HARD TIMES™

A MEGATRAVELLER SOURCEBOOK

Charles E. Gannon

Science-Fiction Adventure in the Shattered Imperium

GDW

MEGATRAVELLER

HARD TIMES

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MegaTraveller
Hard Times

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Hard Times

I don't remember when it all started to change, when each starport looked a little more rundown than the last, when starships became fewer and farther between. It was sometime after 1120. What I do remember is we finally turned our backs on the Core and charted a course for the Frontier by late 1124.

But there was no Frontier remote enough to remain unaffected by the tides of war or its destructive eddies.

Instead of the increasing paranoia, insularity and authoritarian mindset of the Core, we found the Outlands full of dying backwater planets.

From *The Memoirs of Trevor Scotius* (a pseudonym), starmerc/merchant captain.

BACKGROUND

The Rebellion has wrecked the Imperium as a unified political entity. However, as is often the case with wreckage, some of the remaining pieces are larger than others. **Hard Times** portrays this "new" incarnation of the Imperium—a collection of separate interstellar states surrounded by blasted, abandoned battlefields.

The interstellar states are centered on the areas still controlled by each of the respective factions of the Rebellion. For the most part, these power centers were untouched by the depredations of war. With their industrial and population centers intact, these safe areas carry on in an essentially pre-Rebellion fashion.

The regions beyond these cores of safety have a different story to tell. The Frontier around the Safes were aided and supplied by their allied factions. Thus they managed to retain much of their technology and industry despite being repeatedly visited by combat.

Beyond the Frontiers are the starkest tragedies of the Rebellion. These no man's lands, trapped between gigantic warring factions, bore the brunt of the savage war that raged across the former heart of Imperial civilization and culture. The ruin visited on them was not relieved by outside aid. Industries, technologies and societies staggered, stumbled and fell.

Tragically, these regions can be further divided into areas of real suffering, the Outlands, and areas of abject misery, the Wilds. While the Outlands were simply abandoned by retreating factions, the Wilds were additionally brutalized by repeated, agonizing combat.

These four environments—Safe, Frontier, Outland and Wild—now constitute the terrain of the new Imperium. The first type does not differ radically from pre-Rebellion Imperial society and is not dealt with here. However, the last three are new environments within the **MegaTraveller** universe. They offer fresh possibilities for adventure and for a flavor unique to the period presented in **Hard Times.**

STRUCTURE OF THIS SUPPLEMENT

Hard Times is divided into three parts.

Part I is a background section, intended to bring the reader up to date with the changes that have taken place from 1122 to 1125. The end of large-scale fleet actions in 1122 did not signal the end of changes in the post-Rebellion environment. The extensive damage done during the fighting had not yet fully taken effect.

Over the following three years, this damage began to spread like ripples across the once smooth and unified surface of the Imperium. The damage to factories on one world meant fewer goods could be shipped to others; the destruction of a starport on another world meant no new ships could be built to carry these goods. As the flow of trade dried up, people began to change their lifestyles, emigrate to less ravaged areas or starve.

The long-term effects of the damage already done are explained in detailed terms that can be added to any campaign. This section of **Hard Times,** therefore, presents a new Universal World Profile (UWP). modification system that allows referees to bring pre-Rebellion UWP stats into line with postwar realities.

Part II deals with the Hard Times era proper, 1125-1128. This section is set up as a tutorial/adventure source for that era. Starting in late 1124, each of the chapters sequentially examines a six-month segment of the history of that era, explains how successive changes took place, and presents new rules and equipment to detail that stage. Hard Times is the era of viking and pirate attacks, and the era of courageous starmerc bands which fight a rearguard action against these raiders. Rules are provided for creating all these groups, as well as for the changes that fighting has brought about in interstellar trade. Each chapter closes with an adventure that allows players to experience the downslide into Hard Times.

Part III is a data annex. Frequently used rules and tables for this new era are conveniently collected here. Among these are a new character generation system for the gallant starmercs, plus details of the new styles of blade fighting favored by the sociopathic ripper bands. This section also includes rules for spaceship operations at the previously unexamined and unimagined tech levels 4 through 8. As the shadows of Hard Times continue to lengthen, struggling societies will find it ever more important to make regressing technology stretch to previously impossible tasks.

Players who are used to feeling dwarfed by the massive historical movements of Imperial history will find that "the times they are a-changin." In the battered regions of the Outlands and Wilds, players will find a power vacuum the likes of which they could previously not imagine: Little power and few heroes are to be found there.

Even seemingly small acts assume mammoth proportions in this environment, and players will find that opportunities for dramatic action come fast and furious. For there is no small need for heroes in Hard Times.

Referee's Overview

If you thought the Rebellion was going to wreak havoc on your campaign, hang onto your hat. The carnage wrought by several years of warfare has only set in motion forces that will continue to tear down worlds that never heard a shot fired in anger.

The unified Imperial economy has been dealt a mortal wound. And while it is true that a rising tide raises all boats, it is time to learn the reverse is also true: An ebbing tide lowers all boats and leaves a great many of them stranded on the rocks.

Worlds are dying, but different worlds die at different rates. Some die quickly and painfully, while others die slowly in absolute agony. Either way, the human cost is staggering. But extraordinary people—otherwise referred to as player characters—can sometimes mitigate these effects. Sometimes they can slow them down enough to allow some of the innocents to escape. And sometimes by weighing in with their talents and determination, they can tip the scales from death to life, if that is their intent.

Make no mistake, in the post-Rebellion environment there are forces of darkness and of light, and the PCs can be agents of either. Which they will be, and how much impact their acts will have, are the questions treated in **Hard Times.**

IMPLEMENTING HARD TIMES IN YOUR EXISTING CAMPAIGN

Hard Times provides information for referees who wish to establish new campaigns, as well as for those who wish to keep their campaigns current with the era covered by this supplement.

The **Hard Times** campaign assumes that the player characters have access to a starship. If they do not, the adventure patrons will have starships, and part of the PCs' job will be to assume the role of its crew. The PCs should be able to acquire a starship of their own at the end of the fifth adventure of the **Hard Times** campaign.

New and Transplanted Campaigns

The easiest way to use this sourcebook is to establish a new campaign in the subsectors covered in the book. Included in this manuscript are statistics for the Khavle/Diaspora and

Pasdaruu/Diaspora subsectors, showing their post-Hard Times values, as well as 10 adventures set at specific times and places within these two subsectors. As the Khavle and Pasdaruu information has already been "predigested," referees choosing this option will not need to use the UWP modification tables to alter any UWP values, but they will want to be familiar with the procedures of these tables so they can institute the game effects of these changes at the proper stages in the adventures.

Characters for a new campaign should not be from the Khavle-Pasdaruu area; the scenarios work better if the PCs are just learning their way around the area for the first time. Simply have your players generate characters who muster out somewhere near the Khavle or Pasdaruu subsectors at the beginning of 1125.

To transplant an existing campaign from another area into this region requires a little sleight of hand on the referee's part. However, several suggestions are presented in Chapter 4, "Campaign Background."

Existing Campaigns

Bringing an established campaign up to date with Hard Times developments will require some work, but good campaigns always do and are always the better for it. The UWP modification tables in Chapter 3, "Effects of Hard Times," allow referees to appropriately modify the worlds of their campaign settings to reflect the changes since the breakdown of Imperial society.

However, these changes take place in discrete stages which demonstrate the worlds' gradual decay. Referees must take care to apply these changes as indicated in Chapter 3, "Effects of Hard Times," and—in more detail—in the adventures themselves. Referees will want to pay particular attention to Chapter 2, "Eve of Hard Times," to ascertain the conditions in their own portion of the former Imperium.

Similarly, referees who wish to run the **Hard Times** campaign presented in Part II in their own campaign areas must make appropriate modifications to the locale and characters in order to maintain their own storylines. Alternatively, referees may prefer to read Part II to gain a "feel" for the story, then run in their own campaign a similar series of adventures that tell the same overall story.

STRUCTURE OF THE
HARD TIMES CAMPAIGN

The adventure campaign that comprises Part II of **Hard Times** is laid out in Chapters 4 through 14. Chapter 4 lays the background for the following 10 chapters, detailing major NPCs the PCs will meet, and establishing the political and astrographic framework within which the PCs will operate.

Chapters 5 to 14 comprise both the historical analysis of the Hard Times of 1125-1128 and the scenarios of the **Hard Times** campaign. Each of these chapters sequentially covers roughly a six month period, a stage in the continuing decay of the Imperium. By breaking the period down into stages this way, **Hard Times** aims to make players feel immersed in tangible social change; they will sense the onset of Hard Times in the very structure of the play environment. This also allows the referee to assimilate these changes more easily. By breaking down the historical narrative into segments, referees can successfully carry their own campaigns through this period without having to impose too many abrupt changes that have no real foreshadowing.

Each chapter opens with a short piece of "mood" prose that sets the tone of the stage it covers. Each mood section is followed by a collection of essays describing what is going on during this stage and why.

Next is a resource section which offers practical hints to help referees and players integrate a particular stage of Hard Times into their games. These research segments include reminders that it is time to institute changes in a planet's UWP, new equipment lists, NPC and encounter generation lists, a new design sequence, lists of new opportunities and adventure ideas, and other things that will help bring the Hard Times era to life.

Each section ends with an adventure set in the stage covered. This adventure integrates elements covered within the section, thereby giving referees an example of how to turn the presented concepts into a playable reality.

Adventure Outline

The PCs are hired by a front group for the megacorporation Hortalez et Cie. The organization wishes to see if the PCs have the talent to handle a bigger job, so their success in each adventure qualifies them to be hired on for the next.

The first job involves the retrieval of some expensive equipment from a ruined facility and a shoot-out with a lurking presence in the dark. In the second adventure, while transporting this equipment, the PCs are apprehended by starport security officers who intend to repossess their ship due to an extensive—and untrue—history of past-due payments. After discovering that this is actually a scam run by a viking band, the PCs' next job runs them afoul of raiders holding a colony of miners hostage on an airless world. By the successful completion of this mission, Hortalez has enough confidence in the PCs to hire them for a full-fledged job—running security for a newly acquired installation that has been sabotaged by disgruntled locals.

Hortalez next hires the PCs to infiltrate a pirate band, setting the stage for future antipiracy jobs with the company. To convince the pirates of their intentions, the PCs must take part in a raid in which they face the concentrated fire of their real allies, while at the same time seeking to foil the raid. On the way to their next job, the PCs have the opportunity to assist a doctor seeking a solution to a plague striking his declining world. Here the PCs learn that the growing xenophobia of Hard Times is even directed at those attempting to do good. Their next job takes the PCs back into contact with the pirates, this time to "assist" the pirates in capturing a booby-trapped ship which will ultimately be used in a Trojan horse plan against them.

The PCs then become involved in assisting an increasing number of doomed and collapsing worlds, where thousands of lives hang on the technical assistance that one starship crew can provide. These poignant situations should drive home to the PCs the real issues facing humanity in Hard Times. During the last of these projects, the PCs are required to drive off a raid by a pirate group which could blow their cover with the band. If this is allowed to happen, their efforts in the previous adventures to lay an elaborate trap for the pirate band will be wasted. Assuming the characters are up to this challenge, they will arrive at the ultimate goal of Hortalez's long-term planning, the ambush of a major pirate assault. After all the skulking around, the PCs should be gratified that this is a stand-up fight which allows the them to show their true colors. They will be fighting alongside a powerful starmerc unit as part of a combined force facing down over a dozen pirate vessels. While this is the end of the adventure published here, it can be only the beginning of a career for the PCs as troubleshooters in the embattled Diaspora Sector.

The 10 adventures are intended as sequential parts of a unified campaign, but referees may opt to use one or more as stand-alone adventures. The minor changes required to do so are listed with the adventures.

Road to Hard Times
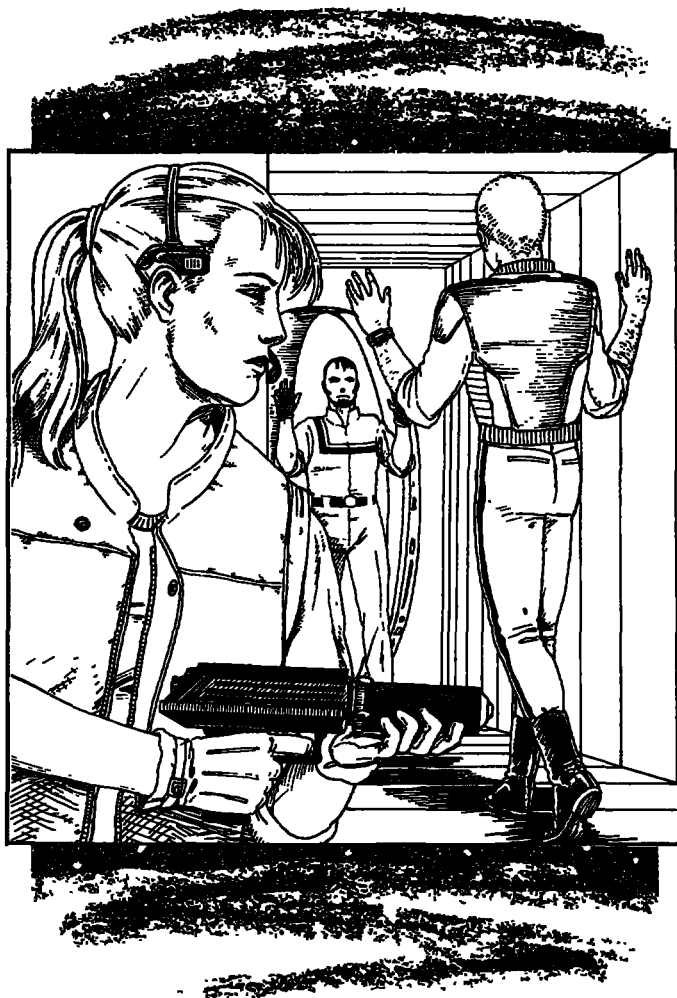
The Third Imperium is predominantly noted for being the first empire in which two branches of humanity held the reigns of power conjointly. It is also noteworthy for the unique blend of conservatism and vitality which this sharing of power produced.

The Solomani tendency toward innovation and conquest was tempered by the traditional Vilani values of restraint and caution. As a result, the Third Imperium achieved an impressive balance between expansion and consolidation, international vigor and domestic security. However, despite the longevity of the Third Imperium and its many noteworthy achievements, it is perhaps best remembered for its fragile governmental structure and its final, tragic disintegration.

From *Imperial Stars: A History of Three Imperiums* by hu-Tugul Ackerson,
published in 1218 by Sodokond Educational Press, Arkirkii/Solomani Rim.

PASSING OF AN AGE

Aftermaths are inevitably longer than the wars that cause them. And the aftermath of the War of the Rebellion is no exception.

Hard Times begins in 1125. The fighting is effectively over: The combatants are too drained to mount the massive campaigns that characterized the first five years of the Rebellion. The factions are now facing the reality of long-term independence and a new political order—but the actual condition of most of the former Imperium continues to worsen.

Even after the last great fleet actions of 1121, the factions continued to hammer away at each other with what force they had left. However, limited resources dictated warfare to devolve into banditry, surgical strikes and terrorism. Resources, which could not be secured for future use were destroyed in order to deny them to the enemy. The space lanes became too dangerous to travel. Trade continued to shrivel up. Contact and communication died away to an intermittent trickle. Most planetary economies retracted; others imploded. Populations decreased, governments grew oppressive; and pirates thrived.

This outcome was not what most military or economic experts forecast. Each faction's chief analysts had predicted that the Rebellion would be resolved in five years, six at the most. They predicted minimal civilian casualties, with acceptable levels of damage to industry and commerce. Encouraged by the comparatively positive tone of these predictions, many faction leaders imagined that a sharp military victory would crush the will and organization of the adversary, and the Rebellion would be over.

But as 001-1125 dawned on Capitol—eight and a half years after the hostilities began—it was quite clear the experts were wrong. Only a very few intelligence agencies and megacorporations had accurately foreseen the outcome of the conflict, an outcome they referred to hopefully as the Short Dusk. But to the sophont in the street, it was simply the beginning of Hard Times.

ANALYTICAL ERRORS OF 1116

By the end of 1116, the majority of experts had already made the crucial mistake that ruined their projections regarding the outcome of the Rebellion. This tragic flaw was inherent in their very first theoretical assumption—that the Civil War of 604-622 was an appropriate historical model for the upcoming events of the Rebellion. Although such a mistake is understandable—the Civil War of 604-622 being the Third Imperium's only prior experience with internal strife—the experts couldn't have been more in error when they selected it as an example. The Civil War of 604-622 was not a civil war at all. It was a series of military coups, with minimal civilian involvement. During that conflict, the political infrastructure of the Imperium attempted to detach itself from the fierce struggles between the military kingpins who collected around Core in pursuit of the Iridium Throne. The admirals held no public loyalty, held no right to specific territories and held no claim to the Iridium Throne other than their willingness to kill to obtain it. In contrast, the legitimate organs of state continued to operate without interruption: The Imperial bureaucracy continued with business as usual, administering the affairs of the Third Imperium while the admirals fought over who would ultimately rule.

Since no admiral had a clear political or ancestral claim to any given region, all were outsiders to every planet and system they visited. Those few admirals who attempted to impose themselves as local rulers quickly became quagmired in the difficulties posed by regional resistance. They found that battlewagons were easier to smash than labor strikes and planetary assaults were simpler to defeat than protest marches. Inevitably, the admirals always gave up empire-building in favor of empire-stealing. After all, if they won, they wouldn't need to build an empire—they could simply claim the extant one as the spoils of war.

The worlds of the Imperium encouraged the admirals to keep their war between themselves. When visited by the fleets of the Imperial contenders, the planets paid tithes, provided the logistical support required of them and did not complain too much. They knew that eventually the admirals would leave, and life would return to normal. Unfortunately, the tendency in this "civil war" to restrict violence to certain select political strata was not a hallmark of the Rebellion.

The Rebellion was—and is—a true civil war. From the very outset, political rivals with competing claims rallied civilian populations to their cause. Fleets went forth not as the embodiment of one admiral's desire to rule, but as an extension of publicly supported policy. This was not just a conflict between soldiers—this was a war between common people, between competing regions, cultures and political ideas.

Consequently, just as the enabling foundation of the war was civil, so were its casualties. Industry, commerce, transportation, even agriculture and population centers became targets. Damage suffered by a faction's populace vindicated counterstrikes. The upward spiral of violence took an increasingly heavy toll on the structure of the Imperium itself.

A NEW KIND OF WAR

It took the experts several years to accept that the Rebellion was different from any previous type of conflict within the Imperium. The military was not used to managing a conflict whose battleground was also its logistical base. Wars with the Zhodani and Solomani, plus various pacification campaigns, gave the Imperial military establishment an institutional predisposition toward conquest at any cost: Damage done today could be rebuilt tomorrow or left for the enemy to handle.

But the Rebellion was a more complex conflict. Every faction's logistical base overlapped onto its area of military operations. Therefore, it was crucial for objectives to be taken and defended intact—there was no time for rebuilding if war production was to retain the momentum required for victory. Strategic success required a deft military hand and an understanding of the subtle interactions of warfare, commerce and politics. An inappropriately timed tactical victory could in fact be a strategic defeat.

Few leaders of the Imperium appreciated this. Those few who did had little opportunity to benefit from it: Lucan's headlong offensives demanded stiff, absolute responses. His irresponsibility as a ruler and unsuitability as a military planner not only squandered his own sizeable resources, but ultimately invalidated any measured responses undertaken by his rivals. Consequently, no single individual contributed more to the downfall of the Imperium than the man who—rightly or wrongly—sat upon its throne.

HIGH-POPULATION WORLDS
ARE BROUGHT LOW: 1118-1120

The Rebellion's most combat-intensive period extended from late 1118 to mid-1120. It was then that the factions strove to attain the key objective in the conflict—control of the high-population worlds. Predictably, but tragically, the battle to control these worlds led unerringly to their ultimate ruination. The intense conflict that surrounded them shattered markets and port facilities, and drove off all commercial shipping. Thus, the huge, import-driven economies of these multibillion-person leviathans retracted—or collapsed.

Few of these worlds were ever self-sufficient. As foodstuff imports dwindled, rationing was introduced, followed immediately by panic. The law levels of these worlds—typically high to begin with—grew more oppressive as governments were forced to adopt draconian measures to maintain control. All too often, the result was revolt, anarchy and ruin.

This result was inevitable, though no less tragic, on high-population worlds with inhospitable environments. With their needs for food, water and air always close to the edge, their slide into chaos was swifter and more absolute—and involved millions of civilian casualties.

Consequently, most high-population worlds quickly lost their value as strategic objectives. Instead, they devolved into chaotic cesspools of misery and desperation. Although few were targets of major attacks, these prizes of the Rebellion became the war's most tragic casualties.

WINDING DOWN: 1120-1121

The Imperium started the war with 320 numbered fleets and an equal number of reserve fleets. By 1121, fewer than 95 numbered and 130 reserve fleets remained. Most had been reduced to 60% strength or less, with the heaviest losses in the BatRons and CruRons. Losses were also severe in the ground forces. As the front moved back and forth, countless divisions were stranded due to insufficient resources for evacuation. Without orbital support, few units survived more than 48 hours past the arrival of an enemy fleet.

Lucan, having held a disproportionately large share of the military resources to begin with, was the only faction leader who could still mount one last major offensive in 1121. So he did. Lucan's final offensive against Gushemege Sector was a pyrrhic victory: His forces were too weakened to hold the territory they had purchased at so high a price in trained personnel and high-tech equipment.

The other faction leaders had already realized what Lucan refused to accept: The war might not be over, but it was collapsing under its own weight. Neither the personnel nor the equipment was left for further offensives. What front-line quality units remained were now barely able to defend each faction's core. And control over peripheral areas continued to recede.

But even more telling than the lack of personnel and equipment was the lack of logistical support. Commerce and industry were devastated. Manufacturing centers watched their shipments of raw materials being reduced to a trickle. The remaining bulk carriers were needed to ensure the immediate defensive and minimal industrial needs of the faction core areas. Even had the combat forces existed, there was no way to reprise the massive offensives of 1118-1120. The supply resources to empower them were gone. Like exhausted prize-fighters, the contenders for the Iridium Throne staggered away from each other and collapsed in their respective corners.
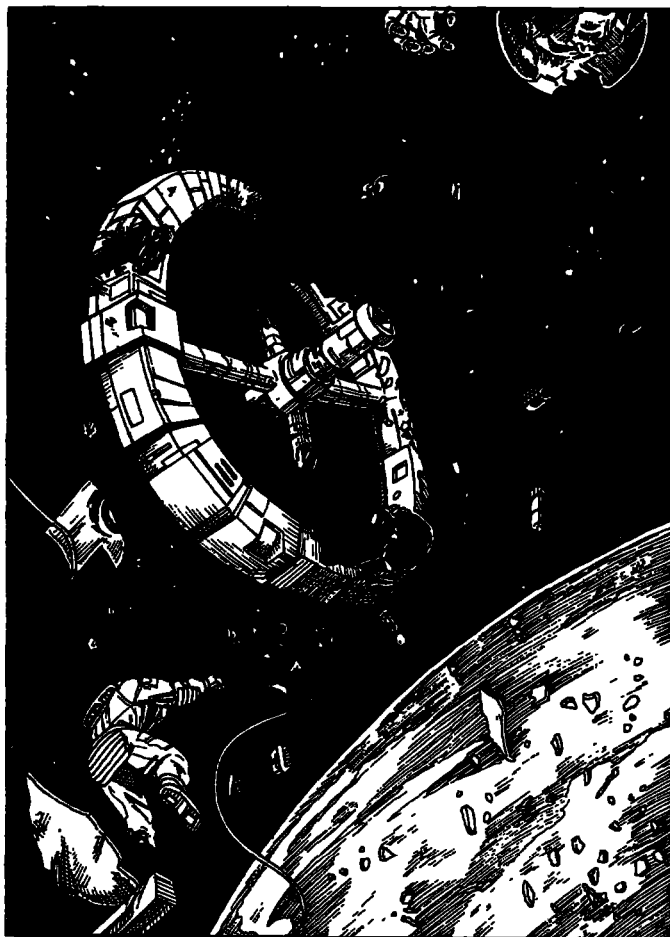
SHADOWS LENGTHEN: 1122-1124

As the faction leaders learned, the costs of war continued to accrue long after the bullets and BatRons stopped flying. Economies did not spring back in response to the deescalation. War-related industries dominated the commercial sectors of the factions. As contracts for new war materiel began to shrink, ripples of unemployment coursed through the economy. Commerce retracted even further: The last viable market—war—had evaporated. Now there was nothing left to sell—which was appropriate since no one had any money to spend anyway.

Each faction began attempting to rebuild its economy and commercial sectors. Among the more successful were the Ziru Sirkaa, Margaret's Domain (whose strong suits were in trade, not war) and—oddly enough—Lucan. The reason for Lucan's success was indeed ironic: The would-be emperor was simply not interested in economics. Consequently, his experts had a relatively free hand. Only his military leaders had to endure his "expert guidance." That guidance mandated a relentless campaign of lightning strikes into the core areas of the rival factions. Convinced that the other factions were on the verge of uniting against him, Lucan decided it was necessary to disrupt their largely illusory offensive capabilities.

As a result, the battles of the Rebellion ceased to resemble arena contests fought with battle-axs and began to be reminiscent of knife fights in darkened alleys. Commerce raiding took the place of squadron actions. Deep-penetration raids by destroyers and escorts replaced fleet-sized thrusts. Hit-and-run strikes by companies or battalions were used instead of full-scale planetary assaults. As the forces shrank in size, so did the objectives: Instead of whole planets, single cities or starports were targeted.

However, despite its seemingly "limited" nature, this new phase heralded a terrible change in military objectives: The desire to conquer had been replaced by the decision to destroy. The targets were not attacked in order to be added to the assets of the attacker; they were being eliminated so the

defender no longer gained any benefit from them. The purposeful destruction of resources had begun years earlier, when retreating naval commanders were forced to destroy key starship construction and repair facilities to hinder pursuit by the enemy. But now this tactic was no longer the exception to the rule—it became Lucan's standard operating procedure.

The other factions had no choice but to respond in kind. This at least forced Lucan to devote more of his assets to defense, which limited the number of offensive strikes he could make. But Lucan still maintained a high level of activity against Dulinor, Vland and the Solomani Confederation.

Just as this period of conflict (referred to by many as the Black War years) evolved new kinds of tactics and objectives, it also produced a new breed of soldier. It placed emphasis on the trained, resourceful professional who could conduct and complete complex missions with minimal support and guidance.

On the other hand, it encouraged the emergence of raiders and "black" units—so named because of suspicions that they were moonlighting as pirates when not on a mission.

By now, the factions were passing out letters of marque as freely as party favors. And the lines separating war, terrorism and piracy—always thin to begin with—began to vanish amid the new brutality of "legitimate" warfare.

As a result of these years of Black War, the factions' efforts to jumpstart their respective economies died. Civilian losses in the peripheral areas caused many heretofore loyal outlying worlds to rethink their allegiances and move toward neutrality. Thus, in a remarkably evolutionary fashion, the areas controlled by each faction continued to shrink to a size which could be defended by what few military assets remained, a task simplified by the deeper no man's land—a byproduct of the receding Frontiers.

By the end of 1124, some measure of stability had finally arrived for the central regions of each faction. However, each of these regions—known as Safe areas—were not much bigger than one or two subsectors. Beyond each of them was a Frontier area, a region where the faction still held a fair amount of sway, but which was more unpredictable and risky for travellers. Beyond the Frontiers were the Outlands, areas that had originally been under marginal control by the faction. After suffering the depredations of full-sized fleets and armies, the Outlands were too battered to endure the insult added to their injury by the Black War. Most of the Outland worlds fell by the wayside, seldom visited.

And further outward still were the Wilds—the areas forsaken by the factions since the war began. Innumerable fleets had raged back and forth across these systems, and then the Black War had ravaged them. Maintaining contact with these worlds was not only pointless—it was folly.

Only the adventurous and foolhardy, or those with intense personal ties, would attempt to cross the gulf to visit those abandoned worlds. And no others were interested in helping them try. For as 1124 drew to an end, it was obvious that the attempts at economic reinvigoration were failing. Merchants were getting nervous about being able to make payments on their increasingly rare jump-capable ships. Every day, another broker closed up shop for good—or opened a window 30 stories up and took a short walk into forever. People stopped spending; stores began closing. You could feel it everywhere: Hard Times were a'coming.
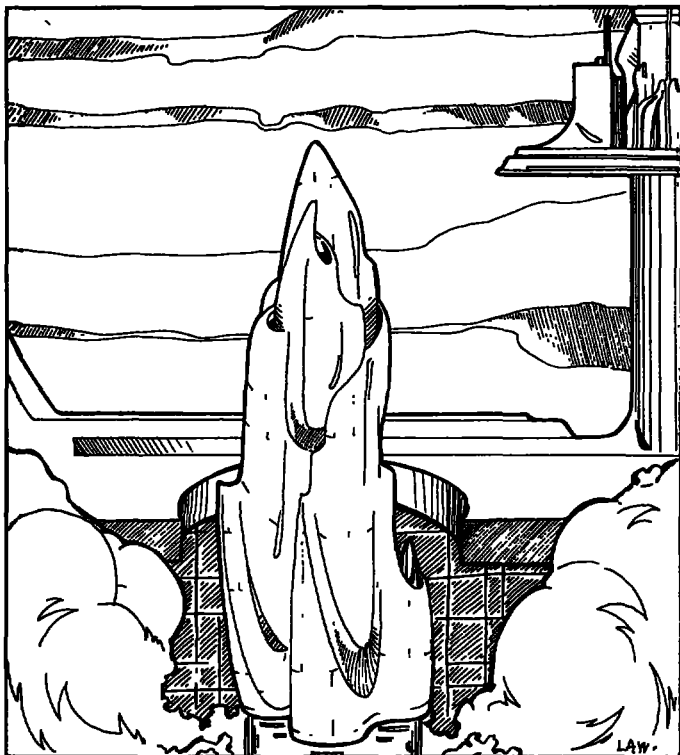
The Shattered Imperium 1122

Depots are shown with a ★ symbol.

〜〜 Border of Frontier   ☐ Safe Areas

〜〜 Border of Outlands   ▒ Frontier Areas

Meshan   Mendan   Amdukan

•Regina

The Spinward Marches

★
Deneb

•Depot

★
Corridor

•Vland
Vland

Tephany•

★
Lishun

The Empty Quarter

Antares
Antares•

•Mora

Deneb•

★

Tobia•

Trojan Reach

Reft Sector

•Usdiki

★
Gushemege

•Nulinad

Dukh•

The Third Imperium

★
Core•

Capital

★
Fornast

Ley Sector

•Cyril

Dagud-ashaag

★

Medurmal•

Shumduur•

Riftspan Reaches

Tripolis•

Verge

•Dlan•
Ilelish

★

Zarushagar

★

•Reference
★

•**Kaggushus**

Massila

Delphi

•**Anaxias**

★

Glimmer-drift Reaches

•Libert

★

Vaward

Hlakhoi

Ealiyasiyw

Reaver's Deep

★

•**Warinir**
Daibei

•Liasdi

Diaspora
★

Former Solomani Border

Old Expanses
★

Hinter-Worlds

•**Marlheim**

The Aslan Hierate

Imperial Border

Staihaia'yo   Iwahfuah   Dark Nebula •**Kusyu**   Magyar

★

Solomani

Alpha Crucis

Spica

•Dingir•

Rim

•**Terra**

The Solomani Confederation

The Hive Federation

•Home

Aktifao   Uistilao   Ustral Quadrant   Canopus   Aldebaran   Neworld   Langere

Eve of Hard Times

The Hard Times period (also known for a short time to hopeful social scientists as the Short Dusk) effectively begins in 1125 as a result of the havoc wrought by the War of the Rebellion from 1117-1124. For referees and players who are understandably curious about the look of the Imperium since the last maps were published in the **Rebellion Sourcebook**, new maps on pages 11, 13, 15 and 17 provide subsequent references up to 1125.

ROAD TO HARD TIMES MAPS

Three maps trace the evolution of the Imperium from 1122-1124. These maps indicate two boundaries about each faction. The inner boundary indicates secured areas that are essentially 100% committed to and integrated with the faction. The outer boundary indicates areas that are less secure and fully integrated, but are nonetheless effectively controlled by the faction. Referees who intend to play their campaigns forward into the 1125 era will find these maps especially valuable.

The map for 1121 is not presented in **Hard Times** since it is essentially identical to the map for 1120. In effect, the events of 1120 had only one major effect—they proved that the factions were no longer able to exert dramatic influence upon each other due to their collective state of military exhaustion.

Shattered Imperium 1122: This map (on page 11) shows the beginning of a slight recession for all areas of influence, although the losses for Strephon and Daibei are particularly dramatic (and are the results of the last great campaigns of the Rebellion). At this point, the economic effects following the cessation of high intensity conflict have not yet been felt.

Shattered Imperium 1123: This map (on page 13) shows the profound effects caused by the public and commercial adaptation to the end of the war economy fostered by the Rebellion. It also shows the erosive influence of the Black War. The shrinkage of the secure areas held by each faction is particularly noteworthy.

Shattered Imperium 1124: This map (on page 15) indicates the continuing shrinkage of each faction's secure areas. The two factions farthest from Lucan's scorched earth maraudings—the Domain of Deneb and the Solomani Confederation—are also the two factions whose borders are showing signs of stabilization.

HARD TIMES MAP

Shattered Imperium 1125: By the beginning of 1125, the factional core areas have achieved basic stability. Military forces have withdrawn to lines that can be reliably defended, allowing the worlds within these boundaries to retain pre-Rebellion economic levels. However, their outlying regions—and the interstellar reaches beyond—are still adjusting to the tremendous changes caused by the Rebellion. The 1125 map indicates these regions and several other features which are not present on the 1122-1124 maps but which are relevant to **Hard Times** play.

Area Distinctions

As explained on page 5, there are four categories of areas in **Hard Times**: Safe, Frontier, Outlands and Wilds. The differences between these areas are crucial in campaign terms, as a world's location in one of these areas will largely determine how badly its UWP will deteriorate under the rules presented in Chapter 3, "Effects of Hard Times."

Safe Areas: Safe areas are the most secure areas in the Rebellion Imperium. They represent the cores of the respective factions and are carefully guarded by the remaining military forces. These function as isolated pockets of pre-Rebellion times, where commerce, industry and civil government continue as before. The only thing that breaks the illusion of travelling back in time to 1115 is the attitude of the inhabitants. They are wary and vigilant, for only vigilance can keep these areas secure. In addition, they know what is going on outside the Safes, and this has made them cautious spenders. They have something of a lifeboat mentality, hardening their hearts to the tragedy outside the Safes, knowing there are only enough resources to retain selected parts of their civilization. Safe worlds are not subject to UWP modifications.

Frontier Areas: These lie just outside the boundaries of the Safes. They encompass areas whose security cannot be guaranteed by the reduced militaries of 1125. Consequently, their factional loyalty is lower. The level of factional control and defense runs about 50%, although most of the Frontier worlds must trade with the Safes, the only real economy around. Although lower than in the Safes, the level of naval patrolling is sufficient to encourage moderate interstellar trade and transport. But the danger to shipping is sufficient to reduce its volume to well below pre-Rebellion levels. The increased risk shows in the attitudes of the people. They have become careful and shrewd, sometimes gruff. However, unlike the more desperate people farther from the Safes, Frontier-folk are still usually generous to travellers in need of help. After all, a favor done is a favor owed, and everyone needs favors and friends when there is no shortage of enemies. These enemies—pirates and raiders—are drawn to the Frontier because shipping is still sufficiently plentiful, and defenses sufficiently light, to make such raids a reasonable proposition. Also, technology needed to keep ships and weapons functional is becoming increasingly rare farther out, where the bones of civilization are rapidly picked clean. Frontier worlds are subject to UWP modification.

Outland Areas: These are the areas that have been forsaken by all the factions, so there is no law or protection beyond what each world can muster for itself. Therefore, space travel is very hazardous. Pirates operate virtually at will, and rescue is unlikely. The Outlands are difficult to characterize—as worlds become isolated, they can evolve drastically different responses to the same circumstances. Some still hunger for their lost trade and the benefits of Imperial society. Others shun trade because it attracts piracy: If you have nothing, no one can take anything from you. Outlanders live by their wits—there are only the quick and the dead. Outland worlds are subject to UWP modification and will suffer more than the Frontier worlds above.

Meshan   Mendan   Amdukan

The Spinward Marches

Regina

Corridor

Vland

Vland

Antares

Antares

The Empty Quarter

Mora

Deneb

Lishun

Nulinad

The Third Imperium

Core

Capital

Fornast

Tobia

Trojan Reach

Reft Sector

Gushemege

Dagudashaag

Reference

Shumuura

Kagoushiu

Tripolis

Dian

Verge

Ilelish

Zarushagar

Massilia

Delphi

Anaxias

Riftspan Reaches

Vawar

Hlakhoi

Ealiyasiyw

Reaver's Deep

Daibei

Diaspora

Old Expanses

War

Imperial Border

The Aslan Hierate

Staihaia'yo

Iwahfuah

Dark Nebula

Kusyu

Magyar

Solomani Rim

Terra

Alpha Crucis

Spica

The Solomani Confederation

Home

The Hive Federation

Aktifao   Uistilao   Ustral Quadrant   Canopus   Aldebaran   Neworld   Langere