

Master of the Galaxy

TALES OF THE SIXTH MILLENNIUM

ARES

IGROLOGY



Millions of years ago

The Yclopes travel between the stars, explore the whole galaxy, develop their technology to the highest possible level, grow consumed with ennui, and retreat to their underground tombs.

1st Millennium

Several races discover FTL technology and expand out across the galaxy. Inevitably, they clash. The Shabazi and their allies are victorious; they form the first Galactic Council and become masters of the galaxy.

The seething hives of the Myrmicoids are united under the control of a single Supreme Ruler, and attempt to conquer the galaxy. They are defeated, and the Myrmicoids homeworld is bombed from orbit. The Myrmicoids survive only in deep caves. A containment grid of automated satellites ensures that the Myrmicoids will never again achieve space travel.

2nd Millennium

The first Wanderer ships arrive in the Milky Way galaxy.

The Crystallides begin to expand into systems unclaimed by the Shabazi, and discover Yclopes ruins. Other races search for Yclopes technology. One race, the Venix, discover the Celestial Negator

and attempt to use it to destroy Shabaz. They succeed only in destabilizing the system's star. With the aid of Omok scientists, the Shabazi erect force-shields that protect their capital world even as the star becomes a red giant. The first Galactic Council collapses.

Humans launch a fleet of colony ships; only one survives, seeding the Zong civilisation.

3rd Millennium

95% of the Human homeworld is uninhabitable; Humans survive on their Martian and Jovian colonies.

The Zong cultivate their telepathic gifts and achieve the first group-mind.

The Estrel discover the primitive Roc civilization and identify the Rocs' innate talent for astronavigation and tactics. They recruit Rocs as pilots for their warships.

To 'protect' less-developed species from being exploited like the Roc, the Shabazi propose the establishment of a galaxy-wide Guardians Guild. Opponents argue that the Shabazi are just trying to prevent other civilizations from acquiring promising client races like the Rocs.

The Rocs turn on their Estreli masters, overthrowing them and conquering the Estreli colonies. The surviving Estreli quickly throw their support behind the Guild, and the Rocs are forced out to the galactic fringes by the Guild's warships.

The Omok vanish, leaving behind only a few mysterious hermits who prophesize that they shall return one day.

4th Millennium

The Yclopan Colossus is discovered within the event horizon of the Cygnus black hole. The Venix civilization exhausts itself trying to recover the relic; their economy in ruins and most of their starships torn apart by gravitational stresses, the Venix are easy prey for a Roc attack.

Humans acquire FTL technology from the Wanderers, and make first contact with the Shabazi. Humans become a Shabazi client race; the great Human mercenary Soto founds the mercenary army that still bears her name.

A human exploration ship "vanishes" when it enters the Centauri system. In fact, it's captured by the Zong; their group-minds apply their combined intelligence to reverse-engineering its FTL drive.

Human/Roc and Human/Crystallide wars rage through the galaxy, fought mostly on behalf of the Shabazi. The Humans discover another Yclopes weapons cache and turn on the Shabazi. A civil war ensues within the Terran sphere.

The Cybreds master FTL and expand out from their homeworld. The region of worlds sucked dry of resources by their rapacious expansion becomes known as the Cybred Wastes.

5th Millennium

The Omok return in a new shape, and urge peaceful trade, galactic unity and an end to war. Rumors swirl through the Galaxy that the Omok have secret arrangements with several mercenary races, and that their proposals for peaceful trade are a trick to lull the other races into vulnerability.

The orbital containment grid monitoring the Myrmicoid homeworld is sabotaged by unknown forces, and the Myrmicoids quickly reclaim the surface. Within a year, they have constructed a fleet of spacecraft and once again expand into the galaxy.

Scattered Humans reunite until a single government.

The Yclopes awaken across the galaxy.

6th Millennium

Now.

What history will you make? Which species will be the new Master of the Galaxy?



Crystallides

Most life in the Galaxy is carbon-based, but the Crystallides' biochemistry is primarily based on siliceous compounds. Their homeworld – and their preferred environment for colonies – is a hellish world, blisteringly hot and seething with acid storms and toxic clouds. There are few worlds they cannot settle, few obstacles they cannot slither over, their pseudopods secreting victory-acids in glee as they triumph once more. They communicate primarily through subsonic vibrations and chemical signaling; their eyes are cybernetic implants used only by spacefaring Crystallides, as their home environments are too hot and dark for vision to be of much use. Their digestive and respiratory systems are supremely efficient and adaptable; Crystallides can get all the oxygen and moisture they need by extracting trace amounts from the rocks they eat. They reproduce using seed crystals that they scatter over “birthing zones” of silicon-rich minerals.

Crystallides are so different from other species that they have difficulty even recognizing them

as fellow sentients. Their term for humans, for example, roughly translates as “squeaky-wet-red-cloud-fuzz”; carbon-based species are so fragile and ephemeral that Crystallides think of them more as transient weather patterns than other living beings. (In first contact with the Shabazi, the Crystallides assumed the metal vehicles were the actual Shabazi, and the operators were just whimsical decorations and hood ornaments.)

Crystallides' lack of empathy for other species means they have no compunction about conquest. They sing subsonic songs of belligerence as they slither around, reminding one another of their impending victory over other, softer species. They intend to dominate the galaxy, to consume world after world until all the universe resonates in triumph!



A parallel, lonely existence to the other actors in the galaxy. They would be tragic if they weren't so problematic. – Sheikh Tushman, Shabazi Strategic Poet



HIGH MINERAL CONTENT DETECTED: DEPLOYING EXTRACTION AND REPROCESSING MACHINERY.
– Righiby-Alpha-74, Cybred Scout.

Cybrids

Many places in the Galaxy have seen the development of intelligent marine beings. Even Earth itself saw the evolution of several such species (most of them, sadly, extinct by the time Mankind overcame the ecological collapse). However, few of them were able to master interstellar travel, because the challenge of developing metallurgy in the submarine world proved an almost insurmountable challenge.

Cybrids are one of those rare exceptions. Due to the discovery of a crashed alien ship millennia ago (probably a Shabazi vessel), early in the development of their culture, Cybrids quickly established their own technological and industrial base in the depths of the ocean. They expanded to the dry land by constructing cybernetic shells for themselves.

Today, Cybrids are fitted with their first shell immediately after birth, and these shells have become astoundingly advanced devices, incorporating artificial intelligence and life-support systems. Cybrid culture and technology is built

around these shells – Cybrids link their shells into their vehicles, ships and stations, becoming one with the systems around them.

In comparison to the other species of the galaxy, Cybrids are primitive. They've taken an evolutionary and technological short-cut, bypassing millions of years in a few thousand, going from aquatic hunter-gatherers to space-faring cyborgs in an eyeblink.

As a result, the Cybrids have little interest or capacity for the development of their own culture or science; instead, they prefer to conquer or steal innovations from other species and add them to their own repertoire. The other species may dismiss the Cybrids as a dangerous child race, but the Cybrids have the savage energy and determination of youth on their side, and they have expanded faster than any other species except perhaps the Myrmicoids.



We applaud when a young species discovers the greater cosmos. Let us welcome you into the galactic community. We shall be friends!

– Sheikh Tushman, Shabazi Strategic Poet



WET-MESS IN METAL, DULL-SWARM IN PROFUSION, OUT OF FLUID DEATH. A SORROWING HAIL TO BE ENDURED.

– The One Who Moves With The Grace Of Mountains, Crystallide Worldshaper

Humans

Humans pride themselves on their resilience and adaptability; other species marvel that Humans are not yet extinct. No other civilization in the galaxy has come close to destruction so many times, usually self-inflicted, and survived. Humans poisoned their own homeworld early during their time as a technological species, but were able to establish off-world colonies on other planets in the Sol system (as well as the Centauri colony that originated the Zong civilization). They purchased FTL technology from the Wanderers and jumped out into the galaxy – and soon became a client race of the Shabazi.

For centuries, Humans were employed as mercenaries and laborers by the Shabazi. The Human civilization – then called the Terran Sphere – prospered under this arrangement, and Earth was restored to health – and then the Humans discovered a cache of ancient Yclopes super-weapons and attempted to rebel. The Shabazi were able to turn the Human rebellion into a civil war between factions within the Terran Sphere.

Different factions turned their elder superweapons on one another, and Humanity blasted itself into near-extinction and irrelevance.

Most species who suffer such devastation never recover. The only comparable case is that of the Myrmicoids, and they took thousands of years to rebuild their strength. Somehow, within a few generations of that catastrophic war, Humans had not only survived but had spread all over the galaxy, leaving their burnt colony worlds behind and exploring new systems. They are everywhere, from the Omok embassy-worlds to the Cybred wastes, hitching rides on Wanderer trade caravans and Shabazi liners.

Twice, Humans have reached for the future and nearly destroyed themselves in the attempt. Now, they have a third chance to claim their destiny. Will the Sixth Millennium finally be the era when Humanity takes its place as one of the dominant species in the galaxy?



It's called evolution. They should try it some time.
– Finas Galis, Speaker of the Southern District Strategic Collective Intellect of the Zong



WE DELIGHT IN ALL WORLDS, BUT REQUIRE CONSTANCY OF SOUL. THAT WET-MESS PERISHES EASILY –WARM-DEATH, COLD-DEATH, LIGHT-DEATH, VOID-DEATH – BUT NEEDS NO FIXTURE OF MIND. IT IS... UNSETTLING.
– The One Who Moves With The Grace Of Mountains, Crystallide Worldshaper

Myrmicoids

It is a matter of debate whether the Myrmicoid population of the galaxy is numbered in the trillions, or in the thousands – or just one.

Individual Myrmicoids are insects of wildly varying size and shape despite their identical genetics.

A Myrmicoid hiveship might be crewed by thousands of tiny maintenance-bugs, born to scuttle through the access shafts, along with a handful of hulking warrior-caste commandoes, a few spindly, twitching pilot-bugs, and sometimes a few humanoid diplomats. This hyper-specialization, coupled with complete disregard for the lives of individual Myrmicoids, makes the species incredibly efficient and productive. Surprisingly, although Myrmicoids are callous and uncaring towards their own kind, they are capable of being friendly and even charming towards individuals from other species. Myrmicoids can breed diplomats and artists as easily as they make technicians and warriors.

All the Myrmicoids in the crew are born from the same pulsing egg-sacs, but chemical signals dictate their growth and development. Every Myrmicoid is designed for a specific purpose in the

collective. Their instincts are preprogrammed. A Myrmicoid technician hatches with a comprehensive knowledge of the ship's systems; any of the billion slumbering eggs on a Myrmicoid ship could hatch to be a Worker, or a Warrior, or a Scientist – or a Ruler.

At the head of each Myrmicoid hive is a Ruler, a hyper-intelligent commander. The Ruler communicates with its subordinates through a combination of chemical signals and telepathy, guiding their actions. Outside of a Ruler's control, Myrmicoids default to the instincts of their caste. Every colony and starship has its Ruler. The Rulers are not immortal, but when one is about to perish, it imprints its memories and personality onto an egg; that egg then hatches into a larval Ruler.

On the Myrmicoid homeworld – beyond the ring of scrap metal that used to be a constellation of heavily armed containment battle-satellites, installed by the rest of the galaxy to keep the Myrmicoids confined – is the fabled Supreme Ruler, who telepathically controls the other Rulers across the galaxy. Are the Myrmicoids a species, or a vast individual life-form that adapts its own macro-cells to serve its goal of universal conquest?



I fear this galaxy is not large enough to encompass us and them.
– Captain Nemo Ano of the Wanderers.



EFFICIENT. ADMIRABLE. ANNIHILATE!
– Righiby-Alpha-74, Cybred Scout.

Omok

Little is known about the Omok with any certainty. The verifiable facts are these: they are a highly advanced civilization with many great scientific achievements. They are not usually warlike, preferring to trade or use their advanced technology to bypass any obstacles. Their homeworld is not in any known part of the galaxy, but they maintain several “embassy planets” linked to this distant homeworld with interdimensional gates.

Everything else is possibly a lie. Take their homeworld – the Omok have, at times, claimed that their homeworld is hidden among the super-dense stars of the galactic core, in the starless depths between the galaxies, was completely transformed into computronium to calculate the meaning of life, exists only in a higher dimension, or that they mislaid it in an experiment with teleportation and they don’t actually know where it is. Similarly, their physical appearance is bizarrely variable. At the moment, all the Omok in the galaxy are humanoid rodents with sharp teeth and furry bodies, but at times, there have been Omok who were shining octopi made of light, towering rock monsters,

and robotic machines. Are the Omok a coalition of species? Do they change their physical form according to some mysterious species-wide fashion craze? Are all these Omok variants just masks for their true form?

With their high technology, the Omok could be key players in the galactic economy, but they are cryptic and unreliable. Sometimes, the Omok are everywhere, trading their high-tech wonders in every Space Exchange; at other times, they withdraw and cannot be found for decades, except for a few isolated outposts and temples. The other species find the behavior of the Omok frustrating, but fear that there must be a plan behind it. The Omok are geniuses, so there must be a logical reason behind their pranks and weird behavior.

One more thing can be said with certainty: those who study the Omok too deeply always go insane.



*Skree! At least with the Shabazi I know they're lying!
At least with the Shabazi I know whose eyes I'm eating!*
– Pulci Neilo, Roc Warflyer



The Omok at the market sold me a plasma pistol, a force-armor belt, and a crystal egg that contained the essential realization of the futility of conflict. Do you want to buy an egg?
– Wukuma Jikh, Human Mercenary

Rocs

The aggressive expansionist Rocs are newcomers on the galactic stage. They have a talent for spotting vulnerable prey, and destroyed several minor civilizations while staying beneath the notice of more powerful foes like the Shabazi or Omok. Now, bolstered by their new colonies and salvaged technology, the Rocs are ready for the next challenge.

Rocs are the best pilots in the galaxy; their avian origins give them an instinctive understanding of positioning and tactics that equals the best battle-computers of other species. Roc mercenaries and pilots are often hired by the Shabazi and Cybreds; Roc traders specialize in dodging pirates and government blockades alike. Their society is controlled by the military; their Council of Warlords commands the Roc civilization.

The Rocs have the shortest lifespan of any of the major species in the galaxy; they are full-grown after seven years, and rarely live past thirty under natural conditions. Roc scientists have developed

a serum that prolongs their lifespan, but this longevity drug is tightly controlled by the Council of Warlords, and is given as a reward to successful warriors and conquerors. Most Rocs fight as though they have nothing to lose, because if they retreat, they may be cut off from their serum allocation and perish of old age anyway. No wonder, then, that the battle cry of a Roc invasion force is the sound that the inhabitants of most fringe worlds fear hearing above all else. Every civilization in the galaxy knows that the Rocs are out there, circling like birds of prey, waiting for one of them to show weakness so the Rocs can strike with devastating fury.

Who's next to fall?



You can't outfly them, so fill the sky with missiles and hope one of them hits.

– Wukuma Jikh, Human Mercenary



Adorable. According to our records, you're the 328th species to declare that you're going to conquer the galaxy since the foundation of the First Galactic Council. Maybe you'll be the one who gets lucky, but the odds are against you.

– Sheikh Tushman, Shabazi Strategic Poet

Shabazi

Shabazi are one of the eldest species in the Galaxy - their ancestral planet orbits around a dying red giant, and continued life there is only possible through technological intervention. Vast shimmering star-shields protect the homeworld from the fires of the swollen sun. Their homeworld is considered by most species to be the capital planet of the galaxy; pilgrims and scholars come from a thousand systems to see the ancient cities, glimmering towers and labyrinthine archives of Shabaz.

Once a feral race of feline humanoids, they are now a sophisticated people: millions of years of civilization turned Shabazi's bureaucracy (a hindrance for expansion of most species!) into a perfected science that helps them to achieve maximum results with minimum effort. They precisely balance the effort expended on every task, preferring to achieve their ends through subtle adjustments and synergies than through brute force. Their military is impressive, but rarely used in open warfare - Shabazi tactics are based on

principles of misdirection and manipulation. If they can intimidate, trick or subvert a foe without firing a single shot, so much the better. To the Shabazi, there is no difference between philosophy, poetry, strategy and science.

Still, their ancient feral instincts are deeply ingrained in their culture and their biology, and from time to time must be expressed, both on an individual level - such as their brutal and often deadly mating rituals - and as a civilization. The Shabazi rarely start a war, preferring to carefully husband their resources and to avoid any possible threat to the delicate balance that preserves great Shabaz - but when their blood is roused, the Shabazi stop at nothing to annihilate their foes. What is a million years of civilization compared to the timeless thrill of the hunt?



When the star-shields fail and Shabaz burns, our fleet will swoop in and take the best of the Shabazi with us. They are degenerated, but they were once great, and that should not be forgotten. - Captain Nemo Ano of the Wanderers



<They> are like <me/us>. <They> <command/suggest> through economics and diplomacy what <l/we> enforce through <biological imperatives>. <Their> method is adaptive, but impure. <They> will <perish/excision> - Abbar the Red, Myrmicoid Ruler

Yclopes

The Yclopes were old when the Shabazi were young. They are old beyond the reckoning of the elder races. They were already roaming the stars when most other species in the Galaxy were still using rocks and bones to fight (or sometimes, when they were still an amorphous goo floating in the primordial waters of their planet). Their original homeworld died millions of years ago, so today the Yclopes survive in vast subterranean vaults where they slumber in suspended animation.

Yclopes themselves are a dying race; bored of science, bored of communication, they spend their centuries sleeping or contemplating mysteries beyond the understanding of younger species. They only reproduce themselves because they do not want the memories of their species to be lost forever, until they create an A.I. sufficiently advanced to preserve and develop them forever.

The Yclopes are figures of legend and terror to the younger races of the galaxy. There are tales of explorers and xenoarchaeologists who uncovered

a Yclopes installation or long-abandoned space station and recovered wonders beyond imagining. There are tales, too, of doomed explorers who accidentally awoke a Yclopes guardian...

As the younger species expand, they trespass more and more into the vaults of the Yclopes. In their cyclopean dreams, the Yclopes whisper to one another that they cannot tolerate their ancient halls being defiled by primitives. Soon, they will wake, and punish the younger species for their insolence. The Yclopes are old – they have seen many, many other species perish in this harsh galaxy. Only the Yclopes endure.



Skree! A myth made up by the Shabazi to scare the younger races!
– Pulci Neilo, Roc Warflyer



A puzzle beyond our comprehension. More data is needed – ideally, data gathered by someone else.
– Finas Galis, Speaker of the Southern District Strategic Collective Intellect of the Zon

Wanderers

Reverse the trajectory of the Wanderers' flotilla of ark-ships, and their course points back to the Triangulum Galaxy, millions of light-years beyond the Milky Way. The Wanderers never speak of their home galaxy, or the mysterious catastrophe or threat that drove them to build their fleet of gigantic arks and risk the perilous crossing of the intergalactic void.

The first Wanderer ships arrived in our galaxy millennia ago. While some Wanderers have settled on uninhabited planets, most Wanderer vessels are nomads. They cross from one system to the next, trading their advanced technologies and techniques in exchange for supplies. Unlike the Shabazi, who are always very careful about the technology they permit younger species to purchase, the Wanderers have no compunction about what they sell – as long as the price is right. Humans and Crystallides both obtained FTL technology from nomad trade caravans that visited their home systems.

The Wanderers have no overarching government or command systems; the captain of each ship is also

the head of a little independent statelet. Wanderer ships may ally with each other for a time, or carry century-old grudges against other Wanderer clans.

For centuries, the Wanderers were dismissed by the most established civilizations as a minor player in galactic affairs; they were seen as nuisances, as beggars and scavengers, as occasionally useful neutral traders. In recent years, though, more and more Wanderer ships have been seen on the galactic fringes, suggesting that the ark-ships that have arrived so far are just the leading edge of a much larger fleet. If the Wanderers arrive in force, they may have the strength to defeat the other species and claim the galaxy.



Skree! Great scavenging! Good prey!
– Woody Condor, Roc Warflyer



<Taste/memory> of great <perish/excision> in <them>. <They> flee <unknown/unknown>. </we> <shall/have already done> adapt <my/our> <seed/ships> to retrace <their> course, that </we> may know this <perish/excision> and <consume/defeat> it. – Abbar the Red, Myrmicoid Ruler.

Zong

In the dark centuries before FTL technology was acquired by Humans, great colony ships were launched from Earth towards the closest earth-like planets, in a desperate attempt to ensure the survival of mankind in spite of the ecological collapse. The fate of most of those “arks” is unrecorded: only one, launched from China, after a 50 years-long trip at 0.1C toward Proxima Centauri B, reached its destination. The limited gene-seed included in the 500 people hibernated on the ship included two mutants with low-level psionic powers.

In the following centuries, that previously-rare trait was cultivated to a degree never achieved on Earth, and proved to be vital to the development of the Zong (“clan”) culture. The Zong had to struggle with a hostile environment, but their psionic gifts of empathy and co-ordination enabled them to create sophisticated terraforming techniques that made their world habitable. The Zong learned to pool their intellects, merging to form temporary group-minds that can consider a problem, devise a solution, and then break apart again.

These collective minds are the foundation of Zong culture; some minds have lasted for centuries, guiding the clans across the generations even as the individual members of that group-mind depart and are replaced by fresh brains. Prejudicial rumors to the contrary, the Zong are not a hive-mind or a collective – indeed, each Zong is taught from a young age to discover their distinctive qualities and talents, so that they may add new abilities to the greater whole.

Conditions on the Zong homeworld restricted their population from expanding quickly, and the Zong were reluctant to attempt another perilous interstellar crossing on an ark ship. Instead, they pooled the minds of their greatest scientists, and this group-mind unlocked the secrets of FTL technology. Now, after many centuries, they are meeting the rest of Humanity again – will they consider them friends or foes?



*[EXPERIMENT][UNCONTROLLED][INDETERMINATE]
[FOURTH-ORDER]
– Glyphs in a ruined Yclopes station found orbiting
Proxima Centauri*



*They don't talk. Whole ships, whole stations, whole planets, and
everything's dead silent. All of them, just thinking at each other.
Watching me. Judging me.
– Wukuma Jikh, Human Mercenary*



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