

A Brief History of the Mandate part I of III

0 (Now): Earth slips towards resource drought, ecological collapse, internal warfare, famine.

+50 years: Humanity expands into the solar system, mining the asteroids and establishing colonies on Mars and the moons of Jupiter. This merely prolongs the agony of the dying Earth. However, it does develop the technology like better space drives, fusion power, and cryo-hibernation. Long-range scans and probes detect dozens of Earth-like worlds across the galaxy.

+200 years: Exodus. As it becomes clear that Earth will soon be uninhabitable, different groups – the few surviving national governments, corporations, social clades and the like – start making preparations to leave the solar system. They bring asteroids into Earth orbit, hollow them out, fit them with ion drives and cryo-hibernation vaults, as well as factories and construction gear to 'bootstrap' an industrial base quickly. Only a tiny fraction of the human population can take this escape route – billions are left to die on the dying planet.

The various colony ships depart in different directions. The crews sleep in the cryo-vaults, watched over by robots. Contact with Earth is lost as the Fifth Water War goes nuclear.

One particular colony ship, the Romanov, was built by Russian oligarchs.

+500 years: The colony ships cross the void between stars. Some head in groups for nearby systems; others seek out their own new world. The Romanov is part of this second wave of ships; after hundreds of years of travel through deep space, it arrives at an Earth-like world – Novy Petersburg.

There is little communication between the various colonies – even the closest ones are several light-years apart, so transmissions take years to arrive, and ships take decades. Humanity is now scattered across dozens of worlds, each growing apart in isolation.

+800 years: Novy Peterburg is now a flourishing planet. The descendants of the oligarchs who funded the expedition are the nobility of this new civilization.

A scientist working for one of the noble families makes an unlikely discovery – she finds a method of travelling faster than light using stationary jump gates. These gates link two points in space-time. The nobles fund the construction of several such gates, linking Novy Peterburg to these nearby worlds.

Novy Petersburg becomes the hub of a small network of gates, and so becomes the main trading world. It grows in wealth and power, as the majority of traffic flows through its ports.

Two of the first wave of colony worlds – Arkwright and Starfall – prosper especially in this era. With its vast natural resources and industry, Arkwright benefits immensely from the opening up of interstellar trade. Starfall becomes a center for diplomacy and scientific research.

Officially, the network is a trade alliance of equal partners. In practice, Novy Petersburg, Arkwright and Europa dominate the smaller colonies.

A Brief History of the Mandate part II of III

+1000 years: First Interstellar War. One of the worlds in the network builds a Gate leading to another human colony called Aramis. However, in the years since that world last transmitted a signal, it had fallen to a xenophobic tyrant. The tyrant's forces release a plague that devastates several other planets. The Black Eagle planets bear the brunt of this onslaught. The survivors cry out for vengeance. The first Grand Fleet is launched, comprised mostly of Novy Petersburg ships crewed by Black Eagle volunteers. After a grueling campaign, Aramis is conquered and the tyrant overthrown.

Determined to prevent future threats of this type, and to solidify their position, Novy Petersburg forces seize control of the gates in more than two-thirds of the systems in the network. In some systems, control of the gates goes undisputed; in others, there are skirmishes or even full-scale naval battles. Novy Petersburg's leader declares that she has a Mandate to protect humanity, and therefore the gates must be under her direct control. The Black Eagle worlds, remembering the devastation wreaked on them, support the seizure of the Gates.

The Europeans of Starfall protest at the seizure of their Gates, but lack the military strength to resist. The Arkwright colonies, though, have vast military production, and mount a lengthy defense of their Gates. War breaks out over the control of the Gate network. After another ten years of war, Novy Petersburg forces successfully capture the remaining gates in the network. The first Empress is crowned.

+1200 Years: The First Fringe Wars. A new protocol is put in place to deal with new gates. Instead of sending through a small expedition and teaching the inhabitants of the newly-contacted system how to build their own Gates, the new approach is to send a fleet of ships through, carrying with them the parts to rapidly construct a second Gate. Once two-way travel is established, the Mandate forces 'convince' the local government to join the Mandate. Sometimes, this goes peacefully as the locals realise the benefit of joining an interstellar trade league comprising dozens of worlds. Other expansions are more like invasions.

+1300 years: Decline of the Mandate. By now, almost all known human colonies settled in the initial exodus from Earth, as well as their daughter colonies established in the years between then and the present day, are part of the Mandate. With no new worlds to conquer – or at least to assimilate with gunboat diplomacy – the Mandate navy loses direction. Skirmishes and disputes between member worlds grow in intensity, and are put down more harshly by the Mandate government. Politics on Novy Petersburg grow more entrenched and calcified; Mandate culture looks more and more to the past, to tradition and the fading years of glory for inspiration. The one exception is on Europa, which continues to be a beacon of progress and innovation.

As economic growth slows across the Mandate, internal problems within the Arkwright culture manifest. The mercantile powerhouse runs low on key resources, and trade diminishes, creating an underemployed and resentful underclass.

History of the Mandate part III of III

+1500 years: The Provincial Expansion. Improvements in Gate technology enable the Mandate to reach more distant worlds, spurring a new wave of colonization. Unlike the previous colony efforts, which used huge sleeper ships that took centuries to cross the gaps between star systems, these new colonies are connected by FTL gates to their mother worlds. Arkwright and Europa worlds sponsor the bulk of these colonies. While this rush of colonization revitalizes the flagging Mandate, it also creates a new halo of Fringe worlds that chafe under Mandate rule.

Worse, as Novy Petersburg is in the center of the gate network, it sees little benefit from the influx of resources and wealth from these new colonies. Instead, it is the mother worlds of the new colonies that grow stronger from this expansion. Emboldened by their new strength, these worlds push back against the power of the Romanovs. Many of the new colonies are treated poorly by their mother worlds, adding to the rumbling dissent.

The old Emperor – the grandfather of the present Empress – responds by launching a series of punitive wars to force the rebellious worlds back into line. In doing so, he underlines the weakness of Novy Petersburg – the heart of the Mandate has become little more than a parasite, a bully that produces little, but takes from the vibrant worlds at the fringe.

War breaks out again. On one side is the Mandate, determined to keep all humanity under a single unifying authority. On the other, the fringe worlds, eager to break away from the yoke of the older colonies. Meanwhile, Arkwright and Europa – the old rivals of the Romanovs – play both sides against each other, hoping to profit from any rebalancing of power within the Mandate.

+1600: Recent Times. The previous Emperor – father of the present Empress – tries to improve relations with the outer worlds, and undo some of the damage his father did, but he dies untimely. Taking advantage of the chaos, the rebellion strikes towards the heart of Mandate space.

The Grand Fleet is dispatched to put down this rebellion, but sabotage scatters its constituent vessels across the stars. As none of these ships have the capability to construct their own Gates, they are now stranded until rescued.