

1.2 - THE POWERS

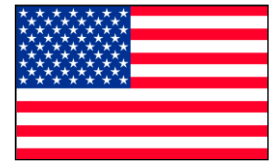
The world of *Darkstar* is not one dominated by one or two superpowers, but instead divided between many colonial powers all jockeying for a bigger share of the wealth offered by the stars. Alliances are made, wars are begun, and cease-fires are brokered - all at a bewildering pace in an ever-changing environment of skirmish, armistice, and new skirmishes. What this means in game terms is that there is no "Federation vs. Klingon" dynamic, no "Cold War" or hot war between traditional enemies. Players can select warships of a certain navy and pit them against the warships of any other navy, in any way that suits the interest and preference of the players. The next game might find those same players and ships teaming up against a new player.

There are also no borders in the *Darkstar* universe, no "neutral zone" or other lines that divide one volume of space from another. All the empires are intermingled, space is just too large for any navy to section off a slice for its exclusive use. About the biggest piece of real estate any power can truly "occupy" as its own is a single small star system, and even these are rare (see the section on Known Space for details). Again, this is to set up a gameplay universe where anyone can fight anyone without worrying about problems of "space geography." Players never have to consider whether the ships of one nation can fight those of another nation because they may or may not be on "opposite sides of the universe."

Still, some structure does exist in the setting. These are sometimes called the "Ten Powers," those nations or other bodies that have sufficient resources and technology to build significant star-faring navies. Each has its own unique character, often built into the very nuts and bolts of its navy's ships. Any navy, after all, is fundamentally an extension of its nation's technology, strategic priorities, resources, experiences in past wars, and armed forces doctrine. These, in turn, are based on the society and culture of the nation itself.

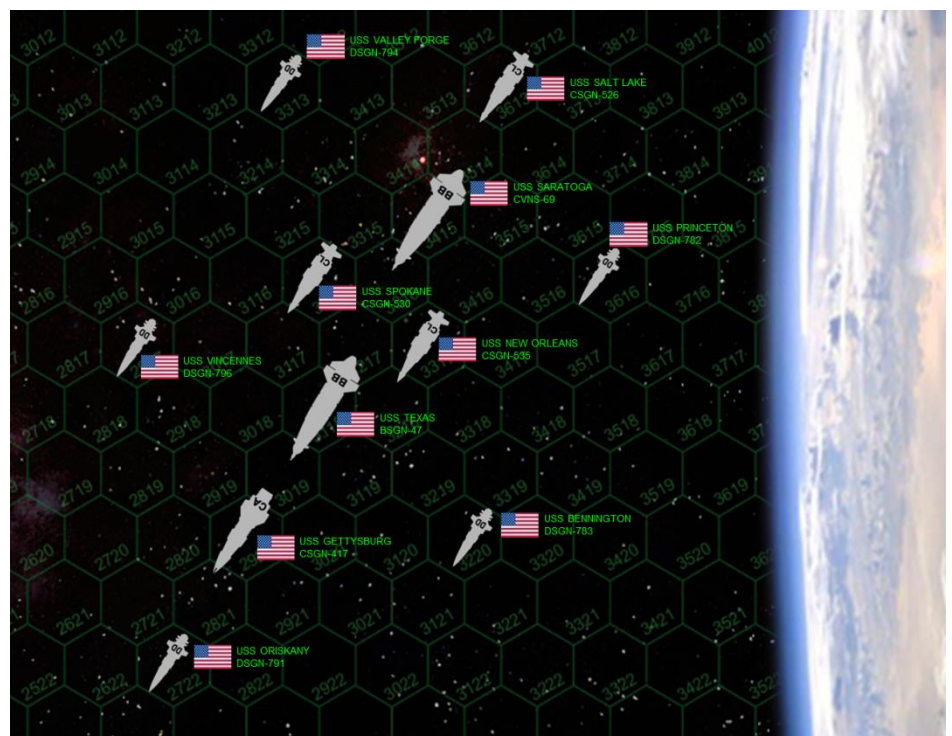
The Ten Powers, and an outline of their star-faring and naval doctrines, are listed briefly below.

United States



Although their blue water fleet once ruled the oceans of Earth with impunity, the navy of the United States has not fared quite as well in the successive centuries. The Water Wars of the 2190s were among the worst for what was once the world's sole remaining superpower, knocking the United States forever off its unchallenged pinnacle. Nevertheless, this nation was at the forefront of the scientific and technological revolutions of the Second Renaissance and was the first to set up permanent settlements on the Moon, Mars, and the moons of Jupiter. Perhaps even more importantly, history will never forget that the USS *Pioneer*, the first manned FTL-capable ship to reach Proxima Centauri in 2429, bore the stars and stripes of the United States.

As the first star-faring nation, the United States definitely deploys one of the largest navies of *Darkstar*. Their officers and men maintain a proud tradition stretching back to the days of Nimitz, Farragut, and John Paul Jones. America was always a carrier power at sea, at least during its navy's "golden age," and remains so to this day. Their supercarriers are simply massive, among the largest warships ever built. They are capable of launching huge strike groups that can supernova an enemy battleship or scorch a planet, sometimes within minutes. Still, because fighter-sized craft cannot range between star systems the way they used to between islands or



continents, the carrier arm of the US Navy is not the singular war-winning factor it once was. While the US Navy does have a handful of “fast battleships,” their excessive dependence on supercarriers has caused some observers to remark that the US Navy has lagged slightly in the development of other naval technologies.

Another area in which the United States still holds a marked lead is in the development and construction of the “marine expeditionary force.” The planetary assault ships of the United States Marine Corps are among the largest in Known Space, carrying the troops, landing craft, assault ships, and vehicles to put large footprints on almost any planet, moon, or asteroid they choose. This concept of a truly combined-arms task force, another hallmark of traditional American naval power, has helped the United States Navy remain one of the most potent fleets in existence.

They just aren’t the *only* fleet anymore.

Fortes: The US Navy tends to have the biggest carriers, the best fighters and bombers in their strike groups, and the biggest planetary assault ships and aerospace strike squadrons for the vaunted United States Marine Corps.

United Kingdom

The naval tradition of the United Kingdom (to include many former commonwealth territories such as Australia and New Zealand) is even more proud and longer-lived than that of the United States, extending back as far as the victories of Sir Francis Drake against the Spanish Armada in 1588. In the world of *Darkstar*, almost a thousand years later, the powerful Royal Navy remains a force to be reckoned with.

Always an island nation utterly dependent on a far-flung trade empire for its survival, the British people were perhaps most instinctively prepared to launch a new empire out into the stars. For the British, such empires have never been pursued merely for riches or conquest, but also the grim realities of subsistence. Either way, over the centuries something has been practically bred into British genes that demands a naval-dominated empire across the sea, be that water blue or black. What is the Earth, after all, if not an island in a vast ocean of space?

Accordingly, the British Navy was all too ready to embrace the vision of the Second Colonial Age. The general reorganization of the world order in the wake of the Blue Plague has also given the British a chance to retake a place of world importance, a chance they have



not squandered.

While some observers comment that the Royal Navy is best characterized as a “light” version of the United States Navy, this isn’t entirely true. True, the British maintain a potent fleet of slightly smaller carriers and marine planetary assault ships. But the Royal Navy has also done a much better job at embracing the reemergence of the big-gun battleship. Furthermore, the Royal Navy is practically the only fleet in space to embrace their cherished concept of the big-gun battlecruiser. While the protection of these ships often suffers when compared against the thicker hides of “true” battleships, the speed of a battle cruiser often affords a protection all its own.

British battleships and battle cruisers never mount the largest rail guns or laser cannons available, instead choosing to mount larger numbers of slightly smaller guns. As a result, British capital ships often mount some of the best-balanced weapons suites, and their cruisers and destroyers are among the finest in Known Space. The one exception to this concept of balance is the steadfast refusal of British naval design to mount plasma projectors, electron particle cannons, or other particle-based weapons on their ships. In their view, such “hypertech blunderbuss” guns lack the professional precision of a laser and the punch of a rail gun.

One last curious aspect of the Royal Navy is their use of privateers. Usually sailing civilian craft retrofitted into frigates, corvettes, or even gunboats, they prey on enemy commerce shipping or even raid lightly-defended planetary or orbital installations. The quality of these ships and their crews, of course, tends to vary widely. They are some of the best . . . and worst . . . in space.

Fortes: They almost exclusively “own” the battlecruiser sub-class, and possess one of the better mixes of battleships, carriers, and planetary assault ships. They also make the best use of specially-designed “privateer” raiding ships.

Panasian Union (PRC)

Effectively this is the People’s Republic of China, which is the central and dominant power in a tightly bound super-state stretching across the Asia-Pacific region, including Mongolia, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), and Thailand. But since the PRC is the only one of these nations to put starships into space, the navy remains exclusively under the command of the People’s Republic of China.



Although the Chinese Navy (and manufacturing base in general) has been plagued for centuries by poor standards of safety and design, the Chinese have made strong progress in recent decades to reverse this trend. Still, the conditions aboard a Chinese warship would appall the officers and men of almost any other fleet, and they are typically the last to embrace new concepts of technology such as advanced torpedo / missile systems, CICs, and ECM shielding.

This being said, the Chinese Navy is definitely the largest in Known Space when measured by sheer numbers. Although deploying very few large carriers or battleships, their numbers of cruisers, destroyers, and frigates almost defies belief. The Chinese Navy has also embraced the tactic of the massed torpedo strike, with many of their ships able to carry incredible loads of missiles. Once these are fired off, however, Chinese task forces often find themselves at a disadvantage against enemy fleets mounting bigger guns or carrier-borne strike groups. Chinese missile technology also lags somewhat behind most other navies, and their missiles tend to be shot down with relative ease . . . until there are a hundred or more bearing down on you. Also, by foregoing heavy rail guns or energy-drinking lasers, Chinese ships are usually very fast for their class, an attribute often further assisted by their dubious regard for crew safety.

Deploying such a fast, missile-heavy, and in many ways unsafe fleet means that the Chinese Navy can hit very hard in the opening stages of a given operation. However, their tactical, operational, and even strategic endurance is very poor. The potency of any Chinese naval effort drops off very quickly, be it a single ship-to-ship action or a system-wide invasion planned over several months or even years.

Lastly, Chinese ships often carry some of the largest complements of marines aboard their warships, not for planetary assaults like American or British Marines, but for ship-to-ship boarding actions and seizing enemy installations. This is almost exclusively used in an offensive role rather than a defensive role. Chinese marines almost never have to defend their ships from boarding actions because, quite frankly, who wants a Chinese ship?

Fortes: Chinese warships usually mount high numbers of missiles and large units of assault troops used for ship-to-ship boarding actions. Also, in almost any plausible naval action, the Chinese will have numbers on their side.

Republic of India

Having suffered for centuries under the curses of poverty, a repressive class system, and religious turmoil, India was often regarded as a “developing nation” in former eras. Being dominated for years under the old British Empire certainly didn’t help matters, and well into the 21st Century India was seen to lag at least half a generation behind the rest of the world in many ways. After the “cosmic reset” button of the 22nd and 23rd Centuries, however, India has emerged as one of the leading powers in the new age of *Darkstar*. Their immense population, first-rate education system, ever-expanding economy, and increasing leads in science and technology have propelled them into the stars to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with more traditional powers like America, Great Britain, Japan, and Russia. During the last great age of imperialism, India was subjugated as perhaps the greatest vassal state the world has ever seen. This time, however, the Indian Republic has vowed that history will *not* repeat itself.



That being said, India doesn’t exactly have a long, proud naval tradition like the United States, Great Britain, Japan, and others. Accordingly, much of their more military technology and naval doctrine has been borrowed from other states. Still, by the time of *Darkstar*, the Indian Navy is a force to be reckoned with some of the more technologically advanced ships in Known Space. Furthermore, not being burdened by centuries of naval preconception allows them to approach many tactical and operational problems with a fresh perspective, producing warships and task forces that many times embrace more imaginative solutions.

Another striking feature of Indian warships is their sheer beauty. While hardly a factor in combat, it cannot be denied that Indian frigates, destroyers, cruisers, and even their handful of fast battleships have been called “Taj Mahals of the Stars.” Indian warships are also some of the most comfortable and spacious for the simple reason that families are very important in Indian culture, to the point where many of their officers and senior enlisted personnel are permitted to bring families aboard even front-line ships of the line. Accordingly, the marine complements aboard these ships are also quite formidable. Such numbers of troops, coupled with the fact that the crew of a disabled Indian vessel is fighting to protect those they love most in the world, makes an

Indian warship almost impossible to board and capture.

Conversely, Indian captains are often more cautious, even skittish, as compared to more militant navies like Imperial Prussia, Japan, or the Holy Russian Empire. Indian warships tend to be rather fast, armed almost exclusively with energy-based weapons. They forego “inelegant” weapons like rail guns and plasma projectors in favor of lasers, EPCs, and x-ray and gamma beam-based weapons suites (usually regarded as the most accurate and powerful such weapons in Known Space). These are often backed up with impressive missile batteries and torpedo bays. This combination of speed and stand-off weaponry further allows the Indian Navy to adopt a less aggressive posture and keep their families safe.

The one notable exception to this rule, however, are the so-called “Kali Squadrons,” stripped down raiders that carry no family and are instead geared exclusively for the most murderous of combat operations. Often, invaders into an Indian-controlled system will see the Indian fleet retire from pitched battle, only to be hit by these near-suicidal units just days, or even hours, later. Again, these ships remain armed almost exclusively with energy weapons, well-suited for fast, hard-hitting raids that maximize the use of surprise.

Fortes: The aesthetic beauty of their ships cannot be denied. They are also usually well-equipped with advanced ECM shielding and CICs, and their lasers surpass those of almost any other navy. Lastly, Indian ships are almost impossible to board and capture.

Imperial Prussia

Rising from the ashes of central Europe in the early 23rd Century, the new Federated States of Prussia is made up roughly of the present-day territories of Germany, Holland, Luxembourg, and western Poland, with strong alliances in Scandinavia, the Czech Republic, and the northern Balkans. Like everyone else on Earth, these “federated states” are forced to behave themselves, starved for resources and trapped on a planet that cannot tolerate the ravages of another war. Once among the stars, however, these people aren’t the federated states of anything . . . they are Imperial Prussia.

The Prussian Empire is another power that, in the world of *Darkstar*, has determined that history not repeat itself. For centuries Germany was more or less a landlocked power, any thought of maritime ambitions traditionally blocked by geography and the more powerful



naval powers of France and Britain to the west. Among the stars, however, there are no such boundaries. Almost immediately after becoming a colonial power, the Prussian Empire launched into a massive naval armaments program, determined never again to be hemmed into the restrictive real estate of the European mainland.

The Prussian Navy in many ways is the most traditional of the great star-faring powers. The inability of small craft such as fighters and bombers to use the Darkstar drive and travel between the stars has led them to completely forego the idea of carriers. Not a single carrier exists in the Prussian navy above the size of a light cruiser, and even these are designed primarily around supporting planetary assault operations. What the Prussian Navy does have, however, are rail guns, *lots* of rail guns, considered by many technicians to be among the best ballistic weapons in Known Space. While not always the biggest, Prussian rail guns are almost certainly the hardest hitting for their caliber, the longest-ranged, and most accurate.

In general, Prussian naval design focuses on firepower and protection at the expense of speed, clinging to the adage that no ship can outrun a rail gun bolt. Their ships are accordingly quite slow, but carry incredible batteries of cannon along with the maximum armor and shielding possible in any given hull class. Their electronics suites are more or less standard, no better or worse than most other navies. Truly the Prussian Empire mounts what many consider the most pure “battleship” fleet, imposing but ponderous, sometimes unimaginative yet undeniably intimidating.

There are two exceptions to this general rule, however. The first is the Prussian perfection of the so-called “pocket battleship.” Much bigger than a heavy cruiser but not quite a British-style battlecruiser, a Prussian pocket battleship is incredibly fast for their class, sometimes able to keep pace even with older destroyers. Protection is usually rather scant in these ships, however, and the batteries are nowhere near that of a full-fledged dreadnought. Still, they can overpower anything they can’t outrun, and are often presented as the answer to those who say the Prussian Navy is just too slow.

The other notable exception to the Prussian naval doctrine is the corvette and gunboat program. Built almost in the tradition of the famed “U-boats” of World Wars One and Two, they are small, fast, and mount impressively stealthy ECM suites. They operate in what the Prussians call “wolf packs,” often lurking deep in the

“Kuiper Belts” or “Oort Clouds” of star systems or even in interstellar space, ready to gather and pounce on isolated enemy ships or merchant convoys with well-plotted torpedo attacks.

Fortes: Prussian ships usually mount the best rail guns, and their navy owns the “pocket battleship” sub-class. They also have superb “U-boat” corvettes and gunboats.

Japan

The naval history of Japan shares much in common with other island nations such as Great Britain. Japan likewise boasts a long and proud naval tradition, and have always depended heavily on their maritime capabilities for national survival. More ominously, they have also had more than one episode of naval imperialism run amok, the shadows of which fall over the nation’s future in this second Colonial Age.



Because the pinnacle of Japan’s naval history happens to coincide with one of the nation’s darkest and most shameful chapters, Japan has traditionally been very wary of building armed forces capable of aggressive actions against other nations. For close to a hundred years after World War II, they technically never had a military at all, only a “Japan Self Defense Force.” Even during the disasters of the late 21st and 22nd Centuries, Japan’s national constitution prohibited the nation to rearm and project military power overseas. Only after Japan suffered horrendously at the hands of the Panasian League during the Water Wars of the 2190s did Japan finally begin building more “proactive” assets into her military.

Even now, despite outward signs like the adoption of the old Imperial Rising Sun ensign, and despite the blatant imperialism of nations like the Holy Russian Empire, Prussia, and even Great Britain, Japan remains a strictly democratic republic, ever-wary against slipping into old “bad habits.” At the same time, the new star-faring Japanese Navy has been built, trained, and honed into one of the most formidable fleets in Known Space, one that would make the spirit of Yamamoto or Togo proud.

In many ways, the Japanese Navy resembles that of Great Britain. While the Americans continue to build their supercarrier monstrosities, and the Prussians cast aside any notion of the carrier at all, the Japanese embrace the potential of the carrier while clinging to the pure mystique of the star-faring battleship. In fact, there are unconfirmed rumors of a super-battleship being

constructed somewhere in Japan’s outermost colonies, a true monster of a vessel in the tradition of the *Yamato* and *Musashi*.

In general, most Japanese warships are sleek, fast, and deadly to their pragmatic purpose. Crew quarters are sparse, and ruthless discipline is enforced for both officers and men. The nation’s long-held reputation for cutting edge technology has certainly not failed them either, with advanced CICs and ECM shielding suites, although their Darkstar drives tend to suffer. After all, a Japanese crew is much more likely to accept long-term “imprisonment” in their ships for what other navies would consider excessively long voyages.

The last great strength the Japanese Navy holds lies in its torpedo design. The latest generation, the Ki-45 *Toryu* (Dragon Slayer) is universally considered the best design of gravitic torpedo in Known Space.

Fortes: Japan’s navy has the most “imaginative” ship classes such as battleship-carrier hybrids, along with the best torpedoes in Known Space. There are also persistent yet unconfirmed reports of their “super-battleship” subclass.

New Roman Alliance



The New Roman Alliance, sometimes derisively referred to as the “Catholic Cartel” or the “Vatican Coalition,” is a loose confederation of made up primarily of the former nations of Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal, and vast stretches of Latin America. Taking their navy lightly is a mistake, however, as many of these nations have proud maritime traditions extending back through the centuries. The Spanish and Portuguese all but ruled the world during the first Age of Exploration, while the French have always boasted a large and powerful “two ocean” navy in both the Atlantic and Mediterranean. The Italians, meanwhile, remember the days of the Roman war galley and victories as old as the Punic Wars almost three thousand years ago. In later centuries, Italy also boasted powerful fleets in the form of the Genoese and Venetian navies, when the Mediterranean was truly *mare nostra* (“our sea”).

Of course, the New Roman Alliance has more practical reasons to command respect. They fashion themselves almost as reborn incarnation of the classical Roman Republic, albeit with a decidedly “Constantinian” Christian spin. On Earth they control vast holdings in other Catholic areas of the world, including almost all of Latin America,

as swath of Africa, and even slices of Asia. The resurgence of religion's power in recent centuries, although it has waned again in many parts of the world, remains strong in any region where the New Roman Alliance holds sway. As a result, they are able to funnel vast sums of money and resources into its colonial war machine. Measured in pure capital, the New Roman Alliance is almost undoubtedly the richest power on Earth.

Such wealth, of course, can't help but translate into fearsome military power, and the Roman navy is no exception. Their starships are among the most lavishly equipped, with accommodations to make the crews of any other fleet green with envy. Almost always built with the most expensive CICs, Darkstar drives, and ECM shielding, their ships are typically very fast, at the trade off of protection. Indeed, the incredible speed and opulence of the New Roman Fleet, coupled with the relative frailty of their ships, has prompted some observers to regard them as a navy of sports cars rather than warships.

Still, the New Roman Navy remains a powerful force with perhaps the widest single footprint in Known Space. Frankly, their territories are everywhere, with at least a "parish" outpost in fully 42% of charted star systems. This gives the New Roman Navy the further advantage of superior infrastructure and support. For the captain of a New Roman ship, a friendly port is almost never far away (at least in interstellar terms), and these ports are among the largest, best-equipped, and heavily defended anywhere.

All this, of course, is a product of the Church's push to "missionize" as many star systems as possible, ensuring that Rome remains a dominant force in religion and culture among the stars as it is on Earth. Yet dismissing this drive to colonize as mere religiosity is a mistake. The New Roman Alliance oversees a vast proportion of Earth's population, including some areas that still haven't fully recovered from the disasters of recent decades. To be honest, many of these areas weren't doing so well even before the human race nearly plunged into the abyss of extinction. Accordingly, the New Roman Alliance requires vast stores of raw materials, food, and industrial resources, almost as much as the population superpowers of India and China. Thus, they need a vast maritime network, and a navy that has to be everywhere at once to support it.

Fortes: New Roman Alliance ships are far and away the fastest and most comfortable "warships" to be found in Known Space, virtually a hybrid between armed cruise

ships and star-faring sports cars. Their all have advanced electronics and targeting suites, and their navy is supported by the best network of planetary bases and orbiting installations.

Arab League

Of all the star-faring nations among the so-called Ten Powers, the Arab League was the last to make the jump out of Sol with the development of the Darkstar drive. On Earth they have become one of the most powerful nations left, a vast coalition of Islamic states ranging from Morocco across North Africa, through the Middle East and all the way to Indonesia. While the collapse of fossil fuels at the end of the 21st Century hit their economies with predictable effect, the disaster actually turned into a long-term boon for these nations. Without economic superpowers like the United States, Europe, and Japan constantly meddling in their affairs, and with the renewed explosion of religious faith that swept the world in the wake of the Blue Plague, the various nations of the Arab League would soon grow into the powerhouses they once were during the Middle Ages. Indeed, we must remember how many of the stars in the sky bear Arab names, from Betelgeuse to Deneb to Sirius to Rigel. Arab astronomers were among the most advanced in the world during Europe's Dark Ages, not to mention inventing the 10-digit system of mathematics that has driven all of human science for the past 2,000 years.

Still, in the wake of the Blue Plague, the Arab League probably had the most catching up to do in terms of post-apocalypse recovery, development of new energy sources, and reclaiming a place as one of the world's preeminent scientific centers. They didn't get an off-world colony firmly established until 2390, after the other colonial powers had already fought three wars over their *networks* of colonies and just a few decades before the historic leap into interstellar travel. As mankind expanded his reach into the nearest stars, the Arab League again struggled in a cosmic game of catch-up. The unfortunate result was that by the time the Arab League could put comparable numbers of ships and installations into neighboring star systems, most of those star systems had been extensively colonized already by other powers.

By the dawn of the 26th Century, however, the Arab League has in some ways surpassed its peers, in some ways *forced* to do so by its late beginnings in the second



Colonial Age. Quite simply, because they were the last major power in space, all the nearby star systems were already claimed and so their navy had to explore ever deeper to carve itself a niche. This has resulted in Arab Darkstar drives being far and away the most advanced in Known Space. Even their warships all carry powerful telescopes, spectrographs, and other astronomical instruments, and their colonies almost universally lie at the furthest reaches of Known Space. Their colony at Eta Pegasi (common name Matar, Arabic for Lucky Star of Rain, right ascension 22h 43m, declination +30 degrees, 13m 17s) is in 2512 the furthest outpost of mankind, at the staggering distance of 215 light-years from Sol. This settlement is more or less safe from attack, since it would require the battleships and cruisers of most other navies nearly 17 months at maximum Darkstar wave amplitude to reach it. For a ship of the Arab League, of course, this time is greatly reduced.

Still, although the warships of the Arab League Navy are among the most “enlightened” in Known Space, they are still warships, and their advanced Darkstar technology means that they have an operational and strategic flexibility no other navy can match. What this means is that an Arab ship can emerge just about anywhere at any time, and if it has to flee, is almost impossible to catch.

Fortes: The best Darkstar drives in Known Space, assume an Arab ship can reach any point in about 60%-30% of the time it would take a ship of similar class in another navy. Although not exactly a factor in combat, they also have the most extensive research and science facilities aboard their ships.

Holy Russian Empire

Like the Prussian Empire, Russia has long been a nation yearning for a great navy, yet doomed by its geography and traditional enemies never have one. Despite Herculean efforts during the eras of Peter the Great, Czar Alexander III, and the Cold War of the 20th Century, the lack of westward-facing warm water ports and chronic political instability has made these periods of Russian naval power very brief. Typically such flowerings of a true Russian fleet last only about a generation or so, until the fleets are either lost in battle or, more commonly, left to rot at the docks.

No longer. Like their German neighbors, the reborn Russian Navy has vowed to expand into the stars where its traditional geographic and political weaknesses will never



plague it again. The Russian state has also been greatly fortified by the religious rebirth in the wake of the Blue Plague, making it into a cultural and religious Orthodox powerhouse to rival the Catholics of the New Roman Alliance of the Muslims of the Arab League. Religion has proven the glue that has finally united the fractious Russian people, neutralizing the second great failing that has so often hampered the Russian Navy in former centuries.

On Earth, the Holy Russian Empire is again ruled by a Czar, although he is largely a figurehead sharing “power” with a Patriarch (a Russian Orthodox figure not unlike the Vatican Pope). Real power rests with a more conventional president, who shares power with a prime minister, balanced against a legislature in the form of the “Duma.” Although satellite states such as the Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Kazakhstan are technically sovereign, no one doubts the star around which these “satellites” orbit.

In space, the Russian Navy once again closely resembles the fleet of Imperial Prussia. Their ships tend to be large, heavy, and armed with powerful batteries of rail guns (the Russians are also infamous for their “flamethrower” plasma projectors), although squadrons of faster missile cruisers do exist. The Russian fleet also fields a modest number of carriers, and boasts perhaps the second best planetary assault force (surpassed only by that of the United States). Although not as Spartan as the ships of China or Japan, Russian warships are traditionally lean on accommodations and comforts, instead pragmatic machines built around a singular purpose.

Where the Russian Navy truly excels, however, is in durability. Their simple, robust, and practical design makes their ships very difficult to disable and damned near impossible to destroy. Even wrecks are sometimes towed and put to use, their orbital outpost as Zevijava (11 light-years from Sol) is reportedly built in the hull of an old *Catherine the Great* class battleship.

Consider the old story from the legendary Space Race of the 1950s and 60s, when America’s NASA space program reportedly spent half a million dollars designing a ballpoint pen that would write in zero-g. For their cosmonauts, the Russian space program found a different solution: a pencil. In the 1970s, Russian Soyuz crews once reentered Earth’s atmosphere in the wrong place, and spent several tense days lost in the Siberian wilderness. The Russian solution: all subsequent Soyuz missions went up with a sawed-off shotgun so cosmonauts could hunt for

food and ward off wolves and bears. Such are the guiding principles that still guide the star-faring Russian Navy five hundred years later in the age of *Darkstar*.

Fortes: Durability. Without a doubt, Russian ships are the toughest to be found in Known Space. This resilience extends well-beyond simple armor and shield ratings, but into redundancies and no-frills practicalities built into the very frame of Russian ships. Their task forces are also some of the best supplied, with extra attention paid to fundamentals like water filtration, food storage, and reserve supplies of oxygen. Their batteries of plasma projectors are fearsome, anyone who engages a Russian battlegroup at close range does so at their mortal peril.

Consortium

The last of the Ten Powers technically isn't a "power" at all, at least not in the sense of a traditional nation-state. This, of course, is the Consortium, a loose conglomerate of powerful multinational corporations with enough wealth, political pull, and control over the world's technologies to effectively become independent nations unto themselves.

Although the Consortium is a "partnership" of at least half a dozen powerful corporations, the most powerful remains Cignis Systems, a cutting-edge technology company originally founded in the last years of the 20th Century. Five hundred years of progress, disaster, near-extinction, and recovery has seen the company somehow endure and grow in a world where nations . . . and whole coalitions of nations . . . crumbled into the dustbin of history.

Originally Cignis was an enterprise computing solutions company primarily concerned with themes like desktop virtualization and cloud technology. But by the mid-21st Century the company found itself at the cutting edge of revolutionary new technologies like the optical computer (running on light instead of electricity) and trinary processing languages (replacing the binary logic of 1s and 0s with 1s, 0s, and -1s, leading to an exponential leap in speed and power). Although largely defunct during the dark decades of the Blue Plague and the ravages which followed, the company resurrected itself in the early 2300s and helped lead the world into the Second Renaissance of technology and science. Cignis computers and networks drove the collaboration that designed the first fusion reactors, Cignis computers established the first Omnet connections with the colonies on the Moon,

Cignis computers plotted the four-dimensional space-time leaps for mankind's first voyage to Proxima Centauri. By the time of *Darkstar*, Cignis quite simply controls and enables almost all aspects of mankind's communication and business. They have built the web that holds Known Space together, and many observers whisper that they are on the verge of a breakthrough that could lead to genuine faster-than-light communications, one of the very few factors that stand in the way of man's next great leap into space.

While many people regard such powerful corporations with mistrust and suspicion, Cignis does all it can to break the stereotypical mold of the "evil sci-fi megacorp." Their employees are treated exceedingly well, corruption is almost nonexistent, and the company strives to support occasional (and exceedingly well-publicized) charity and outreach programs. That being said, the company is out to make a profit, and never passes a chance to "synergize and leverage new channels of revenue." While they are far from "evil," they admittedly operate almost entirely outside of any conventional law. The reemergence of old-school imperialism among the Ten Powers strikes the company with profound distaste, so they simply walked away from the whole idea of the nation-state. National governments haven't exactly done a bang-up job over the past 500 years, after all. Thus, the employees of Cignis answer only to themselves . . . and of course their shareholders. All the same, while Cignis itself doesn't engage in any blatantly exploitative behavior itself, *other* companies within the Consortium sometimes engage in practices including corporate espionage, government corruption, and even piracy.

Because of the chaotic political and military environment of mankind's far-flung colonies and the fact that no navy will defend people who have forsaken citizenship in any of their countries, Cignis and the other companies of the Consortium recently established a joint "security consulting firm" to look out for their off-world employees and their interests. This security branch has been steadily building a star-faring navy for the past 25 years. Of course it will never even approach the size of even the smallest "national" navy, and will never deploy a supercarrier, battleship, or even a heavy cruiser. But what the Cignis fleet may lack in size or numbers it more than makes up for in technology. Cignis warships have far and away the most advanced CICs, comnav arrays, and targeting systems anywhere in Known Space. Their ECM shielding systems border on a "cloaking" device, and their



Darkstar drives almost approach that of the Arab League. Their missions are rarely clear, usually revolving around espionage, surveillance, or nudging a particular conflict between two nations a certain way to the Company's benefit.

Fortes: Consortium ships are almost never allowed to build above light cruiser in class, and even these are exceedingly rare. However, they have access to the very top of the line in any electronics systems, allowing their ships to be light, fast, and hard-hitting even at the longest of ranges.

Khitan-Tunguska Free State

While the "Ten Powers" listed above represent the "official" nation-state or corporate factions at play in the *Darkstar* universe, there remain further options for enterprising players. The "astrostrategic" situation in the *Darkstar* universe is deliberately complex and dynamic, and as nations and megacorps jostle against each other, smaller pieces can "chip off" and form the seeds for new factions.

The largest of these is the Khitan-Tunguska Free State, unofficially known as the "Black Dragons." Spawned as recently as 2512 by a massive revolt among Imperial Russian and Panasian colonies in the Sagittarius, Scorpio, and Libra strategic command sectors, they have banded together and formed the first "nation" (they have yet to achieve any formal diplomatic recognition) entirely free of



Earth, born and bred independently among the stars. Mostly of Russian and Chinese stock - their ships, technology, bases, and armies are also based on Russian and Chinese equipment and infrastructure. That said, they have also accrued more ships and equipment in wars against the Japanese, Americans and British, and have also started buying large amounts of weaponry and industrial equipment from allies in Imperial Prussia and the New Roman Alliance.

The Black Dragons have adopted a cultural heritage drawn from the Siberian separatists of Russia, Manchuria in China, and Mongolia. Their flag features the two stars from Russia and China from which they ultimately rebelled, and a Black Dragon that reflects this eastern Asian heritage and the Black River that runs through this part of Terrestrial Earth. As such, they see themselves almost as "Star Mongols," determined to forge a destiny of their own among the stars, usually through brute violence and merciless conquest.

The Black Dragon Wars along the aforementioned command sectors have caused tremendous problems for the Panasian and Holy Russian empires, so much so that other colonial powers have tried to jump in and exploit this weakness, only to be drawn in the expanding wars themselves.

Suffice it to say that this this story is still being written - in no small amount of blood. It remains to be seen what the full impact will be following the "Rise of the Black Dragon."

