

Serpent's Reach

Game Rules

- The game will be run in metric. American players, get over it.
- Mechanic is Blue Planet V2, with some alterations and omissions. CJ's universe does not have Cats, Silvas, or uplifted cetacea. Don't bother asking.
- Campaign takes place ten years after the Council Massacre, news of which reached the Outside.
- Campaign takes place during the Mri-Regul Wars. Humanity has just learned that the Mri have three castes, only one of which are warriors, so that two thirds of the people in their encampments were unarmed civilians. Horrified, Alliance has turned its weaponry directly against the regul, and is working on how to retake Haven without causing civilian casualties.
- Between the Regul Wars, Union's long history of dumping problems on Alliance (everyone looks at the Gehennan), and Earth having apparently gotten involved with a confederation of nonhuman species just in time to ride the coat tails of a change in power, Alliance is understandably nervous about securing lines of supply for medications that we've all become so very dependent upon. We really need this mission to succeed, or people in power will get desperate and do stupid, reckless things. You know how that goes. If your request is within reason, it will be granted. See later notes about Equipment.

Players

Understand that you are plausibly deniable assets. You will be going in under your own identities, people with a reputation for taking considerable risks in search of very large paydays. You are there because there is a retirement fund level commission to be made if the contract gets signed, and you are greedy. The best lie is the one that is closest to the truth. If anyone looks into you, they will find that you have done perhaps some questionable things, and taken together you are an interesting mix, but Garvey Trading is risking quite a lot on a single throw of the dice. It is reasonable that they hedge the bet to the extent they can, partly by hiring avaricious professionals who themselves have much to gain from a successful trade mission.

All that said, the Reach government will assume that you are spies. They assume that everyone we send is a spy. They are not entirely wrong.

Character Build

Species

Characters can be Baseline Human, Modi, or Transhuman. As previously noted, there are no Cats, Silvas, Aquaforms, or Cetacea in this universe.

Gender and plumbing are matters of personal choice. Body sculpting is considered an aesthetic decision, and accorded no more significance than a change of hairstyle. As such, and as a body sculpt is

not an enhancement, a Baseline Human who gets a sculpt is still considered a Baseline Human for social and game mechanic purposes. Pronouns are adjusted in comp at the end of the sculpting session, and everyone gets on with their lives. For character build purposes, a body sculpt has zero cost, is written into the character's backstory, and has no mechanical effects.

Transhumans, having been gene sculpted before birth for biological enhancement, are from wealthy backgrounds with considerable access to resources. (They may or may not still have that access, see the idea of the Remittance Man.) They suffer a mild social penalty in Alliance space, as they're a little too close to what Reseune does at Cyteen, making custom humans they call azi. More about those in the briefing. Given that the Reach was originally Union, and retains much of Union culture, transhumans may find sympathy among Reach citizens.

Origins

- Replace Earth Culture with Alliance Culture except as noted.
- Replace GEO Culture with Incorporate Culture.

Allowed	Denied
Earth Orbit (renamed as Stationer)	Colonial Pioneer
Earth Orbit (renamed as Spacer, replace Incorporate Culture with Spacer Culture)	Colonial Urban
GEO (renamed as Alliance Gov)	Free Zone - Enclave
Incorporate	Free Zone - Wasteland*
Mars Colony (renamed as Colonial)	Luna
Urban	Native

*The Gehennan character uses this Origin package, and replaces Earth Culture with Gehenna Culture

Backgrounds

- Colonial and Native are not available.
- Replace Earth Culture with Alliance Culture.
- Replace GEO Culture with Incorporate Culture or Space Culture as the player decides.

Special Origins

- The Gehennan gets the Free Zone – Wasteland Origin, as noted above, and cannot take an Aptitude in Tech. Their grey will be an NPC, and will mostly reside aboard the ship. Bringing the grey onto a station, or down to a planet, will be a Very Big Deal.

- A Mri character possibility would use the Free Zone – Enclave Origin, replacing Earth Culture with Mri Culture, then taking the Space Background and Military Specialist Professional packages, their presence being explained as the sole survivor of a khemys, who agreed to hire on with the humans on condition that they were sent as far from the regul as possible. Other Mri options may exist but would similarly require custom build and justification in the backstory.
- A Union-origin character can only be present as a mole, with a convincing cover story. Their ultimate mission will be to route anything brought back to Union instead of Alliance. They will have a one-time means of contacting Union and asking for extraction / capture of the players' ship / whatever.
- For regular military, they were offered a chance at special duty that came with a large pay bonus, and the opportunity for either serious promotion or early mustering out.

Professional Packages

- Characters should choose the Specialist packages.
- Replace Earth Culture with Alliance Culture.
- Replace GEO Culture with Incorporate Culture or Space Culture as the player decides.
- Aquatics may be replaced with any other Athletics skill.

Roles / Character Type Packages

Administrator	Frontier	Incorporate Security	Private Investigator
Artist	Organized Crime	Intelligence Agent	Scholar
Civilian Pilot	Alliance Marshal	Journalist	Scientist
Doctor	Alliance Patrol	Medic	Spacer
Ecoterrorist	Alliance Peacekeeper	Mercenary	Technician
Freebooter	Alliance Shock Trooper	Miner / Asteroid Miner	Trader

Players are of course not limited to these.

Power Level

Characters are Exceptional, and get 30 ChIPs accordingly.

Do not be concerned with equipment, unless there is a specific piece of kit you need for character backstory reasons. You will be kitted out by AlSec after your briefing, when you know what you're walking into. There will also be opportunities for deepstudy skill gain (spending ChIPs accordingly), although there is no tape available for the Reach. The briefing will provide what we know of the Reach, which isn't much, which is why you're going in.

Pay

Base pay is 100k credits, half in advance.

Mission Completion Bonuses

- Exfiltrate rejuv manufacturing process: 100k cs
- Exfiltrate immunocorrector manufacturing process: 50k cs
- Source data on majat, Kontrin, political situation, &c at judgment of AlSec, and based on completeness and novelty. Range is set to 10k – 200k cs.
- The Reach is unusually high in human compatible worlds, having 9 that AlSec knows of. Does the Reach have advanced planetforming technology, or were they just lucky? Range of 10k – 200k cs, again based on completeness and novelty.
- Bonus may be exchangeable for specific items of equal value, on a case by case basis.

Penalty

- 50% overall if exfiltration is loud / cover is blown.

Ship

Tango's Payday was an independent freighter under Alliance registry. Half of the Delaquinta Family died when the shielding on a hot cargo failed. The survivors sold off the ship and merged with the Rodriguez Family of *Lux Nuovo*. Garvey Trading, chartered on Pell, bought the ship and recommissioned her. Some of the ship's mass has been removed, partly in the form of crew facilities and support systems not needed with the substantial reduction in crew size, resulting in a ship that gets better delta-V from its engines, and thus faster climb rates for system exit, better fuel economy at shipping-lane speeds, and longer jumps possible, although dark points cannot safely be used for such, as they may not have enough mass to pull the ship out.

What is not publicly known is that Garvey Trading is an AlSec front operation.

Understand that the job of the crew is to get the ship back to Pell. If you are aboard, that is all well and good, but if you are not, our first assumption is going to be that your absence is due to your own action.

Crew

- Ser Gim Allon, mainday captain
- Sera Salu Digby, alterday captain
- Sero Brin Londo, mainday pilot
- Ser Tenzil Kim, alterday pilot

- Ser Jord Delehanty, mainday longscan tech
- Sero Jan Arrah, alterday longscan tech
- Sera Fiella Suchkul, mainday navigation
- Sera Ayla Ranz, alterday navigation
- Ser Lar Gand, mainday engineer
- Sera Tasmia Mallor, alterday engineer
- Sera Condo Arlik, med tech
- Ser Brek Bannin, cargo and weapons tech

Jump Drive

Jump involves climbing out of the local gravity well far enough to launch the ship into jumpspace, aimed at a gravity well big enough to yank the ship back out into realspace. Miss your shot and who knows where you'll end up.

The climb out of the gravity well, in a controlled system to the zenith of the ecliptic, the designated departure point, is the longest part of any trip, and can take days or weeks depending on your starting point. Stations with no associated planets are usually well out from the system primary, so that the climb is easier than that from the Goldilocks zone habitable worlds. Coming in, at system nadir in a controlled system, your biggest concern is slowing down, as the ship emerges from jumpspace at .75c, and must cycle its vanes to dump velocity into the interface between manifolds. Braking is a rough and unpleasant procedure. A ship that loses a vane during braking is doomed, moving far too fast for a rescue mission to intercept them.

Once down to acceptable velocity, the ship follows a designated approach lane to the station, which generally is a matter of hours. Docking begins with cycles of braking, requiring the take-hold alert to be sounded. The docking and airlock crews take their positions as the ship maneuvers into position. Nothing is left to human judgment when docking a starship. Everything is measured by triply redundant systems, each bump on an attitude jet calculated by three systems with a majority vote. Once the bangs and bumps stop, and the lights go green, the crews secure the ship's connection to station, verify the service umbilicals, test the airlock connections, and set the ship up for business.

Humans manage jumpspace, a continuum with different physical laws than our own, with trank, a generic term for a tailored drug suite supplied to each person on board in a carefully identified patch. Failure to apply your patch, or removal before the all clear is sounded, absolves the ship of all responsibility for your physical and mental well being. There are urban legends of people who have learned to manage jump without trank, but you've never found anything that could be substantiated. What can be readily documented are cases where people's trank wore off in jump. Some of them eventually recovered, usually after Adjustment. Thankfully, the apparent transit time in jumpspace is

brief, the length of an unpleasantly disorienting amusement park ride, although time dilation can occur, causing the ship to exit objective days, weeks, and in a few cases months, after the initial leap.

Jump travel is at its foundation a cycle familiar to anyone who has served in a military: long periods of crushing boredom punctuated by moments of terrifying stress.

Backstory

The ship has been sent out on her first mission under her new owners, with a company crew, and a trade delegation. Garvey Trading is looking to cash in on the lucrative market in Majat goods, by running a company-owned long-distance freighter from the Reach all the way back to Pell.

Yes, the finances of this look preposterous. Even running a dedicated long-haul, the distance and fuel / supply costs would raise the price of the goods to prohibitive levels. But, the delegation is getting paid quite a lot to open the negotiations, establish contacts, and get an export contract into place. What happens on the back end is not their problem.

Preparation

The characters have the opportunity to go through an AlSec combat training course, and face simulated majat (remotely piloted drones) in one or all of three courses, station, city, and wildlands. The environments are all replicas of Istra. Doing the course gives a buff, or reduction of a debuff, in each environment, and removes the debuff for the first encounter with majat.

Equipment will be provided within reason. AlSec wants this mission to succeed. They're not throwing the players in unprepared in any way, to the limit of the budget, deniability, and available information.

Briefing

The characters gather around a ring of holographic projectors set into the floor. The display is spherical, but the trivid is full color and high resolution, none of that grainy laser projection garbage.

Game world – background of Alliance and Union, and why nobody cares about Earth

“HYDRI REACH: CLASSIFIED: Apply XenBureau for Information.”

—Encyclopaedia Xenologica

“HYDRI STARS: quarantined region. For applicable regulations, consult Cor. Jur. Hum. XXXVII 91.2. Native species of alpha Hydri III include at least one sapient species, majat, first contacted by probe Celia in 2223. Successful contact with majat was not made until Delia probe followed in 2229, and majat space was eventually opened to very limited contact under terms of the Hydri Treaty of 2235, with a single designated trade point at the station of beta Hydri II, locally called Istra.

Presenter: What they're not telling you here is that the Celia delegation was eaten. Majat learn by chemistry. They gained human speech and a basic understanding of our standard language, and were ready to talk when Delia arrived. Details of the Treaty and of how Union screwed the majat below.

“The entire region is under internal regulation, assumed to be a majat-human co-operation, and it is thus excluded from Alliance law. Alliance citizens are cautioned that treaties do not extend to protection of Alliance citizens or property in violation of quarantined space, and that Alliance law prohibits the passage of any ship, or person, alien or human, from said zone of quarantine into Alliance space, with the exception of licensed commerce up to the permitted contact point at Istra, by carefully monitored lanes. The Alliance will use extreme force to prevent any such intrusion into or out of quarantine. For specific regulations of import and export, consult ATR 189.9 and supplements. The nature of the internal government is entirely a matter of speculation, but it is supposed on some evidence that the seat of government is alpha Hydri III, locally called Cerdin, and that this government has remained relatively stable during the several centuries of its establishment...

Presenter: We covered this elsewhere in the briefing. The last sentence there is purest bullshit, as you already know, and one of the reasons you're going in. Next slide.

“Majat are reported to have rejected emphatically all human contact except the trading company initially introduced by Delia probe. The Kontrin company is currently assumed to be the government of the human inhabitants. Population of the mission was originally augmented by importation of human ova, and external observation indicates that colonization has been effected on several worlds other than Cerdin and Istra within the quarantine zone.

The majat said they would accept a single hive. The Kontrin Company presented themselves as a unified organization. What they didn't tell the majat was how many humans were actually in that ship. They arrived with a Reseune-level birthlab facility aboard, and Union only knows how many ova ready to hatch out. Union wasn't going anywhere without their azi.

“Principal exports are: biocomp softwares, medical preparations, fibers, and the substance known as lifejewels, all of which are unique to the zone and of moat manufacture; principal imports are metals, luxury foodstuffs, construction machinery, electronics, art objects.”

Presenter: Medical preparations is an innocuous phrase for “better rejuv than Cyteen is making”. Before the majat, rejuv was effective for an average of four doses, and good for about 20 years per dose. Majat rejuv is effective for an average of five doses, and good for about 30 years per dose. Do the math. Oh yes, there's other medications they produce that we simply cannot duplicate, and some of those do amazing things, but the rejuv is the big-money item. Majat silk is a high priced luxury item. Lifejewels are part of majat chitin, and are harvested from the shed carapace when they molt.

—XenBureau Eph. Xen. 2301

“MAJAT: all information classified.”

—XenBureau Eph. Xen. 2301

“The fact is...we've become dependent. We can't get the materials elsewhere. We can't duplicate them.”

—report, EconBureau, classified.

“Advise you take whatever opportunities exist to establish onworld observation at Istra, even to clandestine operations. Accurate information is of utmost importance.”

—classified document, AlSec

The Union practices slavery. There's no getting round this. They call them azi, and they're cloned humans produced in factories, raised in isolation and taught by tape. Azi are effectively autistic, and are vulnerable to overstimulation from unfamiliar circumstances. Their first response is to freeze and await instructions. They may suffer motor dyskinesia, confusion, or panic. Azi are trained for very specific functions, and are treated as being not much of a step up from robots. Union regards them as expensive assets, and does have processes and laws in place to protect them, but Union is protecting property, not people. An azi who asks to see their counselor is moved to a quiet space and left alone, although watched, until the counselor arrives. Azi become clumsy when overwhelmed, due to motor confusion. Reduce the amount of novelty in their environment and they will generally recover.

They die at the age of 40, due to preprogrammed biological failure. All azi know this, but have been tape conditioned to accept it. Yes, azis come with a manual that tells you how their minds are put together. Above all else, they are loyal to their current contract holder. It's conditioned into them practically from decanting.

Serpent's Reach was colonized by a Union expedition. There are azi production facilities on all inhabited Reach planets. You will be dealing with azi at Istra. If you get past Istra, your ability to deal with azi as a part of everyday life will be vital to your cover.

An instructor who has been to Istra, and encountered majat first hand, will present a series of trivids, and answer whatever questions the players may have. The instructor notes that small arms only annoy majat, and that your best bet is a sniper rifle with HEAP ammo, aiming for the third cervical ring. It's an aimed shot, with appropriate game mechanics, but if it hits, there's no damage roll, it's an instant kill.

The characters are shown a vid of a majat charge. It's like seeing a zerg rush. A human stands his ground, and fires an SMG on full auto. A Warrior, 9m of iridescent nightmare, charges into the fire, scoops the man up, and snips his head off with its mandibles. There's a huge spray of blood, and then the majat goes down, its thorax ripped open by the SMG fire. Two more Warriors rush by, going after targets off camera. The instructor notes that one for one is not a good trade with majat. Crunch all you want, they'll hatch more.

If a majat bites you, you're done. You'd have about three seconds to inject a hypo the size of my forearm just to have a chance at survival. Now, your Caliban, there, he's got enough body mass, he might be able to hold out long enough to actually pull it off, and to him, the injector is an epipen. What we're going to do is fit his harness with an auto injector that he'll be able to trigger. It'll hold one dose, and fire it straight into his major cardiac artery for optimal distribution. No guarantees it's gonna work, but better to try than not. If it does work, there'll be a couple more doses aboard the ship. Three is all we can swing without someone noticing the weird biologicals.

The majat have their own azis. They buy them from the factory at 12 instead of the usual 188, and raise them in the hive. Do not expect these azi to act like humans. They will act like majat workers, having accepted and assimilated into the culture and environment they were brought into.

You initially have one contact in ISPAK, in Majat Goods Export Licensing, and two contacts in ITAK, a married couple who hold positions as contract handlers. Who else you make contact with is your own lookout.

Do not try to be social with station personnel. Do be social with planetsiders. Go to dinner with the ITAK reps. They will see this as the normal course of discussing business. Do not offer to buy lunch for the ISPAK person. They will see it as an attempt at bribery.

Majat

Life expectancy 18 years, longer for queens, but the hives are immortal, and can remember back to when they gained intelligence

Majat smell like old paper

Ant-like general build, with head, cervical ring, thorax, abdomen. Six limbs, lower four are used as legs and upper 2 as hands, although locomotion on all fours is possible and increases speed. Two compound eyes, seeing in the red and infrared range. Mandibles, chelae, palps, as you would expect.

Venom:

Lethal Neurotoxin

Onset Time: 5 seconds

Duration: 24 hours

Damage Rating: By caste and attack type, which determines dosage delivered

Worker

Workers are about a head taller than humans.

Stat Base Score

Build	2
Fitness	2
Agility	1
Dexterity	0
Awareness	1
Intellect	-1
Presence	-2
Will	2

Endurance	1
Reflexes	0
Strength	+1
Toughness	1

Venom: Bite 5, Wound 3

Forager

Foragers, like Workers are about a head taller than humans. They are of a slimmer, faster build, more suited to fast travel over distance, where a Worker is built for steady labor in place.

Stat Base Score

Build	1
Fitness	2
Agility	2
Dexterity	0
Awareness	2
Intellect	0
Presence	-2
Will	2
Endurance	2
Reflexes	0
Strength	+1
Toughness	1

Venom: Bite 5, Wound 3

Drone

Drones have the function to Remember, and bring up memories for the Queen as needed. Drones stand an average of 2.5 meters high, but rarely position themselves fully upright.

Stat Base Score

Build	1
Fitness	0

Agility	0
Dexterity	1
Awareness	2
Intellect	2
Presence	0
Will	2
Endurance	0
Reflexes	0
Strength	+1
Toughness	1

Venom: Bite 6, Wound 4

Warrior

3m tall, half again as tall as a human. Warriors are the most independent of units, able to reason through complex circumstances to carry out their missions, and given some latitude of judgment.

It hunched down, an assemblage of projecting points and leathery limbs, in the latticed play of sun and shade...a Warrior, and not to be approached.

Stat Base Score

Build	4
Fitness	4
Agility	3
Dexterity	-1
Awareness	2
Intellect	2
Presence	1
Will	3
Endurance	4
Reflexes	2
Strength	+3

Venom: Bite 8, Wound 5

Queen

She filled the Chamber. Raen hung in the grip of the Workers, awed by the sight of Her, whose presence dominated the hive, whose mind was the centre of the Mind. She was the one, if there was any single individual in the hive, with whom they of Kethiuy had so long dealt...the legends of all her childhood, living and surrounded by the seething mass of Her Drones, a scene of fever-dreams, males glittering with the chitinous wealth of the hive.

More air sighed into Mother's reservoirs. "Since before humans were known, blue-hive has held this hill. Humans came, We majat killed the first. Then we understood. We understood stars and machines and humans. One Family at last we permitted, all, all, red-hive, blue, green, gold...one human ship to come among us, one human hive. One ship, which brought the eggs of other humans. We were deceived so. Yet we accepted this. We permit Kontrin-hive to trade and breed and build, instead of all other humans. We permit Kontrin-hive to keep order, and to keep all other humans out. So we have grown, majat hives and Kontrin. We have gained metals, and azi, and consciousness of things invisible; we have enlarged our hives and sent out new queens beneath other suns. Azi work for us with their human eyes and their human hands, and trade gives us food, much food. We can support more numbers than was so in many cycles. We have ridden Kontrin ships to Meron and to Andra and Kalind and Istra, making new extensions of the Mind. We have been pleased in this exchange. We have gained awareness far surpassing times before humans. Your hives have multiplied and prospered, and increased nourishment for ours. But suddenly you fragment yourselves, and now you fragment us. Suddenly there is division. Suddenly there is nest-war among humans; this has been before: we have seen. But now there is nest-war threatened among majat as it has not been since times before humans. We are confused. We reach out to gather the Mind and we have grown too wide; the worlds are too far and the ships are too slow to help us. We do not gain synthesis. We failed to foresee, and now we are blind. Aid me, Kethiuy-hive. Why are these things happening? What will happen now?"

Workers are about a head taller than humans.

Stat Base Score

Build	6
Fitness	7
Agility	-2
Dexterity	1
Awareness	4
Intellect	5
Presence	5
Will	6

Endurance	4
Reflexes	0
Strength	+3
Toughness	6

Venom: Bite 13, Wound 12

Houses and People

27 houses, 58 septs at the start, before Sul sept is massacred.

Meth-maren

blue

Sul

formerly of Kethiuy, now one survivor, Raen a Sul hant Meth-maren.
Blue with a white border.

Ruil (defunct)

blue with a black border. Massacred in the Revenge at Kethiuy.

Thon

red striped with green
primary Hive contact on Cerdin

Yalt

white with yellow

Hald

black circled in red
Ros Hald

Ren

Pol a Ren hant Hald

Ilit

Primary banker on Meron

Norn

Hal a Norn hant Ilit, betrayed Raen a Sul and died for it

Welz-Kaen

Malind

Ren-barant

Ys Ren-barant, killed in the Council Massacre
Arl Ren-barant

Tern

Eft

Moth

Delt

Helim

Thel

Once allies of the Ruil, and of the Red rebellion on Cerdin

Eron Thel, killed in the Council massacre

Stars and Worlds

Alpha Hydri

Alpha Hydri III (Cerdin)

Majat homeworld

Kethiuy: former holding of the Meth-maren House, destroyed in the Red Raids
Station is described as “cosmopolitan grandeur”

Humans require sunsuits with visors for protection from solar radiation

Beta Hydri

Beta Hydri II (Istra)

Humans require sunsuits with visors for protection from solar radiation

ITAK (Istran Trade Association, Kontrin-licensed) on world

- Ser Merek Eln, Sera Parn Kest – field agents
- Sera Hela Dain (relative of the ITAK president), Ser Elan Prosserty, vice presidents on the board
- Ser Enis Dain, president
- Sero Ren Milin, head of Agriculture
- Sera Rugo Tuld, senior envoy, Meron
- Alpais Legor
- Oda Nantes
-

Outsiders

- Ser Ab Tallen, senior trade delegate
- Sera Mara Chung, trade attache (intelligence analyst)
- Ser Ben Orrin, trade attache (military liaison)
- Emma Gozbert
- Lo Gers vind
-

ISPAK – station and power corporation

- Sero Cheldrik Fulred, Majat goods export licensing
- Guntram Amat
- Ingel Werin
- Gund Tassilo
-

Two major continents (East and West), two ports onworld (Newhope (E) and Newport (W)), a great deal of desert covering those two continents. The weather patterns of Istra bestowed rain in a serpentine belt, low on one continent and coastally on the other, storms breaking on an incredible mountain ridge which created wetlands coastward, and one of the most regrettable desolations of the Reach on the far side. The rainfall patterns never varied, not during all human occupancy. Such life as Istra supported before humans and majat came had never ascended to sapience...and such as dimly knew better had retreated from the vicinity of majat and humans both.

She had deepstudied Istra, and knew it with what information the tapes had to give. It was not populous. The onworld industry was agriculture, and that was sufficient for self-support: the Family had never thought it wise to turn its most prosperous face to the Outside, The world was merely support for the station, that was the real Istra: the agglomeration of docks and warehouses swinging in orbit about Istra was the largest man-made structure in the Reach, the channel for all trade which passed in and out.

Istra Station

This station wasted nothing on display, no expensive shielded viewports. It was all dark machinery and automata, bare joinings and cables and every service-point in sight and reach of hands. It was a trade-station, not for the delight of tourists, but for the businesslike reception of freight. Conveyers laced overhead; transport chutes and dark corridors led away into narrow confinements; azi moved here and there, drab, grey-clad men, unsmiling in their fixation on duty.

Newhope

Night-time city whisked past, lines of domes marching out into dark interstices of wild land, asterisk-city, mostly sealed or underground. The flavour of the air was coppery and unpleasant. The stormclouds boiled above them, frequent with lightnings, and a spattering of rain hit the windshields and windows, fragmenting the lights. Then they were underground again, locked into the subway track, whisking in behind a big public carrier. Raen hated these systems, this projectile-fashion passage through public areas; but it was, perhaps, the safest means of travel this night.

Newport

On West continent

Newhope and Newport were the two cities, Newport seeming a very small place indeed; and the town of Upcoast was the other major concentration of population, only an administrative and warehousing area for the northern estates. The rest of the population was dotted all over the map, in the rain belts, on farms and pumping stations and farms which served as depots on the lacery of unpaved roads. Over most of the land surface of Istra was nothing but blankness, designated Uninhabited. There was the spectacular upsurge of the High Range on East; and an extremely wide expanse of marsh southward on West, marked Hazard, which given the habit of Istran nomenclature, might be the name of the place as well as its character.

In the several pages of the atlas, three were city-maps, and they were all of the pattern of Newhope. The city was simplicity itself: an eight-armed star with business and residential circles dotted along its arms and with wedges between wistfully titled Park... Park doubtless being the ambition. Reality was outside, over the garden wall, a sun-baked tangle of weeds and native trees which could not have known human attention in centuries. Newhope must have had ambitions once, in the days of its birth... ambition, but no Kontrin presence to aid it: no relief from taxes, no Kontrin funds feeding back into its economy, for beautification, luxury, art.

Most of the building-circles were warehouses: the two arms of the city nearest the Port were entirely that. There were local factories, mostly locally consumed equipment for agriculture, light arms, clothing, food processing. There were services and their administrations; worker-apartments for the ordinary run of betas; mid-class apartments and some residential circles for the mid-class well-to-do; and one arm was all elite residence-circles, like circle 4, which this house occupied. The highest ITAK officials lodged in circle 1, the lowest in 10. And the guest house was second circle of the eighth arm: the Outsider-mission's residency, while ITAK officers were dead centre, zero-circle.

The Labour Registry was a maze of curving corridors, all white, all the same. Lifts designated sub-basements down to the fifth level; Raen recalled as many as twenty stories above ground, although the lifts in this area only went to the seventh: she recalled the overhang. They passed row on row of halls, a great deal of seemingly pointless walking with ser Itavvy in the lead. There were doors, neat letters: LIBRARY: COMP I: LEVEL I: RED CARDS ONLY.

Ser Wes Itavvy, on site senior manager
daughter Meris. wife Velin

Meron

Hald holdings at Ahl villon, the manor and surrounding city
Station: chrome and glitter

MIMAK – Meron Interstellar Mercantile Administration, Kontrin-licensed

- Ser Mund Balimber, Senior Envoy, Istra
- Sera Ruia Onulph, Senior Envoy, Andra
- Taur Bertrad
- Emmer Lambert
- Trudi Burchard
-

Andra

Silak

Kalind

Lush plant growth

Sitan

Orthan

Pedra

has no regular star lines
modest shipbuilding industry

Adjustment: Deliberate reprogramming of a person's mind for psychiatric / psychological reasons.

Done as a sentence in cases of violent acts where the alternative is life in high security managed care or execution, or with the patient's consent in cases of significant trauma. Someone who has been voluntarily Adjusted has the same counselor privilege as an Azi, in both Alliance and Union. This person has trauma in their background so terrible they needed medical help to blur the memories and ease the pain. Yes, they get a quiet place to wait until the counselor arrives.