into a single housing. By combining two light particle cannons in this fashion, the Circasians were able to create a weapon that could fire at longer ranges for great damage output. Unfortunately the size of the particle lance and its maintenance intensive nature curtailed widespread use of the weapon. Instead, the particle lance found a home in a series of specially designed warships as part of the Lancer Project.

By the time of the Chouka War use of the particle lance had waned due to internal political and economic issues. Several new lancer hulls were on the drawing board, but few came to fruition. The development of the

particle cannon some years later would signal the end of the particle lance era.

Light Particle Gun

Class: Particle **Mode: Standard**

A neutral-particle beam weapon, the light particle gun and particle gun were developed simultaneously by the Circasians. Poorer than a light particle beam in every way, light particle guns were nevertheless pinnacles of Circasian technological achievement for many decades.

Light particle guns are typically found on older Circasian warships or civilian merchant ships.

Particle Gun

Class: Particle **Mode: Standard**

The particle gun served as the Circasian's first ship-mounted particle weapon of any real note. Poorer than modern particle beam weapons in every way possible, the particle gun was quickly replaced by the light particle beam once that weapon was developed. Few Circasian military vessels continued to use the weapon. Eventually the weapon ended up in the hands of Circasian civilian organizations, which used the weapon for arming their merchant craft to defend against raiders or other threats.

Light Particle Beam

Class: Particle **Mode: Standard**

A basic particle weapon, the light particle beam was the first particle weapon successfully tested and implemented by the Circasians. Used primarily for anti-fighter and interception duties, the light particle beam is a ubiquitous element of Circasian weapons load out.

Siege Cannon

Class: Particle **Mode: Raking**

An enormous particle beam related to the heavy particle cannon, but far less sophisticated, the particle siege cannon (most often referred to as simply the "siege cannon") was developed during the Chouka War.

Circasian scientists had spent years attempting to develop a larger, more powerful version of the light particle cannon, but with little success. The team behind the siege cannon chose not to work towards developing an advanced particle cannon similar to the standard particle cannon but rather went a step further, attempting to create a weapon capable of incredible destructive power. The result was the slow firing siege cannon. Capable of delivering massive amounts of damage to the target, the siege cannon suffers from uncorrectable focusing and overheating problems. It was not uncommon for system problems to cause the weapon's particle acceleration and focusing systems to shutdown unexpectedly during firing.

The siege cannon ultimately was used as a long-range assault weapon for use in base assaults. The weapon also found utility against ground based targets for planetary bombardment missions. Despite these applications the weapon was eventually phased out of service and the concept shelved after it was found that massed missile/bomb fire and/or mass drivers could do the same job more efficiently.

Due to the size of the beam fired by the siege cannon it is possible to spread damage to up to two separate targets (in which case a flight of fighters is considered one "target"). The limitations is that both targets must be either (a) within one hex of one another or (b) one target must be directly between the firing ship and the other target. If these conditions are met the firing player may then decide on the amount of damage to allocate to each target. The ship cannot roll to see how much damage is done before allocation; they must allocate the raw d10's toward each intended target. To-hit rolls are rolled normally; however, like the Kirishiac hypergraviton blaster, if the beam misses its target it gets to roll to hit again, though at a penalty of 1d10 damage from the allocated amount. This proceeds until either no damage remains to be scored or a unit is hit. In the case of fighter flights, after the first fighter to be 'hit' is destroyed remaining damage cascades to the next fighter in the flight until all allocated

damage is resolved or no fighters remain in the flight.

Light Plasma Cannon

Class: Plasma **Mode: Standard**

The light plasma cannon is the second-generation plasma weapon used by the Circasian military. The successor to the point plasma gun, the light plasma cannon quickly gained popularity among military commanders and was eventually integrated into the Circasian fleet doctrine. The ability to sear through even the most resilient of armors made it perfect for debilitating enemy ships, if not destroying them outright.

During the height of the light plasma cannons popularity in the early 1960's, light plasma cannons were fielded extensively on new construction hulls. These light plasma cannons were almost also mounted forward in turrets capable of extended arcs of fire.

Medium Plasma Cannon

Class: Plasma **Mode: Standard**

The medium plasma cannon was developed following the subjugation of the Chouka. The Circasian medium plasma weapon is based off of captured Chouka heavy plasma weapons and the help of captured Chouka scientists. The medium plasma cannon was a revolutionary leap forward for the Circasians in the field of plasma weapon technologies.

The effect of the medium plasma cannon on the Circasian fleet was extraordinary. Most Circasian designs received upgrades to the medium plasma cannon as soon as they became available. The Circasians favored the heavy hitting abilities of the medium plasma cannon over the older light particle cannon.

Point Plasma Gun

Class: Plasma **Mode: Standard**

The Circasian point plasma gun is functionally equivalent to the Chouka plasma weapon of the same name. The point plasma gun saw limited use in the Circasian military, being mounted only on early Circasian ship

hulls before the development of the light particle beam.

Rockets

The Circasians have never used mainstream ballistic weapons on their ships, instead relying on their own homegrown ballistic weapon system. Circasian rockets are most similar to the torpedoes of other races, relying on the firing ship's electronics suite for guidance data. The fire control computers of rocket launchers tend to be low and are outclassed by those of more advanced races. For purposes of game play, rockets are treated as torpedo weapons and benefit from the effects of offensive EW.

Early Circasian ships used rockets as their primary offensive weapons. Later, as new alien technologies became available, the Circasians abandoned rockets in favor of more versatile particle and plasma weapons.

Light Rocket Launcher

Class: Ballistic **Mode: Standard**

The light rocket launcher is the original Circasian ballistic weapon. Firing weak, chemically propelled rockets, the light rocket launcher is a short ranged weapon that has little use in modern warfare. Few ships remain in the Circasian fleet that use the light rocket launcher and those few hulls that continue to use them are usually older, pre-contact warships that were never upgraded due to their age.

Rocket Launcher

Class: Ballistic **Mode: Standard**

A very basic ballistic delivery system, the rocket launcher fires chemically propelled rockets towards the target. Although traditional missile weapons are more effective, the Circasians favored the rocket launcher because of the smaller ammunition size that allowed each rocket launcher's magazine to hold hundreds of rockets, reducing the logistical strain associated with ballistic weaponry. The fact that the ammunition was less volatile and could easily be spaced to prevent the ship from suffering devastating

magazine explosions also made rocket launchers a more popular alternative.

Following the Chouka War rocket launchers began to be supplanted by plasma weaponry. New construction did away with rocket launchers entirely except in the instance of a handful of revival hulls. These occurrences were rare, however. Rockets were found to be poor for planetary bombardments as well and were replaced by bomb racks and basic missile racks as the need for bombardment ships arose.

Dual Rocket Launcher

Class: Ballistic **Mode: Standard**

The dual rocket launcher was an attempt by the Circasians to build a more effective rocket launch platform after first contact was made with the Kholran. This fast firing rocket launcher is capable of firing twice as fast as a standard rocket launcher, allowing it to saturate the target with ballistic fire.

Heavy Rocket Launcher

Class: Ballistic **Mode: Standard**

The heavy rocket launcher is the largest rocket launcher ever developed by the Circasians. This large rocket delivery system was quite formidable for its time, but unfortunately the technology proved to be antiquated and not well suited for modern warfare.

Circasian Military

The Circasian Empire is a representative democracy governed by an elected civilian government commonly referred to as the Circasian Planetary Assembly, or simply the Assembly. The formation of the Assembly has its roots in the political alliances formed in the aftermath of the Circasian's final world war. The allied powers of the time used the Planetary Assembly as a means by which to settle disputes and pass planetary resolutions. The Circasian Planetary Assembly is granted rights to most governmental powers, though most of these are delegated to subordinate departments of

the government by law and are outside of the direct exertion of the Assembly members.

The military, led by the Circasian War Council, operates as a separate, semi-autonomous unit of the Circasian Empire. The War Council, which also has its roots in the post-war Circasian past, was originally formed to facilitate the integration of the allied military forces following the establishment of the Planetary Assembly as the Circasian ruling body. The War Council is made up of twelve representatives, two from each military command: Star Forces, Ground Forces, Military Intelligence, Diplomatic Corps, Research and Development, and Logistics Command. A sub-department of the War Council acts as an interchange between the six commands to coordinate information and operations. The staffs assigned to each councilor also play an important role in coordinating military affairs. Of the six commands, the Diplomatic Corps is the only one to be staffed and run primarily by civilian personnel. The organization is still operated under the auspices of the War Council and is an entirely separate entity from the diplomatic staffs associated with the Planetary Assembly.

The Articles of the Circasian Empire were amended after the War Council's formation to give the body several emergency powers that were viewed as being necessary should a time of crisis befall Circasia. First and foremost among these are the War Council's war powers. In times of planetary emergency or military crisis, the Planetary Assembly may activate the War Council's war powers giving them direct control over the government for the duration of the crisis. The War Council is to use these powers to successfully resolve the crisis at hand. Although this leaves much room for abuse, there have been very few instances of such abuse over the course of the War Council's existence. One of the powers that the War Council shares with the Assembly during such times of crisis is the power to negotiate with foreign powers. All treaties must be passed by a majority vote of the Assembly to be ratified, however.

In times of peace the War Council works hand in hand with the Planetary Assembly and ensures the protection and safety of Circasian territories.

The Circasian Imperial Star Forces have changed much over the last hundred years, maturing from little more than a glorified coast guard to a full-fledged navy. The Star Forces are well regarded for the high level of training their crews receive and for the battle hardened status of many of its officers who are the veterans of multiple conflicts.

Starships

Aschar Troop Transport Nalessin Variant (Common)

As the Luscan Assault Frigate began to show its age, the Circasian War Council was left with an urgent need for a new troop transport. Proposals for new assault cruiser designs were rejected as being too expensive; instead, the War Council opted to begin converting surplus Nalessin Military Freighters for the role.

Aschar Troop Transports were typically used to transport ground personnel between Circasian military installations and bases. The Aschar is larger than the Luscan and was capable of carrying a larger number of troops and their equipment. This meant that a single Aschar could replace multiple Luscan frigates on personnel transfer runs.

The Chouka War saw the Aschar Troop Transport's first active deployment into hostile territories. Aschar Troop Transports rarely accompanied the forward battle fleets. Rather, Aschars waited until a colony was mostly subdued before arriving at the scene to deploy peacekeeping and occupation troops.

Cairn Carrier Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

This older Circasian carrier was used heavily during the early days of the Circasian space fleet. Small for a carrier, the Cairn Carrier can operate four flights of fighters, including a single flight of heavy fighters. Cairn

Carriers were commonly used as convoy escorts or as support elements in Circasian patrol fleets. The Cairn's fighters were effective deterrents against enemy fighters and the fighter support these fleet elements provided was invaluable.

Feilah Gunboat Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

This small patrol boat is deployed at most key installations and colonies in the Circasian Empire. Cheaper than other frigates, the Feilah Gunboat proved effective for short-range defense actions. Because of this Feilah Gunboats were usually used as planetary garrison forces to help defend colonies from attack.

Gallah Auxiliary Carrier Gallah Variant (Common)

When the need for carriers became pressing for the Circasians during the war several aging freighter hulls were conscripted to serve as auxiliary carriers. The Gallah Transport was just one such ship converted for this purpose. The Gallah Auxiliary Carrier can operate three flights of light fighters, allowing it to project adequate fighter coverage for a fleet when operated in groups of two to three ships.

Gallah Transport Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Circasians operated Gallah Transports as their primary military transport type for nearly three decades. These ships were regular sights along the major trade routes as they carried supplies between Circasia and the colonies as well as the numerous military commands within Circasian space.

The Gallah Transport was eventually replaced by the Nalessin Military Freighter. The Gallah hulls were sold to civilian interests rather than put into mothballs and soon found a new life hauling cargoes under the direction of civilian agencies.

Illustris Heavy Destroyer Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Illustris Heavy Destroyer was one of the largest warships of its day. Classed a heavy destroyer by the War Council, the Illustris could have been better called the heavy cruiser of its day. Illustris Heavy Destroyers formed the core of Circasian patrol fleets, one Illustris usually operating as the command ship for the fleet.

Although technologically advanced, the Illustris was still inferior to the ships operated by other powers in the region, including many raider warships. Nonetheless, the Illustris was a capable warship and proved to be one of the most effective of the Circasian's early starship hulls.

Illustris Command Destroyer

Illustris Variant (Rare)

As the raider wars continued, the Circasian War Council identified a need for an improved command and control presence in larger patrol fleets. Most fleet commanders placed their flags on destroyer craft or carriers in the fleet, but these ships did not have the dedicated CIC equipment necessary to effectively direct large fleet actions.

An updated version of the Illustris Heavy Destroyer was ordered to fill this need. This improved command model included dedicated fleet command facilities, a bleeding edge electronics package, and a reinforced space frame that allowed it to mount larger, more powerful weapons. Unfortunately the cost of one command destroyer was nearly twice that of a standard model.

Despite the expense the War Council authorized the construction of several Illustris Command Destroyers. The improved CIC facilities proved invaluable in coordinating fleet actions in combat and were much loved by their commanders.

Kalichar Lance Cruiser Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

The Kalichar Lance Cruiser represents the pinnacle of Circasian particle lance

development. The Lancer Design Project, which had given birth to such ships as the Xandar and Shenna during the previous two decades, had been working for years on a capital ship equipped with the particle lance weapon. The design team was later presented with a series of requirements very similar to those given to the designers of the Thrace Jump Cruiser and forced to adhere to them in the designing of the new Kalichar. Although the Thrace would prove to be the more popular of the two designs, the Lancer Design Project had earned a great deal of respect and maintained strong support at that time from prominent military leaders.

The Kalichar Lance Cruiser is built around a pair of particle lances and an assortment of tertiary heavy and light weapons. A formidable warship, the Kalichar was easily the most powerful Circasian cruiser of its day.

The Lancer Design Project fell out of favor after the Chouka War, a fact that would keep the Kalichar from being widely produced or adopted by the Circasian Empire. The Kalichar Lance Cruiser, despite its success in tactical simulations, became a victim of shifting political alliances.

Kiralina Jump Ship Base Hull (Restricted Deployment 10%)

The first large explorer vessels built by the Circasians, the Kiralina Jump Ships were a massive undertaking for the Circasian Empire during their early years of interstellar exploration. It was the Kiralina Jump Ships that mapped out the early hyperspace routes connecting Circasia to other nearby systems and ultimately opened the Empire to the galaxy.

The Kiralinas continued to explore on the frontier throughout the Circasians early conflicts, expanding the influence of the Circasian Empire to new systems even after nearly eighty years after their construction. The Kiralinas were finally decommissioned in 1978 after mounting safety concerns following a catastrophic reactor system overload destroyed the *Mishila*.

Kolanis Cruiser

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The first cruiser hull produced in any quantity, the Kolanis Cruiser is a poor attempt to project firepower on a capital ship hull. The Kolanis Cruiser was built for long range probing missions, a necessity during the early days of the Circasian Empire before extensive jump networks were formed. The Kolanis was able to carry enough supplies and spare parts to supply three frigates on attack sorties into other systems. Kolanis Cruisers were often converted into other roles as needed. Commonly Kolanis Cruisers not destined for long range patrol missions would convert their cargo space into two six-fighter hangar bays, allowing the ship to field a squadron of fighters. The Kolanis also made an acceptable ad hoc assault ship, converting its cargo hold into troop quarters for half a division of troops.

During the Chouka War, the Kolanis Cruisers served well as combat units and front-line logistics vessels, but the ratio of combat ability to cost was staggeringly high, too high for the still small Circasian Empire. Following the war, military support for more cruisers cooled with attrition becoming the name of the game. As Moshesta production increased, production on Kolanis hulls almost ceased. The remaining Kolanis hulls were considered for a weapons upgrade two years after medium plasma cannon technology was first successfully demonstrated on the Moshesta frigate, however the War Council ultimately decided that it would be too costly with too little return. The Kolanis was not an easy hull to modify and in many ways had already been replaced by the more popular Thrace Jump Cruiser.



The ak-Tai War was the final nail in the Kolanis Cruiser's coffin. The Kolanis simply couldn't take the damage that other cruisers its size could, and it was hopelessly outgunned compared to modern combat units. The Kolanis was no match for the ak-Tai Thor'usal Heavy Cruisers, let alone the array of lighter ships the ak-Tai and their allies fielded. Casualties were high and more valuable skilled personnel paid the ultimate price for the Empire with each cruiser that exploded in flames.

Following the war, all Kolanis Cruisers remaining in service (about ten of them) were mothballed at the Circasian lunar facility of Hatdam. They would later be reborn as the Koric Mine Cruiser.

Kolanis Siege Cruiser

Kolanis Variant (Rare)

The Kolanis Siege Cruiser is a late-war conversion of the Kolanis Cruiser designed explicitly for long-range heavy bombardment support, something that became a necessity during the Chouka War. Circasian tacticians knew that cracking the orbital defense bases of the Chouka would be a daunting task and something that the existing Circasian ship classes may not have been able to handle without higher than acceptable losses.

In previous years, Circasian research and development teams had been working off and on attempting to develop a successor to the particle lance but had little success in developing an acceptable prototype model. Some showed distinct promise but there were always problems associated with them that kept them from entering mainstream service. The war with the Chouka, however, accelerated research in this direction and eventually led the project to fruition.

The Kolanis Siege Cruiser replaces its cargo bays and many other tertiary ship systems with two enormous siege particle cannons. These weapon mounts are capable of dealing immense amounts of damage to the target. The cohesiveness of the beam fired from the cannon also proved to be highly effective in effecting long-range bombardment.

The first two Kolanis Siege Cruisers made their presence known at the Battle of Mishtuki. In that battle, it was the Kolanis Siege Cruisers that were responsible for destroying Mishtuki Station, a move that saved countless Circasian lives in the assault.

Several Kolanis Siege Cruisers were built after the war was over, but most of them were either destroyed or scuttled due to long-term systems problems with the siege cannons.

Luscan Assault Frigate Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Luscan Assault Frigates formed the backbone of the Circasian ground force's deployment forces for much of the early history of the Circasian Empire's navy. Luscan Assault Frigates are small atmospheric transports intended for landing Circasian marines directly on enemy soil.

Before the Chouka War the only action Luscan Assault Frigates saw was transporting troops back and forth between Circasian bases and colonies. It was during the activation of the Mishtuki Plan that the first Luscan Assault Frigates headed into the battle zone filled with their deadly cargo.

The Luscan Assault Frigates were eventually pushed out of service, beginning in 1975, to be replaced by another, larger troop transport model. The War of the Seven Stars necessitated the reactivation of many mothballed Luscan's, but the war only acted to stave off the ships' inevitable journey to the scrap yards. The last Luscan Assault Frigate was officially decommissioned in the spring of 1996.

Moshesta Frigate [Alpha Model]

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

One of the longest serving classes in the Circasian Star Forces, the Moshesta Frigate was the pinnacle of Circasian military development during the 1960's. The Moshesta was envisioned as a cheap answer to the military's need for increased numbers of warships during the period following the end of

the raider wars. This mid-sized frigate could perform near-colony defense against pirates as well as general system patrols. After battle reports continually showed that the Moshesta Frigate was an able combatant. Dozens of Moshesta Frigates were produced to meet the needs of the Circasian fleet and soon it was one of the most common vessels in Circasian service.

The Moshesta Alpha model saw its first non-police combat action during the Chouka War. The speed and mobility of the Moshesta allowed for stunning victories over the more ponderous Chouka warships. Each Moshesta carried enough firepower to be a threat on the battlefield, and the flotillas of these ships fielded by the Circasians increased their deadliness. Of all of the designs employed by the Circasia Empire at that time, the Moshesta was regarded as the most important and influential in most battles and was quickly heralded as the pinnacle of naval engineering.

Moshesta Frigate [Beta Model]

Moshesta Variant (Common)

Because of its fame, the Moshesta was one of the first hulls considered for widespread upgrades in the fleet. Following the war with the Chouka, new technologies were quickly recovered from scientific records taken from the Chouka homeworld and from combat scans. The new Moshesta Beta model was the first Circasian warship to be outfitted with the advanced medium plasma cannon. Several unique Moshesta hulls were also used to testbed other new weapons and technologies developed after the war, though none of those were as successful as the widely produced and upgraded-to Beta model.

In the wake of the Chouka War, most new Moshesta Frigates took on the names of famous Moshesta commanders from that war. It became a point of honor for the ships, and those few Alpha models that were retained in service due to inability for an easy upgrade were rechristened with the names of their current commanders who would command them until decommissioning.

Nalessin Military Freighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Nalessin Military Freighter replaced Gallah Transports as the Circasian military's primary logistical supply vessel upon its introduction to the fleet. Larger and better equipped than the Gallah, the Nalessin Military Freighter proved capable of moving larger cargo loads while being able to fend off minor raider attacks.

Olcata Frigate

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

One of the Circasians second-generation warship hulls, the Olcata Frigate was meant to replace older ships such as the Yollana that had proved ineffective at combating the raider threat. The Olcata Frigate was designed to be smaller and more cost-conscious than older frigates. These savings were then used to allow the ship to mount more advanced weaponry in larger, more expensive turret mounts. These mounts provided the Olcata with larger arcs of fire, making it more effective in combat.

While Olcata Frigates never performed to expectations they were a common sight within the Circasian territories and were most often used in an escort role. The Olcata was eventually replaced by newer frigate designs, including the Moshesta Frigate.

Reglata Bombardment Cruiser

Base Hull (Restricted Deployment 10%)

The Reglata Bombardment Cruiser is a larger version of the Toltara Destroyer designed and produced by the same ship manufacturer as the Toltara. The Reglata was meant to serve as a heavy capital ship in the Circasian fleet and to this end was armed with four dual rocket launchers, allowing the ship to fire a continuous stream of rockets at the enemy.

The expectations for the Reglata were perhaps too high, and the incredible cost of

maintaining and resupplying the ship proved to be detrimental to its success. The original order of fourteen Reglatas was slashed down to only five after construction began. A few additional Reglata hulls were laid down, but not many.

The Reglatas were originally meant to serve as a heavy cruiser in the fleet but instead found themselves operating as long-range bombardment support units for larger Circasian patrol fleets.

Rotarra Police Cutter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Rotarra Police Cutter is an older starship used during the period following first contact. Designed to serve as a light frigate within the Star Forces, the Rotarra was instead relegated to the role of a small patrol boat charged with keeping the peace along the newly formed Circasian borders.

Rotarra Police Cutters were ill prepared for their mission. Most alien ships were far more advanced, with better weapons, armor, and equipment.

Shenna Strike Carrier

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

Developed alongside the Xandar Lancer Frigate, the Shenna Strike Carrier is the second vessel to mount the particle lance. The Circasian War Council had determined that a new carrier design was needed to replace older Circasian carriers currently in service. Additionally, it was decided that any new carrier would need to be able to hold its own in battle.

The Shenna is equipped with two particle lances. Unlike the particle lance used by the Xandar, the entire particle lance assembly is integrated into the Shenna's hull. Fielding three flights of fighters, the Shenna can provide suitable fighter cover for small Circasian fleets.

Unfortunately for the Circasians, the corporation whose shipyards were contracted to produce the Shenna Strike Carrier faced financial decline following the completion of the last batch of Xandar Lancer Frigates ordered

by the Circasian Empire. They had underbid on the project and, although the Shenna contract proved lucrative (albeit short lives), they could not make up for the losses incurred in the production of the Xandars. They would later recover but few more Shennas would be produced, keeping the class rare in Circasian service.

Thrace Jump Cruiser Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Thrace Jump Cruiser stands as one of the most important starship developments in Circasian history. Before the development of the Thrace very few Circasian ships were equipped with jump engines, owing mainly to the low concentrations of the rare element Quantum 40 in the Circasian home system. The war with the Chouka, however, illustrated just how important the strategic movement advantage jump engines provided could be.

Although development on the Thrace Jump Cruiser began during the Chouka War, the first operational prototype hull was not completed until 1975. These ships were fitted with the newest weapons and technologies available to the Circasian Empire. Although the Thrace had originally been intended as a strategic fleet support element, the needs for a next generation cruiser hull prompted the Circasian War Council to increase the number of ships ordered for production. Quantum 40 deposits in Senuka allowed the Circasians the resources to make the mass production of a jump-capable cruiser a reality.

The Thrace Jump Cruiser soon became a ubiquitous element of the Circasian order of battle and took its place as the primary cruiser in Imperial fleets. Despite the Thrace's advancements in ship construction and weapons technologies it proved unready for combat against the likes of ak-Tai and Lleskath forces.

Thrace Jump Cruisers were relegated to secondary positions during the mid-1990's, moved from the frontlines back to patrol and policing missions within the Empire.

Toltara Destroyer Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Toltara Destroyer is a smaller cousin of the more powerful Illustris Heavy Destroyer. Equipped with a pair of dual rocket launchers, the Toltara offers extra long-range firepower to Circasian patrol fleets.

Toltara Destroyers were never popular postings in the fleet and the destroyers ultimately proved to be a logistical burden to the still developing Circasian Empire. Newer warships eventually replaced the Toltara and they moved into other support roles in the fleet.

Tormin Light Cruiser Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

An advanced hull coming into service only a year before the Chouka campaign, the Tormin Light Cruiser was a showcase for the new engineering and technological breakthroughs made by the Circasians in the previous two decades.

A mid-sized, compact heavy combat vessel, this 'light cruiser' (it was later sometimes referred to as a 'heavy destroyer') filled a very important role in the Circasian order of battle. The Tormin was designed to perform the mission objective of a light warship to fight in support of other fleet elements.

The Chouka War saw the Tormin's first active service, though very few hulls had been completed at the beginning of the conflict. Production increased and was maintained at a fevered pitch throughout the war, but an appreciable amount of new Tormin Light Cruisers did not enter service until after the subjugation of the Chouka people.

Following the war, the military smiled upon the efforts of the lesser Moshesta frigate, not the Tormin Light Cruiser. As far as they were considered, the Tormin Light Cruiser was still an untried hull and they did not have the hard, definitive combat analysis to support its abilities, while they had such information on the Moshesta Frigate's combat performance. The Tormin silently served, patrolling new territories and exerting control over sectors newly discovered by Circasian explorers. The

Tormin cruisers received major structural upgrades starting in 1976, with the last Tormin being upgraded by 1980. This round of upgrades hardened the armor on the outer structure blocks while retrofitting advanced weapon systems to the hull.

The Tormin Light Cruiser saw its last major conflict during the Circasian/ak-Tai war. The fleet elements of the ak-Tai Hegemonic members and their fleet tactics left the Tormin as little more than cannon fodder in most battles, and the light cruiser could not do appreciable damage to enemy ships before being eaten apart by fighters and medium ships. A limited amount of Tormins were refitted with repeating plasma cannons in a vain attempt to offset these disadvantages, but their early shakedown cruises ended in disaster and all were scrapped following the war.

The few Tormin Light Cruisers that survived the war were not scrapped or mothballed but instead sold to the Th'sook.

Tratha Light Cruiser **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

The Tratha Light Cruiser was developed by the Circasians to provide a warship that had more firepower and durability than a frigate, but less than that of a medium or heavy cruiser. The Tratha Light Cruiser is more of an escort vessel than a stand-alone warship, however, as it is equipped primarily short-range particle and plasma weapons. Most Tratha Light Cruisers were operated in just this manner, being used to screen friendly warships against incoming enemy fighters.

The Tratha Light Cruisers proved unable to be upgraded to the new technologies developed following the Chouka War. These ships remained in service as escorts until better craft could be procured, but the Trathas soon found themselves escorting freighter convoys instead of heavy cruisers.

Tratha Scoutship **Tratha Variant (Rare)**

As the Circasian Empire continued to grow it became obvious that the small fleet of

dedicated explorers could not adequately maintain the needed pace of exploration. The Tratha hull proved acceptable as a starting point for developing a mid-sized jump ship.

The Tratha Scoutships were used to follow up on previously explored system located by the larger Kiralina Jump Ships. Because of this the Tratha Scoutships are optimized for performing planetary survey missions and scientific research, not combat situations.

Yollana Escort Frigate **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

The Yollana Escort Frigate is the original modern Circasian police ship. This ship was designed to escort the larger, slower freighters traveling through Circasian space. The Yollana was armed heavily for a ship of its time in order to better counter raider forces that had begun to filter into Circasian space and prey on shipping.

The fixed arc particle beams were found to be inadequate for a ship of its type and the Yollana was eventually phased out of service. Those that remained in service during the Chouka War protected the backwater territories of the Empire, including those outposts that were on the edge of known space and distant from other inhabited worlds. By the ak-Tai War the Yollanas had been scrapped.

Xandar Lancer Frigate **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

One of the first military vessels constructed in numbers by the Circasians, the Xandar Lancer Frigate was an interesting ship concept that came to fruition. Designed to include a large under slung gunnery implement, the Xandar is an odd looking ship, but one who gains additional firepower at the cost of a non-integrated hull design. The ship is actually made up of three definite sections; the first, the actual gun or "lance" is a massive construct that allowed for the pairing of two light particle cannons (then bleeding edge technology) into a single housing. This setup had some limitations but was seen to be far

superior in the short run to attempting to integrate the light particle cannons in any other fashion. The second and largest section is the engineering and control section, the rear of which houses the main engines, thrusters, and reactors for the frigate. Command facilities (four of them, each acting as distributed nerve centers) are mounted towards the front of this section. The last section, the hangar and auxiliary weapons segment, is connected to the engineering section through a series of walkways and connecting struts. Here the ship's two shuttles and rocket weaponry are stored, with retro thrusters mounted underneath.

During the ongoing raider war, the Xandars were seen as affordable, successful units for hunting down raider fighters and armed freighters. The state of the art technologies built into the Xandar Lancer Frigates were more than a match for the raider forces. Where the Xandar's sibling, the Yollana Escort Frigate, was unable to put up enough of a fight to be effective, the Xandar was capable of fighting running battles and maintain combat effectiveness.

Before the Chouka War started the Xandar Lancer Frigates began to be decommissioned slowly, replaced by newer ships—primarily the Moshesta Frigate. The Lancer Design Project, however, lived on, though the proposed designs never were thought as progressive as in the days of the Xandar. The Kalichar Lance Cruiser would be the next and final iteration in the lancer design lineage.



Bases & Defenses

Jenholen Space Station Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Jenholen-type Space Stations were fairly common sights within Circasian space. Named after the first space station of the class, placed in orbit of the gas giant Jenholen in the Circasia system, Jenholen Space Stations are designed as multipurpose ports of call. Principally operated and maintained by the Star Forces, Jenholen Space Stations are often open to civilian traffic and are used as trading posts, meeting places, industrial complexes, scientific research centers, and more.

The ship control sheet included for the Jenholen Space Station represents the configuration of the station at the end of the Circasian raider wars. This configuration proved to be the most common one in service from that point on.

Morket Defense Satellite Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Morket Defense Satellite was developed after the Circasians made first contact with other alien races. It was determined that a strong defensive position had to be taken to protect Circasia and her colonies from possible alien aggression. This need was made even more real when bands of pirates, raiders, and brigands began migrating into Circasian space to prey on unprepared merchants and installations.

The Morket is an odd satellite design in that it is asymmetrical. It is a three-armed structure, each arm containing one of the satellite's three rocket launchers and their internal magazines. A single light laser is mounted in a rotary turret as a separate section of the satellite.

The short range of the Morket's rocket launchers eventually forced them to be withdrawn from service and replaced with newer, more advanced satellite designs.

Mukanta Small Base **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

The Mukanta Small Bases were often used by the Circasians as listening posts and fuel depots throughout Circasian space. Mukanta Small Bases were by far the most frequently seen and widely used base in the Circasian Empire for over half a century.

In battle, Mukanta Small Bases are forced to rely on their escorts and garrison fleets for defense. Despite being well armed with expensive dual rocket launchers, the Mukanta cannot take on an enemy warship and hope to survive.

As military use of Mukanta Small Bases declined starting the 1960's, most bases of this class were slowly decommissioned. New Mukanta Small Bases continued to be built by civilian interests that desired an orbital presence at which to carry out research or commerce related activities.

Taryn Starbase **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

The Taryn Starbase is the primary military station operated by the Circasians. Taryn Starbases are not meant as defense bastions but instead serve as command and logistics centers for the Circasian fleet. These starbases are well armed for their own defense, but rely heavily on their cadre of supporting OSAT's for protection.

As of the Chouka War five Taryn Starbases had been constructed with three located in Circasian, one in Senshuka, and the last in Res'den.

Circasian Mines

Circasians have seldom used mines or engaged in mine warfare during their time in space. Circasians rarely mine high traffic corridors or areas within the vicinity of fixed orbital facilities. Circasians do, however, lay minefields around important defense and listening posts to better protect them from surprise attack. Such bases are usually constructed in isolated locations that see very little military traffic and no civilian or commercial traffic.

Due to the Circasian deployment policy on mines, the Circasian Star Forces had only developed a handful of basic mines by the time of the Chouka War. In any case, no Circasian mine would ever be encountered in a location that could possibly see non-military traffic.

Stoka Proximity Mine: Cost 10, Damage 15, Signature 3.

Raka Proximity Mine: Cost 16, Damage 20, Signature 4.

Nolaras Captor Mine: Cost 15, Range 3, Accuracy +6, Damage 15, Signature 2.

Lorun DEW Mine: Cost 16, Range 6, Accuracy +4, Signature 2 (1), Armor 1, Structure 8. Fires a light particle beam. A fairly common DEW mine, the Lorun was used heavily around secluded or important Circasian military bases to provide additional anti-fighter fire support.

Fighters & Shuttles

Istale Light Fighter **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

The successor to the Vakar Starfighter, the Istale Light Fighter was a response to the growing raider activity within Circasian borders. The Istale Light Fighter was designed to better combat comparable raider fighter designs and as such functioned as an interceptor within the Circasian fleet. The Istale's speed and durability proved a major advantage in combat and the fighter soon became the standard Circasian fighter.

The Istale Light Fighter served as the primary fighter craft of the Circasian Empire until the development of the hardier Jaga Medium Fighter in 1978. The last Istale Light Fighter was officially taken out of service after the end of the ak-Tai War.

Katin Breaching Pod **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

The Katin Breaching Pod used by the Circasians is a typical, unarmed breaching pod. The early Circasian forces had little use for breaching pods but the raider wars brought

on a desperate need for boarding craft. It was one thing to hunt down and disable suspected pirate craft, but getting personnel to the ships was a hassle using hull boring and direct ship-to-ship connections.

The Katin Breaching Pod is a fast design, though its engines are highly volatile and do not take well to damage. A Katin Breaching Pod will lose 1 point of thrust for every three points of damage. Despite this, the Circasians fully embraced the Katin Breaching Pod and continue to use it as their primary boarding craft.

Kolam Long Range Fighter

Base Hull (Special Deployment Limitations)

The Kolam Long Range Fighter is optimized for long-range flight operations. This two-seat fighter is equipped with additional fuel capacity that allows the fighter to operate farther from its carrier. Kolam Long Range Fighters were used for system patrol to aid in local policing and defense duties as well as forward observation and scouting where their ability to travel ahead of the fleet allowed them to gauge enemy forces and/or resistance and relay information back to their carrier.

Kolam Long Range Fighters were expensive to produce and proved unpopular due to the logistics of long duration fighter operations. In addition to these problems, pilots also found that Kolam fighters were simply not equipped for mainline combat duties. Only one flight of Kolam Long Range Fighters can be purchased per three flights of fighters in the scenario. So a player that takes four flights of fighters could take two flights of Kolams, but the other two flights would have to be of a different type.

Rehka Heavy Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Rehka Heavy Fighter was the first heavy fighter deployed by the Circasian military. Used solely by the Star Forces, the Rehka Heavy Fighter is an incredibly durable

fighter and the first to mount the light particle beam. The Rehka was meant to serve as a dual role fighter equally capable of providing heavy escort for freighters and task forces, screening against enemy fighters, as well as being able to disable or destroy enemy warships. To this end the Rehka was optimized for space combat at the expense of atmospheric combat abilities.

The Rehka was a stronger fighter than the Vakar or the later Istale, but it proved awkward and slow and unable to combat the faster light fighters operated by other powers, including the raiders. The issue of basing became an issue for the Circasians as well. The Rehka Heavy Fighters simply took up too much valuable hangar space and could not be easily based on existing carriers. New build carriers designed to operate the new heavy fighters were expensive and production was slow. All of these elements limited the Circasian deployment of the Rehka and later heavy fighter designs.

Ruglin Aerospace Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Ruglin was the first Circasian space fighter and it shows. Still trying to get a grasp on ship and fighter design, the Ruglin is a very poor fighter platform incapable of posing a threat to even the worst enemy fighter. Slow with no armor and a single gun, the Ruglins were quickly taken out of service and replaced by more competent craft.

Skessa Defense Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Based on the popular Skessa fighter chassis, the Skessa Defense Fighter is an advanced model Skessa redesigned for dual environment use. Entirely redesigned and reengineered, the Skessa Defense Fighter quickly replaced the Skessa as the standard planetary air defense fighter. With better thrust, armor, and the ability to fight in space, the Skessa was an influential early Circasian star fighter design.

Within a decade of their deployment few Skessas remained in service, most being

retired as replacement Skeshas became available. The Ruglin, too, fell out of favor and was replaced by the more powerful Skesha design. Planetary fighter garrisons continued to rely on squadrons of Skesha Defense Fighters for defense into the mid-20th Century. Such fighters were also widely used by civilian defense companies with most Circasian civilian fighters operated after 1930 being of the Skesha type.

Skessa Atmospheric Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

This atmosphere-only fighter design was popular on Circasia in the 19th Century. Better in many ways than the dual environment Ruglin, the Skessa Atmospheric Fighter had better armor and a small profile. Most national defense agencies operated Skessa Atmospheric Fighters for local defense operations because of their better atmospheric combat abilities and lower maintenance costs.

Note that the Skessa can only be operated in a scenario that allows for atmospheric fighter entry and combat. Even if a Skessa managed to survive the transition from atmosphere to vacuum, the cockpit would quickly depressurize, instantly killing the pilot.

Tyra Heavy Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Circasian's second heavy fighter design, the Tyra Heavy Fighter was introduced in 1967 as a dedicated anti-shipping fighter. Heavily armored, this large fighter is equipped with three light particle beams, allowing it to deliver potentially devastating barrages to enemy ships.

The Tyra Heavy Fighter saw very little activity during the Chouka War by virtue of the fact that heavy anti-shipping fighters had not yet been widely adopted by the Circasian military and few carriers were available from which to base such large fighters. Tyras were used sparingly during the war, with a substantial number of these fighters not seeing service until the closing months of the

conflict. Tyra Heavy Fighters saw heavy use in the final Battle of Chouka where they proved themselves to be a worthy counterpoint to the Chouka Bloodlust Assault Fighters.

After the war, the Circasians experimented with fielding a greater number of Tyra Heavy Fighters, but the early momentum behind the movement waned and by the time of the War of the Seven Stars the emphasis had returned to designing and maintaining a fleet of advanced interceptor fighters, not anti-ship fighters. It would not be until the Escalation Wars that the Circasians would find need for a new heavy fighter design to finally replace the Tyra Heavy Fighter.

Vakar Starfighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Vakar Starfighter represents a major leap in fighter construction for the Circasian Empire. The first fighter design to mount two ultralight particle beams, the Vakar also boasts a pair of improved engines that increase overall thrust. New fire control computers and tactical display system were also installed in the Vakar. These improvements made the Vakar Starfighter a significant improvement over older fighter designs.

The Vakar Starfighter remained the primary fighter in the Star Forces until the development of the Istale Light Fighter. The Vakar participated in combat actions throughout the Circasian raider wars and were well regarded by Circasian pilots who valued their sturdiness and dependability.

Chapter 4: The Chouka Theocracy

Background

The Chouka are a race of methane breathing creatures that can best be described as a bizarre bipedal amphibian-like creature. The Chouka are quite tall, though their bodies lack mass and appear frail and weak, which is for the most part true. Their wrinkled skin ranges from dark red to light pink in coloration. The most notable physical feature of the Chouka is the odd gill-like structures set atop their heads. Most races find the rhythmic convulsions of this undulating structure both offensive and distracting, but the Chouka have never cared what others, let alone aliens, think of their appearance. Chouka eyes are also quite large compared to that of other species. Chouka have excellent night vision, a side effect of coming from a very dark, overcast world.

Intermediary Period

The Chouka were unified by their religious institutions' spiritual unification in the Earth year 1483. Before this time internecine wars directed by the heads of planetary religious institutions plagued Chouka. The constant chaos strangled the emerging industrial revolution, an event that had been threatening to begin for over seventy years. Following the unification, the Chouka people joined together in a never before heard of solidarity that allowed them to continue towards future technological and social development.

In the early days of this new, unified planetary order, a coalition of religious institutions formed the foundation from which order and tranquility sprang. A doctrine of non-interference between the orders was accepted which allowed each sect to pursue its own individual goals.



Without wars of territory or ideology to distract them, the Chouka civilization experienced a cultural and social rebirth. Small city-states gave way to larger republics, leagues, and eventually empires. All of these new political entities operated under mutual goals while asserting a great degree of sovereignty. Disputes between nations were handled by the religious coalition, which had by this time come to be known as the Circle of Elders. The Circle of Elders acted as a neutral party in such cases, dispensing justice and counsel to feuding parties. The Circle's claims of neutrality usually could not be further from the truth but the decisions of the coalition were more often than not respected by those involved. The Chouka people saw the Circle as the moral authority of their species, while the Chouka national rulers respected their position of dominance over church and state.

With industrial, technological, and social progress developing at such a fast rate, the Chouka experienced a renaissance of culture, art, and philosophy that had not been enjoyed since the heyday of the first city-states. This time in Chouka history was quite progressive and would be long remembered as one of the few golden ages in recorded Chouka history.

Middle Period

As the power of the Circle grew its members became more corrupt and lusted for even greater power. Many clerics in the upper echelons of the individual religious orders desired greater dominion over the affairs within their respective domains. This desire for power eventually led to many Circle members attempting to dominate or undermine first local city governments and then, later, entire nations. Many of the Circle's members abhorred the acts of their fellows and denounced their actions, but their warnings and opinions fell on deaf ears. Most nations did not view the wise elders of the Circle as subversive or power-hungry and thus ignored such warnings to the contrary. Those that did take heed of the warning often saw themselves overrun and conquered by their neighbors, who themselves were acting as proxies of the corrupt Circle members.

By 1620, the last of the independent nations on Chouka had been absorbed, each being taken into the control of the Circle either peacefully through annexation or brutally through wars of religious succession. Commonly such conflicts began with edicts against those dissenting members of the Circle of Elders that held power in the independent territories. These religious leaders were subsequently branded as heretics and enemies of the faith, the Circle claiming that they had turned against their god as well as their own followers. Deadly inquisitions followed, almost always with the support of the proletariat population. This period of history is known as the Middle Period and would play a central role in the development of modern Chouka state.

Following these purges and the usurpation of national powers by the Circle, the First Circle of Elders was disbanded and a Second Circle established. The first official meeting of this new Circle of Elders would occur at the religious shrine of El'ham'za'mell in the Earth year 1649. The ancient shrine dated back some two thousand years to a religion and civilization

lost to the annals of time. It had become common practice since that time to make a pilgrimage to the site at least once in a lifetime as part of one's personal service of worship. The clerics attending and organizing the council hoped to use the aura of majesty surrounding El'ham'za'mell to lend credibility to the new world order they were there to establish. It was amidst the holy ruins of El'ham'za'mell that the Circle of Elders formed the Chouka Theocracy and set plans in motion that would change the future of Chouka forever while ensuring the clerics' own personal power.

The first to pay the price of the Circle's ascension to total power were those few dissenters among their ranks who had taken their message to the people over the previous decades and had up to that point escaped persecution. Most were discredited, some simply killed, to rid the Theocracy of potential political enemies. A great purge swept Chouka, with the followers of the dissenters' now alienated religions paying the price for their leaders' political views.

Years, decades, and centuries passed. The height of civilization experienced during the Intermediary Period was now mostly forgotten. Much of the technological innovations of the era had also been lost, some due to the widespread destruction of the wars of the time, but just as many were destroyed by decree of the Circle of Elders. Most of the devices and inventions destroyed by such orders were those the Circle leaders viewed as a possible threat to their control over the population.

New technologies continued to be discovered (or, in the case of outlawed technologies, "rediscovered"), though always in the name of 'spiritual and moral' enlightenment rather than technological development for its own sake. Such religious propaganda was even associated with the development of weapons of mass destruction. For a time nuclear weapons were even prayed to as the fruition of god's fury. The Circle would later condemn this as an act of heresy when it became obvious that the people were beginning to put more trust in technology than the Theocracy itself – something that the elders had tried to avoid at all costs.

Each new generation of clerics used their power to further their own lofty ambitions, wasting huge amounts of government money and resources on their own pet projects and vices. None of the general population knew what happened behind the closed doors of the citadels of the Theocracy. The air of mystery that pervaded the government did not bother them, however, as they were assured that the institution had their best intentions at heart. This blind faith in their religious leaders for guidance, in many ways harking back to the people's belief in the neutrality of the old Circle, allowed the Theocracy to maintain a submissive population.

The Modern Period

The Chouka Theocracy established their presence in space in the 19th Century. The first major orbital facilities came online in 1833 and many other space projects were started at roughly the same time. The Theocracy's move into space was prompted as much by the desire to tap several rich mineral deposits within their home system as it was to search for spiritual truths.

In 1837, the first true Chouka starships left Chouka orbital shipyards to complete extensive surveys of their home system. Robotic probes had been used for over a hundred years to explore the Chouka System, but none of these could return the kind of interactive data that manned exploration missions could provide.

Not long after these first explorers ventured forth into their solar system the first colony was established on the neighboring world of Ixmai. Thousands of potential colonists lined up at Chouka starports waiting for their chance to depart to this or other fledgling colonies. It soon became obvious to the Circle of Elders that establishing scores of far-flung off world colonies would be ultimately self-defeating. The Theocracy ruled by application of force and intimidation and if too many Chouka should migrate to other colony worlds it would become impossible to monitor the entire populace and weed out troublemakers in order to prevent future dissension. Because of this stance, initial

colonization was limited to only a handful of small outposts in the home system, constructed at locations of significant material value to the Theocracy.

The Aliens Appear

In 1878, the Chouka Circle was forced to admit the presence of intelligent beings other than their own when a Novon scout ship transited into the Chouka home system. The event caused an instant ripple of discord throughout the Theocracy. Many Chouka, including those at high levels of the religious institutions, felt that this was a sign from the gods that they were returning to pass judgment on the Chouka for their crimes.

It did not take long for the Circle to realize that what they were faced with was first contact with an alien species. There had been many closed-door meetings among the elders discussing just such an event, but none had ever expected it to happen in their lifetimes. Cautiously the Chouka replied to the Novon communications and attempted to establish contact.

After several weeks of trial and error, a dialogue was finally established between the Chouka and the Novon scout. The Chouka learned that, not only were they not alone in the galaxy, they were literally surrounded by a half-dozen other intelligent alien species. This dismayed the Circle, as the Chouka had long believed themselves to be far superior both intellectually and genetically, and the thought that other more advanced species existed in the unknown darkness of space was unsettling.

The leader of the Novon scout mission, Nokar val-Harhee, represented his master, Novon Trade Lord Harhee, in the negotiations. Nokar explained to the Chouka that Harhee was in a position of great power within the hierarchy of the Novon Trade Lords and that an alliance would strengthen both of their positions. The Circle was skeptical of Nokar's claims and questioned his insistence in the matter. The concept of conversing with aliens about galactic politics was disconcerting to the Chouka and they had a natural distrust of these outsiders.

The leader of the Theocracy at that time, High Cleric Tieste refused Nokar's offer of alliance but instead presented a counter offer to the Novon captain. The Circle of Elders was unwilling to commit to a course of action based on the unknown military or political situation presented by the Novon. However, the Chouka were willing to provide Nokar's master with raw materials and manpower in exchange for advanced technologies to further the Chouka cause. The Novon delegation agreed to consider the compromise and excused themselves to return to confer with Lord Harhee.

The Circle, including Tieste, had believed that the Novon would not be back, that their reason for departure was an excuse to extricate themselves from the negotiations. It was a surprise then when a small fleet of Novon transports arrived in the Chouka system ten days later. Nokar val-Harhee was among those captaining the Novon fleet and relayed the acceptance of Tieste's compromise to the Theocracy. The logistics of the transfer were quickly settled and the necessary goods transferred into Novon hands. In exchange for several million tons of both raw and processed ores and the conscription of ten thousand Chouka troops, the Chouka were presented with a computer data terminal that included raw technical information for such things as advanced power generation systems, anti-gravity plating, and, most importantly, jump engines.

This influx of new technologies revolutionized Chouka science and within only two years a permanent jump gate had been established linking the Chouka and Breth systems. The first jump capable exploration craft came soon thereafter. Hyperspace and the jump gate network had opened the Chouka to a whole new universe, a universe that the Chouka people were finding it hard to react to. Some more puritanical Chouka saw the aliens as a threat to their values and were openly hostile towards them. Many of these Chouka went so far as to advocate violence to maintain the purity and sanctity of the Chouka homeworld. Others saw the Novon and other aliens as saviors sent by the gods to bestow

great gifts upon the Chouka Theocracy. As far as the Circle was concerned the Novon had provided them with knowledge that would have taken hundreds of years to develop and they were grudgingly thankful to them.

The next several decades saw the Chouka spreading outward from their home system and establishing diplomatic contact with their neighbors. Formal relations were established with many of the races on their borders, including the Novon, UkaI, Kholran, Kástan, and Thaline. Relations were especially amicable with the Novon, despite the defeat of Lord Harhee's forces in 1894. Strong trade relations with the remaining trade lords were established and maintained, the Chouka exchanging raw materials and valuable Quantum 40 to the Novon trade lords in exchange for advanced technologies (primarily holographic imaging devices), drugs, and military protection from lesser trade lords. The trade was fairly lucrative for both sides. Trade with the Thaline was also very strong, being the most active and mutual trade relationship the Chouka would establish with an alien race. The Thaline and Chouka had an affinity for one another and both profited from the flow of trade across their borders.

For their part the Chouka remained diplomatically aloof, maintaining an ambivalent attitude towards their neighbors. Although the Chouka maintained embassies on most of the alien worlds in the sector, very rarely was an ambassador or his/her staff ever present.

Isolationism became the Theocracy's way of dealing with outsiders. That policy was only strengthened when certain segments of the population began attributing the problems of Chouka to alien manipulation and influences. The Circle fanned this distrust of aliens as they saw it as another excellent tool in maintaining control over the population. The Circle was careful however to draw distinctions between those aliens that were friendly towards the Theocracy and those that they believed to be a possible threat.

Chouka exploration opened up many new systems to them, but the expansion policies of the Theocracy limited the growth of new colony worlds. The expense of

maintaining their exploratory program was high and was constantly threatened by budget cuts. The Circle did not believe that expansion was necessary for survival. The Chouka had built up an adequate defensive fleet to protect their territories and none of their neighbors were perceived to be a realistic threat. Several had aggressive tendencies, such as the upstart Sshel'ath or the erratic Kástan, but because of geography or simple numbers they were not considered to be valid concerns to Chouka planetary security.

Then came contact with the Circasians, an event that would ultimately lead to the Circasian/Chouka War (or simply the Chouka War, as the Circasians often refer to it) and the ultimate fall of the Chouka Theocracy. The conflagration lasted more than two years, and ended with the Chouka fleet destroyed and their people broken. Their empire had collapsed, all of their territories being captured by the Circasians or other opportunists. Their homeworld suffered massive casualties under orbital bombardment before the Circle finally surrendered in 1973.

Following the war, the Chouka were slowly integrated into the Circasian Empire. The Circasians made no pretenses at fairness or equality for the conquered Chouka. The Circasians considered the Chouka to be second-class citizens that existed to provide for the Circasian Empire's needs.

For its part Chouka was a model conquered population. The few guerilla forces on the planet had been quickly located and terminated shortly after the Circasian occupation force's deployment and all organized resistance was eliminated within two years. The Chouka rebuilt what they could with what funds they were allowed. The Chouka religious infrastructure had been dealt a heavy blow by the bombardment and subsequent occupation, but the systems were not wholly dismantled. The Circasians instead used them to manipulate public opinion to calm and control the Chouka population. A puppet Circle of Elders was installed to serve the will of the Circasians and further their long-term goals. Those leaders that had previously

held positions of power within the Circle were hunted down and imprisoned before being brought before military tribunals and tried for war crimes.

For the Chouka people the memory of the years directly following the Circasian invasion of their homeworld slowly faded as their lives returned to normal. Life underneath the Circasian Empire was really no different than that under the Theocracy. They were forced to work just as hard and the Circle remained a visible facet of their lives, constantly espousing religious beliefs and handing down moral judgments. The fact that the Circasians did not attempt to curtail Chouka religious freedom is probably one of the most important reasons that the Chouka people did not react with greater hostility towards the occupation.

The Chouka would be one of the races most devastated by the Escalation Wars, their homeworld changing hands several times over the course of the war. Many important battles of the Escalation Wars were fought over Chouka and it was considered a strategically important system throughout the war. After the war Chouka was not only economically but also ecologically devastated, being subjected to horrible bombardments by nuclear and biological weaponry. The Chouka Theocracy would be reborn from these ashes, and the Chouka that lived through the wars vowed to never again allow their world to be taken by any invader, no matter the cost.

Chouka Technology

The Chouka have developed many different types of weapons and technologies during their time in space. Quite advanced for a race that has only been in space for roughly 150 years, the Chouka owe much of their advancement to having developed a high technology culture prior to reaching for the stars.

Military applications for new technologies were always the driving force behind the Theocracy's research programs, and as such the Chouka developed a variety of different types and classes of

weapons. The Chouka eventually became the undisputed experts on several fields of technology, most notably plasma technologies, besting even some of the older races in the region.

By the time of their conquest the Chouka had started research into gravitic technologies, as indicated by the gravitic tracting rod, but all of this research was lost during the war.

Heavy Plasma Gun

Class: Plasma **Mode: Standard**

The heavy plasma gun was the Chouka's plasma weapon designed specifically for anti-shipping use. Developed only a few years before contact with the Novon, the heavy plasma gun is inadequate at best when compared to the more advanced plasma cannon weapons. The Chouka used the heavy plasma gun extensively until the development of the light plasma cannon, at which point the heavy plasma gun fell into disuse.

Light Plasma Cannon

Class: Plasma **Mode: Standard**

The light plasma cannon was used as a light secondary gun on most Chouka ships. Often light plasma cannons were installed in turrets or other wide-arc mounts, allowing them greater versatility in dealing with enemy threats. The fast rate of fire of the light plasma cannon compared to the larger medium or heavy plasma cannons also proved an important factor in battle.

Medium Plasma Cannon

Class: Plasma **Mode: Standard**

The tried and true medium plasma cannon is used on several older Chouka warship designs. The medium plasma cannon was the first of the plasma cannons to be widely used as the primary armament of a Chouka warship. The medium plasma cannon's ability to cut through thick armors and do large amounts of damage to a target at close engagement ranges was very appealing to the Theocratic Guard Forces.

The medium plasma cannon was eventually replaced with the more advanced heavy plasma cannon. No longer the heavy weapon of the Chouka fleet, use of the medium plasma cannon dropped off substantially, only being used as a secondary weapon or on those hulls where a heavy plasma cannon could not be installed.

Heavy Plasma Cannon

Class: Plasma **Mode: Standard**

The standard Chouka plasma weapon, the heavy plasma cannon was preferred over comparable weapons technologies because it allowed a cruiser to have the potential of crippling opponent with a single, well-placed blow.

The Chouka military had begun to phase out the heavy plasma cannon by the time of the Chouka War, replacing it instead with the newer twin laser cannon. Many new construction ships and defense satellites continue to make use of both systems in hopes of a synergistic result.

Point Plasma Gun

Class: Plasma **Mode: Standard**

The point plasma gun is the first plasma weapon developed by the Chouka for use in their space navy. The point plasma gun scores damage to its target by way of a directed spray of superheated plasma. It is this dispersed, wide-area firing effect that allows point plasma guns to intercept incoming ballistic weaponry.

Heavy Point Plasma Gun

Class: Plasma **Mode: Standard**

The heavy point plasma gun is an improved version of the original point plasma gun. The heavy point plasma gun benefits from both an enhanced rate of fire and higher overall damage, making it more effective in combating fighters and other small craft. However, due to the nature of the point plasma weapons, the range of the gun is still limited compared to that of other plasma weapons.

Light Laser Cannon

Class: Laser **Mode:** Raking

At one time the most common weapon in the Chouka fleet, the light laser cannon is prized for its small hardpoint size and reasonable damage potential. The light laser cannon proved to have better range than the contemporary point plasma gun and, although it did less potential damage than the light plasma cannon, proved to be a more reliable weapon.

The light laser cannon served as one of the main Chouka's main anti-shipping weapons until the development of the medium plasma cannon.

Twin Laser Cannon

Class: Laser **Mode:** Raking

The twin laser cannon is the pinnacle of Chouka laser technology. This weapon combines two light laser cannons in a single weapon housing. Chouka scientists were able to extend the weapon's range by utilizing a more efficient power system to create a stronger, more focused beam. The extended range of the twin laser cannon proved to be a marked advantage over previous plasma weapons, allowing for reliable target acquisitions beyond even the range of the lauded heavy plasma cannon. What is astonishing about the twin laser cannon is that the Chouka originally were attempting to create a brutal short-range assault weapon when they developed it!

The Chouka military quickly adopted the twin laser cannon and ships were promptly refitted to make use of the new technology. By 1960, nearly all of the ships in the fleet had swapped their older heavy plasma cannons for the new twin laser cannon. Some new construction designs continued to use heavy plasma cannons, but all of them also included twin lasers for additional tactical flexibility.

Both shots from a twin laser cannon are considered linked and as such a single to-hit roll is made when the weapon is fired. If the twin laser cannon hits, both shots are scored against the target.

Like the quad array, a special critical is scored whenever a twin laser cannon receives a critical roll of '20' or greater on the normal weapon chart. If such a critical result is rolled, one of the weapon's laser barrels is disabled, reducing the number of times the weapon's damage is scored by one. If a twin laser cannon loses both of its laser barrels in this way immediately mark the system destroyed.

Gravitic Technologies

Gravitic weapons and technologies were in their infancy when war erupted between the Chouka and Circasians. The only meaningful technologies to be developed from research into of gravitic technology and its applications were limited artificial gravity equipment and the gravitic tracting rod. These early developments showed great promise for the future, but development of such technologies was cut tragically short due to the war.

All Chouka information related to gravitic technology was destroyed during the war. Much of this knowledge was lost when military installations and manufacturing plants on Chouka were destroyed by orbital bombardment. The rest was lost with the scientists themselves. The last action of the Circle was to dispatch elite guardsmen to eliminate all of those involved in the development and production of such systems, including their families. They were successful with their final mission, depriving the Circasians of any information about these advanced technologies.

Gravitic Tracting Rod

Class: Gravitic **Mode:** Special

The gravitic tracting rod is an interesting system developed by the Chouka as a realization of what some races would call an insane premise. The Circle of Elders wanted a device that could be used to either draw enemy vessels towards or away from the firing ship, depending on the specific circumstances.

Before the development of the tracting rod the only way to draw a ship closer to your

The Chouka Theocracy

own vessel was by physically tethering lines to the ship, and a ship with any degree of maneuverability could easily tear such tethers to ribbons. The entire reason the Circle wanted the capability of 'reeling in' enemy ships was to make boarding operations easier. Small ships were adequate early on for such boarding actions, but they desired the ability to do the same thing with much larger ships capable of delivering greater numbers of marine contingents.

The gravitic tracting rod allowed them to do exactly this. The system was capable of creating a gravitic attraction or repulsion effect at will against enemy vessels, albeit at short ranges. This allowed large ships to draw in enemy ships and, once at close range, grapple onto their hull and send over wave after wave of boarding parties. The gravitic tracting rod could also function as a tractor beam, giving it additional flexibility.

This system was first widely used on the Apostle Holy Cruiser where it met with great success in its intended mission. Many freighter captains cowered in fear as the leviathans ordered them to stand down and be boarded as the large Chouka cruisers began tractoring them into grappling range.

Missile Racks

Class: Ballistic **Mode: Varies**

The Chouka relied heavily on missiles in their fleet, most notably on their planetary defense platforms where the stability of the launch platform allowed them greater launch ranges. Despite their reliance on such ballistic launch devices, the Chouka were slow to develop newer, more advanced missile racks and tended to field ships with antiquated missile racks.

Most Chouka ballistic craft use the original missile rack, the Class-O Rack. The O-Rack proved to be cheap to build and maintain and the Chouka saw little reason to mount anything better on their hulls.

Some higher profile ships used Class-SO Missile Racks, but these ships are relatively rare. The Class-SO Rack was space intensive and not fully miniaturized at

the time, requiring the space normally occupied by two Class-O Racks.

Chouka bases and satellites used the more advanced Class-S Missile Rack in order to take advantage of its larger magazine and upgraded missile guidance capabilities. The Chouka never got the chance to miniaturize the Class-S Rack sufficiently so that it could be mounted on a starship and the technology behind the rack was destroyed during the war.

Missiles

The Chouka were fairly prominent users of early missile technology and had developed many different missile types by the onset of the Chouka War. The Chouka used light missiles exclusively until the introduction of the basic missile in 1930. By the time of the war, the Chouka had access to light, basic, heavy, chaff, and anti-fighter missiles.

Chouka fighters made very heavy use of fighter missiles and, although the Chouka only had access to the basic fighter missile, their missile-laden fighters proved to be an exceptional deterrent to enemy cruisers and their escorts. A single squadron of Chouka missile fighters could devastate enemy fleets, a proven fact that the Chouka took to heart in their later fighter designs.

Missile Availability

Type	Class	In Service
Light	D	1817
Basic	B	1930
Chaff	C	1939
Anti-Fighter	A	1941
Heavy	H	1948

Chouka Military

The Theocratic Guard Force is the name of the military force in charge of Chouka naval operations. The Theocratic Guard Force was first organized in the beginning of the 20th Century in order to develop a space navy capable of safeguarding the Chouka

homeworld from outside threats. From these early beginnings the Theocratic Defense Guard grew to become one of the most disciplined and fanatical military organizations operating in known space at the time.

Chouka ships tend to be multipurpose vessels meant to perform multiple and sometimes disparate tasks. This was done more out of necessity than for any other reason. The Chouka economy simply could not support a large enough fleet to allow for large degrees of specialization. Instead, most Chouka ships are designed for multiple mission roles, one of which is almost always courier duty. Even the Chouka's largest cruisers are outfitted for transporting bulk cargoes, personnel, and VIPs around Chouka space. It is common for a single cleric or other religious leader in the higher echelons of the Theocracy to have a ship personally assigned to his/her command.

Starships

Acolyte Patrol Frigate **Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)**

The Acolyte Patrol Frigate served as the primary patrol ship in the Chouka fleet. Except in situations of necessity born of the Chouka War, Acolytes very rarely operated in fleet actions. The Acolytes were meant for long range, solitary system patrol work. In this role the ships served beautifully. Armed with an impressive amount of weapons for a ship its size plus a full flight of fighters, vessels of this class were able to effectively combat raiders and other light combatants while performing their routine patrols.

During the war, the Acolyte frigates redirected to fight on the front lines typically accompanied larger Apostle Holy Cruisers into the fray, escorting the larger vessels and supplementing their firepower. Acolyte Patrol Frigates found it difficult to deal with the numbers of Moshesta frigates sent against them by the Circasians and most were easily dispatched.

Apostle Holy Cruiser **Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)**

The ultimate warship in the Chouka fleet, the Apostle Holy Cruiser was not only a showcase for advanced technologies but also the principal executive transport of the Theocracy. Armed to the teeth with plasma and laser weaponry, the Apostle could hold its own against any foreign warship. However, the Apostle's mission of flagship for traveling clerics was just as high a priority to the Defense Guard.

One quirk of the Apostle is the addition of a boarding prow slung beneath the ship's nose. Equipped with the bleeding edge gravitic tracting rod and two breaching ports, the Apostle was designed to be able to draw in derelict ships and board them, allowing the Chouka to capture enemy ships, perform checks for contraband, or simply exact personal retribution upon the survivors. More ceremonial than practical, this feature of the ship was used on several occasions against enemy ships that could no longer fight.

During the war, the Apostle was the most feared Chouka ship. A single salvo from an Apostle could shatter Circasian cruisers with firepower to spare. In addition, the Apostle cruisers were built with durability in mind and were able to soak up enormous amounts of damage before being destroyed.

Due to the expense of construction and maintenance, Apostle Holy Cruisers made up a disproportionately small amount of the Chouka military force.

Apostle War Cruiser **Apostle Variant (Rare)**

The desperation of the Chouka War led the Circle of Elders to order the construction of several heavily modified Apostle Holy Cruisers specifically refitted for combat. The Apostle War Cruiser exchanges the base hull's amenities, including all extraneous cargo and personnel facilities, for an expanded arsenal of weapons. Additional plasma cannons and point plasma guns were added to the hull in place of outer cargo bays. In addition, a pair of missile racks and their associated munitions

storage were added to the ship, giving the Apostle War Cruiser two 360° missile launchers.

The Apostle War Cruiser proved to be far better in combat than the Apostle in almost every way. Unfortunately, the appearance of the Apostle War Cruiser came too late to make a major impact on the course of the war. Circasian and Chouka scholars alike have theorized that, if the Chouka had been allowed another six months of production time, enough Apostle War Cruisers could have been produced by the Theocracy to stalemate the war.

Arbiter Customs Cutter **Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)**

The Arbiter Customs Cutter was one of the Chouka's primary anti-raider vessels. Fast and relatively maneuverable, the Arbiter was capable of pursuing suspected pirate craft and grappling onto them with its forward mounted grappling claws. Once attached, the Arbiter could then deposit customs crews and marines to the target to check for contraband.

The Arbiter is normally equipped with nine marine contingents at any given time. This is more than enough to capture and secure civilian and raider vessels to take them to justice.

When confronted by raider fighters or ships an Arbiter can only barely hold its ground and usually will be forced to flee the area. In areas particularly hard hit by raider activity, the Theocratic Guard would often assign small fleets of Arbiters to work in tandem on their system patrols to provide suitable firepower to intimidate raiders and would-be bandits.

Believer Police Frigate **Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)**

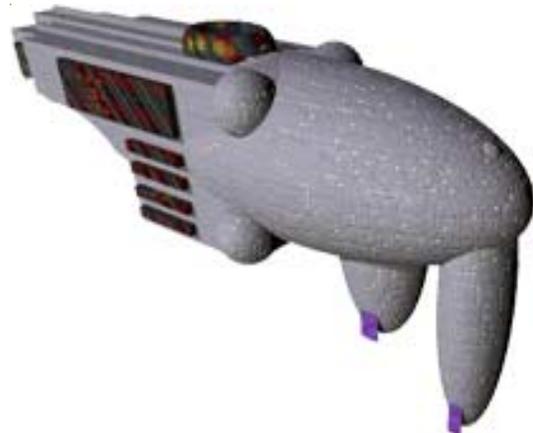
An early Chouka frigate design, the Believer Police Frigates were constructed shortly after contact with the Novon was established. The Circle recognized the need for a modernized defensive craft to help and defend Chouka from attack. These ships represented the best that the Chouka could build at the time.

The Chouka soon found that the ships were ineffective at combating the craft fielded by neighboring militaries and, in fact, they were barely suitable for keeping raiders and pirates in check. As soon as new technologies were available the Believer Police Frigates were retired from service. Many of these ships were sold to Chouka government sponsored privateers and pirates for use in raiding alien convoys.

Bishop Warship **Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)**

Designated a warship by the Theocratic Defense Guard, the Bishop Warship is in fact a priority courier ship. The Bishop was built as much to ferry religious leaders as it was to act as the testbed for the new twin laser cannon. Individually, Bishop Warships are not equipped to take on enemy cruisers of similar size. However, when operating in wolf packs, Bishop Warships can be very deadly opponents.

Almost all Bishop Warships produced by the Chouka were assigned to a single cleric or high priest of the Theocracy. These clerics used their assigned Bishops as personal yachts. Many clerics even took up residence on their private warships. Often times the ships would be used to take the clerics and their guests to religious retreats in the Mishtuki or Sha'al systems or simply to remote and exotic locations in the Chouka home system so that the cleric could meditate. When the war began with the Circasians the Bishops were slowly recalled to strict military service.



In some cases the clerics were even ordered by the elders to take their ships into battle to defend Chouka from the heathens! The clerics had no choice but to comply with the orders, lest they face the wrath of the Circle.

Covenant Minelayer

Base Hull (Restricted Deployment 10%)

These dedicated minelayers were extremely rare vessels in the Theocratic Defense Forces. Covenant Minelayers are large craft, one of the largest operated by the Chouka. Designed solely with minelaying operations in mind, this craft and its complement of ten shuttles can deploy entire minefields in only two or three days of twenty-four hour minelaying activity. Covenant Minelayers are strictly business and completely lack the creature comforts that most Chouka captains are used to.

When not in active duty, Covenant Minelayers were stored in mothballs in orbit of Chouka. Their maintenance cost and that of their minelaying shuttles was high, too high to warrant their operations during peacetime.

Crusader Dreadnought

Base Hull (Unique Ship)

The Crusader Dreadnought was a response to the military threat of the Circasian Empire. For years before the Chouka War started the elders knew that the Circasians were building up their fleet and collecting intelligence data on Chouka holdings. This unwanted interest drew the ire of the Circle and events were set in motion to provide a counterpoint to any possible Circasian threat.

Unfortunately for the Chouka the war was upon them before the Crusader had even left the drawing board. With the reality of the crisis at hand the project was put on the back burner, although many vocal supporters claimed that it was the only possible way to teach the Circasians a lesson they would remember for decades to come.

By the time of the fall of Mishtuki the first Crusader had begun construction and the skeletal hull completed. The Chouka's increasingly dire position prompted them to

work more fervently than ever before to complete the Crusader Dreadnought prototype before it was too late. Unfortunately, timing was again not on the Chouka's side. When the Circasians launched their assault on the Chouka homeworld the Crusader was less than half-finished and barely able to maneuver under its own power. Weapons systems were hastily installed onboard and the ship readied for the final fight.

The first (and only) Crusader Dreadnought was destroyed by the Circasians in that final battle when its reactor experienced an unexpected power feedback loop and exploded.

Holyland Assault Cruiser

Scripture Variant (Uncommon)

The Chouka rarely had need for an assault ship given their reclusive and isolationist nature. In the rare instances that did require the deployment of Chouka ground forces, Holyland Assault Cruisers were called in to deliver the troops to the target. A modification of the Scripture Intelligence Cruiser, that ship's silent running abilities came in handy and allowed Holyland Assault Cruisers to get very near their target before setting off early warning detectors.

Each Holyland Assault Cruiser can transport one battalion of troops and deposit them simultaneously to the target by virtue of the ship's extensive assault shuttle facilities. Crew comfort is low and quarters cramped onboard such assault ships when loaded to full capacity, but it is a necessary evil endemic of most assault craft.

Inquisitor Light Cruiser

Base Hull (Special Availability)

Introduced shortly after the Priest Plasma Destroyer, the Inquisitor Light Cruiser acted as both a system patrol cruiser and heavy warship within the Theocratic Guard Forces. The Inquisitor was sturdy and heavily armed for a ship of its size; however, the Inquisitor Light Cruiser did prove to be less maneuverable than would have been liked.

The Inquisitor Light Cruisers were overshadowed several years later with the introduction of the Retribution Battlecruiser. The larger and faster Retribution proved more popular among military commanders and the Inquisitors were eventually phased out of service.

From 1921 to 1945 the Inquisitor Light Cruiser is considered to be Unlimited Availability hull. In scenarios set after 1945, the Inquisitor should be considered a Limited Availability (33%) hull until its final phase out date of 1960. No Inquisitors remained in active service after 1960.

Priest Plasma Destroyer Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Priest Plasma Destroyer was one of the first Chouka military craft to enter widespread construction. Built at the orbital Canfara Anglasun shipyards orbiting Chouka, the Priest Plasma Destroyers were built in large numbers in the decades after the acceptance of the design by the Circle. Armed with two medium plasma cannons and a trio of light plasma cannons, the Priest was a capable opponent in battle. Although the Priest was not superior to the alien analogs of its day, it remained an important step forward in Chouka ship construction technologies.

By the time of the Chouka War, most Priest Plasma Destroyers had been shifted from their original cruiser mission duties to that of escort and support craft. Many others had been converted into any number of variants, including luxury liners and personal transports for high-ranking clerics. In battle the Priest Plasma Destroyers proved to be equal to many Circasian designs and proved its effectiveness on several occasions.

Priest Escort Destroyer Priest Variant (Uncommon)

Only a few years after the introduction of the Priest Plasma Destroyer into service, a request was put in for a variant of the hull that would be better suited for convoy and fleet escort duties. Although the Priest Plasma Destroyer was a capable warship there

remained a need for a heavy escort to provide anti-fighter protection for the fleet.

The Priest Escort Destroyer was the Chouka answer to this problem. The upper hull of the Priest is heavily modified from that of the original ship, expanding and reinforcing the upper gun turrets. The light plasma cannons formerly installed in these turrets were replaced with point plasma guns, providing the Priest Escort Destroyer with excellent 360° weapons coverage.

Radiance Explorer Base Hull (Restricted Deployment 10%)

The Radiance Explorer is a massively refitted Retribution Battlecruiser. Using the latter's engine pod and several other modular components, the Radiance is considered an entirely different ship type due to the number of changes made to the basic design during its development and construction.

The most notable addition to the Radiance is a counter-rotational section that provides limited micro-gravity, allowing the ship and its crew to perform extended duration exploratory missions. The ship's weapons and high power sensor package make it adequately defended should it run into hostile forces while abroad.

During the Chouka War, Radiance Explorers were typically not drawn into combat, as most were still deployed on the Rim of known space at the time of the conflict. One was destroyed at the end of the war when it attempted to seek refuge in Breth, being destroyed by the Sshel'ath force that seized that system. Of the other two that survived the war, one was presumably lost in hyperspace and the other continued to explore uncharted space lanes. The ship and crew had left Chouka only months before the Circasian's final assault on their homeworld and it was the crew's decision to strike out and find a new beginning for their species and civilization amongst the stars. They eventually reached a fertile world in a system they called Regalo, establishing a colony from which to begin anew. The colony's location and very existence would remain unknown, even after the last of the Escalation Wars.

Retribution Battlecruiser

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Retribution Battlecruiser is one of the few dedicated warships in the Chouka fleet. The Retribution represented the best technology the Theocracy could muster during the 1930's and was an impressive ship for its time. Retributions served with distinction in the Guard Forces, but after three decades it became obvious that time had not been kind to the class. The Retributions had become somewhat long in the tooth compared to other newer classes and simply could not compete with newer cruisers operated by the Chouka or their neighbors.

By the time of the war with the Circasians the Retribution Battlecruiser had been relegated to reserve unit status. Retribution Battlecruisers were usually only activated when they were needed for fast strike missions that would rely on the Retribution's speed to complete the mission objectives.

Revelation Auxiliary Carrier

Revelation Variant (Uncommon)

Several Revelation War Barges were converted into auxiliary carriers both before and during the Chouka War. These ships exchanged the missile racks in the aft section and their magazines for a series of combat fighter bays in the aft section of the ship capable of housing two flights of heavy fighters.

The Theocracy commissioned very few of these before the war, but during the war they became a necessary piece of equipment as they represented one of the few ways to bring appreciable fighter support into a fight.

Revelation Freighter Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The original incarnation of the Revelation, this interplanetary freighter is a boxy design originally intended solely for transporting cargo and equipment. Only

marginally armed and not meant for combat, the Revelation Freighters would later be converted into war barges as a cheap combat unit.

Revelation Minelayer Revelation Variant (Uncommon)

Castoff Revelation Freighters were often converted into minelayers by the Theocratic Guard Forces when the need for minelayers became great. The larger Covenant Minelayers were better equipped to lay extensive minefields, but they were expensive and rare. Revelation Minelayers were used to supplement the Covenants, laying mines in locations either too remote or too dangerous for a Covenant to dare travel.

Revelation Minelayers saw a resurgence during the Chouka War. Many of these ships were constructed to bolster defensive lines along the Chouka border, particularly in the Sha'al system. It was during their service on the frontlines that the biggest flaw of the Revelation Minelayers became evident. The minelaying equipment retrofitted onto the Revelation hull left little room for defensive weaponry and Revelation Minelayers found themselves unable to deal with even the smallest enemy threat. This resulted in droves of minelayers being destroyed by enemy frigates and fighters during the course of the war.

Revelation War Barge Revelation Variant (Common)

A converted freighter, the Revelation War Barge is an auxiliary support ship. The Revelation War Barges were initially designed as logistics vessels for the movement of munitions from Chouka to fleets and outposts in Mishtuki or Breth. Eventually the Chouka Theocracy decided that they were a cheap alternative to fielding "real" warships and the pace of production was picked up. Slow, ponderous, and equipped with antiquated missile systems, the Revelation is the perfect example of a government cutting corners to save money.

The Revelation War Barges saw extensive service during the Chouka War and were one of the most common units seen in combat. Almost every Chouka fleet of any size included several Revelation War Barges. Revelations were found to be most effective in a fleet action scale environment where they could periodically fire salvos of missiles at Circasian warships while they were distracted by heavier warships, such as the Apostle Holy Cruisers.

Reverence System Monitor

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

The Reverence System Monitor is the first large capital ship design built by the Chouka. A large heavily armed, heavily armored warship, the Reverence was little more than a mobile base designed for projecting the power of the Theocracy within its territories. Reverence System Monitors, although slow, were more than a match for most enemy warships.

The Reverence proved to be difficult to upgrade and the design was unable to accept upgrades to more advanced plasma and laser weapons as they became available. This failing caused the Reverence System Monitors to be pulled from active service. They were not replaced with a newer system monitor design, however, as the Chouka saw little need for a new monitor when their cruisers and patrol frigates could handle the job of system defense more than adequately.

For a time, the recalled Reverences were put into orbit above Chouka and served as actual defense platforms to reinforce important defensive linchpin positions. However, as time went on, it became obvious that the Reverence would not be effective in such a role and the remaining Reverence System Monitors were mothballed. They were demothballed to help defend the Chouka homeworld during the Chouka War, with little effect.

Scripture Intelligence Cruiser

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

The Chouka operated very few ELINT vessels, the most common being the Scripture Intelligence Cruiser. The Scripture Intelligence Cruiser, unlike the scouts operated by other powers, is not meant to function in combat situations. Rather, the ship is designed to keep watch over Chouka territories and watch for any possible alien fleet movements. These ships were very common in newly explored territories where they kept watch for possible alien intruders that may have had existing knowledge or claim to the system in question.

The Chouka War forced some Scripture Intelligence Cruisers to join the war effort, and some served well in the major fleet actions of the war. Unfortunately, they were not designed for the role and were easily gunned down by Circasian cruisers and frigates.

Scripture Intelligence Cruisers are capable of stealthy movements, the ship's design optimized to reduce radiation emissions. This allowed Scriptures to operate silently in potentially hostile territory, concealing their location from possible observers. This silent-running ability does not offer any tangible benefits in pick up games but can be of great utility in campaign situations. In these cases, GM's should consider allowing Scripture Intelligence Cruisers and any other hulls based on the Scripture to have a chance of not being detected if they move in or out of a system that is one jump from a Chouka system.

Vengeance Carrier

Vengeance Variant (Uncommon)

The Vengeance Carrier was designed to meet the Chouka demand for a dedicated carrier unit. Other hulls had previously been tested for conversion into carriers but only the Vengeance was large enough to allow for the expansion of the existing internal hangar to carry more fighters. In the end the Vengeance Carrier carries only one flight more than its

predecessor at the expense of several weapons and a section of the ship's reactor.

Carriers of this class were meant to serve as part of larger fleets where their extra fighter support is needed. Vengeance Carrier also proved to be an exceptional escort craft when using its plethora of point plasma guns to shoot down enemy fighters.

Vengeance Heavy Cruiser Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

The Vengeance Heavy Cruiser was the Chouka's first heavy cruiser design. Heavily influenced by the designs of the neighboring Thaline, the Vengeance Heavy Cruiser incorporated the best technologies the Chouka were capable of producing. The Chouka stressed the importance of making the Vengeance a multi-roled cruiser design capable of handling itself in all situations. This doctrinal decision led to a design that boasts a substantial number of anti-fighter batteries.

The Vengeance acted as the primary Chouka heavy warship until the development of more advanced warships in the early 1940's. The Retribution Battlecruiser ultimately replaced the Vengeance in its role, relegating it instead into a support position in the fleet.

The Theocratic Guard Forces had hoped to upgrade the Vengeance Heavy Cruiser as time went on, but the proliferation of other, newer hulls that could do the job just as well forced them to abandon such plans. Without major incremental refits the class was eventually retired with the last hull being struck only three years before the start of the war.

War Prayer Gunship Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The War Prayer Gunship is a dedicated warship designed specifically for taking down enemy cruisers of greater size. Armed to the teeth for a ship of its size, the War Prayer Gunship is a capable combatant with better speed and maneuverability than any other Chouka ship.

Though the War Prayer's design would seem to lend itself to a wolf pack mentality, the

Chouka never used them in this fashion. Instead, the Theocracy sent War Prayers on solitary sorties, patrolling nearby regions of space or testing enemy defenses and resolve through lightning strike raids into enemy territory.

War Prayer Minesweeper War Prayer Variant (Uncommon)

The invention of the twin laser cannon by the Chouka prompted the Theocratic Guard Forces to reevaluate their existing fleet and identify those ships currently use the heavy plasma cannon that would take part in the fleet-wide upgrade initiative. Initial reports indicated that it would not be cost effective to upgrade the existing fleet of War Prayer Gunships to the new technology.

This determination prompted many of the Chouka military leadership to begin putting forth options for alternate refits or uses for the War Prayer hull. The leading contender (and the first to make it to the prototyping stage) was the War Prayer Minesweeper.

The War Prayer Minesweeper exchanges its plasma cannons for point plasma guns, weapons that are better for sweeping enemy minefields because of their high rate of fire. The War Prayer's sensors were also increased and special mine detection packages added to aid in the detection of enemy mines.

The War Prayer Minesweepers were rarely called on, though there were some instances during the heightened tensions with the Circasians before the outbreak of the war that such minesweepers were used to check for Circasian mines in their territories.

Bases & Defenses

Brimstone Heavy OSAT Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The largest and deadliest of the Chouka orbital defense satellites operated during the war, the satellites of the Brimstone type were commonly deployed as linchpin defense units at key strategic points. Their heavy firepower and durability made them the

equals of enemy frigates. When supported by lesser satellites as part of a comprehensive defense structure, walls of these satellites could easily defeat wave after wave of enemy cruisers.

Citadel Star Fortress

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The most powerful starbase every constructed by the Chouka, the Citadel Star Fortress was a massive starbase that served as the center of operations for the Chouka Theocratic Guard Forces before and during the Chouka War. Megalithic in size and stature, the articulately designed space station was the epitome of the grandeur of the Chouka military and seen as a testimony to their faith. This large base was completed in 1961, and later destroyed in 1973 during the final assault on Chouka by Circasian forces.

Hellfire Defense Satellite

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Hellfire OSAT was the most common Chouka defensive satellite in service. Developed as one of the first weapons in the Defense Guard's defensive arsenal, the Hellfire Defense Satellite was a common sight over Chouka and Mishtuki for over half a century.

Penance Military Base

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

Penance Military Bases were constructed throughout Chouka space to act as listening posts and supply stations for Chouka forces. Deployment of Penance bases was accelerated prior to the Chouka War when the Chouka leadership became more and more concerned about possible hostilities with the Circasian Empire.

The Penance Military Bases erected in the Mishtuki and Chouka systems were important bastions for ships cut off by the Circasian military advance. Such bases were able to maintain supply for these isolated ships, allowing them to perform important

raids on Circasian fleets, most importantly supply convoys.

Several Penance bases survived the fall of the Chouka homeworld, but all were eventually hunted down by the Circasian occupation forces in the years following the collapse of the Theocracy.

Solitude Religious Retreat

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

There were many areas in their space that the Chouka found to be unusually serene or beautiful. These locations were sought out by those true believers and pilgrims who believed that these places could take them closer to their god. As the number of worshipers increased the Theocracy would pay for the construction of small stations to make their stays more comfortable. Such stations were never heavily armed and most were off the beaten path far from the normal routes of system patrols.

Solitude Religious Retreats became known as places of reverence, contemplation, and religious fervor. Psychotropic drugs were used to heighten pilgrim's experiences and convocations could often get out of hand.

When the Circasians invaded Chouka space they recognized the civilian nature of these bases and did not target them for destruction. Instead they used marine assault squads to capture the base and then assigned a small detachment of personnel to oversee operations. The Chouka pilgrims at the retreat were held prisoner and not allowed to leave, a fact that infuriated them to no end and spurred some violent encounters, but in the end it was a blessing in disguise. The pilgrims at Solitude bases were saved from the carnage experienced by the major Chouka population centers as a result of orbital bombardment and ground combat. If many of them had been back at home rather than at the retreats they would have most likely been killed.

After the war was over those Chouka held on Solitude bases were repatriated to their places of origin. The retreats were

maintained by the Circasians from that point on and remained centers for religious worship.

Taera Shrine

Base Hull (Unique Base)

The outpost of Taera Shrine in the Sha'al system began its life as a simple Solitude Religious Retreat erected near the Lights of Taera. However, as the number of pilgrims traveling to see the Lights continued to increase, the station was forced to expand in order to accommodate them. These additions to the station were sometimes haphazard, yet others were extensively planned. The final result was a piecemeal station whose beauty was entirely in the eye of the beholder.

Taera Shrine became a staging post for Chouka fleets in the Sha'al system during the Chouka War. An extensive field of mines as well as additional OSATs was deployed at the base to provide for its protection. In the end these defenses proved unable to hold back Circasian attacks on the system and the shrine was left unguarded and defenseless.

Attempts by the Circasians to capture Taera Shrine proved disastrous due to the fanatic defense of the Chouka pilgrims and security personnel onboard the station. In the end the Circasian commander in charge of the mission evacuated their marines and destroyed Taera Shrine along with its entire population of some five thousand Chouka.

Temple Starbase

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

These small bases were often constructed at important locations throughout the Chouka Theocracy. Temple Starbases are meant not so much for defense but instead as waystations for travelers traveling to and from religious convocations and retreats. Several could be found in orbit of Chouka, and another at Mishtuki VII.

Chouka Mines

The Chouka were strong believers in the power of mines and established many extensive minefields in their territory. The

Chouka often used vast minefields to help protect bases or reinforce static defense points. It was just as common, however, for the Chouka to lay tracts of mines along important, non-commercial transit routes to help to dissuade unauthorized movement in their systems. Because of their heavy use of mines, the Chouka developed an inordinately large number of mine types when compared to other powers.

Conviction-A Proximity Mine: Cost 6, Damage 10, Signature 2.

Conviction-B Proximity Mine: Cost 10, Damage 15, Signature 2.

Vedas-A Captor Mine: Cost 12, Range 4, Accuracy +3, Damage 12, Signature 4.

Vedas-B Captor Mine: Cost 18, Range 5, Accuracy +4, Damage 15, Signature 4.

Vedas-C Captor Mine: Cost 22, Range 6, Accuracy +6, Damage 18, Signature 5.

Watcher-A DEW Mine: Cost 22, Range 6, Accuracy +3, Signature 1 (0), Armor 3, Structure 10. Fires a light plasma cannon. Includes an Identify Friend or Foe (IFF) enhancement in the mine cost. This large mine is heavily armored and reinforced to withstand enemy fire. Watcher-A DEW mines were traditionally encircled space stations in one or more concentric rings about the base and functioned as a poor man's OSAT.

Watcher-B DEW Mine: Cost 15, Range 6, Accuracy +3, Signature 2 (1), Armor 1, Structure 4. Fires a light laser cannon. This variant of the Watcher-A mine frame was developed as a cheaper DEW mine that could be deployed more widely than the Watcher-A. The Watcher-B's were commonly used to mine trade routes or opening of jump gates during wartime.

Fighters & Shuttles

Bloodlust Assault Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Chouka have always preferred heavily armed heavy fighters as part of their military doctrine. The Bloodlust Assault

Fighter is a perfect example of this military design ideology. The Bloodlust is armed with two laser beam weapons and six missile hardpoints.

The Bloodlust's high forward armor made it a formidable opponent against Circasian units during the war, but the maneuverability and speed of the Circasian Istale more than made up for the heavier firepower of the Bloodlust Assault Fighter.

Faithbringer Heavy Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

An improvement over the Wraithblade Heavy Fighter, the Faithbringer Heavy Fighter was designed to replace the Wraithblade as the Chouka's premier heavy fighter. The Faithbringer was better armed and armored, and sported many new fighter technologies.

The Faithbringer heavy fighter had a short production life, being quickly replaced by the Bloodlust Assault Fighter. Faithbringers continued to serve faithfully after the Bloodlust's entry into service, though most were transferred to patrol craft or second tier defense facilities.

Infidel Breaching Pod

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The standard Chouka breaching pod, Infidel Breaching Pods were common equipment onboard Chouka patrol ships. The Chouka preferred a direct ship-to-ship connection for conducting boarding operations, but this was not always possible. Some ships that were called on to stop and be boarded did not heed the warning. Infidel Breaching Pods were used to hunt down such fugitives and board them, capturing their ships and detaining their crews for questioning.

The Infidel's design stresses speed over survivability. This unarmed breaching pod is lacking in armor and structure, but the engine system is well developed, offering above average thrust output. Because of the engine's sturdy construction, an Infidel Breaching Pod only loses 1 point of thrust per 4 boxes destroyed.

Teuton Assault Shuttle

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

This small assault shuttle was used by the Chouka for launching planetary assaults on alien worlds. Teuton Assault Shuttles are armed for their defense, often using their single light laser beam to shoot down intercepting fighters on their way to the target.

The internal volume of each Teuton Assault Shuttle is low and each shuttle can only carry three marine contingents at a time. This was not a problem for the Chouka as Teutons were mainly used for small covert operations that relied on small combat teams.

Wraithblade Heavy Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Wraithblade is the Chouka's first modern heavy fighter unit. Slow and only lightly armored, the Wraithblade was designed as a testbed for early Chouka fighter technologies. Early prototype versions of laser, plasma, and ballistic weapons were testbedded on the hull before being further developed into shipboard mounts.

As a combat unit, Wraithblade Heavy Fighters are mediocre at best. They don't have the speed to keep up with comparable enemy fighters and their paper-thin armor makes them easily dispatched by the enemy. Because of their numerous failings the design saw a very short deployment life. Many ended up being sold off to third parties, often to the black market where they would fetch a decent price from interested buyers. Because of this, Wraithblades could often be seen flying in the service of raiders or civilians.

Chapter 5: 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 attempting to develop orbital defense platforms for insertion into planetary orbit. Both possessed nuclear capabilities and hoped that their network of satellites would be able to successfully intercept any incoming enemy ICBM's *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 amazing find. The protoplanetoid, as well as the rest of the asteroid belt, had an unusually high concentration of heavy elements and other important or rare ore deposits that were both very pure and easily extractable. Unfortunately for the Mst'as, the A'hel'is intercepted the transmission.

Both nations accelerated their space programs in a race to be the first to reach and exploit the asteroid belt. Both nations believed that the influx of raw materials would allow their respective economies (and militaries) to surpass that of their rival, allowing for any final confrontation between the powers to end in their favor. Thus started the A'hel'is/Mst'as War, known to most alien historians as the misnamed Sshel'ath Civil War.

The A'hel'is/Mst'as War was one in name only. The fighting on Sshel'a continued at the same pace it had for over two generations. Rather, the war was one of national prides. Both wished to claim control of the asteroid belt and its lucrative resources while at the same time denying them to their rivals. Both nations spent massive outlays of capital and resources in an attempt to be the first power to establish productive colonies in the asteroid belt and secure a monopoly on interplanetary commerce. Espionage, sabotage, and intrigue were the primary weapons of the war. The A'hel'is/Mst'as War did see several space battles, but most were wholly unspectacular. The Sshel'ath space navy technology was extremely primitive and their weapons crude. Most battles amounted to two ships firing nuclear missiles at one other until one struck its target, crippling or destroying it, or both ran out of ammunition, forcing a retreat.

The space race between the rival powers largely fizzled and led to a decline in hostilities as both powers fortified and bolstered their newly established colonies. Lack of available real estate in the asteroid

belt was not an issue and both A'hel'is and Mst'as found they were isolated enough through the belt to make offensive actions against the other unwise.

The Birth of the Alliance

Finally, in 1928, the leaders of the A'hel'is and Mst'as governments signed an armistice. Both sides had achieved their goals of reaching into space but in so doing they had discovered that both of their nations could profit equally from the endeavor. The A'hel'is and Mst'as leaders both realized that more was at stake than the control of a single planet or a collection of asteroids, they had an entire solar system to bring under their control!

In addition to the armistice treaty, both nations agreed to form the Sshel'ath Alliance, a joint-council made up of representatives from both factions given the authority and responsibility of monitoring and administering interplanetary efforts.

The A'hel'is and Mst'as quickly realized that this dualistic space agency was an excellent tool for power. Both sides used the Alliance to maintain their separate space monopolies, denying space travel to other neutral nations and regulating space travel and commerce in such a way as to only benefit the Alliance's controllers. Tensions quickly dissipated between the two former archrivals. Petty bickering over the limited resources of Sshel'a seemed almost inconsequential in comparison to the riches to be made through interplanetary trade.

It was not long after the formation of the Alliance that the Sshel'ath made first contact with intelligent alien life. In 1938, a small Ukal scout ship entered the Sshel'ath home system and made contact with the Sshel'ath, the scout communicating a message of peace and friendship to the Sshel'ath people. The Sshel'ath responded naively to the alien communications, but this was only posturing on the part of the Alliance leaders. Cordial relations were something that the Sshel'ath did desire (they weren't stupid enough to believe themselves the technological equals of the Ukal after all), but

they were far more interested in trying to figure out how this turn of events could profit them.

It did not take long during those early negotiations before the issue of securing advanced alien technologies was brought up. The Sshel'ath were interested in any and all technologies the Ukal were willing to offer, most notably the faster-than-light travel drive that the Ukal had demonstrated upon entering their star system. The Sshel'ath desperately wished to join the galactic community and gain access to foreign markets.

The Ukal were at first very wary of the Sshel'ath's insistence on discussing technology exchanges but eventually gave in. The price the Ukal quoted for these technologies, however, was extremely high. In fact, the price the Ukal demanded for the exchange of what little technology they were willing to divulge was easily equal to several times the Alliance member's combined annual appropriations budgets!

The Sshel'ath Alliance agreed to the terms despite the price tag attached. Terms of payment were arranged and, following a substantial down payment in the form of refined ores from the Sshel'ath asteroid belts, the Ukal delivered to the Sshel'ath leadership an immense storage bank containing a treasure trove of alien knowledge. By deciphering the Ukal texts and reverse engineering key technologies, the Sshel'ath were able to develop more advanced construction techniques, better drive systems, and, perhaps most importantly, jump gate technology. Doing so, however, had forced the Alliance to the brink of financial ruin. The Sshel'ath administration was forced to look to independent contractors willing to work for product-for-technology compensation in order to move forward with plans to implement these new technologies. Construction conglomerates within both the A'hel'is and Mst'as nations were awarded the key construction contracts for a pair of in-system jump gates while other nations and corporations benefited from the dissemination of the new alien technologies into the Sshel'ath economic and industrial infrastructure. Products of every shape, size, and imagined

purpose were constructed at newly retooled factories all over the planet and quickly made their way into Sshel'ath homes and offices.

Within five years of having built their first jump gate the Sshel'ath had expanded their commercial interests to several nearby star systems. Instead of focusing on establishing new colonies and building up territorial holdings in surrounding systems as many young races historically tended to do, the Sshel'ath were able to apply their newfound trade wealth into reinvigorating their planetary economy. This calculated maneuver paid off, though the saturation of cheap Sshel'ath merchandise and shipping angered many foreign merchants. Some Sshel'ath free traders also turned to more lucrative enterprises such as black market cargo runs and even piracy during this period, spreading throughout known space and preying on alien shipping.

The A'hel'is and Mst'as soon found themselves recovering from the debt owed to the Ukal Combine and began investing more heavily in their respective military forces. The Sshel'ath had never felt a great urgency to militarize before this time by virtue of the still nearly impregnable defense satellite network in orbit of Sshel'a. This vestige of the cold war was still an effective deterrent to alien attack despite its lack of sophistication.

The Sshel'ath Alliance's military construction program was originally intended to address the modernization of the homeworld defensive infrastructure. As development and funding matured within Alliance committees the focus of military funding became more concerned with developing a space navy for projecting power outward from Sshel'a. The need for escorts to protect freighters and ore haulers in Sshel'ath and other nearby territories required a more aggressive defensive approach than had previously been taken. The initial ship designs put into production consisted predominantly of cheap, expendable cruisers and frigates designed for mid-range patrols, especially convoy patrols.

The First Novon War

Relations between the Sshel'ath and the Novon had been tense since the moment that Sshel'ath traders began appearing in and around the territories claimed by the Novon Trade Lords. The trade lords saw the Sshel'ath as a threat to their mercantile supremacy in the region and harbored a special hatred for their race. The Sshel'ath couldn't understand the Novon's reaction to their efforts and resented their hostile attitude.

Relations were stressed to the breaking point after a series of Novon raids upon Sshel'ath merchant craft in which the ships' crews were detained, tortured, and some even killed by the Novon. The trade lords behind the seizures, primarily lead by Lord Kuparca, ignored the Sshel'ath protests and claimed that the Novon were simply performing standard police actions and punishing criminals in their space according to Novon law. When Sshel'ath ambassadors requested documents enumerating the crimes of which the crews had been charged they were expelled from the trade lord's domain.

These events eventually culminated in the First Novon War of 1960. The First Novon War was not a full-scale conflict by any means as only a handful of weaker Novon trade lords acted as co-belligerents in the war. Best described as a border war, the conflict saw battles fought in both the Sshel'a and Huplat system including several heated battles between Sshel'ath and Novon patrol groups.

Unfortunately for the Sshel'ath, even this small coalition of lesser trade lords still represented a stronger foe than they could safely deal with. Many within the Sshel'ath Alliance advocated an immediate end to the war, fearing the eventual intervention of other, stronger trade lords into the fight. The doves did not hold enough sway over the Alliance to secure the adoption of their appeasement policy. The Sshel'ath would follow the war to its conclusion.

The Sshel'ath issued many letters of marque to friendly raider groups during the war, offering them hefty rewards for their assistance in the conflict. The truth was that the Novon trade lords were wearing down the

Sshel'ath's forces quicker than had been anticipated and any and all assistance was needed to maintain the slow but steady gains against Kuparca's forces.

The war ended in the Sshel'ath's favor, with the war's final Battle of Fodrehnolm seeing the death of the trade lord Kuparca. His alliance quickly disintegrated with each of the remaining trade lords attempting to secure Kuparca's now leaderless territories. The cost of the war compared against the negligible gains infuriated many doves and moderates alike in the Alliance. It also made an enemy of many of the former followers of Kuparca, the trade lord's former allies swearing a blood oath against the Sshel'ath.

The Aftermath of War

Many minor planetary powers on Sshel'a came away from the First Novon War outraged at what had transpired. Prior to the war, these nations had been the worst hit by the economic downturn stemming from the Alliance's debt to the Ukal. These costs were passed on to them in the form of higher prices for goods imported into their respective countries from the A'hel'is and Mst'as. During the war prices skyrocketed as, again, the Sshel'ath Alliance passed on the cost of its operations to the other planetary markets in the form of increased tariffs and duties.

An attempted popular uprising in 1964 ended in failure, being easily put down by an extraordinarily adept and cleverly crafted propaganda campaign. The leaders of the Alliance noted the underlying problem, however, and took steps to rectify it. In order to appease the more powerful independent nations remaining on Sshel'a, the Sshel'ath Alliance extended membership in the Alliance to these powers. In order to facilitate this move the Alliance also changed its policy regarding member representation, basing the number of representatives proportionally to the nation's presence in space. This helped to placate those minor nations that had started to develop and invest in space interests while leaving the power firmly in the hands of those that had held it the entire time. These neutral nations had little choice but to accept the

proposal as it was offered. All feared that this would be their one chance to be allowed a voice in the Alliance and, should they decline it now, it might not be offered to them again.

The Second Novon War

A short border skirmish with the Chouka helped to mold future Sshel'ath military evolution, but the turning point for the Sshel'ath military was the disastrous Second Novon War.

The Sshel'ath in 1966 felt optimistic about the state of their standing naval forces. The First Novon War had taught the Sshel'ath several important lessons about the realities of war. The Sshel'ath had quickly applied these lessons, developing new tactics and technologies to combat the Novon. Much of the new construction coming out of the Sshel'ath fleet yards were seen as revolutionary advances in starship combat technologies and were heralded as such by the naval admiralty, most of whom had served in the First Novon War and remembered the brutal conditions under which they had served.

Under the orders of the Alliance, the Sshel'ath dispatched a large task force to Huplat and began attacking the fleets and convoys of several key minor trade lords in the system. These systematic attacks were meant to test the resolve of the trade lords and ascertain whether a larger invasion force could be launched against them in the near future.

The Sshel'ath made substantial initial gains into the Huplat system. A small force of Karaut Stealth Destroyers was dispatched ahead of the main attack group with the mission of shadowing Novon ships to Quadrant 4 to determine the size and composition of hostile forces in that system. The first month of the war showed a record of consistent Sshel'ath victories over the Novon. Many of those trade lords targeted by the Sshel'ath were those that had been dispersed by the death of Lord Kuparca several years earlier and held little significant power. Buoyed by their gains, the Sshel'ath believed that Huplat would fall within two months if the war continued at its present speed.

The defeat of several weaker trade lords in Huplat had not gone unnoticed. Lord Tlactal, one of Lord Kuparca's closest allies during the First Novon War, had absorbed much of Kuparca's territories, forces, and power following the latter's death and had seen his star rising within the hierarchy of the Novon Trade Lords. Lord Tlactal had spent the opening campaigns of the Second Novon War watching while other, lesser trade lords fell in battle to the Sshel'ath. As one trade lord after another was killed by the Sshel'ath, Tlactal continued to analyze and dissect the capabilities of the Sshel'ath's new warships and the performance of the crews flying them.

The Sshel'ath's morale was shattered on August 14, 1966, when a Novon fleet under the command of Lord Tlactal ambushed the Sshel'ath fleet blockading the Novon world of Tovas-an-elman. The Sshel'aths forces, composed of a majority of the expeditionary fleet, were massacred in the attack. Only a handful of Sshel'ath ships managed to retreat from the battle, their fellows left derelict on the battlefield. Novon marines captured these disabled ships and their crews were never seen or heard from again.

After a momentary pause to regroup, the Novon fleet was again put into motion, this time entering hyperspace on course for Sshel'a. The enemy fleet set off the long-range hyperspace alarms six hours out of the system. Sshel'ath defense fleets were activated and readied for battle, yet no one knew where the Novon fleet would exit hyperspace. This forced the Sshel'ath 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 Tlactal 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 Tlactal 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 of potentially rebellious colonies to administer. The Alliance leaders feared that certain Novon trade lords would attempt to take advantage of the situation, but luckily the Novon were suffering from the effects of heightened internal strife. There was some increase in the amount of raiding activity in Breth, but that was easily put down by the Sshel'ath presence there.

With new trade routes secured and new territories to exploit, the Sshel'ath Alliance was on its way to asserting itself as an important power in the region.

Sshel'ath Technology

The Sshel'ath use many different types of weapons technologies. Before contact with the Ukal, the Sshel'ath arsenal was made up of primitive ballistic, laser, and matter weapons. After contact, however, the Sshel'ath adopted and developed advanced particle, laser, matter, and electromagnetic technologies. The Sshel'ath have developed a special affinity for electromagnetic and laser weapons, developing both fields of research further than most other races in the region.

Point Defense Laser

Class: Laser **Mode:** Standard

The point defense laser is an older model weapons system that was used extensively during the pre-Contact period as the Sshel'ath's primary anti-ballistic interception device. The point defense laser system is made up of a series of external satellite and laser focusing arrays that independently triangulate the location of incoming missiles and small craft and then target them for destruction. The laser batteries that are central to the point defense laser's design are very weak and are not well suited for anti-fighter duties. The weapon was oftentimes conscripted into this duty, however, until the light particle beam was more widely available.

Because of the external nature of the point defense laser, it cannot be armored in any way. This leaves point defense laser units extremely vulnerable to damage and is another reason why the Sshel'ath abandoned the weapon in favor of other more advanced types.

Unlike other laser weapons, the point defense laser is capable of intercepting both ballistic and non-ballistic weapons fire. The concentrated nature of the point defense laser's interception fire helps to diffuse or dissipate incoming fire before it can strike the target. It is not very effective against non-ballistic weapons fire and the Sshel'ath rarely used it in this fashion, preferring to hold their

defensive fire in case of a surprise missile strike.

Light Laser Cannon

Class: Laser **Mode:** Raking

The light laser cannon is the basic weapon used by most ships in the Sshel'ath fleet. Where other species have adopted alternates to the light laser in their own navies, the Sshel'ath have stood behind their light laser cannons and swear by their dependability in battle.

The light laser cannon remained the most common laser weapon used by the Sshel'ath during the time of the Chouka War. New technologies and laser cannon replacements were on the horizon, but none had yet made it past the early design stages.

Gatling Laser

Class: Laser **Mode:** Pulse

A logical progression of laser technology, the gatling laser is a wholly Sshel'ath weapon system. The gatling laser is closely related to the light laser cannon and borrows heavily from its basic design. Where the light laser cannon fires a single, continuous laser, the gatling laser fires several short, discreet volleys instead. The number of individual laser pulses fired by the gatling laser can theoretically allow a single gatling laser to score more damage than a light laser cannon. The volume of fire also allows the gatling laser to have a better chance to hit enemy fighters.

The gatling laser pays for these benefits through its increased size. The gatling laser's five laser barrels are housed in a large rotating fire housing which takes up more space than a light laser cannon. The gatling laser also requires more power than the light laser cannon, which can be a problem for smaller ships whose reactors are already being pushed to the limit.

Most modern Sshel'ath vessels have abandoned light particle beam technology in favor of the gatling laser for their anti-fighter and interception requirements. The gatling laser has also proven extremely effective against enemy starships where the volume

and non-interceptability of fire are major assets.

Light Laser Cutter

Class: Laser **Mode: Raking (4)**

The light laser cutter is one of the earliest Sshel'ath laser weapons. A highly constrained beam, the light laser cutter can track across large areas of enemy hulls in rapid fashion, doing small pinpricks of damage to multiple systems as it travels. The Sshel'ath mostly abandoned the light laser cutter after the development of the light laser cannon, being used primarily in industrial applications such as asteroid mining.

Those Sshel'ath military vessels that mount the light laser cutter use it primarily to disable enemy craft or strip them of their weapons, or to combat enemy fighters. In the case of fighters, a single blast from a light laser cutter will likely destroy the target.

Laser Cutter

Class: Laser **Mode: Raking (6)**

The laser cutter, with a longer range than the standard light laser cannon, was considered the premiere long-range laser weapon of its day. With twice the range of a light laser, the laser cutter can strike at targets far outside normal engagement range. The constrained nature of the beam means that the target will suffer less overall damage, but the ability to deal damage without closing with the enemy proved popular within the Sshel'ath military.

Although fitted to many Sshel'ath vessels during the Chouka War period it remained an uncommon weapon. The lack of widespread use can be owed to the size of the laser cutter, which the Sshel'ath traditionally classed as a heavy weapon.

Light Particle Beam

Class: Particle **Mode: Standard**

The Sshel'ath first demonstrated the light particle beam in 1940 after acquiring it from the Ukal Combine. The light particle beam, ubiquitous in the navies of younger

nations, would serve as the Sshel'ath's primary anti-fighter weapon until the invention of the more powerful gatling laser.

Antiquated Railgun

Class: Matter **Mode: Standard**

Sshel'ath advancements in electromagnetic theory gave way to the introduction of their first weapons-grade railgun in 1930. This early matter weapon, termed the antiquated railgun, is a direct antecedent of the modern railgun. The two weapons are nearly identical except for the antiquated railgun's lower damage potential.

The Sshel'ath embraced railgun technology as an advancement over existing missile weapons and the antiquated railgun was used on many ships during 1930 and 1945. Most Sshel'ath designs equipped with antiquated railguns used them as 'ship-crackers' for taking down enemy warships.

The antiquated railgun was quickly replaced by the modern railgun upon its development in 1944. Few ships remained after that time that used the older antiquated railgun. Some raiders continue to use this weapon, though the ammunition requirements make this very rare.

Light Railgun

Class: Matter **Mode: Standard**

The light railgun was developed at the same time as the railgun to serve as a lighter model for mounting on smaller ships. The Sshel'ath operated the light railgun as a multipurpose weapon mount on their warships. The light railgun could target ships as well as fighters, giving the ship a greater degree of flexibility in battle.

Railgun

Class: Matter **Mode: Standard**

The ubiquitous railgun found its way into the Sshel'ath navies in 1944. Those ships operated the older antiquated railgun were upgraded to take advantage of the improved damage and fire control of the full-fledged railgun. However, few new construction

The Sshel'ath Alliance

vessels would ever field the railgun. Research into other fields was offering up better weapon options, and the railgun was eventually phased entirely out of service. Some minor Sshel'ath navies continued to rely on railguns, but these powers were far and few between.

Light Gauss Cannon

Class: Matter **Mode: Standard**

The light gauss cannon was the result of an experimental project meant to upgrade existing Sshel'ath railgun weapons technologies using knowledge gained from the Ukal. The light gauss cannon delivers on its promise of being superior to existing light railgun weapons. The light gauss cannon possesses a faster rate of fire than the light railgun and is optimized for combating ships rather than enemy fighters.

Electromagnetic Torpedo

Class: Ballistic & Electromagnetic
Mode: Flash

The electromagnetic torpedo, more commonly referred to as the EM torpedo, was the Sshel'ath's response to the First Novon War and the gravitic shielding used on Novon starships. During that war, Sshel'ath forces found it difficult to break through the Novon shield's with their weapons, especially those shields found on the larger cruisers and battleships of more affluent trade lords.

The electromagnetic torpedo launches a small nuclear charge encased within a time delayed magnetic 'wrapper'. Seconds before impact this wrapper disengages and the charge explodes violently. The charges fired by the electromagnetic torpedo are optimized to create maximum electromagnetic interference upon detonation, generating a massive electromagnetic pulse that can short out enemy weapons or, perhaps more importantly, enemy shielding.

Electromagnetic Torpedoes began entering service shortly before the outbreak of the Second Novon War. The Second Novon War proved the utility of the EM torpedo,

allowing Sshel'ath ships so equipped to deactivate or destroy Novon shielding systems regularly in battle. Electromagnetic Torpedoes have no special rules or bonuses against EM or Gravitic Shields, but its flash mode damage increases the chances of scoring a hit against enemy shield systems.

Electron Polarizer

Class: Electromagnetic **Mode: Flash**

An important development into electromagnetic weaponry, the electron polarizer was a reaction to the decades of conflict with the Novon. In battles with the Novon it was proved time and time again that Novon gravitic shielding was an obstacle that the Sshel'ath found difficulty overcoming.

The electron polarizer fires a massive burst of highly charged particles at enemy vessels. These particles cause an explosive effect upon impact with target's hulls. The energy from this reaction can be impressive, often damaging other nearby units. Electronics systems are especially vulnerable to the effects of electron polarizers, causing system failures in those systems that are not destroyed in the initial blast.

Missile Racks

Class: Ballistic **Mode: Varies**

The Sshel'ath made widespread use of missile racks and missile technologies during the period pre-contact. After contact with the Ukal use of missile racks began to decline until they were ultimately superceded by the electromagnetic torpedo and other, similar long range weapons.

Missiles

The Sshel'ath never developed a wide range of missiles, relying for the most part on

Missile Availability

Type	Class	In Service
Light	D	1850
Basic	B	1940
Heavy	H	1960

more standard missile types. The Sshel'ath used Class-D Light Missile until shortly after contact with the Ukal when the Class-B Basic Missile was developed based on Ukal data. The only other missile type developed by the Sshel'ath was the Class-H Heavy Missile, which made its debut during the First Novon War in 1960.

Sshel'ath Military

The Sshel'ath do not field a single, unified space navy. Instead, each planetary power on Sshel'a that has space-based interests operates its own navy. These naval forces are used primarily to defend important installations or resource sites, such as any shipyards, space stations, or colonies controlled by the nation. The navies of most Sshel'ath nations are very weak and can barely be viewed as anything other than a token investment compared to that of the A'hel'is or Mst'as.

Although the Sshel'ath Alliance does not operate a navy per se, the fleet elements of the A'hel'is and Mst'as national forces more often than not coordinate their efforts and act as the Alliance's main power projection element. In most wars and border conflicts it has been this allied force that has taken part in the fighting. Most notably during the First and Second Novon Wars, the A'hel'is and Mst'as forces made up nearly 90% of the expeditionary forces operating in Novon space.

Coordination of the national fleets to act in accordance with Alliance resolutions is achieved through the Allied Defense Command, a special cooperative military organization attached to the Alliance council. Staffed by selected military leaders from each Alliance member country, the Allied Defense Command's duty is to ensure cooperation between allies during times of national crisis. During peacetime the Allied Defense Command sits mostly idle, relegated to making sure that system patrol duties are adequately met by Alliance members. When the Alliance goes to war, however, the Allied Defense Command is the hub of activity responsible for coordinating Alliance fleets and

making sure that national fleets can integrate and work together.

There have been some instances in the past where nations have withdrawn military support and removed their military representatives from the Allied Defense Command in protest of Alliance council resolutions. The largest defection came in the middle of the Second Novon War when the Yhabn'I Consortium and five supporting nations withdrew their support following a political furor in which the Yhabn'I claimed that A'hel'is and Mst'as field commanders were using their forces as sacrificial lambs, dispatching a disproportionate number of minor power ships on what they viewed as obvious suicide missions. The Yhabn'I and their supporters would sit out the remainder of the war, only rejoining the Allied Defense Command in 1970.

Sshel'ath Marines

Terror is the primary weapon employed by Sshel'ath marines, and it is this aspect that gives Sshel'ath marines an important edge in combat. Sshel'ath physiology allows them a great degree of flexibility in rearranging their physical structure, allowing them to fit through narrow openings or squeeze through places other aliens could not hope to reach. Whether it be silently scaling walls or moving down ductwork, Sshel'ath marines are deadly adversaries that are hard to combat if they manage to achieve access to an enemy vessel.

Sshel'ath marines gain a marine combat bonus of -1 if the attackers are Sshel'ath and +1 if the defenders are Sshel'ath on marine mission success rolls.

Starships

Alveka Scout

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

The Alveka Scout is the Sshel'ath's first production model jump-capable starship. Alveka Scouts were the first ships to explore the area of space surrounding Sshel'a and

The Sshel'ath Alliance

many brought back important information about surrounding systems, both inhabited and uninhabited.

The Alveka Scout is armed only for its own protection and, if forced to enter a combat zone, the Alveka is better off fleeing rather than fighting. The First Novon War demanded that some Alveka Scouts join the war effort to provide electronic intelligence support to Sshel'ath fleets. Unsuitable for such missions, Alveka Scout suffered high casualty rates as the Novon began systematically destroying any Alvekas at the beginning of engagements.

Production of new Alveka Scouts ceased after the end of the Second Novon War. Those that remained in service were assigned almost entirely to exploration missions.

Araunax Attack Frigate

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Araunax Attack Frigate is a sturdy medium ship developed by the Sshel'ath in the mid-1960's to replace older frigate designs. The Araunax was one of the fastest Sshel'ath ships of its day and proved effective at countering smaller Novon warships. Optimized for attacking enemy starships, the Araunax lacks anti-fighter defenses, requiring that other ships or fighters accompany it into battle for its own defense.

Danesti Battlecruiser

Base Hull (Restricted Deployment 10%)

The Danesti Battlecruiser was developed during a time of increasing Sshel'ath political and military power. Having acquired the Breth system, the Sshel'ath found need for a warship with more firepower than a Vipindra Heavy Cruiser but that maintained that ship's maneuverability. The design of the Danesti Battlecruiser reflects these design requirements. Faster than many other Sshel'ath cruiser designs, the Danesti has weapons to match. Sometimes referred to as a 'fast battleship', Danesti Battlecruisers

were never built in large numbers, restricting their deployment in the Sshel'ath fleet.

Named in recognition of Charles "Danesti" Haught.

Karaut Stealth Destroyer

Base Hull (Limited Deployment 33%)

Shortly after the Sshel'ath entered space, new research projects were started to experiment with the feasibility of stealth technologies. Although great strides were made in these projects, the Sshel'ath were never able to build a completely stealth warship hull.

The Karaut is one of the first warships to be built from the ground up to incorporate stealth construction techniques, including advanced emissions masking systems and composite hull material. The Karaut Destroyers were built in small numbers and used primarily for covert missions into Novon space. Though not hidden in actual combat, Karaut Destroyers could move unseen through enemy systems if they avoided enemy patrol groups. Such missions were invaluable to the Sshel'ath intelligence efforts and the design was considered a resounding success.

Despite the advantages of the Karaut Stealth Destroyer, the cost of the Karaut's stealth systems was high and required extensive maintenance to keep operational. The Sshel'ath were not able to maintain a large number of them because of these issues, although they would have loved nothing more than to field entire fleets of the stealth warship.

Kasolra Bombardment Cruiser

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

One of the few missile cruisers employed by the Sshel'ath Alliance, the Kasolra Bombardment Cruiser is designed specifically as a fleet support element. In a fleet environment, the amount of ballistic firepower a single Kasolra adds to the fray can be significant. A Kasolra Bombardment

Cruiser can fire enough missiles at an enemy to effectively neutralize enemy warships at range, weakening enemy fleet formations before the fleets enter optimal firing ranges. Deployment of Kasolra cruisers has been limited by the logistical strain of their ammunition dependent weaponry. However they have remained important fleet elements and are often seen in major fleet actions fighting alongside other Sshel'ath vessels.

Nasarra Attack Cruiser **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

A reaction to the First Novon War, the Nasarra Attack Ship is the first Sshel'ath warship to mount the Electromagnetic Torpedo — a weapon designed to counter Novon gravitic shielding technologies. The Nasarra is light for a capital ship but, when used in groups or as part of a larger fleet structure, it can be a deadly opponent.

Naslik Escort Carrier **Nirte Variant (Common)**

The need for a dedicated carrier didn't become a reality for the Sshel'ath until their forces began encountering the larger cruisers and battleships of the powerful Novon trade lords. Such ships could operate as many as 72 heavy fighters each, a number that overwhelmed the Sshel'ath's own carrier capacity.

Naslik Escort Carriers exchange the Nirte's missile racks for an expansion of the existing hangar capacities. New hangar modules were developed for mounting between the ship's outer wing structures allowing for an additional flight of fighters to be based out of each. External fighter rails were also added to the upper and lower portion of the ship's wings to allow for quick deployment of even more fighters. Internal hangar capacity was also expanded to allow the Naslik to carry the absolute maximum number of fighters the hull could allow.

Naslik Carriers saw extensive use before and after the Second Novon War and continue to be used into the modern period. Their ability to base 30 fighters was a major

advantage to Sshel'ath fleets and the support they offered was much appreciated by Sshel'ath commanders.

Nirte Command Cruiser **Nirte Variant (Rare)**

A limited number of Nirte Cruisers received extensive upgrades to increase their firepower and survivability in order to make them better suitable for the role of fleet command ships. These command cruisers traded their fighter capabilities for a heavier armament, including four bleeding edge laser cutters that are far more effective against shielded targets than the ship's existing weaponry.

Nirte Medium Cruiser **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

The Nirte Medium Cruiser represents the first cruiser to be constructed by the Sshel'ath Alliance. The Nirte's primary goal was to project power into nearby areas of space and provide a solid medium cruiser hull that could go toe-to-toe with the light cruisers of other races.

The Nirte Medium Cruiser served as the Sshel'ath's mainline warship during the First Novon War. It became evident after only a few battles against the Novon that the Nirte Medium Cruisers were no match for Novon warships and the Sshel'ath began slowly transitioning Nirte cruisers into a secondary role in the fleet. The ship remained an important part of the Sshel'ath order of battle, however, as they had been built in such large quantities that they could be used to pad fleet sizes and increase the number of hulls in a squadron.

Skavna Torpedo Frigate

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

A small fast attack platform, the Skavna Torpedo Frigate is armed with two electromagnetic torpedoes for use in harrying enemy units at range. Designed for wolf pack tactics, Skavna attack groups can effectively

cripple enemy warships at range before closing for the kill with their gatling lasers.

Skavna Torpedo Frigates typically found themselves being assigned to escort cruiser squadrons where they could both snipe at enemy targets at range while providing much needed close in anti-fighter support to the rest of the fleet.

Skonna Corvette

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Skonna Corvettes were used by the Sshel'ath to escort convoys through their territories. Lightly armed and cheaply built, Skonna Corvettes can take little damage before they are destroyed. Skonnas were built in large quantities during the late 1930's and are very common warships.

Skraltna Assault Cruiser

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Skraltna Assault Cruisers served as the Sshel'ath's primary assault ship during the first several decades after contact with alien races. Originally Skraltna Assault Cruisers were built to ferry troops between the homeworld and outer outposts in the home system. Skraltnas were later used as mercenary craft, transporting Sshel'ath troops to distant combat zones.

Skraltna Assault Cruisers saw their greatest service during the wars with the Novon. Although few Sshel'ath ground actions proved successful the Sshel'ath continued to try. Wave after wave of Skraltna cruisers would be sent against enemy positions in an attempt to deliver enough assault shuttles to achieve a beachhead on the enemy worlds.

After the disastrous end of the Second Novon War the Sshel'ath had little use for assault craft and most Skraltna Assault Cruisers were modified to serve other purposes. A number of Skraltnas were always kept available for Alliance use in the event of emergencies.

Solna Light Cruiser

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

During the construction ramp up leading up to the outbreak of the First Novon War, the major shipyards operated by leading Alliance members (particularly the A'hel'is and Mst'as) chose to focus their resources on the production of Nirte Medium Cruisers.

While these shipyards output Nirte Medium Cruisers, other shipyards instead chose to produce Solna Light Cruisers. The Solna Light Cruiser started its life as a competitor for the position of the Alliance's mainline cruiser. Looked over in favor of the Nirte, a Mst'as design, the Solna wouldn't have seen the light of day if not for the stolid determination of the design's contractors. The Solna design firm managed to sell plans for the vessel to several nations, including many less affluent countries that dreamed of fielding a sizeable navy. The Solna was a cheaper ship to construct than the Nirte, and this cost savings allowed nations with less construction capital to get more hulls for the same cost.

A majority of the Solna Light Cruisers produced by 1960 fought in the First Novon War, and most of those that participated in active fighting were destroyed. The Solna Light Cruiser was not a poor design by any measure, but they simply were not capable of rivaling the Novon's own cruisers.

After the war production on new Solna Light Cruisers slowed, but a trickle of new hulls continued to be produced. Few would ever serve in allied fleet actions again, most being used by minor countries to defend important strategic locations. Because of this, and the fact that the A'hel'is and Mst'as never fully embraced the Solna, the Solna Light Cruiser should be considered a Limited Availability (33%) hull if being flown as part of an A'heli's or Mst'as fleet.

Stoaka Destroyer

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

A'hel'is Only

The A'hel'is Stoaka Destroyer was the main space warship fielded by their navy during the A'hel'is/Mst'as War. Stoaka

Destroyers are armed with three missile racks, giving them the ability to launch massive missile strikes on their smaller Mst'as adversaries.

Sulkor Scout Destroyer

Karaut Variant (Uncommon)

When the need for combat scouts increased, the Sshel'ath had to find alternatives to the existing Alveka Scout. It was decided to build a new scout ship based on the basic Karaut space frame. The Sulkor Scout Destroyer shares the same basic design as the Karaut but lacks the special composite hull materials, buffered drive system, and emissions masking systems of the Karaut. In its place the Sulkor mounts an expanded weapons arsenal and a larger ELINT-capable sensor array. A jump engine was also added to the design to give it strategic movement capabilities.

The Sulkor Scout Destroyer found popularity during the Second Novon War where they proved their worth as long-range fleet support units. Construction of new Sulkors continued after the war but the number of new build hulls remained low, limiting their deployment within the fleet.

Takhira Laser Destroyer

Tasholn Variant (Rare)

The Takhira Laser Destroyer was an attempt to modernize the Tasholn hull and incorporate new laser technologies, namely the gatling laser. The Takhira is meant to operate as an attack ship rather than an escort and in this role it serves adequately.

Placing the firepower of a light cruiser on a destroyer hull did not come without its share of disadvantages. The extra power required by the ship's light laser cannons puts a heavy stress on the reactor and it is unable to provide the amount of power the ship requires to power all of its weapons simultaneously. Because of this, a Sshel'ath commander must be careful to anticipate his/

her enemy in order to determine which systems can be shut down to cover the Tasholn's power deficit.

Tasholn Destroyer

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Tasholn Destroyer is an incredibly effective destroyer design. This class is equipped with four particle weapon batteries of two guns each with wide arcs of fire making the Tasholn an excellent anti-fighter escort. Ships of this class were prized for the amount of raw firepower they could add to a fleet.

Toglaka Patrol Cutter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

A smaller Sshel'ath ship, the Toglaka Patrol Cutters were used to patrol the Sshel'ath home system during the early years after their emergence to the galactic scene. Toglakas utilize a mix of old and new technologies, using new Ukal particle beams in conjunction with tried and true Sshel'ath railgun technologies.

The Toglaka Patrol Cutter was meant as a showcase of Sshel'ath ingenuity and technological development, but the final design didn't live up to these expectations. Although the ship successfully integrated domestic and foreign technologies it was barely effective against pirates and raiders, let alone the likes of a foreign navy.

During the First and Second Novon Wars, Toglaka Patrol Cutters were often freed from their normal system patrol duties to join Sshel'ath fleets going into battle. The addition of Toglakas was ostensibly to provide extra anti-fighter support to Sshel'ath fleets to combat wave upon wave of Novon Hest'a Medium Fighters, but in truth the Sshel'ath simply needed additional targets to ensure the survival of the fleet.

Toglaka Patrol Cutters were moved into the Breth system in large numbers following its subjugation at the end of the Chouka War and used to keep the peace while searching for any hidden enclaves of Chouka resistance.

Trovalta Frigate

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)
Mst'as Only

A contemporary of the Stoaka Destroyer, the Mst'as' Trovalta Frigate is its equal in battle. The Trovalta Frigate is armed with a wide-array of weapons, including both ballistic and laser weaponry. The Trovalta's major advantage in battle is its speed and mobility, which allow the ship to outmaneuver the slower A'hel'is ships of the day.

Ushula Direct Assault Frigate

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Ushula Direct Assault Frigate is an odd ship within the context of the Sshel'ath fleet. The Ushula looks little like other Sshel'ath ships, resembling a turtle shell more than anything else. Where other Sshel'ath ships are built to fight back against their opponents, the Ushula is built with boarding actions in mind. Small and relatively mobile, the Ushula uses its two forward grappling claws to attach itself bodily to the enemy craft so that it can disgorge its crack troops. Silent and deadly, Sshel'ath marines are formidable opponents and very deadly. Due to the very nature of Sshel'ath physiology, Sshel'ath marines can easily crawl through cramped air ducts and other confined spaces. The element of terror that these troops instill on a ship's defenders is great, and this psychological edge is often times all the Sshel'ath need to bring them victory.

In order to make sure the Ushula will reach its target, the ship is heavily armored (for a Sshel'ath vessel) and built to resist enemy fire, especially from enemy fighters.

Vahskal Patrol Carrier

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Vahskal Patrol Carrier is a pre-contact system patrol carrier design used by the Sshel'ath Alliance to patrol space around Sshel'a and the asteroid colonies. The Vahskal can transport and deploy twelve

fighters via the vessel's bottom mounted fighter rails.

The Vahskal's outmoded technologies proved uneconomical to upgrade and the ships were slowly sold off to civilian or foreign interests. Vahskal carriers that have been converted into ore haulers or other bulk transport craft are common sights in Sshel'ath territories, and some less affluent Sshel'ath nations continue to operate such ships in their fleets.

Valransa System Monitor

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

The Valransa System Monitor is one of the largest warships ever constructed by the Sshel'ath. Valransa System Monitors serve as mobile bases, continuously patrolling the edges of Sshel'ath space. Due to their slow speed and lack of strategic mobility, Valransa System Monitors cannot safely travel through hyperspace without assistance from tugs or other such support craft.

In combat, Valransas function very much like a slightly mobile base. Their wide weapon arcs and thick structure blocks make up for their lethargic maneuverability and speed. Each Valransa also operates two squadrons of fighters, allowing it to suitably counter those fielded by enemy forces.

Vilindras Heavy Cruiser

Vipindra Variant (Uncommon Deployment)

A variant of the popular Vipindra Heavy Cruiser, the Vilindras Heavy Cruiser is equipped with laser cutters to extend the hull's normal engagement range. The extended range of the laser cutters provides the Vilindras with the standoff range necessary to provide firing support for other shorter ranged Sshel'ath fleet elements. Vilindras Heavy Cruisers have also been used to provide heavy escort support to other long-range fleet support elements, such as ELINT ships and bombardment cruisers.



Vipindra Heavy Cruiser Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Vipindra Heavy Cruiser is the first of a new generation of Sshel'ath warships conceived after the disastrous conclusion of the Second Novon War. The Vipindra Heavy Cruiser is a sizeable ship built by the Sshel'ath to serve as a new multi-role cruiser capable of taking on the heavy cruisers of other regional powers. Although slower than some enemy heavy cruisers, the Vipindra carried a solid weapons array that made up for this failing.

The Vipindra proved itself during the brief fleet actions at the end of the Chouka War when Sshel'ath forces invaded Breth. Later confrontations with Novon fleets proved that the design was sound. Production of the Vipindra remained high for several decades making the Vipindra one of the most common ships in the Sshel'ath fleet.

Bases & Defenses

Kaumlar Command Fortresses

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

When considering a total nuclear war scenario, there is always a desire to make sure that a nation can remain in control of their arsenal long enough to exact final revenge against their enemies. The Sshel'ath leaders realized this and were quick to install small

bases in orbit to control orbital weapons launch platforms in the case that ground-based control targets were destroyed in a first strike.

Considered large bases at the time of their construction, these command fortresses are little more than large OSAT's. Crewed by twenty to thirty Sshel'ath at any given time, Kaumlar Command Fortresses had the communications equipment to seamlessly assume control of nearby OSATs in order to continue delivering nuclear payloads to the planet's surface should ground based control centers be neutralized by the opposition.

After first contact with the Ukal the position of the Kaumlar Command Fortress in the Sshel'ath military was diminished. The possibility of an external threat to Sshel'a suddenly became much more real than any other terrestrial threat. Most Kaumlar were eventually sacked and replaced with newer OSATs and bases.

Ritesh Orbital Satellites

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Ritesh OSAT is a heavier model of pre-contact orbital satellites. Although not operated as widely as the smaller Vadikar Micro-Satellites, Ritesh OSAT's were still a very common sight in the skies above Sshel'a. The Ritesh's two missile racks allowed it to fire larger, longer-ranged missiles than those the Vadikar could fire.

Starting in 1918, Ritesh OSATs underwent an upgrade to Class-SO Missile Rack technology. Before this time the Ritesh used the older original missile rack, the Class-O. The improvement in effectiveness was substantial and allowed the Ritesh to continue to serve for decades to come as the primary Sshel'ath OSAT.

Ukav Orbital Satellites

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Ukav Orbital Satellites were developed by the Sshel'ath as an eventual replacement for the Ritesh satellites. Larger and more

heavily armed, Ukav OSATs are better equipped to handle modern threats. Ukav OSATs are built around a central laser cutter and are intended for taking out enemy cruisers through massed laser fire from OSAT clusters.

Usarra War Station

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Usarra War Station was the largest type of military defense base operated by the Sshel'ath during the Chouka War period. A large, formidable base, the Usarra is armed primarily with long range laser and missile weapons that allow it to engage enemies at extended distances, weakening them before they can enter firing range. As of 1974, two Usarra War Stations had been built in orbit of Sshel'a. Both of these bases served as important military command and logistics points providing support to Sshel'ath fleets.

Vadikar Micro-Satellite

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Even before the Sshel'ath made contact with alien races, the skies above Sshel'a were littered with thousands of defense satellites. Such satellites were originally built not to defend from threats from above but threats from below. Such nuclear launch platforms were used as an equalizer to keep opposing powers in check and act as a deterrent against possible attacks.

Following first contact and the formation of the Sshel'ath Alliance, satellites like the Vadikar Micro-Satellite became the Sshel'ath's first line of defense against alien threats. The intense cold war atmosphere that embroiled Sshel'a for so many decades had the serendipitous effect of leaving Sshel'a extremely well defended from foreign invaders. Though primitive, early satellites such as the Vadikar were more than capable of dealing fatal blows to enemy warships.

The Vadikar was the most common satellite used during the early period of Sshel'ath interstellar activity. Other smaller satellites did exist, but were much weaker in

comparison and less suited for use against space-based threats.

Sshel'ath Mines

The Sshel'ath were known to use mines, especially in their war against the Novon. Despite their use of mines, the Sshel'ath never felt the need to develop a large selection of mines. The Sshel'ath typically deployed mines ahead of allied fleets in an attempt to create valuable terrain they could later exploit should a campaign go badly. Desperate Sshel'ath commanders often would try to lead their pursuers back into these minefields in hopes that the waiting mines would wrack them.

Ilvhassa-A Proximity Mine: Cost 8, Damage 12, Signature 4.

Ilvhassa-B Proximity Mine: Cost 9, Damage 10, Signature 5.

Tarkahn Captor Mine: Cost 13, Range 5, Accuracy +4, Damage 16, Signature 3.

Ruslika Captor Mine: Cost 22, Range 4, Accuracy +6, Damage 20, Signature 2.

Srata DEW Mine: Cost 20, Range 6, Accuracy +6, Signature 4 (0), Armor 1, Structure 9. Fires a laser cutter. The Sshel'ath regularly operated Srata DEW mines during the First and Second Novon Wars. Srata mines typically were only able to fire once after activation before being destroyed by the Novon, but they did prove effective at mauling or disabling small Novon warships. However, the mines proved to be very expensive to produce. In campaigns, apply an economic cost modifier of +33% to the base cost of Srata mines.

Torrok DEW Mine: Cost 24, Range 5, Accuracy +4, Signature 3 (1), Armor 2, Structure 10. Fires a gatling laser. Developed as an advanced mine to deter enemy fighters and ships alike. Minefields of Torrok mines are often laid around important defense structures on the Novon border to protect against attack.

Fighters & Shuttles

Kavasa Breaching Pod

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Few Sshel'ath units can create as true a sense of terror as that generated by the sight of a Kavasa Breaching Pod on the field of battle. Painted black as night and adorned by six claw-like extensions, these breaching pods are a psychological as well as physical tool of terror.

The Kavasa Breaching Pod is one of the few armed breaching pods operated in known space. Armed with a single ultralight particle beam, these pods use the beam to protect them as they make their way towards their target.

The Kavasa Breaching Pod loses 1 point of thrust per four boxes of damage.

Skratar Light Bomber

Skrehga Variant (Uncommon)

Skratar Light Bombers were developed during the First Novon War to provide additional offensive firepower to combat the more advanced Novon ships. Skratar bombers were used extensively during that war but soon fell out of favor because of the heavy logistical burden that accompanied them.

Skrehga Light Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

An early Sshel'ath fighter, the Skrehga Light Fighter is a very effective interceptor platform. The Skrehga was built to function as a dedicated interceptor in part to make up for the relative lack of anti-fighter weaponry on most Sshel'ath ships. Because of this, the Skrehga is typically used to escort its carrier and engage enemy fighters that come into range.

Most Sshel'ath ships built after 1958 were designed to carry at least a flight of Skrehga fighters to help defend them from enemy fighters.

Svralla Assault Shuttle

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Svralla Assault Shuttle was the primary assault shuttle of the Sshel'ath Alliance. This unarmed assault shuttle is built for speed and durability instead of combat and relies on its powerful engines to keep it out of harm's way.



Chapter 6: Raiders and Pirates

Background

At some point in the history of almost every spacefaring alien race there have been those that have participated in piracy and other black market enterprises to sustain them. These individuals and the groups that they form are usually shunned by society and, in most cases, actively hunted by military forces in order to protect vulnerable civilian and military shipping from their attacks.

At the time of the Circasian emergence into space, piracy in known space was experiencing something of a renaissance. Numerous well-organized raider, pirate, and privateer bands had formed over the previous century, each positioning themselves to fill their own niche. Through successful raids or government support, these raiders had managed to expand their presence and become true military threats to races unable to counter their forces.

The opening of the Circasian and Th'sook frontier in the early 20th Century gave these raiders just the opportunity they were looking for. Although both the Circasians and Th'sook had small pre-contact navies that could be used to defend their territories, the technology demonstrated on these vessels was woefully inadequate to counter even the hand-me-down technology found on the raider craft of the day.

The raiders found these virgin territories ripe for the picking. Slowly but surely more and more raiders made their way into the area from as far off as the ak-Tai Republic and other Hegemonic member states in the outward sectors and Quadrant 4 in the coreward territories. All saw the new trade routes and space lanes in the region as areas that could easily be raided with little threat to their raiding fleets.

For a time this new frontier remained lawless, raiders and pirates feasting on unsuspecting convoys that traveled in the region while Circasian patrol ships tried futilely to counter the ever-increasing raider threat.

If not for the Circasian coordinated strike against the major raider organizations operating in their space the raiders would likely have come to control most of the region by virtue of their technological superiority. However, the raiders lust for power and money led them directly into the Circasian trap after which they were left in shambles. Following the attacks, the remaining raiders operating in and around Circasian space mostly fled, though many remained hoping to capitalize on Circasian overconfidence. What these raiders perceived as overconfidence on the part of the Circasians was really a growing professionalism and maturing acuity towards space warfare. The raiders that remained were consistently beaten and slowly disappeared or followed their brethren back to their original territories.

Most of the raiders that fled Circasian space found it hard to transition back into their old haunts, each power vacuum having been filled long before by other enterprising raiders. The end of the Circasian raider wars signaled the end of a golden age of piracy in known space. Raiders and their like would not enjoy another such resurgence until the years following the Escalation Wars.

Chouka Pirates

It did not take long after contact was made with aliens for several Chouka to take to the stars in search of adventure. Many of these treasure hunters and thrill seekers dabbled in black market goods as well as out-and-out piracy to maintain their ships and the way of life that they were quickly becoming accustomed to.

Unlike many foreign governments that frowned on pirate groups, the Chouka Theocracy sponsored many raider factions that operated in and around their borders. Offering these bands money, ships, and

materiel, the Chouka Theocracy hoped that funding piracy on their borders would distract neighboring races while providing a slow influx of stolen goods and technologies captured by the raiders.

As the Theocracy grew stronger its support of pirates and privateers waned, but the preceding fifty years of support had left many Chouka raiders in a position of strength. Many Chouka raiders sported large raiding fleets and were quite bold in their attacks. Of these Chouka bands, several operated covert raider bases along the outskirts of Chouka space. Using these hidden ports as a base of operations and stop off point, the Chouka pirates were able to build a profitable enterprise around smuggling and convoy raiding.

Chouka raiders saw the emerging Circasian Empire as an easy target for their raiding efforts and heavily raided Circasian space during the Circasian raider wars. Only independent pirates or the smaller raider bands were involved in the raiding of Circasian space. The larger, more organized raider bands were located on the opposite side of Chouka space along the Novon and Thaline borders and the distance prevented them from securing a piece of the action.

The Chouka raiders along the Circasian border were dissipated and many destroyed during the Circasian counteroffensive of 1955. The attack had the desired effect of dissuading other Chouka raiders from hitting Circasian trade routes lest they, too, be forced to confront the modern Circasian navy.

Following the raider wars and the drop-off of government funding, Chouka raiders were forced to fend for themselves. Smaller, independent operators were forced to move into other markets to keep their heads above water and only the largest cartels survived, and then only because of their close financial ties to the Theocracy.

The Chouka War put an end to organized Chouka raider organizations. As the Circasian fleet slowly swept through Chouka territories, they confronted Chouka

military craft and pirates alike in battle. The Chouka raiders were hired as mercenaries to take part in the defense of the Theocracy with promises of high commissions, but it did not take long for many of these privateers to realize that their only commission would be death. Those raiders that did not fight and die alongside their fellow Chouka were dispersed, moving into other neighboring territories in order to flee inevitable Circasian persecution or attack. Many of these raiders took refuge in Thaline space while others moved into Novon and Solassi territories.

Following the war very few Chouka raiders remained. Those that had been dispersed by the conflict were forced to integrate themselves into new territories, and most did not survive the transition. The Chouka Theocracy had been very forgiving of piracy in their territories, but other alien governments were much more strict, not to mention much better at conducting anti-raider actions.

Starships

Gambler Blockade Runner

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Gambler Blockade Runner is a small, atmospheric-capable ship used for breaking through enemy blockades to get cargo in or out of such blockades. Most Chouka blockade runners were used to ferry black market or otherwise illegal cargo in and out of the Theocracy. Gamblers rely on their speed and mobility to evade and outwit pursuers as they are lacking weapons and their hull is unable to survive more than a few shots.

Hand of God Raiding Cruiser

Base Hull (Restricted Deployment 10%)

The Hand of God Raiding Cruiser is the largest design operated by Chouka raiding parties. Converted from surplus Vengeance Heavy Cruiser hulls, the handfuls of Hand of God Raiding Cruisers in existence were operated by only the largest Chouka pirate groups. The

Delkeshore pirates in particular were known to operate two such ships at their peak.

Each cruiser is heavily armed, its trio of medium plasma cannons providing sufficient deterrent against lone military patrols. Tertiary guns are used to stave off attack from lighter units, such as enemy fighters and light combat vessels.

In practice, Hand of God Raiding Cruisers typically operated in the company of one or two other ships on raiding missions across foreign borders. The Hand of God would then ambush its intended target, stashing their captured cargo in an aft cargo bay before retreating back to the safety of Chouka space.

A rare variant of the Hand of God exists that exchanges the aft cargo bay for a jump engine. These jump-capable cruisers were the only jump-capable units ever purchased or converted by the Chouka pirates before they were dispersed by the Circasians after the war.

Heresy Wolf Raider

Revelation Variant (Uncommon)

This variant of the Revelation Freighter was a favorite of Chouka pirates.

Indistinguishable from a standard Revelation Freighter outside of a detailed short-range sensor scan, Heresy Wolf Raiders often joined up as members of unsuspecting convoys only to loot and raid them once underway.

Heresy Wolf Raiders rarely operated alone. Ships of the class usually acted as inside informants, gathering information on the convoy's routes and flight plan and then funneling it to the raiders. Mid-flight, the Heresy's brethren would set upon the convoy at which point the Heresy's true nature would be revealed.

Highwayman-A Sloop

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Highwayman Sloop is the most common Chouka raider craft. A rebuild of the old Believer Frigate, the Highwayman is the epitome of ingenuity. "Jury rigged" best describes the state of most Highwayman

Sloops, with raiders installing whatever weapon they could get their hands on in any way possible. These ships little resemble the original Believer Frigates and resemble them even less so as more modifications are made to each ship over its lifetime.

Although weakly armed compared to other ships, the Highwayman Sloop is effective in crippling enemy transports. Highwaymen are no match for enemy military craft and, if confronted, will be forced to flee.

Most Highwayman Sloops are equipped with a pair of external cargo pods specifically for storing captured cargoes. These long, cylindrical assemblies can be easily jettisoned in the instance that the ship is being pursued. While the pods are attached the Highwayman is not considered an agile vessel and pays a higher price for pivots and rolls as well as acceleration/deceleration.

It is possible to convert the Highwayman Sloop into a makeshift carrier by modifying the external cargo pods to hold fighters. A Highwayman can base two fighters in each of its external cargo pods. Note that this configuration makes it impossible for the Highwayman to carry cargo of any type in the cargo pods.

Highwayman-B Sloop

Highwayman Variant (Uncommon)

Though most Chouka ships utilize common plasma weapons as their primary armament, many raiders have been able to procure more exotic weapons during especially fruitful raids on enemy shipping. Raiders on the Thaline and Circasian fronts often modified Highwayman Sloops to use captured particle cannons and beams. Replacement parts for these weapons could be procured from disabled freighters, especially military logistics freighters.

Because of the lack of dedicated lines of supply to keep such particle maintained, the Highwayman-B Sloop remained an uncommon variant of the Highwayman.

Oathbreaker Raiding Barge

Revelation Variant (Common)

The Oathbreaker Raiding Barge was one of the standard raiding cruisers operated by Chouka pirates. Oathbreaker Raiding Barges typically acted as command and control craft for small raider attack groups, directing fighters and light combatants into battle in order to coordinate strikes on unsuspecting freighters. Oathbreakers were very popular units by virtue of their strong armament and fighter rails that allowed it to bring twelve fighters into combat.

The Oathbreaker is based on the Chouka Revelation Freighter design but the Oathbreaker cannot be mistaken for a Revelation due to the extensive external modifications necessary for the fighter rails. This means that it is not possible for an Oathbreaker to pass itself off as a Revelation Freighter in order to avoid capture or to set up an ambush.

Revelation Freighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

Most Chouka raiders operated stock Revelation Freighters for moving their cargo (usually contraband) between their hidden bases and friendly ports where they would sell the merchandise. Revelation Freighters were also used as plants, joining up with outgoing convoys in order to relay intelligence data to nearby raider command and control craft.

The raider Revelation is of the same type as that operated by the Chouka Theocracy. Use that ship control sheet for this ship.

Thief Grappling Cruiser

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

A rare design, the Thief Grappling Cruiser is a converted Thaline freighter designed specifically for grappling onto freighters in order to board them and seize their cargo. A Thief Grappling Cruiser's four grappling claws allow it to deploy a large

number of mercenary troops to the target, easily overwhelming the freighter's own crew.

The Thief Grappling Cruiser is only lightly armed, relying on its speed to keep it safe from enemy escorts or police craft. Very few Chouka raiders could afford the price of purchasing and converting a Thief Grappling Cruiser and as a result the ship remained uncommon in their service.

Wrath Warship

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Wrath Warship, based on the Devotion Free Trader, is one of the more potent warships operated by Chouka raider bands. These fearsome ships are armed with two forward medium plasma cannons that allow it to deliver massive blows to the enemy. The Devotion's cargo carrying capacity is exchanged for an enlarged reactor and engine, allowing it to power its new weapons and achieve greater speeds than the original civilian craft.

Wrath Warships are typically used as heavy escorts in case of attack by neighboring patrol ships, or for softening up heavily armored units, such as military transports. In these cases the heavy firepower of the Wrath can easily disable the target in a single volley.

Fighters & Shuttles

Wraithblade Heavy Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

Chouka raiders used many different types of fighters, but in most cases they tended to use the older Wraithblade class of heavy fighter. The Wraithblade, despite its age, is still a capable fighter. Armed with two plasma blasters, the fighter is capable of stripping freighters of weapons and thrusters, allowing for the ship (and its cargo) to be captured.

The ship control sheet for the Raider Wraithblade Heavy Fighter is the same as that of the Chouka's own Wraithblades.

Other Fighters

The Chouka pirates relied heavily on light fighters of foreign manufacture and favored the Reclum-D Light Fighter, using it as their standard light fighter design.

The Unsheathed Claw

This independent raiding organization is different from other such organizations. Rather than being a wandering band of pirates and renegades, the Unsheathed Claw is a group of Ghotekhen refugees that fled the Ghotekhen territories following the end of the Great War against the E'chekri. The Unsheathed Claw was founded by several surviving military ship commanders following the end of that war. Having survived in exile fighting a guerilla war for nearly five years, these Ghotekhen officers could not bear to return to their devastated homeworld. The world that they had fought so long for was no longer the world they remembered and they felt it was time to move on. The Claw's founders returned to Ghotekh just long enough to resupply their ships and retrieve their family members before heading into the unknown territories of the dead zone.

This refugee fleet eventually ended up in the burned out husks of former Kholran and X'chukta space and opted to settle among the ruins of the fallen Kholran Stacis colony. There they built new homes and began building a new society. Relations were maintained with their homeworld, although contact was infrequent at best and most Ghotekhen had little idea where the refugee colony was really located.

This group of Ghotekhen took the name "Unsheathed Claw", a reference to the clan's originators. In Ghotekhen tradition, the warriors of a power that has been devastated in an unjust war are known as Unsheathed Claws because it is said that their claws remain forever at the ready to exact vengeance against those that wronged them in the past, even long after the conflict is over. The soldiers that founded the refugee colony

were considered Unsheathed Claws, and they accepted the moniker with honor.

The Unsheathed Claw continued to expand their holdings on the Stacis colony, which they called Ghea'khathen ("World of Hope"), over the course of the following hundred years. The population of Ghea'khathen swelled from only a few thousand in 1840 to nearly 15,000 by 1930. Enough infrastructure was developed to allow the Unsheathed Claw to lead a subsistence existence on the world. This, however, was not enough to maintain the Unsheathed Claw's fleets, let alone provide for their people's long-term infrastructure expansion and retention needs.

In response to this realization, the Unsheathed Claw began refitting their fleet for piracy. Their fleet was comprised mainly of old warships that the founders of the Claw had brought with them to Ghea'khathen a century early. These ships were in a state of disrepair and only still operational by virtue of simple Ghotekhen ingenuity. All of their vessels had long ago ceased to look like their original hulls, and many new variations and unique designs were born from the necessity of scavenging one hull to repair and maintain another.

With their fleet refitted, the Unsheathed Claw began seeking out nearby trade routes and preying on non-Ghotekhen shipping. The Unsheathed Claw never attacked any ship of Ghotekhen registry, placing a greater price on loyalty to their own people than to profit. Non-Ghotekhen ships moving through the burned out worlds of the dead zone had to stay alert lest an Unsheathed Claw raiding cruiser appear on the edge of their scanner range. The Unsheathed Claw were humane as far as raiders go, though they had a particular zeal often demonstrated in combat. It was not uncommon for the Unsheathed Claw to board enemy ships and steal what they could take with them before retreating back to their ships. Sometimes this even included hostages and prisoners to work as slave labor in the factories and mines of Ghea'khathen. They did not do this often, and usually only did so if the Claw commandos felt that the crew was particularly distasteful.

The Unsheathed Claw eventually came to operate as a privateer force aligned with the Ghotekhen government, receiving funding and supplies from the Ghotekhen to patrol the far edge of the frontier. The reasons for the Ghotekhen funding of the Claw are many, and rumors and speculations abound as to the true reason behind it. Most historians believe that the Ghotekhen government wished to keep an armed force on the frontiers to keep watch for any possible E'chekri presence on the far side of the dead zone.

The Unsheathed Claw began raiding Circasian space as soon as a route to their territories became widely known in the late 1930's. The Claw found the Circasians to be technologically inferior compared to even their aging technologies and considered them to be an easy mark. Likewise the Th'sook seemed equally ill equipped to combat Claw raids into their space. Such attacks continued slowly but steadily, each raid more daring than the last. The acts of piracy that had originally started as a way to maintain their people had grown into a tool of fear that the Claw's leaders hoped would propel Ghea'khathen into a position of power in the region. There were many who believed that it could one day be possible to turn Ghea'khathen into a southern capital world of the Ghotekhen Empire, perhaps even one day eclipsing Ghotekh itself.

The forces of the Unsheathed Claw were largely destroyed by the Circasian surprise attack in 1955. The Circasian fleet assembled to combat the Claw threat proved formidable and, despite having a similar number of hulls, the quality of Claw warships was lacking. With their fleet in shambles and no longer able to perform raids upon enemy powers, the Unsheathed Claw pulled its forces back to defend Ghea'khathen from any further attacks.

The Unsheathed Claw eventually recovered from the defeat, but by the time they had again assembled a fleet of any consequence their moment of opportunity had already passed. The Circasian's raider wars had propelled them into the position of a minor military power, and the Th'sook had also developed a space fleet capable of providing

policing action within their own territories. Relations with the homeworld had also become strained in the interim, continued connections with the Unsheathed Claw having caused political problems for the Ghotekhen government in the Hegemony. It became apparent to the Claw by the summer of 1968 that they would have to forge an alliance with some power in order to maintain their way of life.

The Unsheathed Claw eventually chose to align themselves with the Th'sook Dominion, accepting protectorate status in exchange for military protection and much needed supplies. The Unsheathed Claw fleet remained in service as a local defense force protecting Ghea'khathen from any possible attack. Ghea'khathen flourished with the influx of goods and traders and became a major regional trade hub, bringing wealth to both the Unsheathed Claw as well as the Th'sook.

The Unsheathed Claw protested against Th'sook involvement in the ak-Tai War. Although the Claw threatened to break their many protection treaties with the Th'sook they never did, though they refused to take part in the conflict. They were enraged by the Circasian assault on the motherlands, but did not have the resources to take part in the conflict.

Starships

Dushar Hyperspace Probe

Base Hull (Restricted Deployment 10%)

The tenuous hyperspace routes leading out of Ghotekhen space and into the E'chekri dead zone required the Unsheathed Claw to coopt several small scout craft for exploring ahead of the main fleet. These small hyperspace probes escorted the Claw fleet through hyperspace, guiding it along the beacon paths leading to their eventually home in the Stacis system.

After the migration was complete, the remaining Dushar Hyperspace Probes were assigned to escort convoys traveling back and

forth between Claw and Ghotekhen territories. Without the support of their Dushar Hyperspace Probes the Unsheathed Claw would have been forever separated from their brethren at Ghotekh. Such a situation would have left the Claw without a source of supplies or support and would have been the doom of their fledgling colony.

Felrauk Warship

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Unsheathed Claw operated several Felrauk Warships, mainly because of their relative inexpensiveness as well as their atmospheric capability. The ability to land ships for repairs was very important for the Claw as most of their manufacturing and shipyards were located planetside on Ghea'khathen.

The Felrauk Warships are armed with off-the-shelf plasma weapons that could be easily purchased from the Claw's contacts in the Ghotekhen Empire. Felrauks proved to be inadequate warships on their own, but when operated in groups they were able to overwhelm larger cruisers.

Feltann Heavy Destroyer

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

The Feltann Heavy Destroyer is a class unique to the Unsheathed Claw created by bolting together two Felrauk Warship hulls. This concept was born from the Claw's need for a strong line of defense around Ghea'khathen and their lack of suitable warship hulls. The effort required extensive prototyping by Claw scientists before a suitable process for combining the hulls could be found, but the resultant design was everything that the Claw could have hoped for.

After their development, a small number of Feltann Heavy Destroyers were constructed to provide Ghea'khathen with an elite destroyer force. These destroyers have the structural strength of two ships and the firepower to counter the light cruisers of other neighboring races.

Only limited numbers of Feltann Heavy Destroyers were converted by the Unsheathed Claw because of the scarcity of hulls at their disposal. Those Felrauk Warships selected for conversion were usually those that had sustained massive damage in combat or had been experiencing system difficulties that would necessitate widespread system overhauls. The Feltanns that saw combat, however, proved the effectiveness of the class.

Gabrak Long Range Transport

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

Gabrak Long Range Transports are converted troop transports designed for long distance cargo transport. It was onboard Gabrak Long Range Transports that the first colonists made their way to the Stacis system to found the Ghea'khathen colony. After founding the colony, the Claw assigned their fleet of Gabrak Transports on a trade route between Ghea'khathen and Ghotekh. This pipeline insured that the colony was kept resupplied and helped maintain contact with the motherworld.

Later, after the Unsheathed Claw began raiding merchant vessels, the Gabrak Long Range Transports were used to transport captured goods that were of no use to the Claw back to Ghotekh for sale in local markets. This trade gave the Claw a constant influx of funds for use in maintaining their colony and raider operations.

Journan Corvette

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

This conversion of an old Ghotekhen police corvette is a common warship operated by the Claw. The Journan Corvette is heavily armed for a ship of its size, though this firepower is exceptionally short ranged. Journan Corvettes were used predominantly for system patrols within the Stacis system, though many Journan Corvettes were pulled from this duty to participate in raiding actions on nearby space lanes.

When operating as part of a larger fleet, Journans would provide antfighter support to other fleet elements, using its plasma cutters to shoot fighters down before they could strike at the vitally important cruisers and carriers.

Kiltrac Raiding Cruiser Vatraliak Variant (Common)

When the need for raiding vessels arose the Unsheathed Claw turned to their Vatraliak Defense Cruisers as the answer. The Claw proceeded to convert nearly their entire fleet of Vatraliaks into Kiltrac Raiding Cruisers.

This shift in focus came with a heavy price tag. One of the most important changes to the Vatraliak hulls was the addition of a jump engine to allow the Unsheathed Claw unprecedented strategic mobility. The cost of the Quantum 40 and technicians necessary to build and install these jump engines was sizable. The Claw was forced to take out loans and secure under-the-table financing from contacts in the Ghotekhen Empire in order to realize the conversion of their Vatraliak fleet to the new design.

The Kiltrac Raiding Cruiser soon became one of the most effective raider craft in the sector. The Kiltrac Raiding Cruisers usually operated in tandem with other small Claw ships, but some of these cruisers also found themselves operating solo on extended sorties deep into Circasian or Th'sook space.

Komdustur Command Carrier

Unique Ship (2 Exist)

The Unsheathed Claw operated two heavy cruisers at the time that their founders sought out in search of a new home. These heavy cruisers operated for more than two decades after the founding of the Ghea'khathen colony but, eventually, they began to suffer system problems related to a lack of supply and routine maintenance.

Because of these supply issues, the leaders of the Claw decided to perform

massive modifications to the cruisers and turn them into command vessels for their small war fleet. Heavy weapons and other hard-to-maintain systems (including the vessels' large jump engines) were stripped from the hull and replaced with cheaper, more reliable equivalents that could be fabricated—albeit slowly—by local industry.

The Claw used the extra space freed on the cruiser hulls for installing extra hangar facilities, allowing each command carrier to operate thirty heavy fighters. The Claw leaders hoped that a large command carrier hull would be able to project power near Ghea'khathen in such a way as to discourage attack.

The Komdustur Command Carriers rarely left orbit of Ghea'khathen, being used in a purely defensive role. The Unsheathed Claw guarded their command carriers fiercely, sacrificing other ships and fighters in their defense. Both Komdusturs survived the end of the Circasian raider wars and remained in Claw service for several more decades before finally being dismantled.

Murston Assault Frigate

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Murston Assault Frigate is a transport designed to deliver small groups of specially trained special operations troops to planetary sites, usually for the purpose of retrieving important goods or information. The Murston is heavily armored for a Ghotekhen vessel, but the extra mass makes the ship slower and less maneuverable.

The Unsheathed Claw commonly used Murston Assault Frigates to raid small colonies and settlements on their borders. Claw troops often met armed resistance from settlers after the first few raids, but Claw reprisals upon colonists eventually cowed the population, allowing them to take what they wanted from these unprotected settlements.

Murston Assault Frigates were eventually abandoned as raiding and terror weapons after the Th'sook and Circasians developed a significant garrison force at their

colony worlds. The Murston transports were simply too slow to outrun any planetary defenders, and many raids ended in disaster when assault transports could not escape before enemy ships arrived on the scene.

Ships of this class later became used as military training ships and remained in service as such until 1986 when the last Murston broke down and was scrapped.

Tolaniask Patrol Carrier

Gabak Variant (Rare)

Tolaniask Patrol Carriers were deployed by the Claw following the decision to begin raiding surrounding territories. With many of their cruisers away on raiding missions the Claw needed to maintain a fierce defense at Stacis to repel any opportunistic attacks by other powers or raiders.

These carriers can operate twenty-four Delrain Attack Fighters on long range patrol missions of the system. Often operating alone, Tolaniask Patrol Carriers routinely patrolled the Stacis system in search of potential intruders.

Vatraliak Defense Cruiser

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

Of the larger cruisers the Unsheathed Claw has in its possession, most are of the Vatraliak class. Vatraliak Defense Cruisers are heavily modified versions of the Ghotekhen Ghairada Attack Cruiser. Over the years, the Claw has upgraded the hulls to meet their needs in defending Ghea'khathen from attack. Early upgrades saw the addition of port and starboard missile pods, as well as the addition of additional structural reinforcements.

Vatraliak Defense Cruisers were used for defending Ghea'khathen from attack and seldom left the colony's orbit. The cruisers were simply too valuable to risk losing them, as there was no way for the Claw to secure replacement hulls. This outlook eventually changed when the Unsheathed Claw retooled their fleet for raider operations, but it was still

very rare to see a true Vatraliak Defense Cruiser prowling the space lanes.

Bases & Defenses

Drakheara Base

Base Hull (Unique Base)

Two decades after the Unsheathed Claw's main colony in Stacis was founded their leaders began an ambitious project to fabricate a starbase with which to defend the colony from potential attack. In the past, the Unsheathed Claw had relied entirely on its fleet to defend the colony. The lack of an orbital base detrimentally affected the readiness and supply of the fleet, however, and the slow process of launching payloads into orbit was cost prohibitive for long-term maintenance of the fleet.

Drakheara Base took many years to build and has a varied background. The only Unsheathed Claw unit to sport heavy plasma cannons, those weapons were obtained through a wealthy patron from Ghotekh in return for an exclusive maintenance contract. The base's weapons pylons were manufactured on Solassi and imported, and other sections were fabricated elsewhere in the Hegemony and imported for final construction. For the most part, though, Drakheara Base was constructed using local materials, industry, and manpower. It stands as the crowning achievement of what the Unsheathed Claw were able to build out of nothingness, a testimony to their ingenuity and belief in their new world.

Fighters & Shuttles

Delrain Attack Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Delrain Attack Fighter is a fighter unique to the Unsheathed Claw. Produced at factories on Ghea'khathen, the Delrain Attack Fighter was developed by the Unsheathed Claw to provide them with a superior space superiority fighter to protect their colony from attack. Dual environment fighters, several

squadrons of Delrain Attack Fighters were always stationed on Ghea'khathen to counter any possible attack.

The development of the Delrain Attack Fighter was a closely held secret within the Unsheathed Claw. Very few knew about it, and very few outsiders believed that the Unsheathed Claw maintained enough research and development infrastructure to develop a new class of fighter.

The presence of Delrain Attack Fighters in Claw raiding forces made them an especially potent force. The Delrain outperformed most fighters operated by neighboring militaries, and civilian escort fighters were unprepared for combating such an excellent fighter.

The Unsheathed Claw has remained protective of the Delrain Attack Fighter and its design, allowing few other organizations to purchase fighters of this class. The Th'sook have managed to procure several examples of the Delrain with the intent to develop a hybrid Th'sook/Claw strike fighter.

Ventisahr Breaching Pod

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Ventisahr Breaching Pod is the primary breaching pod used by the Unsheathed Claw. The pod's design is a slightly modified version of an older Ghotekhen breaching pod dating from the time of the Great War. The Ventisahr is unarmed and slow, but compensates for this with an extra strong hull and heavier armor.

Ventisahr Breaching Pods were heavily used during the Claw's raiding career, attaching themselves to disabled freighters to secure the ships prior to transferring the vessel's cargo. The engines on a Ventisahr are improved over that of other breaching pods and can sustain heavy damage before being disabled. A Ventisahr Breaching Pod will lose 1 point of thrust per 5 boxes of damage.

Zeron Heavy Fighter Base Hull (Special Deployment)

The Zeron is an old Ghotekhen heavy fighter design dating from the Great War. The Unsheathed Claw used Zeron Heavy Fighters almost exclusively after the exodus to Stacis, not changing over to other fighters until the development of the Delrain Attack Fighter. The Zeron was still a competent and effective fighter, but most of the Claw's remaining Zerons suffered from debilitating maintenance-related failure.

Zeron Heavy Fighters operated by the Claw after 1840 are subject to the following penalties: -1 free thrust, -1 offensive bonus, 1d3 points of pre-existing damage. Additionally, the gradual depletion of replacement parts caused the Unsheathed Claw to begin scuttling Zeron Heavy Fighters, cannibalizing one fighter to fix another. In scenarios set in or before 1890, Zerons are considered Unlimited Availability fighters. In battles after 1890, only one flight of Zeron Heavy Fighters may be taken per two squadrons of fighters.

The Circasian attack on the Unsheathed Claw in 1955 signaled the death knell of the Zeron Heavy Fighter in Claw service. No Zeron fighters can be used in scenarios set after this historic attack as all remaining Zeron fighters of consequence were destroyed in that battle.

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 in the Imperial Court among the women of the 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 Brahaen 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 Quantum 40 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 Quantum 40. The raid on the Thaline convoy was a success and the Blood Swords got away 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 Quantum 40. More than a few buyers were willing to look the other way to purchase some Quantum 40 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 Quantum 40 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 Quantum 40 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 *Lady of Dark Souls*-type cruiser to lure the local Circasian patrol fleet into a trap. Brahaen knew from the 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 second *Lady of Dark Souls* 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 Quantum 40 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 are crewed primarily by Kástan nationals and as such benefit from the Kástan racial Expert Helmsman trait. All Blood Sword ships are equipped with an Expert Helmsman for no extra cost, the value of the Elite Officer being factored into the ship's base cost. The Expert Helmsman is not considered optional and is allowed even in situations and scenarios where the Elite Officers optional rules are not in play.

In addition to their Expert Helmsman, 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 in addition to their Expert Helmsman.

Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) Elite Officer in the Blood Sword arsenal was Brahaen Ghaira himself. Ghaira is represented in battle as a Lucky Captain

and gains all of the advantages and abilities therein. As with the previous note pertaining to Expert Helmsmen, a Lucky Captain special officer should be granted to the Blood Sword player in any battle in which Brahaen Ghaira is present.

Starships

Dark Soul Battlecruiser

Base Hull (Restricted Deployment 10%)

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, forgoing extensive cargo facilities in favor of more weapons and, perhaps more importantly, a jump engine. These warships are more than capable of taking on military patrol cruisers on an equal footing—and winning.

Only two Dark Soul Battlecruisers were ever fielded by the Blood Swords and, except on a few rare occasions, they did not operate together.

Firebrand Frigate

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

Based on the aging Kástan Steelsabre Frigate, Firebrand Frigates found widespread use in the fleets of noble families serving as escorts, couriers, and warships in their service. Many also found themselves used in foreign territories as mercenaries or raiders, and it is in this capacity that they became best known. Brahaen Ghaira's first ship, the *Raining Thunder*, was of the Firebrand class and was the first ship used by the Blood Swords early in their raiding career.

Firebrand Frigates are sturdy craft and heavily armed for their size. The class is well regarded for their ability to stand up to enemy cruisers and accept more punishment than would be reasonable for a frigate of their size.

Lady of Dark Souls Command Cruiser

Dark Soul Variant (Unique)

This unique variant of the Dark Soul Battlecruiser represents Ghaira's command ship, including the cost and abilities of its Elite Officers and Crew. The *Lady of Dark Souls* was Lord Brahaen Ghaira's command ship and the dearest to his heart. As such it was always armed with the best weapons and systems money could buy and staffed by the finest crews available. The bane of the starways, the *Lady of Dark Souls* instantly struck fear into the hearts of any convoy or lone transport that had the ill luck of encountering it.

The *Lady's* distinguishing mark was an illustration of a Kástan woman draped in white cloth immersed in a sickly whitish-green glow painted on the ship's nose. The rest of the ship was painted a dark crimson, making the *Lady of Dark Souls* appear nearly black in color.

Raining Thunder Frigate

Firebrand Variant (Unique)

The *Raining Thunder* had a slightly different configuration than that of a standard Firebrand Frigate. Because of Ghaira's financial resources and connections he was able to outfit the *Raining Thunder* with better weapons as well as several other amenities not seen on other ships of the class.

Razor Brigand

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

Razor Brigands were the cheapest and most plentiful craft operated by the Blood Swords. These small warships were used for escorting larger raider ships or harrying enemy military patrols long enough for the fleet to retreat with its loot. Razor Brigands cannot take much damage in due to their paper-thin armor, a fact not lost on the Blood Swords. However, the low crew requirements of

Razors coupled with their low cost made them perfect attrition units.

Scythe Raider

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The standard Blood Sword raider ship, the Scythe Raider is a conversion of an old Kástan freighter used in the previous century. Most Scythe Raiders are little changed from these old barges with the one major modification being the addition of additional weapons to the hulls. Scythe Raiders also convert one of the freighter's cargo bays into a cramped six-fighter hangar adding invaluable fighter support to Blood Sword raiding parties.

Fighters & Shuttles

Chariot Boarding Sled

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The Blood Swords regularly used breaching pods in their raiding operations, mostly for performing hideous mass extermination missions on the enemy crews. Chariot Boarding Sleds are poor breaching pods cobbled together from cast off shuttles and other components. They are, however, adequate for delivering marines to slow-moving or disabled freighters that cannot escape their pursuit.

Trident Light Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

Trident Light Fighters were the principle fighter craft employed by the Blood Swords. Tridents had been abandoned by the Kástan military in light of newer fighters such as the Katanna and the number of Tridents one could procure was limited only by available liquid assets.

The Blood Swords used Trident Light Fighters much as any other raider group uses their fighters, relying on the craft as attrition units that could be easily replaced if lost and that could easily disable civilian craft.

In practice the Trident fighters proved to be a match for early Circasian fighters but

were woefully underarmed when compared to the military fighters of the Chouka or Thaline.

Other Raiders

In addition to the major raider bands, numerous minor independent raiders and privateers operated near Circasian space. These freelancers did not have the financial or political resources of the larger raider organizations and were forced to eek out a living in small pockets of territory not prowled by other, more powerful raiders.

Starships

Drifter Galleon

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

Of the ships modified for raider actions, the Drifter Galleon is one of the more universal. The Drifters began life as old cargo freighters but have since been retrofitted to serve as raiding carriers. The galleon's internal cargo bay was all but gutted to make room for an expanded hangar deck capable of basing 18 light fighters, typically of the Reclum-type.

Drifter Galleons provided raiders with a well-rounded ship for use in raiding civilian freighters. Not only could the Drifter deploy a large number of fighters but also its cargo facilities allowed it to quickly onload stolen bounty before security patrols arrived on the scene.

Minnow Gunboat

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

The origin of this small raider craft is unknown. Ships of this class first began harassing the space lanes in the late 19th Century. Often times Minnow Gunboats appear to have been born from a piecemeal construction and some have made visible use of castoff scrap from alien shipwrecks.

As a combatant Minnow Gunboats are lacking. These gunboats are small and poorly armed and will flee in the face of any real military threat.

Tokandra Frigate

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

Tokandra Frigates were commonly fielded by Sshel'ath pirates during the raider wars. These raiding frigates trade their existing railgun weapons for medium plasma cannons procured from Chouka pirate contacts. In practice the Tokandra's heavy hitting plasma cannons proved to be poor weapons for disabling freighters, but they were invaluable in taking down convoy escorts.

Fighters & Shuttles

Reclum Light Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Availability)

These cheap, ubiquitous fighters are the primary fighters operated by raiders in this area of known space. Produced by numerous independent construction firms and sold on the black market, the Reclum series of light fighters are the best that most raiders can afford.

Unlike other fighters the Reclum comes in many different varieties depending on the production source. Four major production sources exist in known space and each relies on locally produced weapons and materials in the construction of Reclum fighters.

The **Reclum-A**, the first model widely available on the open market, was designed and built by the Solassi. These fighters were lightly constructed but benefitted from a better than average drive system. Reclum-A's are fast and effective raider fighters.

The **Reclum-B** model of fighters comes from Ghotekhen space, Octirna in particular, and as such represents a more Ghotekhen design mindset. The Reclum-B features a scaled back engine, reducing free thrust; this change is in some ways a blessing as the replacement drive is much more reliable and less maintenance intensive than the Solassi drives installed on the Reclum-A. The space freed by use of the small engine is used to mount two larger plasma guns onto

the fighter chassis, increasing fighter firepower. In addition, the armoring of the existing drive is improved to increase fighter survivability.

The **Reclum-C** fighter model is a Thaline variant of the Reclum modified for civilian use. Although many civilian interests were known to use Reclum-C's a large number of these fighters wound up in raider hands. The Reclum-C exchanges some performance related features for improved fighter armor and a more advanced electronics package.

The **Reclum-D** was the last Reclum model to be produced. Designed by the Neliste, the Reclum-D is optimized for those races that require alternate atmosphere or environmental conditions. The Neliste need for an aquatic environment for their pilots necessitated the development. The increased versatility of the cockpit made it slightly more attractive to other races such as the Chouka or Thaline, though only slightly so. The enhancements to the pilot canopy made by Neliste engineers actually increased the safety of the pilot inside and increased the chances of successful ejection from the fighter. Combat-wise, the Reclum-D was stripped down and rearmed with a single gun, the leftover space replaced by two missile hardpoints. Other minor improvements were also made, but they had little effect on the design. Because the changes on the Reclum-D proved to be so minor it is rarely seen outside of Neliste or Chouka service.

Chapter 7: Civilians

Background

The area of space including the Circasian and Chouka empires was still young when the Chouka War broke out and strong economic ties had not yet been forged with the neighboring sectors. Trade slowly flowed into Sshel'ath and Chouka space from the Novon Trade Lords and the Solassi Corridor that led to the major colony at Ula. Thaline space offered access to other lucrative markets coreward, but this commercial traffic had yet to substantially spill over into the developing empires.

Nonetheless trade was very much alive in the region. A constant flow of merchants came and went with over a dozen worlds and colonies represented among their numbers. Thaline, Chouka, and Circasian commercial interests accounted for the bulk of trade, but the ak-Tai, Ghotekhen, and Solassi had also started to enter the market via the Solassi Corridor.

Civilian traffic in Circasian and Chouka space receded temporarily during the period known by the Circasian as the raider wars as more and more pirates began operating along the new trade lanes. This elevated raider activity stymied economic growth and stalled economic expansion into the region for some time. After the resolution of the raider wars civilian traffic once again began to increase.

The Chouka War caused another recession of civilian commercial traffic heading into the area. Soon after the Circasian conquest of Chouka, these civilian vessels returned to their normal trade routes. The Circasians encouraged civilian activities in the former Chouka territories whereas the Chouka had done their best to exert greater control over the flow of trade through their space. Under Circasian control the Chouka territories flourished with the influx of people, corporate interests, and independent merchants reinvigorating the local economy.

Starships

Benakar Commercial Transport

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Benakar is a stock commercial freighter that has been operated by the Solassi for nearly one hundred years. Boxier and more utilitarian than most Solassi ships, the Benakar Commercial Transport is all business and no beauty. Many pilots refer to Benakars as “flying wedges,” a term which is a fairly accurate description.

Carkoreth Escort Cruiser

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

Few civilian agencies have ever constructed dedicated warships for escorting their fleets. In most cases alien governments expressly prohibit such actions in order to preserve the supremacy of their own navies. However, some governments have been known to allow the construction of just such craft by groups within their empire.

The Ghotekhen built Carkoreth Escort Cruiser was developed as a mercenary cruiser whose sole purpose is to provide escort to important convoys or commercial ships. Carkoreth Escort Cruisers are well equipped to handle the typical raider threat. One Carkoreth is not enough to take on an entire raider strike fleet, but that is not really its mission; the Carkoreth and its fighters are meant to tie-up the raider forces just long enough for the escorted fleet to move outside of range and escape the battle.

Carkoreth Escort Cruisers proved to be only marginally profitable and many investors that funded initial construction of the cruisers backed out after three years of losses. The Carkoreth Escort Cruisers eventually found their place and achieved profitability but never yielded the return on investment originally estimated.

Devotion Free Trader **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

The Devotion Free Trader was a common Chouka trading craft before the fall of the Theocracy. Many Chouka captains operated such ships along the trade routes, trading with neighboring powers and proselytizing as they traveled from star to star. Many of the more affluent Chouka citizens purchased Devotions and used them as luxurious personal yachts.

In the final battle at Chouka, a large fleet of Devotion Free Traders was conscripted by the Theocracy to fight the Circasian fleet. These ships were slaughtered in the battle, but their zealous crews were more than willing to die for their world.

In the aftermath of the Chouka War, some Chouka merchants remained at large in areas outside of the former Chouka and Circasian spheres of influence. Many continued their previous trade operations, but others grew tired of the nomadic life and sold their Devotion Free Traders to outside interests, especially pirates and raiders who were more than willing to pay good credits for surplus hardware.

Felenia Transport **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

A common multipurpose Circasian freighter design. Often found ferrying passengers or cargo between Circasian and alien ports, Felenia Transports are small and poorly armed. Most stuck to the space lanes and relied on military patrols to ensure their safety.

Gallah Transport **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

The Gallah Transport is the standard freighter deployed by the Circasians in the early part of the 20th Century. Lightly armed, this class of ships carries two primary cargo containers slung underneath the main body of the craft. These cargo pods are modular units that allow the ship to attach

mission specific cargo pods to carry specific types of cargo. Gallahs commonly are employed as tankers, ore transports, and passenger liners.

Hastal Jump Transport **Hatanra Variant (Rare)**

This rare class of civilian jump cruisers was built from heavily modified Hatanra Transports. The aft section containing the Hatanra's four aft cargo pods was removed in exchange for a new section housing the ship's jump engine and improved reactor system. Because of the heavy modification involved it is not possible for an existing Hatanra Transport to be modified into a Hastal.

Hastal Jump Transports found limited use by the major Circasian corporations, acting as a priority transport for making crucial cargo deliveries or for transporting VIP's to important trade negotiations. The cost of Quantum 40 in the Circasian sectors forced even the largest corporations to limit their purchase of Hastal Jump Transports, which in turn kept Circasian shipyards from increasing construction quantities due to lack of demand.

Hatanra Transport **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

A close cousin of the Felenia Transport, the Hatanra Transport is a larger Circasian design capable of carrying more passengers or cargo than the Felenia. Hatanra Transports, along with carrying more goods, proved to be a much more mechanically reliable design. Most merchants that could afford it traded in their Felenia Transports for Hatanras.

Ironcrest Ore Barge **Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)**

This Kástan ore hauler was operated widely between 1920 to 1960 between Kástan and Thaline ports. Ironcrest Ore Barges transported rare and valuable ores from Kástan past the Rapids of Rodirra to important processing centers at Thaline. The ships would then return with processed goods, making a tidy profit on both exchanges.

Civilians

Ironcrest Ore Barges largely replaced the older Bronzebearer Ore Barges that served before them. Like the Bronzebearers, however, raiders often attacked Iron Crests, some of the barges eventually falling into raider hands.

Kree Shielded Transport

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Novon trade vessels such as the Kree Shielded Transport were not often encountered more than two or jumps from Novon space. Those systems that were within range of the Novon and held valuable resources did see a great number of these transports, however, as they moved into to secure the commodities for their trade lord. A sole individual usually operated Kree Shielded Transports with the assistance of a small, loyal crew of two or three other Novon.

Kree Shielded Transports are named as such as they are protected by a powerful gravitic shield system. This shield protects the Kree from most fighter fire, and even some lighter ship-mounted weapons.

It is true that no Novon ships are civilian in nature, and the ship is identified as a Novon ship and not as Civilian on its ship control sheet. However the Kree is the closest analog the Novon have to a 'civilian' craft.

Numark Large Freighter

Base Hull (Limited Availability 33%)

Numark Large Freighters are one of the largest civilian freighters operated by the Thaline. Uhsmaster Industries, a leading Thaline ship construction and technologies firm, operated most of the Numark's in service. These large transports are capable of transporting all types of cargo and are often called on to transport equipment that is too large to be carried onboard smaller freighters.

Revelation Freighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Chouka traders commonly use Revelation Freighters as merchant craft and are quite common in the territories in and around Chouka. Revelations are well suited for bulk cargo runs and are often used in this manner.

The civilian Revelation is of the same type as that operated by the Chouka Theocracy. Use that ship control sheet for this ship.

Rollan Transport Cruiser

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

One of many pre-Contact Circasian hulls, the Rollan class of cruisers were mighty warships of their day and some of the largest ships the Circasians fielded in their fleets. However, new technologies made the Rollan and its peers obsolete. Surplus hulls eventually found their way into civilian hands and found new life as liners, transports, and ferries.

The Rollan Transport Cruiser represents the most common civilian refit of the Rollan Heavy Cruiser. The ship converts the interior volume previously consumed by the vessel's weapon systems into spacious, compartmentalized cargo holds capable of holding all types of cargo. Passengers can be crammed into these holds, but it is usually an unsafe procedure. Instead, the central corridor of the ship that housed weapons lockers, munitions storage, and other now unneeded equipment were converted into crew and passenger quarters. Although most Rollan Transport Cruisers are operated with very little emphasis on amenities there are indeed some Rollan Transport Cruisers in service that are replete with all the finery a Circasian (or alien) noble could need on their journey.

Selenar Bulk Freighter Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Selenar Bulk Freighters are one of the more common merchant vessels used by the Solassi and were common sites along the Ula to Thaline trade route. Often times Selenars carried heavy ores or precious commodities—including Quantum 40—making them priority targets for raiders and brigands along their trade routes. Luckily for the shipping company's operating Selenars, the ships were fairly well armed by civilian standards and could fend off the weaker raider threats that attempted to steal its cargoes.

Sournar Priority Liner Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Another castoff Circasian hull, the Sournar Priority Liner serves in a far different capacity than it was originally constructed to as a military destroyer. The Sournar Priority Liner is devoted solely to speed and the mission of getting the chartering VIP to their destination as fast as possible. Exchanging interior space for larger, more power engines, the Sournar provides luxurious accommodations and short travel times to its customers.

In practice Sournar Priority Liners proved to be a hot target for raiders. The detection of a Sournar Priority Liner meant nothing more than another chance for kidnapping and extortion, taking the VIP hostage and ransoming them for large amounts of cold, hard credits. Luckily the speed of the Sournar usually prevented raiders from achieving the price that they sought, but this was not always the case.

Tithe Pleasure Yacht Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Many in the higher echelons of the Chouka Theocracy owned and operated opulent pleasure yachts like the Tithe Pleasure Yacht for their own personal enjoyment. Supplied with the best in food, beverages, and meditative aids, Tithe Pleasure Yachts were typically viewed as a means by which one

could commune with the universe by breaking themselves away from the hustle and bustle of their everyday lives. The truth, however, is that the Tithe Pleasure Yacht was more often than not used to indulge the owner's more earthly pleasures.

Luckily for the Chouka these pleasure yachts rarely strayed far from Chouka patrolled space for, if they had, they would have been lucky to make it out of a battle alive.

Ti'Liun Commercial Freighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Thaline independent traders operating in Chouka space commonly used this small trading vessel of Thaline origin. Equipped with four internal cargo holds, the Ti'Liun Commercial Freighter is best suited for moving light cargoes between worlds. Often times Ti'Liun freighters found themselves ferrying important biological or chemical agents for interested parties. Cargo transfer times for Ti'Liuns are remarkably fast and made them perfect for moving such volatile or perishable commodities.

One oddity of the Ti'Liun Commercial Freighter is that its forward cargo bays (located in the ship's two forward 'prongs') are designed to be fully extended out of the ship's hull. This allows for easy loading and unloading of cargo once landed on a planetary surface and vastly speeds up the bays' cargo transfer time.

Uroua Ore Barge

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Uroua is a large Sshel'ath ore barge built pre-Contact but that was still operated by the Sshel'ath and other civilian groups throughout nearby space during the Chouka War. Cheap to build and very reliable (despite its appearance), the Uroua became a favorite of asteroid miners.

Vahsta Hauler

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Civilians

A common Sshel'ath freighter type, the Vahsta Hauler carries two cargo containers slung underneath the vessel's boxy main body. The Vahsta Hauler is a primitive ship even by civilian standards, but their low maintenance and high volume of surplus hulls has made them extremely popular with independent operators.

Volnoumesta Luxury Liner

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The greatest luxury liners of the Chouka War period were those from the rich ak-Tai Republic, the largest of which were the Volnoumesta Luxury Liners. These large passenger liners could carry almost a thousand passengers on month-long voyages across the stars, traveling from port to port in elegance and style.

To travel on a Volnoumesta was a cosmopolitan experience and guaranteed that the passenger would rub shoulders with Ghotekhen, Thaline, and Circasian alike. Most of these great liners traveled routes within the ak-Tai Hegemony, traveling from Khatil and Lleskath upspin to the coreward homeworlds of the Solassi and Ghotekhen. Several Volnoumesta Luxury Liners traveled outside the Hegemony's borders, traveling as far out as Thaline.

Once the Circasian/Chouka War began, the owners of the Volnoumesta cruiser liners made a conscious decision to cease service to the region. A Volnoumesta Luxury Liner would not return to the region until 1975.

Bases & Defenses

Due to the developing nature of the region of space, the bases and defenses operated by civilian interests near Circasian territories during the Chouka War were limited in scope. Use the Civilian Small Base to simulate the small trading bases that dotted the area.

Other areas of the galaxy, including the trade-rich Solassi territories, had more extensive trading posts and civilian bases in

place, but trade had not reached a high enough saturation point in Circasian nor Chouka space to warrant the cost of building such facilities.

Fighters & Shuttles

Offering Armed Shuttle

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Most Chouka that traveled the stars of their own free will could not afford large starships. Instead they operated larger than normal shuttles equipped with enough supplies and quarters to house a dozen Chouka on their voyages to and fro. Many missionary groups used Offering Armed Shuttles to ferry their members to alien worlds to spread the one true faith.

For protection the Offering Armed Shuttle is armed with a single plasma blaster. This single weapon is not much of a deterrent from attack, however, and most Offering Armed Shuttles surrendered without firing a shot when accosted by raiders or pirates.

Steltra Light Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

Manufactured by Enziny Corp, based on Ula, this Solassi manufactured space fighter is a cheap export design operated by many civilian institutions. The Steltra Light Fighter is weaker than the fighters operated by alien militaries but is still sufficient for combating raider fighters of similar strength and ability.

Enziny Corp was very careful of who it sold these fighters to and no Steltras are known to have been found in raider use. Unconfirmed reports were submitted placing Steltras in raider hands but these reports could not be conclusively confirmed (nor denied) by either Enziny Corp or other government authorities.

Timur Light Fighter

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

The Timur Light Fighter is an export model of the ak-Tai Timan Light Fighter. Small and maneuverable, the Timur were quite common in civilian use in the outward sectors dominated by the ak-Tai Hegemony. Freighters traveling out of that region were usually stocked with Timur Light Fighters, if they carried any at all.

The major functional difference between the Timur and Timan is the exchange of the Timan's meson weapons for traditional, off-the-shelf particle beams. The use of particle beams lowered maintenance overhead by negating the need for an extended maintenance contract with the ak-Tai government.

Other Fighters

In addition to the Steltra and Timur, several other fighters were widely available on the open market for civilian purchase. Most of these fighters were older model military fighters that were being phased out of service by their respective governments. Civilians may use any of the following fighters:

Circasian: Ruglin, Skesha, and Vakar

Chouka: Wraithblade

Kástan: Dart

Other: Reclum-C

Chapter 8: Other Races

In addition to the races mentioned previously, many other races were active in Known Space during the Chouka War. Each of these races will be detailed in another supplement at a later time.

Th'sook Dominion

The Th'sook are a reptiloid species whose territories are located outward of the Circasian Empire. Located in the heart of the dead zone, an area of space devastated during the E'chekri war, the Th's were spared by virtue of the fact that the hyperspace beacon trail leading to Th'su had not yet been discovered by the E'chekri.

The Th'sook have been in space for a similar amount of time as the Circasians and the two young nations have come to be solid allies and trading partners. At the time of the Chouka War, the Th'sook and Circasians had begun discussing pursuing mutual research and technological development.

The Th'sook did not participate in the Chouka War due to their distance from the front lines. The Th'sook did offer humanitarian aid and protection to the Circasian fringe worlds in the event of a worst case scenario, but this did not come to pass so such help was not needed.

Thaline Republic

Best described as a stick-insect merged with an anteater, the Thaline are a non-humanoid race situated between Chouka, Kástan, and Ingalli space. The Thaline maintained close trade ties with the Chouka throughout their spacefaring career.

The Thaline Republic has traditionally sought a relationship of non-intercourse with other races in hopes of not entangling themselves in the affairs of foreign powers. This staunch neutrality did not waver during the Chouka War, and the Thaline did not offer any military aid to the Chouka during the war.

The Thaline did however champion humanitarian efforts in the conquered Chouka territories during and after the war.

Kástan Imperial Monarchy

A race of pale-skinned, red haired humanoids covered in a dapple of subtle red and yellow pigmentation, the Kástan are a people separated by geography. The region of hyperspace surrounding Kásta is turbulent and treacherous, making travel in the area dangerous. This geographical impasse has worked to protect Kásta from outside attack, but it has also hindered Kástan attempts to expand their empire.

The Kástan are noted mercenaries and warriors known for their professionalism and excellence in combat. The Circasians hired Kástan mercenaries to help support their own troops during the early stages of the Chouka occupation.

Ingalli Democratic Republic

The mysterious Ingalli are a race of largely isolationist humanoids. Controlling a reasonably sized empire, the Ingalli have come into conflict with their neighbors in the past, fighting several major wars over the last two hundred years.

The Ingalli were not directly involved in the Chouka War due to the distances involved, but Ingalli spies and intelligence personnel were very active during the war gathering information for sale to the highest bidder.

Thrikin Planetary Assembly

This canid race was barely interplanetary at the time of the Chouka War. A neutral world, Thrikin had barely enough military infrastructure to defend itself against raider attacks, and often their own defenses proved barely adequate in defending against these threats. After the war the Thrikin

became a protectorate of the Circasian Empire.

Borillians

An industrialized race of large eel-like creatures, the Borillians had been contacted only a few times by aliens but remained extremely xenophobic and fearful of aliens. As the Borillians did not have interplanetary travel abilities, let alone access to jump technologies, they were not involved in the war.

Novon Trade Lords

An older race of aliens, the Novon have been in space for almost four hundred years. In that time they have come to dominate many important systems, establishing hubs of trade linking the major areas of known space.

The Trade Lords were still recovering from their intense civil wars of the previous decades at the time of the Chouka War, and in any case very few Trade Lords would have been interested in moving in on Chouka territories due to their low strategic value.

Kholran Republic

The second oldest space faring race near the Circasians, the Kholran have been in space even longer than the Novon. The Kholran were hard hit by the Great War against the E'chekri and never fully recovered from that conflict. Reticent and slow to act, the Kholran have already ceased outward exploration and have begun pulling back from their border worlds, slowly abandoning their territories as the populations there decline.

The Kholran were not involved in the Chouka War, as they were not interested in the conflict or its outcome.

Ukal Combine

The Ukal are the oldest starfaring race in the region. The Ukal Combine at its height two hundred years earlier spanned

most of known space, including almost all of the ak-Tai Hegemony and much of what is now Antician space. The Ukal are highly advanced and field warships more capable than entire fleets of those operated by younger races.

The Ukal had long stopped being interested in the affairs of other races by the time of the Chouka War and, although they continued to explore in the region, they took no interest in the war or its participants.

Neliste Empire

A race of aquatic aliens from the Tona system, the Neliste have tried over their history to distance themselves from other races in order to avoid political entanglements. Mildly xenophobic, the Neliste relish their isolationism and have little contact with the rest of known space.

Chapter 9: Scenarios

A Race Through Dark Places

(1936) Early Circasian freighters often found themselves targeted by raiders whose ships and technology were far superior to their own. The raiders knew an easy mark when they saw one and had no qualms about preying on a weak and (at the time) insignificant race.

One such Circasian ship, the *Yalounha* (Circasian for '*Hasty Delivery*'), found itself set upon by a pair of Chouka raiders while traveling through the Senshuka system at the end of the Earth year 1936. Hopelessly outgunned and outnumbered, the *Yalounha* sought refuge in an unusually dense asteroid formation. The *Yalounha's* commander hoped that they would be able to elude the raiders in the belt long enough to beat a retreat to safety.

Set Up

Terrain: The scenario takes place in an asteroid belt. Randomly place 80 asteroids on the map.

Civilian: 1 Felenia Transport in hex row 35xx, speed 6.

Raider: 2 Highwayman-A Raiders in hex row 42xx, speed 8.

Victory Conditions

The Felenia Transport must escape the asteroid belt and exit the map through hex row 01xx. Failure to do so is considered a loss for the Civilian forces and a win for the Raiders.

Historical Outcome

Despite their best efforts, the crew of the *Yalounha* was unable to best the Raiders in speed and maneuverability. Their small Felenia was successful in drawing them into the asteroid belt, but were unable to escape before being disabled and boarded by the raiders. Only one Highwayman survived the

confrontation, though, its brethren having been destroyed by an unfortunate encounter with an asteroid.

The Claw, Unsheathed

(1940) After a series of skirmishes with Circasian patrol fleets near Quadrant 1, the leadership of the Unsheathed Claw made the determination that the only way to break the resolve of the upstart Circasian Empire was to launch a meaningful attack on their infrastructure. Claw probing missions determined that, though Circasia itself was too well defended, the transfer point in Res'den seemed the perfect target for a retaliatory strike. Res'den, a strategically important system lacking in exploitable resources, was weakly defended compared to some of the Circasians other territories.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard.

Neutral: 1 Fixed Jump Gate in hex 4002, facing E.

Unsheathed Claw: 1 Kiltrac Raiding Cruiser, 2 Felrauk Warships, 2 Journon Corvettes in hex 4002, facing E.

Circasians Garrison Forces: 1 Mukanta Small Base in hex 1420. 2 Rotarra Police Cutters, 2 Yollana Frigates, 1 Cairn Carrier within 10 hexes of 1420 at a speed no greater than 4.

Circasian Reserve Forces: 8 Rotarra Police Cutters.

Fighters: The Unsheathed Claw have 6 Zeron Heavy Fighters and 12 Delrain Attack Fighters. All Claw fighters begin the scenario launched. 6 Vakar Starfighters are based on the Mukanta Small Base, and another 18 Vakar Starfighters are based on the Cairn Carrier. Activated fighters begin the scenario within 5 hexes of their carrier.

Breaching Pods: All Claw breaching pods begin the scenario onboard their respective carriers. The Kiltrac Raiding Cruiser is basing two Ventisahr Breaching Pods and each Felrauk Warship has one breaching pod onboard.

Special Rules

The Unsheathed Claw have just exited through the local jump gate. The jump gate must finish recharging before it can be used again.

The Circasian Garrison Forces are at Patrol Stations.

The Circasian Reserve Forces will arrive during the scenario to aid the existing Circasian forces. Before the start of each turn, the Circasian player should roll a d6; if the number rolled is a '6', the Circasian reserve forces will have arrived. Once the fleet has arrived, the Circasian player may place the ships anywhere in 01xx hex row. All reserve ships enter the scenario at a speed of 8.

Victory Conditions

The Circasians will win only if they drive off the Unsheathed Claw without losing the Mukanta Small Base. Any other result is considered a Claw victory. The Unsheathed Claw will score a victory if they manage to land troops on the Mukanta Small Base and successfully complete at least one Rescuing a Captive marine mission, where the 'captive' being rescued is Circasian equipment and other goods.

Because of the above victory conditions, it is possible for both players to win under the right circumstances!

Historical Outcome

The Unsheathed Claw were successful in destroying the Circasian garrison and disabled Res'den Station. Claw troops then boarded the base and stole every piece of equipment and all the supplies that weren't bolted down. Unsheathed Claw boarding parties were already preparing to return to their ships by the time that the Circasian police cutters arrived and, after collecting their crews and bounty, the Claw retreated back to Stacis.

The defeat of the Circasian forces at Res'den prompted the Circasian War Council to increase the number of ships patrolling the system. The elevated military

presence in Res'den protected the transfer point from further raids and the Claw never threatened it again.

Bad Business

(1942) Circasia-based Toltaya

Technologies had been a major player in the pre-contact military hardware market, specializing in electronics packages. The arrival of the Kholran and the wave of alien merchandise that flowed into Circasian space following first contact had hurt Toltaya Technologies' balance sheet and sent stock prices plummeting. Toltaya's only hope (or so they reasoned) was to establish a hardware distribution contract with an alien supplier before any of their competitors could do the same.

It took many years of failed attempts but, finally, Toltaya Technologies was able to convince representatives from Solassi-based Enziny Corp and Thaline-based Uhmastar Industries to meet with company representatives and consider possible distribution contracts. The meeting took place in secret in the Res'den system under an extreme veil of secrecy. Toltaya did not want any of their competitors catching wind of what they were attempting to do, afraid that they would try to somehow sabotage the conference.

Unfortunately for Toltaya Technologies, their attempts to prevent outside knowledge of the meeting could have been better used for internal security. A mail clerk in the Toltaya Technologies home offices discovered a memo to the corporate executives detailing the conference and its location and sold the knowledge to certain black market dealers. These dealers in information then resold this information to a third party: a small band of raiders looking for an easy mission.

The first in a series of meetings between the Circasian, Solassi, and Thaline corporate representatives had entered into its third hour when raider ships appeared on their screens taking Toltaya and its potential business partners completely off guard.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard.

Toltaya Technologies: 1 Hantanra Transport within 2 hexes of 3016, speed 0.
 Enziny Corp: 1 Benakar Commercial Transport within 2 hexes of 3016, speed 0.
 Uhmastar Industries: 1 Numark Large Freighter within 2 hexes of 3016, speed 0.
 Raiders: 1 Drifter Galleon in hex 4201, facing D, speed 5.
 Fighters: The Benakar Commercial Transport is carrying one flight of Steltra Light Fighters that begins the scenario in the Benakar's hangar. The Drifter Galleon is carrying 18 Reclum-A Light Fighters. The Reclum-A fighters begin the scenario within 2 hexes of the Galleon.

Special Rules

One shuttle each from the Enziny and Uhmastar ships start the scenario onboard the Toltaya Hantanra Transport. These shuttles will launch at the end of the first turn and are to be recovered by their respective owners.

All non-Raiders ships begin the scenario in a state of Tactical Surprise.

The Called Shot optional rule is in effect.

Victory Conditions

The Toltaya Technologies player wins if he/she manages to successfully disengage the Hantanra Transport.

Enziny Corp and Uhmastar players will score a minor win if they manage to disengage their respective ships from the scenario. They will score a major victory if they manage to disengage from the scenario with their shuttle that started the scenario onboard the Toltaya ship in their hangar.

The Raider player will score a minor victory if they capture or disable one corporate ship. The player scores a major victory if they capture or disable two corporate ships. For a total victory, the Raider player must capture or disable all three corporate vessels.

Historical Outcome

The raider disruption quickly put an end to the talks that Toltaya hoped would save their company. All of the corporate vessels present

were able to flee from the raiders with a minimal loss of life, but the long-term effects of the incident were staggering. Enziny Corp and Uhmastar Industries accused each other and Toltaya for sponsoring the raider attack on the conference and refused to return to the negotiating table. Toltaya denied these allegations and themselves blamed rival Circasian corporations of being behind the attack.

Unable to secure the foreign support and distribution contracts they needed, Toltaya Technologies was forced to scale back their operations and layoff thousands of employees. The effects of this business meeting gone awry would continue to plague Toltaya Technologies for the next twenty years, resulting in the eventual buyout of Toltaya by an industry rival.

Arrogance of the Fallen

(1950) Admiral Haelitis Xan was one of the most prominent military commanders in the entire Circasian Empire during the 1940's. Spearheading the reconstruction and modernization of the Circasian fleet, Haelitis Xan was a hands-on commander that took pride in working alongside his subordinates to get things done. History credits Xan with redefining Circasian naval structure and doctrine, laying the foundation for what would later develop into the modern Circasian navy.

Unfortunately, for all of his strengths, no accomplishment could change the fact that Haelitis Xan the man was arrogant to a fault and sure that his way was always the right way. Haughtiness combined with this arrogance made for a dangerous combination, and during his career Xan made as many solid friends with his personality as he did brutal enemies.

None of this phased Admiral Xan. He had a family of which he was proud, and it was his family that he swore to protect every day that he served. In 1950, Xan found himself in command of the 6th Fleet, charged with the patrol of the neutral territories lying between

Circasian, Chouka, and Kástan territories. It was this in this area of space that the Blood Swords, an especially powerful raider organization, hunted their prey, seeking unsuspecting ships. The Blood Swords were especially brutal, their calling card being the grotesque scenes they left for the crews of rescue ships to find on the vessels they attacked.

Haelitis Xan had fought raiders before, both on the bridge of a command destroyer as well as in the cockpit of a fighter. He had nothing but hatred for them, but he felt that no raider group, no matter how organized, could hope to stand up to a Circasian patrol fleet.

So was his attitude when he was commanded to attempt to intercept and destroy the *Lady of Dark Souls*, the flagship of the Blood Sword leader. The *Lady of Dark Souls* had been spotted in the region by several observation outposts and tracked with some certainty. This was the chance the Circasians had been waiting for: a chance to cut the head off of a very dangerous serpent.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard

Circasians: 1 Ilustris Command Destroyer, 1 Ilustris Destroyer, 2 Cairn Carriers, 3 Olcata Frigates within 3 hexes of 3622, facing A, F, or E, speed 6.

Blood Sword Fleet One: 1 Dark Soul Battlecruiser, 2 Scythe Raiders, 1 Razor Brigand within 2 hexes of 0407.

Blood Sword Fleet Two: 1 Lady of Dark Souls Command Cruiser in hyperspace.

Fighters:

Options

Give three of the Circasian ships Green Crew status to represent the inexperience of the Circasian military personnel.

Another option to liven up this scenario is to switch the unnamed Dark Soul Battlecruiser that begins active in the scenario with the real *Lady of Dark Souls*.

Special Rules

At the beginning of each turn, during the Jump Point Formation Segment of the Turn Sequence, the Blood Sword player has the option of opening a jump point and bringing the *Lady of Dark Souls* into play. Use the Jump Engagement and Jumping into Combat rules to (RC, pg. 168, 142) for determining placement and direction of the jump point.

Victory Conditions

Minor Circasian Victory: Initial Dark Soul Strike Cruiser destroyed.

Circasian Victory: *Lady of Dark Souls* destroyed.

Total Circasian Victory: Both Dark Soul Strike Cruisers destroyed.

Minor Blood Sword Victory: *Lady of Dark Souls* survives the battle.

Blood Sword Victory: Circasian fleet destroyed.

Historical Outcome

Admiral Xan's arrogance was his downfall when the Blood Swords played him for a fool by ambushing his fleet. The ship that the Circasians had previously identified as the *Lady of Dark Souls* was in fact a decoy dispatched to draw out the 6th Fleet so that it could be easily destroyed by their forces. Every ship in the fleet was destroyed with all hands lost.

Following this massive defeat the Blood Swords enjoyed virtual *carte blanche* in the region, raiding at will. Back at home the political fallout from the defeat was staggering. Xan's supporters were derided for their ties to the dead admiral and the Xan family lost most of their former political standing in the Empire.

It was the death of Admiral Haelitis Xan that led to the development of the plan to eradicate the raider threat. Without his death and that of the crews of the 6th Fleet it is unlikely the Circasians would have decisively retaliated against the raider threat.

Waves Upon a Distant Shore

(1951) Foolish were those attempts by patrol forces to follow the Blood Swords back into Kástan space. The Rapids of Rodirra proved a formidable opponent to those unskilled pilots that tried to maneuver its currents. The threat of being torn off the beacon by fierce hyperspace events was enough to cause most pursuers to break off their hunt for Blood Sword raiders, but some commanders proved more zealous than others in their quest to bring them to justice.

In January of 1951, a Circasian commander pursued the Blood Swords deep into the Rapids of Rodirra at great risk to himself and his crew. This dogged pursuit alarmed the Blood Sword commander and, with her back against the wall, she decided that her ships had to turn and meet this force or else run the risk of being caught themselves in a strong hyperspace current.

Set Up

Terrain: This battle takes place in the Rapids of Rodirra. A strength 6 hyperspace rapids formation covers the entire map (for information on hyperspace rapids see pg. 181, RC). The rapids' current is moving in direction F. Any ship with an Expert Helmsman will ignore one point of the rapids' strength (strength 5 rather than strength 6).

Blood Sword: 2 Scythe Raiders, 3 Razor Brigands within 5 hexes of 3623, facing B, C, or D, speed 8.

Circasian: 1 Ilustris Heavy Destroyer, 1 Toltara Destroyer, 2 Olcata Frigates within 3 hexes of 0611, facing C, speed 8.

Fighters: Both Scythe Raiders carry a flight of Trident Light Fighters. All fighters begin the scenario in their hangars.

Special Rules

Only two areas of the map are acceptable locations for players to disengage from the scenario. These two regions represent the safe routes back to the established hyperspace beacons. Ships can safely exit through either hexes 0107, 0108,

0109, 0110, and 0111 (for the leftmost passage) or through 4226, 4227, 4228, 4229, and 4230. (the rightmost passage). If a ship should exit the map through any other hex than those listed above they are lost forever in hyperspace with no hopes of finding their way back home.

Victory Conditions

Victory points for this scenario are awarded as follows:

2 points per enemy heavy combat vessel destroyed

1 point per enemy medium ship destroyed

1 point per enemy fighter flight destroyed

2 points per surviving friendly heavy combat vessel

1 point per surviving friendly medium ship

5 points if all enemy ships are destroyed

The player with the most victory points at the end of the scenario is the winner.

Author's Notes

This is a particularly vicious scenario for all players. The Blood Swords have the advantage in arms compared to the Circasians, but the fact that they have to turn into the rapids to make an attack run means that they run the risk of over accelerating and being swept off the board. Both players should be careful to keep control of their ships in the rapids and, if things get hairy, head for an exit grid to make good an escape.

Historical Outcome

This confrontation proved that combat in hyperspace is a losing proposition for all parties involved. The Blood Swords were able to batter the Circasian force with their first pass but quickly found themselves out of control and at the mercy of the Rapids of Rodirra. One Scythe Raider, her forward retros knocked out by Circasian fire, flew out of control into the hellish landscape and was

never seen again. At battle's end, only two Circasian and three Blood Sword ships survived the encounter and even then they were barely able to navigate home under their own power.

Removing the Claw

(1955) The Circasians had long suffered attacks from the Unsheathed Claw among other raider organizations, and it was these constant attacks on the welfare of the Circasian Empire that lead them to develop a plan to eradicate each major raider organization simultaneously in order to end the threat forever.

The Circasians had spent years developing new technologies to counter raider ships, many of which operated weapons and technologies far in excess of their own. The Circasian's secret weapon, the Xandar Lancer Frigate, had been kept a closely guarded secret by the War Council and the planned attack on the Unsheathed Claw was to be the craft's first appearance in combat. The War Council had developed an intricate plan that would lure the major raider bands, including the Unsheathed Claw, out of hiding to strike a fictitious convoy loaded with a large shipment of Quantum 40.

When the Unsheathed Claw jumped out in Quadrant 1 at the location reported in the leaked flight plan documents, they were greeted not by an unsuspecting convoy but by a battle ready Circasian fleet.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard

Circasians: 2 Ilustris Heavy Destroyers, 5 Xandar Lancer Frigates, 1 Shenna Strike Carrier, 1 Tratha Scoutship. The Circasian fleet must be deployed within 10 hexes of each other. All fighters are launched.

Unsheathed Claw: 2 Kiltrac Raiding Cruisers, 1 Dushar Hyperspace Probe, 1 Feltann Heavy Destroyer, 2 Felrauk Warships, 2 Journan Corvettes, 1 Gabrak Long Range Transport. The Unsheathed Claw enter through a jump point formed with arrival hex of

2020. Use the Jumping into Combat rules to determine final placement. Only half of the Unsheathed Claw fighters may be launched before exiting the through the jump point.

Fighters: The Circasian Shenna Strike Carrier is carrying one flight of Rehka Heavy Fighters and two flights of Istale Light Fighters. All Circasian fighters begin the scenario within 5 hexes of their carrier. The Unsheathed Claw raiding cruisers are filled with three flights of Zeron Heavy Fighters and three flights of Delrain Attack Fighters between the two cruisers.

Special Rules

Use the Jumping into Combat rules for determining the placement and direction of the Unsheathed Claw's jump point. The Circasian Tratha Scoutship has 20 turns remaining until its jump engine is recharged.

The Unsheathed Claw force is taken off guard by the Circasian attack and as such suffers from initiative penalties as they attempt to adapt to the situation. On the first turn after emerging from the jump point, all Unsheathed Claw ships (but NOT fighters) will suffer a -4 initiative penalty. This penalty will decrease by one per subsequent turn until no penalty remains.

Victory Conditions

Minor Circasian Victory: Destroy both Kiltrac Raiding Cruisers.

Total Circasian Victory: Destroy the entire Unsheathed Claw fleet.

Minor Unsheathed Claw Victory: Escape with the Kiltrac Raiding Cruisers intact.

Total Unsheathed Claw Victory: Escape with the Kiltrac Raiding Cruisers intact and destroy all of the Circasian Xandar Lancer Frigates.

Historical Outcome

The Circasian ruse caught the Unsheathed Claw by surprise and the Circasians exploited the situation to its fullest. Before the Unsheathed Claw could fully react to the ambush over half their number had already been cut down. A running battle

between the two sides ensued leaving both bloodied, but the Circasians were able to destroy the Unsheathed Claw force down to the last fighter. The destruction of such a large segment of the Unsheathed Claw's total fleet effectively ended Claw raids into Circasian space.

Blood Calls Out for Blood

(1955) At the nearly the same time that the Unsheathed Claw were being devastated by the Circasians in the outward frontier, the Blood Swords were themselves walking into another Circasian trap. Lured by the allure of Quantum 40 the fleet was caught completely unawares by the waiting Circasian warfleet.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard

Circasians: 8 Xandar Lancer Frigates, 4 Olcata Frigates. Circasian ships may begin anywhere on the map with the player's choice of facing and a speed of 3.

Blood Swords: 1 Lady of Dark Souls Command Cruiser, 1 Dark Soul Battlecruiser, 3 Scythe Raiders, 2 Firebrand Frigates, 3 Razor Brigands. The Blood Swords enter through a jump point formed with arrival hex of 2020. Use the Jumping into Combat rules to determine final placement. The jump point was formed by the Dark Soul Battlecruiser.

Fighters: The Blood Sword ships are fully loaded with Trident Light Fighters. Half of the Blood Sword's fighters begin the scenario launched.

Special Rules

Use the Jumping into Combat rules for determining the placement and direction of the Blood Sword's jump point.

The Blood Sword force is taken off guard by the Circasian attack and as such suffers from initiative penalties as they attempt to adapt to the situation. On the first turn after emerging from the jump point, all Unsheathed Claw ships (but NOT fighters) will suffer a -4 initiative penalty. This penalty will decrease by

one per subsequent turn until no penalty remains.

Victory Conditions

Major Circasian Victory: Destroy the Lady of Dark Souls Command Cruiser and the Dark Soul Battlecruiser.

Circasian Victory: Destroy the Lady of Dark Souls Command Cruiser or the Dark Soul Battlecruiser.

Blood Sword Victory: Escape with the Lady of Dark Souls Command Cruiser intact.

Major Blood Sword Victory: Escape with the Lady of Dark Souls Command Cruiser intact and destroy the entire Circasian strike fleet.

Historical Result

The Blood Swords were dispersed, though the *Lady of Dark Souls* and her captain escaped the battle in one piece. The Circasian strike devastated Blood Sword morale and the raider band that was once feared by everyone that crossed the starlanes faded into history.

The First Surprise

(1971) The first surprise of the Chouka War was on the Circasians when they transited into the Mishtuki system via an outer jump gate only to be greeted by a Chouka welcoming party. The Circasians had thought themselves ready for a fight but the Chouka hoped to teach them otherwise.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard.

Neutral: A jump gate is present in hex 1209, facing C.

Circasian: 1 Kolanis Cruiser, 2 Tormin Light Cruisers, 5 Moshesta Frigate in hex 0909, facing C, speed 5.

Chouka: 2 Apostle Holy Cruisers, 3 Revelation War Barges, 6 Brimstone Heavy OSATs. Chouka ships can be placed anywhere within 8 hexes of hex 0909 at speed 1 and a facing of the player's choice. OSAT's

are placed one each in hexes 1506, 1809, 1813, 1616, 1217, and 0915.

Special Rules

The Circasians have just exited from the local jump gate and must meet its recharge delay before it can be used again.

The Chouka did not have time to fully activate their OSATs before the Circasian's arrival. Roll a d6 for each satellite; on a roll of '4' or greater the satellite is operational. Those satellites that fail their activation roll will make another activation roll on the following turn. All weapons are fully armed on the satellites whether they are activated or not.

The Circasians may ram, but the Chouka may not.

Victory Conditions

Circasians: The Circasians win if they manage to escape back through the jump gate in order to return to Senshuka with the information they have gathered. The Circasians will win a total victory if they manage to escape while also destroying the Chouka forces.

Chouka: The Chouka win if they destroy the entire Circasian probing force.

Historical Outcome

A single Moshesta Frigate and a shuttle managed to get through the jump gate after a running battle with Chouka forces. All other units were destroyed.

Family Honor

(1972) Toran Xan, son of the late Admiral Haelitis Xan, was barely a young man just entering the Imperial Academy when his father was cut down in battle against the Blood Swords. The Xan family name was blemished by the apparent miscalculations of Admiral Xan in his last battle. Through it all Toran Xan remained faithful in the belief that his father was a hero, a hero that Circasia had shunned.

Toran Xan felt that it was his duty to reclaim his family's honor and position. He redoubled his efforts and devoted himself

entirely to his military career. A rising star in the Imperial Star Forces, Toran Xan rose to the rank of Captain by 1965, taking command of the Kolanis Cruiser *Chofeskal*.

When the Chouka War began, Toran Xan at last found the means by which to prove himself and his family. Toran Xan pressed the military command to move the *Chofeskal* to the front lines and into battle against the Chouka. Luckily for Toran Xan he was moved to the Chouka front to participate in the second wave of offensives.

Captain Xan was charged with leading a small scouting force into the outer Mishtuki system to gauge enemy resistance in preparation for a major naval deployment into the system. Xan accepted the mission enthusiastically. The *Chofeskal* and its escorts were to jump into the Mishtuki system and gather as much data as possible until challenged by Chouka system patrols, at which point the fleet was to jump out and fall back to Senshuka to deliver the intelligence data.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard

Circasian: 1 Kolanis Cruiser, 2 Moshesta Frigates, 1 Ilustris Destroyer, 1 Tratha Scoutship within 5 hexes of 3307, facing E, speed 5.

Chouka: 2 Acolyte Patrol Frigates, 1 War Prayer Gunship within 3 hexes of 0426, facing B, speed 8.

Fighters: Both Acolytes have a full complement of Bloodlust Assault Fighters (no missiles). All fighters are deployed within 2 hexes of their carrier (same facing and speed).

Special Rules

The Tratha Scoutship's jump engine has fulfilled its jump delay and the ship may open a jump point at any time.

Victory Conditions

The Circasian's mission is to return with the intelligence information it has gathered to Senshuka. In order for the Circasian player to score a victory, either the Tratha or the

Kolanis must successfully escape the scenario through a jump point.

The Chouka score a victory if they destroy the Tratha Scoutship. Without the Tratha the Circasians will not be able to escape the system, leaving the fleet to be easily intercepted and destroyed by other Chouka fleet elements in the system.

Historical Result

The Circasian fleet was forced to flee rather than fight, much to Xan's chagrin. The Kolanis, Tratha, and one Moshesta managed to escape into hyperspace and back to the safety of Senshuka. The other Circasian ships were not so lucky, giving their lives to ensure the safe escape of the rest of the fleet. The Chouka fleet was damaged, but no ships destroyed.

Of the ships that survived, all were heavily damaged. Toran Xan himself was badly injured in the attack and forced to sit out over six months of combat as he recovered from his wounds. Toran Xan regretted being sidelined by the injury and continued to vow to redeem himself and his father during the war.

Convictions of Fire

(1972) The continued violation of Chouka space by the Circasians angered the Circle of Elders. The Circasian fleet at Mishtuki IV especially angered the Elders who now knew that the Circasians were not going to be easily deterred through indirect displays of force. The Theocratic Guard Forces were dispatched to take care of the Circasian problem in the Mishtuki system once and for all.

Set Up

Terrain: Hex row xx30 represents the planetary surface of Mishtuki IV.

Circasian: 1 Kiralina Jump Ship (Upgraded), 4 Kolanis Cruisers (Carrier Variant), 2 Tormin Light Cruisers, 1 Cairn Carrier, 2 Xandar Lancer Frigates, and 5 Moshesta Frigates within 6 hexes of 3020, facing A, B, or F. All units start at a speed of 5

or less, except for the Kiralina Jump Ship, which begins at a speed of 0.

Chouka: 3 Apostle Holy Cruisers, 2 Acolyte Patrol Frigates, 2 Bishop Warships, 1 Priest Plasma Destroyer, 2 War Prayer Gunships, 3 Revelation War Barges starting anywhere in hex row xx01 of 0426, facing C, D, or E, at speed 6.

Fighters: The Circasian hangars are filled with Istale Light Fighters. The Chouka are loaded with Bloodlust Assault Fighters with full fighter-missile complements. All fighters begin the scenario launched.

Special Rules

The Chouka may ram if half or more of their ships are destroyed.

Victory Conditions

Major Circasian Victory: The Chouka fleet is defeated or forced to retreat.

Minor Circasian Victory: The Kiralina Jump Ship escapes into hyperspace.

Major Chouka Victory: The Circasian fleet is defeated or forced to retreat.

Minor Chouka Victory: The Kiralina Jump Ship is destroyed.

Historical Result

The Battle of Mishtuki IV left both sides bloodied, but it was successful in forcing a Circasian retreat from the system. The Circasian jump ship was heavily damaged after the battle, in large part due to the successful ramming attempt by the Chouka flagship. The loss of such an expensive piece of military hardware would have been disastrous for the Circasians but luckily it could be repaired.

Quiet Time

(1972) Following their pyrrhic victory at Mishtuki IV, the Chouka decided that it was time to deliver the Circasians a blow that they would not soon forget. The Theocracy was quickly growing tired with the Circasian's attempts to take Mishtuki and viewed a

retaliatory strike into the Circasian Empire as one of the easiest ways to end the conflict.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard.

Chouka: 2 Apostle Holy Cruisers, 1 Retribution Battlecruiser, 1 Acolyte Patrol Frigate, 4 Revelation War Barges with 3 hexes of 2515, facing F, speed 6.

Circasians: 8 Feilah Gunboats, 3 Moshesta Frigates, 2 Olcata Frigates.

Fighters: The Chouka hangar bays are filled with Bloodlust Assault Fighters and full loads of fighter missiles.

Special Rules

The Circasian ships arrive on the beginning of the first turn through a jump point formed by a jump ship remaining in hyperspace. Use the Jumping into Combat rules for determining the exact starting location and disposition of the Circasian forces. The jump point is considered to have been formed on the previous turn (before the scenario began) and the Circasian ships are entering the battle on the beginning of the first turn.

The Chouka units suffer from Tactical Surprise.

Victory Conditions

Chouka: The Chouka win if they defeat the Circasian attackers.

Circasians: The Circasians will win if they manage to destroy or disable at least five of the Chouka warships.

Historical Result

The Circasians ambushed the Chouka fleet and were successful in disrupting the disoriented fleet. The Chouka were forced to flee the system due to the heavy combat losses they incurred at the hands of their smaller opponents.

The Battle of Mishtuki

(1972) The culmination of the Mishtuki plan, the Battle of Mishtuki was a do-or-die battle for the Circasian Empire. If their attempt

to subdue the Chouka defenders failed they would be forced to adopt a long-term defensive stance to protect the Senshuka and Circasia systems from Chouka reprisals.

Set Up

Terrain: Hex row 42xx represents the planetary surface of Mishtuki VII. An strength-1 atmosphere occupies hex row of 41xx. The main Chouka colony on the planet is located in hex 4225. If scoring damage to the site, the hex has a to-hit value of 20 and 1000 structure (no armor).

Chouka Fixed Defenses: 1 Temple Starbase, 6 Brimstone Heavy OSATs, 12 Hellfire OSATs. The Temple Starbase is in 3722, facing F. The Chouka satellites can be placed anywhere within hex rows 36xx, 37xx, 38xx, or 39xx.

Chouka Fleet: 5 Apostle Holy Cruisers, 2 Acolyte Patrol Frigates, 1 War Prayer Gunship, 6 Bishop Warships, 1 Retribution Battlecruiser, 2 Priest Plasma Destroyers, 1 Priest Escort Destroyer, 10 Revelation War Barges

Circasian Fleet 1: 1 Kolanis Cruiser, 1 Tormin Light Cruiser, 1 Xandar Lancer Frigate, 6 Moshesta Frigates.

Circasian Fleet 2: 2 Kolanis Cruisers, 1 Reglata Bombardment Cruiser, 2 Tormin Light Cruisers, 1 Ilustris Heavy Destroyers, 1 Toltara Destroyer, 2 Moshesta Frigates, 1 Gallah Auxiliary Carrier.

Circasian Fleet 3: 2 Kolanis Cruisers, 1 Cairn Carrier, 2 Gallah Auxiliary Carriers, 3 Moshesta Frigates, 2 Xandar Lancer Frigates.

Circasian Fleet 4: 2 Kolanis Siege Cruisers, 6 Moshesta Frigates.

Fighters: All Chouka hangars are filled with Bloodlust Heavy Fighters with full complements of fighter missiles. Chouka fighters begin the scenario unlaunched. The Circasian Fleet 1 has 6 Istale Light Fighters; Fleet 2 has 30 Istale Light Fighters; and Fleet 3 has 6 Tyra Heavy Fighters, 6 Kolam Long Range Fighters, and 42 Istale Light Fighters. All Circasian fighters begin the scenario launched.

Special Rules

The Circasian forces are emerging from a jump point formed in 0303, facing C, by a Kiralina Jump Ship sitting in hyperspace. At the end of every turn another Circasian fleet will emerge from the jump point at a speed of 5 until no more Circasian fleets remain.

Victory Conditions

The player that holds the field at battle's end wins this scenario.

Historical Result

The Circasians managed to defeat the Chouka defenders, but at a significant cost in ships and lives. The capture of Mishtuki VII was a milestone in the war that would give the Circasians the momentum they needed to continue pursuing the war.

The Battle of Chouka

(1973) The last major battle of the Chouka War, the Battle of Chouka was an epic battle between the forces of the Circasian Empire and the Chouka Theocracy. The entire war had been leading to this: a Circasian offensive against the heavily defended bastion of the Theocracy. The battle was long and bloody and filled with notable battles and heroes, many of them unsung and forgotten.

Because of the scope of the battle it is separated into four different scenarios, each scenario depicting a section of the battle in place and/or time. The first three represent sections of the battle fought in preparation for the final assault as depicted in *Fall of the Theocracy*.

Battle of Chouka #1 - The Last Flight of the Solukar

The Kolanis Cruiser Solukar led the Circasian attack on the main Chouka battle line. The Chouka's defenses around their homeworld were all but impregnable, but the Circasians knew that it would take only a

single buckle in their defensive network to create an exploitable weakness in the Chouka defenses. Circasian tacticians correctly postulated that a crack in the Chouka defense net would rapidly splinter the Chouka defenders, making it easier to strike directly at the planet's satellite defense systems.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard.

Circasian: 1 Kolanis Cruiser, 2 Kolanis Cruisers (carrier variant), 2 Tormin Light Cruiser, 1 Shenna Strike Carrier, 5 Moshesta Frigates in hex row 01xx, facing C, speed 6.

Chouka: 1 Apostle War Cruiser, 1 Apostle Holy Cruiser, 3 Bishop Warships, 2 Priest Plasma Destroyers, 6 Revelation War Barges in hex row 42xx, facing F, speed 5.

Fighters: The Shenna has 6 Tyra Heavy Fighters and 12 Istale Light Fighters, the Tormins have 6 Istale Light Fighters each, and the two Kolanis carrier variants have 12 Istale Light Fighters each. The Acolyte has 6 Bloodlust Assault Fighters and each Apostle has 12 Bloodlust Assault Fighters. All Bloodlusts are fully loaded with fighter missiles. All fighters begin the scenario launched within 2 hexes of their carrier.

Victory Conditions

The Circasians must defeat the Chouka force. Anything less is a Circasian loss. Likewise, the Chouka must defeat the Circasian fleet in order to pull off a win.

Historical Result

The Circasians were able to open up enough of a rent in the Chouka batteline to allow additional forces to move in and begin destabilizing the Chouka battle fleet. The Chouka were forced to fall back and regroup, the Circasians using the opportunity to deal additional damage to their fleets.

Battle of Chouka 2: Xan Redeemed

After being forced out of commission by battle injuries suffered in a mission into the

Mishtuki system, Toran Xan was anxious to return to the fray. His former command, the *Chofeskal*, had been destroyed in the interim and with it the crew that he had come to know and respect. Xan now added vengeance for the deaths of his former crew to the list of factors pressing him forward. He was determined now more than ever to achieve victory for himself and his nation at any price necessary.

Captain Xan found himself commanding the *Xolophanes*, another Kolanis Cruiser, into the final battles leading up to the Battle of Chouka. In these battles Xan was able to gain a rapport with his new crew. Captain Xan felt that the *Xolophanes* was the right place to be for the final battle and entered it with confidence.

The *Xolophanes* was assigned to the Fifth Flanking Squadron and assigned the mission of knocking out an especially reinforced segment of the Chouka homeworld defense fleet. It was important to the Circasian battle plans for this segment of the Chouka battle line to be dispersed or, at the very least, disrupted so that a strong thrust by the main fleet could finish them off.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard

Circasian: 4 Kolanis Cruisers (carrier variants), 2 Tratha Light Cruisers, 1 Tormin Light Cruiser, 4 Moshesta Frigates, 1 Xandar Lancer Frigate, 2 Gallah Auxiliary Carriers, within 3 hexes of 4022, facing F or E, speed 6.

Chouka: 1 Apostle War Cruiser, 2 Apostle Holy Cruisers, 1 Acolyte Patrol Frigate, 1 Priest Plasma Destroyer, 1 Priest Escort Destroyer, 4 Revelation War Barges within 6 hexes of 0406, speed 5.

Fighters: Two Kolanis Cruisers carry a flight of Tyra Heavy Fighters and a flight of Istale Light Fighters each. Two Kolanis Cruisers carry a full load of Istale Light Fighters. The Tormin Light Cruiser carries a full load of Istale Light Fighters. All Chouka ships carry full loads of Bloodlust Assault Fighters with six missiles each. All fighters begin the scenario deployed within 2 hexes of their carrier at the same speed and heading.

Special Rules

The Circasian player must secretly select one Kolanis Cruiser to be the *Xolophanes*. This should be recorded on a piece of paper and saved until the appropriate time.

Once and only once during the scenario, the captain of the *Xolophanes*, Captain Toran Xan, may 'lead the charge' into the enemy fleet. Once declared, all Circasian units in the battle will receive a +2 to their initiative rolls. In order to perform this action the *Xolophanes* cannot have been destroyed, nor can its C&C be destroyed.

Victory Conditions

In order to score a Circasian victory, the Circasian player must destroy all three Apostle Holy Cruisers. With these ships destroyed the Chouka squadron will be sufficiently weakened for future Circasian strikes to break through the segment of the battle line.

The Chouka player wins if he can prevent the Circasian fleet from destroying the three Apostle Holy Cruisers. The Chouka need these three Chouka cruisers intact in order to hold the line against the Circasian invasion force.

Historical Outcome

The Circasian's Fifth Flanking Squadron was successful in dispersing the Chouka fleet segment, causing them to move out of formation and opening up a gap in the battle line for the rest of the Circasian fleet to move in and exploit. The Fifth Flanking Squadron's command ship was destroyed in the attack. Toran Xan took command of the squadron and commanded it throughout the rest of the battle.

After the third wave of attacks on the Chouka positions, the Fifth Flanking Squadron withdrew from battle. Toran Xan felt robbed of the chance to participate in the final strike against the heart of the Chouka fixed defenses, but despite this he felt that he had earned the victory he needed to redeem his family name.

Battle of Chouka #3: The Final Disgrace of Defeat

As the Chouka's luck faded and the battle pressed onward, Marzuula Tien found himself as the last bastion of defense against the encroaching Circasian fleet. His defensive position was the only thing that stood between the Circasian fleet and the final lines of defense orbiting Chouka.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard.

Chouka: 1 Apostle Holy Cruiser, 1 Retribution Battlecruiser, 2 Reverence System Monitors, 3 War Prayer Gunships, 1 Covenant Minelayer, 3 Revelation War Barges, 5 Brimstone Heavy OSATs, 12 Hellfire OSATs.

Circasian: 3 Kolanis Cruisers (carrier variants), 1 Kolanis Siege Cruiser, 1 Tormin Light Cruiser, 1 Illustris Destroyer, 2 Xandar Lancer Frigates, 4 Moshesta Frigates in hex row xx01.

Fighters: All Circasian hangars are filled with Istale Light Fighters. Chouka hangars are filled with 50% Bloodlust Assault Fighters and 50% Faithbringer Heavy Fighters. Both come with complete missile loadouts. All fighters begin within 3 hexes of their respective carriers.

Special Rules

Chouka units may ram.

Victory Conditions

The Chouka must destroy or disable the entire Circasian force. Any other result is a Circasian victory.

Historical Result

First Hand Marzuula Tien was killed along with the rest of the Chouka defense forces. The Circasians were able to rip apart the Chouka fleet and open the door to a final thrust to the heart of the Chouka defenses.

Battle of Chouka 4: Fall of the Theocracy

The Chouka Circle of Elders and the high priests in charge of the last defense of Chouka knew that their mission to defend the motherland had failed when the Circasian fleet broke through the third defensive line. Scattered and broken, the Chouka had counted on their battle line to hold back the waves of Circasian warships and protect the planet itself from direct attack. Unexpected losses incurred as the line fell part had weakened the Chouka sufficiently so that a wing of several Circasian attack squadrons could break through to attack the Chouka's primary defensive linchpin.

Although they had had a long time to prepare for the eventuality, few Chouka commanders thought the Circasians would be able to reach their most defended planetary position, but the battle would prove them wrong.

Set Up

Terrain: Row xx30 represents the surface of the planet Chouka.

Circasian: 2 Kolanis Siege Cruisers, 6 Kolanis Cruisers (carrier variants), 1 Reglata Bombardment Cruiser, 2 Tormin Light Cruisers, 3 Xandar Lancer Frigates, 2 Tratha Light Cruisers, 1 Tratha Scoutship, 1 Toltara Destroyer, 2 Illustris Heavy Destroyers, 2 Gallah Auxiliary Carriers, 12 Moshesta Frigates, 4 Olcata Frigates in hex row xx01, any facing, speed 8.

Chouka Fleet: 1 Crusader Dreadnought, 1 Apostle War Cruisers, 3 Apostle Holy Cruisers, 2 Retribution Battlecruisers, 3 Acolyte Patrol Frigates, 4 Bishop Warships, 10 Revelation War Barges, 2 Revelation Auxiliary Carriers, 2 War Prayer Gunships, 2 Priest Plasma Destroyers, 1 Priest Escort Destroyer, 1 Scripture Intelligence Cruiser.

Chouka Fixed Defenses: 1 Citadel Star Fortress in hex 2327; 2 large shipyard complexes, one each in hexes 2026 and 2627; 10 Brimstone Heavy OSATs and 20 Hellfire Defense Satellites (either version) within 4

hexes of the planet's surface. The two shipyard complexes have no ship control sheet, but can take 500 points of damage before being destroyed.

Fighters: All Chouka ships and bases have full complements of Bloodlust Assault Fighters with fully missile loadouts. The Circasians are operating a number of Istale Light Fighters equal to 75% of normal. All fighters begin within 5 hexes of their carrier.

Options

For a "what if" scenario, start the Crusader Dreadnought launched at the beginning of the scenario. The Crusader Dreadnought has an Expert Religious Leader onboard, located in the ship's C&C. This leader is First Hand Shcuizkho Yular, famed Chouka commander.

Another possible change to the scenario is to include the *Xolophanes*, Toran Xan's Kolanis Cruiser, as one of the ships in the scenario. If this is done, the Circasian player should secretly designate one of the Kolanis Cruisers as the *Xolophanes* and give it an Expert War Leader.

Special Rules

The Crusader Dreadnought has Pre-Existing Damage as it is only partially completed at the time of the battle. The Chouka were unable to finish the first prototype before the attack. Specify one of the two shipyard complexes as the current location of the Crusader. This information should be publicly declared so that all players know the ship's location at the beginning of the scenario.

At the beginning of each turn, roll d6; on a roll of '6' or more the Crusader Dreadnought will be able to launch at the beginning of the next turn. Add 1 to the roll for each turn that passes in which the Crusader fails its launch roll. Note that, since the Crusader will be starting at a speed of 0 from the dock it will incur a -10 initiative penalty on the turn it is launched.

All Chouka units may ram, with all ramming attempts receiving a +2 ramming bonus.

Victory Conditions

Minor Circasian Victory: Destroy both shipyards.

Circasian Victory: Destroy the Citadel Star Fortress and half the enemy OSATs.

Major Circasian Victory: Destroy all Chouka bases and OSATs.

Minor Chouka Victory: Prevent the destruction of the Citadel Star Fortress.

Chouka Victory: Prevent the destruction of the Citadel Star Fortress and both shipyards.

Major Chouka Victory: Prevent the destruction of all Chouka bases and OSATs.

Historical Outcome

First Hand Shcuizkho Yular, commander of the prototype Crusader Dreadnought, was killed while attempting to reach his ship in the shipyard. The Crusader launched without him, but it was a poor harbinger for the battle to come.

The Chouka ships and bases put up a good fight, but ultimately the Circasian numbers managed to overwhelm them, just as they had throughout the course of the war. The Citadel Star Fortress stubbornly resisted Circasian attempts to destroy it while frigates and cruisers mauled one another all about the battlefield. Kolanis Cruisers exploded under the stress of walls of missiles and heavy plasma volleys. Apostle Holy Cruisers burned in space, candles in the dark whose flames represented the growing despair and desperation of the Chouka people.

As the Chouka became more and more desperate, Chouka vessels began ramming Circasian ships in an attempt to slow down their advance. Many Chouka and Circasian ships alike died from such suicidal collisions, but in the end it served little purpose. The Citadel Star Fortress, long the symbol of Chouka impregnability, was destroyed by the Circasians and with it the majority of the Chouka bases and satellites that accompanied it. The Circasian squadrons were forced to retreat after suffering horrendous casualties, but with the Chouka's strongest planetary defense position

destroyed the followup strike by the Circasian forces easily overwhelmed the remaining Chouka defenders, signaling the end of the war.

Fight or Flight

As the climactic Battle of Chouka was nearing decision, many Chouka commanders could see the writing on the wall that their defense of Chouka had failed. These commanders saw little point in fighting a futile battle and signaled to their fleets to retreat to Breth. Most ships in these peripheral Chouka squadrons balked and remained to fight to the death, but some fled the battle in hopes of regrouping in Breth to lick their wounds and decide on a new course of action.

The Circasians were not about to let any Chouka elements escape the battle, and many Circasian vessels supporting the rear of the fleet were dispatched to intercept the Chouka dissenters and cut them off from the local jump gate.

Set Up

Terrain: Standard.

Chouka: 1 Acolyte Patrol Frigate, 2 Revelation War Barges, 1 War Prayer Gunship within 3 hexes of all other Chouka units, placed at least 30 hexes from the local jump gate, speed 8.

Circasian: 1 Kolanis Cruiser, 1 Xandar Lancer Frigate, 2 Moshesta Frigates at least 10 hexes behind the Chouka fleet

Neutral: A standard jump gate should be placed on the far side of the map from the Chouka starting position.

Fighters: No ships in the fleet have fighters, the fighters still fighting over the skies of Chouka.

Victory Conditions

The Chouka player scores a victory if at least two of his/her ships successfully escapes through the jump gate.

The Circasian player scores a victory if at most one Chouka ship successfully escapes through the jump gate.

Historical Outcome

The War Prayer sacrificed itself to save the rest of the fleet, distracting the Circasian force long enough for the Acolyte and both Revelations to escape into hyperspace. The Circasian was however able to intercept several other dissenters also attempting to flee through the jump gate.

Honor, Exile, and Death

(1974) The Chouka covertly sponsored several large raider bands on their borders, the largest being of the Delkeshore pirates of the Breth System. Delkeshore raiders habitually struck into Kolir, Sshel'a, and Novonous. When the Circasians began their attack on Chouka the Delkeshore knew that their days were numbered.

Fearing a Circasian attack into Breth, the Delkeshore raiders fled to Kolir and attempted to establish themselves within the system. Attempts to negotiate with the Trade Lords failed and they found few allies among those that they had formerly raided on an ongoing basis.

Ultimately the leaders of the Delkeshore pirates decided that it would be better to die with honor in a fight to liberate their homeland than to live in exile in alien space. Many Delkeshore did not agree with this ruling and split from the group, but a significant portion of their remaining assets agreed to launch an assault on the Circasian forces garrisoning Chouka in order to do as much damage as possible to the heathens.

Set Up

Raiders: 1 Thief Grappling Cruiser, 1 Oathbreaker Raiding Barge, 3 Highwayman-A Sloops, 1 Highwayman-B Sloop.

Circasians: 1 Kolanis Cruiser, 3 Moshesta Frigates, 1 Cairn Carrier.

Fighters: The raiders are loaded with Reclum-A Light Fighters. The Circasian Cairn Carrier is filled with 18 Istale Light Fighters. All fighters begin the scenario in their hangars.

Special Rules

The Delkeshore vessels have all suffered damage to their systems, either from combat with enemy craft or through lack of maintenance to ship systems. Roll 1d6 damage (ignoring armor) twice against each ship side.

Victory Conditions

Minor Raider Victory: Half of the Circasian force is destroyed.

Raider Victory: The entire Circasian force is destroyed.

Total Raider Victory: The entire Circasian force is destroyed and at least one Raider unit remains active.

Circasian Victory: The entire raider force is destroyed.

Total Circasian Victory: The entire raider force is destroyed without the loss of any Circasian ships.

Historical Outcome

The Delkeshore pirates were outmatched by even the small Circasian fleet that intercepted them. All of the Chouka raider craft were destroyed to the loss of only a single Circasian Moshesta Frigate, many before they were ever able to fire a shot.

Afterword

Where Did All of This Come From?

The concept of the Escalation Wars was born from a series of conceptual story ideas that I developed for a strategic/roleplaying campaign in 2001. What began as just another game setup bloomed as soon as I put two words to my electronic canvas: Escalation Wars. Things have changed a lot since then, but it is from those humble beginnings that the body of what would one day become the Escalation Wars universe took shape.

Creating the Past, Present, and Future of the Escalation Wars Universe

The Escalation Wars is something of an amalgam of many different fictional backgrounds that I have been developing over the years. The Escalation Wars and the concept behind them was born two or three years ago as part of an aborted campaign. The idea and the major players in the conflict intrigued me, so I continued development of their universe in earnest.

The Circasians have existed in multiple forms for many years, dating even before the creation of the Escalation Wars concept. Traditionally a hybrid of the Dilgar and Narn, looking like Dilgar and (originally) flying very Narnish ships, the Circasians had always been one of my favorite creations. Their inclusion in this new, different universe spurred me to action more than anything else. The current incarnation of the Circasians is far different than their initial incarnations in which they were a far more spiritual people, and even slightly more aggressive than they are now.

The Courata were a new race when the Escalation Wars material was first being drawn up. I had only used them once before, and then only as a minor power. As the background came together a picture of the

large, cat-like aliens so devoted to their family and their emperor soon took form. Despite their similarity to the Kilrathi from the Wing Commander universe, I felt that the Courata as developed would work as an excellent counterpoint to the Circasians.

Now, as many will undoubtedly note, this does pose a slight oddity in that both the Circasians and Courata have feline overtones, but it is something that happened out of coincidence and there was no preplanning or conscious thought involved in that decision. At one point I considered modifying the Courata to remedy this situation, but ultimately decided that it was unnecessary.

Many of the other races that you'll find in the Escalation Wars universe come from other universes or campaign settings. The Vendrizzi, Anticians, and Vok'Nar are just some of these races that have made appearances elsewhere before being woven into the history of the Escalation Wars.

A Place to Start

The first challenge in deciding on where to go with the concept of the Escalation Wars was to pick a race and a time period to begin working on. I thought about starting off with detailing the Escalation Wars themselves, but quickly realized that, without a foundation from which to build on, the history would most likely be too disjointed. So I decided to go back and explore the history of one of the races and see where it took me.

Now, when I first started on this project I was assuming that I would sit down and in a week have all of the backstory and information for the race I had chosen to start with (in this case, the Circasians) all done and taken care of. I was wrong. Just as in my campaign universes, the Circasians proved to have an interesting tale to tell that couldn't be limited to only a few pages.

Over the course of that first week the picture of who the Circasians were started to fall together. And, as the image of the Circasian people and their empire grew sharper in my mind, there emerged several other races that I had not heard of or considered in the past. The Chouka and

Sshel'ath appeared for the first time and took shape, as did the Th'sook. As I mapped out the future of the Circasian down my rough timeline of events even more things began to appear. The war against the ak-Tai. The border wars against the Ukal. The race called Ypsi, whose sole description was (and is) that they resemble "a flamingo mated to a pair of fuzzy dice". There was a larger story that could be told than just that of one war or one race.

Empire Rising represents the fruition of nearly three years of effort. Things have changed several times between then and now, but I am confident that the Escalation Wars universe has now taken its final form, or at least something very close to it.

What's Next?

There are several obvious choices, including some that I have given considerable thought to and even started preliminary work on. Some of the potential projects include: the War of the Seven Stars, covering the Circasian/ak-Tai War; the Courata rise to power, covering their early history including the Ingalli and Rekshu Wars; the Great War, detailing the great war against the E'chekri in the outward sectors; and, finally, the Escalation Wars themselves.

What will determine what portion of the Escalation Wars universe I explore next? You. That's right, the feedback of my audience has in the past spurred me to action to get work done on this project and I don't think that is going to be changing anytime soon. If there is a race or time period that you are especially interested in tell me about it. You just might get me to work on it and bring it one step closer to completion.

Credits

Written By Tyrel Lohr
 Editing Tyrel Lohr,
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Playtesting and Other Contributions

Charles Haught and Thad Diaz:

These two provided a large amount of encouragement and playtest data for the Escalation Wars ships, especially those featured in Empire Rising. Charles Haught had a hand in influencing the final design of the Sshel'ath as well as providing moral support for many of the other supporting races.

Paul Brown: Paul was always there helping to support the Escalation Wars stuff, and I don't know if I would have done as much with the background material if it weren't for his Tolkien/Rawnjok ships.

Simon Bloomer and Company:

Thanks go out to Simon Bloomer and his campaign group that integrated the Chouka War races and ships into their local B5W campaign. The feedback and reports generated by that campaign were helpful in many ways.

Contact the Author

For more information on the Escalation Wars universe or to find related downloads and materials, please visit www.escalationwars.com, or e-mail Tyrel Lohr at information@escalationwars.com. I always look forward to battle reports, user questions and comments, or inquiries on Escalation Wars background.

Revision History

Version 1.0: The original release of Empire Rising was released under the title "The Chouka War" and contained a fraction of the information available in the current version.

Some of the information contained in that release has been superceded and the document should be considered apocryphal in regards to current Escalation Wars canon.

Version 2.0: The re-release of “The Chouka War” includes additional ships and information for the core races as well as adding information on raider and civilian entities.

Version 2.1: Includes edits submitted by several readers. Errors in the fluff have been corrected and several SCS errors fixed.

Submission Guidelines

Have ideas for new races, designs, scenarios, or technologies that you think would make a good addition to the Escalation Wars universe?

Firstly, any and all materials submitted cannot be copyrighted by yourself or others. All materials submitted and accepted into the Escalation Wars universe will become a part of it and can be used in any future Escalation Wars related supplements and fiction. If this bothers you then please protect your own intellectual property and don't submit it. Why is this important? There is the potential for a novel or other products to one day be created based on the Escalation Wars property.

That said, I am more than happy to take a look at what you have cooked up and see if it can be worked into the Escalation Wars mythos. Concepts that undermine the existing storyline or important historical details will not be included.

When readying your submission be sure to review all of the information available. The Escalation Wars univers is a busy place and, with much of its history already mapped out, there are some places where new races simply cannot be included without making unacceptable changes and compromises to the storyline. But don't despair! The northern wastes are still largely unfinished at this time and can accept most races or race concepts. The right sid the map, too, can be altered as the races located there are not yet set entirely in stone (nothing has been developing for the races upspin of the loka.

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