



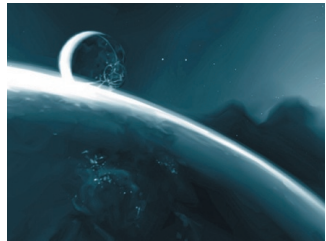
Prelude to the End Times

Hiigaran History from 9525 GSY to 9625 GSY, outlines the period spanning the return of the Exiles to their Homeworld through to those events generally acknowledged as the beginning of the End Times.

The following is a chronicle of the events occurring after the return of the Hiigaran Exiles to their home, under the leadership and command of Karan S'Jet [Fig 1.1]. The years immediately following landfall upon Hiigara were, without doubt, among the hardest the Exiles had faced. Those who had been brought to Hiigara in suspended animation, known as Sleepers, arose to the revelation that the planet upon which they had lived for so many years, Kharak, had been destroyed. The world they had been brought to, Hiigara, was their only chance for the future.

Colonization was a slow and difficult process. The Hiigaran Kiithid had expected to return to paradise, yet they instead found shattered cities left in the wake of the Taiidani evacuation, following the death of their emperor, Riesstiu IV the Second. However, they could ill afford to expend all of their resources upon rebuilding, given

Fig 1.1:
Hiigara and the Angel
Moon as seen from
orbit.





the presence of raiders, pirates, and Taiidan still loyal to their fallen emperor - all of them eager to test Hiigara in its weakened state. Even political factions, including members of the Galactic Council, argued that the Exiles could not possibly defend themselves and therefore required assistance from a larger government. All of these opponents, military and political, had underestimated the Exiles' resolve. Having lost so much and fought so hard, they were not prepared to fail at this stage. Against all who would take Hiigara from them, they stood firm.

REBUILDING

Slowly but surely, the shining cities of Hiigara were rebuilt [Fig 1.2]. Libraries were unearthed, filled with documents detailing the ancient histories of the Hiigarans, their origins and ancestry. While often arcane and frequently contradictory or couched in the language of myth and legend, they were nonetheless a revelation for the Kushan people. Having lived so long without a true history, they now had access to archives detailing events of up to 6,000 years past. As a people so long without a history to call their own, the discovery of records outlining their past came as a welcome core on which to build their new future.



Fig 1.2:
The Hiigarans set about rebuilding the cities abandoned during the Taiidani evacuation following the death of their Emperor, Riesstiu IV the Second.



More importantly, this history gave the Exiles hope. They were a proud people with an even prouder past, and no longer mere Exiles, but Hiigarans. They had faced endless trials and bitter enemies, and yet in the face of every challenge they had built a republic spanning nearly 40 worlds at its height. This growth had begun with the introduction of hyperspace technology, approximately 4,000 years prior, and continued until the time of Exile.

THE GIFT OF HYPERSPACE

Among the facts within the manuscripts was the role of the Bentusi in spreading the secrets of hyperspace across the vast expanses of space. It began with the Outer Rim Trade Routes, traversing hundreds of occupied worlds and bringing the Bentusi to each. With knowledge far exceeding that of any race they encountered, they were able to profit while spreading their wisdom. With each passing decade, more of the fledgling races purchased the knowledge of hyperspace and charts of the Outer Rim Trade Routes, each thereby joining the Bentusi as unbound races among the stars [Fig 1.3].

What had once been a collection of isolated peoples, each believing itself to be the only life in the galaxy, was



Fig 1.3:
The Outer Rim Trade Routes allowed the Bentusi to visit hundreds of occupied worlds and enabled them to profit from the sale of Hyperspace technology.



now becoming a galactic community released from the shackles of sublight travel that once bound them. Trade, discussion and war followed in the wake of the Bentusi. Yet the Bentusi withheld a key advantage from the races with which they had traded. Ever canny, it seemed they had not given up all of their secrets.

SHORT AND FAR JUMPS

While many races now had access to hyperspace, the range and potential of their drives was limited. Despite being able to travel farther and faster than had even been conceived of in the days of sublight travel, there were still limits to the power of the drives derived from the Bentusi blueprints. These limits did not seem to apply to the Bentusi themselves, however. They were able to effortlessly travel the vast expanses of the galaxy in a mere blink of an eye - to Far Jump. Many races managed to reverse engineer the Short Jump technology provided by the Bentusi, and some even developed improvements and refinements upon the original designs. Yet even the finest of scientists granted that Far Jumping would require a level of power exponentially greater than that currently available. Thus, despite the many minds applied to the question, Far Jumping remained the exclusive privilege of the Bentusi.

CONFLICT AGAIN BESETS THE GALAXY

When the spectre of war first raised its head, the Bentusi moved quickly into action. Many would-be conquerors were left impotent by the arrival of the Bentusi Flagship and its accompanying fleet. Never the first to fire, they were nonetheless capable of incapacitating entire armadas while taking almost no losses. Such extreme measures were rarely required, however, as few fleets would stand and fight when confronted with the power



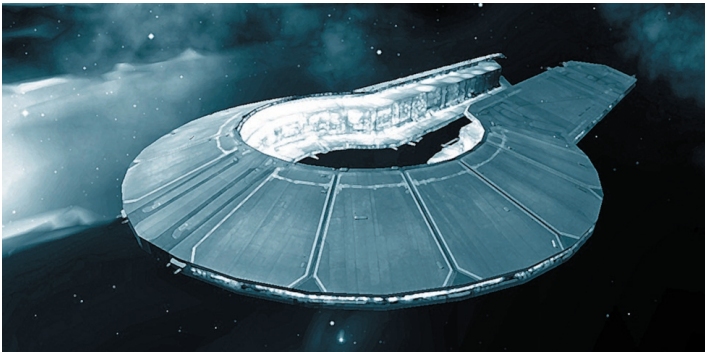
of the Bentusi Fleet. And any bold enough to do so did not fight for long. The Bentusi offered their trading partners a guarantee of peace, provided they remained peaceful in turn. Regardless, there were always some who would wage war upon their neighbors. After facing the overwhelming might of the Bentusi Fleet, however, none were foolish enough to make a second attempt.

Nearly 500 years passed with the Bentusi keeping the peace amongst the thousands of races with which they dealt. However, with communication and the exchange of diplomats amongst the planets came a growing murmur of dissent. The Bentusi, many said, had no right to dictate their wishes to an entire galaxy. Slowly this dissent grew, and in time it gained its focus.

AN UPRISING

Who the leader of this revolution was and how precisely he managed to coordinate such a bold uprising has been lost to the sands of time. Yet it would seem that over the course of several hours, thousands of wars

Fig 1.4:
Bentus, the Bentusi
Harbour Ship.





began at once, scattered across the entire spread of the Outer Rim Trade Routes. While the Bentusi Fleet was effectively invincible and seemed able to cross the galaxy in mere moments, it could not be everywhere at once. Its greatest strength was its greatest weakness. Some assumed the Bentusi possessed many fleets, each headed by one of their Harbor Ships. In truth, only one Harbor Ship existed, and when confronted by galaxy-wide wars, the Bentusi faltered [[previous page - Fig 1.4](#)].

With outright war breaking out across the galaxy in hundreds of locations, there was little the Bentusi could do but deal with as many cases as they could and await the inevitable end of hostilities. When the chaos at last died down, many worlds had been conquered, and where there had once been hundreds of tiny individual governments now stood powerful empires spanning multiple worlds. Amongst the conquering empires was that of the Hiigarans, whose war fleets easily shattered their neighbors' defenses and brought them under the auspice of the Diamid, Hiigara's ruling council.

THE RISE OF THE GALACTIC COUNCIL

These new empires were able to make demands upon the Bentusi that would have been impossible as individual worlds. With the ability to disrupt the Bentusi trade routes ably demonstrated, they coerced the Bentusi into allowing them self-government, although there are some who contend this was always the Bentusi intent, and they were merely awaiting evidence the worlds were ready for independence. Regardless, the worlds maintained that a collective of rulers (many of them, ironically, dictators in fact if not in name) would be a fairer way for the fates of the worlds to be decided, rather than the dictatorship that had been imposed by the Bentusi. Thus, through the trials of revolution, anarchy,



and outright war, the Galactic Council was born, and the Hiigaran were amongst its founding members.

Also joining them amongst the 16 founding empires of the Galactic Council were the Taiidani, who had already been involved in a number of disputes with the Hiigaran people. Both located in the same area of space, they had built their respective empires by assimilating those worlds that surrounded them. However, those worlds on the borders between them had been bitterly fought over during the preceding battles, and their respective troops were still locked in combat above the skies and upon the ground of many. The ownership of these disputed planets was one of the first matters brought before the Council, and the resolution clearly favored the Taiidani. It appeared the Taiidani representative had bribed, blackmailed, and in some cases even arranged the assassination of members of the Council in order to have the planets awarded to the Taiidani [Fig 1.5]. Worse, a 30-light-year exclusion zone was instituted, into which the Hiigaran fleet could not approach without the threat of serious reprisals from the Council.

Fig 1.5:
A dispute over an area of space located on the Hiigaran-Taiidani border was one of the first matters brought before the Galactic Council. The Taiidani representative used several devious methods to secure these planets for the Taiidan Empire.





THE SECOND CORE IS FOUND

Had circumstances differed, the Hiigarans would have been impotent in the face of the Council's edicts. Yet it was at this point that exploration within several previously uncharted sectors of the Great Wastelands unearthed an artifact that would prove the most important discovery in the history of Hiigara. A Hyperspace Core was found enclosed within a crystalline lattice, supported within the heart of a shattered starship of awe-inspiring scale [Fig 1.6]. This Hyperspace Core would provide the Hiigarans with the means to take their vengeance upon the Taiidan and recover those planets they considered rightfully theirs, yet this would ultimately also seal their fate as Exiles.

With time, they unlocked the mysteries of the Hyperspace Core, clearly as powerful and capable as the Far Jumper utilized by the Bentusi. After extensive re-engineering of the core's containment unit, it was mounted into a newly constructed Flagship christened Sajuuk's Wrath. This single vessel harnessed more firepower than any other vessel in the Hiigaran Navy. And this, combined with its ability to Far Jump, represented the advantage required to both crush the Taiidan and allow the Hiigarans complete freedom unmatched by any other than the Bentusi.

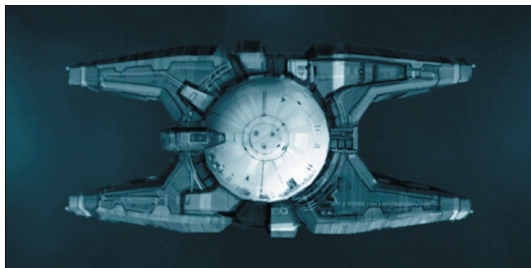


Fig 1.6:
The Far Jumper
Hyperspace Core
discovered by the
Hiigarans in the
Great Wastelands.



POWER UNLEASHED

Heeding the Bentusi example, every operational ship of the Hiigaran Navy was recalled and reformed into a single, massive fleet. Knowing that the bulk of the Taiidan Navy was currently poised at the Hiigaran border, the Hiigarans utilized the advantage of their Far Jump capabilities and struck deep behind the Taiidan lines. Able to strike the Taiidan patrols and garrisons they encountered with the full force of their entire fleet and then quickly move on, the Hiigarans demolished each Taiidan force they encountered. Before the first report of this destruction could reach Taiidan, the seat of the empire's power and home to the Imperial Palace, the Hiigaran fleet stood poised in orbit.

The Taiidan Elite Guard, realizing they could not hold against such overwhelming force, nevertheless threw themselves into the fray, hoping vainly to hold the line long enough for reinforcements to arrive. With the last barrier between Sajuuk's Wrath and the Imperial Palace of Taiidan removed, the Hiigarans maneuvered into high orbital position in order to begin planetary bombardment [Fig 1.7]. A surgical strike was planned to cripple the Taiidan and therefore ensure they would be unable to mount a

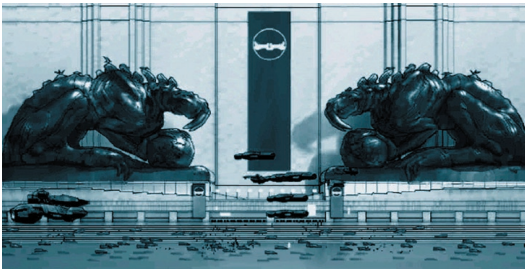


Fig 1.7:
The Taiidan Imperial Palace, as well as every Taiidan military facility on the surface of the planet was destroyed in a surgical strike by the Hiigaran Navy.



retaliatory strike. The orbital missiles fell for a full day upon the Imperial Palace and every military facility upon Taiidan's surface. Satisfied that the Taiidan threat had been permanently neutralized, the Hiigaran Navy departed. Sixty-seven hours had passed between the departure of the fleet from Hiigara to its return.

IMPOSSIBLE DECISIONS

The outcome of this action and the potential reprisals from the Galactic Council had been exhaustively discussed in the Diamid before the attack was launched. After long debate, it had been decided that defiance of the Council's orders was the only option remaining to the Hiigaran people. Had the Taiidan been allowed to keep the worlds they had taken, they would soon encroach upon worlds deeper within the Hiigaran territories - if not by force, then by economic influence. It would then be but a matter of time before Hiigara was merely another subservient world under the banner of the Taiidan Empire.

Slow assimilation was considered unacceptable, especially given the harsh limitations placed upon the development of the Hiigaran military by the Council. It was clear that action needed to be taken immediately, or the glorious history of Hiigara would end here, a mere footnote for the future. The ancient core had evidently been handed to them by the will of Sajuuk, and it was his wish that Hiigara use the advantage it had been granted in order to snatch victory from the Taiidan while they least expected to be opposed.

The strike complete, and the core having proven more successful than even the most optimistic general had hoped, the Hiigarans awaited the inevitable reaction



from the Galactic Council. The Council was notoriously slow in its decision-making processes, a failing the Diamid had banked upon in the calculations for the war against the Taiidan. Given the usual timeframes of the Council, Hiigara would have time to dispatch the fleets upon their borders and reclaim the worlds that were rightfully theirs, presenting the Council with a fait accompli impossible to reverse. Surprisingly, the Council moved faster than anyone expected, and within days of the return of Sajuuk's Wrath, the Council had delivered its initial edict. The Hiigarans were to turn over their core to the Council's safekeeping, retreat from the disputed worlds immediately, and abandon all military vessels of the Hiigaran Navy within the 30-light-year exclusion zone. Precisely what decision would be made thereafter, as well as the eventual fate of the core and the navy, would be resolved at the Council's usual pace. Hiigara was given 24 hours to comply or face the severest possible consequences.

Debate raged throughout the emergency meeting of the Diamid, yet one fact remained clear throughout. The glory of the Hiigaran Fleet, combined with the power of the Far Jumper, gave them an unstoppable advantage against any opponent foolish enough to challenge them. No foe could possibly challenge Hiigara, except one.

HONOR OVER ALL

On the matter of the Bentusi, the words of Malketh LiirHra - Kiith-Sa of his people and their representative at the Diamid - have been preserved to this day.

"We are a people forged in the struggles of battle, conflict, and death. Where others see pride, we see only duty. Where invaders see weakness, we see honor. As



individuals we go to war, yet we return as family, Hiigarans, Kiith. The choice before the Diamid is that between war and submission. Our foe possesses every material advantage that we possess and hundreds of years more experience wielding the power of their core. They have the support of the Galactic Council while we stand alone. You cannot consider your spirits yet tested if you accept only those battles where victory is certain. Many men would turn back now at the thought of the hardships before us should we challenge the Bentusi. We stand at the edge of our future with only one question to be answered. Are we to be remembered as Hiigarans, or do we bow to the sands of time?"

The eventual decision for the Diamid was clear. As the deadline for compliance reached its final minutes, word was sent to the Council that the Hiigarans agreed to the conditions outlined. Their Navy would be abandoned within the exclusion zone and the core would be handed into the safekeeping of the Council, with one caveat. The Hiigarans trusted none of the Council to guard the core responsibly, except the Bentusi. The core would be delivered to the Bentusi Harbor Ship and none other.

Relief within the Council was palpable. It seemed the Hiigarans had submitted at the eleventh hour, and the prospect of war had been put to rest. Yet the Hiigarans had no intention of honoring the agreement they had proposed. When the Bentusi Harbor Ship arrived within the exclusion zone, it found the entire Hiigaran Navy waiting, and seemingly abandoned. Sajuuk's Wrath stood at their center, core exposed and ready for Bentusi removal.



However, upon observing the entry of the Bentusi and their lack of escorts, the Hiigaran Navy sprang into action. Power-up sequences firing under emergency procedures, the fleet moved against the Bentusi from every vector before they could begin to react. The Hiigaran Fleet gave no quarter, the initial salvo slamming into the housing for the Bentusi Hyperspace Core. This bold and decisive move, had it succeeded in disabling the core of the Bentusi, could have changed the future of the Hiigaran people in the blink of an eye. Yet they had not counted upon the capabilities, experience, and raw speed of the Bentusi.

BENTUSI COUNTERATTACK

Leaping immediately into action, the docking bays of the Harbor Ship began to launch powerful and compact combat-ready vessels, while the power of their core wrenched the rest of their fleet from nearby staging grounds directly into the heart of the war zone before them [Fig 1.8]. Shields and defensive fields were raised as the gravity around Bentus began to increase in magnitude by the second. The Hiigaran admiral watched in shock and dismay as his fleet began to fall on all fronts before the overwhelming experience and

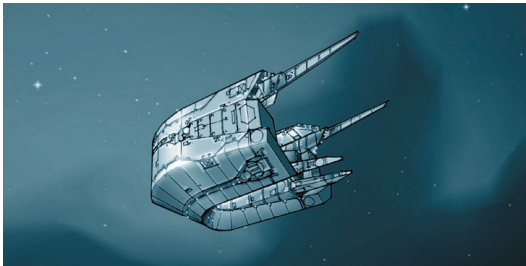


Fig 1.8:
While Bentusi
Tradeships appear as
harmless spacegoing
vessels, they are also
extremely effective
warships.

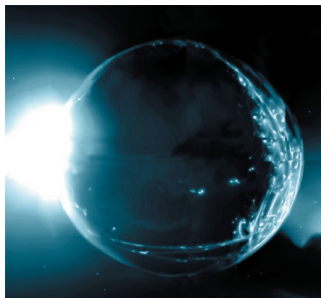


Fig 1.9:
Hiigara's Angel Moon,
as seen from space.
The commander
of Sajuuk's Wrath
destroyed the ship
by attempting a
hyperspace jump
while close to the
Moon's Gravity Well.

technology of the Bentusi. What had a moment earlier, seemed to be a textbook victory was quickly dissolving into a massive defeat.

As in every battle the Bentusi had fought, they offered their opponent every opportunity to surrender. Yet even against impossible odds, the Hiigarans fought on. Sajuuk's Wrath leapt from flank to flank, blinking in and out of hyperspace and bolstering the Hiigaran forces wherever it was needed, yet the Bentusi Harbor Ship outmaneuvered it each time. After many hours of solid, bloody combat, there was nothing left of the Hiigaran Navy beyond debris and their Flagship. Once again, the Bentusi offered the option of surrender, and once again they were refused. Wishing to ensure the core was preserved, they ruined the engines of Sajuuk's Wrath and began to maneuver into position to dock.

A DESPERATE ESCAPE

However, the commander had a contingency plan prepared. Manually disengaging the mass overrides, he plotted a course for the surface of the Hiigaran moon [Fig 1.9]. It was almost certainly suicide to hyperspace so close to a Gravity Well, yet he knew that any sane course he could plot the Bentusi would follow. Having watched the fleet



he had so proudly commanded annihilated in battle, he could not survive them and retain his honor. Even if the maneuver ended in the ship's destruction, the Diamid had been told of his plan and knew where to look for the core. Perhaps the future could be salvaged from the wreckage of the present.

CONSEQUENCES

In the aftermath of the overwhelming Hiigarans defeat, the Galactic Council granted the remaining Hiigarans their freedom under the condition that they would never again prepare for war or bring arms against others. With the fleet wiped out and the Hyperspace Core lost (or so it was assumed) they presented no threat, in any case. Further sanctions were agreed to be unnecessary, as Hiigara had been all but crippled by its own foolish actions and stubborn pride.

The remorse of the Bentusi was second only to that of the Hiigarans. They had existed for so long alone among the space-faring races, truly unbound and possessed of power beyond the grasp of any other. After so many hundreds of years they had finally found a potential equal, or so it had seemed. Now they were responsible for stripping that power from the Hiigarans for crimes that, while certainly of immense seriousness, essentially amounted to immaturity. They had made errors of their own, and their histories told of early incidences of abuse of the power they had been granted. If there had been an older, Far Jump-capable race present at the dawn of the Bentusi expansion, they may well have found themselves in precisely the position the Hiigarans were now trapped in. A time of formalized mourning began among the Bentusi, and when they were done, each Bentusi vessel was disarmed and demilitarized. Their announcement to



the Council was one of the final entries in the Galactic Council records preserved among the documents found upon Hiigara. Events beyond this time have largely been assembled from other sources, many of them less formal than the records of the Council.

“We retract our martial support from the Council we once founded. Never again will the Bentusi wage war for the cause of peace. We bind our hands before the collected worlds. We will remain, if permitted, members of the Council, no more nor less than any other. May a new age of peace prosper free of our influence.”

NO LASTING PEACE

The age of peace hoped for by the Bentusi was not to be, however. Lacking the guiding hand of an emperor, the Taiidan worlds were in chaos. The only remnant of their once fearsome navy was the fleet staged upon the Hiigaran border, under the command of Admiral Riesstiu. With no emperor to guide his actions, Riesstiu declared himself sole commander of the Taiidan Navy. Already viewed as a hero due to his bravery and strategic acumen in battles past, his declaration was nearly unanimously supported. It was, however, a mere formality, as he had already been appointed commander of the border forces, which were very nearly the entirety of the Taiidan Navy after the brutal Hiigaran invasion. It was generally believed that what was needed now was decisive and unbending leadership, and under such circumstances the admiral was seen as the perfect man to lead.

Uncompromising in the face of hard decisions and untouched by any streak of mercy, in more gentle times he may have been viewed with an edge of suspicion. Yet the destruction of the Imperial Palace had struck the Taiidan hard, and the



call for revenge was heard at every turn. With the Bentusi withdrawal from military enforcement and the Hiigaran Navy in ruins, Riesstiu knew his opportunity had arrived.

The Taiidan offensive against the Hiigaran Empire moved quickly, smashing what small defenses it encountered upon the way to its final destination. Each planet it passed was offered the chance to join the Taiidan Empire, and all those who refused were annihilated. The Taiidan had developed weapons that would cleanse the entire surface of a planet of any sign of life, and they were both prepared and horribly eager to use them upon those who had slain their emperor.

A TERRIBLE REVENGE

The first planet to refuse served as an unforgettable demonstration [Fig 1.10]. Hundreds of millions of lives were ended without warning as revenge for a crime of which they were ultimately innocent. After that, few other worlds refused the offer of Taiidan alliance. Regardless of their submission, many planets were razed anyway. Some, the admiral claimed, had converted too easily and therefore

Fig 1.10:
The Taiidani had developed what were termed Atmospheric Deprivation weapons, enabling them to completely wipe life from the surface of a planet.





would make untrustworthy allies. Others were overly reluctant and therefore most likely still loyal to Hiigara. More lives were lost in the space of Riesstiu's Revenge, as the slaughter became known, than had been lost in all recorded battles since the Outer Rim Trade Routes were first established. The Council threatened sanctions, yet Riesstiu carried on without care. Taiidan was an Empire without an emperor, and there was little effect any sanction could have upon them, given their complete lack of structure or hierarchy.

As news spread of the utter carnage being waged against a defenseless foe, protest began to build. Many races, both those of the Council and independent worlds, called for the Bentusi to intervene with force - yet they would not. Their vow had been in earnest and though they wept for the Hiigaran's fate, they would not return to the ways of conflict they had abandoned. They did volunteer to adjudicate discussion between Riesstiu and the Diamid, in pursuit of an acceptable resolution.

TAIIDAN DEMANDS

The admiral's demands were simple. All Hiigaran worlds would now belong to the Taiidan Empire. Hiigara itself would stand as the site for the new Imperial Palace, given that it had the resources and infrastructure in place that had been destroyed upon Taiidan. Every native Hiigaran would be executed or pressed into slavery, dependent upon the level of their involvement in the destructions wreaked upon the Taiidan Homeworld.

Despite attempts to find a middle ground by the Diamid, the admiral would not move on any point. The Hiigaran spirit had been broken by the loss of the fleet and the core such that they could nearly accept the loss of their



empire, even the occupation of their planet, but slavery was too bitter a pill for even the most broken Hiigaran spirit to swallow. Resigning themselves to destruction, they prepared for the end.

EXILE

Yet the Bentusi, shamed by their part in the Hiigaran's downfall, continued to negotiate and finally managed to find a solution acceptable to the Council, Taiidan, Riesstiu, and the Hiigarans. The Hiigarans would have a single month to board a sublight transport departing toward the galactic outskirts 1.11. Any left behind would be enslaved or executed, but those willing to accept the compromise arranged by the Bentusi would be dispatched to an occupied desert planet far beyond established trade routes. There they could attempt to build a new life, provided they never again developed Far Jump hyperspace technology. If they were to venture beyond their planet with the now-missing core or another like it, their destruction would be sealed.

The Diamid decided quickly. Given the choice of death or exile, the Kiith-Sa voted overwhelmingly in favor of granting their people the option of life, regardless of how difficult that life may prove to be.



Fig 1.11:
The Khar-toba class transport ships carried the able-bodied population of Hiigara into exile upon the remote desert world of Kharak.



Thus, all of the able-bodied population of Hiigara was exiled to the desert world of Kharak, only the smallest of victories held within their grasp. The Hyperspace Core, the single most powerful artifact possessed by the Hiigaran people and the match of that possessed by the Bentusi, had been retrieved from Hiigara's moon and smuggled aboard the ship that carried them to their Exile. Thus, they hoped, their ancestors may one day have the chance to regain their home and their empire. Even in the most futile of situations, the Hiigarans retained their dignity and dared hope for the future, despite the dangers that possession of the core brought with it. And so, onboard sublight transports the Hiigarans saw Hiigara vanish forever behind them.

LIFE ON KHARAK

For 3,000 years, the Exiles survived on Kharak [Fig 1.12]. Hiigara became a legend, and in time even the legend was forgotten. This all changed when a satellite discovered an ancient starship buried in the sand. Inside lay the Guidestone and the word "Hiigara", home, etched on its surface. But this was not the only discovery, for deep

Fig 1.12

The surface of Kharak, a barren desert planet.





Fig 1.13:
The wreck of the Khar-Toba was rediscovered purely by accident, 3000 years after the Hiigarans arrived on Kharak.

within the ruin lay the ancient Hyperspace Core [Fig 1.13]. When once it had resulted in their Exile, this core would now return the Exiles home.

The blueprints of the core were integrated and expanded upon, or so the Hiigarans presumed. In fact, the core itself remained at the heart of the Mothership's drive. It was merely the containment unit that had been expanded to account for the stresses of sending a Mothership class vessel through hyperspace. The containment units, which had proven perfectly sufficient onboard Sajuuk's Wrath, were unusable due to the substantially lower energy output of post-Exile technology.

Despite having brought the core with them, the Hiigarans had no understanding of its power or its true origins until 40 years after their arrival on Hiigara, when the first documents explaining its history were unearthed. Accompanying these documents were a collection of blueprints and schematics remarkably similar to those produced thousands of years later by the engineers who built the Mothership.

However, further delving into the archives revealed that these cores were more than merely the instruments of the



Hiigaran's Exile and return. In many of the archives, it was recorded that the cores possessed by the Hiigarans and the Bentusi represented two of three powerful artifacts dating far beyond the reach of history.

BLESSING OR CURSE

Reports differed depending on the source. Some stated that these cores were a gift from Sajuuk, the Great Maker, to his favored children. Others suggested that they may have been forged at the same time as the universe itself, within the same forge in which Sajuuk had hammered the sky from raw thought. Still more implied the cores survived from a time before time, when gods traveled the stars in search of races to endow with sentience for their amusement. More mundane, but mentioned in several key writings, was the possibility that they were merely leftovers from an empire that had fallen many hundreds of thousands of years prior.

Yet all the documents, while differing in many areas, agreed upon one fact. When the third of the great cores is unearthed, it will mark the beginnings of the End Time. Judgment will come upon the children of Sajuuk, and only the Sajuuk-Khar, the chosen people, will stand unchanged by His Hand.

MOTHER OF THE NEW HIIGARAN AGE

Debate raged throughout the Diamid for many years after the Hiigarans returned home regarding what should be done with this ancient core. The Kiith Nabaal and Maanan both argued in favor of restoring the core to active service, while Kiith Soban and Somtaaw thought the past was better left buried. However, in reality, all awaited the verdict of one Kiith upon the matter.



Ultimately, the decision lay not with Kiith S'Jet, but in the hands of it's most honored and respected member, Karan S'Jet. As the pioneer of the neural interface that made the Mothership's journey possible, and the mind behind its pilgrimage, hers was without doubt the most respected opinion on Hiigara. All the more so because it was so rarely given, and even then only on matters of grave import. There was no doubt that in a matter tied so closely to the history of their people and the technology of the Hyperspace Cores, Karan's opinion, if given, would be the deciding factor for the Diamid.

Her connection to the Mothership had permanently changed Karan [Fig 1.4]. The years since the return to Hiigara did not show upon her features, nor had she lost any of the sharpness and incisive intelligence that had allowed her to both develop the first neural link and guide the Mothership through the trials it had undergone traveling to Hiigara.

Yet Karan had withdrawn from any involvement in governance almost immediately after reaching Hiigara. While never detailing her reasons, she had made it clear that being connected to the core had changed the way in which she saw both the world and the stars. Already



Fig 1.14:
Karan S'Jet's neural connection to the original Mothership had permanently altered her. Age no longer seemed to affect her, and she was widely revered as the saviour of the people of Hiigara.



Fig 1.15:
In accordance with
Karan's wishes, the
Hiigaran Hyperspace
Core was placed in a
museum at Assam
Kiith'Sid, the new
Hiigaran capital.

regarded as a saviour, her distance from the public eye actually enhanced her status as an enigmatic messiah, and the cult of personality that had already begun to form around her was growing daily. Already various groups were offering insights into her every word, and icons depicting her embedded within the bridge of the Mothership were sold in every corner of Hiigara.

THE CORE AT REST

On the matter of the ancient core she offered a rare public opinion, outlining the matter in the simplest terms. The core, regardless of the power it offered, was best left as a publicly accessible monument to the trials and triumphs of the Hiigaran people and the mysteries that still remain to be resolved, rather than being pressed into active service. After all, while it would offer near limitless travel to the fleets of Hiigara, it was a freedom that would merely distract from the duties at hand. With the process of rebuilding still ongoing, the population of Hiigara was still only barely sufficient to protect the nearby sectors of space, let alone to travel across the galaxy in safety.

Following her wishes, a museum was founded at Assam Kiith'sid, also the home of the planetary government [Fig 1.15]. Here the core and the history of its



origins and meaning to the people of Hiigara were made available to any and all who cared to visit. For many, it was the first chance to see the instrument of their salvation, and also to reflect upon its role in their Exile. Also including the few artifacts brought with the Hiigarans from Kharak and many new discoveries unearthed upon Hiigara, the museum reflected the past, present, and future of the Hiigaran people.

ENEMIES OLD AND NEW

So the reconstruction of Hiigara continued for a time. Yet the matter of the core was not settled. Rumors soon began to reach Hiigara of rising conflict in the Eastern Fringes, a war-torn zone constantly harassed by forces from the Vaygr Reaches. However, the nature of the conflict had recently undergone dramatic change. Where previously small, disorganized raiding parties had launched guerilla raids upon the fringes, now they came with overwhelming force, pressing relentlessly onwards [Fig 1.16].

MAKAAN AND THE SAJUUK-KHAR

It seemed that a new warlord had taken control of the splintered Vaygr tribes and Taiidan remnants and united them beneath a single banner. Known only as Makaan,



Fig 1.16:
Newly united tribes from the Vaygr reaches attacked targets in the Eastern Fringe with overwhelming force. Prior to these events, the Vaygr had only ever launched small guerilla-type raids.



Fig 1.17:
Recon images of the
Vaygr fleet indicate
that the Third Core is
housed in this vessel.

his advance could no longer be dismissed or ignored. What had been only a nuisance for hundreds of years had become something substantially different, a holy crusade with Hiigara as its destination.

Under Makaan, the Vaygr were moving with unheard of strength, speed, and numbers. Planets fell before his forces and were stripped of every available resource and left barren. These resources simply acted to bolster the growing war fleet and carry Makaan to yet more triumphant victories.

Analysis of Makaan's movements allowed but one conclusion. He was headed in the direction of Hiigara and along the way was gathering a fleet larger than any since the time of Exile. Furthermore, the manner and the speed with which his fleet was traveling had a chilling implication. The Third Core, spoken of in prophecy and myth, had been found and was in his hands [Fig 1.17].

His people worshipped him as the Sajuuk-Khar, the chosen one foretold by prophecy to lead his people to conquest and salvation. He had not only united the Vaygr, he had given them a cause, a dream, and a reason



to fight. It quickly became clear that the Eastern Fringes, long a safe buffer against Vaygr incursions, would not hold for more than a few months, at most, against this newly organized horde.

Like a wave of locusts, the forces of Makaan swept unstoppably forward, seemingly without any goal but the destruction of all that lay before them [Fig 1.18]. It was only by piecing together the reports of various individuals who had escaped their attacks that the matter finally became clear.

The arrival of the Vaygr also frayed the Galactic Council, and the Vaygr incursions started a series of border clashes that quickly spread like wildfire. Within a few short years, the entire Inner Rim was at war. Many pleaded with the Bentusi to intervene, but they remained enigmatically distant. The fate of the Inner Rim was not theirs to decide. With war spreading and tension high, the Galactic Council fractured, and an institution that had survived for millennia collapsed.

Fig 1.18:
The Vaygr are now united under the leadership of the warlord Makaan. They appear to be on a holy crusade, with their Hiigara as their ultimate destination.





Again the Diamid looked toward Karan for guidance, and this time her advice was to attempt the reactivation of the ancient core. However, if this was to take place she had a request. Again, she would be the one to join with the Core via her neural links. In her words, “I did not lead my people to their home in order to allow their destruction now. If the call has come to defend Hiigara then I must do so. It is neither duty nor obligation that drives me; it is simply what must be.”

The Diamid attempted to persuade Karan to reconsider, explaining that there were many other people more capable, better trained, and possessed of the same neural link that had once made Karan unique. Hundreds of hyperspace-capable ships had been built since Karan led the first Mothership to Hiigara, and advances had been made in both technology and technique. More importantly, Karan was of great importance to the people of Hiigara as both a focus of faith and as a figurehead. Yet Karan would not be swayed from her decision. If the core was to be reactivated and the fleet of Makaan held at

Fig 1.19:
The Pride of Hiigara
is being constructed
inside the derelict at
Tanis, located deep
within the Great
Wastelands.





bay, it would be her mind at the helm. Thus when the construction of the new mothership, the Pride of Hiigara, was begun at Tanis, Karan was there to oversee the final elements and tests, along with the ancient core that was to be installed within it [previous page - Fig 1.19]. Her mind was to guide it in the coming times, for she understood what the appearance of Makaan and his possession of the Third Core implied.

The End Times had begun.



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SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- Arioch for his suggestions and for running Homeworld Shipyards for so long.
- Keiichi for transcribing Appendix C of the Strategy Guide.
- Malignus for his excellent correction skills.
- Retroboy for suggestions and tips.
- Troff for hosting, suggestions, and reminders.
- Relic for developing the Homeworld series of games, and writing the original text in this document.
- Sierra for publishing the games. As much as we don't like the way they do things, we have to admit without them these games may not have been made at all.

DOCUMENT VERSION

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