Vestus subsector is mostly Imperial territory. Lying behind the claw, it is very much a frontier region with the regional capital, such as it is, lying at Lintl. From here, a small bureaucratic apparatus oversees Imperial activities in the coreward region of Reft, answering to the sector capital in Deneb.

The primary concern for the Imperial authorities of Reft is relations among and with the small states of the area, and with Aslan Hierarchy territories on this side of the Great Rift. The Aslan habit of sending out parties of land-seeking adventurers has at times led to conflict. While the Imperial assets in the region are scanty, they are entirely enough to deal with a few bands of adventurers seeking to make a landgrab somewhere. What they are totally inadequate for is dealing with conflict with an Aslan clan.

There is always the risk that an Aslan clan might be drawn into conflict with the Imperial authorities by process of escalation. Local residents might evict Aslan settlers by force, or the Imperial Navy might be forced to fire on their ships, and a clan might decide to push the issue. For the Imperials, the question is whether to risk conflict or allow Aslan to occupy parts of Imperial worlds.

Inevitably, these enclaves grow and eventually send out landgrab missions of their own, so a line has to be drawn somewhere. At present, that line is in Vestus subsector, and a mix of force and diplomacy is required to hold a firm frontier without provoking a serious incident the Imperials lack the resources to deal with.

The Imperial centre of government is located at Lintl’s orbital highport, with only an embassy on-planet. This is largely to avoid entanglement in Lintl’s internal affairs; the world is home to 39 billion people, all governed by a strict theocracy. Lintl’s religion preaches that every sentient is part of a collective consciousness called the Totality. Conformity is enforced through harsh law enforcement and fear of retribution after death – those that defy the world’s religious leaders are doomed to an eternity in mental isolation rather than becoming part of the Totality after death.

The Imperial Charter permits worlds to govern themselves as they please, and the regional government has no interest in becoming involved in local politics, but Lintl’s society is not conducive to supporting a bureaucracy serving a diverse range of worlds and peoples. The highport sees a great deal of trade, but access to the world itself (other than the downport) is restricted.

The Imperial Navy maintains a modest Subsector Fleet in Vestus, built around two cruiser-class vessels. One is a new light cruiser, while the other (the subsector flagship) is an obsolescent strike carrier. The latter represents a significant force at the head of its supporting task force as most threats to Imperial authority could be crushed by a single vessel of this size. A more serious threat would be dealt with by capital ships sent from Deneb sector.

Evidence has been found of Vilani settlements on some worlds in Vestus. There are no records of deliberate Vilani settlement in the region, and archaeological finds suggest these were refugee colonies. Almost all finds date from between –2300 and –1700 in the Imperial calendar, though occasional earlier sites suggest crews of misjumped starships made the best life they could for themselves on these worlds.

It has been theorised that Vargr raiding and piracy during the decline of the First Imperium forced the abandonment of some settlements within Corridor sector. Refugees from these worlds pushed on into what was at that time uncharted territory, seeking new homes in Reft and the Trojan Reach.

Some of these ad-hoc colony missions seem to have reached Vestus and settled there, though the majority died out before the coming of the Third Imperium. Those that survived were, for the most part, incorporated into the more successful later settlements.
Cauldron is a typical backwater Imperial world, colonised by a handful of people and then more or less forgotten about. It lies off the main trade routes and has too small a population to develop much of an economy. However, there are reasons why Travellers might visit this world.

Cauldron itself is a large, wet world, with about 80% hydrographics and a dense atmosphere. This permits lush vegetation and a well-developed ecosphere which includes large predators. There is a zone of both temperate conditions and mild weather in the mid latitudes north and south of the equator but away from this band, violent storms are common; they are probably the origin of the world’s name.

Agriculture is easy in the temperate lands, with multiple harvests possible in the same year providing crops are rotated and land is left fallow at times, a process followed by 500 or so residents, of whom most dwell in a single village. The remainder are mainly hunters and trappers who ply their trade in the wilderness surrounding the settled area. Most of the planetary surface remains entirely unexplored; even the most adventurous locals rarely travel more than 100-200km from their homes on a trapping expedition.

Local hunters use imported rifles to deal with larger predators, and make a reasonable return selling the pelts to luxury clothing manufacturers through a chain of intermediaries. Meat is another export, albeit on a very small scale. However, most of the world’s income is derived not from the product of hunting expeditions but from the expeditions themselves.

Cauldron is popular with big game hunters and safari operators. Some wish to photograph the wildlife, some come to study it and some want to shoot large creatures. There is nothing the locals can do to stop a safari ship from landing anywhere on the planet, at which point the passengers can do as they please.

However, in recent years it has become fashionable to hire a local hunter as a guide and learn the ways of the hunted creatures while seeing landmarks made famous in some documentary made a few decades ago. The locals derive income from this service and from the Credits spent by safari parties. Many buy up local souvenirs or even animal pelts they can claim they shot themselves.

There is also a growing interest in ‘adventure retreat’ type holidays, for which Cauldron is becoming a popular destination. The mildest of these involve a stay in the locals’ village and tours of nearby wilderness areas for rafting or climbing expeditions. More robust parties...
head out into the wilderness to try the life of a hunter or trapper for themselves, or fly to the mountains to go climbing.

There is little provision for safety or rescue, which deters many potential visitors but enthuses others. Bored, well-off workers and minor nobles thus come to Cauldron to live the rugged outdoors life for a couple of weeks before returning home with vids and the occasional scar to show what a tough guy they are. The locals are somewhat amused by the idea that people want to pay them for the privilege of sampling their lives and the dangers of the outback. A minority dislike the intrusion but most are happy enough to accept the extra Credits.

The locals have a sustainable Tech Level 4, but use a variety of low-maintenance imported items to add comfort to their lives. They are familiar with the use of many high-tech items such as holocameras and personal comm units and, in many cases, own them. However, little reliance is placed on these items. The locals distil a pretty good liquor out of their cereal crops using a high-tech fusion still, but would not be dismayed if it broke down. The distillation process could be carried on using lower-tech systems, and even if it could not, society would not collapse for lack of booze.

Cauldron’s social system is both simple and complex, as frontier systems tend to be. On the one hand, it is easily categorised as a participating democracy, in which all adults have a say in what passes for governance. In practice, the setup is quite complex as opinions of individuals carry more weight or less, depending on the subject at hand.

There are few laws as such, and little in the way of formal legal process. In a society where everyone is known to everyone else, it is not hard to figure out who committed any given offense. Potential criminals tend to be discouraged at an early age by mild punishments, and the stigma attached to being called to account in front of the whole community. Serious offenders are driven out of the town without weapons, which is tantamount to a death sentence.

One subgroup within the community stands out enough to surprise visitors. This is the crew of a very old (and long since paid-for) free trader, who have ‘gone native’ and made Cauldron their home as well as their base. Their ship is borderline spaceworthy, and makes semi-regular trade runs with a hold full of meat and pelts. When not out trading, the crew act as starport technicians, patch up their ship and help out around town.

Most of Cauldron is unexplored. There are rumours of raider starships operating out of hidden bases in the outback and lost Ancients sites, but those are common on any world with a significant wilderness. More credible is the persistent story that a modest population of Vilani made their way to Cauldron in the last years of the First Imperium and built a settlement high on a mountain... or in a valley, or on an island, or somewhere suitably inaccessible.

There are reasons to believe this story may be true. Artefacts have been found from time to time, though these could be from safari parties who tackled a wild area without a local guide. If a Vilani group did settle on Cauldron, they must have died out or moved on before Imperial explorers arrived, and if that is so, they may have left behind a city or town of some kind. While salvage of usable technological items is unlikely after all this time, a settlement might be of interest to archaeologists seeking evidence of Vilani culture in a survival environment.
REUDDEN

Reudden is a medium-sized world with thin atmosphere and relatively little surface water. It lies in a sparse star system, which has no major planetoid belts or gas giants. Reudden Highport is thus the only ready source of fuel in the system.

The port sees a considerable amount of trade passing through, and generates a great deal of revenue from sales of overpriced fuel, costly maintenance fees, and through taxation of all commercial activities at the orbital or ground facilities.

The Imperium considers starports to be Imperial rather than local territory, but allows operators considerable leeway in how their installation is run. Thus, since Reudden Starport is owned and operated by an extremely high-law state, it shares some characteristics with the planetary society and while Imperial High Law places restrictions on how far the government can go, Reudden has been given an Amber Zone travel code.

Reudden Starport prohibits all weaponry, enforcing an effective Law Level 9. The usual penalty is a stiff fine and immediate deportation, which can cause problems if the offender does not have a berth on a ship awaiting him. In this event, the offender is given a short period to make arrangements (from a holding cell) and held until he boards a departing starship. If he cannot obtain transport offworld, he is considered guilty of further offences and passes into the planetside justice system until either someone pays for his passage or his sentence is completed.

Strict laws apply to all aspects of the port’s activities. Customs and safety inspections are especially rigorous, and ships that fail a safety inspection must seek repairs before being allowed to leave; the only yards available are state-licensed and overpriced. This practice is monitored to ensure that it lies within the bounds of fair practice as the Imperium is prepared to tolerate overzealous interpretation of its regulations by high-law member states, but will not accept blatant abuse of regulations to sucker ships into paying for unnecessary work.

Reudden, not surprisingly perhaps, remains scrupulously legal in its dealings, but enforces every nuance of every regulation to its utmost extreme. Free traders and similar independent ships are not often seen in Reudden’s port, for the simple reason that they may not be able to pass inspection or pay for work needed to get back out of the port again.

Reudden Downport is not located at the planetary capital as deliberate care has been taken to isolate the downport from the rest of the world. There is sizable town at the downport, but it is entirely within the port’s Extrality Line and therefore part of the port rather than a local facility. The port is surrounded by a high wall topped by a fence, with a ditch and then another fence outside that. Beyond is a region of desert, with the only settlement within 20km being the compound that houses customs and enforcement personnel employed at the port.

Access to the rest of the world is via a single underground monorail line for personnel and another for heavy goods, both well-guarded and subject to stringent controls. Grav and air vehicles are not permitted to approach or leave the port without special clearance, which is rarely granted. Even spacecraft are forced to keep to specified lanes on approach or departure. Craft have in the past been fired on for deviating from traffic control instructions.

The world itself is a dictatorship, run by the head of the Internal Security Forces. This is a paramilitary organisation that handles law enforcement, civil defence and some aspects of bureaucracy. Laws are incredibly strict and pervade all aspects of everyday life, but are fairly applied. It is not clear why Reudden needs such strict law enforcement, but the leaders seem to believe in following their own rules. As for the general populace, they are raised in a highly regimented environment and subjected from birth to propaganda that tells them their way of life is the only correct one.

The world’s four million or so citizens dwell in modestly sized cities separated by large expanses of wilderness. Travel between communities is restricted and not common, and only some settlements are eligible to provide highport or downport staff. Residents of these communities are barred from certain governmental jobs and cannot join the military or Internal Security Forces.

Sustainable Tech Level is 7, providing a comfortable basic standard of living for everyone. Access to luxuries is dependent as much on status as money, and status is awarded for achievements within a strict code. Basically, the closer to a model citizen one is, the greater chance of promotion, which leads in turn to a better lifestyle and admiration of lesser citizens. This does, of course, promote a certain mediocrity as well as conformity.

Reudden’s military system is based upon conscription. Internal Security Force personnel are all volunteers, but mainstream military forces are composed almost entirely of conscripts and reservists. A period of military service is mandatory for all adults, with the option to volunteer for extended service or career. This is viewed favourably when applying to the ISF or other high-status jobs.
PETRE

Petre is a mid-sized world whose atmosphere is rated by IISS surveys as ‘dense, tainted’. In fact, it just barely qualifies as dense, with an average pressure of 1.52 Atmospheres at sea level. Sea level on Petre is very low compared to that of, say, Earth and although the world has roughly 60% coverage of surface water, this is shallow, as oceans go. The oceans tend to lie in the bottom of deep bowls, with surrounding coastal plain. Inland from this the land rises rapidly, in spectacular sheer cliffs hundreds of metres high. It has been suggested that Petre once had far more water, and that the coastal plains are what was once the continental shelf.

Various theories have been put forward concerning the missing volume of water and, as usual, the Ancients are blamed; presumably they took the water for some purpose or used a device that caused it to vanish. There is a notable lack of evidence to back up such claims, though they are given more credibility than jocular explanations such as ‘someone pulled the plug out’.

Strangely, the ‘bathplug theory’ was the subject of a major scientific investigation some years ago. It was theorised that the oceans drained into cracks in the crust caused by tectonic or volcanic activity, or perhaps by more of those Ancients superweapons. A lengthy study by robotic divers and submarines failed to uncover any evidence of deep-ocean crustal cracks, though by no means was all the seabed accurately mapped.

Marks and weathering on rocks above sea level indicate that the sea level was once much higher, but this could be explained by tectonic or volcanic movement. If the deep-sea crack theory is correct, there may be vast basins filled with water beneath the surface of Petre, perhaps with their own unique environment. The intrepid scientist that undertook an underground-underwater odyssey to explore such basins would run grave risks but might make wholly new discoveries.

Petre’s coastal plan lies just above sea level, and is largely uninhabited. Most of the populace live on the high interior regions where air pressure is somewhat lower though they must still deal with the atmospheric taint, which is simply a vast amount of airborne dust. Filter masks are only necessary in dust storms, but tend to be worn to reduce the irritation caused by tiny airborne particles. Goggles at the very least are recommended to anyone working outside.

Settlements tend to be large, concentrating the population into several dense areas with untamed wilderness between them, permitting artificial irrigation of farmland or indoor gardening to feed the population. Industry is likewise concentrated, with a local Tech Level of 10, sufficient to support a reasonable export industry which centres on low-volume, almost craftsman-made technological goods.
**STATESMAN LUXURY GRAV CAR**

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>COST</td>
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</table>

**EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS**

- Autopilot (enhanced), Communications System (improved, satellite uplink), Computer/2, Control System (improved), Entertainment System, Fire Extinguishers, Life Support (short term), Navigation System (improved), Sensor System (improved, increased fidelity), Wet Bar

- No weapon

**TRAITS**

- Autopilot (skill level): 2
- Communications (range): 500 km
- Navigation (Navigation DM): +2
- Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM): +2
- Camouflage (Recon DM): -
- Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM): -

**DESCRIPTION**

Advertised as having all luxuries bound within an understated body, the Statesman is highly customisable and intended to be the last word in status among business executives and mid-ranking government officials. There is a saying that the word ‘performance’ is not allowed to be so much as mentioned in the factories, as everything in the Statesman’s design is geared towards true luxury and comfort.
Starting life as an Imperial heavy fighter, the Cosmic Mako is a one-off conversion built by the Cosmic Racers yard on Petre. Intended for the two-seater ‘heavy’ class of racers, the Cosmic Mako has had its hull thoroughly gutted and replaced with lightweight racing grade components and a massive high burn thruster, making it extremely fast and manoeuvrable, in both space and within atmospheres.
Most of what comes out of Petre’s workshops is built to a standard design, albeit with great care by skilled craftsmen. However, the cities do offer custom-build packages for those prepared to bear the cost and long wait. Some of the best luxury grav vehicles in use by business and political figures as far afield as Deneb and the Spinward Marches are made on Petre.

Petre has a large and extensive highport, which is supported by downports at all the major settlements. The highport is also used as neutral ground for delegations from the cities to discuss any issues that have arisen; these are far more likely to be commercial than territorial, as the cities are widely separated and not subject to population or resource pressure.

The highport is home to another Petren industry; the conversion of ex-naval fighters into one- and two-seater racing craft. The sport of small craft racing has been around for a long time but is enjoying an upsurge of interest from well-off individuals seeking to sponsor a team or complete directly. Events include manoeuvre challenges, straight speed courses, point-to-point and endurance races, and the Imperial Navy has shown an interest in recruiting racers as instructors or potential fighter jocks, maintaining a small recruiting office at the highport.

**AMBOSSA**

A medium-sized world with dense atmosphere and little surface water, Ambossa was perhaps less welcoming than many prospective colony sites, but eminently capable of supporting human life with minimum technological support. Large areas of the continental interiors are very dry, and can be prone to violent windstorms. However, Ambossa posed no real problem for early settlers and a small community soon grew up.

With few major deposits of useful minerals and a climate unsuited for large-scale agriculture, the population of Ambossa never grew beyond a few tens of thousands. The world was a reasonable enough place to make a living, but not somewhere fortunes were made. The best and brightest tended to drift offworld, following well-paid contracts or seeking greater opportunities. Those who returned after a period of offworld study or military service tended to find their homeworld had become frighteningly mundane in their absence, and often went back to the stars.

This might have gone on forever, but for a huge social upheaval that wrecked Ambossan society 300 years ago. It started with a string of natural disasters that affected all aspects of Ambossan life; food production was reduced by a series of major storms, while an earthquake severely damaged one of the subordinate settlements. These problems were serious, but might have been surmountable, had not the government lost the confidence of the population. The result was widespread anarchy and destruction of resources that might have been used to deal with the disasters.

Order was restored by the Imperial Army, which maintains response forces trained for this kind of duty. Once the Army arrived, an effective government was put in place. Martial law lasted only a few weeks, but that was long enough to prevent matters getting any worse. Critical industries were protected from destruction, then brought back on line to support the reconstruction, which was assisted by funds from the Imperial Colonial Office.

When the dust had settled, Ambossan society had changed considerably. The central city, site of the downport, capital and most major industry, was secured along with some of the outlying settlements. However, some settlements declared themselves independent of the new government, though they were careful to show continued loyalty to the Imperium. The Imperial Army declined to take part in forcible reintegration, considering this an internal matter. Once it pulled out altogether, fighting between the independents and central government began. This was small-scale, as both sides had no heavy equipment, little training and were fielding scraped-together militias. The superior numbers of the central government were counterbalanced by fervour and desperation on the part of the independents.

The Ambossan Civil War went on for nearly thirty years and was ended by the decision to mortgage the world’s future in return for ending the conflict. Offworld mercenary units were hired and quickly demolished most opposition. Their superior discipline, weaponry and training was simply too much for the rebels. Some of the re-conquests were very bloody, though most ended in reconciliation or (more often) surrender in the face of overwhelming firepower. Soon the central government was in control of what remained of the outlying settlements. This did not end the war at once; significant urban guerrilla opposition continued, along with operations by forces based in the countryside.

Today, the central region of Ambossa is ruled by a Governing Council that controls important functions such as power generation, machinery construction and access to the starport. Laws are strict and the populace is kept in order by a force that still calls itself the Militia but is essentially a paramilitary police force with light-infantry capabilities.
Central government claims to own and control the outlying settlements and most accept this, though some pay lip service to their notion of independence. The few that remain truly outside mainstream Ambossan society are semi-ruined, with little industry. Technological capability is much lower than the TL9 enjoyed by the central region, with limited amounts of TL7 gear available in addition to whatever can be scavenged, traded or occasionally taken in a raid.

The upshot of Ambossa’s troubled history is that the world became even less important on the cosmic stage than before. Resources, already limited, were wasted in paying for mercenaries or rebuilding settlements. The Governing Council satisfies itself with keeping order and enabling citizens to go about their daily business, but it cannot offer them a bright future.

IGUALADA
Settled originally as a stopover on the Rift-edge route, Igualada is a desert world with a thin, tainted atmosphere. There is very little surface water; less than 2% of the planetary crust is covered with water of any sort, and this includes regions of swampland that dry up every year.

The atmospheric taint is quite harmful to humans, a product of life in such an arid environment; the only native life on Igualada is fungal, and the air is filled with spores that drift on desert winds. These grow rapidly wherever they encounter moisture, normally along the fringes of a swamp or oasis. However, spores can anchor and grow in a human’s mucous membranes, so pose a hazard to anyone breathing them in. Complete protection requires sealed suits and decontamination systems, though a filter mask and goggles will reduce the chance of spore infection to virtually nil.

Conditions on the surface are of little interest to most of the population in any case, as the majority never leave their environmentally-controlled home, a subterranean city that is the only settlement on Igualada.

Igualada City is tunnelled into rock within an area of high ground which is one of the driest on the planet. It is supplied with water by deep artesian wells, and has excellent recycling facilities. Food is grown in huge garden complexes located on the top levels where they receive natural light through a glazed ceiling.

Being far from the nearest water, Igualada City is not much troubled by airborne spores, though maintenance crews working outside are protected by coveralls, gloves and masks as a matter of routine. Decontamination procedures are effective and well-practiced.

This has not stopped the occasional fungal outbreaks in the city. If spores get in, they grow rapidly and can cause a serious problem. However, fungicides are effective against infestation, as is, ironically, water. Too much water, or even excessive humidity, will kill most species of fungus and render spores unviable. The first line of defence against infestation is thus a good dousing with fire-suppression sprinkler systems, followed by steam-jet cleaning of the infested area.

Individual infection is also easy to treat. It is rarely fatal, but produces ‘flu-like symptoms that can kill weak or elderly individuals. More often, the victim is incapacitated for a few weeks then gradually recovers. Fungi growing in mucous membranes such as the lungs or eyes tend to die off due to excess moisture, even if the body’s own defences cannot cope. Antibiotics are ineffective against infection, but several drugs are tailored to certain species of fungus, which rapidly kill an infection and allow rapid recovery. Most infections happen because someone was lazy or less than thorough, so there is a social stigma attached to becoming infected.

<table>
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<th>END check Difficulty</th>
<th>Damage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Igualada Fungal Infection</td>
<td>Average (8+)</td>
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<td>1D weeks</td>
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Some of the fungal species found on-planet are used as the basis of a range of pharmaceuticals, and are ‘farmed’ in moist areas. This entails seeding an area with spores and then waiting a few weeks before coming back to harvest the crop. Seeder missions normally use grav craft, while collection is undertaken by protective-suited personnel operating from heavy crawlers.

Harvested fungal material is taken by crawler to segregated areas of the city, dried, and packaged for collection by starships out of Gaspar. Igualada could support a pharmaceutical industry of its own, but this is not permitted by the government of Gaspar, which owns the world and operates the collection operations as part of a state-owned business.

Gaspar also dictates policy and is ultimately responsible for overseeing affairs on Igualada. Some, but by no means most, of Igualada’s high officials are citizens of Gaspar sent to oversee the colony. The arrangement is accepted by most of the populace, and is beneficial to Igualada. High-technology goods are imported at affordable prices from Gaspar, and hard-working Igualadans can aspire to a job or university place on Gaspar, which can in turn lead to citizenship of that world.
Igualada has a good Class B starport, which is also owned and operated by businesses on Gaspar. Significant income is derived from service contracts to the Imperial Navy, which maintains a small base as an annex to the port and is home to two DesRons (destroyer squadrons) and a dozen small escort and patrol ships, in addition to much of the Vestus Subsector support flotilla. The Flag Squadron for Vestus, built around a small carrier with destroyer escorts, is based out of nearby Carian but also obtains spares and supplies from businesses on Gaspar, staged through the base at Igualada.

As with many such worlds, there are really two entirely different planets called Igualada. One is a self-contained city of citizens going about comfortable, mundane lives. The other is a harsh desert environment with virtually no population. Most citizens would not be able to navigate, work or even survive in the desert, though they would be quite at home in almost any other city or starport. However, every citizen knows how to use a filter mask, recognise signs of fungal infection, and effectively decontaminate a person, vehicle or item. Apart from being useful work skills and a way of avoiding social stigma, these activities are a staple plot device in entertainment vids. Igualadans grow up seeing how to do these things right (and wrong, which usually identifies the villain) almost every day of their lives.

COLONY FIVE

Colony Five is a high-population world, with a population of some eight billion or so. It is a dry but otherwise entirely habitable world and, with advanced farming techniques, the world supports a large population, who enjoy high living standards. The world’s high Tech Level and large population allow considerable industrial output, much of which is exported. This brings offworld revenue and contributes to prosperity.

Despite these advantages, Colony Five has had a troubled political history, which has recently produced something of an oddity; a liberal dictatorship. Absolute power is vested in the hands of one individual, who enjoys massive popular support, in part because the recent transition from republic to dictatorship affected the general populace relatively little. There are few harsh laws and the dictatorship has directed its powers towards solving problems rather than oppression.

The origins of the name Colony Five are lost in antiquity, but are generally thought to relate to the designation of the settlement that rose to dominance during the settlement phase as it is known that several seeder colonies were settled on-planet at that time. Some were unsuccessful while others grew and even thrived. Those that did well attracted additional investment and pulled in more settlers, expanding into cities.
Around 850 (Imperial Calendar), Colony Five was wracked by a period of internal conflict that stopped little short of civil war. Regions and cities broke away from central government, forming alliances that absorbed other polities and shed original members as the political wind shifted. The Scout Service redesignated Colony Five as balkanised as a new world government emerged but failed to create a lasting stability. Alliances stabilised and the rapid transfer of political support became less useful as a bargaining tool. This arrangement became entrenched for more than a century, and it was not until the 1070s that a move towards unification began in earnest. This happened gradually, with smaller alliances and free city-states flowing together until they had sufficient collective power to start bargaining with the larger polities.

A World Republic was declared in 1089, creating the first true world government on Colony Five in two centuries. However, after less than a decade the cracks began to show. Perhaps political dissolution had simply become a habit, but for a range of trivial reasons, power blocs small and large began threatening to secede from the republic.

A solution appeared out of nowhere, in the form of a middle-aged civil servant, who had been running a political forum on the planetary datanet. A massive datanet campaign, run on a shoestring by enthusiastic amateurs, quickly emerged, with the civil servant becoming an overnight ’net sensation as ‘the woman who thinks she has the answers’.

Apparently, she did. At the core of her ideas was the concept that states and cities were made of people who live there. If it were possible to ask everyone what was really going on around them, then it might be possible to determine just why Colony Five’s world governments kept fragmenting. If they could figure out what was going wrong, maybe political leaders could create a workable solution.

What amounted to a giant viral campaign began, encouraging citizens worldwide to put forward their ideas, likes, dislikes and things they could just not live with. Much of this data was self-serving or shortsighted; some was downright idiotic. There was enough useful content, however, to build a very detailed picture of the political, social and economic conditions prevailing across the world. A group of political scientists and other academics, many of them undergraduates enthused by the project, collated and distilled the data, then fed it back into the datanet, with recommendations.

Nothing happened. Political leaders showed polite (and often genuine) interest in the data but were unable to make anything of it.

In 1091, that changed with the emergence of the Alliance for Unity, a political group whose members were not divided between different states. The AfU asked the question, ‘what if we actually did these things?’ and listed a set of policies it would implement when (not if) it became the world government. Although not always workable, the AfU manifesto was sufficiently appealing to gain massive worldwide support. Demonstrations, marches and even riots broke out, creating a state of emergency.

The shaky world government responded by placing emergency powers in the hands of the president and suspending many laws and customs that prevented decisive action. A frantic round of bargaining resulted in many political blocs agreeing to stop blocking one another’s favoured policies in return for help with local problems or a reciprocal favour. The crisis did not produce a new government, but forced the existing one to put its house in order and make deals that allowed a number of key policies to be pushed through. Among these were several that echoed the AfU manifesto, guaranteeing their popularity among much of the populace.

By 1092, the crisis was over. The government had addressed many problems and created workable compromises, and the populace were generally appeased by seeing ‘their’ policies put into action. The government now enjoyed strong but not overwhelming popular support. However, there was one big change. The greatest act of democracy in the world’s history had created a dictatorship.

Colony Five’s government placed emergency powers in the hands of the president, who used this ability to force new legislation through and instigate compromise deals that either reduced tensions or the influence wielded by the more difficult elements of Colony Five’s political structure. He also made his powers permanent.

The presidency became a lifetime office, and what resistance remains has been marginalised. Most of the population are strongly behind their president and his government, and great strides towards true unification are being made. It remains to be seen, however, whether the situation can be made truly permanent, as much depends on the ability of the government to maintain popular support. That in turn requires tangible results – which so far have been delivered.