

DARKSTAR

IMPERIALISM AND COLONIAL NAVAL COMBAT IN THE 26TH CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

The year is 2512.

The powers that remain on an ecologically-devastated and plague-ravaged Earth have been forced to look to the stars for the resources, capital, and room not only to expand, but to survive. While the setbacks encountered by mankind over the past 500 years have forced him to unite in a shaky global coalition and make fantastic strides in technology, they have also caused seismic and reactionary shifts in religion, culture, and politics. A second age of imperialism has dawned, and because man would never survive another war on the fragile remains of planet Earth, he is forced to ply his oldest trade exclusively among the stars.

Darkstar is a tactical war game postulating naval combat in a “science fiction” universe set five centuries into a troubled and uncertain future. Players take command of warships serving in the new “black water” navies of reborn empires of old, struggling for control of

shipping lanes, resources, and colonies. Ships maneuver and fire in fast-paced combat, with survival not only of the players’ fleets at stake, but perhaps their nation and all of humanity as well.

This book is divided into several sections for ease of reference. First, **History and Setting** lays the backdrop for the *Darkstar* universe, providing a general context for the wars and battles portrayed in the game. Second, **Darkstar Tech** describes the general advances that have been made in the last 500 years, sketching in broad terms the science and machinery that allow these navies to function. Thirdly, **Rules of Play** outlines how to actually play a game of *Darkstar*, including movement, firing of weapons, and assessing damage. Next, **Ships of the Line** gives a sample list of the warships and classes available to the navies of *Darkstar*. Finally, **Starship Design** presents the rules, data, and tables that allows players to, if they choose, design their own warship classes to use in naval battles.

SECTION ONE HISTORY AND SETTING

Battles have no meaning without a context in which they take place. In this section, we briefly review the history, politics, and general layout of the *Darkstar* universe.

1.1 - FIVE CENTURIES

The past 500 years of Earth's history haven't exactly been kind to the human race. Then again, the human race hasn't done much to woo the affections of karma.

2020-2100 A.D.

Despite repeated warning signs and the grave alarms sounded by every responsible scientist on the planet, the nations and corporations of the Earth continue to plunder the planet's resources and pour pollutants into the reeling ecosystem. By the end of the 21st Century, reserves of fossil fuels are all but exhausted. While the manufacture of new synthetic "artificial oils" briefly steadies the world's economies, the environmental effects of these fuels prove even worse than the natural ones. As sea levels rise, salt water backs into river basins of the Congo, Ganges, and Amazon, killing huge swaths of the planet's oxygen-producing potential. Continued global warming also reaches a critical tipping point when the permafrost of the great Eurasian landmass finally begins to thaw. Over millions of square miles of tundra, billions of tons of methane are released into the atmosphere almost overnight. By the end of the 21st Century, the collapse of the Earth's ecosystem spins completely out of control.

2101-2200 A.D.

The dawn of the 22nd Century sees the planet's deteriorating ecosystem finally taking a direct, undeniable, and deadly effect on the global population. Agriculture collapses and famine kills hundreds of millions by 2130. The human immune system begins to break down, not only in people already on the planet, but also in successive generations born through the mid 2100's. In some respects, human physiology begins to "de-evolve," the race as a whole becoming weaker and less resistant to disease and starvation.

In 2165, the first reported cases of the Blue Plague are reported in Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific Rim. The disease takes its name from its primary and most lethal

symptom, depriving the ability of hemoglobin to carry oxygen through the human blood stream. The plague quickly sweeps the planet, killing approximately two out of every three people by the end of the century (some estimates range as high as eight *billion* fatalities in thirty years). By the time the Blue Plague has finally run its course, human civilization is sufficiently devastated to allow "dead" diseases like cholera, small pox, dysentery, and the Spanish Flu to reemerge, killing perhaps a billion more. War erupts everywhere as nations try to close their borders against millions of terrified refugees and armies scramble to grab whatever resources are left. The Water Wars are the worst, raging through the 2190s over the few remaining puddles of the planet's drinkable water.

2201-2300 A.D.

A grim and exhausted calm settles over the planet, with nations no longer able to wage war against each other. As the number of humans left on the planet drops to about one billion, population density is finally thin enough to allow the rampage of diseases to burn itself out. A backlash of religion sweeps over the various cultures of Earth as humanity struggles to cope with what has happened and gropes for a reason why. The planet's ecosystem begins to stabilize in the wake of industrial collapse and the humanity's severe depopulation. Through a long, painful process of recovery and reorganization, the more powerful nations still left on the planet begin to reassert control. But the Earth, and the people who live there, will never be the same.

The remaining nations sign the Jerusalem Accords in 2276, vowing to share equally in the planet's precious remaining (but still dwindling) resources, and establishing an overall body of government that restricts national sovereignty and banishes forever the prospect of war on Planet Earth.

Although the Jerusalem Accord marks a major step forward in the global community, on a more local level human society continues to regress into provincialism and religiosity. Those people who survived the war and plagues, and their descendents, continue to see themselves as "blessed" or "chosen," and regard the Jerusalem Accord as the dawn of a new age of God, whatever god that may happen to be. As religion's influence continues to reassert itself all across the planet, society in general becomes more conservative, even reactionary. Politics cannot help but follow suit, the recovering and reorganizing governments of Earth



gradually restructure themselves on steadily older models. This trend only sharpens after the governments are forced to agree to the limitations of the Jerusalem Accord. Thus, in a historic paradox, even as the governments of the world are forced to unite in a new spirit of unity and global responsibility, there is also a powerful and reciprocal backlash of cultural isolationism.

2301-2400 A.D.

With some degree of global stability restored, humanity enters a period that some historians call the Second Renaissance, where a recovering mankind adopts to life in the new age. Because global priorities have been drastically reshuffled by the grim events of the past hundred and fifty years, incredible investments and progress can finally be made toward advances geared toward planetary survival. Controlled fusion is first successfully tested in 2315, and while the planet will need several more decades to completely realign its industries and infrastructure to the new source of power, by the

mid-2300s humanity's power needs are effectively solved forever.

However, other threats to humanity's survival and continued progress remain. Most pressing of these is the ravaged state of the planet. The damage suffered from the 19th through 23rd Centuries has been catastrophic, and the ability of Earth's ecosystem to sustain human civilization long-term still remains in doubt. Agriculture will be problematic in the devastated climate, especially as population levels recover in the successive centuries. Mining for minerals is also a problem on the desperately-fragile planet. Even recycling the ruins of the old civilization results in byproducts which the planet can just no longer tolerate.

Clearly, if mankind is to truly recover and make forward progress through the third millennium, then the exploration, colonization, and industrialization of space is the only answer. As they did with fusion in the early 2300s, in the second half the 24th Century the nations of Earth unite in a historic effort. With the seemingly

limitless power unlocked by “cold fusion,” the expansion into space gets under way and quickly accelerates.

By the 2350s and 60s, the resurgence of religion begins to subside in some parts of the world, countered somewhat by the remarkable discoveries of science. In others areas, however, societies still see themselves as “chosen,” perhaps to embark on a second Exodus or other religious journey, this time across the stars. In any event, the effects of this religious surge have already cemented themselves in place. The surviving nations of the world have been reborn into the empires of old.



Throughout the planets, moons, and asteroids of the solar system, a second Age of Exploration soon blossoms into a new age of colonialism, together with everything that comes with it. While the world’s nations remain resolutely united in peace *on Earth*, forced to do so by the need to survive on a critically-damaged planet, in space the story is predictably different. The fact that they cannot expand, colonize, exploit, or fight each other on Earth only makes them more eager to do so in space. Throughout the planets, moons, and asteroids of the solar system, conflicts spark over newly-discovered resources which are, although promising, relatively slim compared to the starving needs of the still-recovering human race. The first war on Mars is fought between the United States and the Panasian Union in 2375, followed quickly by the Titan Insurrection of 2387 and the “Four Moons” War in Jupiter orbit, fought from 2394-2396.

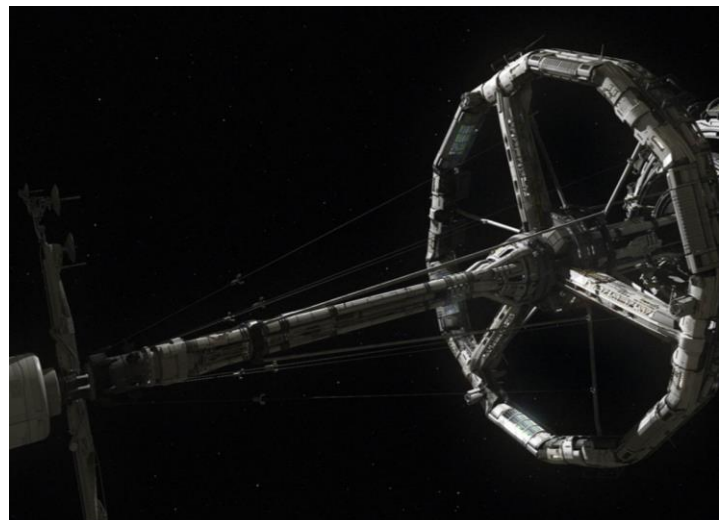
2401-2500 A.D.

In the year 2410, mankind makes the next great leap in human progress. This is the so-called “Darkstar” drive, a way to harness the most basic and abundant element of cosmological reality, the natural and universal expansion astrophysical space-time itself. The only thing in nature,

after all, that can go faster than the speed of light . . . is space itself. By harnessing this property through intense manipulation of incredible electromagnetic fields (powered by a new generation of unbelievably powerful fusion reactors), mankind has finally learned to break the light barrier. Travel to the nearest star systems becomes possible, and in 2429, the USS *Pioneer* becomes the first manned mission to the Proxima Centauri system, reaching the nearest star to Earth in just 14 months.

The impact on human history, of course, is nearly instantaneous. Despite the Jerusalem Accords and mankind’s more careful handling of the planet’s damaged environment, even now Earth remains in danger of losing its ability to support human civilization. As population levels again pass three billion, the need to expand to new colonies and planets becomes ever more pressing.

The reborn empires of Earth, once they become “Darkstar capable,” launch themselves into the stars. The United States, the United Kingdom, and China are the first with mining colonies at Proxima Centauri, Wolf 359, Groombridge 34, and Procyon. The next twenty years sees explosive growth even deeper into space, with Imperial Prussia, the New Roman Alliance (a loose confederation primarily built around Italy, France, Austria, and Spain), and India establishing permanent settlements on marginally habitable planets and orbital installations at Sirius, Altair, and Capella. Japan soon has a colony at Iota Pegasus, the Holy Russian Empire at Tau Ceti One, with independent multinational corporations and even an Arab League soon following suit in other star systems.



Because of the enforced peace imposed on Earth, and with a plethora of “starving” and mutually-hostile empires struggling for dominance among newly-discovered riches across the stars, it’s only a matter of time before small colonial skirmishes, “incidents,” and outright wars break out across star systems ranging up to 20 light years from Sol. Some politicians move to have the mandates of the Jerusalem Accord pushed out into space as well, but religion has again lost its power and the robber-barons of a “Second Industrial Revolution” are pulling the strings of these reborn imperial powers. By the end of the 2400s, the overall situation resembles that at the end of the 19th Century, with various empires jockeying for control of far-flung possessions not across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but up to 120 light-years of charted space.

The Present: 2512 A.D.

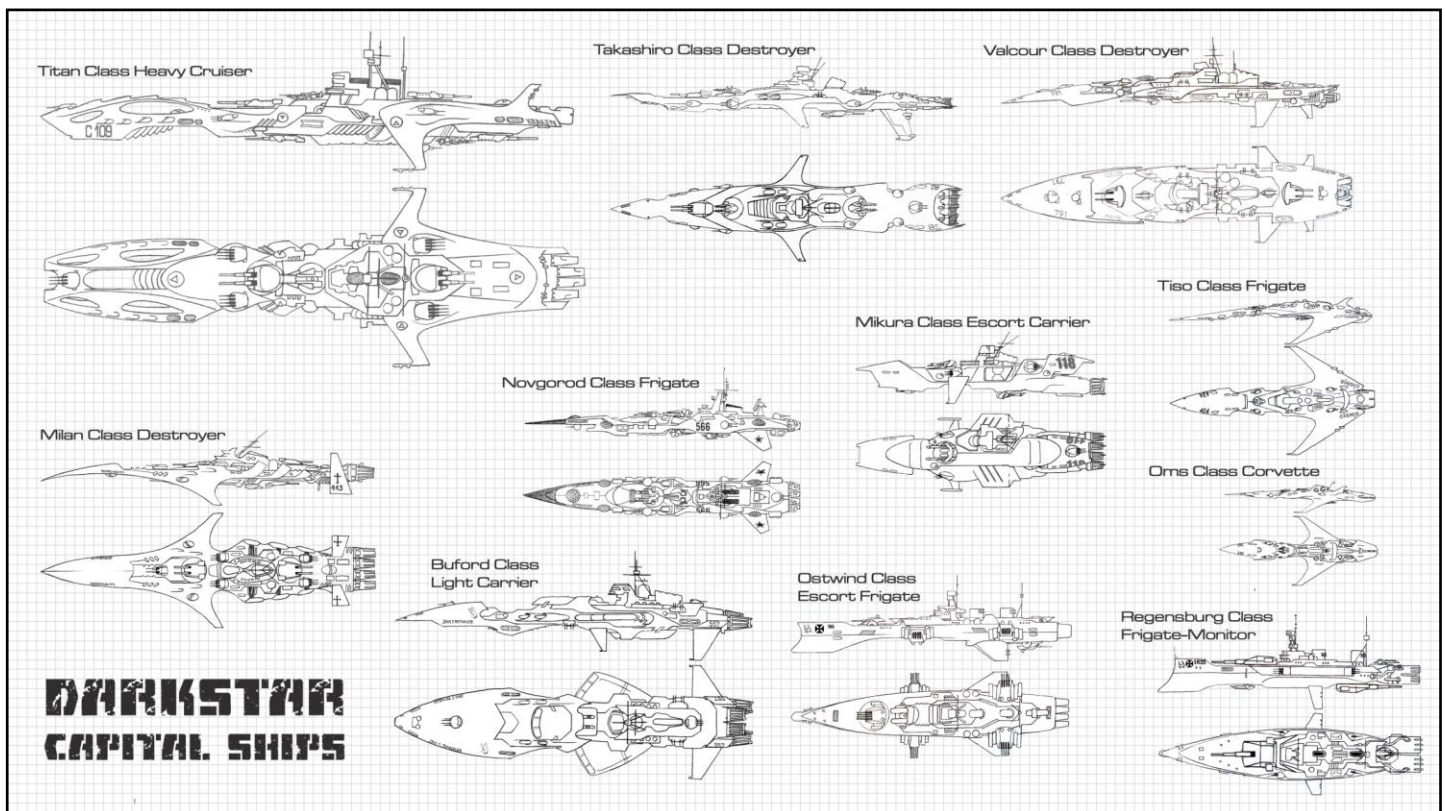
Presently, the area that is generally considered “Known Space” encompasses a roughly ellipsoid-shaped volume with Earth’s solar system (hereafter referred to as “Sol”) at its center. This oval extends to a radius of about 200 light-years along the galactic equator, and about 100 light years along the axis of the galactic poles. Within this volume lie at least 5,000 stars, but only about 200 systems of any kind of interest (having planets, planetary nebula, asteroids, or other extrasolar bodies of colonial or

industrial value). It is over control and dominance of these 200 systems that the majority of *Darkstar* battles are fought.

While no official war has ever been declared between any of the star-faring powers, it is an accepted fact that an undeclared state of hostility generally exists between all of them at any given time. Fleets that may be at each other’s throats one week in a given star system may be allies next week as a third power sends warships into the system. Two powers that may be at all-out war in one star system may be as good as blood-brothers in the next system over.

Also, while faster-than-light (FTL) travel may be commonplace for military and commerce vessels, FTL communications has not necessarily kept pace. Thus, commanders, captains, and admirals in a given system are often given tremendous latitude in their orders and missions, expected to operate independently of fleet command, sometimes for years at a time. As a result, many system commanders have become local warlords. Virtual sovereign powers in their own right, they are free to do as they wish so long as the flow of resources and raw materials keeps flowing from their protectorate.

No one really has a firm idea on how many warships may be operating among the navies of *Darkstar*. Counting only the larger classes of ships (frigates, destroyers, cruisers, and battleships), the number may be anywhere





from one to three thousand between all the navies deployed. This number of course does not include corvettes, patrol craft, fighters, bombers, gunboats, and the myriad of support vessels that keep such navies in operation.

Political movements on Earth are always pushing to extend the mandates of the Jerusalem Accord into space, or at least into the rest of the Sol System. Treaties limiting the size of capital ships, the number of vessels, and the space in which they're allowed to operate are also continually on the floor of various legislative assemblies. However, the industrial forces of capitalism make any such legislation and all but impossible. Furthermore, the imperialist nationalism of these paranoid and aggressive governments also ensure that the enforced peace that reigns on Earth has so far not extended into the stars. Many fear that one day, an incident or conflict in the stars will whiplash back to Earth despite the Jerusalem Accord, and the survival of mankind could again be brought into dire jeopardy.

Exploration still deeper into space, of course, always remains a factor. Current limitations of Darkstar drive technology, however, keep further expansion into the stars at a modest, if steady, pace. So while the sphere of

Known Space does continue to expand, it does so rather slowly. After all, commercial and colonial concerns have driven mankind's foray into the Milky Way far much more than scientific curiosity. People are out here for power and money, not some Sagan-esque quest for the stars. Any new system that is discovered, especially if found to contain any kind of value, is not used as the springboard of further exploration, but instead quickly built up with factories, mining facilities, and refineries. Just as frequently, however, such a new system becomes the latest hot spot in a rash of naval skirmishes and political wrangling back on Earth.

The future of the *Darkspace* universe is anything but certain. The various colonial powers that have staked claims in Known Space are more or less evenly balanced. Any attempt by two or more of these powers to form a larger coalition is quickly broken up by other powers. There are no

"superpowers," and everyone is making sure that none will emerge anytime in the foreseeable future. The ultimate purpose of mankind's outward expansion remains focused firmly *inward*, toward the all-too visceral question of humanity's planetary survival. Of course, everyone wants to get rich in the process, and all nations remain ever distrustful of all others. People will remain people, after all.

If one could summarize mankind's current predicament and past five centuries of history, the synopsis would read something like this. In effect, our blindness and arrogance in the 19th, 20th, and 21st Centuries led to a horrifying brush with complete extinction. Our deliverance from that abyss, however, and the leveling of the cosmic playing field has only led to a quickened repeat of the last thousand years of our history. A second hyper-religious Dark Age was followed by a second Renaissance. A new Age of Exploration and Age of Reason has finally led to a new Industrial Revolution, all of which has replayed at a greatly accelerated rate, this time unfolded across the tapestry of the stars. Many questions remain, but one overshadows them all. Will we make the same mistakes? Has man learned from his experience, or will we again stare into the abyss of self-destruction?