

## **Civilizations of The Deep**

The Periphery, both Old and New, has long been the dumping ground of the worst traits the Human Sphere had to offer. It has also been the place where those who felt the established governments were too oppressive traveled in search of freedom. Whatever the reason for traveling out so far from Terra, most who live and travel in The Deep are accustomed to hardship and to relying only on themselves. This has made both the Old and New Peripheries regions of space where only the hardy and driven survive.

There are pockets of civilization though, some great and some small. Some, such as the Hanseatic League, we know well. But for every civilization in The Deep that we have studied there are numerous worlds our explorers have not been to since the days of the First Star League, or perhaps even then, that house humans. Most nations in the Outer Sphere (the Old Periphery) and the New Periphery control fewer than six worlds, and command minimal space fleets or armed forces. Raids by fallen pirates unable to make their mark in the Inner Sphere are common, but are rarely as dangerous as those nearer civilization.

### **Major Players**

The major players of the New Periphery have substantial manufacturing capabilities, fleets or armies large enough to make them major powers in their own rights, and the organization to use those assets effectively. While not as powerful as many realms in the Inner or Outer Spheres, these major players have no equal in the New Periphery.

### **Hanseatic League**

Formed in the thirtieth century, the Hanseatic League is a realm built on trade and treachery. The Hansa became the most powerful realm in their area of space and used their monopoly on JumpShips to gain an iron control over dozens of worlds and some smaller states, though in recent decades their control has slipped. Until the 3060s, they effectively controlled the fighting in nearby Nueva Castile, but in 3068 the Castilians assaulted the Hansa in retribution.

The Hansa fought hard, but lost nearly a quarter of their systems, including Bruges, before marshalling their army and navy to stop the Castilian advance. Unfortunately the forces it would take to push them out were being drained away from convoy escorts and pirates were preying upon the easy spoils, causing the merchants to scream for support. Instead of driving back the entire invasion, the Hansa planned and executed a quick assault on Bruges designed to drive the invaders off world and teach them a lesson.

The assault achieved one of the two goals, nearly destroying the Castilian force holding the world. The Umayyads arrived to support the Castilians shortly before they would have completely collapsed though and began to heavily hamper the Hansa assault. As the assault bogged down, the civilians began to support the Umayyads and Castilians, hitting the Hansa with improvised explosives and car bombs at any opportunity. But the Hansa

military leadership knew they could win. All they need was a few more troopers and an “open hand to deal with the terrorists.”

But the merchant council had had enough. The war no longer made business sense. Too many of their interests were taking losses because of the preoccupation of their military assets, and they didn't want to worry about pacifying Bruges. And it wasn't like the invaders had captured any other world worth more than a few kilograms of germanium. It was more cost effective to simply write the systems, even Bruges, off as capital losses and expand elsewhere.

In June of 3070 the Hansa army and navy lifted off Bruges, leaving it to the Castilians and Umayyads. They returned their forces to protecting their convoys, though left enough to watch the exhausted invaders, and went back to the business of making money. A cool war dominates the two realms now, with raiding common but outright conquest much more rare.

A council of merchants rules over the Hanseatic League and has placed extensive resources into building control over worlds anti-spinward of their core space. This has helped them recover the power the League once enjoyed, but much of their profits are tied up watching for Castilian assaults into more Hanseatic worlds. The Hanseatic League enjoys cool relations with the Sea Foxes and Jårnfòlk, as well as many other nations deeper into the Human Sphere, but has built up an impressive fleet to protect their interests.

Small WarShips protect their fleets and worlds, supported by assault ships, fighters, armed JumpShips, and even atmospheric ships as needed. BattleMechs and vehicles are built and used as well, but are not considered as important as the space arm. The military is spread throughout Hansa-controlled space, its mission to maintain Hansa control and to stop any who would challenge it. An unofficial mission it often approaches is actively raiding its rivals, such as the small Khwarazm Empire and Nueva Castile, in order to bolster its JumpShip fleets. These actions have gained them few friends and many enemies, but so far few enemies have been powerful or driven enough to take action.

## **Jårnfòlk**

A loose alliance of over two score families, the Jårnfòlk (literally Iron Folk) have a trading empire second only to the Sea Foxes, and even that is open to interpretation. While the Sea Foxes are without question far more powerful than the Jårnfòlk, the Jårnfòlk maintain trade relations across a larger range of space. Jårnfòlk trading ships are often seen traveling with Sea Fox convoys throughout the Inner and Outer Spheres in fact. The practice of each of those trading alliances to paint their ships in bright colors and designs is of particular interest and may have something to do with their close relations.

Beyond the Outer Sphere though, the Jårnfòlk appear to trade a full one thousand light-years spinward of their homeworlds, and the fairness of their trading practices has made

them welcome in nearly any port. Their homeworlds have expanded to nearly a dozen worlds since the 3060s as nearby systems have been colonized or inhabited systems joined the Järnfölk in space. Due to the later growth, the Järnfölk are no longer strictly Scandinavian in ancestry, but are host to a number of other cultures including German, French, English, American, and Japanese derivatives. This has made the Järnfölk alliance more fractious than in the past, but also more broad and powerful.

Some of the newer families, most having purchased their JumpShips from the Sea Foxes, are more willing to use weapons of war than the older families, and did not back down when raiders began to prey on Järnfölk convoys. They hunted the raiders down with any weapon they could build or purchase, many from the Sea Foxes again, and left the remains as a warning to future pirates. Never mess with the Järnfölk. These actions have allowed the Järnfölk to continue to trade throughout the vast range of space they service with few problems, and their continued fair trading practices have kept them a welcome arrival at nearly all ports, unlike the Hansa.

The Järnfölk are still known for making the best personal weapons in space, with Sea Fox support being able to build Clan-level weapons, and dueling has become an accepted practice in all families. The Kaufmann, Warwick, Lucas, and Yoko families have also embraced the heavier weapons of war such as ground, air, and space vehicles. They do not use BattleMechs though, considering them to be too expensive and hard to hide while maneuvering for battle. It is known that they have also purchased a number of frigates from the Sea Foxes, giving them a formidable fleet that has on occasion faced off against the Hansa favorably.

Those who wish to trade with the Järnfölk should remember that when they take offense they do call for duels. And outsiders rarely have the practice to match a Järnfölk dueler. Trade with them on your best behavior as they highly dislike it when they think they are being taken for a ride. They trade fairly and expect others to trade fairly with them. Those that do not do so have an uncanny ability to drop dead soon thereafter, sometimes due to duels and other times to more mysterious means. Trade fairly and they will trade with you often. Cheat them and you had better be able to run very fast and have a very deep hole to hide in.

## **Nueva Castile**

Colonized by Iberians in 2392, Nueva Castile never knew about the rise or fall of the Star League or any of the other nations in the Inner or even Outer Spheres. A handful of JumpShips maintained communications between the nine worlds of Nueva Castile, but they had no wish to explore systems outside their territory and they lived their agrarian lifestyle in peace. In 2830 that peace came to an end as a single JumpShip brought invaders in BattleMechs, an alien war machine to the Castilians. They named the invaders Umayyad and as the years went by the invaders proudly accepted the name.

The war continued for more than two centuries, as factionalism robbed the Umayyads of their central power, and the Castilians abandoned their agrarian ways to live under

despotic kings intent on taking power for themselves. They slowly drove back the Umayyads until the invaders were nearly removed from the worlds of Castile. But in 3062 evidence came to their attention that suggested an outside source had been playing them off each other to keep the war going rather than allow either side to fully win.

At that discovery, the Umayyad and the Castilians called an unofficial truce as they searched for their victimizer, planning to impose the ancient golden rule on them. The Word of Blake showed them evidence implicating the Lyrans, and the two forces nearly jumped on the Alliance. Only a last-minute hesitation caused by their distrust of the Word of Blake kept them out of the start of the Jihad. At the Word's assault of the Lyrans their distrust turned to a burning suspicion that the Word had lied to get their support, and they more closely studied those closer to them. They compared notes on the various contracts the Hansa had negotiated for them to acquire mercenaries and spare parts and soon came to the conclusion that it was the Hansa that had played them.

They assaulted the Hanseatic League in March of 3068, the Umayyad's Star League-era BattleMechs cutting a swath through the numerically superior Hansa. Even the Castilians acquitted themselves well, proving that the hard-fought battlefield experience they had gained over the centuries fared well against the inexperienced Hansa forces. They conquered world after world, smashing one Hansa force after another, but the Hansa had the numbers to weather the losses and come back for more. It took them nearly two years to marshal a response from their combined army and navy and drop it in front of the lightning assault that had cost them a quarter of their worlds, including Bruges.

Realizing that further war with such numbers would destroy them, the Umayyads and Castilians fell back to the conquered territories and began fortifying their gains. The Hansa followed the Castilians to Bruges, nearly destroying the Castilian force holding the world. The Umayyads arrived to support the Castilians shortly before they would have completely collapsed though and began to strike the Hansa from all sides, hopelessly bogging down the invasion. Then the civilians began to support the Umayyads and Castilians, hitting the Hansa with improvised explosives and car bombs at any opportunity.

In the end the Hansa retreated from Bruges, leaving it in the hands of the remaining Castilian and Umayyad forces. That was the effective end of the war, though a cool war of assassinations and raids continues to rage to this day. But the war between the Umayyad and Castilians was over for good. The Umayyad had withdrawn all military and civilian forces from Cordoba to fight the Hansa. The Castilians recognized the gesture and Umayyad control of Granada in return, and began to look towards the newly conquered worlds to see what they could do with them.

Now, after three decades of working together closely, the differences have begun to disappear. Without the constant war to maintain the king's power, the Castilian citizens have demanded and gained numerous democratic rights. They have also taken a greater interest in the arts and other matters of high society that the Umayyads brought with them. The younger Castilians (Castilians, Umayyads, and former Hansa) see each other

as kindred spirits now and happily work together to bring more power to their new realm. The elders do not forget the old wars but the younger generation now drives the various peoples together.

A handful of Hansa merchants have maintained their trade on Bruges, and have begun to make the Castilians a true merchant power in the immediate area. While having nowhere near the power of the Hansa or the Järnfolk in trade matters, the Castilian merchants have begun to make a name for themselves. The old Umayyad technologies have filtered into all levels of Castilian life, making both the military and civilian opportunities superior to that enjoyed a mere three decades ago. Limited local production of ships, vehicles, and BattleMechs, as well as purchases from the Sea Foxes and Lyran Commonwealth, give the Castilians the security they need. And though the cool war continues with the Hansa, both sides are careful not to kill the civilians, keeping it as a general non-issue to the Castilian voters.

In short, the Nueva Castile of today is a democratic, progressive, enlightened place to live. They accept millions of Hansa refugees searching for freedom every year, and these immigrants have begun to be a major part of the growing military that protects the Castilian territories. Many entire planets have tried to join Castile since the end of the official war in fact, but so far the Hansa have been able to maintain control. Projections suggest that they will not be able to do so forever though, and that Castile will supplant the Hansa as the primary power in that sector of space within the next fifty years.

## **Lesser Players**

### **Fiefdom of Randis**

Colonized by refugees of the Succession Wars, the world now known as Randis was for centuries simply one of many small colonies in the dregs of the Old Periphery that even pirates refused to bother with. That changed when Erdelmaine Randis formed the Brotherhood of Randis in 2988. The Brotherhood of MechWarriors proved to be less than effective though, despite harsh training practices, and the fortunes of Randis did not begin to rise until 3037 when Galahad Frews challenged Randis and defeated him for command of the Brotherhood.

His reforms made the reinvented the Brotherhood into a cohesive force of MechWarriors, and brought a technological renaissance to the world. The lives of the civilians improved along with the qualities of the MechWarriors, and Randis became a strong magnet of trade in the Old Periphery. This brought pirates of course, and the Brotherhood fought them and won across much of the Old Periphery, including Antallos.

The former Clansman Lucas Beckett took over command of the Brotherhood in 3060 and has driven the Brotherhood to cleanse the area of all pirates since then. Despite his advanced age Grand Knight Beckett continues to defeat all challengers for command, and Brother Galahad Frews aids him to this day in curbing his idealism with reality. Still, the

Brotherhood has taken nearly a dozen nearby systems under its wing, protecting them from the pirates of Tortuga.

The majority of their machines come from Taurian factories now, as they have joined into a pseudo-alliance with the larger nation, but they also purchase machines from the Sea Foxes as well. This gives the Brotherhood impressive capabilities and has kept them alive against the Lady Death so far.

### **Franklin Fiefs**

For nearly half a millennium a world of haves and have-nots, fifty or so principalities had commanded Nova Franklin for as long as anyone can remember. The social pecking order of the educated landowners and the uneducated workers ended in the 3060s though when the workers finally began to successfully revolt against their “betters”.

Unfortunately, the workers had none of the education of the landowners and have squandered their newfound freedom. Chaos rules the world with only three of the former principalities approaching the standard of living once considered normal. Commanded by three of the most intelligent of worker-leaders, they have banded together to attempt to bring order to the world but have only been able to maintain their small areas of responsibility. At least they maintain the majority of the remaining BattleMechs on the world, the only organized militaries, and protect the only spaceport. Beyond their zones of control where the rights of everybody, except the families of former landowners, are protected, the chaos of roving gangs, bandits, and surviving landholder guards rules supreme.

### **Herotitus**

Herotitus. Known throughout the galaxy as a place to go to have fun. Or to trade or meet with people when you don’t want anybody to know you are meeting with them. In the 3060s it appeared as though the forces of imperial morality would conquer the world, to the great dismay of traders, smugglers, diplomats, and spies everywhere. Luckily for these people, the citizens of Herotitus rose up against the vile morality enforcers and told them exactly what they could do with themselves during the Jihad. The world avoided harm during that conflict, as well as the Trinity War that came later, and continues to be a neutral system where anybody can come for a good time. There still remain a handful of cities that are the “refuge of moral peoples” but travelers tend to avoid them like the plague, preferring to spend their money on more carnal appetites than humming on hard benches under stained-glass windows.

### **Khwarazm Empire**

A merchant empire like the Hansa and Järnfölk, the ruling Khwarazmi merchant princes ply space in their pursuit of profits while the average Khwarazmi continue to survive at subsistence levels. Conquered by the Jade Falcons during the Clan Invasion, the Khwarazm weathered the occupation well. In the 3070s though Jade Falcon interest in the realm dwindled and they pulled out their forces. The Khwarazmi merchant princes have been happy to have their freedom since then and have continued to their old ways of life, trading wherever they can and ruling their subjects. JumpShips that have slipped too far into space the Hansa consider “theirs” without escort have often disappeared, bringing the merchant princes to heavily distrust the Hansa. They continue to do well in their own corner of the universe though, cooperating with ComStar, the Sea Foxes, and the Järnfölk. They own few BattleMechs, relying primarily on ground, air, and space vehicles to protect their interests.

### **Mica Majority**

A former mining system, the majority of the accessible resources dried up a century ago. Since then the system’s habitation domes have supported themselves by mining asteroids and, after the 3050s, bringing in tourism. It appears that many rich Spheroids like to try “roughing it” in the mines and the Micans are only too pleased to divest of them of their money if they wish that experience. In the 3060s though the Micans began to expand their trading practices again when they began looking outward to exploit nearby systems. Now having mining concerns on a dozens worlds within two jumps of their home system, the single large trading station at Mica’s zenith jump point is the center of trade for various rare metals, minerals, and even organic products. While still not rich enough to warrant raids by anything more than the smallest of pirates, the Mican government is working to increase the size of their local militia.

### **Niops Association**

A former Star League multi-generational research outpost, Niops had everything it needed to survive when the Star League failed. They actually had no idea of its failure until a wave of Capellan refugees fleeing the destruction of the First Succession War found Niops, but quickly adapted to the new reality. They allowed the Capellans to live on Niops, guaranteed them a comfortable standard of living, and commenced to rule over their new serfs for centuries. Benevolently of course. In the 3050s though they began to run out of resources to maintain the standard of living and begin looking outward for support. Unfortunately those who could help they soon learned not to trust and those they could trust couldn’t even help themselves.

Rather than see their home destroyed by outside conquest or internal strife due to their inability to maintain the status quo, the scientists set aside their power and gave the serfs an equal vote. The former serfs, upon realizing the true situation and being given full rights, stepped up and did what needed to be done. With the full population of the system producing at a greater rate, Niops was able to pull out of the downward spiral and began to recover.

It also began to sell the product of centuries of research to private corporations through the Inner and Outer Spheres, pulling in more money for expanding their educational systems and military forces. They remained neutral through the Jihad and the other wars that have ravaged the nearby realms, selling information to anybody that needs it and has the funds. Now a bastion of calm and tranquility in the Human Sphere, Niops is a rich system with a navy powerful enough to protect it from any pirate force and most governmental forces. It still shows no interest in expanding to other systems, happy to stay where it is and perform research as it has for centuries.

## **Mysteries of The Deep**

The Old and New Peripheries are rich in vast unknown regions, some that the Star League once claimed and some that even it never explored. ComStar's Explorer Corps, the Taurian Far Seekers, and numerous other agencies are devoted to exploring the unknown, but have so far come up with more questions than answers. Dozens of small proto-states have been discovered out there, and hundreds if not thousands of inhabited worlds have been brought back into intermittent contact with civilization. But not all who live in the depths of space are so willing to meet with other Terrans.

The insular White Wings that Taurian explorers have run into rimward of Taurian space are the most visible example of an organized force that avoids contact. Flying Star League craft from WarShips to fighters, the White Wings have been spotted watching numerous worlds throughout the rimward New Periphery and Outer Sphere. They have never responded to communications and avoid contact, jumping out if necessary to do so. The only way to recognize them is that they paint their ships in a uniform white with the only markings being angel wings on the flanks or wings. The Far Seekers believe that the White Wings are related to the centuries-long rumors of the Vandenberg White Wings and the Battleship of Merope, but the Explorer Corps hypothesize this may be a new group. Despite decades, or centuries if you count the Far Seekers, of searching their base or bases of operations have never been found.

There are also rumors of vaguely human peoples living on worlds throughout the New Periphery. Oh, we know about the Merfolk of the Trinity Alliance and more minor but still recognizably human genetic mixes that are seen on many worlds throughout the Human Sphere. Homo Stellaris is far different from those who once were born, lived, and died only on Terra after all. From the earliest days of stellar exploration until the great days of the Star League, genetic research and modifications were common to allow us, a race born of a single world, to colonize thousands of worlds. Our aging process was slowed, the biological clock that once counted down the doom of human reproduction was permanently defeated, and our immune systems were fortified to help our bodies survive the bugs of the galaxy. Engineering designed to make us both healthy and attractive was common, and designed to replicate down the lines of humanity through dominant characteristics. We know of course that some Terrans are closer to our ancestors in genetic content than to the epitome of Homo Stellaris, but the majority of the basic bioengineering designed to allow us to see the stars has held true over the centuries.



But there are peoples out there the rumors say that are at best vaguely human. Snake-like skin, bodies with more joints than normal, and other such oddities are only the least of what has been reported. Some people report seeing genuine aliens, beings that are totally non-human in form and yet demonstrate human-level intelligence. This does not mean the “snuggle bears” of Gemini or other similar beings. Rumors of much larger creatures living in areas that no human should have a right to live have been heard. Some suggest that these creatures are the result of heavy genetic manipulation, citing the known Clan ability to manipulate the human body. Some say that they are aliens while some say dismissively claim that they are the figments of too much coffee in the morning.

Whatever the truth of these rumors and the other organizations we have found or haven't found in depths of space, we know this for certain. We still only know a small fraction of what there is to know out there.