

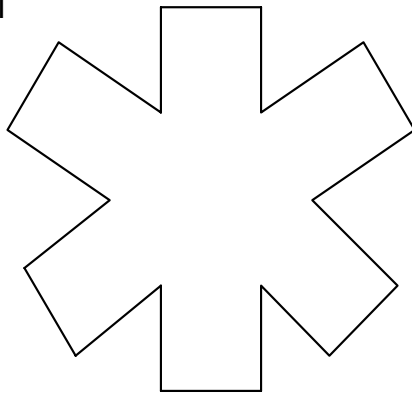
Artemis IV - The Siegeworld

Artemis IV is an enigma. To begin with, the planet is large, especially for one with a solid structure as opposed to a gas giant

The planet is almost entirely a single land mass. There is no known surface water of size larger than a small lake. There is some volcanic activity, but for the most part the planet is stable and universally temperate. It is believed by scientists who speculate that Artemis IV's unique structure and climate are because it has no fixed revolution and no fixed axis of rotation. Instead, the planet tumbles following an almost random rotation through its orbit. This gives a slight semblance of seasons, but makes almost every point on Artemis IV's surface of universal climate and structure.

Original settlement of Artemis IV was apparently in the long distance past due to the presence of the fortresses which dot its surface. The fortresses may be of human or alien construction. It is not entirely clear. They are however all of similar design (generally being of the design of a six pointed star with flattened points (See FIG. 1)

FIG 1



The original walls are of some form of reinforced cast stone (although many have now been replaced with conventional concrete or equivalents due to damage) of significant height and are clearly designed with generally human sized occupants in mind. There is a large gate structure at each of the flattened points clearly designed to accommodate items of massive size. The walls are also dotted with smaller gates each of which is still capable of handling traditional sized war machines. The vast majority of the fortresses are still in excellent repair with only a few having fallen into ruin.

The Fortress walls form a perimeter generally on the order of 5 miles from a central point (2 miles to the closest angles of the walls). In the center of each fortress is a crystal deposit of completely unique composition. The composition is useful for a wide variety of things from focusing apparatus for weapons, to making delicate music. The most valuable use of the crystal, however, is as an energy source. Harvested crystals steadily

produce a constant heat, under any condition and for at least as long as the oldest has been harvested. For this reason, every race in the known universe desires the crystals as an essentially unlimited power source. They are however, very difficult to obtain as the crystal structure is very fragile. Crystals can only be harvested in a window of 24 hours when they reach a certain size within the greater crystal structure of the deposit. Further, a crystal bud will take between 15 and 16 thousand years to reach this point and removal of the bud will inhibit it from become larger and budding on its own. Even when harvested, only a shoebox sized chunk is taken and even given the immense size of the crystal deposits, a single deposit will only yield a suitable piece every 45-50 years.

While controlled testing is limited, it is understood that attempting to harvest a crystal either larger or smaller than one in the known window will result in massive death to the crystal deposit as a whole, generally within a span of a few weeks. Therefore, it is only safe to get the invaluable material after extremely careful monitoring of the deposit.

Further, the crystal death, while focused on the parent deposit, is not limited to it. It appears to human scientists that the crystal formations are actually all one interlinked formation, extending under the crust of Artemis IV and connecting to form a single mass somewhere in the planet's core.

The entire crystal structure is very unstable from what has been learned. When attempting to harvest crystals for use, the slightest miscalculation in cutting or timing can lead to disastrous consequences as the structure of neighboring crystals collapses.

Needless to say, the properties of the crystals have made them valuable to virtually every race known to mankind, and they all have interest in gathering the crystals. Originally, most races apparently thought they were the only ones harvesting crystals as for the first 100 years after human discovery of the planet, no other mention of alien races is mentioned. However, more recently it has been found that virtually every race is present harvesting crystals and that between 80 and 90 percent of the fortresses are now occupied.

For those familiar with the military operations of humanity, one may wonder why one race has not simply bombed their enemy held fortresses into oblivion. The answer is that they have tried. There are 4 recorded instances of a race bombarding a fortress from space. In all four instances, the fortress of the enemy was destroyed, attempting to leave the crystal intact. This was generally successful, however, within a couple of weeks of destruction of the fortress, the crystal began to die. Originally for the forces, this was acceptable loss as they had at least denied their enemy the resource. However, other crystal outcroppings across the surface (and in an apparently random pattern) began to die. These damaged outcroppings were impossible to harvest and the invasions ended up costing their attacking forces more crystals than they denied the enemy. It has therefore been speculated that damage to the fortress actually harms the crystal structure within. However, damage to the fortress which is limited, and relatively quickly repaired, seems to have a limited, if any, impact on the crystal growth.

For this reason, Artemis IV has earned itself the nickname of “Siegeworld.” All known races fear destroying the crystal deposits by broad attacks, and therefore they each strike out from their respective fortresses to lay siege to their neighbors hoping to break through the walls, destroy the inhabitants and take the fortress for themselves. They will then rebuild the walls and await the next inevitable assault from their neighbors.

This slow ebb and tide of battle means that every force known to humanity has forces on Artemis IV. The forces live far from a state of peace, but instead every fortress slowly builds up forces for defense, until it feels it has enough strength to attack one of its neighbors without potential harm befalling itself. Even these battles are unpredictable, as Artemis IV’s erratic rotation can end a battle before it is begun by plunging the forces into an unexpected nightfall, or a period of snow or scorching sun.

The constant assaults on its surface have led to a planet permanently cut by the trenches, fortifications, and constructions of Siege combat raging at that point at some time. The massive battles bringing one side the possibility of a future crystal cutting, or the possibility of themselves being besieged. Further, even as attackers fail and their trenches are destroyed, a later attacker, years later will rebuild them again.

Due to the structure and size of the world no one race can gain an upper hand on its surface. While in space a similar fact holds true as common enemies will generally make it impossible for any one race to gain a stranglehold on the space lanes. Instead transports will constantly run the gamut to land fresh supplies looking for the valuable credits granted by the government whom they support.

These strange alliances will also often manifest in the surface battles, with one fortresses garrison coming to another’s aid to keep a common enemy from gaining an increased foothold or trying to help in the siege in the hope they can then turn on a weakened ally and capture not one but two fortresses.

When a crystal is harvested, it is a momentous occasion for the race succeeding and they try with all their might to get a transport to take the invaluable crystal off planet. Even with their best efforts, however, only 1 in 3 survive to escape the solar system.

In a universe racked by war, Siegeworld is just one example of a perpetual conflict, a battle without any clear victor or clear end. Interestingly, fighting on the Siegeworld is considered an honor for almost any military force of all races. Many forces sent to the Siegeworld never return from it, they are locked in perpetual combat and their bleached bones and broken vehicles litter the space between fortresses. Some however will fight on Siegeworld and are evacuated and relieved by fresh forces. These forces take valuable lessons that can only be learned from such a war zone with them and back to their superiors. Often they escort a crystal shipment to insure safe arrival of the precious cargo which is usually worth more than the entire force.

Forces that have fought on Siegeworld, each bear their races mark of allegiance to show their participation in this endless, but essential, conflict. That mark, has now become

universal for all forces (even forces that are not known for marking). The logo, a planet superimposed on crossed rockets and a downward saber has become synonymous with war. One of the highest honors many can earn, the mark is borne on the banners of those who have fought on one of the harshest war zones imaginable. Further, individual crews will often place a stylized form of the mark, the 6 point star fortress-shape with a circle in the center on their vehicles or uniforms to show that they fought there.