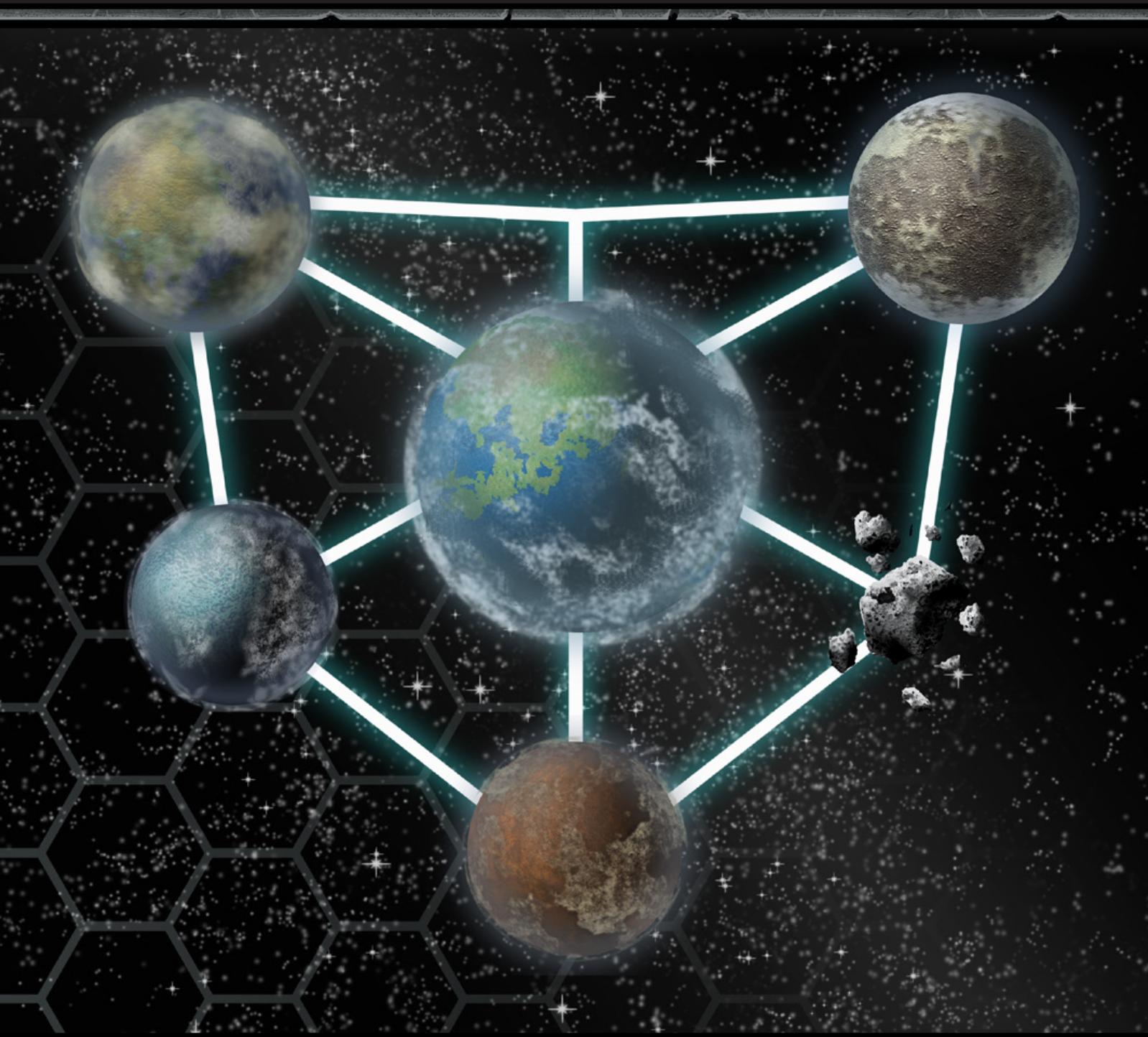


# TRAVELLER

THE UNION SHIELD WORLDS



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

# TRAVELLER

THE UNION SHIELD WORLDS

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# INTRODUCTION

The ‘Lunion Shield Worlds’ is an unofficial term referring to a group of star systems on the border between the Third Imperium and the Sword Worlds Confederation. . Although they form part of the Spinward Main, these worlds are very much a backwater and frontier. Few major corporations are keen to invest in a region that will surely be a battleground in any future war, leaving opportunities for smaller firms and private operators to move in and take up the slack. The Shield Worlds are a high-risk environment, but risk and reward go hand in hand... at least, sometimes.

## LUNION SUBSECTOR

Lunion subsector was settled during the early Imperial expansion into the Spinward Marches, with Lunion itself becoming an important local and regional trade hub. Expansion was largely guided by the Spinward Main, with worlds lying off it receiving less attention at first. However, today the subsector is a mature one, with several high-technology worlds. Lunion and Strouden are major centres for shipbuilding, with Ling Standard Products (LSP) maintaining huge yards at both worlds.

These yards mostly produce high-volume craft and vessels for major clients such as shipping lines or the Imperial Navy, but smaller-scale building is also available. Most minor vessels are built at smaller yards owned by subsidiaries of LSP or other contractors. Lunion and Strouden are also the subsector's main naval bases, with heavy units concentrated there. Lunion would be a primary strategic target in the event of a war with the Sword Worlds. The 43<sup>rd</sup> Fleet, which has responsibility for defending the subsector, regularly holds exercises based around this possibility. Both Lunion and Strouden have large system defence fleets as well as assets of the Imperial Navy assigned to protect the naval bases. The main decision in the event of war would be whether to attack into the Sword Worlds Confederation or counter a thrust on the approaches to Lunion and Strouden. The so-called Lunion Shield Worlds, located at the Spinward side of the subsector, are likely to be the site of early clashes in either case.

The Shield Worlds are typically patrolled by destroyers and the occasional light cruiser, heavier units than would normally be encountered on such duty within an internal backwater. This is mainly a flag-showing exercise, intended to reassure local citizens and deter

Sword Worlders, but there is a feeling locally that no real attempt would be made to hold the shield systems in the event of major conflict. Instead, these light units would skirmish and fall back, reporting the position of an incoming fleet whilst a large-scale response was readied at the main naval bases. Whilst probably good strategy in terms of winning a war, this apparent abandonment is controversial locally, and diplomats from the more important local worlds such as Tenalphi routinely lobby for a forward deployment of battle squadrons.

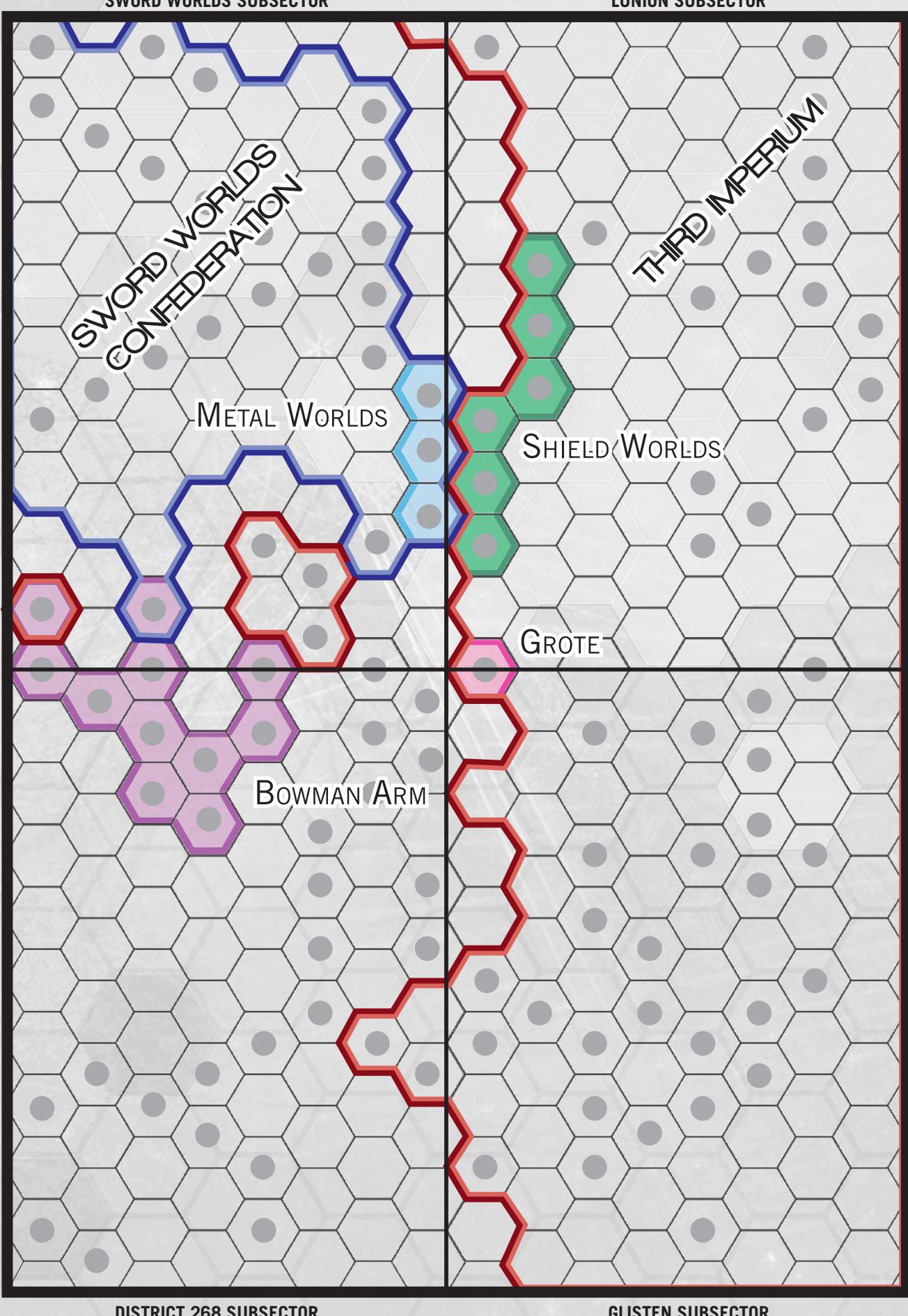
## NEIGHBOURING REGIONS

To spinward of Lunion subsector is Sword Worlds subsector, home of the Sword Worlds Confederation. The Sword Worlders have little love for the Imperium and fought against it at times, but at present relations have thawed a little. It would not take much to reverse this position however, especially as power shifts in the internal politics of the Confederation.

The immediate neighbours of the Shield Worlds (to spinward) are the undeveloped ‘Metal Worlds’ of Steel, Mithril, Bronze and Iron. These are claimed by the Confederation, a claim not disputed by the Imperium, but whilst they are earmarked for development ‘at some point in the future’ they remain uninhabited except for rudimentary outposts that serve as starports. This makes the transit though the Metal Worlds to Imperial holdings further spinward a difficult one, and has contributed to the general feeling that the Imperium effectively ends at the Lunion Shield Worlds, with Five Sisters as a distant holding.

This will surely change when District 268 is annexed, creating a route through newly-Imperial space to connect Five Sisters to the rest of the Imperium. That route will connect more readily into Glisten subsector, however, and the expected new surge of interstellar traffic may well bypass the Lunion Shield Worlds entirely.

Lanth subsector lies directly to coreward, but other than via the Spinward Main at the very trailing edge of the subsectors, it is largely cut off from the Lunion area by an area of sparse star systems and the so-called Abyss Rift. This region seems to have an unusually high incidence of misjumps for reasons currently unknown, further discouraging traffic in that direction.



# WORLDS OF NOTE

The following star systems are not counted among the Lunion Shield Worlds, but are associated with it closely enough to merit consideration by economic and military planners. Rabwar and Arba lie to coreward within Lunion subsector, whilst Grote is located at the coreward end of Glisten subsector. Penkwhar, Harvovette and Persephone form a three-world cluster towards the rimward/trailing end of Lunion subsector. Worlds are denoted by their name followed by their subsector.

## ARBA (LUNION)

Whilst not part of the Lunion Shield Worlds, Arba shares their strategic importance as the first Imperial territory entered by a hostile fleet from the Sword Worlds. The Arba system has no gas giants, making the modest starport the only readily available source of fuel, albeit in small quantities. The starport is the only settlement on Arba, an airless rockball world chosen as the system's mainworld for lack of anything better. It is home to about 600 people, all of whom are employed in or connected with the port.

Arba provides a jump-2 link between Lanth, Lunion and Dyrwyn in the Sword Worlds Confederation, resulting in high cross-border and along-the-border shipping traffic. Lanth is an economically and strategically important world (and indeed a subsector capital) but has no other jump-2 connection to the Imperial worlds to trailing or rimward. Any other route requires a higher jump capability and perhaps a transit of the hazardous Abyss Rift, or else a lengthy trip by way of Vilis subsector.

Arba is thus of great importance to Lanth, and receives subsidies to ensure its port remains in good repair. Security is good, with ground-based missile turrets and a small force of mercenaries on contract to the port but paid for by the government of Lanth. Advisors are available for those who plan to cross into the Sword Worlds Confederation, and there are regular one-day workshops dealing with common words, slang and what is or is not an insult – all intended to keep venturesome trader crews from getting into trouble.

Ships from the Sword Worlds routinely enter the Imperium by way of Arba, and many crews have made friends among the port workers. There is a degree of tolerance at Arba that does not exist in some other places, and there are those who believe the workshops

are not about keeping traders out of trouble at all; they are about educating non-Arbans in how not to spoil the friendly atmosphere built up over years of peaceful interaction – not counting the odd barfight, of course.

## RABWAR (LUNION)

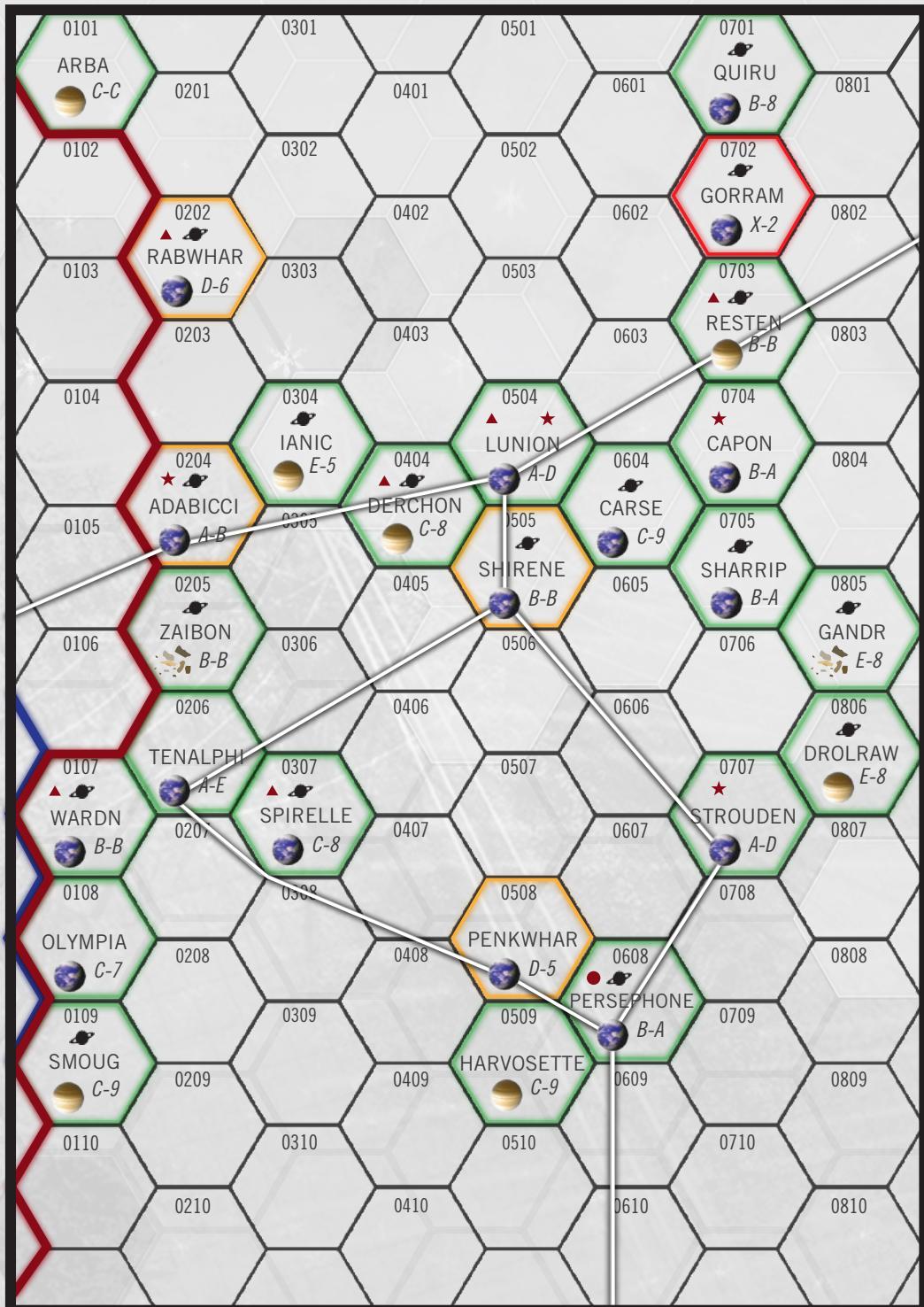
Rabwar is what might be described as an 'almost-agricultural' world. Despite being a little dry, it has rampant plant life, which produces both food crops and other plant-derived products such as pharmaceuticals and organic materials used in the construction industry. Abundant plant life also supports herds and flocks, though it can be difficult to keep land in the condition required for grazing – scrub and bush growth is so rapid that constant effort is required to keep it down.

Rabwar is rich in fossil fuels, and has relied upon them for a great many years. As a result, development of cleaner energy sources took place slowly. This has changed in recent years, mainly out of concern for the environmental effects of coal and petroleum. A move to nuclear energy was begun in some haste, but already the world's ecosystem has suffered significant damage. This has harmed Rabwar's economy, as many of its organic exports are valued for unusual properties resulting from a thin bit oxygen-rich atmosphere.

Rabwar is currently an Amber Zone, due to lingering unrest after a coup some years ago. The rebels were ultimately unsuccessful, but did manage to gain control over the world's governmental apparatus for a few days. The incident has sharply divided the three hundred million or so inhabitants of Rabwar. There are several factions ranging from staunch supporters of the reinstalled planetary monarchy to those who never gave up the struggle against it even when the rebellion was put down. In between are various groups that dislike one or both sides and have their own agenda.

It has been alleged that some of these groups are receiving support from outside the Imperium, i.e. from the Sword Worlds Confederation. It is possible this may be true on a minor level, but there is not thought to be any large-scale involvement on the part of any Confederation government. Modest quantities of small arms find their way onto Rabwar from elsewhere, but nothing that would tip the balance of power has been imported.

# MAP OF THE LUNION SUBSECTOR



- Gas Giant
- Naval Base
- Scout Base
- Way Station
- Military Base

- Secure System
- X-Boat Route
- Red Zone
- Amber Zone
- Imperial Border
- Sword worlds Border
- B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level

- Planet (Dry)
- Planet (Water Present)
- Asteroid Belt

Rabwar is not a war zone, but there are some areas where intermittent clashes take place between insurgent groups and the planetary army. This has not triggered an Imperial intervention, and is not likely to unless something changes drastically. The Imperium considers situations of this sort to be internal affairs, and does not become involved unless the security of the Imperium or safety of trade is threatened. Neither seems likely, so at present Imperial interest is limited to a small group of observers at the capital.

## GROTE (GLISTEN)

While not of any great importance in the grand scheme of things, Grote is significant locally as the last major port in the Imperium before a vessel enters District 268. Traffic bound for Imperial holdings in Five Sisters subsector, by way of the Bowman Arm of the Spinward Main, often stages through Grote as an alternative to the Metal Worlds which lie in the Sword Worlds Confederation.

Grote is an airless rockball world with a population of around ten thousand people, all of whom live and work within the excellent starport. This exists mainly to facilitate traffic into District 268 and on to Five Sisters subsector, and was extensively upgraded in anticipation of expanded trade into the region. Although this has not yet appeared, the port makes enough profit to remain viable and in good condition.

Vessels from outside the Imperium often visit to sell their goods into Imperial markets and buy from them. Trading at the very edge of the Imperium reduces the amount of paperwork required, as compared to obtaining licenses and clearance to proceed deeper into Imperial space. Likewise, goods are available in the brokerages of Grote that would not be obtainable elsewhere, or at least at cheaper prices.

Grote is what might be termed an ‘artificial territory’ of the Imperium, in that without its port it cannot support an economy or even an indigenous population. It is inhabited only as a place to put a starport, and people only live there because the port provides an income. The port’s operators are acutely aware their existence depends entirely upon interstellar trade, and do their best to promote it as far as possible. One outcome of this is the creation of a small trans-border shipping group, made up of minor starship operators

Strategically, Grote is not especially important but its status as a major trade port makes it a place the navy must protect. Although it lies within Glisten subsector, Grote is more conveniently patrolled by the Lunion subsector fleet – more conveniently for personnel based

in Glisten subsector, anyway. Thus, there is usually a guardship from the 43<sup>rd</sup> Fleet, typically a destroyer based out of Strouden, in orbit over Grote. This is an unpopular assignment and subject of much grumbling.

Naval task forces out of Lunion subsector sometimes hold exercises in the Grote outsystem where they can be seen by ‘the people over the border’, and vessels or small squadrons make the occasional sweep into District 268 on a variety of pretexts. On these occasions, liberty is usually granted at Grote before and after the deployment, gaining it a reputation as the ‘first and last friendly port’. Of course, these ships are seen by the Sword Worlders and minor powers of the region, reminding them of the potency of the Imperial Navy.

## PENKWHAR (LUNION)

Penkwhar is a large, wet world with a tainted atmosphere. Its official population (i.e. Imperial citizens) number just three thousand living in a single enclave. There is some confusion about the world’s accessibility – some sources say it is a Red Zone and completely interdicted, while others record an Amber Zone designation. It is thus possible to apply for and be refused a visa to visit the world, but then to simply go there without penalty. The question has been referred to the Imperial Bureaucracy, and an answer is promised ‘in due course’. In the meantime, the world’s starport is designated Class X by those who believe it is a Red zone, and Class D by those who do not.

Information on local conditions is likewise patchy, since data on Red Zones is routinely controlled. Penkwhar is known to have a mean surface temperature that lies at the upper end of what humans can tolerate, making it a very unpleasant place to visit. There are also said to be indigenous inhabitants, who may be hostile to outsiders. These are currently being studied, so contact is undesirable to avoid cultural pollution.

The Imperial enclave on Penkwhar consists of a mix of Scout Service personnel, scientists and various support workers, plus a small but growing population who came to the world either to work in supporting roles (shopkeepers, construction workers and the like) and stayed, or dependents of personnel deployed there. The enclave has no industry and cannot support anything higher than TL5, though equipment is imported.

Visitors to Penkwhar are often greeted with the rhetorical question ‘don’t you know we are a Red Zone?’ or a tongue in cheek ‘where’s your permit?’ but are welcomed readily enough providing they do not want to leave the enclave and upset the locals. Occasionally a visitor gets arrested by a badly-timed naval ship, and this can play out in a variety of ways. There is so much confusion

about the world's zone classification, and about whether violating a Red Zone is punishable if the offender's astronavigational database did not mention it, that those arrested cannot be sure what to expect. Sometimes the result is a negotiation and mildly embarrassed release, on other occasions crews have languished for months waiting for someone in authority to decide whether they have committed a crime or not.

## HARVOSETTE (LUNION)

Harvolette is a desert world with barely enough atmosphere to support life. It is nevertheless home to some ninety million people because of its mineral wealth. Much of the planet is volcanic wilderness, with rocky badlands and sharp mountains which have seen little erosion. This forbidding landscape produces little food but has vast mineral resources extracted by industrial-scale operations.

One of the notable features of Harvolette is its huge mobile strip-mining vehicles, which rumble ever so slowly across the surface, ripping up soil and rock, and sifting for useful minerals. This method would be ecologically devastating to a world not all but barren already, and has attracted adverse comment from environmental groups. It is, however, efficient, and feeds the processing facilities and factories of Harvolette with an endless supply of high-bulk, low-value ore.

More precise extraction techniques are used for higher-value ores or crystal deposits, and these too are fed into the world's industrial processes or sold offworld. The operators of these mining, processing and fabrication complexes form an oligarchy that runs Harvolette in the manner of a government, but in practice it is not so much a civilised planet as a planet-sized region in which several companies operate.

The companies are based out of Harvester's cities, and generally cooperate on most issues. Disputes do arise, and sometimes break out into conflict. Similarly, there is a fair amount of disaffection among the population, and this too can occasionally turn violent. Critics of Harvolette have suggested that the 'oligarchy of mine bosses', as they refer to the world's ruling council, has created a planet-sized frontier zone with city-sized mining camps for the workers. Harvolette is not, they claim, an inhabited world at all. It is nothing more than a resource to be strip-mined after which the top echelon will move on and the workers will be left behind to spiral into ruin.

There are moves to make Harvolette more self-sufficient and improve its image. These include investment in innovative cultivation techniques and attempts to foster a culture beyond that of corporate-town and mining camp. Artists' retreats have been set up, along with parks and recreation areas that require endless attention to keep them green and pleasant. It is not clear whether this is a cynical corporate exercise to improve the mining companies' image or a genuine attempt to make Harvolette a place to live rather than to work, but either way the quality of life has improved a little lately.

## PERSEPHONE (LUNION)

Persephone is an average-sized world with sufficient water to support a strong ecosystem. Although it is chilly and has a tainted atmosphere, it is still a habitable world which, not surprisingly, supports a population of just over nine hundred million people. Persephone is economically important, exporting considerable amounts of manufactured goods by way of Strouden and on to the wider markets of the Spinward Main. This industrial base is largely supported by raw materials from the mines of neighbouring Harvolette.

Persephone is also home to an Imperial Interstellar Scout Service way station, a major base whose official purpose is to support the X-boat communications network. This is true, but only part of the story. The way station also serves as an intelligence collation and distribution centre. Unconfirmed reports claim a flotilla of Scout Service jump-6 couriers operates out of Persephone, ensuring anything known there is reported within two weeks at Lunion and Mora, and within another week at Rhylanor and Glisten.

The primary focus of this intelligence-gathering apparatus is, according to rumour, the Sword Worlds and District 268, with a network of Scout Service operatives and ships openly and covertly collecting information along the frontiers. Conversations in the bars of the Lunion Shield Worlds are reported back to Persephone Way Station, and thence to the Subsector Dukes of the Spinward Marches.

There may be an element of paranoia in this claim, but it seems likely the Persephone Way Station is an 'alarm bell' for the Imperial authorities in the Spinward Marches. In addition, it maintains routine X-boat and courier connections to worlds across the region, and supports more mundane surveying operations that make the day-to-day activity of the Scout Service.

# THE LUNION SHIELD WORLDS

The Lunion Shield Worlds are a segment of the Spinward Main that run from Adabici to coreward onto Smoug to rimward, and includes Spirelle. The Shield Worlds are so called because they form an (almost entirely imaginary) shield against Sword Worlder aggression. In reality, they are more strategic tripwire than shield, but this does not lend itself to a romantic moniker.

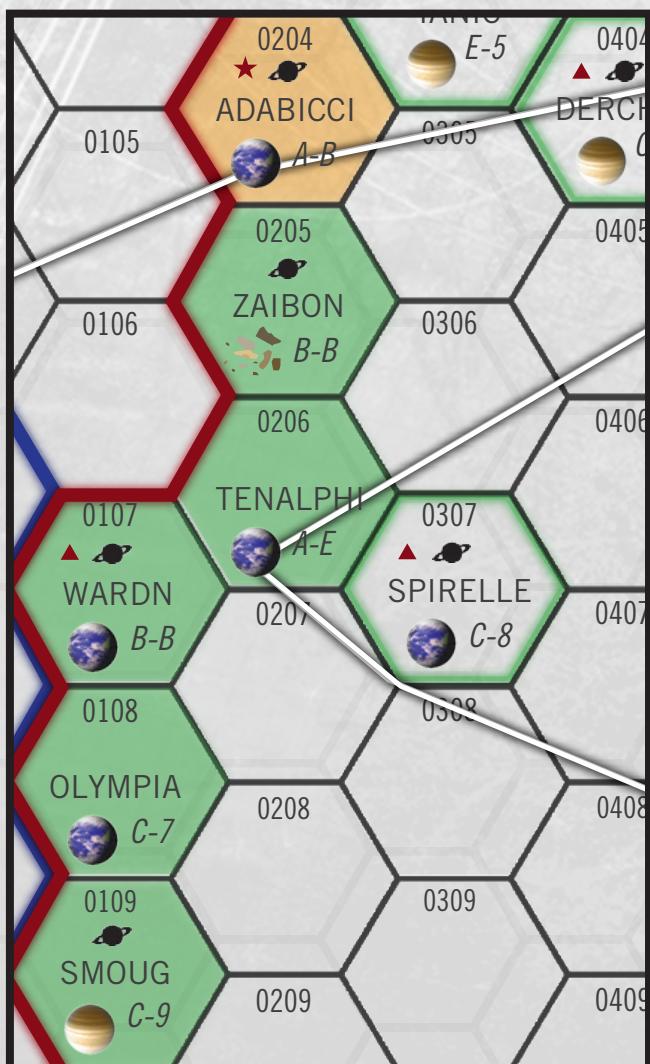
The Shield Worlds are often considered to be the last Imperial ports on the Spinward Main. This is inaccurate, as there are others further along, but they are the last connected to the rest of the Imperium by purely Imperial controlled space. This has an economic effect on the Shield Worlds, as many merchant ships turn around at Wardn or Tenalphi, reducing traffic through Olympia and Smoug, and effectively doubles the amount of shipping through Zaibon and Adabici.

The Lunion Shield Worlds fall under the jurisdiction of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Fleet, which occasionally deploys heavy squadrons to the border in response to a crisis or as a flag-showing exercise. More commonly, light forces out of Adabici conduct patrol operations along the border and longer forays into non-contiguous Imperial space.

The Shield Worlds are a mix of well-developed and backwater worlds. The local economy is dominated by Adabici and Tenalphi. The latter is the source of high-technology goods, but not in any great volume, whereas the much larger but less advanced industrial base of Adabici provides day-to-day items. Goods come up the Main from Lunion and beyond, and there is a certain amount of cross-border trade as well.

Trade with the Sword Worlds Confederation is a volatile business. At any given time, some of the Confederation's worlds are all but closed to Imperial goods due to some dispute or upswelling of anti-Imperial sentiment. The nature of Sword Worlder politics is such that at the same time there will be some worlds seeking new trade deals or even hungrily seeking as much Imperial commerce as possible. It is rare for all worlds to have same attitude to Imperial goods, but it does happen from time to time. This can create a brief bonanza or cripple trading corporations with too much invested in the cross-border run.

Likewise, attitudes among the non-Imperial worlds of District 268 vary considerably. Collace is pro-Imperial and has strong trade links, whilst Trexalon is staunchly anti-Imperial and has been accused of sponsoring corsair attacks on Imperial ships. Other worlds vary in their stance, making trade in this region a difficult business. Those who know the market well enough to predict its trends can do very well indeed, but many Imperial corporations consider District 268 to be too risky for general trade and will work only through local contacts who carry most of the risk.



# SHIP ENCOUNTERS IN THE SHIELD WORLDS

Most of the Imperial-registered shipping in the Shield Worlds are small trade ships plying the Spinward Main. Ianic (which is not considered to be one of the Shield Worlds) acts as something of a choke point into and out of the region, since jumping to a low-end port of no real economic significance rather than one where far more trade can be done is a difficult decision for a trader captain. Thus, traffic into and out of the region is slightly reduced, resulting in the same ships running up and down the Shield Worlds section of the Spinward Main for an extended period. There is also a significant jump-2 trade run from Adabici to Derchon, again with ships staying on the run for years on end due to regular profits.

Adabici thus acts as the turnaround point for ships on the internal run and the entry/exit point for goods from the wider Imperium. From there, these goods are dispersed around the Shield Worlds or carried onward to rimward and spinward. Many of the ships making the internal run are old friends of the port operators, and subject to preferential docking clearance and cursory customs checks. If one of these ships changes its routine or arrives late, there are many who would become concerned and begin an investigation. A newcomer is not subject to this consideration, and would be a far better prospect for a smart pirate band – attacking an ‘old shielder’ trade ship will provoke a response sooner and more thorough in nature than taking a ship nobody has heard of.

Non-imperial ships are typically traders registered out of Collace, Flammarion or Elixabeth (but not necessarily owned by any interests on those worlds). Far Traders and other jump-2 ships are far more common than jump-1 vessels such as Subsidised Merchants and Free Traders, as they can transit through Grote to Smoug rather than making the slog through the Class E starports of Caliburn, Gunn and the Metal Worlds. This region is something of a barrier to low-end commerce, but occasionally an enterprising captain makes the run.

Sword Worlder ships enter the Imperium by way of the Shield Worlds, usually transiting from Biter to Wardn. There are quite a lot of Sword Worlds-registered vessels on the Spinward Main, some of them ranging right across the sector. In times of tension, these vessels are carefully watched, and the Imperium is well aware that at least some are engaged in intelligence gathering operations. However, there are no peacetime restrictions on foreign vessels in Imperial space and the benefit of trade with so many worlds attracts numerous ship

operators. A few of these vessels are very large, making lengthy cruises along the Spinward Main and trading in many ports before returning home with a full hold. These ships make the first and last legs of their voyage through the Shield Worlds.

The Imperial Navy attempts to maintain guardships and patrols in the Shield Worlds, but coverage is patchy. The 43<sup>rd</sup> Fleet is tasked with patrolling its own subsector and the world of Grote in Glisten subsector, plus maintaining patrols into the coreward-trailing end of District 268. No subsector fleet has enough patrol ships at the best of times, and those of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Fleet are stretched thin indeed. This has the effect that larger assets are sometimes used for patrol work.

It is possible to encounter a carrier task force or heavy cruiser on a routine patrol, sent out at enormous cost to cover the lack of a few small escorts. This has positive effects for security in the region, but results in increased maintenance loads for the navy and the possibility that heavier units might be unavailable for warfighting missions or caught out of position and defeated in detail at the outset of hostilities.

## ADABICCI

Adabici is unusual in that its starport is of major significance whilst the world itself is not nearly so prominent. Adabici is dry and cold, with an atmospheric taint. Its eight hundred million or so inhabitants are subject to strict governmental control. Not surprisingly, Adabici’s downport is quite small and interactions between the general population and offworlders tend to be limited.

Most of the people living at the downport and its associated startown are of offworld origin, and there is little cultural mingling between them and the locals. There is even less with the population of the large orbital highport, which has what can be described as a standard-interstellar culture and is quite different to what might be encountered on the surface.

Most offworlders visiting Adabici pass only through the Highport, and never encounter the locals. Those that do find them to be friendly and welcoming, with a cheerful disregard for many of the laws that supposedly bind them. Open defiance is uncommon, but many of the regulations on the books are out of date or unenforceable, and there is a culture of going along with the general intent of the law without much regard to details. This means that on any given day someone might break several minor laws, but not in such a flagrant way as to attract the attention of those who enforce them.

Adabici Highport has a considerable amount of manufacturing and industrial capability, and a modest shipyard that mainly builds small trade ships for local operators. The port is busy, with ships coming in from Derchon on a regular cycle, as well as vessels from further afield moving along the Spinward Main. As the entry point from the trailing portions of the Spinward Main and the turnaround for ships coming in from spinward-rimward, Adabici Highport is one of the biggest trade markets in the subsector.

Commerce is brisk. Indeed, it is not uncommon for a cargo to be bought and sold several times before the ship carrying it has even docked. A broker will often buy an option on a cargo then sell it to someone else for a modest profit without taking possession of the items. This can be a big-money, high-risk game with huge profits, but it is also possible to tread cautiously and still make a little money. However, ports like Adabici are notorious for burned-out brokers and highly stressed executives blowing off steam in expensive bars and clubs.

This prosperity allows Adabici Highport to maintain its own force of system defence boats and fighters, but they are more for local policing of traffic than defence against serious aggression. Fortunately, the port benefits from the presence of an Imperial naval base. This is in orbit around the system's only gas giant, and is far larger than its complement of vessels requires.

Adabici Naval Base was constructed with the primary purpose of supporting patrols along the frontier. As such, it would normally be built to a fairly modest design as a destroyer base capable of accommodating only a couple of larger ships. However, its secondary role is as a forward base for strikes against the Sword Worlders in the event of a major war, and as such it must handle dreadnoughts by the squadron. The big battlewagons are not based at Adabici; they are concentrated further back from the frontier where they are less vulnerable to sudden attack, but the base itself is heavily fortified.

A force of monitors defends the base, along with the rest of the system. These ships cannot be redeployed and cannot escape the fall of the system if they are defeated, but are sufficient to defeat most threats. Obviously, an incoming fleet could jump past Adabici and head for Lunion, but this would suit Imperial strategy – it would create a base in the enemy's rear and threaten his supply line. Thus, Imperial strategy is to either force a Sword Worlder fleet to reduce the base at Adabici, suffering heavy casualties in the process, or leave it intact so the heavy units of the subsector fleet could strike deeply into the Sword Worlds once an attack had ground to a halt. This strategy is well publicised and whilst it has its critics, the Adabici Pivot Strategy is an effective deterrent.

## ZAIBON

Zaibon's primary is a red giant star, whose gravitational 'jump shadow' makes it impossible to directly access the remaining worlds of the inner system. The innermost worlds were consumed when the star grew to its present size, whilst those farther out benefited from greater warmth. One of these planets is thought to be borderline-habitable, but it is deep within the jump shadow and thus not economically viable for colonisation. There is no official data on this world, though it is possible that it has been explored and the findings kept out of the public databases.

Zaibon's asteroid belt lies outside the star's jump shadow. This was fortunate, as the belt once contained the largest deposit of copper ever found, along with sizable amounts of other minerals. More importantly, these were easily accessible, and soon a huge mining operation was set up. This operation, along with the employees' dependents and the usual assortment of people working in support and service industries, created a permanent population and Zaibon became a member state of the Imperium.

The easily accessible minerals have been played out, and the largest-ever copper deposit long ago disappeared into factories. The big mining concerns pulled out of Zaibon, but there was still money to be made on a smaller scale. Thus, although the industry is in decline and the boom days are long gone, the people of Zaibon continue to produce minerals for sale through the starport.

Zaibon is officially a representative democracy, though in practice the representatives are a council of company executives, mining foremen and prominent citizens who are not all elected to their posts. The government, like the population in general, is factionalised, with 'company men' lacking the trust of ordinary miners, and some of the foremen having an agenda that gets in the way of productivity, therefore harming everyone's income.

The population is scattered around the belt in a variety of habitats. Some are built into planetoids, some on their surface and some are free-floating space stations of various sorts. Most notable among these is the Amusement Wheel, a large space station converted into a giant fairground. Its creation was part of an endeavour to re-invent Zaibon as a tourist destination and a desirable place to retire to. Considerable effort has been expended in this direction, but it remains to be seen whether the idea will catch on. In the meantime, Zaibon's population is falling as workers and their families seek better opportunities elsewhere.

The decline in Zaibon's fortunes is obvious to anyone venturing beyond the starport concourse. Charts of the system's asteroids are dotted with abandoned mines and settlements, and active ones decline at an increasing rate. It has been suggested that some of these abandoned settlements are now home to new arrivals, perhaps pirates and smugglers. Certainly, more recently abandoned ones might remain at least partially habitable and would be a useful place to hide out or stash goods for later retrieval.

Since the decline of the mining industry, much of Zaibon's income now comes from trade passing through its starport.

The main trading docks are busier than ever, but the vast ore-handling facility stands idle. Some of the smaller bulk cargo areas remain active, but the days when megafreighters loaded processed ore for shipping are a distant memory, and there are those who wistfully hope the last miners out of Zaibon will leave the lights on behind them.

## TENALPHI

Tenalphi is an Earth-like planet, though with a hot climate and tainted atmosphere. Nevertheless, it supports a diverse ecosystem and is highly suitable for agricultural activity. This was the salvation of original colonists, who came from the Sword Swords. Cut off during a period of internal warfare, the colony on what would eventually be named Tenalphi had to chart its own course, and at first regressed to a very low Tech Level.

During the rebuilding, the world was settled by modest numbers of colonists from both the Sword Worlds and Imperium. Initially, this was peaceable, but clashes occurred later. Settlement of these disputes eventually led to the formation of a world government, and Tenalphi petitioned to join the Imperium.

Today, the world's population has grown to some sixty million or so. It retains a strong democratic tradition, with all adults entitled to vote on issues of importance. This is made possible by the world's high Tech Level and prevalence of mass communication. In theory, any adult is permitted to speak before the electorate on any issue, though this takes the form of video diatribes in most cases, and the number of people reached is not large unless the speaker has a following. This does happen, with some highly inappropriate individuals becoming prominent in Tenalphi's political circles due to their datanet popularity.

In general, mass-democracy is kept within sensible limits, with most of the population holding moderate views and outvoting those who have some other agenda. There have been exceptions, however, resulting in the implementation of some very short-sighted policies in response to an event that sparked widespread emotional response. These are typically reversed soon enough, but have demonstrated that Tenalphi's politics can be governed by knee-jerk reactions.

Tenalphi's excellent starport is a link on the X-boat network and maintains a flotilla of support craft in addition to the world's modest enforcement and defence force. System defence rests mainly in the hands of two old heavy cruisers stripped of their jump drives and converted into monitors. Officially, one is always on station and the other under maintenance or refit, but in practice the age of the vessels means they spend a lot of their time out of service, and replacement is long overdue. The rest of the flotilla consists of minor craft suitable mainly for deterring piracy.

As the only source of TL14 goods for several parsecs, Tenalphi is a major exporter, and primarily imports raw materials for use in its advanced factories. Its port also builds starships, though not in large number. Capacity is not great, and full order books result in prices edging upwards. This is acceptable to most clients; Tenalphi's yards have a good reputation for quality and reliability.

Tenalphi is also thought to be the site of an Ancients installation. Artefacts have been found, scattered over the planetary surface. This lack of concentration is puzzling and, so far, no major site has been located although there are a few nodes where groups of artefacts were found close together. Efforts to find a site have been patchy, with various initiatives being launched then drying up after a few months as funding waned. Tenalphi has thus far resisted offers by offworld concerns to help fund the Ancients treasure-trove some think lies hidden.

## SPIRELLE

Spirelle is an Earth-like mid-tech world lying ‘behind’ the Lunion Shield. Lacking a high-technology industrial base, Spirelle is a market for exports from worlds like Tenalphi and Adabici, and can export only lower value goods of its own. The difficulty of creating a sustainable high-technology base is such that, given the funds available to it, Spirelle is more than likely doomed to be forever a backwater, albeit a comfortable one.

Spirelle’s internal transportation system relies heavily on maritime traffic, with most population centres on or near its coastlines. This includes the starport, which is also a major seaport. The same containers are used in sea and space transportation, and one of Spirelle’s few competitive exports is the shipping containers themselves.

Most inland areas are very sparsely populated. This suits the purposes of the Scout Service, which leases large expanses of land for a base and survival training centre. The Scout base is in a remote area with its own spaceport, and is quite extensive. Scout personnel are rotated through the base for basic, refresher and specialist training, including paramilitary skills such as hostage-rescue and vaguely-defined ‘object retrieval’ missions.

The Scouts are popular on Spirelle, not least since they take liberty at the starport or other cities and spend quite a lot of Credits when they do. Recruitment to the Scout Service is also high on Spirelle, due to this association. As far as the government is concerned, the Scout Service is vital to the world’s economy and its hopes of future development. Major decisions are always taken with regard to maintaining and ideally expanding this relationship; at any given time, there is always at least one proposal in the works for an expanded Scout Service facility or greater presence on Spirelle. Thus far, none of these ideas has been implemented but it is possible that eventually there will be additional investment which can be ploughed into development.

## OLYMPIA

Olympia is a small world with a great deal of surface water. Its very thin, tainted atmosphere is inadequate to support humans for long, but can be tolerated for a short time by a suitably acclimatised person. The locals can briefly function without compressor masks, where offworlders would rapidly lose consciousness. Despite this, the population tends to be very careful about their equipment, not least since their small population means there are no well-equipped hospitals.

Olympia is home to around a thousand people, most of whom live in a single settlement at the starport. The world is officially TL7, but has no manufacturing capability as such – anything that must be made or maintained passes through the hands of a small number of craftsmen in workshops equipped in many cases with improvised tools. Most of the population are farmers or work in businesses at the port, which does not see a great deal of traffic.

Despite its lack of economic prominence, Olympia is significant to the Imperium as a ‘landgrab’ world, and may have been originally settled for no better reason than to prevent Sword Worlders from claiming it. Certainly, the starport receives a subsidy from the Imperial Colonial Office, permitting it to maintain its modest level of service even when there is little traffic to bring in revenue.

Away from the starport, much of Olympia is virgin wilderness, with only the most basic orbital maps available. Occasionally, a hopeful survey party will conduct a search for mineral deposits in the outback, but there has never been a strike of sufficient value to merit exploitation.

## SMOUG

Smoug may well have been landgrabbed in the same manner as Olympia, but its extensive mineral wealth – particularly iron – made it a far more important acquisition. The opening of numerous mines brought people to settle Smoug, and over time a viable economy was built up. Most the population work in the mining industry or one of its peripheral sectors, and much of the produce is fed into the factories of Smoug's cities. The remainder – a very significant amount – goes up the Spinward Main to Tenalphi and Adabicci.

Smoug is a vast, dusty desert with virtually no standing water. Filter masks are necessary to deal with ever-present dust, which has a high iron content and can cause problems with electronic equipment. The settlements of Smoug have effective anti-contamination measures and strict rules about cleaning dust off pretty much everything when entering a town or installation. Similarly, many instruments give confusing readings in parts of Smoug due to the magnetic effects of iron-bearing dust. Various workarounds exist, including clever algorithms to filter out these effects, but there is no substitute for experience and local knowledge.

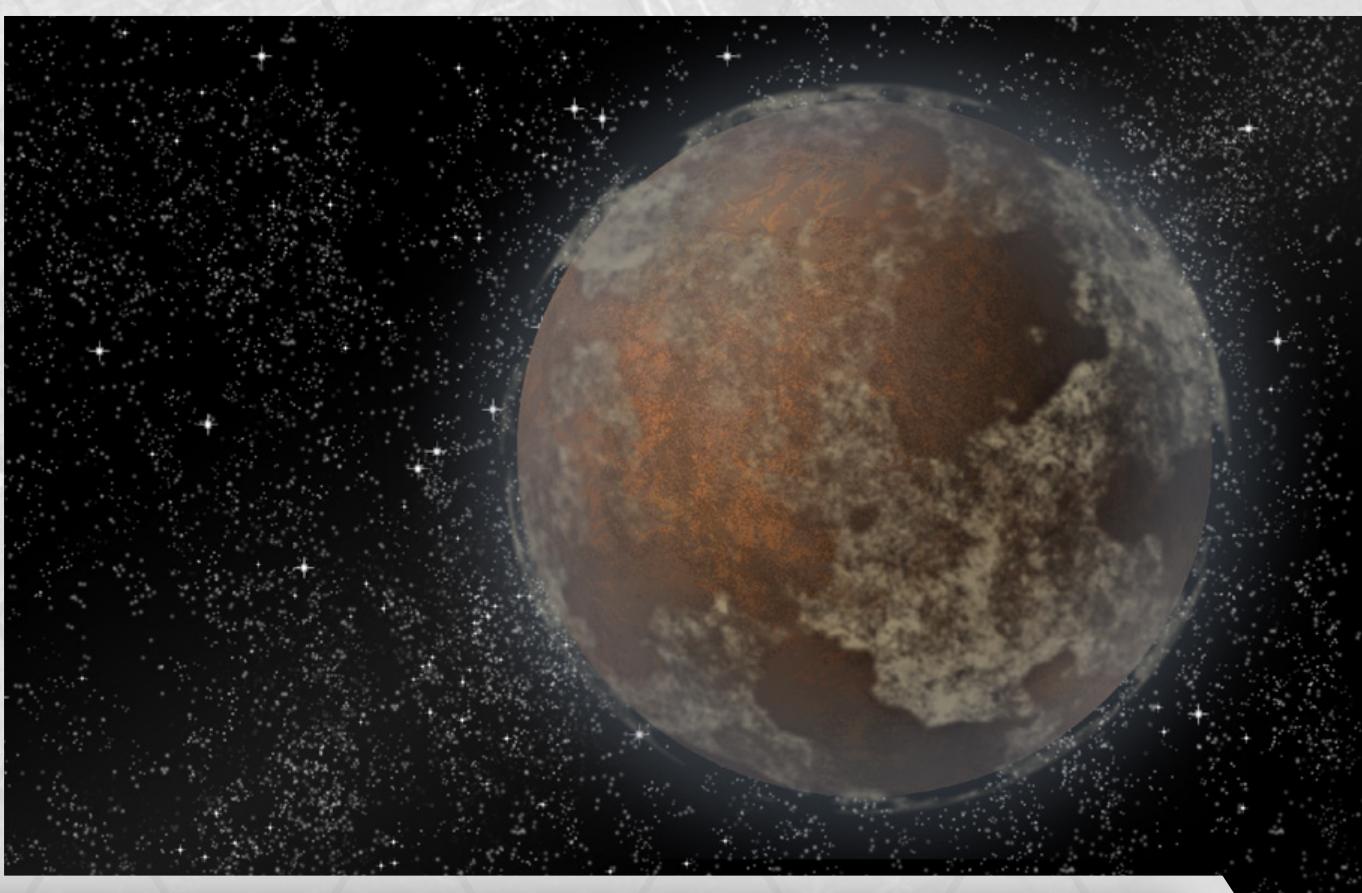
The population of a little over 40 million is governed by a rather bland bureaucratic apparatus which is inextricably tied into the mining industry. Many officials pass back and forth between corporate and

governmental sectors, to the point where it can be hard to see where one ends and the other starts. Many settlements have a security force provided by the region's main mining company rather than a government-sponsored police presence. Similarly, many aspects of rescue and emergency assistance are handled by the corporations' assets rather than the government.

The port sees considerable jump-2 traffic to and from Grote, and thence District 268, and acts as an entry point to the Imperium. The port and its surrounding startown are thus very cosmopolitan, whereas other cities of Smoug tend to be rather more insular.

Ships of the Imperial Navy are common visitors, with crewmembers generally made very welcome when they take liberty in the port. Occasionally a Sword Worlder warship pays a visit, which can be alarming in times of tension but more often takes the form of goodwill missions intended to promote better understanding. These ships have always been very ready to offer assistance to any vessel in trouble, and their crews are usually well-behaved.

As a result, the port of Smoug is generally friendly to Sword Worlders, and a frequent location for cross-border trade. Sword Worlder merchant vessels commonly trade at Smoug rather than return home than passing up the Spinward Main, generating revenue that makes Smoug's port more profitable than its small size would indicate.



# SYSTEM PROFILE: WARDN

Lying right on the border with the Sword Worlds, within one jump of a major fleet base, Wardn is of strategic importance to both the Imperium and Confederation. Its starport is often considered to be the first or last major port on the Spinward Main. This is not strictly accurate of course, but is the first (or last) on the part of the Main that runs through purely Imperial space.

## WARDN

Wardn orbits a K2V (orange main sequence) star named Wardn Primary as one of five terrestrial (rocky) planets and two gas giants. There are no planetoid belts in the system. Wardn is the only Imperial member world in the system, and the only one to be permanently inhabited. However, all bodies in the Wardn system are claimed by the Imperium and whilst transient inhabitation for economic purposes (e.g. mining or scientific operations) would be overlooked, a permanent settlement would constitute a territorial claim and require permission from Imperial authorities.

In order from the star, the system contains:

Position	Name	Type	UWP
1	X0107-1	Uninhabited Rockball	X300000-0 Ba Va
2	Apelinne	Small Gas Giant	
3	Pzl	Uninhabited World	X411000-0 Ba Ic
4	Wardn	Inhabited, Imperial Member World	B756486-B Ni
5	Enex	Small Gas Giant	Scout Base Enex
6	X0107-6	Uninhabited Rockball	X100000-0 Ba Va
7	X0107-7	Uninhabited Iceball	X6A2000-0 Ba FI

## X0107-1

X0107-1 is coded rather than named, following the practice of assigning an X code to uninhabited worlds with no locally assigned name that have found their way into navigational databases. 0107 refers to the system's position within its subsector and the final digit is orbital position. Correctly speaking, this world should be referred to as 'Spinward Marches X0107-1 Lunion' but this is only relevant on large-scale charts.

X0107-1 is not inhabited but has been surveyed from time to time, and is subject to routine flybys by Scout Service vessels. This is partly due to the system's sensitive location on the Imperial border; even a tidally locked rockball like X0107-1 might be useful to external powers as a forward base or listening post.

## APELINNE

Apelinne is a small gas giant with no significant moons. It has a rather unimpressive ring system but is otherwise unremarkable. Apelinne is occasionally used for fuel skimming by cheapskate ship operators who do not want to pay starport operators. Vessels seeking to infiltrate Imperial space or bypass border customs inspections also sometimes refuel at Apelinne, a fact well known to the Imperial Navy. It is claimed that the gas giant's atmosphere is seeded with mines of some kind, and that monitoring satellites orbit above it. The latter is far more likely.

Apelinne is also a good place to get stopped and searched by an Imperial Navy destroyer crewed by very bored personnel stuck in orbit over a nowhere gas giant for weeks on end. Searches and interrogation of suspect crewmembers tend to be rather intense.

## PZL

The origins of Pzl's name are lost in obscurity, but the name appears in old star charts and may be a corruption of someone's name or a non-Galanglic word. Whatever the case may be, Pzl is a small rocky planet with a trace atmosphere, and water locked up as ice in areas that receive little solar heating. It is not habitable, but a better prospect for colonisation than a true rockball planet.

There have been attempts to create a settlement on Pzl, but most failed to secure appropriate funding or were withdrawn after proving unviable. The world has extensive volcanism, which may make some minerals accessible. This has not been enough to make it worth the expense and effort to set up a community.

## ENEX

The gas giant Enex occupies the next orbit out from Wardn, and is typical of the type. It has several small moons and one large one, which is designated Scout Base Enex. The scout base is one of two installations in the Wardn system – the other being on the planetary surface – and is quite extensive. Its official purpose is to monitor shipping and traffic along the border and maintain charts of the region. It is an open secret, however, that Scout Base Enex exists mainly to support intelligence gathering operations by Scout Service vessels beyond the border. This includes neutral space, but the obvious target is the Sword Worlds Confederation.

## XO107-6

XO107-6 is a rockball planet orbiting far out from its primary. Full surface charts are on record, but there is no real reason to visit such a remote location other than to monitor it for occupation by pirates or infiltrators. A Scout Service ship dutifully makes a flyby every few months, but other than that XO107-6 remains undisturbed.

## XO107-7

XO107-7 is usually considered to be an iceball rather than rockball since it has an atmosphere of sorts and water is present, in the form of ice, and contains various compounds mixed in from the atmosphere. Overall, XO107-7 is a forbidding environment of no real economic or strategic value but the Scout Service maintains a small research outpost on the surface. It is resupplied from the scout base from time to time, and receives no non-official traffic. The assumption is that the Scouts are conducting planetology experiments on XO107-7, but no data is publicly available.

## THE SCOUT BASE

There are two Scout Service installations in the Wardn system, though both are under combined command and considered a single base by the authorities. The oldest was built on Wardn itself, at what was then the starport. Its express purpose was to study the Sword Worlds, and over time the installation grew until a second facility was built on the largest moon of Enex. From this point on, the original base waned in importance until all interstellar operations were staged out of the Enex installation.

The base on Wardn was drawn down, and parts of it are now all but derelict. However, a portion of the original facility remains in operation and fulfils a range of functions. It has its own landing field, and often receives couriers (and the occasional larger ship) from deeper within the Imperium. The installation is fed reports on shipping coming through the main starport, and data feeds from vessels monitoring traffic in other systems. This information is collated into monthly reports on shipping volumes, trade tonnages and the like, and sent to the region's major bases, notably Persephone.

In addition to this function, the installation on Wardn sends parties out to Wardn's surface, but notably the Patterned Desert. The Scout Service does not comment on what it might be doing, but it seems that the work they are engaged in is mundane. Soil sampling, air composition analysis and so forth are common activities for these parties. There are those who remain convinced that the Scouts are looking for evidence of alien civilisations on Wardn, and there may be some truth to this. After all, the Scouts have enough personnel in the system to spare a few to poke around Wardn on the off chance that rumours of alien inhabitation in the distant past might be correct.

Although the installation on Wardn usually has a ship on the landing pad, virtually all Scout Service vessels coming through the system go via the Enex base. It maintains a large flotilla of couriers, survey scouts and other craft, including a few vessels that look a lot like common designs but may in fact be covert surveillance ships. Big scout cruisers sometimes visit Enex before heading over the border on long cruises into Foreven sector or even beyond.

Occasionally, a joint Scout/Navy taskforce forms up off Enex before heading out across the border. These groupings are usually short-lived, with vessels dispersing to carry out duties once they reach their operational area. Naval couriers also use the base as a refuelling point, typically when transiting between Adabici and Caladbolg, or en route to Five Sisters subsector.

# WARDN

Wardn has a breathable if thin atmosphere and 60% surface water coverage, placing it well within the category of garden worlds. It has a rich and diverse ecosphere, with numerous native and imported species. As with other worlds of the Lunion Shield, Wardn is strategically important to the Imperium but cannot support sufficient defences of its own.

Wardn's large and well-run starport sees a considerable amount of interstellar trade, which in turn provides a great deal of revenue for the world. Despite being TL11, Wardn does not have a sufficient workforce to create a major manufacturing sector, so most goods are imported. This makes high-tech items expensive on Wardn, though there are moves to remedy this situation, by bringing in skilled workers and investing in modest factories, but the process is going slowly.

At present and for the foreseeable future, Wardn relies on its starport and exports of agricultural produce for profit. Food is a high-bulk, low-value item with heavy shipping costs; agricultural economies are at a huge disadvantage in interstellar trade. This is offset somewhat by the export of higher-value goods based on agricultural processes. Thus, Wardn tends to export a little less grain each year and far more secondary products. These include wines and spirits, high-quality meat products and a range of truly excellent cheeses. The latter are so heavily pushed that the 'Wardn cheese salesman' has become a byword for hard selling.

Wardn's 'great anomaly' as some call it – a rather grand term but one that has stuck – is the strange system of lines and patterns carved into the surface of

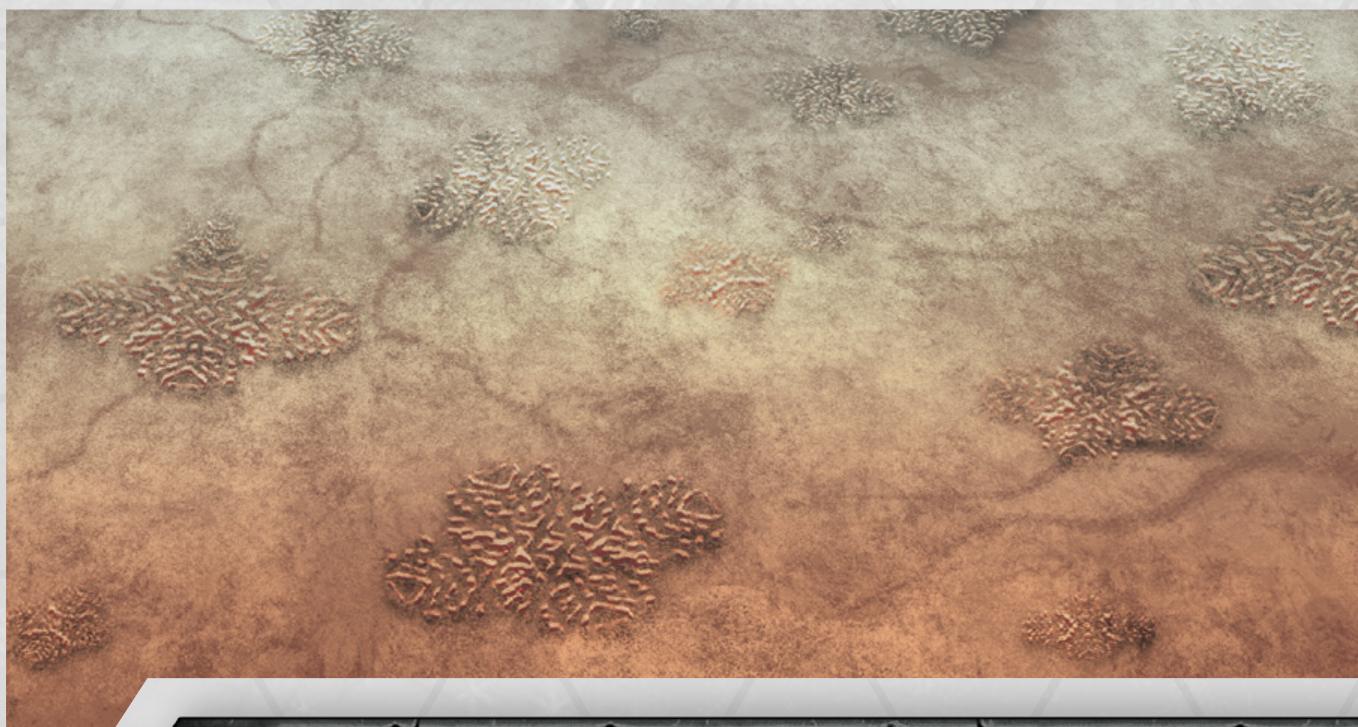
what is known as the Patterned Desert. It is believed by scientists that these patterns are the produce of anaerobic life in the baked sand of the desert, but many still believe the patterns are evidence of a vanished civilisation. Expeditions occasionally attempt to prove one answer or the other, but so far there has been no solid conclusion.

## Plant and Animal Life

Wardn's plant life varies in character across its surface. Close to the cities and in cultivated areas most species are imported, including several staple crops grown on multiple worlds. The native plant life has been driven back from these areas, though it still exists in patches. Some species are more common, especially those farmed or cultivated for decorative purposes.

Away from the main centres of habitation, Wardn's natural ecology remains strong. The character of vegetation changes noticeably as a Traveller moves into the countryside, and in areas not temperate and well-watered, the native plant life tends to remain unchallenged. This implies that imported species have made many local ones extinct in certain niches – notably those suitable for farming or human habitation – but have made few inroads into less desirable areas.

Animal life, also, is a mix of imported and local species. Colonists imported animals that were easy to farm and offered good yields, and simple economics meant these species became prevalent in farming regions. Local species, whilst suitable for eating, have been edged out of main agricultural zones but are farmed in remote areas. They can also be encountered in wild herds where human habitation is sparse.



# ZHETTIL'S GRAZER (PLOD)

The most commonly encountered food animal on Wardn – and numerous other worlds besides – is Zhettill's Grazer, often known colloquially as a Plod. One of several species controversially recatalogued by naturalist Anastasia Zhettill, Zhettill's Grazer is a slow-moving, docile and rather dumb creature which typically weighs 500-600kg. It is in many ways comparable with a Terran cow, and gives drinkable if rather odd-tasting milk. Plods have grey or grey-white skin, often mottled with darker brown patches, and typically form groups of 4-6 females plus several juveniles.

Even when a larger herd is artificially created, it will rapidly break into smaller groups, with individual animals seeking one another to reform their sub-herd. These groups are rarely formed among closely related animals; instead Zhettill's Grazer seems to prefer social groups. Zhettill herself, in her work *Redefining the Natural World for the Interstellar Traveller*, named these groupings 'gossips' and compared their behaviour to that of

humans discussing a sports event or some controversial incident. This description attracted a considerable amount of negative comment, but the label stuck.

Males accompany the herd but generally remain apart from it; they do not as a rule join a gossip unless attempting to mate with one of the females. A given male is typically associated with one or more gossips and, when not attempting to mate will – in the words of Zhettill's book – 'blunder along behind the herd getting into pointless disputes with other males over nothing'.

Zhettill's Grazers are ranched for food on many worlds, and generally give a good yield. However, they require a fair amount of land; Plods do not move fast but move constantly. Where land is not a problem, some ranchers prefer to turn the herd loose and hunt animals they wish to slaughter, whilst others keep tighter control over the herd. This is more labour-intensive but requires much less territory.

The Plod is not a territorial or aggressive animal, but it does have thick skin that can make a Plod difficult to bring down. When threatened, gossips move closer together and bunch around the juveniles, whilst their associated males range between their gossips looking for the threat. A male plod defending its gossip will charge its opponent, knocking down and trampling smaller creatures and butting larger ones with its heavy skull.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Plod	35	5m
SKILLS	Athletics (strength) 1, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Hooves (2D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+2), Large (+1)	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbivore, Grazer	



# SWAMP-SWARM

The term swamp-swarm is typical of spacer-shorthand, a habit of giving things a quick and simple – often flippant – name. A swamp-swarm is essentially a swarm of insect-like creatures found close to bodies of water or marshy areas. Most are harmless, but can cause a range of secondary problems. A swarm of insects that likes to feed on blood can cause a huge distraction if they get under clothing and armour, or might cause a Traveller to have an allergic reaction. Dealing with such a swarm is problematic; most weapons are unlikely to have much effect on a swarm of insects.

Swarms can cause a variety of problems, few of which can be solved by direct violence. Distracted Travellers, plagued by insects, may blunder or fall into a serious predicament, or simply be unable to go into some areas. Insects can also clog up air intakes or make vision impossible out of a suit or vehicle. Powerful all-terrain vehicles have been brought down by humble insects – lots of them – and an inconveniently placed ravine or boulder.

Some swarms are more dangerous than others. The typical horde of insects is more of a serious inconvenience than major threat, but species of flesh-eating bugs do exist. These will swarm over suitable food sources – people or animals that wander into the area – and begin feeding. Each bite is tiny and inconsequential on its own, but given enough time a swarm can pick a human clean to the bones. The presence of flesh-eating swarms is usually given away by skeletal remains of large and small animals, close to a suitable place for drinking from a river or pool. The only real defence against such a swarm is a sealed vehicle or suit, repellent chemicals or weapons with the Fire trait.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Flying Eater	-	4m
SKILLS	-	
ATTACKS	Countless Tiny Bites (1D)	
TRAITS	Flyer (Idle)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Eater	



## The People of Wardn

Wardn is home to around fifty thousand people, most of whom are human, though there are significant numbers of Vargr and other races. Society is well integrated; there are no racial divides or separate enclaves, and few cultural variations among the small population.

Most of Wardn's inhabitants live in a cluster of small cities in the temperate region. The only other major centre of habitation is the scout base, which is situated a few hundred kilometres away on the site of the world's original starport. This was replaced by an upgraded installation in the early development of the world, and became the sole property of the Scout Service. The new port was in turn upgraded over the years to create the present highly capable facility.

The people of Wardn are mainly farmers or small-city folk, who work in small teams of farm hands or minor businesses. There are no large-scale employers on Wardn; even 'large' firms rarely employ more than a hundred people and most are much smaller. This has an impact on society; the people of Wardn are used to close relationships with a small number of people, and are mindful of the need to be accepted by the group they are part of. They tend to have a strong work ethic and feel the need to be seen to pull their weight.

The folk of Wardn also tend to play fair by others. Getting one over on someone is not worth the damage to reputation, which can result in resentment and ostracism. Thus, a Wardner can be trusted to pay his debts and repay favours when the time comes. They will sometimes go out of their way to repay someone for some small help that has been forgotten about.

Wardn's agriculture-based economy is gradually changing, with increasing amounts of secondary produce being exported. Thus, whilst there are still just as many farms and ranches as there ever was, there are far more distilleries, wineries, breweries and cheese-making facilities. Some of the skills used to make these products are home-grown, the result of trial and error that has produced some outstanding examples of good and bad products. However, in many cases experts have been brought in to set up or run these new businesses, a move met with mixed emotions by the populace.

The indigenous cuisine of Wardn is unsophisticated but good. With large amounts of grain, meat and vegetables available even poorer segments of Wardn society can afford to eat well, enjoying large steaks that would cost a fortune on a vacuum world. The quality of ingredients is such that most local food tends to be plain, with little needed to enhance it, and Wardners are highly suspicious of adding seasoning to perfectly good food.

Located as it is on the edge of the Imperium, Wardn is vulnerable to attack or invasion, and does not have the resources to maintain a credible defence force. Space defence is virtually non-existent, other than a few missile launchers on the highport and whatever vessels the Scout Service provides. If there is no Imperial Navy vessel in the system, Wardn is at risk of pirate attacks or raids on its settlements. However, these are defended by an effective militia.

Although possession of most firearms is illegal on Wardn, militia armories are maintained in most settlements, with small arms available for use at need, mostly assault rifles or light support weapons. The militia squads are motivated and reasonably well led, but uncoordinated. The command structure of Wardn's militia comprises mainly prominent citizens who lead bravely but have no grasp of strategy. A few professionals, most of them veterans of Imperial armed forces, act as advisors and teachers.

Wardn's militia is entirely capable of handling a small-scale attack by raiders, which is all it is likely to face outside a major war. In the event the world were to be invaded, say by the Sword Worlds Confederation, the militia would be able to put up no more than token resistance. This is really all that could be expected of a world like Wardn, which relies on the protection of the Imperium against major threats. This is a major part of why the Imperium exists.

Overall, society on Wardn is based around small groups living and working in small cities. People are hard-working and generally very honest. They are polite to outsiders but slow to extend a particularly warm welcome unless there is reason for trust to be established. Despite this stand-offishness, Wardn is generally considered a pleasant place to visit, if unsophisticated and a bit rustic.

# ADVENTURES ON WARDN AND THE SHIELD WORLDS

The following adventure seeds can be used to set up quick adventures in the Shield Worlds region.

## FLIGHT TO EVADE CAPTURE

Elley Umdishma is a former inhabitant of Wardn who went offworld to work. Somewhere along the way, she discovered thievery and con-artistry were much easier than working for a living and, unusually for a Wardner, she took to the criminal lifestyle with ease. This is partially because she is a sociopath, who considers the people around her no more significant than insects. She has no remorse for anything she has done, and can always come up with a reason why her victims deserve what happens to them, or why it is all someone else's fault.

Elley is an apparently charming and friendly individual, but uses people to get what she wants then leaves them to deal with the consequences. She has reinvented herself several times as she moves from world to world, leaving behind a trail of misery and broken dreams. Elley specialises in scams that build on a person's desires and aspirations; she knows people will delude themselves given the right prompting, which makes them much easier marks. Indeed, she has run several complex scams in which one person has brought in others, increasing the profits for Elley and creating a patsy to take the blame.

Eventually, Elley's luck ran out and she fell foul of a powerful individual on Adabicci. With no hard evidence, there was no chance of bringing Elley to justice but her enemy was quite willing to take vengeance in other ways. Elley fled, eventually returning to her home on Wardn. There, she is well respected; nobody suspects what she really is.

Elley knows her friends and family on Wardn will not suspect her activities and would protect her. She plans to hide out for a while before assuming a new identity and starting a new set of cons. In the meantime, she has settled back into her old life in a small community on Wardn, welcomed by old friends who would be very hostile toward anyone who came around with accusations or ill-intent.

The Travellers might be the victim of Elley's scam, or could be contacted by one with a view of bringing her from Wardn to face 'justice', the nature of which is left vague. Finding her and getting her offworld will not be easy, and since she is not a wanted criminal, even if the Travellers have a bounty hunter license, they will be guilty of kidnapping if caught.

## INDUSTRIAL ESPIONAGE

The giant mining machines used on Harvesette have been the source of controversy for many years. They rip up the topsoil and upper layers of rock beneath, crush the whole lot and then pulverise it. Useful ore is extracted from the resulting gravel and dust by chemical processes. The waste is dumped behind the vehicle, mostly filling in the gouge it has left in the world.

The companies operating these vehicles claim they do not cause excessive damage. Although the rock and soil is churned up, it is put back and soon sprouts new growth as nature reclaims territory. Numerous 'information' campaigns have been run showing the high rate of natural reclamation, and statistics regarding damage as well as time to full recovery are widely available.

The environmental group Natural Action maintains these reports and information sequences are falsified, and that the process used in extracting ores leaves the resulting waste barren and unable to support life. Worse perhaps, it is loose and tends to blow around in what little wind Harvolette has, carrying its contaminants elsewhere and killing everything for many miles outside the mining zone. Natural Action wants proof of the destruction being wreaked on Harvolette's ecosystem, not least so it can mount an effective challenge against the use of these machines elsewhere. Rumours are beginning to surface that similar operations are planned on other worlds, and Natural Action is in a hurry to find a way to oppose them.

Natural Action is well known to mining companies, and unlikely to be able to sneak onto a mining machine. However, a band of 'freelance experts' might find a way to bluff their way aboard, or sneak onto a machine some other way. If they can obtain proof of the falsified reports, perhaps in the form of the real data used to generate them, there might be a chance to mount a challenge before another world is befouled by these monsters.

If the Travellers are amenable, Natural Action would be very happy to see one of the machines suffer an accident or become disabled in some way. They are not willing to consider violence and do not want anyone to get hurt, but the activists are keen to see a machine damaged. It may be apparent to the Travellers that Natural Action's people are a little disconnected from the reality of the situation – they want their rapacious opponents to suffer without having injuries or deaths on their collective conscience. Hard-nosed Travellers who challenge this rosy mindset may alienate the activists or upset them badly, though this will lead to nothing more than a slightly embarrassing petulant tirade.

And of course, there are some within Natural Action who favour a more direct approach. So long as what happens is denied, these members will not object to anything the Travellers do to the mining companies.

## A FLARE FOR THE DRAMATIC

The Travellers are approached by someone who could not possibly be an Imperial intelligence agent, with a discreet and rather urgent task. In one of the systems just over the border, the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service has been trying out a new covert monitoring technique. This involves positioning a heavily shielded vessel quite close to the star where electromagnetic and thermal activity of the star will conceal it from detection. From this position, instruments can watch the comings and goings of ships in the target system.

The system has been tested within Imperial space and proven reliable, but this is its first field deployment. The operation was considered low-risk as the target system (one of the Metal Worlds) has very little interstellar traffic. However, the scout vessel is overdue and it is not desirable for the technology or even the concept to fall into Sword Worlder hands. A private starship is the best choice for investigation as it would be possible to concoct a story about a bad jump emerging close to the star whilst on some innocent errand. A naval or scout vessel would be harder to explain.

The mission brief is simple – jump to the target system and find out what has happened to the scout ship. It may be disabled, captured, or still in place and simply prolonging its mission for some reason. Execution is harder, however. The scout vessel is still present but has been heavily damaged by an unexpected coronal mass ejection. Some of the crew are still alive but trapped in various parts of the ship and unable to make repairs on their own. There is a real danger of further activity which could endanger both ships and, of course, the existence of the ship should not be revealed to the rulers of the system.

The Travellers must devise how best to make a rescue, if one is even possible.

## FOUL PLAY

Following up a rumour about a wrecked Type Y Yacht in a very unusual eccentric orbit, the Travellers narrow down which system it is in, and begin making efforts to locate it. This should be presented by the referee as a puzzle to solve, at which point the Travellers can attempt to locate the actual craft. It is in a very strange solar orbit; not one a ship would normally find itself in under any set of circumstances the Travellers can think of. It does not, however, show signs of weapons fire.

Boarding the yacht, the Travellers find it is deserted. Critical systems have been destroyed by internal explosions which must have been deliberate, totally wrecking the drives and flight controls but leaving the powerplant functional. The plant is running on a minimal level, and still has a little power left. This is being used to keep a single low berth running.

The low berth has been jury-rigged using parts of all the ship's emergency survival systems, which look like they, too, were deliberately trashed. Judging from the items lying about, it seems someone fixed up the low berth aboard a dying ship and crawled in, and is just barely alive. The low berth occupant is badly hurt, having been shot in both legs. She must have crawled around the ship for days collecting the components she needed and has done a good job of rigging the low berth as a survival pod. She needs careful waking and urgent medical attention, but will live – and perhaps even make a good recovery.

The low berth occupant is – was – a highly placed official in a large business group. An enemy she made in her rise engineered a particularly cruel way to murder her, leaving her wounded aboard her crippled yacht to slowly die as the air ran out. What they did not know was that she started her career as an engineer, and had the skills to give herself a chance of survival.

She has been unconscious for more than three years, and her 'murderer' thinks he has got away with his deed. The ship's eccentric orbit was taking it far outside the system, not to return for decades and, in the meantime, her 'killer' has used her absence to prosper. The victim has no resources, no wealth, and no position any more; she is officially dead, presumed lost in a misjump incident. Naturally, she wants revenge and will try to get the Travellers to help. If successful, she will be able to reward them richly, but has little to offer at present.

Of course, it is up to the referee to decide if she deserved what happened to her...