

# The Splintering Shard

A background supplement for *Beyond the Gates of Antares*

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# Introduction

One of the longest standing conflicts in the Antarean universe is that between the opposing IMTEls (Integrated Machine INTElligence) of the PanHuman Concord and Isorian Senatex. Having expanded across the many worlds of the Antarean Nexus for almost 300 years, the separation of the PanHuman Concord into two shards was in no way an easy split. It is perhaps best to regard the sundering of the IMTel as an oft-violent and haphazard splintering, the usurpation of the IMTel's nanosphere by a foreign nanospore: the biosilicon

nanospore infected by the Isorian's conflict with the Tsan Kiri. This mini-supplement explains the background and effects of the conflict, in particular as to how it impacted on the Northern Interface – the fragile border extending roughly along the Antarean north west from the cauldron of conflict, the Determinate. The effects of the real-space Tsan Kiri wars is shown, and we present some of the key individuals and units from a critical moment along the shifting frontier: the Isorian capture of the strategically vital system of Averahn.

A whistling snap of inrushing air was the only warning. Naral's squad dived into the shallow stream-bed as wind buffeted their suits. Behind them, the 'shroom-trees bowed, bent, then snapped, squeaking as they toppled, the supportive strands stretching to their limits and rubbing against the fibre before finally popping apart. It was a poorly-aimed shot but, like the rest of his squad, Naral kept his head down, relying on the spotter to relay the Tsan's locations to his combat display.

Except the plots on his display were abruptly replaced with the amber glow and accompanying probabilities of predicted locations snatched from the combat nanosphere. Naral glanced around to see the mangled wreck of the squad's spotter drone embedded in the debris of the tall fungii.

'SPOTTER OFFLINE,' blinked in a corner of his display. 'As if I didn't know.' What was worse, the massive heads of the fallen 'shroom-trees had created a barrier, blocking off their escape.

'They're not so stupid, after all,' muttered Naral, relying on the IMTel to not patch his private comments through to the other strike troopers. He switched to the squad channel just as the IMTel updated its feed to predict a probable ground assault. 'Squad, incoming torus troopers.' The comments were almost superfluous but added weight to the combat shard's assessment. He raised the top of his helmet over the crest of the earth before him, then immediately ducked back down. Hopefully, it was long enough for the suit's sensors to bring in data.

The plots updated: a four-strong squad of Tsan Kiri cantering towards his ditch, the horse-collars of compression torii around their necks. 'I hate being right,' he murmured. 'Squad, on my mark.' The only solution to the invaders heavy ground troops was to shoot first, disable as many as possible before they came close. His order triggered the IMTel to display a countdown on his overlay.

Simultaneously, the squad leapt up, each strike trooper laying down a hail of rippling plasma fire before the Tsan Kiri assault troops could react. 'Go down!' snarled Naral, launching his own suppressive slingnet to slow down their advance and push them into the ground. The Tsan stumbled but carried on, bursts of superheated plasma splashing against their armour shields. One tripped and fell, its armour finally flaring out of control and taking out a leg and hunk of shoulder with it.

Then the remaining Tsan were leaping over the bank and onto the Isorian strike troopers. The compressors dealt out deadly

waves of destruction, each trooper caught in the compression waves being crushed, their hyperlight armour flaring as it tried to absorb the energy. Naral strained, heaved aside a heavy Tsan with his carbine and fired his slingnet at the squad once more in an effort to bring them to their knees. But the Tsan were too strong, could not be pushed aside by the panhumans facing them. Trooper after trooper fell, unconscious or crushed by the Tsan Kiri weapons.

Naral dived to his hands and knees and wove his way through the thicket of galloping legs. A heavy hoof struck his head, he reared back and a compressor wave lifted him off his feet, flung him backwards into the barrier of logs. His armour screamed warnings as it tried to convert the energy to sink-mass. The force of the blow was such that some of the power leaked through. He lay still, stunned and in pain, as his suit injected analgesia, anaesthetic and adrenalin into his system. His eyesight faded and he waited for the killing blow, the concentrated blast of energy, the trampling hooves of the Tsan Kiri soldiers.

But the Tsan moved on, galloping along the stream-bed to their next assault. Naral glanced at his readouts, but his faceplate has shattered, the display a riot of fragmented colours. 'Display broken,' said his suit. 'Rescue beacon has been initiated. Please wait.' Then the teetering pile of 'shroom-logs collapsed on him, pinning him in place. In the dark beneath the logs, his armour flared...

...but held. Naral slipped into unconsciousness, hidden from the marauding invaders of Orates.





## THE EARLY IMTEL

The Isorians created and founded the IMTel, primarily as a way of keeping their various, real-space colonies in line with the home world. The IMTel was designed to be self-updating and self-replicating, all the machines and databanks within its umbrella automatically updated with new data, whether new discoveries, research, development, news, successes and failures. Some saw it as a way of offering perfection to those within its care with its superb prediction and personalisation, especially when access to advanced fabricator technology meant those on its core worlds had no physical, emotional or materialistic wants whatsoever.

Ironically, the major problem is that the IMTel itself was designed to protect itself from corruption. After the Tsan Kiri attacked the outlying colonies and initiated a centuries-long war, the Isorians were forced to adapt their own nanosphere to better dominate that of the Tsan Kiri, so altering its core algorithms and structure. In order to defeat the Tsan

bio-silicon technology, they were forced to adopt and adapt much of the technology they had discovered – including the bio-suits and phase armour used by their opponents. In doing so, and even whilst winning the war, they unwittingly offered the Tsan Kiri a back door to their own nanosphere, an infection route to compromise their own IMTel. The combined fleets and forces of the PanHuman Concord may have won the war, but what emerged from the blend of PanHuman and Tsan technology was a very different IMTel to that envisaged by the Isorian founders of the Concord.

On return to Isori, the war fleets' military IMTel and nanophages quickly overcame the civilian nanosphere on Isori – after all, the civilian IMTel-based nanosphere had little defence against what it thought was an extension of itself! After absorbing Isori, the new nanosphere spread off-world through the Antarean gates, transforming the worlds around it into the new IMTel that was radically different from the PanHuman Concord which it had originally founded. The Splintering had begun, And the Isorian Shard – the Senatex – emerged.

The assault shuttle looked little more than a multi-limbed amoeba, but with armour. It slammed into the Irel system defence boat, brushing the gravitic shields aside as if they barely existed. An explosion resounded through the ship and the artificial gravity temporarily altered as the ship's drives compensated for the added mass. Helmets morphed into place as the internal environment collapsed.

'I have been boarded,' announced the ship. 'Structural damage being repaired. Environmental controls compromised.' More explosions, screams, came through the muted comm channels. 'Attackers using phase weaponry that is causing considerable damage to my internal nanosphere and physical power lines.' The ship's IMTel flashed up recommendations, reassignments, and Defence Officer Terasi accepted almost all, routing marines to the damaged sections, retargeting defence turrets to fire into the body of the shuttle, rerouting injured and essential personnel to the escape pods.

There was one recommendation she did not accept; and one other came back with a rejection from the recipient. Terasi sighed. 'Captain, both the ship and the IMTel recommend you evacuate.'

'As it did you,' growled Captain Gerlan. 'I'm staying here.'

The ship shook once more and warning sirens sounded. 'Power failing. Nanosphere failing. Targeting lost. Intelligence distribution compromised. General evacuation ordered. Saving to—' Its voice cut off.

'Bridge crew: escape pods, now!' All the bridge crew bar Terasi obeyed, backing into the stasis pods that wrapped around them and slid into the pods. 'Launch,' said Gerlan. She glared at Terasi. 'I suppose you're going to explain it's your job.'

Terasi nodded. 'It is.' She reached under her station, most of which was now showing the bright red signs of failed systems and dead squads. She slung out a combat belt and a plasma carbine. 'And I know you're not going to your own pod until you're sure everyone's been evacuated.'

Gerlan chuckled. 'Dead right. Lead on.' She drew her plasma pistol.

Terasi swept to one side of the door, opened it on manual. The corridor beyond was dark, only a few emergency lights in operation. She kept to the side of the corridor, Gerlan to the other. 'Survivor report,' asked Terasi of her suit. 'Any personal rescue beacons?'

'Cannot connect to shipshard,' announced her suit. 'Comms compromised.'

They stopped at a blast door. Terasi stroked the release, allowing her suit to transmit her ID. 'Command not recommended,' announced the door display. 'Hostiles present.' As to emphasise the warning, the blast door shook as something crashed it from the other side.

Terasi glanced at Gerlan who raised her plasma pistol and nodded. Terasi lifted her carbine, aimed it beyond the door. 'Override—' she began, but the centre of the blast door abruptly disappeared. Eight-legged aliens streamed through the gap, massive weapons in their hands. One swung her way, fired, and her hand faded from her sight then reappeared, twisted. Pain shot up her arm before being suppressed by the suit systems.

Then the aliens were all over them both, hooves kicking, impossible hands-within-hooves grasping at their weapons and armour, nightmare faces glaring from too many eyes. Terasi had only moments to comprehend who – or what – had ruined their ship before Captain Gerlan gave the order she hoped she would never hear.

'Ship: autonomous self-destruct. Maximum kinetic damage. Now!' What was left of the ship's systems acknowledged the order. Terasi threw herself back against the closest wall and clutched her carbine to her chest as a stasis pod wrapped around her. Her last view was of the walls tearing apart, the floor ripping open, the ship's armour breaking like a flower, the aliens tossed about like leaves in a storm. The ship – her ship – was destroying itself, piece by piece. Amidst it all was Captain Gerlan, arms across her chest, her head bowed to the crew and ship she had lost.

Then the power-core flared, ripped apart the pieces and Terasi's pod was sent tumbling into space.



## THE ORIGIN OF THE SPLINTERING

The shape of most conflicts in the Antarean universe are defined by the layout of gates on the surface of Antares. Irrespective of where – or when – the star systems are in real space, the Antares Nexus creates an artificial geography as if the systems were merely island destinations on the surface of a vast ocean. Conflicts are relatively quick affairs, most lasting months or a few years – at least, where such conflicts aren't the ongoing rumblings and low-grade wars of border, claims and trade disputes, or IMTel border conflicts. It is this latter war that has been running for nigh on a millennium, the natural and uncontrollable antagonism arising from the automatic expansion of the supposedly helpful, but acquisitive, IMTel nations.

Other wars are kept short by the speed of communication between Antarean Gates: a few weeks between gates may not be instant travel, but it sets the tone for a relatively short

### Nexus vs real-space invasions

In Antarean space, many systems under threat have a huge advantage over attackers: they know the direction from and location at which the attackers must arrive. The existence and location of the Antarean gate is known – exactly – and due to the distances involved, attackers have no option but to travel through the gate.

In contrast, in a real-space war using sub-light velocity, the efficiency of the Gravitic Annihilation (GA) drive grants one of the very few advantages the attackers can gain: misdirection. With a GA drive, moving around a system to enter from a different point adds relatively little time to an interstellar journey and allows an attacking force to choose its target; in contrast, the defenders have to find the attackers and determine the direction from which the attack (or attacks) will come. No matter that the destination may be predictable, such as core planets on fixed orbits, manufacturing space orbitals, or critical space- or moon- based military installations, the direction of attack can be from anywhere in the surrounding globe of space.

In practice, of course, the advantage is not the full, three-dimensional 360° that might be expected, and the attacker's drive signature may be detected from some distance. However, the attackers are able to take advantage of drive signature spoofing or 'going dark' – shutting down many detectable systems – to hide their numbers and direction of attack.



period of time. During the long period of isolation between the Sixth and Seventh Ages of Antares, such connectivity was totally lacking, travel limited to sub-light speeds between stars many petayan apart. When the Isorians encountered the Tsan Kiri, the resulting war was carried out in real-space, an arena where travel between stars and battle sites could take decades. What is more, during such battles no-one can call for reinforcements– excepting were they to wait a decade more for the message to reach their home planet – and retreats are costly affairs. As the defender has many of the advantages, the attacker has to use overwhelming force: such a situation frequently leads to the annihilation of either the invader or the defender, and rarely a stalemate.

Such was the case in the Tsan Kiri war: by the time the Isorians received news of the attacks on their colonies and their acquisition by the Tsan, it was twenty-five to forty years too late to react. As they geared up for war and sent out scout ships to find out what happened, more systems fell. All the Isorians could do was send out additional defenders to the colonies they guessed might be most vulnerable – no matter what the probability the IMTel calculated, it would still be a guess against a foe whose capabilities were unknown!

A major problem for both sides was that the Tsan Kiri had their own version of an IMTel, but one based on biological nanites: not only would it react to a foreign IMTel with hostility, but the underlying technology was profoundly different. The only factor that the Isorians was their technological ability to adapt their own combat nanospore to a biosilicon basis that could overwhelm the Tsan on their own terms. Unfortunately, in so doing, their core nanosphere was contaminated by returning combat ships – faced with an attack by their own military, the civilian nanosphere and IMTel was quickly absorbed.

Such contamination and inability to respond was only possible because of the distances and communication time-lag involved. The Tsan Kiri war lasted centuries, eventually running 200 years into the start of the Seventh Age (as judged from the point when Isori was reconnected to the Antares Nexus). Whilst the Tsan had ravaged worlds relatively close to Isori, their own world was around 40ly away from the Isorian capital and not linked to the gate network. As soon as the Isorian's new technology began defeating them wholesale, the Tsan Kiri seemed to believe they had no option but to raze their home world completely and disappear before the Isorian invasion fleet arrived.

To where the Tsan Kiri fled is still not known. Given they have not been found in 1000 years, some believe they fled into interstellar space and live between the stars. Others claim the Tsan found an Antarean Gate on an otherwise unknown or undiscovered system and jumped through it, perhaps even collapsing it behind them. Given the Tsan Kiri have not been found anywhere on the Nexus, the gate is presumed to have led to the past or future or, now the Xilos Catastrophe has occurred, another Nexus entirely.

The legacy of the war, the technological breakthroughs and the takeover of the Isorian IMTel by their own technology led to a major complication that still has major repercussions on the Antares Nexus today. The natural hostility of the two nanospheres led to the splintering of the Isori from the PanHuman Concord they founded.





Octos-three Sechir shuddered as the creatures crawled across the jungle landscape projected before him. Two-legged with dual, stick-like manipulators, it seemed as if they were toppling every time they moved. It made him dizzy just to watch. He felt his brood-mates around him shift as his discomfort spread to them, their face-tendrils writhed as they sensed the shifting odours in the breeze.

'Calm,' he thought to the Kirimind. It responded immediately, and the implanted nodes released hormones into his bloodstream, replaced the pheromones of sickening despair with those of tranquillity. Around him, the members of his Octect relaxed as they unconsciously sensed his new emotions – false emotions – that reflected themselves in emanations.

Still, the creatures' images continued to topple across the surface of a far-distant world, one many years distant even with the new star drives Sechir's people had constructed. The creatures were small and wore smooth, plain armour whose surface shifted with colour and heat as it crossed from shadow to light. The weapons they carried were similar to the Tsan Kiri's own, roils of superheated plasma bursting into being where the focusing coils directed their lethal energies. The armour twinkled and the figures stumbled when the energy of incoming fire was absorbed by the shielding that emanated from the complex, physical shells. Displays to the side of the projection indicated the state of the nanocyte combat as the opposing 'sphere's fought each other: the biosilicon of the Tsan Kiri against the artificial nanites of the intruders.

In many ways they are like us, he thought. But more numerous. He shivered.

The nanosphere displays shifted. It appeared that the Kiri combat shard had abruptly overcome its opponent: displays indicated the biped's nanosphere was totally overwhelmed.

The display faded to darkness and the light returned to normal. Octos-four Kekhtor stepped into the centre of the briefing pit.

'We won,' said Sechir. 'Our nanosphere overwhelmed theirs.'

'No,' said Kekhtor. 'We lost.' There were susurrations of dismay from the assembled Octos. 'That was the last

transmission we received, and from a damaged message-boat at that – one whose engines are so badly damaged it cannot decelerate.'

'How old is the transmission?' asked Sechir. He was the ranking Octos-three, expected to be next promoted.

'Around seventeen years, we believe. If we lost...'

'We may expect an invasion,' finished Sechir. 'In less than five-oct of years.' He bowed his head. 'My apologies for the interruption, Octos Kekhtor. It is just...' He trailed off, rattled his palps in concern. 'If they overcame our nanosphere...' He shivered, took hold of himself. 'I mean, it appeared that our own nanosphere overwhelmed theirs!' He paused, then lowered his head. He could sense it through the biosilicon nanosphere interfaces: the fear coming from his brood mates reflecting his own. The old wound on his far-rear right leg began to throb. 'I am shocked, Octos-four, that is all. The evidence seems contradictory.'

Kekhtor remained upright but they could all sense her dismay. 'Shocked, we all are, Octos Sechir. It appears that far from overwhelming theirs, it was their artificial nanosphere that merged with our own bio-silicon nanites by first emulating compatibility. Once synchronised, they turned our own nanophages against us and dominated the combat shards.'

There was a gasp from around the briefing chamber. 'But that means...' Sechir trailed off, his dismay deepening.

Kekhtor finished for him. 'That means that every single one of our kin must have died, separated from the Kirimind.' She stopped to let the impact set in, the pheromones to quieten down. 'We have lost our last colony and the bipeds are on their way here.'

'But we may now know how they overcame our defences,' said Sechir, allowing hope to slip into his tone.

'We do. Their own Seekers-into-the-Unknown absorbed our technology into their own, into their IMTel – technology we left on the worlds they took from us. Against such a merge we are powerless, limited in data and adaptability.' She looked round the gathered war-leaders, the Octos. 'And I am not being melodramatic in saying we have only a few years left to save our civilisation.'



## What would the forces in the Tsan Kiri conflict looked like?

Details of the Tsan Kiri technology has been lost, other than that absorbed into the Isorian culture and nanosphere and reflected in their now-organic technology. This makes exact analyses and comparisons extraordinarily difficult, other than the fact that the Tsan technology was on a par with that of the Isorians.

For much of the conflict the Isorians had not yet developed their bio-armour, so the forces can be easily emulated by using Concord forces against Tsan Ra, perhaps with bio-suits and phase armour in a few squads towards the latter end of the war. The Tsan Kiri weapons could be considered to be not too dissimilar in effectiveness to what the Tsan Ra carry now. Tsan Kiri support teams would have similar capabilities – mag overhead weaponry and plasma style direct fire weapons – as well as a nanosphere that, like the panhumans, was invented long before the emergence of the IMTel.

It is likely that both forces would be light on support drones, though the medium weight vehicle combat drones would be possible. Again, for the Isorians, their vehicles

would be a mix of Hyperlight and phase armour, the latter more common towards the end of the war and completely absent at the start. For both forces, buddy drones would be common, just as they are now. Pulse bikes have not yet evolved into a Tactical option, so should be used as Support choices.

## Refighting the Tsan Kiri Wars

If refighting battles from the war against the Tsan Kiri, the Isorians can use their normal lists but cannot take Tsan Ra. For the Tsan Kiri use the 'Tsan Ra Task Force' list from the free, downloadable Isorian lists, but the army cannot take any panhumans at all.

For more flavour, the Isorian's armour could be early bio-armour or resemble that of the Panhuman Concord. If so, the Isorians replace their phase armour with hyperlight armour and no unit can take phase armour or phaseshift shields. Later in the wars, the advantage of the Isorian nanophage adaptations means that, for each Isorian NuHu in the army, a free 'Superior Shard' Army Option is allowed in addition to any other Army Options to which the force is entitled. Only one Superior Shard can be used by a force in a turn, however.





# Timeline of the Splintering

*This presents a timeline of the critical events that led to the Splintering, from the founding of the IMTel to the Tsan Kiri War and finally to the shattering of the PanHuman Concord into two rival shards.*

<b>7A c.-3000</b>	6th (Trisapient) Age ends with the Trisapient Catastrophe: the cascade collapse of gate system after several Vorl gates are destroyed by the Isorian Senatex, the NuXon Empire and the Human League/Alzanthan Federation	<b>7A 75</b>	Scout ships to Irel find world totally taken over by Tsan – but do not report back to Isori for another 25 years
<b>7A -2800</b>	Advanced gravitic (space-time warping) drives developed by Isorians who then start real space expansion to systems approximately 25ly from Isori. Oblon (5ly) and Tsates (8ly) colonies established shortly thereafter.	<b>7A 84</b>	Reinforcements arrive at Tsates, Oblon and the other three original colonies.
<b>7A c.-2500</b>	Development of IMTel to maintain cohesiveness of Isorian worlds	<b>7A 100</b>	News of Irel's absorption comes to Isori. The Tsan Kiri war enters a stalemate and the next 80 years see Isori work on attacking the Tsan through their major dependency: their bionanosphere.
<b>7A -2000</b>	Five systems fully explored and settled, more distant colonies established	<b>7A 180</b>	Isorians go over onto offensive using merged Tsan-Isori silicon-carbon biospore. Systems close to Isori on Antares and involved in the conflict slowly become overtaken by the new, combat-honed nanosphere.
<b>7A -30</b>	Isori loses first colony (Irel) to Tsan Kiri. As it is 25ly away, the news does not reach them for 25 years.	<b>7A 190</b>	Irel selected for launch of counter-offensive.
<b>7A -27</b>	Isori loses second colony (Orates) to Tsan Kiri (20ly from Isori)	<b>7A 194</b>	Isorian phase armour and bio-silicon interface suits developed
<b>7A -22</b>	Isori loses third colony (Tsajhon) to Tsan Kiri (17ly from Isori)	<b>7A 215</b>	Irel retaken. Used as base to launch attacks on nearby colonies. Starmaps find location of Tsan homeworld and details returned to Isori (see 7A 240).
<b>7A -15 to -5</b>	News of loss of outlying colonies reaches core worlds. Older Isorian colonies ramp up their defences.	<b>7A 225</b>	Isori amasses Concord allies, materials and starships for major invasion fleets
<b>7A -10 to -5</b>	Devastating loss of fourth colony (Vahhn) only 15ly from Isori. The world is almost ruined as the defenders sacrifice everything to fight off the invaders.	<b>7A 235</b>	Remaining colonies retaken (news of success will not reach Isori for 5-20 years).
<b>7A -7</b>	News of loss of Orates reaches Isori. A mystified Senatex despatches scout fleets.	<b>7A 240</b>	Location of Tsan homeworld reaches the Isori system IMTel; invasion fleet immediately launched.
<b>7A -5</b>	News of the loss of Irel and Tsajhon makes Isorians realise Tsan Kiri aliens are taking and razing panhuman colonies. Incompatibilities, especially around nanite vs bio-spore, initiate the Tsan Real Space War	<b>7A 250</b>	Tsan Kiri withdraw from remaining colonies – theirs and those formally Isori.
<b>7A 0</b>	Isori reconnected to the Antarean Nexus	<b>7A 280</b>	Invasion fleet arrives at Tsan Kiri homeworld to find there is no more opposition. The Tsan have disappeared, having devastated their homeworld completely: even today, their whereabouts is a mystery. Nonetheless, a substantial military presence is established and most of the fleet returns to Isori.
<b>7A 3-5</b>	Tsates attacked but having already geared up for war, repulses invaders	<b>7A 280 to 340</b>	Isorian Senatex separation from PanHuman Concord: accumulation of irreconcilable changes in their hybrid bio-silicon nanospore diverges their IMTel and nanosphere too far from the Concord nanite baseline.
<b>7A 15</b>	Details of Tsan Kiri biologically based nanites reach research facilities on Isori. Militarisation of Isorian economy and manufacturing. PanHuman Concord established.	<b>7A ~300</b>	Intact Tsan hatchery discovered on Tsan colony, now Djarn, ~21ly from Isori. First Tsan Ra hatched into Isorian IMTel society.
<b>7A 20</b>	The IMTel spreads like wildfire across all nearby, newly connected Antarean-linked systems.	<b>7A ~335</b>	First Tsan eggs arrive at Isori
<b>7A 30 to 50</b>	PanHuman Concord reinforcements gather around Isori and are sent to the colonies. Growth of IMTel into Concord nanosphere in Antarean space feeds significant resources into Isori.	<b>7A ~500</b>	Northern Interface largely unstable, Concord leveraging strong frontier presence.
<b>7A 38 to 40</b>	Remains of Vahhn colony retaken from small Tsan Kiri occupational force	<b>7A ~700</b>	Growth
<b>7A 72 to 84</b>	Tsates attacked again by major fleet. Invasion repulsed but with major losses. First infection of IMTel by Tsan Kiri interface spore.	<b>7A 782</b>	'Bridge' system of Averahn finally falls into Isorian hands, shaping much of the Northern Interface.
		<b>7A ~1300</b>	The Xilos Horizon discovered and collapses - possibly by the use of Isorian technology. Effects ripple out through Antarean space.



# Splintering: The IMTel Civil War

Following the absorption of the Tsan Kiri bio-nanite technology into the Isorian nanosphere, the bio-silicon nanites struggled to integrate with the original nanosphere and the IMTel nanites of the Isorian-led PanHuman Concord. This was complicated by the fact that the newly established Concord IMTel was spreading like wildfire across the Nexus, expanding almost exponentially, whilst the new Isorian nanosphere was expanding from within, from the very centre of the 280 year old IMTel society.

It was a time of chaos, when few could tell friend from foe in an expanding, nebulous area of change.

The change in the Isorian nanosphere initially occurred due to the Tsan Kiri adding a silicon-carbon interface spore to their biomechanical technology to overwhelm the Tsates defenders. It very nearly led to the acquisition of Tsates by the Tsan Kiri but they did not reckon on the ingenuity of the Isorian technology. As the Tsan Kiri absorbed as much of the information as they could from the corrupted Tsatean Shard,

the Isorian nanospore reacted, turning the absorption on its head and merging with the Tsan Kiri silicon-carbon interface spore to form a stronger bond that crossed both technologies: in effect, the Tsan Kiri had given the weapon that led to their ultimate defeat to the Isorians.

On return to their home system via the Antarean Nexus, ships carried the now vastly improved and more powerful, military-and combat-refined nanosphere. In their own systems, faced with their own military, the local nanospore was overrun and the Isorian bio-silicon spore multiplied. In some cases it spread shard-by-shard and ship-by-ship, subverting home systems and creating a new IMTel; in other cases the returning military shards were seen as a threat, a virus infiltrating the Concord shard and dealt with severely – often violently – by the Concord's own nanophages. Understandably, those most heavily and quickly infected were those close to the Isori gate, where travel was frequent.

An explosion rocked the command centre; alarms shrieked; deep-throated screams echoed down the halls. Instinctively, Deputy Skr'tchk folded in its fingers and jumped to its hooves. 'How?' it barked to the sensors team. 'Where are the warnings?'

'Our nanosphere is overrun, Deputy! The Command Centre is hit – we have attacks on all fronts.' Another explosion and the sensor displays faded.

'Evacuate,' said Skr'tchk's Assistant, its weapon already in manipulator hands, armour already showing active. 'Bodyguard, on me.' Two huge troopers loomed over the Deputy, huge weapons in their hands. 'Follow.' It led the way down broad corridors meant for full-grown Tsan.

Ahead, the ceiling collapsed, an avalanche of dirt and earth filling the passage. Lights went out as the power shard collapsed. Moments later an enemy drone slid down the newly-formed slope, a batch of smaller drones behind. The troopers fired, shots flickering off the haze of a batter shield. Another drone slid down the bank and the pair oriented themselves like millstones spinning; the heavy plasma weapons swung into focus.

'Corridor E!' screeched the Assistant. It turned, pushed Skr'tchk towards the exit. The troopers were already moving.

Too late. Rapid-firing plasma flared against the Tsan Kiri armour before they could phase out. The Assistant dropped, the stumps of two legs cauterised at the shoulder. A trooper cried out, fell, as another series of bolts dug into, then shot through its torso. Skr'tchk lept, a plasma bolt scorching its rear legs.

They cantered down corridor E, unable to gallop due to the buckled floor. The bodyguard swiped a hoof at an emergency button as it passed but the released blast doors slipped down only a hoof's breadth before getting caught on the twisted walls. Then the ground rocked, the air roared, and a wall ahead exploded inwards. Beyond were scores of the half-sized, four-limbed aliens. Skr'tchk and the trooper slid to a halt, turned to face the way they had come.

Alien weapon drones slid into position to block the exit; behind, aliens poured into the corridor. They were outnumbered.

The trooper holstered its weapon, flicked the restrainer off an explosive. 'You are too important, Deputy Councillor. You cannot be captured.' Skr'tchk bowed in acknowledgement.

White light filled the subterranean corridor; once more, an explosion filled the hallway.







### Strategic problems across the Antarean Surface

All short-distance journeys across Antares take place near the surface of the machine, even if travelling between two gates at depth. To avoid the gates and much of the maelstrom and acute time-dilation effects at the surface of the Nexus, longer journeys over 20 systems or 2 SAU (Standard Astronomical Unit) are taken at higher altitudes, as much as Antares and Obureg will allow

Such time-dilation cannot be avoided completely. At the surface, the time compression effect is roughly 11:1 so, to those onboard, a journey that appears to take a few hours across the Antarean surface actually takes a day in external time. At higher altitudes, the time dilation is diminished but the ships then start struggling with another problem, that of the limits imposed by the power surges for gate creation from Obureg. This is complicated still further as the exact ratio of time dilation at any point in time also varies with a ship's proximity to a gate or to a potential future gate (the emergence of which cannot be predicted).

Most ships are limited in velocity across the Antares surface by the machine and the need to maintain an effective shield against the dangers of Antares. When the density of the deadly Antarean plasma storms and the tidal effects of Obureg are also factored in to any distance calculation, no journey can be predicted with any accuracy.

The average gate is approximately 0.1 SAU (Standard Astronomical Unit) from any other, though the density of

gates is higher in the tropics of Obureg and significantly further apart towards the poles. The majority of advanced ships from the IMTel nations and Freeborn take around 12-14 elapsed hours on average between gates (6-7 days real time), with military ships and scouts being faster and the Ghar and ageing Boromite ships taking significantly longer.

As a result, 10AU can take two weeks relative but 140 days in real time. Actual distances and times vary little above 5AU (see table in appendix). The dangers of Antares and this time delay are major factors in strategic calculations, leading to a multi-tier frontier with progressively stronger military installations the further travellers progress into Isorian or Concord space.

Though developed to keep the elements of its widely-spread, real-space civilisation in sync with each other, the IMTel really found its niche in maintaining an Antarean civilisation across the Nexus. Both Senatex and Concord commanders are dependent on accurate input, predictions and recommendations from the IMTel and are heavily reliant on the NuHus in the military command hierarchy. The distances and hazards mean strategic movement more closely resembles that during the Age of Sail: coordinating attacks and defences between systems is a complex affair, enemy location and movement intelligence often out of date by months. This complexity is a major contributing factor to the constantly shifting border regions of the Southern and Northern Interfaces.



The emergence of the Isorian Shard results in the natural redevelopment of the Isori aesthetic and technological base. On Isori, they had little option but to embrace the new technology: once any IMTel takes root it is extremely persuasive. Much of the older technology was deemed obsolete by the new IMTel and the organic adaptability became the norm.



Once in the Nexus, the Isorian Shard spread like a virus. To start with, many on the closer worlds struggled to survive when their own technology began to fail due to the conflict between the two technologies. Only when one got the upper hand was the balance and technological bases for society restored and, in the early days, it was normally the Isorian biosilicon nanosphere that triumphed. In theory, the 'corrupted' Isorian shard should not have survived against the might of the Concord IMTel from which it had derived, but the Isorian nanophages had been optimised throughout the long-running war against the Tsan and many Concord shards were rapidly subverted before they could adapt.

The new IMTel neutralised the weight of numbers against it because of its innate, Tsan-war derived advantages. But an IMTel learns rapidly, and the frontiers of the Concord were continuing to expand even as the Isorian 'virus' (from the Concord viewpoint) was eating at its core. The only limits became the Antares geography and routes on the surface: at one side of Concord space, the sparse regions to the north of the equator and, to the south, the much-feared Vorl, whose technology was different again.

It seems the new Isorian biosilicon technology should overwhelm that of the Concord as the PanHuman Concord was built on the original Isorian technology. That similarity proved to be its strength: as in the Isorian's battle against the Tsan, the Concord's IMTel reacted to and learned from its interactions with the Isorian shard. Defences were boosted – specifically defences against the Isorian bio-silicon technology – and soon the expansion of the Isorian Shard was slowed. Eventually, the expansion was to come to a shaky halt along the lines of the Northern and Southern Interfaces, in both cases helped by rifts in the Antares surface – areas in which there was an absence of gates.

In the Determinate, the growing Algoryn Prosperate and its refusal to embrace an IMTel, along with the disruptive technology of the Ghar helped provide a buffer zone at the equator between the – what was now – two great IMTel nations. Ironically, the anti-IMTel Algoryn and, to a lesser extent, the Ghar helped shape the Determinate, a massive swathe of the Antarean surface in which the two IMTels struggled to establish a foothold.

The shape of the Antarean political geography seen today was established.





'Why the blazes don't they give up!' shouted Jharrin into his helmet.

'Parameters too vague,' replied his helmet. 'Connecting with force IMTel—'

Jharrin growled. 'I wasn't talking to you,' he snapped. 'I was just venting.' He glanced left and right to confirm what his suit was telling him: only three others left from the Strike Squad's initial complement. He jumped as an explosion threw up sand and rock around him – a small shell, wayward, perhaps from a Senatex x-launcher whose targeting had been thrown by the battle between the hostile nanosphere.

'Spotter, find me that launcher's location. Patch it through to support.' The little drone dipped in reply, sped to one side and peeked round the rocky outcrop behind which he and his squad were taking shelter.

'Located,' announced the drone to the shard. 'Patching.'

Another shell landed, some distance over and closer to a GP drone that was huddling in a crater. This time there was no explosion but the air was filled with a mist that settled around the drone. Its batter shield collapsed, its shield drones dipped as if struggling for power and the GP drone itself began to reverse rapidly in response.

'Scramble,' muttered Jharrin. 'Support, where's that counterfire?'

'On its way,' came the reply. There was a distant snap of a launch and a faint whistle. 'Ranging. IMTel's only just flagged it up, Strike Four. The combat nanosphere interaction is pretty intense and we've severe interference around targeting systems.' The sharp sound of an explosion followed from the direction of the Senatex' launcher. 'Got it. Effect, now.' Another snap, then yet another and the air was filled with the sound of whistling warheads. Jharrin waited for the multiple crashes of the explosions before sneaking a look through his spotter's sensors again.

Where the x-launcher had dug in was a crater; the combat shard hesitated, then marked it as 'Clear'.

No-one else seemed to be paying attention – to this part of the battlefield, anyway. IMTel flagged up a wall on the edge of the settlement as a probable safe stop on the way to their objective. Jharrin tagged it on his display, then stood and ran, his squad following without needing to be told.

When it works, thought Jharrin, the C3 IMTel is a wonderful thing.

Still, in the border areas – the Interfaces – the competing shards could not help but war with one another. Planets and systems changed allegiance and IMTel – sometimes without the population even noticing. The IMTels could not help but take the defensive reasoning to its logical end and all along the rear line of the Interfaces were built shipyards, warships, fortresses, orbital defence platforms, weapons, training bases, whole armies, intelligence, logistical and engineering support units – the whole panoply of constant war.

Both sides mirrored the actions of the other. After all, each nation considered the presence of hostile nanospore as a threat to their very existence, each nanophage capable of eating away – destroying – integral components of the massive, distributed intelligence that was – and is – an IMTel.

The Interfaces deteriorated into a state of uneasy stalemate. This could not be called a truce as there could be no truce between two shards, two nanospheres who regarded each other with such deeply programmed, automatic hostility. But neither was there emotion in the 'hatred' of the shards: like two anti-viruses or predators facing off against each other, both regarded the other as an unwanted infection or natural enemy to be annihilated.

Hostility was unavoidable – and still is, a millennium later.

## RECURRING IMPACT

During the past one thousand years, the systems along the IMTel Interfaces have shifted allegiance and nanosphere from one IMTel to the other. Sometimes a world will stay in the hands of one of the IMTels for a considerable period of time: the longer a world is aligned with a given nanosphere the greater its defences become. But new systems and worlds crop up all the time, each changing the pattern of strategical advantage, so the Interface changes – not so much a delineated border as a jagged, shifting merge between one side or another.





## THE SHAPE OF CONFLICT

Much of the Senatex-Concord conflict highlights the reasons that ground conflict occurs in Antarean space. A drawn-out war could be fought between two nanospheres – and such aspects of an IMTel conflict eventually decide the result, anyway – but the outcome can be influenced by the actions and intervention of units on the ground taking and subverting key installations. Ground based installations are typically larger and have faster access to raw materials than the space-based attackers so have to be dealt with quickly. So the objectives for ground forces are typically power plants, nanospore breeder stations, transmat hubs and construction or manufacturing facilities and, eventually, search and rescue operations.

All these targets could be destroyed from orbit using basic weaponry such as asteroids or small moons, spikes (heavy, solid, limited-guidance projectiles), X- launched munitions or other space-to-ground weapons. However, the side effects of such massive weapons are the crippling devastation of a world or installation and requires the launching and firing ships have uninterrupted access to the ground and their targets.

This 'uninterrupted access' for combat runs is the major issue for an attacker. Whilst atmosphere can attenuate some weaponry and cloud cover can obfuscate visual targeting, the battery of sensors on the IMTel warships make such problems trivial. The real problem is that, in practice, ships coming close enough to fire pin-point attacks through haze-ridden atmospheres normally expose themselves to anti-ship fire, whether from the planetary surface or from defensive platforms and heavily armed system boats in higher orbits. Further, extensive reflex, phase or hyperlight armour shielding around installations can make ground attacks from space difficult. This is complicated by the fact that a ship 'lower' in the gravity well is still at a distinct disadvantage, going so slow they are effectively sitting ducks to the advanced targeting matrices of Antarean technology, despite the massive acceleration granted by gravitic drives.

The net result is that it comes down (literally) to IMTel ground based forces to apply pin-point pressure. Typically dropped some distance from the objective via hyperlight envelope or combat transmats, the Concord or Isorian formations advance towards the objective and are met by the only forces available to counter them: opposing ground troops.

### Dispersed Responsibility

A key aspect of military leadership in the IMTel states is the extreme nature of its devolution of authority, responsibility, command, communication and intelligence. Whilst it does not directly command the forces of either major panhuman faction, the IMTel, after all, 'knows all' and gives feedback on each decision based on an immense number of factors and a concern for the wellbeing of well over a million systems. No panhuman, NuHu or even individual machine intelligence can command or oversee such vast forces.

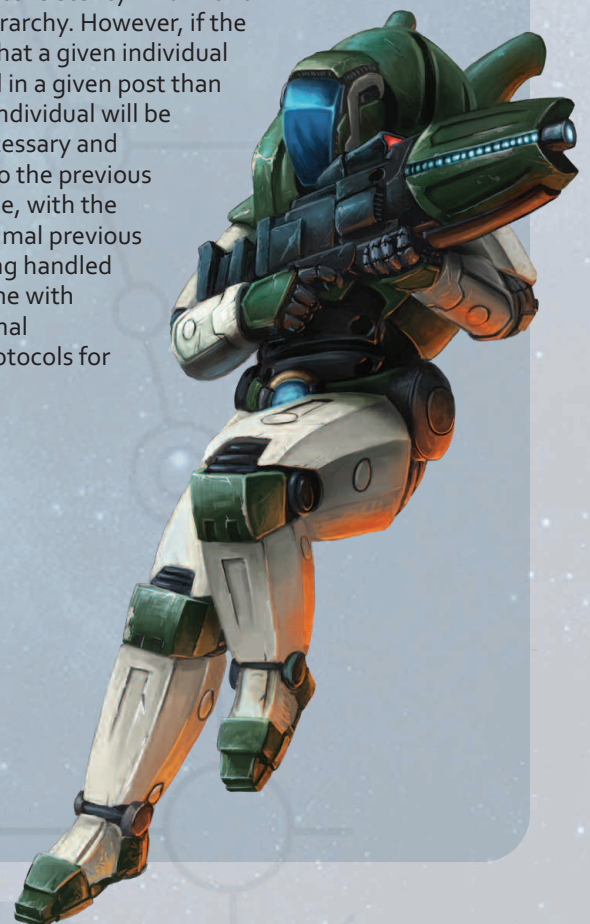
As a result, at the level above the battlefield, there is a very flexible and adaptable command structure in the IMTel nations. There is no 'Five-star General' or overall Commander-in-Chief of the military forces, nor a fixed hierarchy below the IMTel other than the NuHu, merely local generals and command structures selected for being the best match for the situation. For example, one of these was Kamrana Josen, designated Commander-in-chief C3 Xilos Expeditionary Force (XEF); another was Xan Tu, selected for several troublesome commands along the Northern Interface and in the Determinate.

Each commander is given all the information they need by the IMTel and, in turn, the IMTel expands their decisions with more detail after combining it with local combat shard data. It then relays their orders to the individual combat shards – where the local IMTel may optimise the orders even further. In short, the human and machine intelligences command and give general direction whilst the IMTel informs and enables that decision.

A commander in a system on the Northern Interface would have to wait for up to a year for a reply to any message to Isori. Even communication at the local level is slow: it can take over three months for a despatch boat to carry a

message only 10 systems distance and an average journey between two systems in the tropics is 10 to 12 days, at least. Communication across Antares may be much faster than communication in real space, at light speed, but it is still slow!

On the actual battlefield or within active, operational elements such as army groups, divisions, brigades or regiments – however they are classified – there is more consistency in rank and command hierarchy. However, if the IMTel learns that a given individual is more suited in a given post than another, the individual will be trained as necessary and supported into the previous occupant's role, with the less-than-optimal previous occupant being handled carefully, in line with IMTel emotional well-being protocols for panhumans.





## THE FRONTLINE

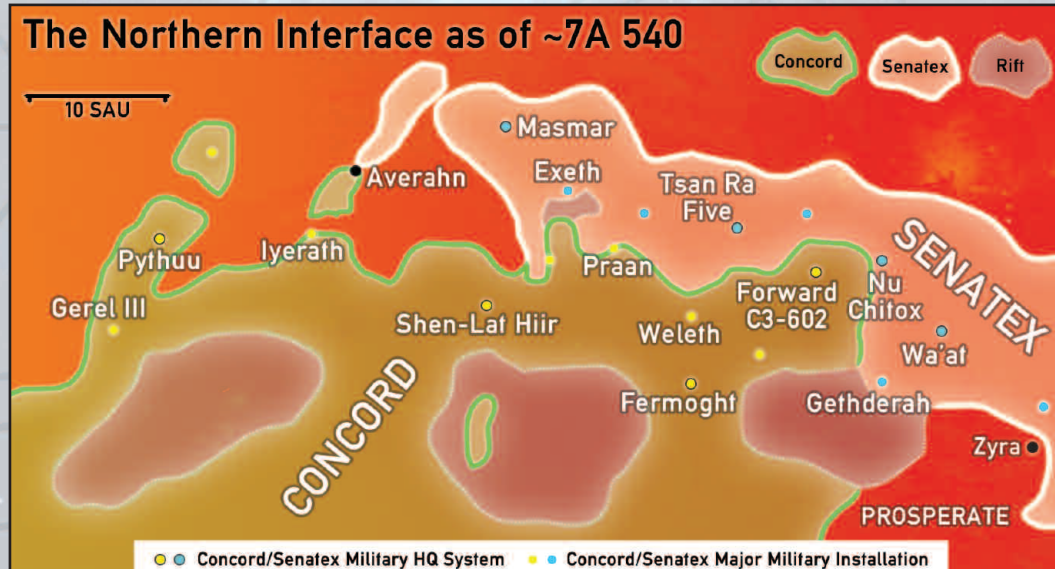
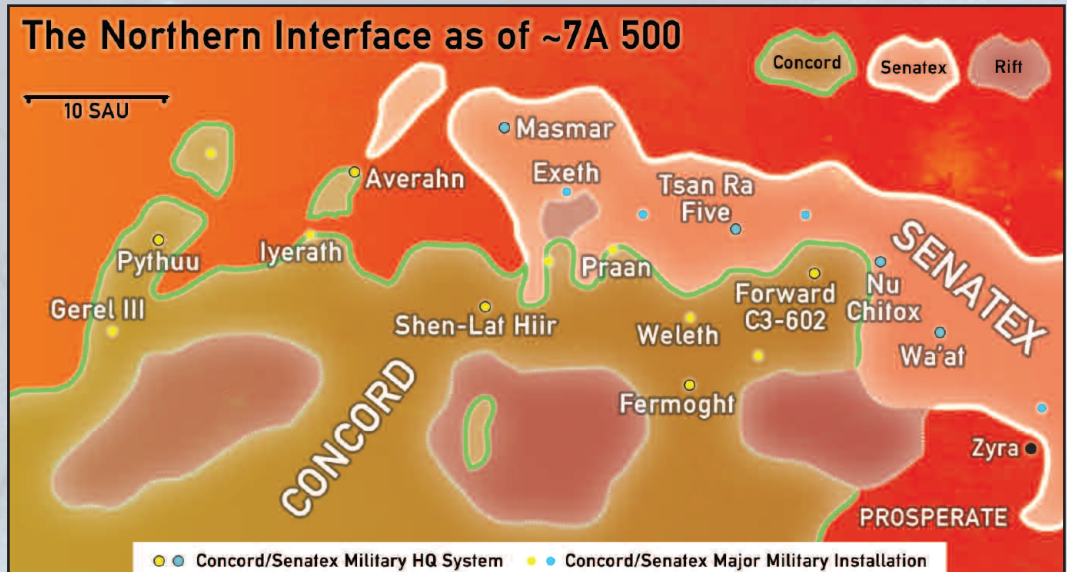
The frontline – the Interface – has changed over the years and swung back and forth. The first point of stability at the North and South interface were hinged on critical systems providing the only route through voids in the gate network, rifts that help provide a natural separation between the two IMTel powers. Of course, such Antarean frontlines change not only with the success and failure of war, but also as new gates are added to the network.

This makes for a constantly shifting battleground where a safe route one month can suddenly turn into a risk-ridden venture after the opening of a gate along the route. The first

IMTel to discover such new gates along the border gains a huge advantage in both offensive opportunities and defensive stability. As a result, both the Senatex and the Concord have a large fleet of scout ships along the borders, supported by intensive, NuHu-led intelligence support and armed, rapid reaction forces to claim whatever the scouts discover.

Around 7A 500, there was a large rift (an area of few, widely spaced gates) to the West of Masmar and Exeth was a small, Isorian naval base linking the fairly new colony of Tsan Ra Five to the separated segment north of Averahn. The frontier was highly fluid and undergoing regular change anchored by the key C3 bases at Iyerath, Praan and Weleth and the major bases at Forward C3-602 and Shen-Lat Hiir.

The rift south of Exeth began to fill in, predominantly from the Concord side and Exeth fell to a large, Concord force. After establishing a major base in the system, the PanHuman Concord managed to alter the alignment of the Interface, threatening to capture Praan and cut off the major frontier world of Masmar.

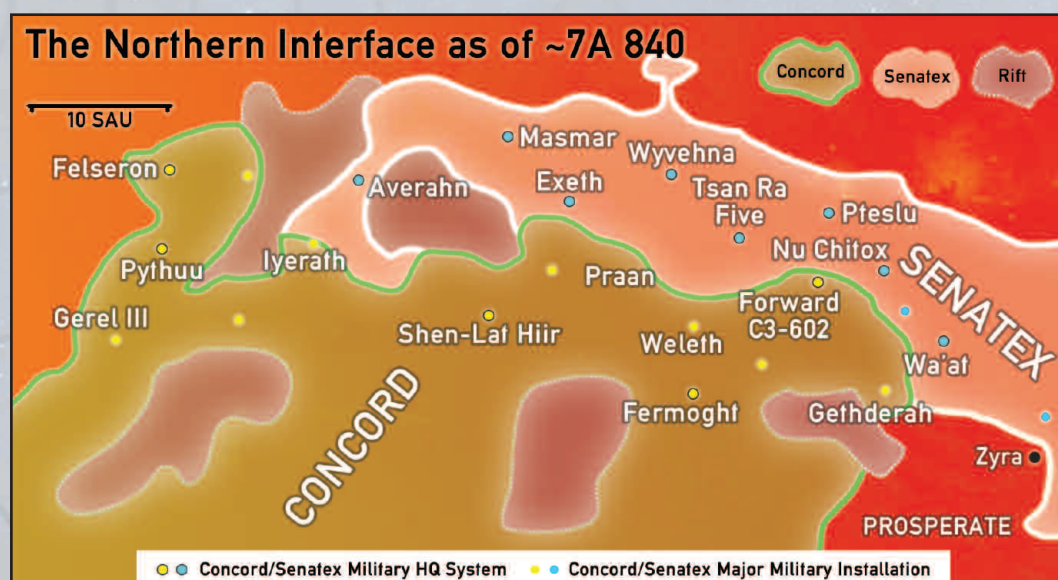
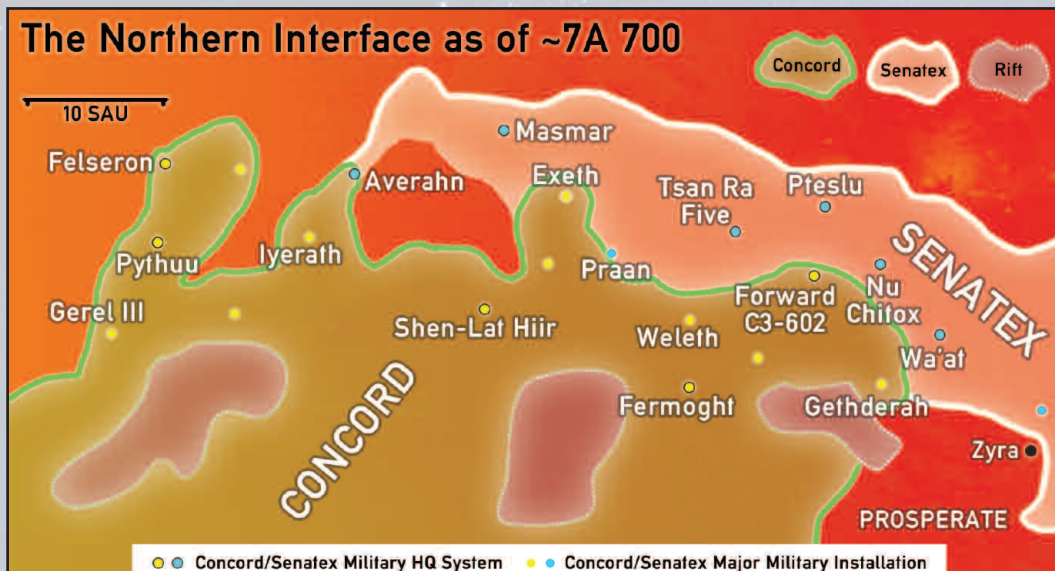


In the meantime, around 7A 540, the rift around Averahn began filling in to the north and south and the Averahn gate became a lynchpin between the aspirations of the two powers, regularly shifting hands due to its position between the two sides of the rift.





To ensure stability, from around 7A 700 the Senatex responded by focusing their scout fleets along the extended line of communications that linked Masmar to Pteslu. After finding few, new suitable systems, they finally grew a new, major base around 7A 740 at Wyvehna, a system otherwise devoid of liveable planets but with a substantial – and still surviving – 6th Age orbital presence.



The technologically advanced panhumans of Wyvehna were welcomed into the Senatex and gladly adapted some of their orbitals to shipyards and training facilities. This enabled the Senatex to support the efforts at Averahn (see 7A 840) and push the frontier south towards Iyerath and to the west of Exeth.

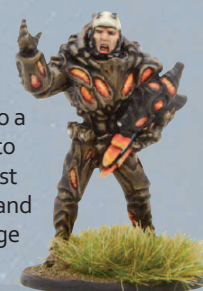
## An obvious ploy

Long ago it was theorised that ships might be able to travel away from Antares to escape the pressures and dangers of the stellar engine, to reach higher velocities, and to shorten journey times. Unfortunately, not only did the limiting effects of Obureg increase as ships travelled away from the engine's surface, but time dilation effects meant that the travel outwards to a distance where the effect could take place was only worth the effort on very long distances.

The optimum distance from Antares was found to be between 6.4 and 7.25SAU. At this distance, ships could travel at their maximum, safe, system speed and the time dilation effect was significantly reduced. Not only were there only minimal benefits from travelling further away from the nexus, but the ships began to be severely interfered with by Obureg – whose exact location does not seem to match the perceived 224 SAU orbit at which an external observer normally places it. In trying to resolve these issues, many ships and drones have been destroyed or had their nerves and brains (artificial or natural) completely scrambled.

However, such a ploy meant that ships could travel long distances within a reasonable time frame. In practice, this time frame is anything from 130-170 days real time but only 13-20 days experienced onboard. On any distance over 2.2 SAU (22 gates), the journey's real time is minimised by rising to a higher orbit it and at 2.4 SAU (24 gates) the experienced time can also be minimised in a similar fashion. In both cases, however, "minimum" is still approximately 14 days experienced but over four months elapsed! In practice, ships on such long journeys must either fly away from Antares to avoid their shielding and armour being breached or call into a friendly system along the route to effect what repairs are needed.

A message and response from Isori to the frontier regions, for example, will take close to a year. But this is little different for gates close to each other: even those only 5SAU distant must still wait 9 months for a reply to a message – and this all ignores the elapsed time during passage within the Antarean gates themselves!





Surrounded by Senatex systems, Exeth was finally returned to Isorian hands. When the western rift beyond Averahn became more heavily populated with gates, they initially favoured the Senatex, enabling the Senatex to spread almost to Felseron itself before the Concord were aware they had expanded so far. By then, it was too late and the Felseron shard and many of the Concord systems around it were absorbed into the Senatex.

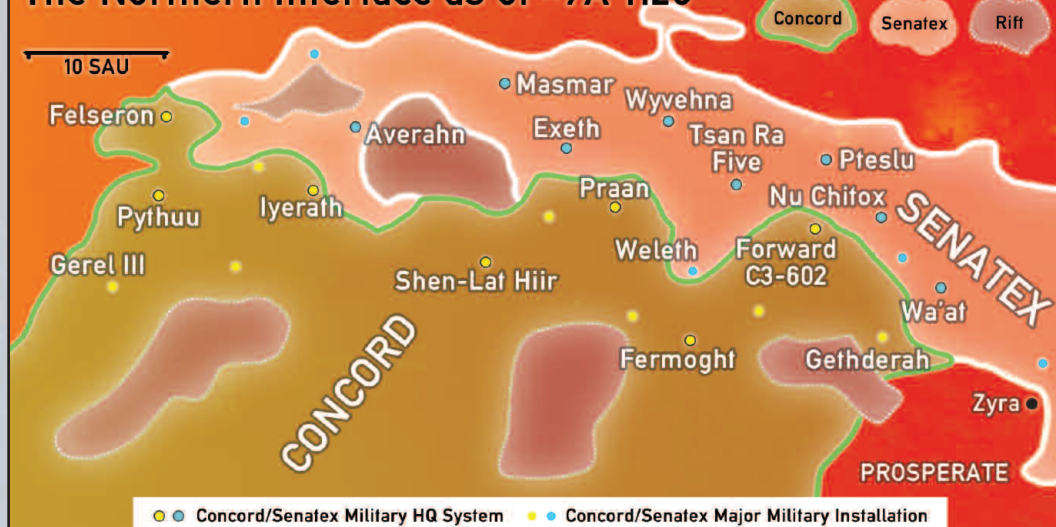
However, with the discovery of the rich, populous and advanced system and society of Gethderah, the Concord were able to extend into Prosperate space and stabilise their front line. The potential support from Gethderah towards the massive shipyards at Forward C3-602 as well as to threaten Wa'at made the Senatex more cautious along the frontier as a whole. It was about this time, however, that the Concord finally mastered their previously erratic subverter technology to counter the Isorian bio-silicon nanospore and a firm, but uneasy, stalemate was reached. The border has been largely stable for several hundred years, the occasional minor system shifting from one side to another as the IMTels encounter each other on new gates.

## THE ACQUISITION OF AVERAHN

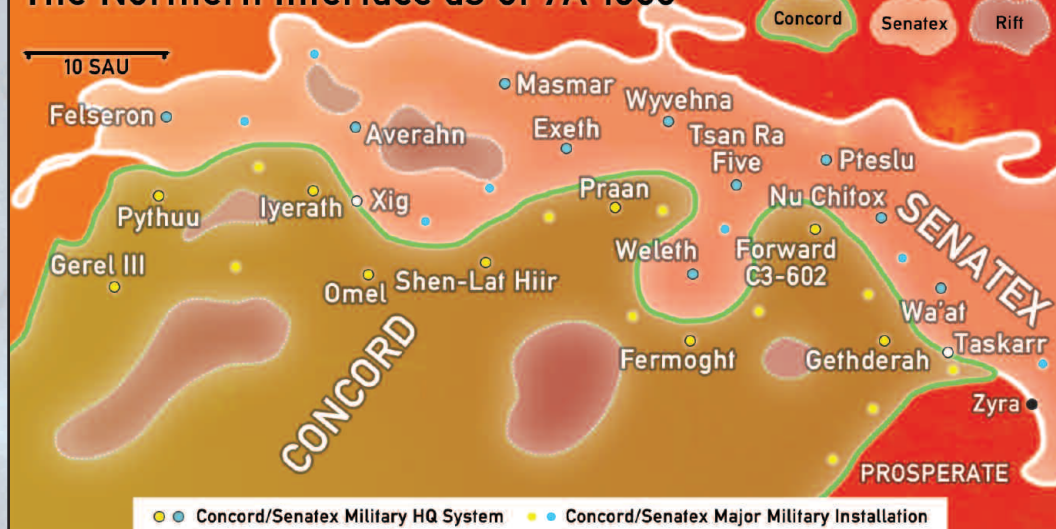
The Averahn system is one of the many on the Northern Interface that, for the first few hundred years after the Splintering, regularly shifted ownership between the Senatex and Concord. A single incident in 7A 782 resulted in it remaining in Isorian hands thereafter – for over half a millennium. Key to the success was the infiltration, subversion and ultimate destruction of a central nanophage factory by a single combat drone and a mix of panhuman and Tsan Ra squads surviving from a frontier company that was isolated on the ground behind Concord lines. The action led to a relatively rare event in IMTel regiments, the naming of a specific unit after its noteworthy commander: the Vylan Ra.

Key to the constant shift in ownership of Averahn is its location in that part of the Northern Interface. Up to around 7A 900, the system was the only one of any import connecting

### The Northern Interface as of ~7A 1120



### The Northern Interface as of 7A 1300



the two sides of a rift between the two IMTel powers, meaning it formed part of a critical bridge – a strategic lynch point. When more gates were added by the Antean machine, it found itself at the centre of a corridor and the pressure on it was relieved, though it was still the military centre of that whole sector of Antean space.

When further gates were added, Averahn found itself a vital system in supporting the expansion westward of the Senatex into uncharted territory – the rift between its western border and the Concord 'bulge' to Felseron and the north. The whole campaign illustrates the delicate and oft-confusing nature of war on Antares: how can one be certain of political boundaries when new gates – geography – are constantly being created!





# Gaming the Splintering

The Splintering offers a rich background for running games of Antares, from the very earliest times right up to the 'present day', the decades following 7A1300. This section provides some background from the period using a highly successful Isorian regiment – the 364th. The background can be used as inspiration or as a basis to model and build your own Isorian regiments or even to fight your own battles along the tumultuous and ever-changing border that is the Northern Interface.

Also presented here are the statistics and history of a few, notable individuals in the Senatex armed forces, as well as some hints on tactics and modelling and gaming the forces during the previous centuries. Finally, we present a scenario from one of the crucial battles of the Splintering: the Capture of Phagefactory 4 on Averahn.

## VYLAN RA'S COMPANY, 364TH PHASE REGIMENT

The 364th Strike Regiment was originally recruited from Isori and the inner colonies and was a wholly panhuman regiment. Whilst it was part of the Tsan homeworld assault fleet, like the rest of the troops on the assault it saw no actual combat on arrival. As part of the Tsan garrison for several years, the regiments primary duties were investigating cultural remnants from the ruins for further analysis – the Isori still feared the return of the Tsan Kiri. After five years, the regiment was gradually rotated back to Isori to train for joint operations with the first Tsan Ra absorbed into the Isorian society.

Now a combined and fully integrated Tsan Ra/panhuman regiment, the 364th was transferred to the Northern Interface as a front line unit, where it remained for the next 600 years. It was there that a notable combat drone, "Dastio", attached itself to the regiment, eventually being drawn (for reasons known only to itself) to Junior Commander Vylan, a young panhuman who joined the regiment early in the 8th century. Commander Vylan made a name for herself and the combined force of panhumans and Tsan Ra under her command, soon being called 'Vylan Ra' by the Tsan in acknowledgement of her appreciation of their abilities. She achieved such success on forward operations that the company became permanently named after her.

The key to Vylan Ra's success was the effective use of the different capabilities of each species under her command or on attachment, whether machine, panhuman, NuHu or Tsan Ra. Whilst an IMTel society can plan, predict and maximise the effectiveness of the units under its command, it can lack the (sometimes erratic) creativity and crucial direction that a living, non-IMTel mind can bring. Her 2IC (executive officer) was a Tsan Ra, Kkr'tchk, and many later NuHu observers claim it was actually the combined command and tactical talent of Vylan Ra, Kkr'tchk and Dastio together that really made them so effective. Whatever way the military historians analyse the situation, all agree that it was Vylan Ra's unique personality that created a bond between the three that transcended the understanding of an ordinary combat shard.





## NOTABLE INDIVIDUALS OF THE 364TH

In 7A1300, the 'present day' in Antares, Vylan Ra, the most famous panhuman commander of the 364th, has retired and been pulled back from active, front-line duties. No doubt she has been reintegrated into a series of replacement body-clones to avoid brain-death, but her current location is unknown. Players may wish to use her and her sub-commanders – the drone Dastio and the Tsan Ra Kkr'tchk – in games involving the 364th during the period of its most active and successful operations in the 8th and 9th centuries of the 7th Age.

## COMBAT DRONE DASTIO

Dastio (D45710) was the first of a new type of combat drone created by the Isorians. Whilst their armour and equipment was similar to that of existing drones, the new series – the KV7s – had an upgraded machine intelligence with enhanced empathy towards humans and greater capacity for individuation (developing its own, separate and unique character).

Dastio itself was the most notable of all such drones, forming close bonds with many Isori. Its actions were critical in the defence of Tsates. Though the drone was destroyed during that Pyrrhic victory, Dastio was able to store its mindstate in an escape shell and have it transmatted to safety. Its mindstate, with all its vital experience, was subsequently downloaded into another drone unit and it continued to fight for the Isorians in the Splintering, eventually permanently attaching itself to the 364th Isorian Phase Regiment. By around 7A 780, it was most often seen accompanying Vylan Ra's Company, and with that company was able to take the critical, Concord nanophage constructor plant during the acquisition of Averahn.

Dastio was one of the first drones to be upgraded from the experimental KV9 series to the heavier MV3 specs. However, it retained its twin plasma carbine turret until it had developed a solid bond with the 364th Phase Regiment's

operational protocols. At that point, it switched over the plasma light support to act as a heavy countermeasure to the Concord's M4.

It is not known whether Dastio is still in operation or was uploaded into the body of a drone commander – or is merely in storage. If it is still in operation, its vast experience would be of significant use in any conflict.

## KV7 Series Combat Drones

Like many of the combat drones, the KV7 were an evolution of the KV series chassis but with a slight improvement on the underlying armour. Early in the 7th Age, the growing PanHuman Concord led to a different role for the medium combat drones. This was partly due to the sporadic border wars as the Concord expanded, but primarily due to the fierce fighting in the real-space war against the very capable Tsan Kiri.

The KV7 included an upgraded solid shell over which the experimental kinetic armour could be stressed. Though apparently minor, the physical changes made them a less agile weapons platform. Aesthetically, though, many Concord observers would see only minor differences between the present-day M4 combat drone and the KV7.

The key difference with the KV7 over previous models in the series was the upgraded machine intelligence and sensor coupling. This gave the drones more independence of thought and superior targeting capabilities. Minor internal improvements also included enhanced contra-nanospore and EM spectrum countermeasures. The combination of alterations paved the way for the long-lasting and ever-popular 'M' and 'T' series drones, though the Isorians eventually had to move to bio-armour with its very different aesthetic.

Drone D45710-KV7 slipped sideways from behind the rocky outcrop, ionisation trails streaming from its twin plasma carbines. Where they struck, superheated plasma roiled, bubbling away the surface of anything it touched. It looked terrifying – and to Dastio, as the drone preferred to be called, that was the point.

The real danger was from its plasma cannon.

The inhuman aliens flinched and began to fade from sight. But it was exactly the warping in the air that Dastio was searching for. Its plasma cannon was already facing their most likely location and it was mere milliseconds to readjust the aim. It spat, catching one of the hooved, spider-like creatures in the chest.

Large they may be, but the full force of energy from a plasma cannon was too much even for them. The alien was thrown backwards, returning to reality even as its squad-mates phased out.

Dastio kept moving, accelerating behind yet another outcrop that regularly struck up from the veldt on these

plains of Tsates. Whilst the hooved aliens seems to like the open expanses of the plains, the foothills into which Dastio's force had retreated gave them substantially more cover – and much more chance of surprise.

A nearby weapon drone lurked amongst boulders. Dastio sent a signal, inviting it to hose down the phased-out squad with rapid bursts of heavy plasma fire from its support weapon. The drone gleefully complied and Dastio silently turned in the air to face the expected approach: the alien squad, it calculated, would likely retreat in only one direction.

An explosion rent the air: the hooved spiders had caught a lucky shot on the weapon drone with their portable, heavy weapons. The result was unfortunate, but it meant their attention would be focused elsewhere. Once more, Dastio shot from cover, plasma weapons blazing to destroy the invaders of Tsates.

Reinforcements may not be coming, but the Isorian forces would not give up their homeworld without a fight.





## Development of the Early Combat Drones

The table below shows the development of the early KV5's into the later MV5s, including Dastio's own development. All the combat drones can be equipped with the standard buddy drone options from the Isorian army lists for the MV5 (such as spotters or shield drones).

The KV5 was seen predominantly as a heavily protected infantry support drone, only occasionally being armed with plasma cannon. The development of the Andhak/C3D2 type drones led to the evolution of the KV7 with its heavier armour. Eventually, the K series morphed into the still-heavier 'M' series, which culminated in the M4 and MV5 Mahran Vesh, both of which are equipped with the advanced machine intelligence from the KV7 series as well as fully developed kinetic armour, plasma light support and plasma, fractal or compression cannons.

All the K-/KV- and M-/MV- series rely on nano-envelope suspensor technology as well as additional reaction thrusters for faster horizontal movement and manoeuvring. Whilst the KV5 and KV7 looked more like the current Concord 'M' or 'T' series combat and transport drones, the later KV series and all the MV series bear the hallmark organic lines of the biosilicon technology on which the Isorians are now dependent.

Dastio can substitute for a strategic choice combat drone (Mahran Vesh) in the Isorian army list but is always Unique – only one can be included in an army. If running games in previous centuries, then players may like to substitute the appropriate combat drones in place of the Mahran Vesh.

## Modelling the early Combat Drones

The early versions of the Isorian combat drones can be represented on the table using the existing models – keen modellers may even wish to make their own turret conversions! The KV5 and early KV7's could be represented by a Concord M4, perhaps with a few organic adjustments to represent the effects of the developing Isorian nanosphere. Later KV7's, KV9s and the MV series would resemble the MV5 model available from the store.

*(Note that it is unlikely we will see such a plethora of historical Isorian combat drones in the Antares range – the MV5 available is the most up-to-date version!)*

Isorian Combat Drone (Vehicle) – evolution

Unit: Isorian Combat Drone (Vehicle)	Ag	Acc	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special	Points
KV5 Tsan Kiri Wars with Plasma Lance and either Plasma Light Support or Plasma Cannon (+5 pts)	6	5	1	11	7	8	Large	154
KV7 Tsan Kiri Wars (including D45710-KV7 "Dastio") with Plasma Cannon and either Plasma Lance or Twin Plasma Carbine	5	6	1	12	8	8	MOD2, Large	188
KV9 (Concord K10) with Plasma Cannon and Plasma Light Support, Early Splintering	5	6	1	12	8	8	MOD2, Large	215
D45710-MV3 "Dastio" Splintering with Plasma Cannon and Twin Plasma Carbine	5	6	1	13	8	9	MOD2, Large, Leader, Unique. Optional Phaseshift shielding	231
MV3-MV5 series with Plasma Cannon and Plasma Light Support (during splintering)	5	6	1	13	8	8	MOD2, Large. Optional Phaseshift shielding	As list: 239
D45710-MV5 "Dastio" Northern Interface 364th with Plasma Cannon and Plasma Light Support	5	6	1	13	9	9	MOD2, Large, Leader 2, Command, Follow, Unique, Coordination. Optional Phaseshift shielding	295

**Unique:** You can only have a single squad or model in an army.

**Coordination:** If Vylan Ra is also with the army, Dastio can use its Follow ability to co-ordinate moves with any group in range that contains at least one Tsan Ra or panhuman unit even if the co-ordinated/Follow-ing unit has pins (see Vylan Ra for full details).



## SENATEX COMMANDER VYLAN RA

Here we show Vylan Ra at the peak of her capabilities commanding the 364th Phase Regiment in the 8th century. She is at her best when used in a mixed force with Dastio and her Tsan Ra Sub-Commander, Kkr'tchk. She can be represented on the table by an Isorian commander model, perhaps with a closed faceplate.

Senatex Commander Vylan Ra							
Infantry Command Unit	Points Value: 150						Unique, Limited Choice
Substitutes For: Senatex Command Squad							
Unit: Commander Vylan Ra	Ag	Acc	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special
1 x Commander Vylan Ra with plasma carbine, X-sling, phase armour	5	6	5	5(7)	10	9	Leader 3, Command, Follow, Hero, Coordination
2 x Phase Troopers with plasma carbine, phase armour	5	6	5	5(7)	7	8	–
0 x Tsan Troopers with plasma duocarb, phase armour	5	6	7	6(8)	7	8	Large
Options							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Add up to 2 Phase Troopers to unit @22pts each</li><li>• Upgrade up to 2 Phase Troopers to Tsan Troopers at 7 points each</li><li>• Include Spotter Drone in unit@10pts</li><li>• Include Medi-Drone in unit @20pts</li></ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give unit Plasma Grenades @2pts per model</li><li>• Include Synchroniser Drone in unit @20pts</li><li>• Give Commander Vylan Ra SlingNet Ammo @5pts</li></ul>			
Special Rules							
<p><b>Unique.</b> You can only have a single squad with Commander Vylan Ra in an army.</p> <p><b>Coordination.</b> Vylan Ra is extremely good at co-ordinating operations between drones, panhumans and non-humans. When using her Follow ability on a group of units that contains at least one drone (including drone vehicle) or Tsan Ra unit, she can include units with pins. The pinned, Follow-ing unit must still take and pass a Command test (using Vylan’s Co, of course!) when starting their turn.</p>							





## SENATEX SUB-COMMANDER KKR'TCHK

Kkr'tchk can be represented by a standard Tsan Ra command model: critical to Vylan Ra's success was that she was capable of combining the skills of ordinary panhumans and aliens to make an exceptionally effective force.

Senatex Sub-Commander Kkr'tchk							
Infantry Command Unit		Points Value: 151					Unique, Limited Choice
Substitutes For: Tsan Ra Command Squad							
Unit: Sub-Commander Kkr'tchk	Ag	Acc	Str	Res	Init	Co	Special
1 x Sub-Commander Kkr'tchk with plasma duocarb, X-sling, phase armour	5	6	5	5(7)	7	9	Leader 3, Command, Follow, large, Coordination
2 x Tsan Troopers with plasma duocarb, phase armour	5	6	7	6(8)	7	8	Large
0 x Phase Troopers with plasma carbine, phase armour	5	6	5	5(7)	7	8	—
Options							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Add up to 2 Phase Troopers to unit @22pts each or 2 Tsan Troopers at 29 points each</li><li>• Include Spotter Drone in unit @10pts</li><li>• Include Medi-Drone in unit @20pts</li></ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give unit Plasma Grenades @2pts per model</li><li>• Include Synchroniser Drone in unit @20pts</li><li>• Give Sub-Commander Kkr'tchk SlingNet Ammo @5pts</li></ul>			
Special Rules							
<b>Unique.</b> You can only have a single squad with Sub-Commander Kkr'tchk in an army.							
<b>Coordination.</b> If Vylan Ra is also with the army, Sub-Commander Kkr'tchk can use their Follow ability to co-ordinate moves by their own unit and any group in range that contains at least one drone or panhuman unit even if the co-ordinated/Follow-ing unit has pins (see Vylan Ra for full details).							

### Repurposed Shards

It is possible to fight battles using forces that have only just been (re)integrated into one of the IMTel's armed forces, before they are completely equipped with new armour. To do so, use one of the standard lists (Isorian or Concord) but allow up to 40% of the list to be units from the opposing IMTel force in the appropriate slot. This represents the gradual integration of one force's technology into the other, its combat shard having been subsumed into the new IMTel, and much of its active nanospore replaced.

The only major limitations are that Tsan Ra cannot be used in a Concord force as they are completely reliant on the Isorian bio-silicon nanospore and Concord Subverter Matrices (perhaps obviously!) cannot be used in the Isorian force. Whilst the Concord chases after phaseshift technology, the Isorians have coupled it to their bio-silicon nanosphere so it quickly fades in effectiveness: whenever newly-acquired ex-Isorians in a Concord force try to use their phase armour, they should roll a d10 and, if they roll beneath the current turn, the phase armour stops providing its phasing capabilities.

For example, a recently acquired Concord system might still have some Strike troopers and a few squads of Interceptors. These could form part of a new attachment in an Isorian force, the Strike squads substituting for Phase squads and using their hyperlight armour rather than phase

armour, and the Interceptors substituting for Pulse bikes but at a tactical level.

Up until around 1120, even when a Subverter Matrix is used by a Concord force and is blocked by a target's roll of a '10', it should roll a d10 and if it rolls beneath the current turn, the matrix suffers a 'Weapon Malfunction', but is able to be fixed as normal by Self-Repair.

Such combined forces and rules are not recommended for tournaments and competitions, but are much fun in narrative days, nonetheless!





# Splintering Scenario: The Capture of Phagefactory 4

The Concord have retained control of Averahn for several years and used it to block further Isorian expansion into the Concord's territory. Repeated attacks from the Senatex have been fought off, the planet's orbital defences and nanosphere remaining intact despite acute pressure. As Concord reinforcements are detected arriving through the system gate, the Isorians realise they have but one, last chance to destroy the Concord's phagefactories and establish an on-planet foothold. After sacrificing several transports and fast-flying frigates in a bid to penetrate the planetary blockade, the Isorians have managed to drop the elite, hard-hitting and legendary 364th Phase Regiment into the area around the phagefactory.

But the 364th are on their own: no other forces made it through the blockade. All the 364th has to do is take out one phagefactory. Doing so will enable the specialist Isorian phage generator ships to gain the upper hand and capture Averahn before the defender's reinforcements arrive.

## THE CAPTURE OF PHAGEFACTORY 4

**Location:** Averahn, Northern Interface

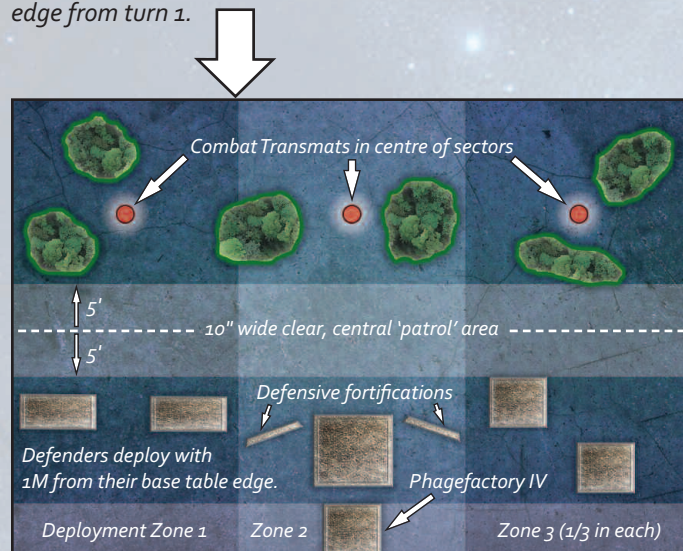
**Year:** 7A 784

### SET UP

This is played on a standard 6' x 4' table. To start with, the 5" x 5"-8" x 8" phagefactory installation is placed in the middle of the defender's deployment area. In front of this is a large (6"-8" x 8") area of Dense terrain such as an industrial area. Each player then alternates placing up to 10 more items, each 5" or more from any other with a clear area 5" either side of the table centre line representing the defender's patrol route.

Ideally, the defender's half of the table should be buildings, manufacturing or industrial installations and power plants, perhaps in an orderly layout – these are IMTel building plans, after all! In the attacker's half of the table, scrub, rocky ground, light woods, and perhaps the occasional area of rocky pinnacles is appropriate.

Attacker's Hyperlight-enveloped deployed units arrive on this edge from turn 1.



After placing terrain, the defenders can then place two linear fortification obstacles in their table half. In the middle of the attacker's three sectors place a combat transmat node or a suitable marker to represent such a node.

### FORCES

The scenario works well with around 1,000 points a side, though players could experiment with larger and smaller forces and even with a slight advantage to the attacker.

The Isorian Forces historically would have been Dastio, an experienced Isorian Human Commander (Vylan Ra), an Isorian Tsan Ra commander (Kkr'tchk) and their troops, a mix of human and Tsan Ra. The defenders are Concord, primarily fixed weapons and strike troops with no drop troops, interceptors or heavy combat drones.

The defender can take turret drones as tactical options if based on gun drones or as support options if based on weapon drones. See The Dronescore Returns (p.19) for details of turret drones.





## DEPLOYMENT

The defenders set up first, placing one third of their order dice (round down, excluding special deployment units such as Snipers) in each sector within 1M of their table edge. Any not deployed in this way can be deployed in whichever sector the defender's wish, but still within 1M of their table edge.

The attacker's vehicles, heavy weapons, humungous beasts or other units that can only use hyperlight envelopes or transports arrive from their table edge on turn one (see Chryseis, p.88-89). For each other unit that can use combat transmats, the attacker nominates a transmat through which the unit is to be sent.

The attacker then deploys their units, one at a time. An attacker's AG Chute equipped unit can be deployed anywhere within the attacker's table half providing it is more than 5" from any other unit. For every other unit able to use transmats, the defender states a combat transmat node and roll 1D10" to determine a random direction and distance the centre of the unit has to be deployed from the transmat. Place the unit on the table around the target point.

If a unit cannot be deployed at the location calculated, perhaps because it would compromise unit integrity or spacing, the unit is put aside and not deployed. It can be brought on in turn two from the attacking force's table edge, testing to arrive as normal.

## OBJECTIVES

The attackers have to capture or destroy the nanophage factory; the defenders have to stop them doing so.

## VICTORY

The attackers (Isorians) win a substantial victory if they capture the phagefactory (5 points), or a simple victory (3 points) if they destroy it.

The defenders score depending on if they break the attackers (1 point) and/or prevent the phagefactory being destroyed or captured (4 points).

## SPECIAL RULES

### Nanophage Generator

The nanophage generator is classed as a building with 30 DP and Threshold 12, but is otherwise destroyed as normal. If Ghar are defending, it can be called a quantum gravity shield generator but has the same functionality as the nanophage generator.

The nanophage generator is classed as equivalent to a subverter matrix to all enemy within 15". It doesn't have an order dice, but every time an enemy unit moves within 15" of the generator or is given an order dice when within 15", it must check as if attacked by a subverter.

### Alternate

Nanophage Factory could also be an anti-ship weapon, firing every turn with an Acc of 6 against orbital opponents. It has SV 20 + d10. If it manages 75 or more accumulated SV it has destroyed the attacker's transport ship: they are stranded and even if the weapon is subsequently destroyed, the most they can achieve is a draw.





# Appendix: A Note on Distances and Times

A SAU is a Standard Astronomical Unit of around 29.9m yan and is based on the historically retained orbit of Old Earth around its primary.

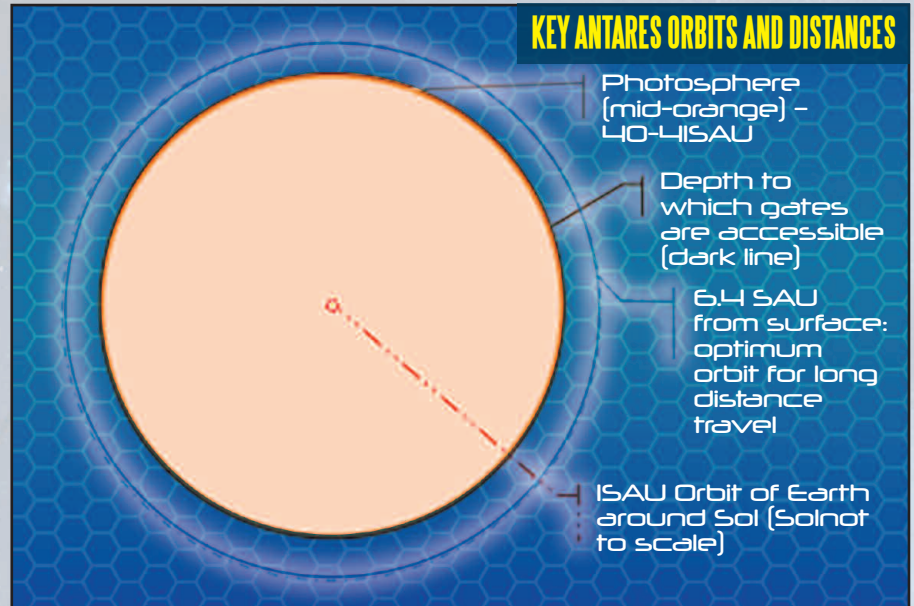
The approximate maximum distance any ship can rise from the Antares surface varies at around 7.25AU with an optimum distance of around 6.4SAU (see orbital distances diagram). At this distance, the density of particles from Antares is such that vessels can reach velocities that are close to those they would normally achieve within a star system. At the surface, however, the dangers of Antares mean that safe velocities are around 100 times less than those achievable at higher orbits.

Such travel times and distances are complicated by the time dilation effects that grow stronger the closer an object is to Antares itself. Isorian scientists also suggest the same effect occurs the closer probes or objects are to Obureg, the powerhouse of Antares. However, when a vessel rises only a short distance from the Antarean surface, it gradually experiences less and less of the time dilation effects of the star and, at the same time, can also reach a higher, safe velocity.

Such complex interactions means that travel to gates up to 22 times the average gate distance (0.1SAU \* 22 = 2.2SAU)

achieves optimal times by traversing the surface of Antares. In contrast, travel to gates further afield obtain their best travel times in terms of elapsed time or experienced time at some distance above the surface.

The table below tries to illustrate some of those distances and optimum times, and are all based on a standard Concord, Isorian or Freeborn cruise liner. None of the times given include the travel time within the gates at either end.



DISTANCE/TIMES	AT SURFACE		AT 6.4SAU	
	Onboard Time	External Time	Onboard Time	External Time
Close gate (0.05 SAU)	6-7 hours	3.3 days	—*	—*
One gate (average, 0.1SAU)	13-14 hours	6.6 days	—*	—*
1 AU (10 gates)	5.75 days	65-66 days	—*	—*
2 AU (20 gates)	11.5 days	131 days	—*	—*
2.5 AU (25 gates)	>14 days	164 days	<14 days (at 6.2 SAU)	138 days (at 6.2 SAU)
5 AU (50 gates)	28.8 days	328 days	14 days	139 days
<b>Averahn – Iyerath (5.9 SAU)</b>	33.9 days	1.1 years	14 days	>139 days
10 AU	57.5 days	1.8 years	>14 days	141 days
<b>Isori-Zyra (46 SAU)</b>	265 days	8.3 years	16 days	152 days (at 7.25 SAU)
<b>Isori-Taskarr** (52.7 SAU)</b>	303 days	9.5 years	>16 days	154 days (at 7.25 SAU)
<b>Isori-Felseron** (109.9 SAU)</b>	1.73 years	19.7 years	19 days	172 days

\* Travel takes longer at higher orbits

\*\*Taskarr is approximately the closest and Felseron the furthest major/important system in the Northern Interface from Isori (the Isorian homeworld – the system is Isori). Zyra, of course, is the Algoryn lost colony on the Senatex-Prosporate border.