



WELCOME TO THE CAVENESS GALAXY

Ninety-two years after the signing of the treaty that officially ended the Unification Wars, Earth sent forth the first two “generation ships” to seek new homes for mankind in the stars.





The *Bohr* and the *Heisenberg* together carried a total of three thousand seven hundred eighty-three pioneers and crew. Each ship was powered by ten linked *Hugh* drives that eventually pushed them to a speed of one-point-four times the speed of light. At that speed their Benjamin drives took over, and they crossed Einstein's Curve where relative speed could no longer be measured.

Two hundred forty-one ship years later, the descendants of those first pioneers celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of their landing on the planet they named Biery after the woman who led their forebears from Earth. Much to their mixed surprise and fear, that celebration was interrupted by the landing of an alien ship containing a race called the Oinaise. To everyone's relief—including the Oinaise's—the contact was peaceful.

Nine years later the Kobler calendar was established and set the date of the first landing as New Year 2500. The following chronology gives a brief listing of major events dated according to that calendar.

- 2530** – First contact with the Oinaise.
- 2575** – First pioneers arrive on Nordeen, the most Earthlike of any planet ever discovered in the galaxy.
- 2599** – Approximate date the last generation ship left Earth, carrying fourteen thousand new-human pioneers, genetically altered people known as homo communis, whose major difference from homo sapiens was a greatly extended lifespan.
- 2648** – The anti-intellectualist riots.
- 2657** – Beginning of the early expansionist movement seeking other planets and star systems suitable for human settlement
- 2664** – Last known message from Earth indicating war, famine, and increasing chaos.
- 2681** – A group of Nordeen's brightest people call themselves homo electus and leave aboard the *Mensch* in search of what they hope will be a better home for the intellectually elite.
- 2723** – The Gouldrive tested and proven. This marks the beginning of the Great Expansionist Movement, the settling of many independent systems, and the establishment of true interstellar trade. The phrase, "a planet for every clan," became popular at this time. Scientific research and technological progress were extremely limited during the movement.
- 2774** – News reaches Nordeen from the so-called homo electus's first contact with the alien Verfen, a reclusive race inhabiting a cluster of star systems near the galaxy's center.
- 2784** – First contact with the crab-like, methane-breathing Castorians.
- 2846** – Discovery of Cloise.

- 2862** – Foundation of Sondak, a loose federation of fifty eight sparsely inhabited planetary systems. Homo electus demanded and received recognition as a separate human race as the price of joining the federation.
- 2893** – Foundation of the misnamed United Central Systems, twenty-seven planetary systems inhabited mostly by *homo communis*. The establishment of the U.C.S. marked the end of the Great Expansionist Movement.
- 3021** – The first galactic war between Sondak and the U.C.S.
- 3024** – The U.C.S., unable to match Sondak's capacity for producing the tools of war, sued for peace. After extended negotiations during which the fighting continued, the U.C.S. promised to pay heavy economic reparations to Sondak and the independent systems, and also agreed not to produce new war materials for one hundred years. Neither promise was kept.
- 3029** – Seemingly spontaneous civil disorder broke out on several planets populated mostly by the fair-skinned, racially distinct, politically fractious Pikeans. Although called by some the Pikean Civil War, the dissidents had neither the numbers nor the equipment to fight a true war, and consequently were forced to leave their home planets. Many of them chose to go to systems controlled by the U.C.S., where they quickly aligned themselves with the political factions that supported a new war with Sondak.
- 3033** – The Cczwyck Skirmish occurred when U.C.S. Admiral Nance made an officially unauthorized attempt to take control of that independent system just as a Sondak border squadron was making a courtesy visit. There was no serious fighting, but the political repercussions caused the U.C.S. to accelerate its secret rearmament program; caused Sondak to increase its economic pressures on the U.C.S. and also on the independent systems that refused to join the confederation; and caused Cczwyck to become more isolationist.
- 3034-3042** – Sporadic raids on U.C.S.-chartered freighters by unknown agents were blamed on Sondak despite fierce diplomatic denials and a total lack of evidence.
- 3038** – Long-range plans began in the U.C.S. for a new war against Sondak.
- 3046** – The so-called "Double-Spiral War" began with raids on ten isolated Sondak systems and several independent systems. During the year the U.C.S. captured the independent systems of Fernandez, Cczwyck, the water planets of Thayne-G, the three systems in the Ivy Chain, and Ca-Ryn. The aliens of Oina and Cloise found themselves drawn unwillingly toward participation in the war. Matthews system, strategically located midway between Sondak and the U.C.S., was the target of an attack and invasion planned and directed by U.C.S. Commander Frye Charlton. The attack failed due to the planning of Sondak Admiral Josiah Gilbert, with the help of Admirals Pajandcan and Dawson, and a great deal of luck. The system was saved, but with a great loss of ships and personnel on both sides. Matthews system's principal planet, Reckynop, was rendered a watery ruin by U.C.S. neutronic missiles that exploded over its poles and melted its icecaps. However, the battle for Matthews was considered a victory for Sondak.
- 3047** – The year opens with the launching of new U.C.S. subspace hunter-killers the Hunks. Sondak's forces on Sutton strongly resist the U.C.S. occupation force and with the aid of a newly reformed Polar Fleet defeat the U.C.S. there and in a space battle for the Satterfield system. The prototype for Sondak's Ultimate Weapon is deliberately lost, and the aliens begin bargaining for a neutral alliance.
- 3048** – U.C.S. Admiral Frye Charlton and Bridgeforce declare a victory at Satterfield and commence planning for a final series of strikes against Sondak, while Sondak's Admiral Gilbert and General Schopper begin their plans for a counteroffensive.

LIVING IN THE DOUBLE SPIRAL GALAXY

Before entering the world of the United Central Systems, Sondak Confederacy and the Neutral Alien Alliance, there are some things about living in these places that all of the residents simply take for granted. These are basic facts of life that should be made familiar before stepping into the depths of politics and history.

HUMANS ARE NOT NATIVES

A brief glance of the Double Spiral Galaxy shows two major human interstellar governments and a handful of neutral colonies encompassing close to one hundred separate colonies as compared to less than twenty planets inhabited primarily by non-human species. Someone who notices this before anything else could be forgiven for thinking that humans were the species native to the galaxy with the other species being recent arrivals. The truth of the matter is that humans have been in the galaxy for just under two hundred and fifty years while the other space-faring species evolved in this area of space.

The humans have not displaced any races, but they have claimed most of the viable colonies in the galaxy, severely limiting the spread of the other races. Likewise, they have put pressure on some of the races that have not moved into space yet, such as the natives of Cloise.

For the most part, humans simply don't think about the other races. For most it's a matter of being out of sight and out of mind. To certain extent, actually, most humans extend this attitude even toward other human colonies. They have kept their individual colonies sparsely populated in comparison to Earth of 21st Century and the wide open spaces give them an impression of being very much alone in the universe. When these humans do think about the other races it is as curiosities more often than anything else, things that stories are told about. The Oinaise are considered to be strange sorts of merchants but more or less respectable for aliens. The Castorians are known to be cannibals and there's a lot of misunderstanding about that. The Cloiseans induce an instinctual sort of fear in humans, possibly due to their resemblance to snakes or dragons, and few humans even know about the Isthians despite them hailing from the same planet.

There are, of course, humans that have more direct contact with or stronger opinions about aliens. Some humans push for more interaction with aliens, such as permanent treaties and alliances and other such things, but most humans that think about other species take a very xenophobic view of things and try to separate themselves more and more from the other species. The governments of both the Sondak and the U.C.S. are dominated by people that take the xenophobic view; in fact the Sondak Confederacy was established to force better trading standards out of the other species. While this racism rarely expresses itself as violence, it is fairly pervasive.

The alien response to human presence varies from species to species, but the prevalence of humanity throughout the galaxy is such that every species has some sort of opinion on humans. They don't have the luxury of an out of sight, out of mind approach to humanity. Oinaise trade with them amicably enough, but still consider them to have strange and dangerous blind spots. Castorians act friendly, but don't really trust the humans, which is actually par for the course for the Castorians with everybody. The two major races of Cloise have suffered from human exploitation for centuries now and many consider them to be soulless monsters that are strangely cowardly in person.

HUMANITY HAS BRANCHED

There are no less than four officially recognized offshoots of humanity in the Double Spiral Galaxy. Humans as a whole are very aware of this, but it is usually never mentioned directly. Meanwhile, the aliens rarely consider there to be any significant differences between various species of humans. Despite the general lack of mentioning the differences in species, each of the two primary nations involved are largely formed of two particular species making for a mild undercurrent of racism that is further underscored by the blatant racism that the Pikeans suffer under.

The four species of human are Homo sapiens, who are the most numerous of the present species and mostly conform to modern day norms; Homo communis, who have a significantly expanded lifespan as compared to other human species; Homo electus, whose designation as a separate species is largely political and Homo Pikean, who are a racially and culturally distinct group descended from Caucasian stock. Both the U.C.S. and the Sondak contain communis, Pikean and sapiens as citizens

but the U.C.S. is heavily dominated by the Homo communis while the Sondak Confederacy is largely Homo sapiens. Homo electus joined with the Sondak Confederacy after their declaration as a separate species was accepted.

Homo sapiens are the most populous human species and the most similar to the Homo sapiens that evolved on Earth thousands of years previous. As a whole, they prefer to live simple lives and have even shown a history of violence toward intellectuals since coming to the Double Spiral Galaxy. Most Homo sapiens live on sparsely populated colonies that sprinkle the galaxy, with the largest number by far being citizens of the Sondak Confederacy. Homo sapiens attitudes toward other species of humans varies from mild unease for the Homo communis, disdain for the self-proclaimed Homo electus to outright prejudice in the case of Homo Pikeans.

The Homo communis are a genetically engineered species that live roughly two to three times as long as other species of humanity and retain their youthful appearances proportionately much longer as well. While they came over on generational ships the same way that the Homo sapiens had, however, their longer life-span means that they had much fewer generations separating them from the Earth of humanity's origin. Significant majorities are eager to keep that connection to Earth and it was the primary motivation for the founding of the U.C.S. Their connection to Earth and their long life spans give them a sense of superiority over the other variations of humanity.

The start of Homo electus came when hundreds of humanity's most intelligent scientists, philosophers and other such people boarded the starship *Mensch* soon after the first human colony was established. At the time, a lot of people blamed the era of war that proceeded Earth's first launch of generational ships on scientists and theoreticians that came up with ideas without considering potential consequences. The more educated individuals of the new colonies were thus faced with a significant amount of social hardship. Given that Homo sapiens-controlled colonies erupted into a series of anti-intellectual riots less than a hundred years later seems to prove the exodus was a wise move on the part of the future electus. For the past four hundred and more years, Homo electus has been trying to control their evolution through a practice of culturally voluntary eugenics where intelligence is considered the primary factor in

choosing a mate. There has been some significant genetic drift due to these practices, but still, everyone tends to make jokes under their breath about how the electus bargained for consideration as a separate species. It is likely that most of the U.C.S. don't consider them as any different from Homo sapiens.

Homo Pikeans bear the distinction of being the only human variation that experiences active prejudice against its members. The Pikeans are descended from Caucasian stock with a far greater propensity for light colorations than other human species. They are rather often viewed as being both incompetent and untrustworthy. This perception generally causes them to be limited to low end menial jobs. There has been a growing trend to ignoring this prejudice and promoting Pikeans to positions of greater authority though there are often clear signs that the position granted is more a matter of appearance than substance. For example, there is a Pikean admiral, however she is assigned to the border fleet in a more or less insignificant stretch of U.C.S. controlled space out of the public view. High ranking members of the military and civilian governments, such as General Mari of the Joint- Chiefs, persist in the belief that the Pikeans aren't worth anything and tend to dismiss examples of competent and trustworthy Pikeans as either exceptions or else simply benefit from having their backs watched by their political allies. The so-called Pikean Civil War that occurred within the last twenty years only served to set back the quest for equality by several decades. Pikeans tend to stick to old-fashioned ways of speech and thought, making them better able to get along with the average communis human than the sapiens human.

In addition, there is the distinction between "dirtsiders" and "spacers" which may lead to another set of branching breeds and may actually have already done so. Given the generational ships that humans came to the galaxy on, it is possible that humanity as a whole has evolved to better handle space travel than modern day humanity on Earth currently is. Still, there are clearly humans who spend most, if not all, their lives in space and humans who likewise spend their lives on the ground. Currently, there is no species distinction for a spacer to a dirtsider, merely a cultural one, but it is feasible to expect that spacers could be a distinct breed of humanity after a few more generations.

SPACE IS VAST

Space is huge and this is something which the setting emphasizes repeatedly. The result is that it seems as if everything takes longer in space than it does on the ground. Where as it is possible to travel from one city to another half-way across the world in a day or less, it takes days or even weeks to travel from one system to another. A fight between two or more people can be over in seconds planetside, while a battle between cruisers and fighters can take hours in space. Searching a wilderness area for a lost traveler could take days but searching an area of nearly empty space could take months.

One of the major pieces of tech characteristic to the setting is the Gouldrive, an FTL drive pioneered by humans which is considered to be the primary means of travel for the space-faring species. The Gouldrive works by allowing the ship to move into a subspace where distances between locations can be traversed much easier. However, the transition from normal space to subspace is not swift. One new class of U.C.S. ship is capable of accelerating to lightspeed in around three hours, which is noted to be twice as fast as anything Sondak has except for an experimental attack ship. What this means is that going from sublight to lightspeed in around six hours is still considered fast at the current time. This is not the instantaneous jump to lightspeed that one finds in other settings, not by a longshot.

The vastness of space is further emphasized in the efforts to find scout ships that the U.C.S. had seeded around the Reckynop colony prior to their attack of it. The ships were originally sent to the system in the early part of the year with the Reckynop defense forces stumbling on one of them by accident within the next month. An effort to sweep the area for more such ships over the next few months results in Reckynop only finding about fourteen of the ships out of twenty by the time the battle was actually joined. This lengthy search time is brought up again when it takes another twelve ship days to search a system for where an ally's ship crash-landed onto an uninhabited planet.

This factor carries over into space-combat as well. Battles take place at ranges of several thousand kilometers. When a ship has to make corrections to put it back in line, it can take several minutes or even as long as an hour to shift around to the desired course, during which time they move further in the wrong direction. Even conflicts between small superiority fighters become a matter of frequent course corrections interspersed by moments of weapons fire. Space battles in the Double Spiral Galaxy typically last for days, even if everything goes perfectly for one side of the conflict. This is enough of a factor that having reinforcements a day out from the battle is still considered to be of tactical importance.

ALIENS ARE NOT HUMAN

This sounds like it is common sense, but in many settings the non-human species are comfortably within human norms in terms of behavior and appearance with the appearance of human-alien hybrids being relatively common. In the Double Spiral Galaxy, the non-human species are very visibly non-human and often have rather inhuman perspectives. There is some overlap in the ways of looking at things that allows for trade, but the fact remains that aliens are very strange to humans and the reverse is also true.

The Oinaise merchants are probably the closest to the humans in terms of ways of looking at life. They are huge beings with a long proboscis in place of a nose and many-jointed seven-fingered hands. They are merchants through and through, perceiving profit as one of the most important things in life. Most humans associate this perspective with greed and unethical attempts to make money whereas most Oinaise adhere to an ethical pattern of behavior meant to keep them looking trustworthy and thus someone who would get repeat business. They do not understand the concept of charity beyond the provision of aid in an emergency and find it strange that humanity finds virtue in helping people when there is neither obligation nor profit, believing that it only weakens the species in the long run. That said, they extend the idea of profit to abstract things that

humans consider unquantifiable. In addition, the Oinaise typically do not raise their own children, turning them over to professionals trained for that task. This is mostly because they do not have families the same way that humans do. There is no marriage and long term relationships are mostly built on business concerns. Children will contact their relatives as they grow older because they already have a way to make their introductions and relatives will accept the contact because it gives them another asset. To humans it might seem cold, but it is what is natural to the Oinaise.

The Castorians look like giant crabs. They are wider than they are tall with both agile manipulators and claw like pincers. They are friendly and charismatic in behavior, perceiving the meaning of life to be found in the facing of adversity with a community. They also find nothing wrong with the devouring of other sentient creatures. Given the human perspective on cannibalism, they are treated with caution. By and large the Castorians are honest about their desires, being confused as to why other species don't consider it a compliment when told that they look delicious. The truth is that the Castorians don't grab people to eat them; they wouldn't be successful merchants if they did stuff like that in general. It does happen, however, and people of the other species tend to be "offended" when the Castorian authorities act as if it is an understandable, if rude, lapse in control as adverse as an outright sin. The friendliness of the Castorians doesn't mesh with the truth and rumors of their cannibalism and eventually cause people to forget the tales until the Castorians do or say something that bring it back to the forefront. Like humans, the Castorians care for their own offspring, with the devouring of one's own children being the absolute worst crime in their society.

The Cloiseans look like a cross between a lizard, a salamander and a snake. They tend toward monogamy, but are occasionally unfaithful, similar to humans. They appoint leaders to make decisions for them, but they don't run elections save in emergencies. Usually, the prior holder of a position appoints a successor, or suggests a successor if there is someone in a superior position. Most of the time, the successor is not someone who sought the position for themselves. Unlike humans, but like the Oinaise, they don't have any particular emotional connection to their own children. Unlike the Oinaise, they don't particularly care about the life

and death of their children, either. The females frequently lay large groups of eggs and most of the resultant children fail to live out the year and the Cloiseans don't care. Humans have the least tolerance for this isolated species due to an instinctual fear reaction that the Cloiseans provoke. In addition, the Cloiseans have a physical dependence on another species that humans and other species might associate with a sexual relationship, which would be disturbing to humans or others if it was commonly known.

THE SONDAK CONFEDERACY

When mapping the belly of Caveness Galaxy, someone with an odd sense of humor had looked at the long string of stars that formed its internal arm and named it the Great Sperm. Eight thousand parsecs behind the head of the Great Sperm lay Biery, the first settled star system. In the middle of its tail lay Nordeen, the capital planet of Sondak.

Nordeen was the first major colony of humans in the Caveness Galaxy and it served as the kick-off point for the birth of interstellar trade when the Gouldrive was first put into use. As such, Nordeen became the kick off point for the Great Expansionist Movement. With interstellar travel now practical, it became possible for colonies in different star systems to establish formal connections. Between that and encounters with an increasing number of alien species, it was inevitable that the humans would close ranks with each other.

The Sondak Confederacy started as a loose federation of fifty-eight sparsely inhabited planetary systems. In addition to Biery and Nordeen, there was the significant addition of the colony which had been founded by the passengers of the starship Mensch, though the residents demanded to be recognized as a separate species as part of the price for inclusion. This made the Sondak Confederacy easily the most powerful political entity in the galaxy because none of the other races seemed to have moved much further than their own planets.

Now that they were acting as a unit, the Sondak allied systems could negotiate more aggressively with some of the other powers, such as the planet Cloise, who could no longer set the price for their methane in the face of multiple competing colonies. Now, instead of charging a premium from competing colonies for the rights