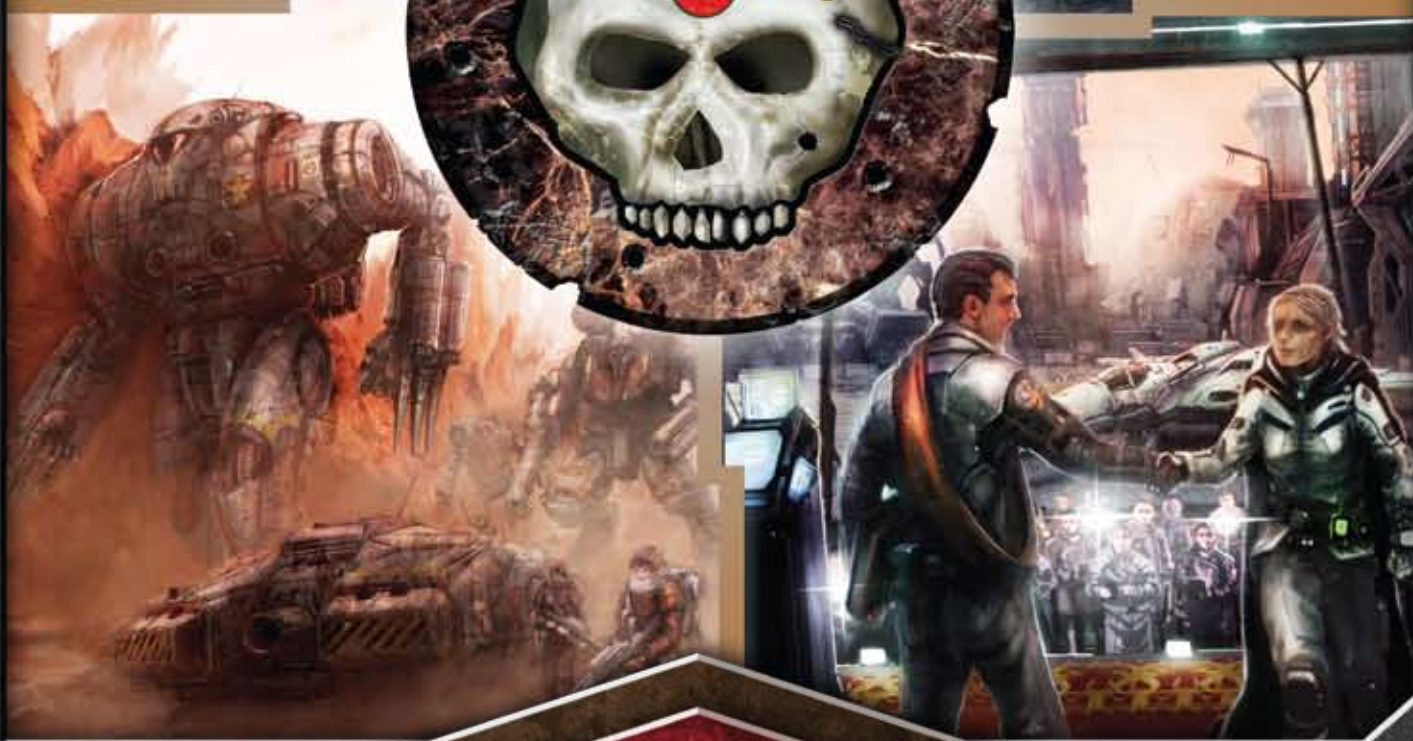
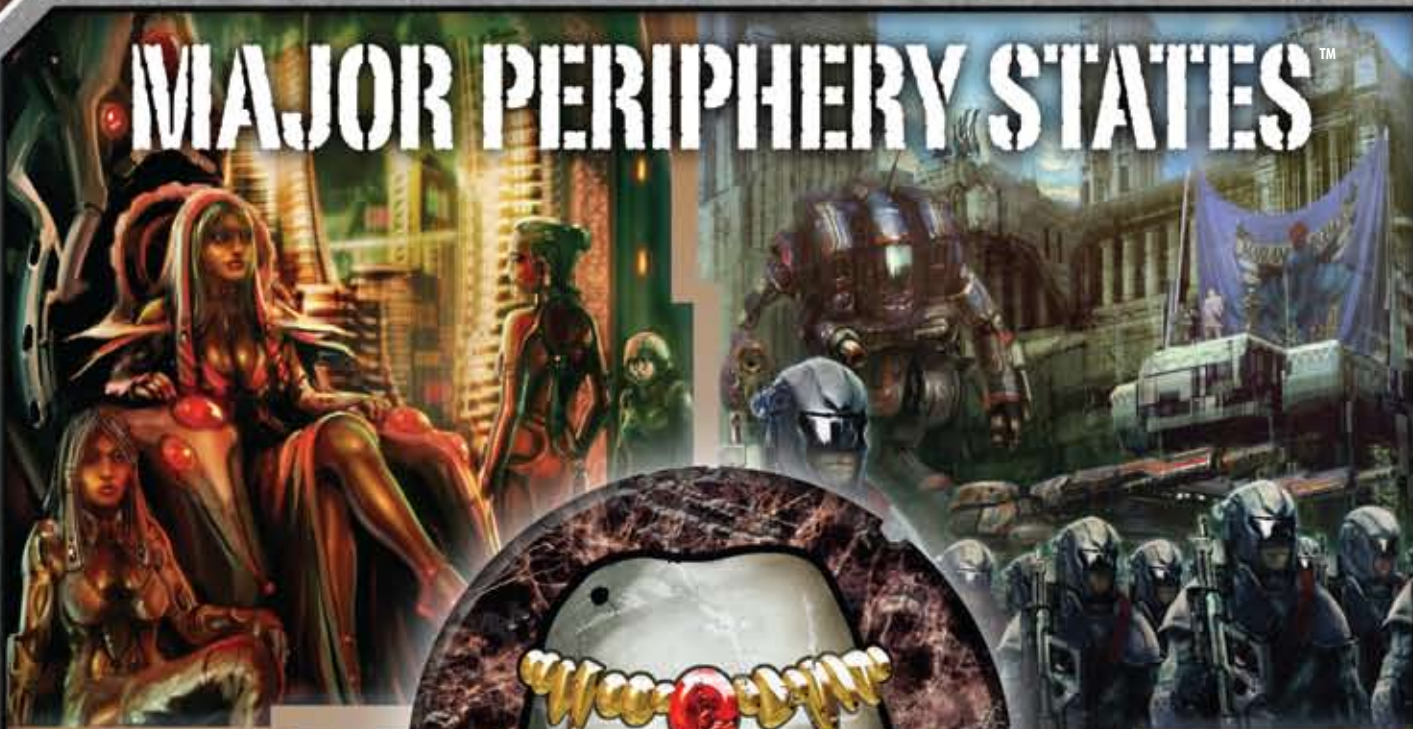


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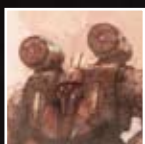
MAJOR PERIPHERY STATES™



Diane Piron-Gelman



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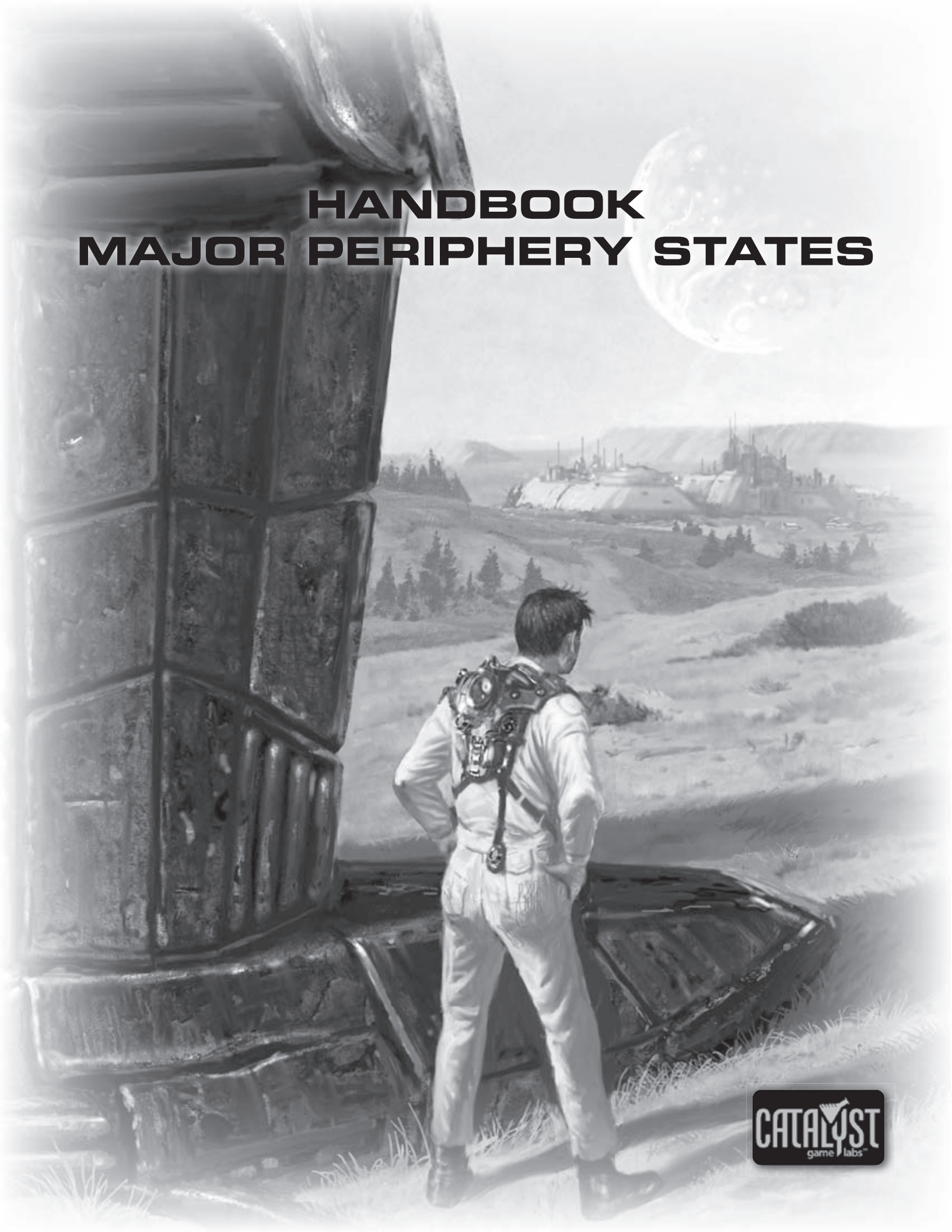




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Writing

Diane Piron-Gelman
Herbert A. Beas II
Additional Writing
Joel Bancroft-Connors

Original Periphery Sourcebook

First Edition
Rick David Stuart

Second Edition

Robert Cruz
Christopher Hussey
Sharon Turner Mulvihill
Bryan Nystul
Diane Piron-Gelman
Rick David Stuart

Product Development

Herbert A. Beas II
Randall N. Bills

Product Editing

Diane Piron-Gelman

BattleTech Line Developer

Herbert A. Beas II

Production Staff

Art Direction
Randall N. Bills
Mike Vaillancourt
Cover Art
Alex Iglesias
Cover Design
Matt Heerd
Classic BattleTech Logo Design
Shane Hartley, Steve Walker, Matt Heerd
Evolved Faction Logos
Jason Vargas
Layout
Matt Heerd

Illustrations

Doug Chaffee
Chris Lewis
Klaus Scherwinski

Color Section

Doug Chaffee
Alex Iglesias
Chris Lewis

Maps

Øystein Tvedten
Record Sheets
David L. McCulloch

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Handbook Series Fact-Checkers

Paul Bowman, Rich Cencarik, Ken' Horner, Mike Miller, David McCulloch, Jeffrey "Highlander" Morgan, "Medron Pryde", Ben "Ghost Bear" Rome, Christopher Searls, Paul Sjardijn, Peter Smith, Øystein Tvedten, Chris "Chinless" Wheeler, and Andreas Zuber.

Playtesters

Raymond Arrastia, Joel Bancroft-Connors, Rich Cencarik, Nicholai Duda, Tami Elder, John "Worktroll"

Haward, Johannes Heidler, Ken' Horner, Jan-Hendrik Kalusche, Camille Klein, Alan Kreilick, Peter La Casse, Nick Marsala, Mike Miller, Andrew T. Norris, Rick Raisley, Jim Rapkins, Björn Schmidt, Christopher K. Searls, Joel Steverson, Chris "Chinless" Wheeler, Patrick "you talk entirely too much, Roosterboy!" Wynne, Andreas Zuber.

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Lake Stevens, WA 98258

Find us online:

Precentor_martial@classicbattletech.com
(e-mail address for any Classic BattleTech questions)
<http://www.classicbattletech.com>
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—Excerpt from *Scoop! VidZine* broadcast,
Luxen, Magistracy of Canopus, 12 September 3067

SCOOP!

VIDZINE

[DENISE DEVALERA]: I'm Denise DeValera for *Scoop! VidZine*. We have a special guest in our studio today—the Periphery's very own oldest living Errant, a MechWarrior whose career gives the words "bold and daring" a style all her own. Now retired on Luxen, she recently celebrated her 120th birthday—and she earlier told this reporter that she plans on "seeing a hundred and twenty more, God willing and the whiskey holds out." Temper MacCaulay, welcome to *Scoop! VidZine*. Thank you so much for being with us.

[MACCAULAY]: My pleasure, Ms. DeValera. [grins] Not often an old girl like me gets an all-expenses-paid invite to tell war stories.

[DEVALERA]: You're a living legend in these parts. How do you feel about that?

[MACCAULAY]: [shrugs] You do what you do. People make what they make of it.

[DEVALERA]: So how did you come by your unusual first name?

[MACCAULAY]: It's Temperance, really. You know—moderation? My folks had a bad case of wishful thinking... I never did live up to it. Daddy used to say I came into the world raging and never got over it. My name got shortened to "Temper" real quick. Mind you, a name like that gives you a rep to match right off.

[DEVALERA]: You grew up on a mining outpost, right? An indy world, not an official colony? How does—and I'll quote from your memoir here—"a rough-edged miner's kid from the back of way beyond,

with no more notion of soldiering than a tunnel rat has of daylight," get to be a MechWarrior in the first place?

[MACCAULAY]: [grins] I blame my daddy. He loved those old flat-screen Westerns—used to watch 'em with me all the time during the light-storms we'd get, when no one dared set foot outside the enviro-domes. This was back on Tumbleweed, where I grew up. My parents followed their old friend Wilkie Jones out there, looking to set up the ideal colony based on the ancient North American frontier... or at least, what they all *thought* was the ancient North American frontier. They'd meant to make landfall somewheres a little gentler, but with food and fuel running low, they settled for Tumbleweed. It had useful ores, and they figured we'd get by inside envirodomes until we could terraform a decent chunk of it for farmland. Population was meant to stay small anyways, so old Wilkie figured, why not? And anyway, weren't we all gonna be hardy pioneer spirits toughing it out on the Great Plains of the Universe? Tumbleweed fit that bill, all right.

Well, things didn't quite work out as planned—which tends to happen on the edges of known space—but we did get by. Nobody much bothered us; even the pirate bands didn't have us on their star charts at first. We all had to work, mind, even us kids. Soon's I got old enough, they let me help fix the IndustrialMechs. Got tall enough, and they let me work 'em. Cut my teeth on those lumbering towers of bolts, held together by then with spit and duct tape and a lot of profane prayer. And I'll tell you something that's likely news to your fancy 'Mech jocks from the Nagelring and such—when your daily bread depends on knowing the quirks of a cranky pile of parts that might collapse out from under you the second you put a foot wrong, you get damned good at tricky maneuvering. And troubleshooting.



LOCAL COLOR





[DEVALERA]: So what turned you into a fighter?

[MACCAULAY]: Tortuga pirates. One of their “Jolly Rogers” happened across Tumbleweed in 2960. Hell of it is, they didn’t even need our ores—not with all the stuff they were sitting on. They were just looking for someone to play with. They did a flyby, blew pure hell out of half our envirodomes, stole everything we’d brought to the surface and wrecked pretty much everything else. Then they took off into the wild black yonder, and left us survivors to clean up the mess. [grim laugh] First old Western me and Daddy watched after that—months later, when we’d finally got some breathing space after burying our dead and jury-rigging vital repairs—was *High Noon*. I wanted to be that Gary Cooper guy—the lone lawman who rides into a scared-as-hell town and sets everything to rights. Most of all, I wanted to get those Tortuga bastards. And any other predators like ‘em out there.

[DEVALERA]: So you got your first ‘Mech...?

[MACCAULAY]: On Illyria, in the Palatinate. [snorts] ‘Scuse me, nowadays it’s the newest toy in the Marian Hegemony. Anyways, they used to hold fight-to-the-death ‘Mech games there. Still do, I guess. Whoever won got the salvaged ‘Mech or spare parts...whatever the combatants put up. Killer poker in a giant walking death machine. Fellow I’d been mechanic for—Ty Falco—got the yellow-bellies, couldn’t make himself go through with the death match. Not even to hold onto his family ‘Mech. He’d been going downhill awhile, hitting the jet fuel real hard just to get up in the morning. Comes to me on game day, drunker than a House Lord, says he wants me to have his ‘Mech. If I can win it in what was supposed to be his fight, that’ll prove I’m worthy of the Gray Lady. That’s what he called her. This was 2970, now, and his family’d had that bucket of bolts for longer than old Ty could recall. She was towering and gray and full of dings and quirks, but she was a sound piece of work for all that. I’d got to know her pretty well by then, and I figured Ty’s offer was my best shot at getting my own ‘Mech. So I fought and I won—blind luck, that last engine shot, doesn’t matter who knows it now—and I figured I was ready to take on the universe.

[DEVALERA]: Tell us about your first campaign.

[MACCAULAY]: If you can call it that. I spent a few years with the Illyrian Militia, knocking out raiders. They kept hitting Illyria, chasing stories about Star League ‘Mech caches on the northern continent. They’d land and we’d bloody their noses, and they’d go away again after doing enough damage to save some face. They mostly couldn’t fight worth a plugged C-bill. Got boring after a time. I got restless. Wanted to face down some real bad guys for a change. So when my rotation came up, I got myself an honorable discharge and went looking for work. Found it for a time on the Lyran border, fighting off raiders from the Oberon Confederation. Then I got itchy feet and joined up with some mercs who were working for Interstellar Expeditions, going out into the Deep Periphery looking for lost colonies. Spent a chunk of the 2980s doing that. Mostly, we found remnants of colonies that didn’t

make it—which gave me a whole new appreciation for how lucky we were to make a go of things on Tumbleweed.

[DEVALERA]: And then you came back to the Near Periphery, in...?

[MACCAULAY]: Let’s see now... 2995, maybe ‘96. Found work on Cadiz, settled by that Far Looker bunch out of the Taurian Concordat. The Taurians were real big on colonial expansion back then, a lot of it pushed by the Far Lookers. Them people’ve always wanted to go way out there, put humans on as many planets as they can. So they settled this pretty little breadbasket world, with a couple-three major mountain ranges on each of its continents. One of the ranges had radioactives in its stone guts, and eventually that made it a target. Pirate band calling themselves the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, of all the fool things, hit Cadiz in the spring about a year after I took up station there. Woman was leading ‘em, went by the moniker Black Maria. As in a hearse, which I guess would’ve made her Death. Never did figure out who was supposed to be War, Pestilence and Famine. There was ten of ‘em all together, which would’ve made a tough fight for me on sheer numbers. Luckily, I was dealing with amateurs.

Me and the local constable, plus about half a dozen colonists in dressed-up hovertrucks, used comm transmissions and misdirection to fake up a couple tank and ‘Mech companies. Amazing, how useful a ‘Mech sensor ghost can be...The set-up convinced Black Maria to duel me for the rights to the uranium mines in the Blue Mountains. She gave me a good fight before I nailed her with a lucky hit that breached her cockpit. With her gone, the rest of ‘em fell to battling each other over who was the new boss. We let ‘em duke it out, and then I knee-capped the last two pirate ‘Mechs standing. The pirates still alive were told they could join the colony or hole up in the brig until Concordat law enforcement took ‘em back to Taurus for trial. Couple of ‘em took the join-up deal, and did okay. I stayed on Cadiz for awhile after, but nothing much happened. I found out why after I’d moved on. God alone knows how, but somehow my rep had preceded me. According to the scuttlebutt, I took out all ten of those pirates by my lonesome—and they weren’t some itty-bitty bandit wannabes, either. One version I heard had me knocking out the entire ‘Mech force of a Marian Hegemony privateer—this was back in the days before the Hegemony got respectable.

[DEVALERA]: And you moved on to where?

[MACCAULAY]: I stayed in the Concordat awhile, as part of the merc unit Thor’s Arms. I liked the pay, liked the people, mostly liked the work. After ‘bout ten years, though, my feet got to itching again. So I left Thor’s Arms, no hard feelings, and went looking for a solo contract. The Lothian League was having some trouble with Caesar Marius O’Reilly around that time, not too long after the turn of this century. Made me chuckle to think I’d be fighting the Hegemony for real.

Anyways, the Lothians hired me to train up a planetary militia on Logan Prime, which was close to the Hegemony border and had some rich ore deposits. Marius O’Reilly had just taken power, and he wasn’t satisfied with plain old piracy. He wanted to play conqueror, and the



LOCAL COLOR

League planets were at the top of his list. I remembered a bunch of stuff from my days with Thor's Arms, and the Logan Prime militia gave a good account of itself when the Marian troops finally hit. We took some casualties, but we sent 'em away good and bloodied. Not that it mattered much in the long run. [grins] But you didn't ask me on this show to talk politics.

[DEVALERA]: Weren't you part of the expedition that forced Marius O'Reilly off Astrokaszy in 3035?

[MACCAULAY]: I wish. I gather that was some ruckus. No, by then I was in Canopian space. Militia training, mostly, on backwater worlds the MAF couldn't reach. The MAF had its hands full at the time with the Andurien situation, and didn't have many personnel to spare for the real podunk planets. So they hired folks like me to fill that gap. Decent money, too. Which was getting to matter to me, being the age I was. Even with Canopian medical tech, a girl can't help slowing down some after she passes seventy.

[DEVALERA]: But you pulled off some pretty impressive feats before then. Like the incident with the Forty-Niners—the germanium prospectors who ran into “dragons” on Far Edge. They weren't really dragons, were they?

[MACCAULAY]: Close enough. Big as tanks, with steel-hard scales and spitting fire... nastiest local beastie I ever tangled with, including the flying spiders on Tango. At least the spiders, you could fry with a good solid laser shot. But the dragons...Lord God, they were tough to kill. Only thing that'd punch through those scales was a big-bore autocannon, and even then you had to be in too close for comfort to get maximum impact. Me and three other Errants took that contract. Only two of us came back. Liz Bennett bought it, along with Li Jun Park. Dragon tore Li Jun right out of his cockpit, like peeling a shrimp. Horrible. Me and Liz and Marti, we went to town on the beastie that did that. And its friend, who damned near got me, 'cept Lizzy got in its way. Killed it with a shot through the eyeball. [pause] It crushed her when it fell. That particular dragon was a lot bigger than the others. We figured out later it was the queen dragon. Its nestlings or whatever scattered after that. Only Marti Winter Moon and I made it back to civilization. But we didn't lose a single miner. I still miss Lizzy and Li Jun like hell, but I'm damned proud of what we all did there.

[DEVALERA]: And what about you taking out Helmar Valasek in the 3030s? That story still makes the rounds in a lot of bars, but you don't mention it in your memoir.

[MACCAULAY]: [laughs] That's because it didn't happen. I had one fight with Valasek's band back in the thirty-teens, when the Outworlds Alliance put together a bandit-hunting force. Got help paying for the deal from some Davion mining companies that wanted to protect their investments. We did OK against Valasek—cost him a few pirates and some materiel—but it was a far cry from “taking him out.” Credit for

that goes to the Clanners, a lot later—3049. They rolled over Santander's World when they invaded Spheroid space—and though I'm no huge fan of 'em, I don't know anyone who's crying about old Helmar. [chuckles] Funny—almost twenty years on, folks are getting the Clan invasion mixed up with ancient history.

[DEVALERA]: What's the most memorable job you ever had?

[MACCAULAY]: Working for Lyle Steadman. Yeah, that Steadman. The guy who made a fortune on Canopus IV in the 3040s—patented some kinda micro-bug that eats poisons out of the soil and rode it all the way to the bank. He'd made and lost a couple fortunes before that, one on a soft drink and another on some gadget I couldn't understand when he tried to describe it. He came from money—Lyle was the eccentric of the Steadman clan, who'd made a pretty C-bill in the gemstone trade here on Luxen. Lyle was supposed to follow his mother into the business, but he preferred tinkering and finding lost treasure. He hired me to help him with that last one. He'd heard all kinds of stories about lostech caches just waiting to be discovered farther out in the Periphery, and he aimed to find one. Hired me as his bodyguard and fix-it person. This was in 3026. Youngster then, Lyle was, ready to take on the universe. [laughs] Especially with a few drinks in him. We met in a bar on Astrokaszy... real dive, but known as a place where a soldier could get decent liquor cheap with no water in it. I'd gone there following up a contract, but the fella never showed. I stuck around for a last drink and happened to catch a couple regulars harassing some new guy. Never could stand for that sort of thing, so I busted up the ruckus that was forming and got the poor sucker out of there. Turned out it was Lyle. After I got him sobered up with plenty of strong coffee down the street at Sal's Diner, he offered me a job.

[DEVALERA]: Treasure-hunting.

[MACCAULAY]: [nods] I'd thought about doing it myself, but never quite worked up the gumption. Or the financing. Lyle had the cash, no problem. I thought, what the hell? Turned out to be a bit more than either of us bargained for, but we did all right. First place we went was a water-world called Tethys—s'posed to have a lost Star League base on its major island. We didn't find one, though we did have trouble with some big cats in those jungles. There were also these flying lizard-snake critters...they'd come at you in swarms. Had a nasty bite. Left the pair of us shivering and sick for a week. Lucky for us, if the first bite or two don't kill you, the rest don't hardly slow you down. Acquired immunity, I guess. Anyways, we went on to a little planet so obscure it didn't even have a proper name. Ten-A-Two, it was marked down as. Supposed to be uninhabited. Wasn't. We stumbled on what must have been the last remnants from a crashed colony ship, barely surviving in the foothills where their ship'd gone down. Slow radiation leak was killing 'em. I don't know how many decades or even centuries it'd been since they saw civilized people, but it must've been awhile. They took us for gods, if you can imagine. None of 'em could remember ever seeing a ship actually fly, and they acted like every piece of tech we had with us was

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some kind of marvel. We didn't find any lostech there, either, but we did some good. Lyle scooped the survivors up and ferried 'em to the temperate southern continent, and we left them what we could to get on with. I was all for takin' 'em to the Outworlds Alliance, which was the closest region in the Periphery where they might get help. Plus, a lot of Alliance planets were still pretty low-tech back then, which I figured would cut down on the culture shock. But they didn't want to leave. Kept calling Ten-A-Two their Promised Land and flat refused to budge.

[DEVALERA]: And you took "No" for an answer?

[MACCAULAY]: That's how we do out here. Folks choose their own way, and unless it involves harming them as can't fight back, we mostly let 'em. Because who's to say what's right for someone else? Wasn't our place to tell 'em, "No, you can't stay here, you've got to come with us for your own good." That kind of stuff you can leave to your Successor States.

[DEVALERA]: So did you ever find that lostech cache?

[MACCAULAY]: [nods] On a godforsaken iceball of a planet way out toward the rim. I don't recall its real name anymore; Lyle named it Brass Monkey, as in "Cold enough to freeze the nose off a...". Even the arctic-weather gear we'd picked up on Thraxa almost didn't see us through those months. Lyle lost two toes to frostbite. But we found the cache, and he still says it was worth the swap. Not a big cache, mind—hardly enough to make the major vid networks back in the Magistracy—but enough to make Lyle happy, and to buy me a brand-new 'Mech with my cut. Lyle insisted I take half, in addition to my pay. Always was generous.

[DEVALERA]: So you traded in the Gray Lady?

[MACCAULAY]: Yep. I felt kind of sad letting her go, but she was an old rattling heap by then, and I seriously needed a new ride. By the time we got back to civilization, the Fourth Succession War had come

and gone in the Inner Sphere, and as usual, all the brawling—plus the Helm Memory Core—had sparked some mighty sweet military tech. So I got myself a new machine, called her Lady Day after a famous blues singer on ancient Terra. And went looking for a chance to christen her in the field. The 'Mech games on Hardcore seemed worth a try... especially with the prospect of resting my old bones in a hot tub afterward, at one of the better hotels. [grins] Was that ever a time. Quite a place, Hardcore.

[DEVALERA]: The site of your last exploit, according to your memoir.

[MACCAULAY]: Getting young Emma Centrella out of her crazy mother's way. [nods] We'd crossed paths before; I did a stint as a guest instructor at the military academy where Emma did her training. Good eye and a steady hand, I thought then. Plus a crafty head on her shoulders. Anyways, I was one of the locals who helped the Magistracy Royal Guards smuggle Emma off Hardcore after Magestrix Kyalla tried to have her killed. The Guards were supposed to arrest her, but Kyalla didn't know how thin her own support had gotten among them. The ones who fetched up on Hardcore were Emma's partisans, and we all knew she was safe with them.

[DEVALERA]: Has Magestrix Emma ever acknowledged your role in that incident?

[MACCAULAY]: Sends me a bottle of aged Canopian apple brandy every WinterFest, if that's what you mean. [grins] She wanted to give me a medal, but I told her I'd rather have the brandy. Woman in her nineties, which I was then, has to think of her comforts.

[DEVALERA]: This has been fascinating. I wish we could keep going, but unfortunately that's all the time we have... so once again, thank you for coming on our show. It's been a pleasure, Ms. MacCaulay.

[MACCAULAY]: Likewise.



INTRODUCTION

The following compilation began more than a year ago, when Doug McCrory—my editor at InterStellar Associated Press—suggested an in-depth series on the Periphery. As ISAP’s unofficial “resident expert,” he tapped me for the job. “You’re the outlander, Ev,” he said. “Here’s your chance to give our readers a taste of home.”

“Home”—meaning Early Dawn, something of a Canopian backwater—was a place I hadn’t been to for some time. Ten years, to be exact. At seventeen, I’d dreamed of getting shut of the place. At twenty, a scholarship to the Royko School of Journalism on Piriapolis gave me that chance. I moved across the border to the Free Worlds League and figured I’d never look back.

Funny thing, though. Getting away from someplace can really make you appreciate all the things about it that you didn’t know you’d miss. I missed my morning cup of *tzim*—a strong tea made from dried grass roots that gives you a kick like a BattleMech while it takes the edge off your appetite. Tastes like old socks smell. The first colonists on Early Dawn used it to get through the Winter of Hunger in 2570, when the gengineered crops failed. The next generation drank it on a dare, then it became a fad during the First Star League era, and finally it got to be a habit. And damn it, living in the League with ready access to fresh-ground Blue Mountain coffee, I found myself hankering for *tzim*.

I missed bigger things, too. Like the feeling that every day is a gift because you never know what might happen in it. The dirt-poor prospector who finally stumbles across that lostech cache and makes his fortune overnight, the prospering farm colony wiped out by bandits,

the explorers who narrowly survive a run-in with some nasty local beastie and then find out its sweat glands contain the cure for a horrible disease... such triumphs and tragedies can happen any time. You don’t get that feeling in the Inner Sphere. The Successor States are too big, too well established, too used to seeing themselves as eternal despite the history books that tell us otherwise. People here have a structure to their lives that’s missing for those on the edges of space. They take for granted that the sun (or suns) will rise and set every day, and that they’ll be here to watch. And so will their families and their bosses and their co-workers, and their houses and their towns and their cities. Oh, sure, Spheroids have seen their share of warfare that blew all their certainties sky-high... but only until someone—new lord or old—rebuilt whatever they’d knocked down. In the end, loss and destruction are temporary here. Everyone knows that.

The Periphery’s different. Back in the day, if bandits hit at the wrong time, your entire settlement could die. Assuming you survived the assault, there might be nothing to survive for—or rebuild with. So many Periphery worlds had no national resources to call on, no Big Government behind them with a stake in whether this or that colony lived and grew. They just had whatever the first settlers brought with them, plus whatever later generations cobbled together. That, and plenty of crazy determination.

We’ve still got our stubbornness. It’s allowed the major states, like the Magistracy and the Taurian Concordat and even the poor-relation Outworlds Alliance, to go from ad-hoc collections of rough colonies to stable nations. But that anything-can-happen sense remains. It’s bred too deep ever to fade away. Because we know we still live on

MINOR POWERS

One can’t discuss the Periphery without mentioning the real “Wild West” portion: the minor powers, including various independent worlds, micro-states and pirate bands of the Near and Deep Periphery. After considerable thought, Doug and I decided that only a second, separate series could do justice to those. The following paragraphs therefore touch on what’s currently happening with some of the Periphery’s better-known minor players. Readers interested in fuller coverage can expect it in the near future.

Mica Majority

This three-world collective has dragged itself a bare notch higher than its historic subsistence-level economy through trade links—licit and otherwise—made possible by its zenith-point jump station, a relic from the Majority’s days as a Combine prison complex. The station has evolved into a major crossroads for small-scale traders, lostech prospectors and other drifters. Merchants from Clan Diamond Shark have come sniffing around lately, possibly interested in adding the jump station to their Periphery trade network. The Sharks may also want a piece of recent mineral finds in a nearby system, which have quintupled the Majority’s trading profits since 3064. So far, both sides are still talking. One wild card in all this: a recent assault on a Shark trade flotilla, attributed variously to the Hansa, Word of Blake operatives or the renegade Smoke Jaguar remnants who call themselves Dark.

Hanseatic League

The Hansa planets are making a packet off the lucrative regional weapons market. From Near Periphery states to local customers like Nueva Castile to the Hanseatic League’s own beefed-up security for its far-flung mercantile fleet, things are booming. Rivalry continues between the League and the Diamond Sharks, though the Hansa remain cautious about provoking another assault like the one that cost them two JumpShips and several DropShips near the Chaimelane Isles in 3055. No major rumbles yet, but most local observers believe the Hansa will make a move once they’ve finished muscling up their ships. Should the Hansa and the Sharks then cross paths, the outcome won’t necessarily be another easy Shark victory.

Niops Association

A few years back, the tiny Niops Association sold several centuries’ worth of scientific research to private Inner Sphere corporations in order to raise money for serious military hardware (comparatively speaking). Royalty agreements on the sold data have since permitted the Association to buy a third ‘Mech battalion, even though the reason for the buying spree—Marian Hegemony belligerence—has ebbed considerably in the wake of Julius O’Reilly’s most recent military adventures. Niops VII has also become a favored destination for science wonks, especially astronomers, throughout the rest of the Periphery and even the Inner Sphere.

JärnFölk Worlds

Descended from 26th-century Rasalhagian refugees, the JärnFölk keep to themselves, though stories periodically crop up of JärnFölk assassins in the Hanseatic League and elsewhere. For the conspiracy-minded who follow the alleged doings of various Periphery and Inner Sphere intelligence agencies, a few recent unexplained deaths among supposed intel operatives may or may not be the JärnFölk at work.

Astrokaszy

This rough-and-ready planet is the arms-deal capital of the Periphery. Everybody who’s anybody has some operation here: Near Periphery states and corporations, the Blakists, Clanners, even some folks from “respectable” Inner Sphere states. Current hot rumor says the Blakies run the joint and are selling off stuff from stockpiles or skimming everybody else’s deals to finance merc contracts (for an unknown sinister purpose). All we know for sure about them is, they’re around and they may have some link with a new pirate band on Astrokaszy, dubbed the “Order of the Faithful” and recruited from the planet’s ubiquitous desert warrior tribes. Astrokaszy also appears to be the base for recent raids into the Marian Hegemony and the Magistracy of Canopus—nothing serious, but enough to keep both realms off-balance. Guessing the raiders’ identity—Blakists? Bandits? Secret Marian and Canopian assault teams hitting each other under “plausible deniability”?—is a favorite local parlor game.

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the edge of existence, even if Canopian or Taurian planets now have a national government to lean on when things get tough. And we know how fragile our nations really are, against the dangers that lurk among the stars—those we've learned about the hard way and those beyond our imagination.

The past couple of decades have seen new hazards appear and others diminish. The Clan Invasion cut a swath through the coreward Periphery, while refugees from their assault on the Inner Sphere swamped us with desperate immigrants—some of whom forged pirate bands to replace the ones the Clanners took out. On the other hand, the new Star League—despite being shaky on its feet—stands as a symbol of unprecedented alliances between Periphery and Inner Sphere powers. For once in our sorry mutual history, the Inner Sphere isn't imposing itself on the Periphery at the point of a PPC. Instead, some of us are working together by choice.

Yet things rarely stay quiet in human-occupied space, and plenty of misunderstanding still exists. So it seemed like a good idea to use this breathing space to show everyone what the Periphery is all about. We're different from you Spheroids, and different from each other... and yet, not so different when it counts. The sooner we all understand that, the more likely our next "breathing space" will last awhile.

So off home I went, to the Magistracy of Canopus. A small team of my colleagues—Tai Eleazar, Leandra Malnati, Felipe Montoya and Osei Li—traveled to the Taurian Concordat, the Outworlds Alliance and the almost-ready-for-prime-time powers—the Marian Hegemony, the Circinus Federation and the Rim Collection. Most of this volume is our own work, based on interviews and extensive research, along

with personal knowledge and insights. I've tried to make this material objective, screening out reporter biases and personal assumptions in order to bring readers the real story. On occasion, when that effort proved impossible, my associates and I went to other sources that do a better job of conveying the full reality of Periphery life. Read all of this with a grain of salt; some sources have their own agendas, and we've all got our bedrock viewpoints to contend with. I will say this: having read previous ComStar compilations on the Periphery, you're better off trusting what's between these covers. Not that the earlier works are completely wrong—but they've got some real howlers, and the authors didn't always do their homework terribly well. Which isn't surprising; records in the Periphery are notoriously spotty, and memories tend to go for color over truth.

For the record, never once was I run off at the business end of a laser rifle. Okay, there was that one time... but they welcomed me in after I told them I just wanted "a set-down for a good jawbone over whatever you've got cooking and a case of Timbiqui Dark." (Yes, even out here, they've heard of it.)

The Periphery often gets stereotyped as "the Wild West"—where the men are tough, the women are tougher, and nobody goes anywhere without a trusty sidearm. The Periphery is all those things. It's also much more. Fascinating, complicated and vividly alive, the Periphery embodies life on the edge. It may draw you, puzzle you or make you crazy, but it's never dull. And I'm proud to call it home.

—Evann Kaplan Soong, *InterStellar Associated Press*
17 November, 3067

Franklin Fiefs

The newly tech-hungry Outworlds Alliance is sending diplomatic missions to resource-rich Novo Franklin, hoping for a mutually beneficial trade deal. Allegedly, the diplomatic vessels carry passengers from Clan Snow Raven. Some think the Ravens want to conquer Novo Franklin, but quietly enough that the other Clans won't come after their new prize until the Birds can defend it. No word on how the Alliance might regard any such plan.

Nueva Castile

The two major political powers in this perennially squabbling collection of planets are finally uniting—sort of—against the Lyran Alliance, which the natives blame for fomenting centuries of warfare that have kept both sides down. An influx of new military recruits and the Lyran's post-FedCom Civil War disarray have enabled this new belligerency—but the Castilians and the Umayyads still don't trust each other, making coordinated military action unlikely.

Elysian Fields

This place has pretty much belonged to Clan Wolf since 3052, though the Wolves keep a light hand on Elissa, stronghold of the One Star Faith. Demonstrating its knack for adapting to the times, this oddball religious sect pretty much runs its own affairs via links to the Faith in Clan Wolf and others. Disagreements exist between Clan and Spheroid

adherents, but so far they're coexisting, despite rumors of agitators stirring up unrest on backwater planets in the Occupation Zones.

Herotitus

The culture-war seesaw continues between the New Hedons and the homegrown puritans, with neither side gaining the upper hand. This planet is principally valuable to the region's bigger players as a vacation stop and minor trade crossroads, though its ongoing political struggles have lately put a damper on the pleasure-seeking tourist industry.

PIRATES

Pirate activity has yet to fully recover from the Clan onslaught that began in 3049, not that plenty of pirates aren't still out here making trouble. The current biggest baddie is Paula "Lady Death" Trealine, onetime ruler of the Tortuga Dominions. The Davions ousted her from there in 3042 and kept her on ice for years, but now she's back—operating from the Pirate's Haven star cluster—and out for blood. A series of raids on the Calderon Protectorate showcased Lady Death's nasty new battle armor, and everybody's guessing as to where she got it. Baron Kithrong of the Protectorate is hiring mercs to defend his tiny realm against this notorious pirate queen.

The planet Antallos remains a brutal bandit haven, with pirate king Vance Rezak battling Clan Snow Raven for his

very existence. Rezak leads the Band of the Damned, and absorbed most of Vinson's Vigilantes after repeated clashes between those two bandit groups. Nowadays, though, Rezak's having a tough time. The Snow Ravens obliterated his former stronghold, Rezak's Hole, and are after his hide on Antallos as well. Scuttlebutt talks of near-daily Trials against Rezak by Snow Raven warriors and even a few surviving Smoke Jaguars. No one's sure how long he can hold out.

A few bit players deserve mention—mostly because out here, you never know how long they'll stay minor. Susie Morgaine-Ryan grabbed sole command of the New Belt Pirates from Morgan Fletcher in 3066, after blaming her erstwhile partner-in-crime for significant losses to a Clan Wolf pirate-hunting unit. Morrison's Extractors got their noses bloodied by Able's Aces in the Rim Collection awhile back and have yet to fully recover. Hopper Morrison's still breathing, so he's likely to pull some sort of "comeback" maneuver. Finally, rumors persist of Clan "Dark Caste" bandits, though no one seems able to nail these stories down. The creepiest variations speak of genetically modified "monsters," complete with tentacles and gills and giant glowing eyes. Highly unlikely among Clanners, if you ask me—even Clanners cast out from their own society. Then again, out in the Periphery, the only thing stranger than a tall tale is the truth.



HISTORY OF THE PERIPHERY

The Periphery was born in the fires of battle, in the minds and hearts and determination of those who'd survived the Outer Reaches Rebellion. Fought in the 2230s, the Rebellion pitted the authoritarian technocrats of the Terran Alliance against their own most distant colony worlds, many of whose people had gotten fed up with the ham-fisted rule of an ossifying planetary government light-years removed from local concerns. The Freedom Declaration—a watershed document comparable to North America's ancient Declaration of Independence—embodied the colonists' passionate desire to be left alone. All they wanted was liberty. They received destruction and death.

Like many an empire before it, the Terran Alliance did its level best to enforce political unity at the point of a gun. From 2236 through late 2237, the Alliance Armed Forces unleashed its power against the rebel colonies and their sympathizers, only to find that armed might could not prevail. The colonies were too dispersed, the army stretched too thin, the opposition too determined. Even when Alliance forces won the day, they could not hold what they had taken, and ultimately had to withdraw. In their wake, they left shattered infrastructures and traumatized populations, for whom "Terran unity" had become at best a hollow promise and at worst a deadly threat.

The Rebellion shook up the Terran Alliance as well. The resulting political upheaval brought the Liberal Party to power in Terra's 2237 elections and ushered in a period of serious retrenchment. The temporary political demise of their Expansionist Party foes, however, only made matters worse for the battered colonies of the Outer Reaches. Facing huge military-driven budget deficits, the Terran Alliance could no longer sustain its colonial empire—and, some still believe, no longer wished to support the "ungrateful" rebellious worlds. Within months of taking office, the new government cut off all colony worlds that lay beyond a thirty light-year boundary from Terra. The people on the edge of human-explored space now had their liberty, but at a stark price. They would get no assistance in rebuilding their homeworlds or keeping them viable—no economic aid, no security against bandit assaults, no tax breaks, no trade. They would make it on their own, or not at all.

The prevailing reaction from the newly independent colonies was summed up by a still-famous newspaper headline from the world of Freedom, which as the epicenter of the Rebellion had received a particularly vicious pounding. In giant boldface type, the 12 October 2242 edition of the *Freedom Gazette* proclaimed, "TERRAN ALLIANCE TO COLONIES: DROP DEAD". Though some sought consolation in the liberty they had won, most colonists knew only too well that they faced an impossible task without Terran resources to fall back on. Two choices loomed before them: beg for readmittance to the Alliance, or strike out toward the unknown stars in hopes of better fortune. They chose the stars. And to that choice—a blend of courage, grit and gambler's pluck—the Periphery owes its existence.

GOOD NIGHT AND GOOD LUCK

Two major groups struck out for unexplored space within fifteen years of the Rebellion's end, under strikingly different circumstances. Hector Rowe and Samantha Calderon never met, and their destinies played out in different regions of what would eventually become the Periphery—yet both were trailblazers for the human race, driven by stark necessity and hope. Calderon would lay the groundwork for the Taurian Concordat, the oldest unified interstellar nation, older even than the Inner Sphere with which the Concordat would later find itself at odds. Rowe's Rim Worlds Republic no longer survives—but the circumstances of its demise would echo the demons that drove its founder.

WAR IS HELL: THE RIM WORLDS REPUBLIC

"The villainy you teach me, I will execute; and it will go hard, but I will better the instruction."

—Shylock, *The Merchant of Venice*; Act III, Scene 1

In many ways, Hector Worthington Rowe was the last person anyone might expect to found a nation—let alone one that would loom so large in humanity's later history. An undergraduate classics and history student at the University of Thebes on Alexandria, Rowe had no military inclinations until the Terran Alliance Armed Forces assaulted Alexandria in 2237. Rowe volunteered to defend his homeworld, and soon rose to the rank of sergeant in Reinfield's Third Alexandrian Militia. The Alliance eventually prevailed in its four-month siege of the planet, but at a staggering cost: three thousand rebel soldiers and even more Alliance troops dead on the battlefields. In one of the ironies of warfare, the Alliance could not consolidate its gains, and withdrew from Alexandria by June of 2238. It left behind a broken and bewildered citizenry barely able to pick up the pieces.

Like many of his fellow soldiers, Rowe could not put the war behind him. The unassuming student, fired by patriotism, had given way to an embittered veteran itching for revenge against the victorious enemy. The Alliance withdrawal only made matters worse. Rowe saw it as a gesture of contempt, proof that the Alliance had never truly valued Alexandria. Instead, its military had wreaked havoc solely as punishment for defiance. Starting in 2239, Rowe created an outlet for the hatred that was eating at him. He founded an anti-Alliance political club, which grew over the next five years into a formidable paramilitary force. By 2244, this so-called Theban Legion was ready for action. All Rowe needed was a suitable target.

HISTORY OF THE PERIPHERY





HISTORY OF THE PERIPHERY

The Lucianca Incident

He found it on the world of Lucianca, some thirty-two light years coreward of Alexandria. Used as an Alliance staging base during the Rebellion, Lucianca still hosted the 151st Altairian Fusiliers, a Terran Alliance military unit. Rowe's 500-man Theban Legion hijacked a commercial JumpShip fleet in mid-2244, attacked Lucianca and swiftly overwhelmed the smaller Fusiliers garrison. Those not killed in the initial fighting were condemned and executed by Rowe via kangaroo courts over the next few weeks, until a daring escape by one of the JumpShip captains brought Rowe's activities to light. The Theban Legion did not dare return to Alexandria, but instead departed toward unexplored space.

As told by historians of the Lyran Commonwealth—to which Lucianca has belonged since its absorption by the Protectorate of Donegal in the early 24th century—this incident is a harrowing parable of treachery that foreshadows the later betrayal of the Star League by Amaris the Usurper. Just as Hector Rowe slaughtered the defenseless soldiers of the 151st, motivated by unreasoning hatred of the Terran Alliance, so his latter-day anti-Terran heir, Stefan Amaris, slaughtered the Camerons and their Star League. This viewpoint equates the Alliance with its successor, the Terran Hegemony, and assumes that because the Star League sprang from the Hegemony, those who despised Terran rule must also have loathed the League. Finally, it fits Lucianca into a narrative humans have told ever since the fall of ancient Rome: the story of centralized, "civilized" empires succumbing to the barbarian hordes from "out there." Certainly, Hector Rowe's actions on Lucianca qualify as barbaric, and no thinking person can justify the execution of innocent men and women for "war crimes" they did not commit. But the Inner Sphere perspective on this ugly piece of ancient history only tells part of the story.

In the Periphery, Lucianca embodies a starkly different reality. Rowe's judicial murder of the Fusiliers represents not random cruelty by a "crude colonial," but the desperate act of a once-honorable man unhinged by a war he never sought and did not deserve to suffer. Similarly, Amaris the Usurper was more than an uncouth Periphery barbarian intent on destroying what he could not comprehend. His actions likewise stemmed from a legacy of injustice and oppression that either patronized the Periphery realms or treated them as a stash of resources to plunder. In both cases, terrible events occurred in reaction to equally terrible acts inflicted by the "civilized" interstellar community. This difference of perspective has separated those who live near the edges of explored space from the rest of humanity ever since human beings first left their birthworld—and, as both accounts show, can lead to horrific consequences when one side's reality remains unacknowledged.

For Rowe, Lucianca became the source of his exile from Alexandria, but also the catalyst for his greatest achievement. The Theban Legion fleet eventually disappeared into the heart of the Dark Nebula, and emerged on the other side to find a small star orbited by a single habitable planet. Rowe christened the world Apollo, and officially proclaimed the existence of the Rim Worlds Republic on 8 September, 2250. He would rule it until 2305, patterning his realm after the ideals of Plato, seemingly content to leave the perfidy of Terra behind him.

STRANGE NEW WORLDS: THE TAURIAN CONCORDAT

Historians like to believe that the character of its founder leaves an indelible mark on a nation. This notion is debatable, but owes its persistent popularity to a grain of truth. Certainly Samantha Calderon, founder of the Taurian Concordat, was a different person from Hector Rowe. Both saw tragedy and death in the Outer Reaches Rebellion, but they dealt with it in strikingly different ways. Likewise, the nations they created sprang from different sources and have seen markedly different fates.

In 2236, a Terran Alliance firing squad on the planet Aix-la-Chappelle robbed Samantha Calderon of her husband and daughters. It also left her the sole heir to her husband's fortune, built on the terraforming industry. When the Rebellion ended, Samantha threw her money and energies into Aix-la-Chappelle's struggle to rebuild. However, the sheer magnitude of the task soon seemed overwhelming, especially since Aix-la-Chappelle and the rest of the outlying colonies no longer had Alliance military protection against neighboring planetary confederations with expansionist aims. The powerful Marik family had begun to build its domain during this same period, and frequently resorted to piracy to fill its coffers. Between 2238 and 2245, Marik privateers operating under letters of marque targeted several Calderon merchant vessels. These losses, coupled with the collapse of financial markets across the Outer Reaches, cost Samantha Calderon more than half her wealth.

Clearly, staying on Aix-la-Chappelle offered Samantha little hope for rebuilding either her homeworld or her life. Out among the stars, she might have a better chance. She used her remaining assets to bankroll a deep-space expedition, and set off for worlds unknown in 2250. Nearly two years later, the 25 ships of the Calderon Expedition reached the nebula-shrouded Hyades Cluster. The nebula concealed a dense asteroid field—one of many later discovered—that claimed several transports as the Calderon fleet traversed it. Shrouded by the asteroid belts were eight star systems with more than forty planets, of which ten were deemed easily habitable. On 23 January, 2253, Samantha Calderon set foot on the world she called Taurus—a planet rich in arable land and natural resources, ideally suited to become the capital of the Taurian Concordat.

NEW JERUSALEMS: THE PERIPHERY TAKES SHAPE

Though Rowe, Calderon and their followers founded the first of the Periphery states before the Inner Sphere nations existed, these states' creation in response to oppression by the Terran Alliance set the pattern by which their later Periphery cousins would define themselves against the neo-feudal governments of the Inner Sphere. The earliest echoes of the Periphery ethos appear in the Freedom Declaration that sparked the Outer Reaches Rebellion. The colonists on Freedom, infuriated by ever-higher taxes and distant Terran bureaucrats' micro-management of local issues, finally spoke their piece with blunt eloquence. They made no threats; they had no army or navy to make threats with. They only wanted to be left alone—to be no longer a possession of Terra, but to stand on their own feet and make their own choices:

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Freedom Declaration

The winds of fate now blow cold across the plains of this, our home. The warmth of our sun has been lost to the oppressions of a world that no longer understands our needs, no longer guards us from danger, no longer supports our wants. Our people have maintained their heart in the face of adversity, but we fear we have lost our soul. Yet, we do not wish a violent confrontation with our one-time benefactors. Such a course might lead to even worse conditions. Rather, we respectfully request a peaceful resolution to our problem, if such be possible...

...As of this date, the planet Freedom does hereby renounce, revoke, withdraw and deny the authority, accountability and responsibility of the Terran Alliance, based on Terra, for our world. We hope that our actions will be acknowledged by the Terran Parliament, and accepted in the humane spirit in which they are intended. However, should the need arise, we are prepared to defend our skies, our soil, our lives, our land, with whatever resources at hand.

—From an editorial published by
the *Jefferson City Press*, Freedom, 27 May 2235

The mid- to late 24th century saw a rapid influx of like-minded folk into the Periphery as the nations of the Inner Sphere came into being, often amid shocking violence. War-weary refugees streamed across the border from the Principality of Rasalhague, fleeing Shiro Kurita's conquering Draconis Combine legions. Citizens of the tiny Stewart Confederacy likewise fled, first from the Free Worlds League and then from the Lyran Commonwealth, finally washing up on the distant world of Somerset. Two other major Periphery states—the Outworlds Alliance and the Magistracy of Canopus—had their origins in reaction to the constant fighting during the 25th and early 26th centuries, known to history as the Age of War. Though they formed roughly a century apart and developed along vastly different lines, these two states shared a deep commitment to their citizens' freedoms and a disdain for the increasingly Byzantine politics of the Inner Sphere, which had clearly become warfare by other means.

Outworlds Alliance

The Outworlds Alliance came into existence almost by accident when Julius Santiago Avellar, a junior officer in the Davion military, resigned his commission in disgust at the horrors of never-ending warfare. In 2413, he retired to the then-independent colony world of Alpheratz. From there, he began a war of words against Inner Sphere military adventurism, with particularly sharp criticism for Houses Davion and Kurita. His writings touched a nerve among citizens of the Federated Suns who had wearied of battle and of the military-industrial complex that supported it. Seeking a way of life not dependent on the technologies of death-dealing, they flocked to Alpheratz. Before long, Julius Avellar found himself the reluctant leader of a thriving planet, and eventually of a small interstellar nation.

Magistracy of Canopus

The Magistracy of Canopus arose from its founder's personal response to military bungling. During a botched withdrawal from the Capellan world of Highspire, Captain Kossandra Centrella and two 'Mech lances from the Defenders of Andurien—a Free Worlds League unit—were left stranded behind enemy lines. Though she returned to Free Worlds space with her command intact, Captain Centrella never forgave her superiors for their blunder. Over the next few years, she gathered several fellow MechWarriors equally disillusioned with their military and their homeland. The membership of this "Black Brotherhood" soon exceeded a hundred, at which point Kossandra led them in the capture of several Davion transports. The Brotherhood then left known space for the Periphery, and in 2530 settled the Canopian star systems near the Taurian Concordat.

The newborn Magistracy of Canopus was quicker than other Periphery realms to see some value in forging limited ties with the Inner Sphere. Distrust of the Inner Sphere states remained, however. Like the Concordat, the Rim Worlds and the Outworlds Alliance, the Magistracy saw itself as an independent nation, proudly belonging "out there" where only the bravest and boldest could thrive. The Inner Sphere states were at best useful idiots, tolerated as long as they served Periphery interests. Otherwise, they were largely ignored. Let the Spheroids stay busy with their petty squabbles over interstellar real estate, the prevailing attitude went; as long as they're not sending armies our way, we're happy to leave them alone.

Such sentiments prevailed throughout the Age of War and the decades immediately afterward, until the waning years of the 26th century. Even the formation of the Star League initially drew little attention—until that newborn federation turned its gaze toward the Periphery with conquest on its mind.

WAR AND PEACE: THE STAR LEAGUE ERA

In the Inner Sphere, the Reunification War that brought the Periphery into the Star League is often celebrated as an idealistic crusade, in which the noble Camerons and their Great House allies conquered the Periphery in order to save it from barbarism. Like many a "civilizing" venture before it, this war concealed plenty of its own barbarism beneath the veneer of good intentions. But even without the usual atrocities committed in the name of high-minded ideals, the Reunification War represented a basic failure to understand one crucial fact about the region and people the Star League aimed to absorb: that no human society has ever appreciated some other human society telling it how to conduct itself. Especially at the point of a PPC.

When Lord Ian Cameron, Director-General of the Terran Hegemony, first invited the Periphery states to join his new Star League, three out of the four gave him a polite "No, thank you." The Rim Worlds Republic hedged its bets, caught between the pro-Terran leanings of its ruling Amaris family and the desire of most ordinary Rim Worlders to keep Terra's nose out of Periphery business. The more naive hoped that Lord Cameron would take "No" for an answer. Wiser heads knew better, and feared what was to come.



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The opening salvos of the Star League's long campaign against the Periphery came not on the battlefield, but in the court of public opinion. As early as the autumn of 2571—with the proverbial ink barely dry on the Periphery's rejection of the Star League Accords—major Inner Sphere media outlets and political figures had begun portraying the Periphery as either “Mother Terra's poor lost sheep” or vicious thugs descended from malcontents and further debased by their supposedly primitive living conditions. Such people clearly merited either redemption or destruction. “Live and let live” was not in the cards.

By 2572, the Star League had ratcheted up the carrot approach. Jonathan Grenvaux, a prominent Star League statesman closely allied with the Camerons, proposed a “galactic summit,” in which the League and the Periphery could “amicably work out our differences, so that our Periphery brethren may join our enterprise as equal partners.” This offer, though apparently sincere, assumed that the Periphery states must eventually join the Star League. Combined with the increasing drumbeat of anti-Periphery sentiment, the summit proposal fell flat. Only Gregory Amaris of the Rim Worlds bothered to show up, and his family's dual Terran-Rim Worlds citizenship made his endorsement suspect among other Periphery realms. The skepticism seemed justified later that year with the Star League Defense Force's failure during highly touted pan-Star League military exercises. Matched against supposedly inferior House troops, the SLDF units botched battle after battle. The Periphery reacted with derision. This was the mighty Star League that wanted to unite all humanity under its “protection”?

A FATEFUL CHOICE

Before long, however, the mockery turned to rage. In 2571, increasingly effective pirate raids against Outworlds Alliance shipping had prompted President Catherine Avellar's government to purchase several companies of light and medium 'Mechs, in hopes of shoring up the Alliance's tiny ad hoc military. Word of this development soon reached the fledgling Star League government on Terra, by which time the story had grown to a full 'Mech regiment, including state-of-the-art assault machines. Ian Cameron responded by deploying SLDF and allied House units on selected Outworlds Alliance planets in late 2572.

The Inner Sphere troops arrived uninvited and decidedly unwelcome. No one believed the official story that they had come for “mutual protection and defense against bandits and brigands,” especially as they never got especially close to the location of any known bandit raid. As more than one local Outworlds editorial noted, what did the Inner Sphere nations care about pirate activity on the edges of occupied space? Rumors of a secret Outworlds BattleMech regiment were similarly disbelieved. Many Outworlds citizens had no idea that their government had bought any 'Mechs, and other Periphery states likewise doubted that this notoriously tech-shy realm possessed such a large complement of the ultimate military killing machines. To many, the conclusion seemed obvious: the Star League knew damned well that the 'Mech-regiment rumor was false, and was using it as a pretext to occupy the Outworlds. To those who knew about the actual 'Mechs, it seemed equally likely that Cameron had deliberately exaggerated the intelligence in order to manufacture a military occupation.

Santiago and Aftermath

Still building up the SLDF, Cameron relied heavily on House troops to help hunt for the 'Mechs. In consultation with Coordinator Hehiro Kurita of the Draconis Combine, Cameron sent the Seventeenth Galedon Regulars to the planet Santiago. Proud of their service to the Combine and convinced of their superiority to “Periphery rabble,” Kurita units in general exemplified the worst of the “imperial Star League.” The Seventeenth was no exception. It didn't take long for the inevitable clash of cultures to explode, in the incident known to history as the Santiago Massacre.

The Massacre began with children throwing snowballs and insults at a lance of Kurita 'Mechs. It ended with twenty-seven dead Outworlds citizens and more than thirty others injured, and set the fires of resistance ablaze across the Periphery. Later Star League-era textbooks often downplayed it as a tragic misunderstanding, touched off by one inexperienced MechWarrior's unlucky overreaction to local hostility. In the Periphery, however, the Santiago Massacre symbolized the Inner Sphere's utter contempt for their “lost brethren.” A popular online journal from the period crystallized the local viewpoint:

“Sick and tired of taunting schoolchildren lobbing snowballs at you? Lob coolant fluid right back, and if one of the kiddies takes a freeze burn to the eyeballs from the freon, well, that'll teach the brats to defy Star League authority. Then, when the screaming child attracts an angry crowd, fire everything you've got at them—because you never know what a rag-tag mob of Periphery lowlifes might do, armed with snow and sticks and clods of frozen dirt. Plus, anyone you injure or kill will serve as an object lesson against future defiance of your superior firepower—and heck, you can always claim later that you ‘just panicked.’ Wouldn't anyone, faced with a screaming horde of savages?” (From *The Way It Is*, “Gentle Annie” Sawislak's personal journal, Alpheratz, Outworlds Alliance, 9 January 2573)

Newsfeeds ran the same images over and over: the injured child screaming in a paramedic's arms, crushed bodies pinned beneath the fallen Kurita 'Mech, a fleeing woman seared to ash by 'Mech laser fire arcing upward through the crowd. A prevalent rumor claimed that when the Kurita MechWarrior stumbled into an abandoned hovercar and felt her 'Mech going over, she deliberately aimed it at the thickest part of the throng, determined to take down as many “Periphery scum” as she could.

The final insult was the Star League's decision to court-martial the unlucky trooper on Terra, rather than leave her to face Outworlds justice. Anti-Star League riots broke out on several Periphery worlds, reaching fever pitch on those Outworlds planets saddled with SLDF units. So intense was the resistance that Lord Cameron ordered the Star League troops to keep to their garrison compounds rather than risk a premature Periphery-wide conflagration. Though some point to this decision as proof of Cameron's benevolent intentions—he could have ordered the garrison units to take control of the worlds where they were stationed—this view sidesteps the SLDF's embarrassing

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performance in the Triumph exercises just months earlier. Pulling back the troops was simple expedience—Cameron needed more time to work the kinks out of the Star League army before pitting it against the entire Periphery.

Other Periphery realms reacted strongly to Santiago as well. Canopian Magestrix Crystalla Centrella broke off negotiations with House Marik over a border dispute, and the Taurian Concordat launched a crash build-up of its Federated Suns border defenses. A belated offer of most-favored-nation trade status if the Concordat joined the Star League did nothing to change Taurian minds. Most Taurians saw it as an attempt to buy them off, and with manufactured goods inferior to their own to boot. The Star League repeated its offer throughout 2573, despite the fallout from what later history came to call “the Malagrotta Crisis”—a misguided Federated Suns assault on Taurian naval vessels that had strayed into the Malagrotta system and panicked a Davion mining outpost on a titanium-rich local moon. While his diplomats gamely kept pushing the MFN deal, Ian Cameron openly sided with the Federated Suns’ demand for compensation by the alleged “Taurian invaders.” The diplomats ceased their increasingly useless efforts only after Protector Mitchell Calderon’s famous reply to the League ambassador: “Go home, sir. We are not ignorant primitives, willing to sell our planets for mirrors and glass beads. We are a free people, and we intend to stay that way.”

Shockwaves from the Massacre even reached the Rim Worlds Republic, sparking a major riot on the capital of Apollo by dissident citizens wearing the uniform of the pre-Amaris Rim Republican Army. Gregory Amaris’ iron-fisted response provoked a backlash throughout the Rim Worlds, which ended only after a viciously effective crackdown. Terrorized into surface obedience, the Rim Worlders became even more bitterly opposed to the Star League—a reality that would sink home for Amaris as the threshold of war drew closer.

CROSSING THE RUBICON

Though the first shots of the Reunification War would not be fired until 2576, most in the Periphery date it from January 2575, when Lord Ian Cameron issued his infamous Pollux Proclamation. In it, he declared that the Periphery peoples had no right of self-determination; instead, they must submit to Star League rule for their own good. He justified bringing about this submission via any means necessary. Inducements had failed; trade sanctions and egregious tariffs, imposed in 2574, had failed. The only tool left to the Star League was war.

With the exception of the Taurian Concordat, the Periphery states had little to fight with, save for fierce determination. The tech-poor Outworlds Alliance counted fewer than 120 light ‘Mechs in its arsenal, many of them beefed-up AgroMechs rather than genuine war machines. The Canopian military boasted seventeen ‘Mech regiments plus several more of Home Guards, but lacked the industrial base necessary to replace materiel lost in combat. Every casualty, therefore, would cost the Canopians dear. As for the Rim Worlds, much of its military remained hopelessly divided over how far to oppose their pro-Star League ruler. To stand against the SLDF meant an open break with the Amaris clan—and if the Star League emerged victorious, as was highly likely, those who had opposed it surely faced execution as traitors.

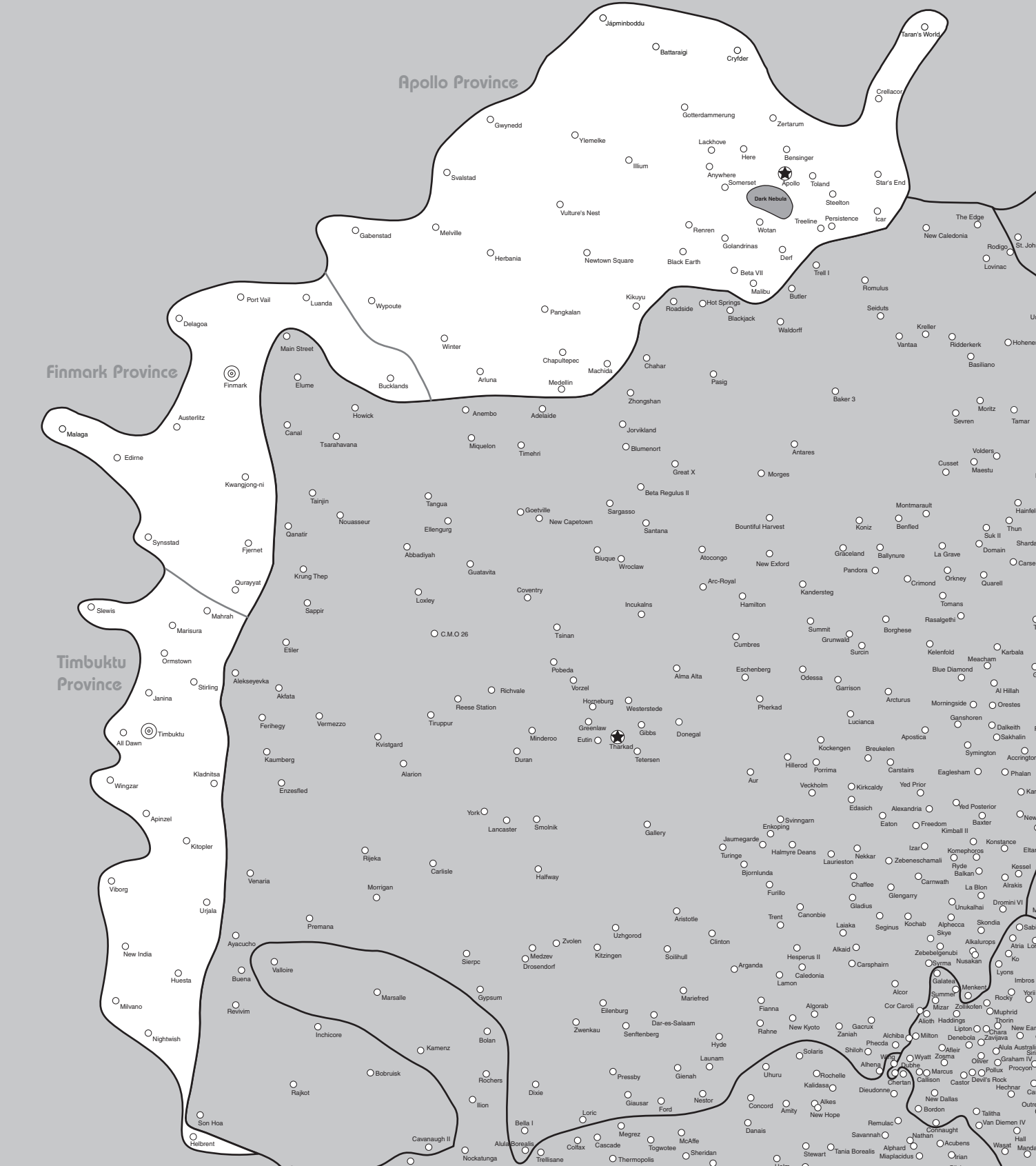
Rim Worlds Rebellion

Events in the Rim Worlds took an unexpected turn, even as the Star League began deploying its forces toward the Periphery borders. Gregory Amaris had hoped his lonely support for the Star League would help him shore up his increasingly perilous domestic position. Substantial trade with the Inner Sphere even before 2571 had greatly expanded the Rim Worlds economy, but the benefits were spread unevenly, and all but the wealthiest suffered under heavy taxes imposed to finance high-tech research and production. Combined with resentment over the loss of many cherished civil liberties under Amaris rule, these economic and political stresses posed a potentially serious threat to the Amaris family’s grip on power. Canny as well as ruthless, Gregory knew he could not hold on to his nation solely through fear. Sooner or later, the rising tensions would explode. By tying his realm to the Star League, he hoped to buy at least the tolerance of his people through the economic benefits of greater trade coupled with access to top-flight Inner Sphere technology. Meanwhile, the background presence of the Star League military would implicitly discourage potential domestic challengers.

To cement his position as the “first among equals” in the Periphery, Gregory voiced swift public support for the Pollux Proclamation. Simultaneously, he passed the Manchester Directive outlawing membership in the Rim Republican Army. These two actions touched off a firestorm of protest, once again centering on Apollo. A workers’ strike in a ‘Mech factory swiftly mushroomed into a planetary coup, with the RRA overwhelming the Fourth Amaris Dragoons and declaring itself the provisional Rim Worlds government. Amaris responded by placing Apollo under martial law and sending in his entire ‘Mech contingent to break the rebels, but the Seventh Amaris Legionnaires and the Eighth Amaris Fusiliers refused to fire on their fellow citizens. Instead, they placed their firepower at the provisional government’s disposal. Amaris ended up cowering in his fortified family estate while his domain crumbled around him. The Star League army he’d counted on was otherwise engaged, battling unexpectedly stiff resistance in the Taurian Concordat and the Magistracy of Canopus. SLDF troops would not arrive in Rim Worlds space until 2581, nearly six years after the Republican takeover.

Quagmire

The four campaigns commonly lumped together as the Reunification War lasted much longer than the Inner Sphere’s hoped-for six months to five years. Much to the surprise of the SLDF and House auxiliaries, the “backsliding malcontents with their tin-pot tanks and sharpened sticks” gave the Star League military a twenty-year run for its money—all while vastly outnumbered and, at least on paper, outgunned. Like the Terran Alliance during the Outer Reaches Rebellion, the Star League hugely underestimated the Periphery’s fierce desire to be left alone. The dreamers and darers who fled civilization for the challenges of deep space had never taken orders well, especially from comfortable bureaucrats in faraway palaces. In a sense, the Reunification War was the Outer Reaches Rebellion on a larger scale. And as with that earlier conflict, atrocities abounded. These too occurred on a larger scale and left searing memories in the Periphery’s collective psyche.



PLANET KEY

- ★ NATIONAL CAPITAL
- ⊙ DISTRICT CAPITAL
- ⊕ PROVINCE CAPITAL

RIM WORLDS REPUBLIC
after
Age of War (2571)

© 3067 COMSTAR CARTOGRAPHIC CORPS

LEGEND

30 LIGHT YEARS

120 LIGHT YEARS OR 26.8 PARSECS

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS

Anti-spinward

Spinward

Coreward
Rimward

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The worst incidents occurred in the Outworlds Alliance and the Taurian Concordat. Ironically, war crimes committed in the Outworlds by General Amos Forlough sparked intense nationwide resistance where the Star League might otherwise have met much less, given the pacifistic outlook of many Outworlds planets and the realm's serious lack of military firepower. As it was, Forlough's decision to meet sporadically tough opposition with the literal decimation of entire planetary populations only made a difficult situation worse. The people of affected planets saw militia recruitment soar in the wake of "Butcher" Forlough's campaigns—even with one in ten adults slaughtered by Forlough's troops. Other worlds, less hard hit but equally enraged, poured everything they had into turning the Butcher's harsh lesson back on him.

President Grigori Avellar received unexpected aid in this endeavor from Lawrence Davion, youngest son of the Federated Suns' reigning Prince Alexander. The Star League's failure to support the FedSuns' ailing economy and to officially recognize Davion suzerainty over the disputed Chesterton Worlds angered Lawrence, and made him receptive to a deal with the Outworlds. In exchange for secret military aid against the Star League, President Avellar offered to place a dozen water-rich and agricultural border worlds under Davion "protectorship." Lawrence agreed, and dispatched three elite Davion regiments to fight for the Outworlds. These soldiers, dubbed the Pitcairn Legion after their commanding officer, joined with the Outworlders and kept Forlough's marauding units at bay for three years until Forlough's replacement brought the Outworlds Alliance campaign to a significantly less bloody conclusion—in part by treating the Outworlds government as an equal at the bargaining table.

The Concordat suffered fewer atrocities, but one infamous incident stands out as among the most senseless civilian massacres of the Reunification War. After winning a vicious naval battle for control of the Robsart system in 2581, Admiral Janissa Franklin of the SLDF ordered the orbital bombardment of Robsart's capital city. Thirty thousand civilians died in the conflagration, which was widely viewed as payback for stiff Taurian resistance. Certainly, this assault had no military justification; Admiral Franklin had just broken the back of the Taurian Navy. Across the Periphery, most people saw the bombardment of Robsart as revenge for Taurian actions in combat—starting with the decimation of the Davion naval contingent over Tentativa in 2577, and including several atrocities inflicted by Taurian fighting forces throughout the bitter Concordat campaign.

Sowing and Reaping

The most infamous atrocity committed by Periphery forces remains the tainting of the water supply on Brussart by Taurian guerrillas before they abandoned its major cities. This act inflicted a slow and agonizing death on the planet's SLDF conquerors. The Taurians also occasionally staged "human wave" attacks, in which irregular bands of men, women and sometimes even children advanced en masse on SLDF 'Mechs and motorized units with satchel charges and wild rebel yells. The perpetrators of these suicidal assaults died in droves, yet they kept on coming.

The Outworlds Alliance was accused of at least one atrocity as well,

when the Alliance Army ambushed elements of General Forlough's Fifth Corps while the troopers were constructing permanent quarters. That surprise assault, still known locally as the Day of Vengeance, cost the Star League army more than two hundred 'Mechs and got General Forlough kicked upstairs to practice his unique brand of brutality in the flagging Taurian campaign. Inner Sphere citizens mostly saw these events as proof that Periphery natives truly were barbarian hordes in desperate need of a civilizing hand. Few stopped to consider that the Periphery realms were fighting for their liberty, and that only the most desperate tactics held any hope of slowing the SLDF juggernaut. The Periphery states faced a technologically and numerically superior army, backed by the resources of thousands of planets. Their defeat was a matter of time—unless they could make the Star League's war of conquest so costly that its people could no longer countenance their leaders' blatant betrayal of the League's high-minded ideals.

This hope proved vain, however. The feudalistic regimes of the Inner Sphere lived and died by their militaries, and few citizens even in the more "democratic" realms cared to question too deeply the need for the Reunification War. Many Periphery citizens had cherished hopes of finding sympathy among the Inner Sphere's ordinary folk, much as average people on Terra had come to support the Outer Reaches worlds in their struggle. When this change of heart did not occur, Periphery dwellers felt betrayed. It was one thing for the high lords and generals to back a military venture that directly enhanced their own power. It was quite another for the Inner Sphere street to do so, particularly in the face of mounting casualties and reports of civilian massacres. By the war's end in 2596, majorities on both sides found their mutual prejudices confirmed. Periphery-dwellers were benighted savages who should be damned grateful they got dragged kicking and screaming into the Star League; Spheroids were arrogant hypocrites who didn't care how many died to bolster their illusions of superiority. On paper, the Periphery and the Inner Sphere had finally united. In many people's hearts, however, the two societies stood even further apart.

RECONSTRUCTION

The surrender of the Taurian Concordat and the Rim Worlds Republic in 2596 marked the official end of the Reunification War. All four Periphery realms formally entered the Star League as Territorial States in 2597, ushering in a reconstruction boom. Despite an accompanying barrage of goodwill propaganda, the presence of SLDF garrisons throughout the Periphery realms served as a constant reminder that their people were enjoying their present "good times" on Star League sufferance. Let any planet put a foot out of line, and the jackboots could come crashing down.

Reconstruction did benefit the Periphery, of course, and the Star League was thorough about accomplishing this vital job. Cynics pointed out (in widely visited electronic message boards) that the Inner Sphere had every reason to properly rebuild what it had broken down:

"...For what use is conquered territory, unless it functions well enough for its inhabitants to pay taxes and tribute to their new overlords? No one wants to rule a wasteland. There's no



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money in it. So of course the Star League and its Inner Sphere corporate honchos are pouring their wealth into revitalizing our worlds. But not for us. They're feathering their own nests. That the actions they take to enrich themselves also help us out a bit comes with the territory." (From *Bull Horn*, a popular EMB on Taurus, capital of the Taurian Concordat, 12 December 2599)

Brave New Worlds?

Many Periphery citizens eventually came to appreciate the Star League, if grudgingly. As one outspoken resident of Raldamax put it during a "man-in-the-street" interview, "Nice to have those big 'Mechs with their big guns pointed at the pirates who used to hit 'round here, 'stead of at us." The Periphery's overall standard of living took a sharp upward jump, especially in manufacturing and medical care. Widespread public schooling also became a Periphery-wide norm for the first time, rather than each realm (or each individual planet, in the Outworlds and the Magistracy) relying on local resources and decision-makers. Despite rosy pictures painted for Inner Sphere consumption about all this Star League benevolence, however, these benefits came with strings attached. The Inner Sphere states tended to regard the Periphery worlds as natural-resource caches to be exploited mainly for the Inner Sphere's benefit; major local industries that received the most significant funding included factory-farm agriculture, large-scale mining and extraction, and various forms of sweatshop labor. Likewise, Star League-sponsored public education ended at age sixteen on most Periphery planets, and often came with lowered academic expectations plus large doses of pro-League, pro-Cameron indoctrination.

For much of the early 27th century, the economic boomlet of reconstruction blunted lingering resentments about the horrors of the Reunification War. Yet the rise in living standards was puny, compared to the economic benefits the Inner Sphere received from the annexation of the Periphery States. Much of the newfound wealth went to relatively few at the top of the Periphery's new imperial order, with the rest scattered among the general population. Gaps between rich and poor widened throughout the Star League era, the pace accelerating as the 2600s continued. The middle class briefly expanded, but then gradually shrank in all four Territorial States, and local politicians could do little to stem the tide. Periodic initiatives by the Star League government and private corporations produced temporary easing on some worlds, most often those with major population centers (and, as critics noted, the greatest potential for damaging levels of unrest). As the Star League era wore on, those whose parents or grandparents had wanted to reform the empire from within began to question that strategy. What, after all, had patience and working within "the system" bought the Periphery worlds? Their independence remained lost; their concerns were haphazardly addressed, their resources vanishing and their people mainly relegated to second-class citizenship. Discontent rose even in the relatively pro-League Magistracy of Canopus, which had fared the best under Star League occupation thanks to the enlightened governorship of Dame Melissa Humphreys and her successors. At best, the Periphery had gained a modest and ill-distributed measure of material wealth. In the process, many feared it had lost its soul.

WHO ARE WE NOW?

Thirty years on from the end of the Reunification War, it's time to take stock. Most folks are content to ask what we've gained, balance it against what we've lost, and pronounce the scales roughly even. A convenient mindset, that. It lets you indulge the desire to badmouth the Inner Sphere—a desire bred into Periphery folk ever since our ancestors first drew free breath—while imposing no obligation to act on your complaints. Because when the scales are roughly even, what you've lost doesn't matter enough for you to risk bucking the system to get it back. What you've gained may be no great shakes, and you still grumble about the damned government every chance you get—but at base, you'll take what the Star League gives you.

So who are we now? We know who we were. We were the intrepid ones—those willing to gamble everything for the freedom to make our own choices. We stood by those choices, even if we died for it. We asked for no handouts. We made our own luck. We made our own rules and abided by them. Most of all, we took care of our own. We did all this with what we had and what we made. What we couldn't make, we did without. We met life head-on, took its punches, shared its triumphs, and didn't whine when it dealt us a tough hand. "Take what comes and get on with it," as my Grandma Jessy used to say. She died at eighty-one with a rifle in her hand, fighting off the Black Star pirates back in 2566.

Some say that's gone now. Phantoms of lost liberty, they tell us, gone with the dead of the War. Obliterated by three decades of sometime prosperity, a little extra money in our pockets after tax time, vaccines and free schooling for the children. "Don't you remember what it was like?" they say. When we had to struggle so hard just to make ends meet, when brigands in 'Mechs could hit anywhere they pleased, when we didn't have planetary computer networks on almost every world and local nets in every city larger than thirty thousand souls? Remember?

Yes, we remember. We also remember when we could call our worlds, our towns and our souls our own. We cherish that, deep down. And not all the technology or faux prosperity in the universe can make us forget it.

It's not that we don't want prosperity, or its advancements—technological, economic, social. But we want to achieve them on our own, not have them thrust on us by someone with a bayonet in his other hand. The Star League, for all its benefits, has denied us that accomplishment. How long will we—the descendants of darers and dreamers—allow this situation to stand?

—Op-Ed from the *Alpheratz Daily Beacon*,
Alpheratz, Outworlds Alliance, 11 March 2625

BUREAUCRATS GO HOME

“...Two days from now, the Magistracy of Canopus will celebrate the New Year of 2704—and the century mark since the last occupying SLDF troops departed Canopian space. Now it’s time for the other “Star League Army” to take itself off home—the army of bureaucrats foisted on us by the BSLA.

For those in the government on Terra who don’t think we can be trusted with the hovercar keys, we have a few pertinent questions. Haven’t we kept the peace out here for a century now? Don’t our resources and our people contribute mightily to the health of the interstellar economy? Haven’t our planetary leaders accepted the Camerons’ leadership, even to the point of suppressing anti-Star League sentiment on some worlds—and providing peaceful outlets for it on many others? Why, then, must we still get permission from some Periphery Administrator to wipe our noses?

If it’s our armies that worry you, let us set your minds at rest. The Edict of 2650 mandates damned small troop numbers compared to the might of the SLDF, and the Territorial States Security Act—remember that one?—has kept us from getting our hands on any weapons much larger than pea-shooters for more than fifty years. As far as we know, both laws remain in force. But even if they didn’t, the Star League has nothing to fear from us. We are the Star League now, just as much as any Inner Sphere member-state. We’ve lived with—and profited from—that reality ever since the end of the Reunification War. Does anyone in the House of Cameron seriously believe that any Periphery government intends to change it now?

All we want is a fair shake. Let us run our own affairs our way, just like the governments of the Inner Sphere. You have our greater friendship to gain, and nothing to lose.

—Op-Ed, *Canopian Daily Herald*,
30 December 2703

DECLINE AND FALL

Popular histories in the Inner Sphere and the Periphery agree on precious little, but both sides generally concur about who destroyed the Star League: Stefan Amaris of the Rim Worlds Republic, forever known as the Usurper, and Richard Cameron, the Usurper’s puppet-king. Perspectives may differ about just how black-hearted Amaris was, or how much Richard’s arrogant idealism contributed to the downfall of the empire he ruled, but few question that Richard and Amaris *as individuals* shoulder the bulk of the blame.

It makes a gripping tale: the lonely child abruptly shoved by his father’s death onto a throne far too big for him, the latter-day Rasputin pretending to befriend him while secretly plotting the destruction of the Cameron line. But the real story goes beyond poor, doomed Richard and his venal puppet-master. The Usurper and the last Cameron were merely the final players in a tragedy whose roots lay decades earlier, during the reign of First Lord Jonathan Cameron. Jonathan sowed the seed, and those who came after him reaped the lethal harvest.

DIRECTIVE 41

Jonathan Cameron became First Lord in 2690, inheriting a Star League apparently at peace—so much so that his predecessor, First Lord Michael, had considered cutting the military budget. Even the restive Periphery states seemed tranquil. The departure of most SLDF troops some eighty to eighty-five years before had removed a major source of unrest, and several decades of relative prosperity had taken their toll on the famous Periphery bent toward stiff-necked independence. True, the Inner Sphere continued to reap greater profit from Periphery membership in the Star League than the Periphery itself did; true, small SLDF garrisons remained on Periphery soil; and true, Periphery voices continued to get short shrift in the Star League Council; but for all that, few could deny that the Star League had genuinely benefited the various Periphery realms. The question in many minds was, were the gains worth the cost?

For those who governed the Periphery realms, and their representatives at the Court of the Star League, the answer was, “Not quite.” By the dawn of the 28th century, ongoing Star League control over day-to-day Periphery governance had become the greatest remaining source of local resentment. Technically, all four major Periphery realms had resumed home rule by 2605. In practice, however, Periphery governments at national and planetary levels could do little without approval from the Bureau of Star League Affairs. The BSLA and its agents became targets for all manner of non-violent protest; graffiti artists tagged BSLA offices with irreverent slogans, while late-night trid comics lampooned the officious—and ubiquitous—Periphery Administrators. Meanwhile, the leaders of the Periphery states took every chance to argue for greater autonomy.

It took awhile, but eventually the arguments sank in—helped, as several local commentators wryly noted, by ugly succession conflicts involving the Federated Suns, the Draconis Combine and a civil war in the Free Worlds League. The last thing the First Lord needed was yet another restive Star League region. In 2722, Jonathan Cameron signed Directive 41, officially loosening direct League control over the Periphery. Proposed by the Capellan and Free Worlds Council Lords, the new law transferred regulatory power from the BSLA to the various Periphery governments. Public reaction across the Periphery realms was swift and joyous. At last, they had reclaimed a portion of their lost liberty. Surely, with more decisions in local hands, the sometimes fitful prosperity of the Star League would spread more swiftly and equitably throughout the Periphery worlds.

It took several months for reality to catch up. Canny and unscrupulous politicians aside, the Periphery public only gradually realized that they had exchanged an irritating but useful set of protections for a freewheeling, “pay-to-play” system.

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Decision-making power, especially over local economies, now belonged in theory to local governments, but actually went to the highest bidder. Those with money and clout used it to buy planetary administrations left and right. Those without got nothing. The citizenry suffered the consequences.

Various Inner Sphere governments and private corporations spent the next three decades bleeding the Periphery dry, with little thought for the ramifications of their greed. No longer restrained by the challenges of circumventing BSLA regulations, they set about remaking entire planetary economies to profit themselves. Wages stagnated and then dropped. A few well-connected Periphery families and business interests rode the gravy train and amassed immense wealth, but the bulk went to Inner Sphere conglomerates and prominent nobles as well as to the Great Houses.

The Camerons also profited by this wholesale looting of the Periphery. A sizable chunk of the funds that poured into Cameron family treasuries went to finance Jonathan's military build-up, which had begun soon after the start of his reign. Far from cutting the military budget, Jonathan bloated it. In the face of a Star League at peace, this decision seemed inexplicable. For many in the Periphery, however, the reason mattered far less than the result. Those who had hoped to influence the Star League from within lost heart at this fresh evidence of indifference to Periphery concerns, while the skeptics found their most cynical predictions grimly confirmed.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The reform-from-within party hoped for a fresh start when Simon Cameron became First Lord in 2738. A blunt-talking man with a reputation for honesty, Simon was known to oppose the expensive SDS installations begun by his father. Periphery representatives on Terra hoped that the cancellation of the SDS project early in Simon's reign heralded a drawdown in military spending and greater attention to Inner Sphere profiteers. Specifically, they hoped for repeal—or major modification—of Directive 41.

Simon's next move swiftly disabused them of that notion. With the funds saved by scrapping the SDS, he began to build massive forts on key worlds in all four Periphery realms—even the Rim Worlds Republic, which stood out during this uneasy period for its apparent staunch loyalty to "Mother Terra." Strenuous protest by the Periphery governments fell on deaf ears, which added fuel to growing anti-Star League resistance movements. On several planets, local leaders offered covert support to resistance groups, while national governments turned a blind eye. The Amaris family of the Rim Worlds once again proved the sole exception, cracking down on dissent and almost gleefully handing over major activists to face Star League justice.

The catalyst for all this was unrestricted production of vehicles, 'Mechs and weapons systems by twenty or so Periphery-based armaments manufacturers. Most of these companies' output since the SLDF pullback more than a century earlier had gone to the Periphery

OutLand: ...Thought the Camerons were supposed to give a friggin' damn about all humanity. Including us, right? So why doesn't Jonny C stop those profiteering S.O.B.s from the Hegemony and all the rest? Can't he pass a decree or something?

No41: They're Inner Sphere. Since when have they cared about us? We're cattle. Have been ever since the War.

Nemo: It's worse than you sheeple think. Ol' Cameron's making money by the pile off the whole deal. Who do you think holds a major stake in Ceres Metals and Di Tron Heavy Industries? 'Benevolent Star League,' my @\$#!

PolWatcher: Come on. He's First Lord, not dictator. You really think Jonathan Cameron says 'Jump' and the House Lords say, 'How high?' Guy has to deal with politics. That's never pretty. Plus, there's local outfits out here making their own mountains of money. How about they share some of their profits with the folks who buy their products? Or make their products? Why blame the Inner Sphere for everything?

Bandyt: Nemo's got a point, though. Cameron's making money off us just as much as anyone else. Maybe to finance those Space Defense Systems they're putting up all around Terra?

No41: Yep. The ones we're not allowed to have. Couldn't be because Jonny-boy wants to leave us vulnerable...and make sure we know it. Lots of those SLDFers that left in 2605 are stationed just a jump or two across the border...

PolWatcher: Why would the Terran Hegemony want to invade the Periphery? Again? (sarcasm) Aren't we all one big happy family now?

Grigori: Remember Tadeo Amaris? In the RWR awhile back, tried to build up a big-ass army? Mikey Cameron passed the Edict of 2650 just to make Tadeo dismantle half his units. Don't think the Leaguers aren't watching us all, seeing if anyone else'll try it. My guess is Directive 41 is a pre-emptive move to make sure no Periphery state can ever challenge the Star League—militarily or economically.

PolWatcher: I still say it's domestic politics. Okay, sure, keeping us happy out here in the back of forever isn't real high on any Spheroid's priority list, but still—Cameron's supposed to be a pretty savvy politico. He can't let us get too unhappy, or he's got a problem. And don't anyone tell me, 'Oh, they'll just invade and occupy us again.' Do you have any idea how much that costs, in money and blood? Cameron lets his military get stretched too thin, and the rest of those lords'll kick his throne out from under him.

No41: I hear Jonathan Cameron's losing it. Monsters under the bed, Terra in flames. As if anyone could face down the entire SLDF.

Bandyt: House Lords could.

PolWatcher: If they all got together. Which they wouldn't in a million light-years.

Nemo: That's what they want us to believe. So we won't see the truth—the Camerons and the House Lords are out to break us once and for all, because they know we'll beat them if they ever let us truly prosper. We're smarter, we're tougher, we work ten times as hard. We'd outstrip the Inner Sphere any day on a level playing field, and they know it. So first they're going to reduce us to beggary, then walk in and crush us under their imperial jackboots again.

PolWatcher: Of course. Which would explain why the SLDF pulled out after the War and let us have our own governments back. And also why the Star League spent what, a hundred years or better investing in Periphery planets. Yep, just so they could knock us down again. Makes sense to me!

Bandyt: You're all missing the biggest thing. Whatever the reason—maybe Cameron's losing it, maybe it's League politics, maybe it's the profits or the military build-up—we get screwed just the same. So what are we going to do about it? Me, I'm done carrying signs...

—Excerpt from a Taurian Concordat chat room, 22 July 2736



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nations' own legitimate armed forces, or to Inner Sphere planets near the Periphery that depended on strong cross-border trade. After 2722, however, stringent oversight of these arms manufacturers went by the board. They continued and even stepped up production, but large numbers of machines and weapons ended up shipped to unknown buyers. Simon Cameron learned of this situation in the 2740s, and jumped to the conclusion that the Periphery states were rearming beyond the level permitted by the Edict of 2650. Fear of a militarily resurgent Periphery prompted him to order the building of the forts, which in turn confirmed the most wild-eyed suspicions that the Star League intended to once again grip the Periphery in an iron fist. Public opinion turned even more harshly against the Star League; resistance increased in numbers and in violence.

By 2750, the situation had become so dire that a dramatic act of diplomacy seemed the only alternative to renewed warfare. The First Lord embarked on a five-year tour of the Star League, intended to symbolize his personal commitment to the welfare of all League citizens. The first stop on his itinerary was the Lyran Commonwealth, including its border region with the Rim Worlds Republic.

Long Live the King

Simon arrived on New Silesia—a mining settlement on a sizable asteroid in the Star's End system, just over the Lyran border in the Rim Worlds—in February of 2751. Within hours he was dead, slain by an out-of-control piece of equipment. Speculation ran rife immediately as to whether the fatal accident had in fact been one, and shocked pundits trotted out the usual suspects. House Kurita had chafed visibly against Star League military restrictions for years, while House Davion had spent the past decade withdrawing from the League in all but name. Lyran Archon Michael Steiner was known for overweening ambition, and Simon had died just outside Lyran space. Even the Periphery came in for its share of blame, among those who bothered to acknowledge that governments of “mere yokels and bumpkins” might nonetheless possess the cunning to bring off such a plot. The Taurian Concordat, the most prone to violent anti-Star League protests, came first on almost everyone's list. The Magistracy and the Outworlds Alliance ran a distant second and third, respectively.

Few outside the “tin-foil-hat crowd” gave any serious weight to suggestions that the government of the Rim Worlds might be responsible, despite Simon's death having occurred in Rim Worlds territory. The ruling Amaris family had gone out of its way to support the Star League since before the Reunification War, and its actions since then had given little cause to question its continuing loyalty. Not even Tadeo Amaris' abortive military build-up in the late 2640s shook this view; he had, after all, peacefully dismantled almost all of the expanded RWR military. Every Amaris since then had shown complete loyalty to the Star League. Indeed, daily praise of the League and of “Mother Terra, birthworld of humanity” had become so pervasive in the Rim Worlds that other Periphery nations regularly mocked it.

Those in a position to know whether the Rim Worlds' current ruler had arranged Simon Cameron's murder kept their silence. Not until the tragic endgame played out fifteen years later would the truth begin to emerge—and even then, the other players in this high-stakes game had no inkling that they, too, were pawns.

STEFAN THE SCHEMER

The man known to history as the Usurper came to power in the Rim Worlds Republic in 2738, a mere eight days before Simon Cameron assumed the helm of the Star League. Literally thousands of books have been written about Stefan Amaris, most of them chronicling his personal excesses, megalomania and bone-deep desire to destroy the Camerons' greatest achievement. Few authors outside the Periphery delve deep into the source of that desire, or depict Amaris as anything but the latest malignant strongman to wreak destruction on the human race.

Vengeance Is Mine

Though no one (except a few diehard despot-lovers) would call Stefan Amaris a hero, views of him in the Periphery are somewhat more nuanced than the typical Inner-Sphere portrait of the rapacious madman out to destroy the Star League. For one thing, it's a common assumption in the Periphery that Amaris was *not* out to destroy the League—he intended from the first to rule it. That intent—carefully kept secret from his temporary allies in the other Periphery governments—afterward earned him the greatest scorn among Periphery populations. The Periphery realms never sought the Star League's downfall, even after the Uprising officially began in 2765—but they definitely wanted out of the Camerons' star empire. If it went down while they reclaimed their liberty, then so be it. The last thing they wanted was to see the Star League reconstituted as the plaything of Stefan Amaris.

More important, few Inner Sphere biographers have asked why Stefan hated the Cameron family enough to violently usurp what they had built. ComStar's original volume about the Star League touches on this subject, noting that “ever since he could remember, Stefan had believed that his family and his realm had suffered at the hands of the Star League like the poor relations of a rich family.” To understand why, we must look back to Gregory Amaris and the Reunification War.

Before the War, Gregory had made himself a pariah among Periphery leaders by his steadfast and vocal support for the Star League. Though he hoped to use the League merely to further his own power, no one can deny that he paid a price for his loyalty. When the Rim Republican Army staged its coup in 2575, Gregory expected that his good friend Ian Cameron would rush to free him from his gilded imprisonment in the Amaris family compound on Apollo. Instead, Cameron didn't even send SLDF units into Rim Worlds space until long after the initial rebellion. Adding insult to injury, the SLDF did not “liberate” Apollo—and Amaris himself—until 2595. Gregory Amaris was thus repaid for his support of the Camerons by suffering house arrest for twenty years. To be so clearly treated as an afterthought by the man for whom—in his view—he had endured disdain, mockery and two decades of powerlessness was more than he could bear. Almost from the moment that the first SLDF trooper set foot on Amaris land, Gregory vowed to make the Camerons pay dearly for their insult.

Every subsequent generation of Amarises was raised on the tale of brave Lord Gregory and the perfidious Cameron clan, who used Amaris loyalty when it suited them and then coldly cast the family aside. (That the Amarises frequently treated others in the same way made no difference.) Stefan learned to project the façade of humble loyalty to Terra while concocting the ultimate revenge: taking the




Apollo Province

Finmark Province

Timbuktu Province

Erdvynn Province

PLANET KEY

-  NATIONAL CAPITAL
-  DISTRICT CAPITAL
-  PROVINCE CAPITAL

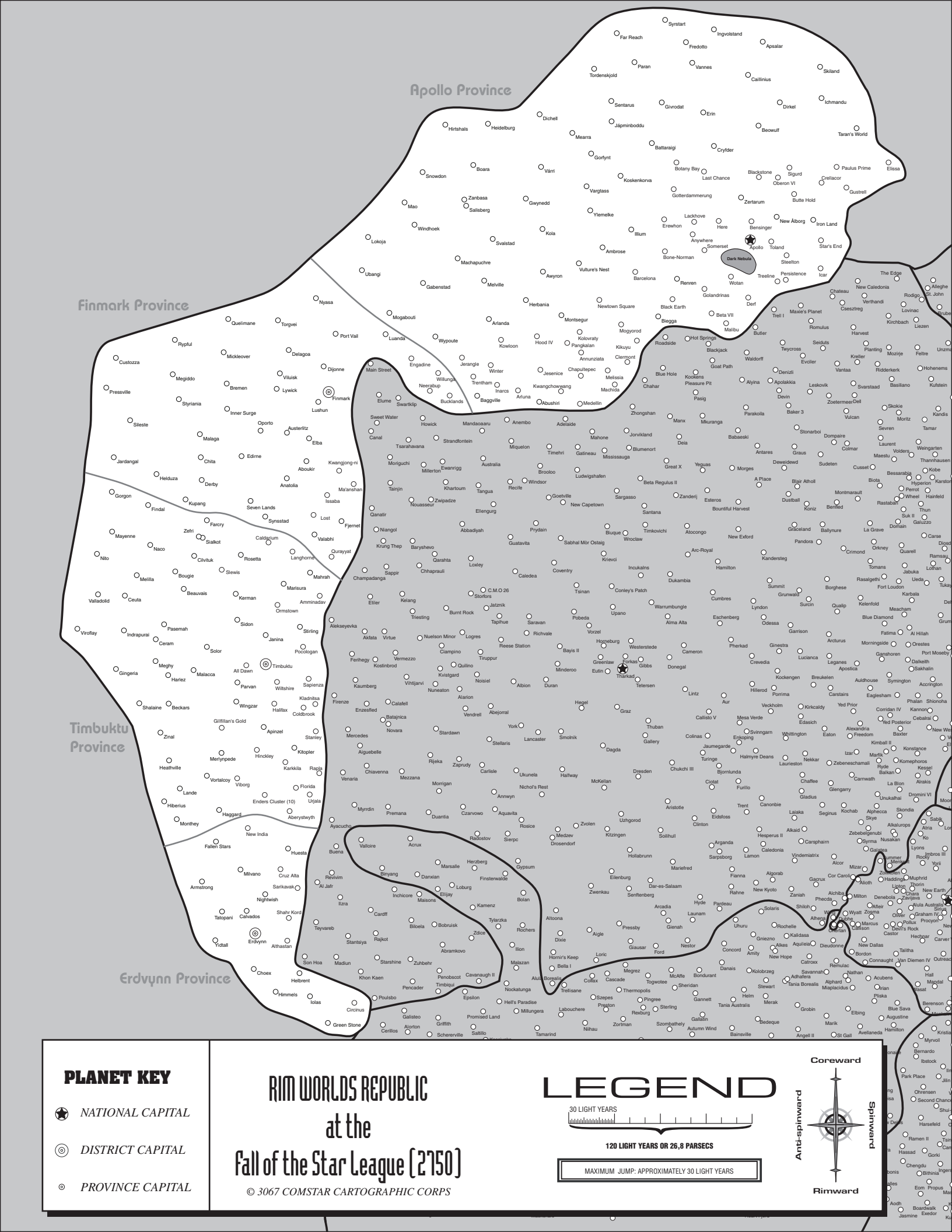
RIM WORLDS REPUBLIC
at the
Fall of the Star League (2750)

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LEGEND



MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS





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Camerons' beloved Star League away from them. Ideally, the last Camerons would see the "barbarian bumpkins" of the Rim Worlds Republic ruling the known universe in their stead, and would suffer the added humiliation of knowing that those they valued so little had utterly conquered them.

None of this, of course, was apparent to most people during Simon Cameron's reign—nor did his untimely death alter many perceptions. The Dark Horse poli-journal on Apollo was the best known of the few exceptions. In the words of its writer, Mathieu Lipking-Monk:

"...Okay, okay, I know what you're all thinking. Conclusion A: It really was a freak accident, sometimes a malfunctioning machine is just a malfunctioning machine. Or Conclusion B: Yep, they murdered poor old Simon—'they' being those who're normally supposed to be competent at this sort of thing. The Dracs, the Fedrats, maybe the Lyrans or even the Cappies.

"But what if it was one of us? We're all sick to death of the Camerons and their Star League out here, and Simon-Says-More-Forts never did us any favors. There's motive. You want means and opportunity? How about the fact that New Silesia is just barely over the RWR border? How about the fact that any one of those miners could have been an Amaris agent? How about the fact that the Amarises have never forgiven Ian Cameron or any of his descendants for not trotting off posthaste to Apollo in 2575, to bail Gregory's silk-padded butt out of the fire? The Amarises are champion grudge holders, and this one's been festering a long time. What if Stefan Amaris saw his big break and took it? Okay, so he's built like a stack of dumplings and everyone's just waiting for him to trip on that goofy dangling mustache—but take it from someone who lives where he rules, the man isn't stupid. A more cunning little bastard never breathed air, and having inconvenient people killed is all in a day's work for him. What if assassinating Simon Cameron is the opening gambit in Stefan Amaris' game to finally make the family revenge fantasy come true?" (Excerpted from *Worms and Turns*, 3 March 2751, posted at 02:13:45 AST)

Almost no one took this or similar speculations seriously. Periphery residents made a darkly funny parlor game out of Guess-the-Killer, but the honors most often went to underground Taurian resistance groups or hypothetical anti-Star League operatives buried in one of the famed Canopian pleasure circuses (one of which had visited New Silesia only seven weeks before Simon Cameron's fateful visit). Stefan Amaris, widely ridiculed in the Periphery for his oafish manners, chieftain-of-the-steppes affectations and obsequiousness toward anything emanating from the Court of the Star League, seemed impossible to suspect of any scheme more complex than figuring out how to simultaneously flip three chilled grapes into his mouth.

So it remained for nearly a decade, until Amaris was ready to make his next move.

The Boy King

Simon Cameron's restive Star League now fell to his only son Richard, an impressionable eight-year-old who preferred fairy tales to reality. Emotionally fragile since losing his mother in 2750, Richard coped with his father's death by closing in even further on himself. Few could reach him, even of those who cared to take the time. The House Lords, preoccupied with one-upping each other during political wrangling over Richard's regency, were not among them. Nor, unfortunately, was the man appointed Protector of the Star League: General Aleksandr Kerensky, the famed commander of the SLDF. By all accounts an honorable man, Kerensky surely would have been a better influence on young Richard than Stefan Amaris soon became—and Kerensky's own private letters make clear his deep regret that he failed as a second father to the last Cameron lord. Military obligations—and later, full-blown crises—kept him far away from his young charge during those first, most crucial years. The Council Lords had deliberately refused Kerensky's attempted resignation from the SLDF upon appointing him regent; they preferred him too busy with the army to rein in their schemes. That choice, combined with Richard's youth and fragility, set the perfect stage for Amaris' deep-laid plot to unfold.

Within months of Richard's acclamation as First Lord, Amaris grabbed headlines in the Rim Worlds Republic with a dramatic photo-op at Apollo's main spaceport. Posing on the boarding ramp of his personal DropShip, with the Amaris crest in gems ablaze behind him, Stefan announced his intention "to offer our youthful sovereign the full devotion, aid and support of the Rim Worlds Republic," by personally relocating to Terra "for as long as Humanity's beloved ruler can benefit from wise counsel regarding the interests of his humble subjects on the fringes of space." This stunt, fawningly praised by the state-run Rim Worlds media, received jeers elsewhere in the Periphery. "Amaris the Boot-Licker" ran the header of one editorial in the *Alpheratz Examiner*; "Stefan the Sycophant," blared another, from the *New Chappelle Defender* on Taurus. A somewhat more sober analysis in the *Canopian Daily Herald* noted that, "if Stefan Amaris is the only voice from the Periphery that Richard Cameron hears, the results will surely be good for Amaris—but what about the rest of us?" In general, public opinion dismissed Amaris as a Star League toady. If he wanted to sit on Terra for who knew how long, amusing the boy king and taking snide remarks from the Council Lords, then good luck and good riddance. Apart from a tiny crop of Rim Worlds dissidents and a few of the savvier Periphery politicians who had personally dealt with Amaris, few saw through his fawning-bumpkin act. Of those who did, none suspected his ultimate aim.

"No Taxation Without Representation"

The death of Simon Cameron and the accession of a regency government on Terra were only the first two in a final, fatal series of body blows to Periphery dreams of reforming the Star League empire. The next blow came in 2753 with a hefty tax increase on the Territorial States. Passed by the Regency Council without the required signature of Protector Aleksandr Kerensky, this first of two large tax hikes a decade apart financed the doubling of the Inner Sphere House armies—an action permitted under an "amendment" to Michael Cameron's Edict of 2650 that the House Lords had passed the previous spring, also

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unsigned by Kerensky. That legislation did not extend to the Periphery realms. All of them remained bound by stringent limits on military force size.

The rank injustice of heavily taxing the Periphery solely for the Inner Sphere's benefit prompted a sharp rise in public calls to "get the hell out of the Star League!" Along with blistering editorials, impassioned political speeches and a frenzy in online forums came a huge increase in acts of public protest—many peaceful, some not. Periphery representatives in the Star League Council denounced the measure, to no avail. When peaceful agitation for repeal went nowhere, the level of violence predictably rose. Terrorist attacks against Star League installations tripled throughout 2753 and 2754, especially in the Taurian Concordat and the already cash-strapped Outworlds Alliance. Significant armed resistance groups like the Taurian Freedom Army came together during that fateful year, along with countless others whose names and faces have since been lost to history (though their legacy remains).

Popular culture reflected this simmering revolt. The holo-vid series *Under Cover*—chronicling the exploits of five female Canopian secret agents masquerading as pleasure-circus employees—began its eleven-year run in January 2754 and consistently landed in the top five most popular vid shows. The tag line for the series was, "Taking down the Star League—one big-shot at a time."

Aleksandr Kerensky, then touring Star League bases in the Periphery, faced vociferous public protests on every world he visited. Those unaware that the tax increase had passed without his signature assumed that Kerensky supported this unjust treatment of the Territorial States. Kerensky's long-standing friendship with Simon Cameron came under intense scrutiny, with many taking it as proof that the "honorable General K" was just another blindly loyal enforcer of the Camerons' imperial will. Those who knew of the Council Lords' machinations had other questions for Kerensky. Why had he let the House Lords get away with it, and why did he not use the powers of his office—let alone his army—to force repeal? "The man who serves on paper as the 'Protector' of the entire Star League appears to find its outermost territories not worth the bother," said one editorial in the *New Chappelle Defender*. "God forbid Aleksandr Kerensky should spend any of his voluminous political capital forcing the corrupt House Lords to get their greedy mitts off the Periphery. We out here in the boondocks of space simply don't matter enough."

Other Periphery denizens went far beyond words. Star League government offices, corporate installations and even military bases suffered rampant vandalism and sabotage, as well as occasional firebombings and shootings. The assassination on Taurus of Rickard Londberg, CEO of Doering Electronics' Concordat subsidiary, in late 2753 marked an ominous uptick in deadly terrorist acts. It also provoked a swift, harsh and ultimately futile response from the Star League government.

Road to Hell

Within days of the assassination, General Kerensky sent in the Special Armed Services—the SLDF's elite counter-terror corps—to seek out and destroy violent Periphery resistance groups. As his private papers

and declassified records make clear, he intended the SAS to act as a surgical strike force, rooting out the genuine terrorists while leaving peaceful dissenters free to protest as their own local governments might permit. As always, however, a gulf yawned between intent and reality. Despite standing orders not to resort to "equal acts of violence" when apprehending terror suspects, more than a few SAS operatives shot first and asked questions later. On some occasions, SAS overkill resulted in sizable numbers of civilian deaths. Documentation from the period shows several incidents in which innocents died through faulty intelligence or mistaken identity. Far from rooting out anti-Star League terrorism, the brutal excesses of the counter-terror campaign provided violent resistance movements with a stream of new recruits. Public insistence by high-level SLDF and Star League civilian officials that "We do not torture terror suspects," "Every suspect will face impartial justice at a fair trial," and "The Star League regrets any collateral damage that may have occurred in attempting to restore peace and order," only fueled the flames. By the end of 2756, car bombings and other homicidal assaults had become an almost weekly occurrence on the worst-hit planets, and the death toll among civilian bystanders was climbing into the thousands.

Amaris the Liberator

During this same period, Stefan Amaris set the second major element of his plot in motion. Judicious use of state-controlled media and other elements of his extensive propaganda network allowed him to plant rumors throughout 2754 of growing disillusionment with his place at the Court of the Star League. According to the rumor mill, contemptuous treatment from the Inner Sphere lords—plus daily witness to their utter corruption—had caused Amaris to rethink his family's long-standing loyalty to Terra. The stories painted Amaris as valiantly attempting to safeguard young Richard Cameron from the unscrupulous House Lords, waging a lonely battle to preserve in the boy's heart the love of liberty and fairness that represented the Periphery's deepest values. As the months went on and it became clearer that his efforts were doomed to fail, Amaris reluctantly concluded that the once-noble Star League was a lost cause. Humanity's future lay with the Periphery realms, the last bastions of true honor and courage—and the Periphery's future depended on its liberation from the declining Star League empire.

Melodramatic and improbable as this story line was, it worked. Many people wanted to believe it, because it spoke to their growing sense of themselves as the only honest, freedom-loving folk left in a universe run by grifters and tyrants. That Stefan Amaris made the unlikely crusader for liberty in the entire Periphery only added to the story's cachet. If an absolute ruler like him could undergo such a dramatic conversion, then the independent spirit of the Periphery could not be dead, as so many had feared. It was alive and well, working its magic in the least expected places. Perhaps it could yet save the young First Lord, whose majority was less than a decade away. If not, the people of the Periphery would do what they had always done—strike out for freedom at any price.

Local political leaders remained considerably more skeptical than the Periphery street, but even they felt the pull of Amaris' carefully crafted spin campaign. For his part, Amaris didn't need his fellow rulers

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to believe him. He simply needed to make them curious. During a brief leave of absence from court on Terra, he successfully arranged secret meetings with officials from the Concordat, the Magistracy and the Outworlds Alliance, “to discuss our present distressful situation and practical measures for altering it.” Skeptical or no, the Periphery’s other movers and shakers had taken the bait. More was to follow, as shown by this recently unearthed transcript of the 30 October 2754 meeting with Isleen Malvena, Privy Councilor to Taurian Protector Nicoletta Calderon:

Amaris: Thank you for agreeing to receive me, Councilor Malvena. Allow me to convey my most profound respect to your esteemed Protector, along with my acceptance of her most gracious apology for being unable to attend our discussion. The duties of state can be inconveniently pressing, as I myself know only too well—

Malvena: Yes, yes. Let’s get to the point. We’re none of us happy with the Star League at the moment. You have some ideas for changing that?

Amaris: I do indeed. As you know, I have spent much of the past three years at the Court of the Star League, where it was my fond—and, alas, foolish—hope to serve my realm, my region and the League by acting as an advocate to young Lord Richard for the peoples of the Periphery. An advocate, I had hoped, for our values as well. My family has always loved Mother Terra, and believed her worthy of redemption despite the many times throughout our history that those who governed her have lost their way—

Malvena: I don’t have much time, Lord Stefan. May we skip the preamble and get to business?

Amaris: I have always admired that about Taurians—your ability to cut swiftly to the heart of a matter. Truly, the Council Lords of the Inner Sphere could learn much of honest statecraft from your example.

Malvena: You have five minutes to say something worth hearing.

Amaris: (pause) ‘Mechs.

Malvena: What?

Amaris: BattleMechs. Several battalions’ worth. Regiments, even. I can help you get them, and give you the means to keep them hidden. Along with those you’ll train to pilot them. A secret ‘Mech force, to be held in reserve until needed for your defense against the SLDF. Because you know, of course, that the Star League will never let us go without a fight. (pause) Have I reached my five-minute limit, Councilor? Or shall I continue?

Malvena: (pause) Lord Amaris... you just bought yourself the rest of my day. What ‘Mechs, where, what tonnage and weaponry, and how in blazes do we keep Kerensky from finding out about them?

Amaris: May I assume that I now have Protector Calderon’s ear—and only hers, along with what few trusted military authorities she deems necessary? We want no leaks of our plans.



Malvena: You have my word—no leaks. (pause) Now—what exactly do you have in mind?

What Amaris had in mind was the very thing Simon Cameron had feared—a Periphery-wide military build-up, conducted under the radar via unmonitored Periphery armaments manufacturers. During and since Simon’s reign, Star League intelligence had made little headway tracing the mysterious ‘Mech buyers that had so greatly concerned the late First Lord. A smattering of ‘Mechs had gone to wealthy individuals on distant Periphery planets. The bulk of the output, however, remained untraced. Not until the secret meetings of 2754 would anyone learn where those machines had ended up: in the hands of the Amaris, in hidden installations on backwater Republic worlds. Stefan Amaris now offered a significant number of those ‘Mechs—along with the means for camouflaging additional purchases—to the governments of his fellow Periphery realms. He would help them build their own ‘Mech arsenals, using techniques perfected by himself and his predecessors to hide their existence from the Star League. In the meantime, he would return to Terra and continue to influence Lord Richard as best he could. If all went as he hoped, the First Lord would grant the Periphery its independence upon attaining his majority. If not, the Periphery would reclaim its liberty by force of arms.

Restive and disillusioned, the other Periphery rulers eagerly joined in Amaris’ scheme. Against all odds, Stefan the Sycophant had turned out to be a patriot—or at least self-interested enough to betray the

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Star League when it served his wishes. That it simultaneously served the entire Periphery's interests was the proverbial icing on the cake. The more cynical of the Periphery's power players counted on that same self-interest to keep Stefan from betraying them in turn. They little knew how wrong they were.

Rim Worlds Ascendant

As 2754 gave way to the new year, the ongoing expansion of Inner Sphere House militaries along with rising Periphery unrest took its toll on the Star League government. Career civil servants in the BSLA resigned in droves to protest the unfair tax hikes and blatant corruption of the Council Lords. Already reeling from earlier waves of resignations over Directive 41, the BSLA never recovered. The departure of so many competent and dedicated civil servants created the perfect opening for Stefan Amaris to fill the vacancies with his own loyalists from the Rim Worlds. Any nagging fears that might have cropped up among Amaris' allies were assuaged by his assurance that his people would use their positions to ensure no trouble when the Periphery realms seceded. Indeed, the influx of Rim Worlders was necessary to preserve the best possible chance for the Periphery and the Star League to peacefully part ways.

So matters stood in 2755, when Richard Cameron issued the Birthday Proclamation withdrawing all SLDF troops from Rim Worlds space. Reaction across the Periphery was swift and angry. Many citizens who had cautiously dared to believe in Amaris-the-patriot saw this clear sign of Cameron favoritism as proof that "our homegrown embarrassment, the petty tyrant of the Rim Worlds" had reverted to type. As one angry Outworlds Alliance politician put it, during an appearance on the popular holo vid news show, *This Week in the Back Room*: "This (deleted) was supposed to help *all* of us! He said we're all in this together, and we'll get out of it together! And now?! His realm is free of the occupiers, but we still have to put up with SLDF garrisons taking up our resources and being paid with our taxes!! Stefan Amaris is a damned liar and a boot-licking toady to the Camerons, and anyone who thinks otherwise is a damned fool!"

Amid furious demands for "the immediate withdrawal of the Star League's imperial military," those privy to the existence of the secret 'Mechs bided their time, trained their new soldiers and carefully fostered their people's seething resentment. Here again, Amaris had laid his groundwork well. By giving his fellow leaders control over sizable 'Mech arsenals, he kept them from asking how many more 'Mechs he might be holding in reserve. Nor did they inquire too deeply into his reassurances that accepting Richard's exclusive favors toward the RWR was merely part of the double game he played. The private letters of Janina Centrella, then heir to the Magistracy of Canopus, voiced the cynical viewpoint that Amaris' true intentions didn't matter. Even if he was working an elaborate double blind, intending to bind the Periphery in chains to the Camerons, his miscalculation in allowing the rest of the Periphery to beef up their militaries would ultimately prove his downfall. Meanwhile, frequent displays of public anger served to mask from the Star League government the true extent of collusion between Amaris the "loyalist" and the other Periphery realms.

This cynic's view suffered a jolt in 2757, when massive SLDF

maneuvers dubbed "Operation Persuasive Force" sent a wave of jitters throughout the Periphery. Ostensibly staged to test the Terran Hegemony's ability to repel a large-scale attack, the maneuvers were swiftly characterized as a prelude to invasion. Few locals believed public statements to the contrary by resident SLDF garrison commanders. One such commander on Taurus fell victim to a hail of raw eggs hurled at a press conference she had convened expressly to allay local fears of impending war.

The exercises ultimately ended without incident. Days later, Stefan Amaris cemented his pose as a Periphery patriot by sharing with his fellow regional leaders the extensive data on SLDF defensive strategies collected by the Rim Worlds observers present on every Terran Hegemony vessel.

"The Revolution Will Be on Holo vid"

Relative calm followed Operation Persuasive Force, until Richard Cameron shattered it with the Taxation Edict of 2763. Earlier histories give no reason apart from personal enrichment for this appallingly short-sighted piece of legislation, but its timing suggests other motives. The First Lord had attained his majority in 2762, and in his first official act had attempted to ram through Executive Order 156—a Star League-wide ban on all House militaries and private armies. The failure of this gambit humiliated Richard, who retired to a palace in the Terran wilderness, disbanded the High Council and announced his intention to henceforth rule by decree. That the Star League Accords gave him no such authority didn't matter. He was First Lord, and he meant to bring the House Lords to heel. The Periphery, too, would loyally obey him or would live to regret it.

Unable to rein in the grossly expanded House militaries, Richard badly needed revenue to finance a tit-for-tat expansion of the SLDF. After the debacle of EO 156, he knew that any attempt to tax the Inner Sphere realms would blow up in his face. The Periphery—far away, fragmented and with truncated armed forces—must have looked like an easy mark. Unfortunately for Richard, it wasn't.

Across the Periphery, the Taxation Edict met with vociferous protest. The Taurian Concordat, Magistracy of Canopus and Outworlds Alliance refused to comply with it, citing clauses in the Reunification Treaties that expressly forbade the levying of taxes in the Territorial States without prior passage by Periphery governments. Only the Rim Worlds obeyed, and even that swiftly became mere lip service by high officials. The people of the RWR, despite the iron fist of the Amaris clan, rendered tax collection effectively impossible through massive civil disobedience. Back in the Inner Sphere, the political idiocy of the tax edict was clear enough to quietly cost Cameron support even within the Hegemony.

Richard Cameron reacted like the petty tyrant he'd become, ordering General Kerensky to reinforce SLDF garrisons in every realm—except for the "loyal" Rim Worlds, which had no garrisons in its territory. Far from intimidating Periphery citizens, the increased troop presence inflamed them. Terror strikes against Star League targets became near-daily occurrences, with the Taurian Freedom Army leading the pack. By contrast, Rim Worlds officials were only too happy to deliver protesters, activists and other "traitors" to the Star League for trial. Newsvid reports



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of RWR dissidents being bound over for the long journey to Terra—or disappearing while in custody—prompted major demonstrations at which Stefan Amaris and Richard Cameron were burned in effigy. As for Amaris' fellow rulers, with their own plans nearing fruition, they didn't need him anymore. Few spared any thought for his apparently schizophrenic actions; he was, after all, the latest in a long line of tyrants. As long as he remained content to play dictator behind his own borders, his treatment of anti-Star League citizens merited no more than a sternly worded official protest or two. The real enemy was the SLDF, and this time the Periphery felt ready for them.

Final Preparations

With their secret 'Mech divisions nearly combat-ready, the Periphery governments stepped up their covert support of local resistance and terrorist groups. Nicoletta Calderon poured additional money into the coffers of the Taurian Freedom Army, while her counterparts in the Magistracy and the Outworlds did likewise in their own states. All three leaders hoped to tie down their SLDF garrisons, leaving them in disarray when the hidden BattleMech forces finally struck. The plan worked beautifully throughout 2764, despite Kerensky's roll-up of the TFA. Subsequent events would reveal Stefan Amaris as the betrayer of the Freedom Army, in a successful effort to direct the general's attention away from Amaris' own schemes. In the end, the demise of the TFA gained the Star League nothing. Terrorism continued to grow, in the Concordat and elsewhere—financed by local governments and also by Amaris. Using his extensive network of intelligence operatives and secret police, he funneled huge sums to countless violent anti-Star League groups—and created a few himself, one of which had a major presence on the Concordat world of New Vandenburg.

NEW VANDENBURG UPRISING

Matters came to an ugly head in 2765, when New Vandenburg and seventeen other Taurian systems formally seceded from the Star League—though not from the Concordat, which remained nominally a Star League Territorial State. The “rebel” planetary governments pointedly cited the Taxation Edict in their blistering missives to Richard Cameron, but at this point not even repeal of that measure could have stemmed the freedom tide. Nicoletta Calderon took no action against the secessionists; in fact, they acted with her blessing. She now had the perfect excuse to begin the slow and careful liberation of the rest of her realm. She began to walk a diplomatic tightrope, intent on keeping more SLDF troops out of Concordat space while buying time to move her own secret army into position.

Initially, Nicoletta's gambit succeeded. The Inner Sphere Council Lords—and Cameron—tempered their fury long enough to send General Kerensky to assess the situation. Kerensky duly went to New Vandenburg, at the head of the First French Regiment, hoping to persuade the secessionists to give up their arms.

Kerensky's regiment landed on New Vandenburg and established itself outside Fort Gorki, a local militia base. While Kerensky met with the secessionist militia leaders, his troops kept up regular patrols in the area. The proximity of mutually wary SLDF and Taurian soldiers was a pile of kindling awaiting a match. When a squad from the First suffered

a vehicle breakdown at the gates of Fort Gorki, virtually in front of a New Vandenburg Militia patrol, disaster became inevitable. Convinced that the stranded Star League troopers were a feint for a full-scale assault by the First French, the Taurian troopers cut them down in a blaze of laser and gunfire, and then retreated inside Fort Gorki.

What happened over the next thirty hours has remained conjecture for centuries, until recent groundbreaking research through ancient archives on New Vandenburg revealed the missing pieces of the puzzle. The New Vandenburg militia unit at Fort Gorki had added increasing numbers of new recruits from 2753 on, and recruiting took a dizzying leap in 2763 and 2764. Among those added to the rosters were a dozen men and women affiliated with the Light of Liberty. This shadowy group had sprung up in the wake of the TFA, and swiftly became infamous for spectacular, if sporadic, acts of violence—among them the destruction of the SLDF's 265th Regiment by a lone terrorist in a car armed with stolen nuclear weapons. Though few people suspected it at the time, the Light of Liberty owed its existence and financing to Stefan Amaris.

Interestingly, the twelve soldiers in question had all fled to New Vandenburg from the Rim Worlds Republic, ostensibly to escape reprisals for “unauthorized political activity.” None of them appeared to have close ties to each other, and they hailed from distant parts of the RWR. Upon digging deeper, however, researchers and computer forensics experts have pieced together fragments of information identifying the soldiers as Amaris operatives.

The rest of the tale is best told by an eyewitness, Captain Sunaiya Owens, in her long-buried account of that fateful day:

...We'd had the jitters for days, of course. How could we not? With every holovid camera in known space turned on Fort Gorki, and that damned SLDF regiment camped on our doorstep. They hadn't made a move since landfall, but we all got the message. Play nice with the Big General K, or we'll squash you like bugs. We were no match for them, and we knew it.

Rochelle talked about that a lot. Captain Gibson. She'd only joined up in 2763, but she was one hell of a soldier. Shot through the ranks like a rocket, but she was so stand-up that no one resented her for it. I guess that should have warned me. But who the hell suspects her best friend of working for the enemy—and who on New Vandenburg knew then that the enemy wasn't just the Star League?

We were out on patrol that day, walking the perimeter, making sure the SLDFers hadn't pulled anything sneaky overnight. It was hotter than hell, and tempers ran short. Rochelle was especially on edge. She'd had a few too many the night before, off-duty, and couldn't quit talking then about the First Frenchies. “They'll make their move any day now,” she'd said. “Any hour. You watch. I'd make it a bet, but odds are none of us'll be alive to collect.”

We were almost through our circuit when we spotted the hovercar. First French, no mistake, practically at the gates of the base. Just one car. No backup, no nothing. At least,



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nothing we could see. The crew'd climbed out to take a look at the hoverfoils. Breakdown, it looked like.

I said as much to Captain Gibson. "Don't take anything for granted," she answered. "Could be they want to see what we'll do."

We hunkered down in the light tree cover and watched. The crew buzzed around their stalled hovercar like bewildered bees. A couple threw nervous glances over their shoulders. I wondered if they felt our eyes on them.

Then a lot happened at once, none of it good.

One of the troopers opened a comm link—reporting the breakdown or calling up reinforcements, we'll never know which. Something bright and angry flashed nearby, and I heard the whine of laser fire. Rochelle yelled, "Sniper!", broke cover and fired where the laser bolt had come from. An SLDF soldier went down, a smoking hole in his back.

The hovercraft crew went for their sidearms. That was all it took. All the tension, all the fear, the days of mutterings and conspiracy theories and having to sit on it all just to do our jobs, finally broke us. I don't even remember pulling my weapon. I found it in my hands, firing toward the SLDFers as if it had a mind of its own.

They died in minutes, those First French troopers. We left the hulk of the hovercar as our calling card, then hurried into the base and locked the doors behind us. The rest of the militia'd heard the firing; when we walked in, with Rochelle white-faced but dead calm at our head, they knew we'd sealed all our fates.

No one said a word against us. The others looked apprehensive, some even piss-scared, but underneath it all I saw pride in their eyes. Pride that we'd struck the first blow against the Star League, even though it surely meant all of our deaths.

The hours crawled by after that. Ten, twelve, fifteen, twenty. No one slept. We waited and talked and voiced our fears, which got worse as time went on.

"Where the hell are they?" Rochelle said. "They think they can wait us out?"

"They know they can." The answer came from another newish recruit—Harden Guthrie, a string bean of a farmer's son who'd signed on in early 2764. "There's a fucking regiment out there, Cap. They can roll over us any time they want."

"So why haven't they?" It surprised me to realize that the third voice in the conversation was mine.

Guthrie paced across the common room. "God knows. Holed up in here, we're blind and deaf. They could be rampaging through Fort Gorki—" the town, he meant—"right now, taking revenge for their dead. When they're done, they'll come for us. Won't even cost 'em sweat!"

Angry murmurs rippled around the room. I felt like I could touch the rage around us. It built and grew as more hours passed with nothing from our enemies—no word, no shots fired. Just silence. Maddening, terrifying silence.

When the clock passed the thirty-hour mark, Rochelle and near two dozen others grabbed up their weapons. "The hell with sitting here, waiting to get fried!" she said. "I say we take it to the enemy. And if we go down fighting, there's plenty more who'll step up to take our places." She gave a crazy grin. "Who's with me?"

I was on my feet and cheering before my brain caught up with my body. I saw the 'Mech jocks go pounding out of the room toward their bays. Guthrie broke open a weapons locker and started passing out ordnance. We took as much as we could carry. No sense going on a glorious suicide run if you can't make it count.

Twenty of us survived. God knows how many of them we killed. A lot more than they expected, that's sure. It didn't hit me until later that the loudest voices in favor of attack were all the newbies—a good dozen or so of them immigrants who'd signed up to show their loyalty to their new world. Funny thing, too—they made up half the survivors. I ended up in a military prison—a Davion one, as it happens, until the collapse of the Star League made the Davions too busy to bother with Taurian POWs and they let us go. Heard lots of interesting rumors there... some about Fort Gorki, and the Light of Liberty, and how they'd actually been a front group for Stefan Amaris. He'd betrayed us all—the Star League, the Periphery, that poor doomed fool Richard Cameron. I knew Rochelle had grown up on some Rim Worlds backwater, and it set me to wondering. Was she one of them? Had she fired that shot intending to touch off New Vandenburg's Armageddon?

If I ever see her again, maybe I'll ask her. Right before I take her head off with the business end of a needler pistol.

—Excerpt from *Hard War: A Memoir*,
by Captain Sunaiya Owens, 2802, Concordat Free Press

Amaris had placed similar agents provocateurs in all three of the other major Periphery states, just in case natural anti-Star League sentiment failed to spark a revolt. In truth, however, the Light of Liberty operatives didn't have to work very hard. Already half-convinced that Kerensky's peace talks were a ruse, the New Vandenburg Militia needed little prodding. The First French Regiment decimated the Taurian troops, but the victory proved Pyrrhic. As news of the battle spread, rebellion erupted throughout the Periphery. This time, the region's leaders were ready—and so was Stefan Amaris.

"THE END OF THE BEGINNING"

With the New Vandenburg peace talks in shambles and his regiment under assault, Kerensky faced two choices: let the Periphery go its own way, or launch all-out war. Some SLDF garrisons held out hope that their general would buck the system; they'd seen the effects of the House Lords' predations first-hand, and their sympathies lay with the locals. Most knew better. Had Kerensky refused to move against the openly rebellious Periphery, Cameron or the House Lords would swiftly have replaced him. War was inevitable. The only questions were how long and how bloody.

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Kerensky and the First French Regiment pulled back across the border, while the general sent redeployment orders to SLDF units stationed in the outer regions of all the Inner Sphere states. Meanwhile, vicious fighting broke out on world after world between SLDF garrisons and citizen militias. These determined but poorly trained irregulars—in some cases, mere mobs with whatever weapons they had to hand—attacked SLDF bases with great courage and little skill. Thousands died in these suicide assaults, but more kept coming. The trained planetary militias, by contrast, initially held back. News accounts at the time reflected widespread bewilderment. At last the Periphery had risen against its conquerors; men, women and children were taking up whatever arms they could find to defeat the imperial foe. On some worlds, sympathetic SLDF troops had even joined the cause, or at least refused to fire on Periphery citizens. Where were the militias? What in the name of hell could they be waiting for?

A month into what was already being dubbed “the Freedom War,” the known universe got its answer. Fifty ‘Mech divisions swept down on those SLDF garrisons that had not gone over to the Periphery’s side—divisions wearing the colors of the Taurian Concordat, the Magistracy of Canopus and the Outworlds Alliance. Only the Rim Worlds remained conspicuously absent during the first months of the Freedom War. Because Amaris continued to fund anti-Star League independence groups while warfare raged, few felt inclined to ask why the Rim Worlds’ ‘Mech divisions weren’t battling alongside their Periphery allies. Those who did wonder had their hands too full to do anything about it, and already saw Amaris as a fair-weather friend. They assumed—wrongly—that Stefan the Schemer was holding his hidden troops in reserve, waiting to see how well the rest of the Periphery did before openly taking sides.

Checkmate

In fact, Amaris had other plans for his ‘Mech divisions. In July of 2764, he had signed a secret treaty with the First Lord, pledging Rim Worlds Republic forces to defend the Terran Hegemony “should a crisis in the Periphery render the Terran Hegemony and humanity’s sacred birthworld vulnerable to attack.” By the summer of 2765, just such a crisis was well under way. With fifty SLDF divisions and regiments cut off by the Periphery revolt, Kerensky found himself scrambling to shift troops throughout the Inner Sphere. Star League divisions, including those based in the Hegemony, moved to take the place of units that had already packed up for the Periphery. The redeployments left the Terran Hegemony seriously under-defended, barely two years after Richard Cameron had alienated all the House Lords by essentially declaring himself dictator of the Star League.

Against this backdrop came rumors of suspicious troop movements in the Draconis Combine. That realm’s Coordinator, Takiro Kurita, had made no secret of his disdain for the “petulant child on the Star League throne,” and war jitters made the prospect of a Combine invasion seem credible. Predictably, Cameron panicked. He invoked the treaty with Amaris, granting official permission to move Rim Worlds troops onto Hegemony planets. In so doing, he placed around his own neck the noose that Amaris had spent nearly thirty years creating.

Revelation of the treaty met with sharply negative press throughout

Richard’s realm. Newscasts and late-night comedy shows mocked the clumsily titled “Humanity’s Homeland Defense Agreement,” while citizens on several Hegemony worlds turned out in mass public protests. General Kerensky objected as well, suggesting instead that the First Lord hire House regiments from more trustworthy member-states. Then, at the height of the firestorm, came word of a major battle in the Rim Worlds Republic. A mixed division of Periphery BattleMechs had attacked the world of Götterdämmerung, but was repulsed by twenty valiant Rim Worlds regiments.

Cameron immediately spun the incident as yet more proof of the RWR’s exceptional loyalty, and of his own wisdom in trusting Stefan Amaris when no one else would. The brave defenders of Götterdämmerung had stood against the rebels, placing the good of the Star League above the selfish regional interests of their fellow Periphery states. Moreover, they had proved their military worth in turning back an entire ‘Mech division. Who dared now call Rim Worlds troops unworthy to safeguard the Terran Hegemony?

Faced with few good options for assuring their own safety, nervous Hegemony citizens fell back on their long habit of trusting the Camerons. Though some continued to protest the presence of foreign troops, Richard’s media campaign generally had the desired effect. The few military experts who pointed out the lack of independent verification for the Götterdämmerung incident either “retired to spend more time with their families” or were quietly demoted. Soon afterward, the first Rim Worlds ‘Mech regiment arrived on Terra. Welcomed with great fanfare, the Fourth Amaris Dragoons received personal orders from Cameron to join the Royal Black Watch in guarding the Court of the Star League.

Discrepancies between the number of RWR troops allowed under the treaty and the actual number that showed up were similarly ignored. Richard was in no mood to question his ally or his own brilliance, and the scattershot reports of mismatched troop numbers made them easy to dismiss as simple error. As the year turned and 2766 drew onward, increasing numbers of Rim Worlds officers infiltrated the SLDF bureaucracy, and the troop discrepancies dwindled to nothing. With the Periphery war heating up, neither Kerensky nor the House Lords spared much thought for events in the Terran Hegemony. Periphery leaders and their people, engaged in what many saw as the final battle for liberty, cared little what Amaris might be up to—so long as he was up to it somewhere else.

The Coup

The Freedom War raged on throughout 2766, with the Periphery armies holding their own against SLDF counterattacks. With Kerensky tied down and all the elements of his coup in place, Amaris traveled to Terra in December of 2766. He arrived at Cameron’s court in Unity City late on the day after Christmas. Some fifteen hours later, Richard Cameron lay dead on the floor of his own throne room, and Amaris loyalists controlled the Court of the Star League. Meanwhile, well-placed Rim Worlds troops mauled the skeleton Star League forces that remained on Terra, using surprise, terror tactics and even nuclear bombardment from aerospace fighters. Having secured Terra, Amaris sent a message to the other Star League regiments and ad hoc garrisons



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still in Hegemony space: acknowledge him as First Lord and lay down their arms, or be slaughtered.

Almost to a man, they chose the latter. And slaughter it was. By the end of the Coup's first day, only a dozen of the 103 Hegemony planets remained free of Amaris' grip. The rest had fallen by the time the New Year dawned—less than a week after Richard Cameron's execution. The scattered survivors escaped to wherever they could, many bound for the Periphery to join up with General Kerensky. The shocking news they bore preceded them, however. In early January of 2767, Amaris publicly proclaimed himself First Lord of the Star League in a transmission sent to all the House Lords and the Periphery governments. His first order to Kerensky: crush the Periphery rebels at any cost.

Betrayal

The order shocked Amaris' erstwhile Periphery allies to the bone. Though none had considered him trustworthy, they had not anticipated this particular betrayal. That Amaris might prove a turncoat and support the Star League against them, they had considered. That he was willing to destroy the Star League in his effort to gain power, they knew. That he would conquer the Star League and then turn its might against them was the one possibility they never anticipated. With their "friend" Amaris turned enemy, the other three Periphery nations could only pray that Kerensky would turn as well. If he defied the Usurper, the Periphery could hope for freedom. If not, they might lose all.

"Day of Infamy" screamed the banner headline in the *Canopian Daily Herald*—not on December 27, 2766, but on the day Amaris formally announced his power grab. The accompanying editorial pulled no punches. "As bad a leader as Richard Cameron was, Stefan Amaris can only be worse. He has no scruples and desires nothing more than to rule over us all. Spheroid, Periphery—we're all the same to him, mere tools to sate his lust for power. To those who believed his promises, mea culpa. To those who did not believe them but took his money and support against the Star League anyway, mea maxima culpa. We are now forced to trust in the honor of General Kerensky, the same man who as 'Protector' permitted this cancer to grow at the vaunted Star League's heart. By reputation, at least, he is less corrupt than the Camerons, the Great Houses and the Amarises. Let us pray this is true, and that Stefan Amaris will live to regret his betrayal of all the Periphery holds dear."

Others took a more pragmatic view, as in this excerpt from a popular online journal that had made its name covering the fighting on New Vandenburg:

"OK, so there's one good thing about Pudgy the Barbarian declaring himself Lord of the Star League. It'll get the SLDF the hell off our planet. 'Cause you know they're not going to swallow this. Big Bad General K's going home to clean house, bet you a 'Mech-high stack of Star League Dollars. And when he does, we won't have to worry about the Star League OR Pudgy anymore. Let the Leaguers and the Rim Worlders knock each other senseless, till they're both too weak to bother anybody else. We'll get on with rebuilding, thanks. We've done it before." (From *YourMorningRant*, Coshocton, New Vandenburg; 12 February 2767)

Hunker down, survive the storm and then clean up the wreckage—so said the conventional wisdom in the first days after the Coup. When Kerensky proclaimed a cease-fire with the Concordat, the Magistracy and the Outworlds Alliance, Periphery citizens in those realms breathed a sigh of relief. The SLDF would now turn its still-superior firepower against only one Periphery realm: the Rim Worlds Republic. After that, Kerensky's army would depart Periphery space to liberate Terra. Thankful at the prospect of soon seeing the back of the empire, few anticipated how long the storm would last—or how devastating it would prove to all of humanity.

BLOWBACK: EVENTS IN THE RIM WORLDS

Predictably, the Rim Worlds had far different responses to the Coup. Amaris had left his realm in the care of Mohammed Selim, a rabid loyalist dedicated to upholding the worst traditions of autocratic government, and he wasted no time in promulgating the official line. "All citizens of the Rim Worlds take pride in this historic day," ran the prime-time newscast on the capital of Apollo, "as our beloved leader claims his rightful place as Humanity's benevolent overlord. He is our True Parent, and he will purge the glorious Star League of the Cameron taint forever. Their perfidy shall no longer disgrace us. Instead, all of Human-occupied space will learn what the Rim Worlds has been privileged for centuries to know: the benefit of a strong, guiding hand from a leader destined to bring us to greatness through obedience, trust and service."

The Dark Horse poli-journal—still operating despite the government's best efforts to shut it down—once again served as the clearest voice of dissent:

Posted: Sat., 13 July 2767, 09:43:15 p.m. AST

"So the Fat Man murders Little Ricky on Terra, a gajillion light-years away. So he calls himself First Imperial Jackass and expects all the other jackasses to bow down. So why should we care?

"I'll tell you why. Because once again, the Fat Man has bought us all a world of trouble. If GK and the rest of the High-and-Mighties accept him, then everybody's going to be in our boat—and First Lord Amaris (yurgh!) will have a much bigger army to lord it over us with. If they tell him where to stick it, then he's screwed—but so are we. GK'll be coming for us, and he'll have the entire rest of the Periphery at his back. Nobody likes a traitor.

"The worst thing, though, is what the Fat Man's a traitor to. Not the Star League, though he is that. Not our neighbors out here, though he's that, too. No—the worst thing he's betrayed is the spirit of the Periphery. Our ancestors came here fleeing oppression; what business have we got oppressing everyone else? Bad enough we in the Rim Worlds have had to put up with it from the thrice-damned Amaris clan for more years than I've got gray hairs. Now the Fat Man's exporting it elsewhere? With the help of far too many of our own fellow citizens who think they know what side their

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bread's buttered on? Any decent denizen of the Periphery wants no truck with absolute power. We just want enough to keep everyone else from telling us how to put on our boots. Anything more, and we're just a bunch of Spheroids living on cheaper real estate. Worse, in fact, because we know better. We have our own past as an example. This is corruption at its lowest depths, folks—and the universe has a nasty habit of dealing out consequences to those who overstep."

RIM WORLDS CAMPAIGN

The SLDF launched its offensive against the Rim Worlds in August of 2767. Many saw this—and some even applauded it—as an act of revenge, but it had its practical points. Star League commanders had barely restrained many of their troops from rampaging against the entire Periphery in the wake of Amaris' treachery, and now the soldiers badly needed an outlet. Kerensky had no intention of letting rage and grief color the eventual campaign to retake the Hegemony, and the Usurper's own realm made a handy substitute. Also, as the only Periphery state not already scarred by warfare, the Rim Worlds offered badly needed resources to an army cut off from much of its Inner Sphere pipeline.

Rim Worlds dissidents regarded the Star League army's approach with dread and anticipation. Once again, the Dark Horse poli-journal and several accompanying comments offer us the clearest picture from those who lived through it:

[BEGIN EXCERPT]

Posted: Mon, 22 July 2767, 07:33:45 p.m. AST

"So forget what I said a few days back about reaping the whirlwind... because hopefully, that won't be all we reap. Yeah, your average SLDFer isn't likely to know the difference—or care overmuch—between diehard goons of the Fat Man and all those everyday Joes just out to survive however they can. That's hell. As for us who've done our bit to keep the real Rim Worlds Republic alive down the centuries, the best I can say is, some of the Leaguers probably know we exist. But it's not like we go around with "DISSENTER" or "RRA" printed on our foreheads—and even if we did, what better way for some Fat Man-lover to hide than to pretend he was one of us all along? So yeah, we're going to get it in the neck, too. At first.

"But once they've hit us, we've got a chance to make our voices heard. The voices of real Republic patriots—those of us who've proudly claimed that identity since forever, and anyone out there now who might be ready to take a gamble with the Fat Man far away on Terra. We can make Kerensky and the SLDF listen. We can make them understand that most folks here despise Stefan Amaris...him and his whole godforsaken family. We just didn't dare do anything about it until now. The Fat Man finally overreached, and now we can all escape him—if we speak up, if we speak out, if we make Kerensky and his troops understand that we want to help them nail that greasy bastard who made our beloved nation a byword for murder and treachery. The only price we ask is that when the dust settles, the Leaguers give us our freedom.

Let us rebuild the Republic the way it used to be, before the name 'Amaris' ever crossed anyone's lips.

"We can do it. We've got the guts and the grit and the passion. We can make the Republic rise again, as a free and honorable nation. So don't give up. Don't give in. Find your neighbors, find your friends, do everything you can to preserve what matters in your town, your city, your planet. From this rich heritage, the Republic will revive. From these fragments of our past and present, we can create our future."

Tags: **Invasion, SLDF, Republic, Fat Man**

55 Comments

1. What future? They're out for Periphery blood. Ours'll do until they can get to Amaris. We're screwed.

Comment by NoName—22 July, 2767 @ 07:48:15 p.m. AST

2. Only if we cross 'em. Which I for one don't plan on doing. Me and my unit didn't sign on to conquer the known universe, or to back up a monster who kills innocent bystanders and kids just because their last name is Cameron. We trained as MechWarriors so we could help liberate the rest of the Periphery from the Spheroid Empire, and to defend ourselves if the SLDF hit us back. Fat bastard lied to us, then left the whole Rim Worlds holding the bag. I'm not putting it on the line for him, or for anyone who supports him!

Comment by SoldierBoy—22 July, 2767 @ 07:55:16 p.m. AST

3. Amazing, how long it takes some people to figure out the truth. My folks've known all about the Amaris Crime Family since Gregory outlawed the RRA back in 2575. They've always been out for themselves, and to hell with anyone who got in their way.

Comment by AnnaK—22 July, 2767 @ 08:02:34 p.m. AST

4. Our Dauntless Leader left orders for us to safeguard the Rim Worlds, while he went partying on Terra. Right you are, sir. Absolutely. We'll do our best to defend the Rim Worlds... against YOU ever getting back into power around here. Hey, General K, walk on in—door's open! My regiment's standing down, and so is every other outfit I know of. Don't smash up the crockery too bad, and for godsakes don't go wholesale after civilians—because then we'll have to fight you. But honestly, we'd rather help you fight Amaris. That's what I call 'defending the Rim Worlds.' Long live the Republic!

Comment by Patriot Game—22 July, 2767 @ 08:06:26 AST

5. Stefan's military is on the side of the angels????

Comment by NoName—22 July, 2767 @ 08:07:10 AST

6. Not all of us, sad to say. But a lot of us left here. The diehards pretty much got sent to the Terran Hegemony to help with the takeover. The rest are sitting on those fortified



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bases the SLDF foolishly left behind after they pulled out in 2755.

Comment by SoldierBoy—22 July, 2767 @ 08:08:21 AST

7. The military isn't the monolith a lot of civvies think it is. Gregory Amaris thought he'd taken care of the RRA, but we've kept its spirit alive down the generations. I'd say about a quarter of the regular army's been loyal to the Republic instead of to the Amarises ever since Stefan sat his fat butt on the throne. Then he started his military build-up in the forties, and only increased the ranks of the patriots. Sheer ego got to be too much for him, I guess...let's just say he was remarkably careless in his vetting of MechWarrior trainees.

Long story short, enough of us in the Underground RRA got in to make a difference. A lot of good soldiers out here won't lift a finger against the SLDF, so long as it doesn't slaughter noncombatants and it makes the Amaris regime its primary target.

Comment by AnnaK—22 July, 2767 @ 08:14:32 AST
[END EXCERPT]

As the dissenters had hoped, the Rim Worlds survived the Star League assault with much less bloodshed than anticipated. The fiercest fighting came at the fortified Star League installations that had fallen into Amaris' lap after the ill-advised Birthday Proclamation, but the SLDF swiftly overwhelmed even the most fanatical loyalist units. Rim Worlds citizens likewise offered little resistance to Kerensky's forces, which in turn cooled their ardor for revenge. Diehard supporters of the Amaris regime tried to rally the people around the occasional atrocity, such as the 90th Dragoons' massacre of POWs at Gutui Junction, but most Rim Worlders only wanted the conflict to end. The pro-Amaris insurgency, such as it was, burned out within months as its fighters either went to ground or scattered to surrounding space as pirates. The murder of Regent Mohammed Selim by an angry mob on Apollo signaled the regime's final collapse, and the underground patriot movement dared to hope that they might yet see their ancient republic's renaissance.

A Dream Deferred

The entire Rim Worlds Republic lay under SLDF control by the end of 2769. On planet after planet, members of the Underground RRA contacted SLDF garrison commanders and attempted to establish their bona fides as opponents of Stefan the Usurper. Some of these efforts ended in tragedy—as on Gutui Junction, where the SLDF commander unluckily executed that world's sole RRA cell in the crackdown following a POW prison riot. Others succeeded. Underground RRA leaders on Circinus formed a particularly close relationship with their de facto military governor, who subsequently used her influence with Kerensky to establish a temporary MechWarrior training school there for the floods of Inner Sphere recruits that came to join the Star League army. The leaders of the Great Houses might be holding back from aiding Kerensky in reclaiming the Star League, but average Spheroid citizens felt little doubt. They traveled to the Rim Worlds in droves, willing to do whatever they could to aid the coming war effort.

The Underground RRA jumped on the bandwagon as well, seeing an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate just how deeply anti-Amaris feeling ran among the general population. Recruiting posters like this one from Apollo's capital sprang up throughout the RWR, seemingly overnight:

CALLING ALL PATRIOTS: JOIN THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM!!!

The Rim Republican Army seeks dedicated men and women willing to aid the Star League Defense Force in its liberation of the Terran Hegemony. We who know the iron grip of Amaris first-hand; who know what it feels like to have our liberty denied us; who have the courage to strike a blow against oppression WHEREVER it may be found; IT IS OUR PLAIN DUTY to bring down the schemes of Stefan Amaris. In so doing, WE CAN HELP OUR REPUBLIC RISE AGAIN!!!

For all Rim Worlds citizens who have suffered at Amaris hands—jailed, beaten, killed or “disappeared” over the long years of darkness—we hereby issue this CALL TO ARMS AGAINST STEFAN AMARIS, DICTATOR AND CRIMINAL.

Do YOU have what it takes to bring this man down?

Are YOU willing to give your utmost in the service of your nation?

Join up today at your local Recruitment Office—117 Republican Way, Sector 3, Liberty City

YOUR REPUBLIC NEEDS YOU!!!!

Despite the additional vetting they received, along with considerable suspicion from their SLDF instructors, Rim Worlders signed up in significant numbers. The hordes of Inner Sphere enlistees still dwarfed them, but the idea that liberating the Hegemony ultimately meant liberating the “real Republic” struck a chord among a citizenry tired of living in fear. Given a shot at reinventing themselves as bold fighters for liberty, many jumped at it.

Meanwhile, efforts at large-scale political progress had mixed results. On worlds with a history of strong Underground RRA activity, pro-Republic governments grew and flourished, or at least claimed enough popular support to have a fighting chance of staying in power once the SLDF left. Worlds with little to no active dissent remained apathetic or simmered with unrest against “the Imperial occupiers.” The SLDF presence kept out-and-out Amaris supporters largely in the shadows, where they laid their plans and bided their time. That same presence was vital to the existence of the fledgling national Republic government. Knowing that the Star League army would pull out before long, a small contingent of dissident leaders on Apollo tried to persuade Kerensky to leave a skeleton force behind. Kerensky refused. He intended to spare no effort to cleanse the Hegemony of Amaris—and with the House Lords lukewarm at best about offering him military support, he couldn't afford to leave any SLDF soldier behind.

One Brief, Shining Moment

Kerensky's forces—enlarged by some 36 regiments—left the Rim Worlds in February of 2772. Within months, the national government—led by Lucien Dormax, the elder statesman of the Underground RRA—found itself besieged on multiple fronts. Remnants of pro-Amaris

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units, shattered by the SLDF in fierce fighting, had used the years of occupation to find each other, regroup and expand. On worlds long known for staunch support of the Amaris regime, these loyalist elements found it easy to play on resentment of foreign occupiers, and to cast all RRA-linked activity as treason. With the Star League army's departure, the loyalists came out of hiding—often with a vengeance. The world of Bucklands saw its RRA governor assassinated by infiltrators in his own guard detail, while Steelton's struggling Planetary Authority succumbed to riots in the wake of a terror bombing that killed several thousand in the planetary capital of Cregan's Bluff. President Dormax and others in the national government had reason to regret the success of their "Free the Hegemony, free the Republic" campaign, as the pro-Amaris reactionaries proved far stronger than anticipated. Still, enough nationalist troops remained to have given the Dormax government a fighting chance...had not outside forces intervened.

The Republic-Commonwealth War

By 2771, Archon Robert Steiner II of the Lyran Commonwealth was already facing widespread public anger over his decision to offer General Kerensky no significant aid against Amaris. Half-measures offered over the next several months, including free passage through Commonwealth space as the SLDF burned toward the Hegemony, only stoked the fires. LCAF troopers and ordinary Lyran citizens had flooded across the Rim Worlds border, a volunteer army bent on doing what their leader would not. Meanwhile, many who stayed in the Commonwealth raised increasingly strident voices against the Archon's self-serving inaction. They demanded swift and substantial military support for Kerensky, or Archon Robert's resignation.

The public clamor had become deafening by late 2772, forcing Robert to take dramatic action. After hurried consultation with his generals, he finally ordered his House levies into action in April 2773—against the Rim Worlds Republic, "in support of the Protector." As he put it in officially announcing the commencement of hostilities: "Some may wonder, why the Rim Worlds, and why now. I say to you, the Lyran people, that we cannot permit the Star League to be stabbed in the back by Periphery traitors while the Protector is reclaiming the Star League's heart. Therefore, we will safeguard the Rim Worlds, lest its people once again dare to raise arms against the Star League."

Over the next three years, the Commonwealth absorbed seventy Republic planets—some ruled by pro-Amaris strongmen, others by Republic patriots, still others bitterly contested between the two

sides. The losses inflicted by the Lyran campaign proved too great for the Dormax government to bear. By 2775, the nascent Republic lay in shambles, with Dormax and the RRA controlling Liberty City and a few kilometers of surrounding countryside on Apollo. Mere months later, the capital of the Rim Worlds succumbed to a determined Lyran assault. Dormax vanished into LIC custody, and Apollo became a Lyran possession.

What remained of the Rim Worlds dissolved into chaos. Strongmen arose on several worlds, while others were ravaged by pirate raids. A small number of warlords, Amaris loyalists all, determined to hold their planets until Stefan or any descendant should return to take power. Among these was Von Strang's World, rechristened by its ruthless conqueror, Baron Nico Von Strang. The planet's original name has been lost to history, but later generations of Von Strangs would make their new stronghold infamous as one of the Periphery's most bloodthirsty bandit regimes. Von Strang's World swiftly became a haven for Amaris loyalists, who like the nationalist Republicans had been scattered by the Lyran advance. Amaris supporters likewise fetched up on a bleak asteroid in the Star's End system, joining the hardened descendants of earlier RWR refugees from the Reunification War. The arrival of these fresh recruits enabled the Belt Pirates of Star's End to expand their raids against the Lyran Commonwealth and the Draconis Combine, especially after the Star League collapsed amid the vicious bloodletting of the Succession Wars.

The nationalist cause survived for a time on Oberon VI and two neighboring worlds, Sigurd and Crellacor. Renamed the Oberon Confederation, this tiny collective managed to survive for nearly two decades, until it succumbed to repeated bandit raids and the harsh reality of interstellar isolation. The refugee settlements on Oberon lasted the longest, aided by the temperate climate and fertile soil, but the breakdown of irreplaceable technology eventually reduced them to isolated small towns much like those of the pre-spaceflight age. The Oberon Confederation would cease to exist in all but name until the 2840s, when Colonel Hendrik Grimm arrived on Oberon VI and set about remaking the moribund Confederation into his personal pirate empire.

Other waves of Rim Worlds refugees settled wherever their meager resources carried them. Many of these colonies did not survive the ensuing centuries; others, like Gillfillan's Gold, maintained a semblance of functioning society up to the present day. Still others thrived as independent worlds—at least by Periphery standards—while the "civilized" Inner Sphere bombed itself back to the Paleolithic.



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EXODUS AND SUCCESSION WARS

Kerensky and the SLDF reconquered Terra in 2779, marking the successful end of the campaign against Amaris. The Usurper's execution that same year prompted widespread rejoicing throughout the battered Star League, less so in the Periphery. With Stefan the Schemer dead and General Kerensky surely poised to take control of the Star League government, could the Periphery states hold on to the precarious independence they had won? Or would the SLDF come roaring back over the borders in a reprise of the Reunification War?

Panicked pundits need not have worried. After the bitter seven-year Hegemony campaign, the Star League army was in no shape to reconquer the three remaining Periphery nations. Though it remained significantly larger than any of the Great House armies, the intense fighting had taken its toll. The restive House Lords had also begun making trouble of their own. The murder of the entire Cameron line left a power vacuum in the Hegemony, along with a wide swath of valuable real estate. Determined to grab territory and power at the first opportunity, the House Lords sharpened their weapons and waited for the Protector to make his next move.

THE STAR LEAGUE DISBANDS

Throughout 2780, most Inner Sphere citizens expected Kerensky to assume the mantle of First Lord. Indeed, many urged it. Had Kerensky done so, the ensuing history of human-occupied space might have unfolded far differently. Kerensky, however, had no desire to rule. In formally reassuming his title of Protector, he made clear that he saw the office as temporary, until the Star League Council reconvened to discuss the League's future.

The Council met for the last time on 10 October 2780, and swiftly fell to wrangling. Of the Periphery governments, only the Taurian Concordat bothered to send a delegate, and Nicoletta Calderon only stayed long enough to nominate the youthful Jerome Blake as Minister of Communications. Disgusted by the Council Lords' posturing, she departed for Taurus mere days after Blake's confirmation. Like her fellow Periphery rulers, Nicoletta had plenty to do back home. They all knew that the Star League might not survive, and did what they could to safeguard their realms from the dislocations that would surely follow. Along with a majority of Periphery citizens, they regarded such potential disruption as a fair price to pay for liberty. The most hotly debated question of the day was not, "What will we do without the Star League?", but, "Will the Star League finally leave us be?"

When the Council Lords formally disbanded the Star League in August of 2781, the Periphery shrugged and got on with survival. A few visionary souls wondered publicly what Kerensky and the SLDF intended to do, now that they had no empire to defend. No one expected the drama of Kerensky's answer to that question.

INTO EXILE

For nearly two years after the fateful final Council meeting, Kerensky criss-crossed the Inner Sphere, pleading with the House Lords to restore the Star League. His pleas fell on deaf ears, and before long,

Great House military recruiters were poaching troopers from SLDF units. Rather than watch while the vultures shredded the carcass of his army and empire, Kerensky chose a different fate. If known space no longer had room for the last bastion of the Star League, then the remnant faithful to that imperial experiment would carry it elsewhere.

Throughout 2783, Kerensky spoke to his troops and laid his plans. Vast numbers of soldiers, ships and materiel traversed the Inner Sphere, gathering first in the former Terran Hegemony and then striking out toward the Draconis Combine "on extended maneuvers." The deception of large-scale military maneuvers held, mainly because the House Lords feared treachery from each other more than anything General Kerensky might do. The SLDF armada reached the Combine world of New Samarkand in 2784—from which it jumped into the Periphery, never to be seen in the Inner Sphere again.

The Exodus fleet—as later historians dubbed it—lingered scarcely long enough in the Near Periphery regions to start pundits babbling about "invasion, after all!" A few frightened commentaries popped up on the airwaves, a few more on the nets—and then the "SLDF assault force" vanished as abruptly as it had come. Scattered reports from outlying colony planets marked the fleet as bound for the Deep Periphery, but no one knew where the ships might end up in that trackless expanse of sparsely inhabited space. Before long, even the rumors of Deep Periphery sightings dried up. It dawned on the Periphery realms, along with the Inner Sphere, that Kerensky and his followers had departed known space for good.

Inner Sphere citizens took the Exodus hard, coming as it did on the heels of the Star League's sudden demise. In the Periphery, by contrast, the Exodus often found favor. Those who loathed the Star League cheered the absence of its "imperial enforcers," while less extremist-minded citizens admired Kerensky's leap of faith. "A bold gesture, worthy of a son of the Periphery," as the *Alpheratz Examiner* somewhat grandiosely put it. Two diaries from starkly different sources show additional shades of general opinion:

[BEGIN EXCERPT 1: From a diary found on Gutara V, author unknown]

Barracks 20

Base Camp Stefan's Glory, Gutara V

12 January 2785

Lot going on in the sky tonight. More stars than usual, brighter. Not stars. Ships. Who in hell'd be stopping by this godforsaken hole? If it's pirates, they've come to the wrong place. Got nothing worth stealing.

Go away, you stupid bastards. We don't want to waste the ammo killing you. Not much left in the old armories, and who knows how long we might need it to hold out?

Damn Kerensky. Should've joined up with us. Lord Stefan made him a fair offer, and he threw it back like garbage. Arrogant. Typical Spheroid. They drove us from our homes just for being loyal. What else should we have been? Hand to mouth now, that's how we live. Like rats. Rats in the crumbling maze of Gutara Academy. Can't believe I trained to pilot a 'Mech here. For Lord Stefan. To serve him and his family and

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his realm. Now look at this place. Stinks like the last refuge of dead hope. How long can thirty of us hold out here?

Ships're still there. What in perdition are they doing?

14 January 2785

Unbe-effing-lievable!!! DropShip came down yesterday—SLDF markings. Colman said they'd come to smoke us out, but they didn't send any fighters to strafe our positions. Plenty of troopers guarding the ship, but it looks like they want to clean out the armories. Landed right by Armory 12. Either they don't know we're here, or they don't care. Not like we could take them on anyways, ragged as we are. Pirates? Sure. Not fully loaded SLDFers.

Have fun with the armories, you sumbitches. Not much left in those.

So what does the SLDF want with them? What's so goddamned special about a few little heaps of ordnance? Just being extra careful, mopping up?

I don't get this.

17 January 2785

There's twenty-nine of us now. Jumbo figured he'd sabotage the DropShip. Got drunk and tried to sneak up on 'em. Stupid bastard must've wanted to die. They cut him down the minute they saw his Amaris Dragoons uniform.

They're nearly done clearing out the armories. No one's come looking for the rest of us. Guess they know without that ordnance, they don't have to bother.

18 January 2785

No more SLDF ships in the sky. Funny, I almost miss them. At least they were something to think about. I could use some company in my head. Can't get away from that last battle on Bucklands, guys dying all around us while the goddamned Spheroids came on and on and on.

Don't know where those ships're going now. Don't care, so long as it's far away from here. Was Kerensky up there, watching his troops steal our scrap of hope for survival? Bet he was. And I bet he knew.

Lord Amaris—or Lady—if you find this, know we did our best to serve Lord Stefan. We'd have fought at his side if he'd asked. He didn't deserve what happened to him. And we don't deserve what Kerensky drove us to.

May he and the whole damned SLDF die a cold death in the uncharted reaches of space.

[END EXCERPT]

[BEGIN EXCERPT 2: From the personal log of Dr. Graciela Bishop, Ph.D., planetary climatologist; found in the ruins of Amor Station, in orbit around Columbus, Pegasus Eridani system]

20 March 2785

Forward sensors say we're going to have visitors pretty

soon. A nice break in routine! They're a couple of days out still—quite a lot of ships, it seems. I know we're isolated out here on Amor, a bunch of wonks buried in our research... but I wonder who's got the money to mount a major colony expedition all the way out here on the fringes? Can't be a war fleet—there's nothing out here worth conquering. Not since the Corps packed up its planetside military base.

An entertaining puzzle. I look forward to meeting our guests.

22 March 2785

Dear God. I never expected...none of us ever thought... General Kerensky? And the bulk of the SLDF? Stopping here, on their way to...where ARE they on their way to? No one's saying. Do they even know?

The Star League is dead. Beyond all hope of resurrection. Without Kerensky and the SLDF, there can be nothing but chaos. We'd truly hoped...What will happen to us now? What CAN happen to us?

25 March 2785

The General was kind enough to dine with us last night, and to answer our questions as he could. Some of us are going with him...bound for somewhere in unexplored space where the Star League can one day rise again, away from the corrupting influence of nationalist pride and greed and all the other ills of Inner Sphere politics.

A pretty dream, that. Riaz is chasing it. So are Kendrick and Hadija Sperling. Okuzawa still hasn't made up her mind. As for Osei and I, we've decided to stick it out. The Exodus fleet—quite the romantic name!—is giving us a small transport, stocked with enough fuel and supplies to get us to Alpheratz. We should be able to get home from the Outworlds Alliance capital...assuming "home" is still worth going to. I suppose the Federated Suns can still use my expertise. It might be worth going back to New Avalon. Though I'll miss this little outpost. There was something clean and pure about being here, out where there's almost nothing to clutter up space. A certain serenity.

Perhaps that's what Kerensky is chasing. Who knows if they'll even make planetfall? Anything could happen. Misjumps, no suitable places to land before fuel and food runs out...even mutiny, if the journey proves harder than expected.

A brave lot, Kerensky and his troops. Brave and honorable—and perhaps slightly demented. Or is that just what we call it when we see other people taking the chances we wish we dared take?

Whatever the case, I wish them well. And if they fulfill their dream, may they one day return to redeem us all.

[END EXCERPT]



SUCCESSION WAR ERA

As the Inner Sphere realms devolved into five perpetually warring Successor States, with each Great House leader determined to claim the increasingly meaningless mantle of First Lord, the Periphery went about its business. Only one major war occurred between the start of the First Succession War in 2787 and the end of the Fourth Succession War some two and a half centuries later. The Concordat-Magistracy War broke out when the Taurian Concordat attempted to capture several border worlds from the Magistracy of Canopus in 2813. The conflict lasted a year and gained nothing for either side. This colossal waste of resources that they could not easily spare taught both Periphery realms a valuable lesson in the futility of military adventurism—especially given the general decline in prosperity, interstellar communications and technology levels following the demise of the Star League. No major Periphery state would attempt any significant military action for more than two centuries, when the Magistracy of Canopus invaded Capellan worlds in the 3030s.

Many Periphery citizens saw the First Succession War as a backhanded benefit. With the Spheroid states busy blowing each other to smithereens, the Periphery realms need not fear invasion from their larger, wealthier and more aggressive neighbors. Few anticipated the hard realities created by the destruction of so many Inner Sphere planets. The Periphery's famous self-reliance had suffered a blow during the Star League era, making many worlds dependent on Inner Sphere suppliers for the spare parts to run everything from water-purification systems to envirodomes to HPGs. The scorched-earth combat of the first two Succession Wars destroyed vital factories and even entire industries, while leading the Successor State governments to conserve for themselves much of what was left. Starved of access to vital components, the Periphery realms saw their general technology levels backslide, in some cases beyond the long-ago era in which the major states had formed. Worlds made viable by the scientific achievements of the Star League could no longer sustain human settlement. Their inhabitants died or fled, adding to the refugee population already trickling into the Periphery from the war-ravaged Inner Sphere.

Cross-border trade declined as well. With war and reconstruction soaking up Successor State revenues, Periphery exports and tourism suffered precipitous declines. Manufacturers in the Taurian Concordat lost major markets in the Federated Suns border marches, while Canopian pleasure circuses saw their attendance plunge. The Outworlds Alliance, already tech-poor and less reliant on Inner Sphere trade, ironically suffered the least disruption—though its worlds, too, saw their living standards decrease. Scores seceded during the early Succession War era, though many colonies died or regressed. Attempts to beef up regional trade helped somewhat, but the Periphery nations were simply too small to effectively replace the vast, interlinked economies of the Star League. The large-scale destruction of JumpShips during the first two Succession Wars was the final nail in the coffin, nearly bringing all of interstellar civilization to a sputtering halt.

Periphery citizens responded with grit and humor, drawing inspiration from their pioneering history. Many who had known nothing but the relative ease of life in the Star League came to take pride in their newfound ability to improvise, jury-rig and make do—or do without. Others saw little change from the days of the fading empire. The heavy taxes imposed during the Star League's final years had already eroded local economies; somewhat rougher living seemed a reasonable price to pay for the precious right to be left alone.

The renewal of the Periphery's famed rugged individualism had another effect as well. As national governments hunkered down amid declining revenues, technological losses, communications breakdowns and shrinking territory, large numbers of outlying planets became increasingly isolated. As with the scattered small towns of the ancient American frontier, these communities struggled to survive with ever-shrinking resources. A "Wild West" ethos took hold, fueled by the new realities of the post-empire age and the Periphery's romanticized view of its own past. Popular culture immortalized modern-day equivalents of the homesteader, the gunslinger and the outlaw: settlers, 'Mech-riding Errants who took it upon themselves to protect backwater worlds, and pirates—the perennial scourge of humanity's frontiers.

FADE IN to a WIDE-ANGLE SHOT of a rocky arroyo. Sunrise. The rock has a rosy glow where the sun hits; elsewhere, it's lost in deep blue shadow. The arroyo appears uninhabited. In the background, we hear the SOUND of a gurgling spring.

SOUND of a boot heel scraping against rock. The boot, along with the leg of its wearer, comes into view. CAMERA PANS UP AND AROUND to show a man, dressed in dusty boots, work pants, shirt and vest. His dark hair is dripping, his face weather-beaten. Age indeterminate. Not an oldster, not a kid.

He walks toward a cliff wall, then around it. We see a small roundhouse, reminiscent of traditional Navajo dwellings. Towering over the house, half-hidden in a recess in another cliff wall, we can make out the shape of a BattleMech.

The man draws nearer. He hunkers down a few yards from the house, by a small, banked fire pit. A dented metal coffee pot sits on a rack over the glowing coals. He picks up a nearby cup and pours himself a slug.

As he drinks, we hear the SOUND of screaming aerospace engines, high up and far away. The man stands, peering up at the sky, shielding his eyes with one hand. The other still holds his coffee. CAMERA PANS UPWARD to show a distant contrail, almost invisible in the brightening sky.

The MechWarrior gulps his coffee, then hooks the cup to a belt loop. We can now see that his vest is a coolant vest, its reinforced fabric obviously well worn. He looks at the 'Mech.

ERRANT: Just when I was getting used to peace and quiet.

He walks toward the 'Mech. As he reaches its giant foot, he turns to look at the dawn-touched rocks behind him. He grins.

ERRANT: I gotta hand it to Ace Ralston. He and his Raiders picked a damned pretty morning to die.

—From a shooting script for *Rough Riders*, a popular holovid series on Erod's Escape, a planet on the fringes of the Taurian Concordat



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Bandit Kings and Pirate Nations

As the years drew on, the Periphery realms found themselves increasingly vulnerable to predation by pirates. The Succession Wars seriously damaged interstellar commerce, shrinking trade and tax revenues available to Periphery governments. Forced to do more with less, they equipped their militias and armies as best they could, often barely managing to stay better armed than the bandits. Meanwhile, the number of pirate bands kept increasing. From discharged native troopers turned soldiers of fortune, to rogue House military units fleeing Inner Sphere justice, to battered mercenary commands and even civilian refugees, the Periphery became a magnet for down-and-outers of every stripe and from every realm in occupied space.

"Thanks so much for sending us your dregs," quipped one bitter columnist after a locally infamous incident involving Bronson's Horde, an ad hoc mercenary unit made up of former SLDF troopers from the Eridani Light Horse. The Horde's attempt to add Periphery recruits initially proved explosive when a drunken riot broke out between "toffee-nosed Spheroid slickers" and "ignorant Periphery pig-sloppers" at a popular soldiers' watering hole on the Canopian agricultural world of Gallis. Most Periphery natives, however, were too busy scraping a living and trying to defend themselves to spare much anger toward the Inner Sphere. Pirates were pirates, no matter their origin—and the Periphery had produced plenty of homegrown troublemakers.

The Belt Pirates of Star's End, founded by Rim Worlds Republic refugees, were among the most notorious during the early years of the Succession Wars, but others became equally infamous. On Tortuga, descendants of a Davion House unit shattered during the Reunification War grew prosperous enough through vengeance raids against Davion worlds to colonize five neighboring star systems, which they christened the Tortuga Dominions. They also expanded their list of targets to include the Taurian Concordat, particularly its ill-defended outlying worlds. The early thirtieth century saw the rise of Morgraine's Valkyrate, the Pirates of Butte Hold and Helmar Valasek's criminal empire on Santander's World. The first two of these bandit fiefdoms owed their existence to a pair of charismatic sociopaths, Maria Morgraine and Redjack Ryan, who broke with Hendrik Grimm III of the Oberon Confederation over Ryan's vicious abuse of a captured planet's population. Santander's World swiftly carved out a niche by specializing in assassinations, frequently paid for by individuals in the Federated Suns and the Draconis Combine as part of the endless power struggle between those two realms. Other sources of ready cash included kidnapping of wealthy passengers from unlucky merchant vessels and the occasional terrorist act against Inner Sphere and Periphery targets.

Two of the most successful pirate realms eventually developed pretensions to nationhood: the Circinus Federation and the Marian Hegemony. Circinian raiders, initially operating on a small scale during the last years of the Star League, eventually branched out from Circinus to attack any merchant vessels that dared to brave open space. Within a few decades, the tiny pirate band founded by the Black Warriors mercenary command had grown into a serious enough threat to attract the attention of Charles Marik, then Captain-General of the Free Worlds League. Angered by near-constant border raids that he could ill afford

in the midst of the Second Succession War, Charles sent Marik troops to conquer and occupy the fledgling Circinus Federation in 2853. They stayed for forty years, until Philippa Marik redeployed them during the Third Succession War. (To this day, any mention of House Marik in the wrong bar on a Federation world buys the unlucky speaker a solid drubbing requiring an extended hospital stay.)

The Marian Hegemony, founded in the early 30th century, began as one man's lucky break and swiftly developed into a miniature Roman Empire-style dictatorship. Johann Sebastian O'Reilly, a Periphery-born adventurer, landed on Alphard in 2920 and stumbled across the last remaining valuable asset on that world that had once belonged to the Alphard Trading Corporation—a hidden storehouse of germanium, a critical element in constructing JumpShips' Kearny-Fuchida drives. With warfare taking its toll on humanity's general technology level, spacefaring vessels had become increasingly precious—as had the resources needed to keep them functioning. O'Reilly swiftly parlayed his find into fifty billion C-bills' worth of profit, which he then invested in colonizing Alphard and opening it up for germanium mining. The arrival of refugees from pirate raids and from the Inner Sphere's ongoing conflicts swelled the young Hegemony's population within a few years of its formation, eventually allowing O'Reilly to establish control over seven nearby planets.

Though the newfound realm initially owed its prosperity to its rich germanium deposits, over time piracy played a greater role in Marian economic expansion. The Hegemony's small but effective military force became notorious for fast, disciplined strikes against neighboring states during the Third and Fourth Succession Wars, becoming a particular thorn in the side of the Magistracy of Canopus. Meanwhile, Caesar Marius O'Reilly took steps to turn the Hegemony into a respectable nation. Using the proceeds of various raids, he founded schools and military academies and kick-started several light industries, simultaneously raising literacy levels and general living standards. Piracy and raiding, however, remained prominent. Indeed, Marius was the first O'Reilly to go beyond mere smash-and-grab raids, doing his best to capture worlds from various neighbors—occasionally the Free Worlds League, but more often smaller powers such as the Lothian League and the Niops Association. By 3040, between planetary assaults and colonization, the Marian Hegemony had extended its boundaries to encompass twelve star systems.

More Perfect Unions?

As the three major Periphery states battled pirates, recession and failing technology, a number of Periphery natives imitated their Spheroid ancestors and struck out deeper into space in hopes of a new beginning. Though many of these privately funded colonizing ventures ended in disaster, those that survived reinforced the prevailing Periphery belief that true grit and a little luck could make any man a king. Most of the Periphery's transients were fleeing pirate activity, but over time tales of lost Star League technology caches drew prospectors and fortune-hunters from across human-occupied space.

Refugees from outlying Periphery planets tended to end up closer to planetary capitals, at least temporarily. Some stayed on, in hopes that proximity to Canopus IV or Taurus or Alpheratz would translate



into greater security. Others left as soon as they could scrape together money and supplies, convinced that the more settled and prosperous worlds of the major Periphery powers merely made tempting targets for well-armed brigands. Several of these explorers and refugees founded mini-realms of their own—or greatly expanded existing small settlements—throughout the Succession Wars era, among them the Lothian League and the Niops Association. Already established states like the Illyrian Palatinate took in tens of thousands of new citizens throughout this long era of conflict.

Apart from the Outworlds Alliance, whose territory shrank by roughly three-fourths through secession during this period, the major states suffered negligible losses from this population shift, largely because of ongoing immigration from the Inner Sphere. Periodic flare-ups throughout the Succession Wars sent new waves of refugees across their Periphery borders, often straining limited resources. The new arrivals faced varying degrees of local prejudice, depending on their numbers and how well they adapted to life on the frontiers. “Greenhorns” who swiftly adapted to Periphery standards of self-reliance eventually earned acceptance, even a certain respect. Those who failed were roundly mocked and often taken advantage of, much like the “city slickers” of ancient rural Terra. A certain cachet surrounded the creative bilking of “soft-handed Spheroids,” with favored targets changing according to regional tensions. Fleecing slickers from the Federated Suns became a favorite entertainment in the Taurian Concordat, stemming from that realm’s long history of special resentment toward House Davion. In the Outworlds Alliance, by contrast, Draconis Combine immigrants were the prime targets. Alliance citizens largely wished to preserve good relations with the Davions, who were far more likely than House Kurita to invest money in local business ventures. The Combine, however, had made little secret of its contempt for the pacifist-minded Alliance, and Alliance citizens often responded in kind. They made an exception for Combine nationals from the Principality of Rasalhague, especially during the upheavals surrounding Rasalhague’s independence struggle during the 3030s. Every Periphery native understood a fight for freedom, and many Outworlders came to see the folk of Rasalhague as kindred spirits. When Rasalhague finally gained its independence in 3034, Alliance President Neil Avellar proclaimed the date a national holiday.

FALSE DAWN

The third and fourth decades of the 31st century seemed to herald a new beginning for the Periphery, after more than two centuries of hardship and decline. The Fourth Succession War had decimated one Successor State and exhausted the rest, making renewed warfare on such a massive scale unlikely for some decades. The Capellan Confederation had seen its territory reduced by half, and the merger of the Federated Suns with the Lyran Commonwealth promised to keep both those nations busy managing the challenges of forming a united realm. A return of relative calm to the Inner Sphere meant less money for armaments and more for diversified trade that included the Periphery, which in turn promised greater resources for dealing with pirates. Most promising of all was the technological renaissance sweeping across the Inner Sphere, launched by the mercenary Gray Death Legion’s discovery of a Star League computer memory core

on the frozen world of Helm. Inevitably, the benefits of the Helm core spilled over into the Periphery, giving its major powers a badly needed shot in the arm. With interstellar warfare receding, slow but steady economic recovery and the first steps toward regaining lost technological ground, the Periphery seemed poised on the edge of a bright future—one in which its people might achieve advancement on their own, rather than being force-fed the “blessings of civilization” by the vanished Star League empire.

ADVENTURES IN CONQUEST— ANDURIEN AND CANOPUS

By the end of the Fourth Succession War in 3029, victorious Davion forces had absorbed a sizeable chunk of the Capellan Confederation. The secession of the St. Ives Compact cost the Capellan nation more planets, while further sapping its military strength. Meanwhile, the restive Duchy of Andurien was causing major headaches for House Marik in the Free Worlds League. Kyalla Centrella, then Magestrix of Canopus, saw potential advantage in the travails of both realms. In early 3030, she opened secret negotiations with Andurien’s ruling duchess, Dame Catherine Humphreys. The talks swiftly bore fruit. By September of that year, the duchess and the Magestrix had signed a treaty in which the Magistracy formally recognized Andurien as an independent nation. Both powers simultaneously formed a military alliance to attack the Capellan Confederation.

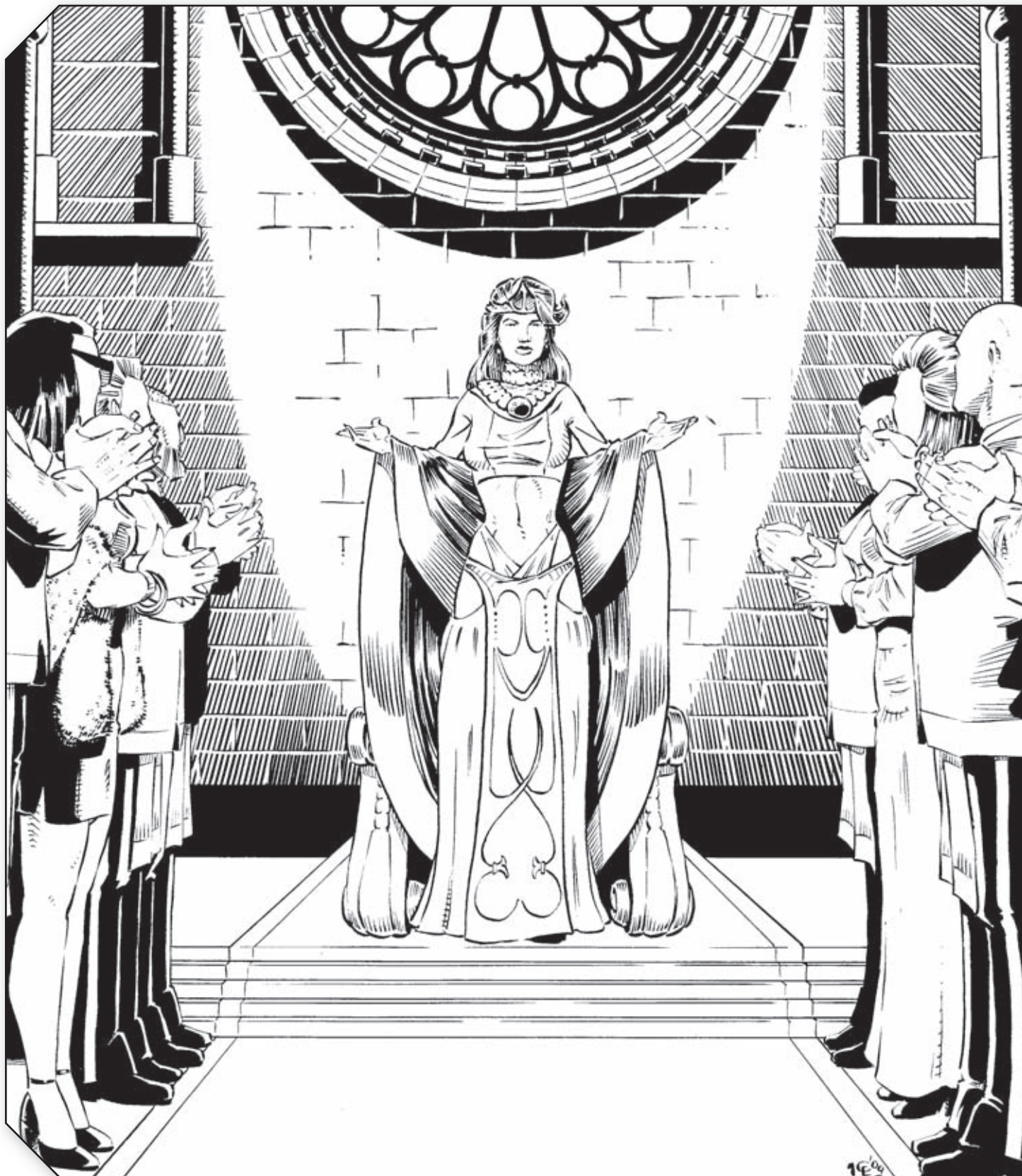
The five-year war against the Capellans initially went well for the Magistracy, but Confederation troops were fighting for their nation’s survival. The Capellan military rallied, and by 3035 had repulsed the invaders. Magestrix Kyalla had gained not a single planet after nearly half a decade’s expenditure of blood, materiel and money. The Andurien rebellion fizzled as well, and the Canopian military was in no state to aid its ally when Marik troops poured across the duchy’s border to bring it forcibly back into the Free Worlds. Indeed, Magestrix Kyalla considered herself lucky that ongoing internal strife in the League prevented those same troops from striking Canopian worlds.

In the end, the Canopian-Andurien campaign proved an unexpected boon to Canopian fortunes—not through successful conquest, but by bolstering the political standing of Emma Centrella, Kyalla’s daughter and heir. Though opposed to the Capellan war, Emma served in it with distinction as part of the Magistracy Royal Guards. After the war’s end, she quietly resumed her duties as duchess of the planet Luxen, but otherwise kept carefully neutral amid rising discontent with Magestrix Kyalla’s administration. She did not publicly back her mother’s policies, or use her growing popularity to defuse opposition. This lack of support did not escape the Magestrix, whose tendency to see the universe as “with me or against me” had only deepened with age. Stubborn, ruthless and determined to keep her grip on the Canopian throne, Kyalla Centrella resented her heir’s popularity, and saw a threat to her own power as Emma became a focal point for opposition groups across the realm.

Emma Rising

Matters came to a head in 3039, when an assassination attempt narrowly missed the young duchess in her own palace on Luxen.

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Popular rumor blamed the Magestrix, though no conclusive proof has ever been found. Still, the bad blood between mother and daughter—along with personal knowledge of Kyalla’s ruthlessness—prompted Emma to flee to the world of Hardcore, where she began to rally supporters. Those opposed to Kyalla’s rule had awaited this moment for nearly a decade. Several groups sent representatives to Hardcore, to pledge their allegiance and work out a strategy for the peaceful overthrow of the Magestrix. (Emma refused to countenance

assassination, according to several sources who later wrote political memoirs describing their involvement in events.)

Predictably, Emma’s flight drew Kyalla’s attention. Now the Magestrix had an excuse to bring her heir to heel. She sent the Magistracy Royal Guards to Hardcore, with orders to arrest Emma and bring her “in chains” to Kyalla’s court on Canopus IV. What happened when the Guards reached Hardcore is, as they say, history:

Assisted by elements of the Guards and some of Hardcore’s

WIDE ANGLE SHOT of a bustling casino: neon lights ablaze, throngs in flashy clothes around the card tables and roulette wheels and vid-poker stations and slot machines. Scantly clad, well-built waiters and waitresses maneuver through the crowd with trays of drinks and hors d’oeuvres. SOUNDS of cheering, clanging slot machines, electronic whooping noises whenever someone wins at vid-poker. Background music, with a deep thrumming beat, is barely audible over the happy chaos.

TIGHT SHOT of a portion of the crowd. A well-endowed, slightly drunk blackjack player in a gold lamé gown shifts aside for someone to pass. We get a fleeting impression of a graceful woman in a dark leather jacket and slacks, a dusky hand and neck, a spill of dark curls pinned back from an elegant, youthful profile. CAMERA FOLLOWS as the young woman cuts through the crowd, aiming for a clear space near an archway. She walks with a military bearing; the set of her shoulders indicates controlled anxiety.

She reaches the archway. Just beyond it is a closed door marked, “PRIVATE ROOM—NO UNAUTHORIZED ENTRY”. A palm scanner blinks by the doorjamb. She presses the scanner. The light turns steady green. The young woman opens the door and slips inside.

CUT TO:

INTERIOR, private room. It’s dark, illuminated only by narrow neon runners near the ceiling and floor. SOUND of the door clicking shut.

EMMA CENTRELLA: Lights, normal.

The lights go on. The room contains a conference table and several large, padded swivel chairs. The chairs are occupied by men and women in Magistracy Royal Guards uniform. They regard the new arrival with serious faces. CLOSE-UP of the young woman. She is Emma Centrella, Duchess of Luxen.

SILENCE for several heartbeats. Then one of the soldiers speaks. Two gold-edged hollow diamonds on her uniform, one inside the other, mark her as a battalion commander.

COMMANDER ZACHARA: Commander Centrella.

EMMA: [salutes] Commander Zachara.

SILENCE again. Zachara shifts in her chair.

ZACHARA: You know why we’re here.

EMMA: I’m afraid I don’t.

ZACHARA: We have orders to take you into custody.

CLOSE-UP on Emma. Conflicting emotions wash across her face: chagrin, regret, calculation. She looks around the room, making eye contact with each soldier. All meet her gaze steadily, betraying nothing. Finally, Emma looks back at Zachara.

EMMA: You’d best do what you came for, then.

ZACHARA: [standing] With pleasure.

Zachara walks over to Emma. As she rounds the conference table, we see she is holding a pair of cuffs. An arm’s length away, Zachara stops, then turns and tosses the cuffs on the table. CAMERA FOLLOWS the cuffs as they slide down its length. Not one soldier touches them.

CUT TO Zachara and Emma.

ZACHARA: Orders are one thing. What we came for is another. [For the first time, she cracks a smile.] Good thing we found you first.

EMMA: I take it not all the Royal Guards are my friends tonight?

ZACHARA: Wish I could say otherwise. You can count on Charlie Company. Hell, you could count on all of Janina’s Battalion, if it were here. Your mother only sent us and Able Company from the Second Cuirassiers.

Emma looks around the table. CAMERA FOLLOWS as she makes eye contact with each individual trooper. This time, she gets several grins, salutes and even a thumbs-up.

EMMA: Thank you all. Neither I nor the Magistracy can ever repay you enough for your courage—and your honor.

ZACHARA: Now let’s talk about how to get you out of here.

—Excerpt from shooting script for *Tigress*, a biopic dramatizing the life of Magestrix Emma Centrella, first release 19 July 3058



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warriors-for-hire, Emma secretly departed the planet. Along with her supporters, she spent the journey back to Canopus IV planning the final confrontation with Magestrix Kyalla. Charlie Company of the First Canopian Cuirassiers arrived on the Canopian capital with its mission ostensibly accomplished, and immediately led the Duchess of Luxen to the throne room—in chains, as specified. The restraints were unlocked, however, easily removed by Emma in response to her mother's opening harsh remarks. When a shocked Kyalla ordered the Royal Guards to execute "this traitor" on the spot, the Guards instead took their Magestrix into custody. The next day, Emma made public a report by several eminent psychiatrists, declaring Kyalla Centrella clinically paranoid and therefore unfit to rule. The Canopian electorate swiftly ratified Emma's self-appointment as Magestrix, closing the chapter on Kyalla Centrella's abortive attempts at conquest.

Under Magestrix Emma, the Canopian state revived and expanded its traditional methods of becoming a power to be reckoned with: gambling emporiums, well-run brothels, pleasure circuses offering every form of nonviolent entertainment, and physicians second to none throughout human-occupied space. Trade and foreign investment likewise took quantum leaps forward, with Canopian firms offering an increasingly educated work force at somewhat lower wages than on many Inner Sphere planets. Mindful of hard lessons learned about Inner Sphere corporate exploitation during the late Star League era, Emma Centrella's government took pains to avoid blatant sweetheart deals, thereby ensuring that a substantial chunk of the profits from Canopian-Successor State ventures remained in local hands. 3048 was a banner year for the recovering Canopian economy, with the promise of many more such years to come.

POLITICS OF FEAR— THE TAURIAN CONCORDAT

The Taurian Concordat fared less well in the wake of the Fourth Succession War, largely because of rising tensions between the Far Lookers—a social and political movement dedicated to expansion through colonization—and Protector Thomas Calderon's unreasoning fear of a massive Davion invasion. With their opposing views of the best way to steer Concordat society, Thomas and the Far Lookers ended up on a collision course, with serious consequences for the Taurian state.

Thomas' predecessor, Zarantha Calderon, had expanded Taurian holdings through stepped-up colonization efforts, financed by a public-private partnership between the national government and the Far Lookers. This increasingly influential sect used numerous tax breaks and other subsidies to colonize several planetary systems rimward of the Inner Sphere between 2990 and 3020. Many of the colonies failed, but enough succeeded to give the Taurian economy a mild boost through discovery of new resources. More widespread benefits came to the industries involved in Far Looker projects, which included everything from exploratory missions to planetary settlement to the construction of high-tech space habitats in the Hyades Cluster. Shipbuilders, zero-g construction firms, terraforming concerns and a host of companies involved in supplying colonists with everything from foodstuffs to mining equipment to pre-fab building materials all made healthy profits over several decades. Intent on protecting their

investments, various subgroups of the Far Lookers entered government at several levels throughout the early 31st century. Political winds could change along with the occupant of the throne, but space colonization took generations to fully accomplish. In order to achieve their goals, the Far Lookers needed funding that would last beyond Zarantha Calderon and into the foreseeable future.

Thomas Calderon, who assumed the Concordat throne in 3017, proved the Far Lookers right about the fickleness of political leaders. A narrow thinker with a nervous temperament and an abiding fear of House Davion, Thomas took little joy in inheriting a much larger realm than the one into which he'd been born. He saw the Concordat's new worlds as vulnerable possessions to be guarded from House Calderon's perennial enemy, the Federated Suns. When the Suns allied with the Lyran state in 3028 to form the vast Federated Commonwealth, marking the occasion with a massive strike against Capellan worlds, Thomas saw it as the handwriting on the wall. He shifted significant monies from colonization to the military, intent on transforming the Concordat's army and aerospace forces into a threat too large for any Davion to tackle.

House Davion's blitzkrieg Capellan invasion confirmed the Protector's worst fears. First the Capellans, he reasoned, then surely the Taurians...unless he could make Hanse Davion see the Concordat as a morsel too big to swallow. Ever-larger chunks of revenue went to the Taurian Defense Forces, including significant sums spent on high-tech weapons research and greater hiring of crack pilots from the Outworlds Alliance Air Force to continue training and strengthening the TDF's aerospace arm. Thomas also rescinded many of the Far Lookers' pet subsidies, citing the need for "every Taurian bull to support the brave soldiers who protect us." With the pool of available monies shrinking fast, and facing increased competition in high-tech industries from Concordat military manufacturers, the Far Lookers used their political clout to safeguard what funding they could—and, in their view, the future of the human race.

Openly, Far Looker members and sympathizers who held prominent public offices did their best to slow or halt legislation aimed at curbing their favored tax breaks. Behind the scenes, other members set up a bureaucratic structure to siphon money into a secret slush fund. This quiet embezzlement took a huge leap forward after the Fourth Succession War, as Thomas Calderon spent more and more money preparing for a Davion attack that never came. The passage of time with not even a whisper of "Davion aggression" soon cost the Protector considerable public support, especially as the military drain on the budget forced painful cuts in needed social spending. Loren MacKenzie, a Far Looker who worked as an auditor for the Ministry of Trade and Colonization, used the political climate and her own position of trust to step up the pace of the embezzlement scheme. By the time Thomas Calderon officially abolished the last of the pro-colonization tax breaks in 3035, the Far Lookers had siphoned enormous sums into their slush fund, making them well able to continue their activities. Acquiring deep-space vessels for continued exploration remained a problem for a time, as most Concordat shipyards had all the business they could handle catering to the TDF—until some bright soul hit on the idea of hiring replacements from the Free Worlds League. Happy



to make a profit while possibly causing trouble for the Federated Commonwealth, League shipbuilders obliged.

All seemed well until 3037, when government efforts to scale up production of high-tech armor and weapons hit a snag. Thomas Calderon had launched an expansion of a crash program to duplicate ferro-fibrous armor—copied from a find in a ruined SLDF storehouse on the planet Celano in 3019—but was dissatisfied with the small-scale results achieved so far. The lack of progress from a program that should have produced more than a handful of upgraded vehicles per year prompted Thomas to launch an investigation, which swiftly uncovered the Far Lookers' illicit activities.

A furious Calderon ordered Loren MacKenzie and the entire Ministry of Trade and Colonization arrested. The lengthy prison terms meted out to the schemers came too late to save the Protector's cherished weapons programs, however. Efforts to mass-produce several advanced weapons and materiel had been set back decades, and would not fully recover until after Thomas Calderon left office.

Years of Misfortune

The collapse of his schemes to make the Concordat an unchallengeable military powerhouse, coupled with the death of his eldest son Edward in a DropShip accident in 3034, left Thomas Calderon an embittered old man for the remainder of his reign. He blamed Edward's death on Davion saboteurs, and the total lack of evidence did nothing to change his mind. Instead, the unlucky incident merely confirmed his belief that the Federated Commonwealth intended to destabilize and then absorb his realm.

The loss of Edward Calderon also cost Thomas a perceptive adviser just when he needed one most. Edward had been popular, and many had looked forward to his assumption of the Protectorship—especially Taurian business interests, many of whom had counted on Edward to open trade relations with the Federated Commonwealth. Edward did not share his father's mania about the "perfidious Davions," and was at least cautiously willing to deal with them as a market for Taurian goods.

His death left Thomas' daughter, Janice, as the Concordat's heir presumptive. Intelligent and poised beyond her fourteen years, Janice Calderon showed potential as a leader, but unfortunately contracted the nerve-wasting disease known as the Brisbane Virus in 3038. Recognizing that her disability would prevent her from fulfilling a ruler's duties, she formally surrendered her claim to the throne in favor of her brother Ian Calderon. Ian, however, preferred the soldier's life, and in 3042 ran away to join the mercenary Green Mountain Boys. The succession then fell to Felix, the fourth of Thomas Calderon's five children. Felix had never expected to become head of state, nor had he been trained to assume such duties. His passion lay with space exploration, and the disappearance of his ship in 3046 on a star-mapping mission near the furthest edges of the Concordat gave rise to days of speculation in the popular press that he had arranged the "accident" in order to flee from a burden he was ill-equipped to take on.

The succession now rested on the youthful shoulders of Jeffrey Calderon, the last hale and hearty family member in the direct line. A mere twenty years old, Jeffrey was an unknown quantity to many

Taurian citizens. Politically, he was as much liability as asset to the aging and increasingly paranoid Thomas. While some pinned their hopes on him, believing that "any Calderon is better than Mad Tom," others began cautiously seeking an alternative.

"Phony War"

The year 3047 saw the first of two incidents that would spark what locals dubbed "the Phony War" across much of the Taurian-FedCom border. Late in that year, a FedCom freighter's misjump into the Landmark system resulted in its destruction by nervous TDF pilots who mistakenly tagged it as a spy vessel. When their report of the incident reached the Protector, he placed the TDF on high alert and began preparations to hold off the full-scale Davion invasion he firmly believed would follow. A few months later, the mercenary unit Detrickson's Devils went rogue over a pay dispute with the FedCom and jumped into the Pinard system, just over the border in Taurian space. Suspecting Davion trickery, the Pinard planetary government refused the unit permission to land and resupply. The Devils' hotheaded commander responded by raiding Pinard's capital and then fleeing deeper into the Periphery. In the wake of what he termed "this unprovoked assault," Thomas Calderon authorized numerous reconnaissance missions to flush out the FedCom army that must surely be massing near the border. The missions found nothing but AFFC units on routine patrol or serving as planetary garrisons, but also provoked small-scale clashes throughout 3048.

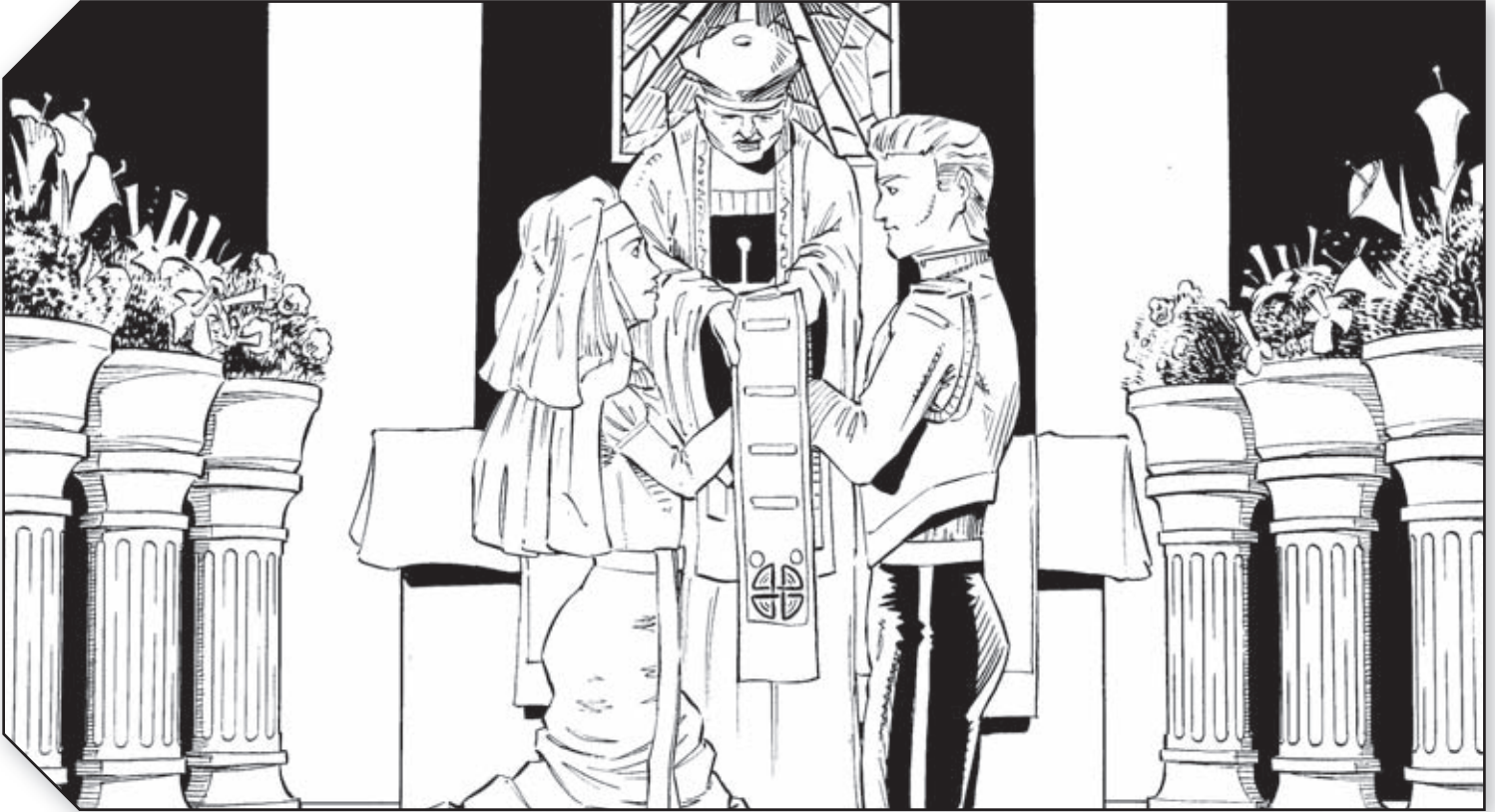
As the year wore on without the expected invasion, Thomas convinced himself that the incident with Detrickson's Devils had been an elaborate set-up, intended to draw his troops into exactly the search-and-destroy missions on which he had sent them. Hanse Davion was testing the Concordat's defenses, learning their tactics and probing for weak spots. When the AFFC launched a major military exercise near Concordat space in 3049, Thomas took it as the final signpost of the long-expected apocalypse. He dragooned massive numbers of Concordat citizens into building elaborate planetary defenses against AFFC regimental combat teams, prompting widespread civil disobedience amid outraged press and holoivid coverage. Jeffrey Calderon, now twenty-three years old and serving with the Taurian Guard, privately begged his father to rescind the draft order, but took no public action against it. A few stalwarts pointed to his conspicuous lack of public support for the Protector's policies as evidence that he opposed them, but many feared the young man was a chip off the old block. Only the absence of a clear leader kept rising opposition from toppling the Protector as the 31st century neared its midpoint.

A DELICATE BALANCE— THE OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE

Between bandit raids, economic doldrums and a President whose heart clearly wasn't in his job, the Outworlds Alliance spent the earlier part of the 31st century teetering between revival and collapse. In one of history's ironies, this perennially poor nation had prosperity within its grasp all along—but because so many Alliance citizens prized "the simple life" above technology, they lacked the proper tools to access their own wealth. Many Alliance



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planets abounded in valuable mineral resources, from germanium to radioactives to precious metals and even gemstones, but for much of the realm's existence its people shunned most technology as primarily serving the engines of warfare. The Star League era had seen its share of investment in the Outworlds' tiny industrial base, but the exploitation that often went with such investment only soured the local population even more on the notion of becoming an urbanized, industrial society. With just enough exceptions to give it a viable (if small) military and enable it to hold together as a realm, the planets of the Outworlds largely remained underdeveloped even by Periphery standards. Small-scale farming, low-tech mining and wilderness planets that drew nature-loving tourists to their breathtaking vistas were the order of the day, and the average Alliance citizen was content with this status quo.

Neil Avellar's ascension to the Presidency in 3015 promised little change. A reluctant ruler, he was adequate to the job—but events soon made it clear that "adequate" was no longer good enough. Pirate depredations increased during the Fourth Succession War, as the battles raging among the Successor States absorbed more and more mercenary units and left fewer of any quality to hire to fight bandits. The war's abrupt end in 3029 brought no relief, as the displaced from the Inner Sphere once again surged into the larger Periphery states. Some settled in the Alliance to begin new lives; others proved unable to handle the Spartan realities of the tech-poor Outworlds, and still others joined up with established pirate bands or founded their own. With Alliance planets generally the least well defended, they made

easy, if somewhat slim, pickings. The Outworlds' most profitable "product," from the bandits' point of view, was often unlucky citizens captured and sold into slavery.

"That Foreign Woman"

The Alliance and its leader limped along for nineteen years, until Neil Avellar found a bride in 3034: Rebecca DeSanders, a Federated Suns diplomat with close ties to House Davion. For the couple, it was apparently love at first sight. The rest of the Outworlds, however, regarded DeSanders with suspicion. Despite a history of fairly good relations with the Federated Suns, many pacifist-minded Outworlders felt reluctant to deal with this military powerhouse any more than necessary—and Davion successes in the Fourth Succession War only reinforced that realm's image as a planet-hungry monster. The merger with the Lyran Commonwealth had likewise raised eyebrows, though business-savvy commentators on Alpheratz pointed out that the formation of this super-state meant potentially lucrative business deals with House Steiner as well as House Davion. "And lord knows, our economy needs all the help it can get," read one scathing editorial in the influential *Alpheratz Daily Beacon*, "especially with President Do-Nothing running the show. We say, let him have that foreign woman and be happy with her—as long as the rest of us get something out of it besides a wedding reception we can't afford to subsidize and a bunch of poor-relation Davions infesting our national government."

The DeSanders-Avellar marriage also threatened the Alliance's longtime delicate dance between the Federated Suns and the

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Draconis Combine. The Periphery nation had survived the Succession Wars intact largely through its leaders' ability to play these two militarily powerful Successor States against one another, so that each one preferred an independent Outworlds Alliance as a potential headache for its rival. Conquering the place would remove it as a "back door" for stirring up trouble, while forcing House Davion or House Kurita to waste time and resources pacifying a resentful population. Neil Avellar's marriage to a Davion-connected diplomat, however, changed the equation. The Combine government initially saw it as a Davion attempt at stealth conquest—rather than sending in the AFFC, the wily Prince Hanse had decided to pull the Alliance's strings from afar. President Avellar's well-known aversion to governing (though he managed it competently enough), along with the indecisive temperament that had earned him the nickname "Ditherer-in-Chief," seemed tailor-made to turn him into a puppet head of state led completely by his wife...who, of course, would take her marching orders straight from New Avalon.

The Combine ambassador strenuously objected to the marriage, only to be met with unexpected stubbornness from the "Ditherer-in-Chief." Neil Avellar had fallen hard for his intended, and for once nothing would dissuade him. Threats of invasion might have worked, but the Combine was still dealing with fallout from its grant of independence to Rasalhague. And neither Coordinator Takashi Kurita nor his son Theodore—then serving as supreme warlord of the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery—felt inclined to launch a Periphery war out of pique. In truth, neither the Draconis Combine nor suspicious Outworlds citizens saw the marriage for the love match it was. By all accounts, including personal notes and private journals, Rebecca DeSanders was as taken with the lonely, sensitive Outworlds ruler as he with her. She also seems to have fallen in love with her adopted nation, despite the stiff-necked refusal of many in the Alliance to fully accept her. In the end, "that foreign woman" gave the Outworlds its greatest gift—her firstborn son, Mitchell Avellar, who would grow to become a brilliant leader just when his nation needed one most.

New Blood, New Hope

Mitchell's birth in 3035 presented the Outworlds Alliance with an heir to its top office, offering the hope that new leadership might make things better in a generation or so. Outsiders might find it odd that an entire nation would take such heart in the arrival of an infant who couldn't change anything for at least two decades, but the Alliance had survived for centuries on exactly this combination of stoicism and long-term thinking. Young Mitchell's early promise—he spoke in complete sentences and understood basic math skills much sooner than typical small children—gave further hope to his people that their circumstances might improve within a foreseeable future. Sporadic investment throughout the mid-3030s by Houses Davion, Steiner and Kurita—the latter refusing to be outdone by its historic rivals—cemented the impression that better times lay just around the corner.

Unfortunately, the uplift proved short-lived. Davion- and Kurita-funded mining facilities suffered pirate raids in 3037 and 3038, followed by drastic budget cuts during the War of 3039, and the hasty

movement of Inner Sphere garrisons from the Periphery to the front lines left half-developed planets woefully under-defended. Local bandit kings took full advantage of the situation. They carried off what they could and wrecked the rest beyond salvage. Successor State corporations and governments were understandably more wary of significant investment in the Outworlds during the 3040s, and what few joint ventures existed were not enough to pull the Alliance out of its economic slide. Federated Commonwealth corporations rebuilt some existing mining facilities crippled by pirate raids, but opened few new installations. The Draconis Combine launched negotiations to subsidize Alliance aerospace production, but these efforts would not bear fruit for years.

Of all the Inner Sphere powers, only ComStar took more than a token interest in reviving the struggling Alliance. Beginning in 3039, thirteen years before the Schism that rocked this quasi-mystical order, ComStar responded vigorously to President Avellar's pleas for foreign investment in his realm. ComStar negotiators offered favorable terms on HPG transmissions, built new HPG facilities on worlds that had long lacked any decent communications, and agreed to hire local people to build and staff the new stations. In return, Avellar granted the Com Guards free use of land on several worlds as training grounds for military exercises.

The ComStar "invasion," as many cynics dubbed it, met with protests that ranged from quiet grumbling at local watering holes to full-scale marches and demonstrations at landings of ComStar DropShips. Allowing a foreign military to litter Outworlds planets with the detritus of their war exercises sat badly with many citizens, and ComStar personnel initially also faced widespread suspicion that their free educational programs were meant to teach techno-religion along with the Three Rs. Over time, however, most Outworlders came to accept these strangers in their midst. Some even joined the order, acting as ambassadors of sorts between their own people and ComStar adherents from the Successor States—many of whom came with considerable cultural baggage concerning the "poor stepchild of the Periphery."

Unluckily for Neil Avellar, the modest improvements in national literacy and planetary economies did nothing to shore up his popularity. If anything, better communications made it easier for opposition factions to come together. Ironically, the very national malaise that had prompted discontent with the "Ditherer-in-Chief" also saved him from being ousted. Despite the widespread conviction that Neil Avellar was an empty suit marking time in the Presidential chair, no one else wanted his increasingly thankless job. With more and more Alliance planets dependent on the barter system for survival, and with many Alliance businesses reluctant to deal in any form of cash but gold or C-bills, the Alliance seemed to be in a race against time. If Mitchell Avellar fulfilled his promise of genius and had real aptitude for governing; and if he did not succumb to accident, illness or pirate assault before reaching his majority; and if there was anything left to salvage by 3055, when Mitchell might actually assume the Presidency; then the Alliance might pull out of the abyss. To many Outworlders, as the year 3050 drew closer, the survival of their homeland seemed like a coin flip.

THE COMING OF THE CLANS

The first indication that 3049 would not be an ordinary year came in late summer, with a sudden drop-off in bandit activity. Outlying Periphery planets wearily accustomed to regular pirate raids found themselves somewhat reprieved, with no apparent explanation. Their parent realms—for those that had one—had not strengthened their defenses; indeed, the nations most often hit by the infamous pirate bands of the coreward sector generally couldn't afford such improvements. Some residents speculated that the pirates had simply grown tired of them; having plundered all there was to plunder, they had moved on to richer pastures. Whatever the cause, people welcomed the change. A few prescient voices wondered if the bandits' vanishing act pointed to a more fearsome enemy, but after several months passed with no such foe appearing, even the speculators shrugged and went back to everyday living.

Then reports began to filter back of mysterious attackers in lethal war machines, assaulting coreward pirate strongholds like Von Strang's World and the Oberon Confederation. They struck like lightning, in strange BattleMechs unlike any ever seen before, even in the heyday of the Star League. They fought with sophisticated weaponry beyond the best the Successor States could produce, attacked with overwhelming ferocity and rarely left survivors. This last unsettled many who might have been cautiously prepared to accept the strange invaders as friends, given their choice of targets. It was common knowledge in the Periphery that the bandit kings held many of their populations in slavery, and many found it troubling that this unknown attacker made no distinction between brigand and brutalized victim. Transcripts from chat rooms reveal lively discussion of the various rumors, including some wild ones straight out of the popular *Tales From the Starry Deep* series:

DeepSpace: So who the hell ARE these guys? I've heard everything, from secret Inner Sphere pirate-hunting commandos to aliens to Mary Deare-style ghosts of the vengeful dead. Anybody got anything solid, or are we all just flying on space dust about this?

TomSwift: Don't forget the children-of-the-Exodus theory. (sarcasm) My personal fave!

DeepSpace: I have a hard time with that one. If Kerensky's fleet survived long enough to put down roots, the last thing their descendants would want is to come waste time back here. We're the lousy bastards who wrecked the glorious Star League, remember?

Seeker: We didn't wreck anything. The Star League Empire damn well wrecked itself.

DeepSpace: I meant us and the Spheroids, hon. All us humans in known space. Or at least, what used to be known space...

Bombshell: That bugs me. The idea that there's been a bunch of people out there in the Way Beyond, farther away even than the Deep Periphery, and we never knew it till they

decided to come callin'. Here we thought we're the ones on the frontier—staking humanity's claim to the deeps—and all along we've been living in civilization. Kinda like thinking you're living on Lastpost and then waking up one morning to find you built your house on Kathil.

TomSwift: So some humans got a little farther out than us. So what? I'm from Ramora, myself. There's plenty of folks out there living lots closer to the edge than me. How's this any different?

Bombshell: It just is. I mean, isn't that what being from the Periphery is all about? Living farthest out, where we can still breathe free air? That's who we are. We fought wars over it. Take the frontier away from us, and what did we fight 'em for? So we could be just another bunch of people, no different from the Spheroids across our borders?

Luria: What makes you think these invaders are people?

TomSwift: Ummmm... 'cause they fight in 'Mechs, which are built for humans? 'Cause we've never found any sentient aliens anyplace, in almost a thousand years of space exploration?

Luria: Everything can happen for the first time. How do we know the Exodus fleet didn't run across some alien life form, built enough like us to use our technology, and end up destroyed by them?

Seeker: Nobody knows what happened to the Exodus fleet. Luria's guess is as good as any.

TomSwift: Why would aliens come all the way back here just to solve our pirate problem for us? I've read the old records. By all indications, the Exodus fleet got pretty far out into the Deep Periphery before their trail disappeared.

Luria: Look at the planets they've hit so far. Santander's World, The Rock, Götterdämmerung, Von Strang's World. What do all those planets have in common, aside from being bandit territory?

DeepSpace: They're all coreward. Pretty far coreward.

Luria: Yep. The shoreline of an invasion wave, if you will. Assuming that our friends are coming from somewhere beyond that particular edge of known space.

Rodin: You laugh at the children-of-the-Exodus story... but the Exodus fleet went that way when it left known space in 2785. Why does it have to be aliens who destroyed them and stole their stuff? Why not the Children of the Exodus themselves?

DeepSpace: Because presumably, they went off to found a new Star League somewhere else. Why bother coming back?

Rodin: Maybe to cleanse us. Starting with pirates.

TomSwift: I heard they hit the Elysian Fields. That's not a bandit kingdom.

Seeker: It's a protectorate of one. Hendrik Grimm III considers it his personal property.

Luria: They leave no survivors. Anyone care to think about why not?

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DeepSpace: Don't tell me. You have a theory.

Luria: What if the aliens killed everyone who went on the Exodus? If so, logic suggests a few reasons. Maybe the Exodus fleet looked like a threat. Or like prey. Either theory might give the aliens an incentive to come here.

TomSwift: OMIGOD!!! The fleet was an appetizer...and WE'RE THE MAIN COURSE!!!! Okay, I'm done laughing my butt off now...

Rodin: I got ahold of an interesting rumor about Baron Von Strang. There's a guy here on Slewis who claims to have survived the assault on Von Strang's World. He's been going around with a comm transcript he says is from the invaders, when they first hit the planet. They speak the same language we do, no alien gobbledygook—apart from a few words here and there that don't make sense. Called themselves the Jade Falcons, whatever that means. But the interesting thing is, Von

Strang calls them "the scum of the Star League, traitors of free will, persecutors of the Periphery come back to lord it over freedom-loving people." What if that bastard was right?

TomSwift: Pretty ironic, Stepan Von Strang jumping on someone else for "lording it over freedom-loving people..."

DeepSpace: Now hold on. Von Strang might have thought these Jade Falcons had some connection to the Star League just because they had 'Mechs that aren't like any we've seen for awhile. Or the transcript could be a fake. Is this guy hawking copies? And how much is he charging?

Seeker: Not like any 'Mechs we've seen, period. Some guy put a picture up on the AlpheWeb. God knows where he got it, and it's not much to look at, but I don't recall seeing that puppy in any Successor State tech manual recently.

Bombshell: Maybe they're just another bunch of pirates. Bigger and badder than the ones they've been rolling over.

Once and Future King?

[*Ed. note: The battle account was posted from Vipaava in the Free Rasalhague Republic, time-date stamped 22 July 3050. The second excerpt was posted from Tellman IV, 28 February 3051.*]

All you people who're going to read this—first off, I don't care if you believe it's me. You likely won't. Fine by me if you think the invaders got me back on Santander's World. Gonna be one hell of a surprise when I come back to retake what's mine at the head of an army! Especially for those bastards who took it from me.

So why am I posting this? 'Cause I don't want those invaders from the pit of hell just waltzing on through the Periphery, taking what's mine whenever they bloody well want. This is MY backyard, and you're MY prey. Only now I have to help the prey get together to drive off the new predators in town. Don't get this wrong; I ain't planning on sitting back on my ass and watching the sheep make a mess of it. Only just now, I can't do much but raise the alarm. And hell—if you DO take to heart what I'm telling you, and you DO manage to run these bastards off, you'll be that much more fun for me to play with—once I've got some men and some 'Mechs to do it. Win-win for me. Always.

We almost got 'em on Santander's World. Turned out they had a lot more troops than they said, so they're a bunch of damned liars. First we knew of 'em was a hail from the nadir jump point. Some woman calling herself "saKhan of Clan Smoke Jaguar" lights up the comm board with a challenge "to the dezgra bandit scum, Helmar Valasek, who styles himself king of this benighted planet."

Now, what a saKhan is, or who the Smoke Jaguars are, beats the hell out of me—but if they want to have some fun, who am I not to play? My men could use the target practice. So I talk back, saying I'll see her nine 'Mechs and raise her a battalion. "Meet you on the Gillard Plains," I say. Got some dead air after that, so I knew she was surprised I'd answered.

Then she says she's going to take the whole planet with just nine 'Mechs.

So now I know she's crazy. Can you believe it, I thought. Lady tells me exactly how many forces she's coming in with, and I know exactly where they'll land. Must have some death wish!

So I have my people figure how long it'll take the Smokies to hit dirt, and we set up a little surprise for 'em. Dummy DropShip hulls, rigged to blow on my say-so. The Plains're only ten kilometers from my main base; makes baiting the trap pretty easy. The Smokies come down—nine 'Mechs, just like she said—and have a look-see at the DropShips. Then they start heading our way. When the most 'Mechs are closest to the ships, I give the order to blow the hulls. Took out five Smokies. They're down to a lance now, and I'm out in front of them with a company. The rest of this, I figure, ought to be a cakewalk.

And it was—at first. We took out the other four 'Mechs and figured we'd taught them a lesson. Then they sent down the reinforcements, and we knew we were screwed.

I've never fought 'Mechs like these Smokies had. Saw one of my best men crisped by laser fire from so far away it never should have reached him. And they kept changing their 'Mechs,

over the whole three days we fought them. At first we thought it was different 'Mechs with more fighters, but the basic chassis didn't change. It was like they'd figured out how to take a 'Mech halfway apart and rearrange it, depending on what they needed. Deadly as hell, and different from anything I'd ever heard of on a battlefield.

Maybe Von Strang was right, calling them "the scum of the Star League." Damned big universe out there, and from all it says in the history books, the SLDF were a tough bunch. Why shouldn't they have survived long enough to have descendants? One thing I know—those Smokies weren't some super-secret Inner Sphere commando team. Line of work me and mine are in, you get to see and hear a lot of things you shouldn't. If any military anywhere had come up with these machines, these weapons, there'd have been a Fifth Succession War already, and whoever had this stuff would've won...

...Been on the run now for quite awhile. Thank god for human stupidity. A glass eye and a few inserts to change the shape of my nose and mouth, and everybody sees what they expect to see. Just your average Joe going about his business.

Got a line on a new 'Mech to replace the one that got shot out from under me. Thinking of slipping back home, scoping things out under the Smokies' noses. Not sure how to manage that, but I can come up with something.

Tough for a pirate to make a living these days. The Clanners—that's what they call themselves, or near enough—hit all the big players. Belt Pirates, Butte Hold, the Valkyrate, Oberon. There's nobody left. Of course, that just means new opportunities for Yours Truly. Trick is finding 'em. Not many pickings in this area of space anymore. Clanners've got lots of other Periphery worlds sewn up tight, keeping the people and the plunder for themselves.

Shipping traffic is way down, too. Bad news must travel fast; no one wants to come out here for fear of the Clan war machine. The only ships that land anymore are full of refugees, the ones who got away before the Clanners locked down their conquered planets. Never figured I'd be one of 'em. Maybe I should take ship on one of those colony transports. Some local rich wacko on Tellman IV, name of Yacov Bernays, is sponsoring a fleet. He thinks the Clanners are bringing Armageddon. Time to get out now, according to him—aboard what he's calling "the New Ark Project." I could do worse. If I can't get back home and figure out a way to kick the Smokies' armored butts all the way back to where they came from, the Ark makes a decent Plan B. They'll need leaders out there, right?

Still, I hate to cut and run. Let the Smokies have my world. Mine, goddammit! Why should I leave? I could strike out for Antallos, splash some C-bills around, gather some like-minded folks to take revenge on the Clanners who've blown our neck of the Periphery purely to hell. What do you say, folks? Anybody up for some payback?

One thing's for sure. You'll all be hearing of me again. The only question is when.

[*Ed. note: As of this volume's press date, Helmar Valasek has yet to be apprehended.*]

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Some lost colony, so far away we've all forgotten about it...plus some survivors from the Exodus fleet, which is why they have 'Mechs. Maybe they've come back for revenge.

DeepSpace: I hope not. If they can take out every single one of the nastiest pirate bands operating out here without breaking a sweat, then the rest of us had better hope they're our friends.

—Chat room transcript excerpt, Alpheratz, 20 April 3050

The fate of some of the Periphery's most notorious bandit lords became clearer by mid-3050, with the online posting of an extraordinary document: the personal diary of Helmar Valasek, leader of Santander's Killers, who'd miraculously escaped the carnage on Santander's World. As a wanted man throughout known space, Valasek seemed the least likely candidate to court publicity—a reality that kept the diary's validity in serious doubt for months. Computer forensics experts, however, validated it in early 3051 using a database of Valasek's speaking and writing styles culled from his colorful (and often profane) public proclamations on Santander's World, ads for the Killers' murderous services and the occasional transcript garnered from inside this notorious criminal's inner circle by undercover agents from various governments. The scattered nature of the postings, consistent with the frequent movements of a fugitive, provided further evidence of authenticity.

ASSAULT ON THE INNER SPHERE

By March of 3050, the mysterious invaders—now known as the Clans—had moved on from Periphery space to attack the Successor States. Between March and October of that year, the Clans overran the Free Rasalhague Republic and gouged significant swathes of territory from the Draconis Combine and the Lyran half of the Federated Commonwealth. Periphery reaction ranged from relief that the invaders appeared to prefer meatier targets, to a blasé, "It's the Spheroids' problem—let them solve it!" to sober assessments that the Periphery's larger states had best sharpen their defenses against the chance that the Clans might yet turn their way. The revelation in 3050 that the Clans were indeed the descendants of the long-vanished Star League Defense Force added weight to this argument. By the Clans' own admission, they had come to cleanse the Inner Sphere of its corruption and forcibly re-establish the Star League. Might the Periphery expect a re-enactment of the Reunification War, this time fought against the fearsome Clan war machines?

The Clans' near-unbroken string of victories came to an abrupt halt near the end of 3050, after a massive assault against the Free Rasalhague Republic. Though neither the Periphery realms nor the Successor States knew it at the time, the Clan invaders had lost their supreme war leader to a kamikaze attack by Pilot Tyra Miraborg of the FRR KungsArmé. The Clans withdrew temporarily to choose a new ilKhan and regroup, though they left garrison troops to guard their conquests. The Successor States used the lull to try to form a united front against the invaders' return—a difficult feat, considering the depths of mutual mistrust between the five realms.

The Periphery, meanwhile, chose a different response. Deep-space exploration and colonization efforts spiked sharply in all three major realms between November 3050 and 3051. Largely driven by private investment, expeditions ranged from well-equipped exploratory missions out past the known Deep Periphery to ad hoc colony fleets led by eccentric visionaries (or crackpots) who wanted to "get while the getting's good." Advertisements like the following ones became increasingly common throughout this "Year of Peace," and especially after the Clan invasion resumed in late 3051.

Various expeditions met with equally varied fates. Contemporary historians have yet to determine how many expeditions there were, but available records of ship purchases, launch permits, emails and HPG traffic from those who joined up indicate that considerable numbers of Periphery citizens at least showed serious interest—and that many may indeed have traveled out to the "new frontier." We have no feasible way to trace the successes; most

SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE PERIPHERY!!!

OPPORTUNITY IS KNOCKING AT YOUR DOOR!!!

Wanted: Men and women with guts and heart, willing to work hard for a chance at the ultimate dream—freedom on the New Frontier! Humanity needs you, to blaze the liberty trail for the next generation. Help us live out the spirit of the Periphery, and grab your own piece of the dream on an unspoiled world "somewhere out there." Will consider any able-bodied applicants. Expertise in wilderness survival, pre-spaceflight technologies, xenobiology and computer/JumpShip maintenance a plus. Contributions to general funding appreciated, though not required. Contact Mason LeBreux, 1232 Calderon Plaza, New Hope, Taurus; HPG #B-152-663-7968-01200. Pls. indicate "Spirit of the Periphery" in subject line.

THE END OF ALL THINGS IS NEAR

The coming of the Clans is the First Sign of the End of Days. "Truly, they shall bring war without end upon you, wielding swords of inviolable power. The sheep shall be helpless against them, but for those few that the Shepherds will save. You shall be brands snatched from the burning, that the fire of Humanity's heart may be rekindled in the blackness of the Void."

We are the Shepherds, and we seek those souls who recognize the truth of this Clan invasion. The Gods of the Void have given us this brief peace so that we may build our New Ark and escape the wrath of the Spirits of War. Join us, that true Humanity may not perish from the universe! Contact Sister Grace, Shepherds of the Void, Risin, Outworlds Alliance, HPG #B-277-489-3789-29713. Pls. indicate "New Ark Project" in subject line. The blessings of the Gods watch over you, those who join and those who are left behind.



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of those who went on these journeys had neither the desire nor the intent to communicate their discoveries to the realms they had left behind. Failed or lost expeditions provide a clearer glimpse of what the Clans' arrival in known space meant to the people of the Near Periphery, and how they responded to that challenge.

Where Few Have Gone Before

[Excerpt from the last known ship's log of the Star Stuff, a deep-space exploratory vessel staffed by planetologists and xenobiologists from the University of Alpheratz. The explorers regularly transmitted data files back to a privately sponsored radio-signal listening station on Dneiper, until they had gone several light-years beyond the most distant charted planet spinward of the Outworlds.]

Log Entry 10, 13 May 3051, 0600 hours

Logged On: Rose (Dr. Kaminsky)

There's really not much out here. Inhabitable star systems are sparse in this region of space. The crew are getting bored by all the black stuff outside the observation ports. So am I. The last bit of excitement we had was when we passed that gorgeous nebula almost two weeks ago. Dr. Lin was over the moons about it. Normally, she's as cool as the glaciers on Risin—it was almost funny to watch her get as giddy as a kid in a toy store. But now even she's run out of data to pore over. I signed up for this trip again why?

Finally! A sensor alert. Something's passing out there. A ship! Not within hailing range. Or weapon range, come to that. Good. OK, Tinhead, read it as best you can. We'll analyze it later and see if you've got anything useful to say about our visitor.

Log Entry 11, 13 May 3051, 1000 hours

Logged On: Grigori (Dr. Giannoulous)

An unknown vessel passed by us during Rose's watch. What we got from sensors didn't match the profile of any known ship...not even the JärnFolk, who sometimes get out this far. Captain Commager wants to find out where they came from, but it could be risky hailing strangers out here. It might be best to follow them—discreetly, of course.

Log Entry 12, 15 May 3051, 1200 hours

Logged On: Ana (Dr. Lin)

Finally, something to look at besides nebulae, space debris and empty darkness! The unknown vessel has led us toward a planetary system. Three gas giants, plus at least two other worlds that might be habitable. We'll know more when we get within better sensor range.

1600 hours

Two habitable planets—a marginal world closest to the system's primary, a better prospect a bit further away. We're picking up traces of habitation on the latter planet, though apparently quite sparse. Captain Commager's sending a

team down. I wonder who we'll find down there?

Just as long as it isn't more of those damned Clans. We came out here to get away from them.

Log Entry 13, 16 May 3051, 0630 hours

Logged On: Rose (Dr. Kaminsky)

I feel like a holoivid character—the Intrepid Scientist who stumbles across the Long-Lost Colony. Of all the clichés...but here we are, and there they are. These people—the forebears of these people—got their hands on a starship and cobbled together whatever they could to make planetfall 470 years ago. Apparently, they fled the Outworlds Alliance ahead of the advancing SLDF during the Reunification War...and they've kept their JumpShip functioning all this time. Barely. They take it out of mothballs once a decade, to see if anyone's heading their way with conquest in mind. Incredible, but they're still expecting the Star League army to come surging through space and attack them. Imagine their relief when they realized we were just one ship full of science wonks... and from a free and independent Outworlds, at that!

We haven't told them about the Clans yet. Not sure if we will. They seem to lie far enough spinward of the Clanners' invasion path to be safe from accidental discovery, and the Clans can't find them if they don't know where they are. Which is why we've omitted the usual course-plotting and star-chart data from this log. These folks have carved out a life for themselves here, and we won't take it away from them.

The leaders of their settlements—twenty small towns scattered across the temperate zone—have asked us to stay. Our various expertise is pretty valuable, I guess. A tough choice. I'm not sure I'm cut out for this kind of rough living...I can barely get by without my Jamaican Blue Mountain in the morning...but what a gorgeous place this is! The pictures don't do it justice. And there's something about the simplicity here...people from elsewhere always rhapsodize about the Outworlds and the "simple life," but we've gone soft over the past several decades. Maybe, just maybe, the Outworlds used to be like this planet. Once upon a time...

I wonder if I could live happily ever after out here in Once Upon A Time?

[Excerpt from a data file in a communications buoy, found drifting in an uncharted star system in the Outer Rim region. The date on the data file is 10 September 3051.]

...Not sure where we are, or how long the food can hold out. Damned navcomp blew a gasket awhile back and we still can't fix the peace-mucking thing. Knew we shouldn't have gone with Kasen Electronics...when a price looks too good to be true, it probably is.

Where are all the habitable planets? We've passed ten systems in twelve weeks, and not a damned one of 'em had any rock worth settling down on. We're not looking for

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paradise. Right now, we'd settle for a desert with breathable air and just enough oases to make irrigation an option. Any living we can scratch out on any old ball of dirt has to be better than starving to death in this tin can. Or dying in the mutiny that's sure to erupt once enough people figure out how bad off we are.

If anyone out there can be of any help to us, I hope to God you pick up this buoy. Keep heading spinward until you see four JumpShips limping along in a row: the *St. Brendan*, the *Leif Erickson*, the *Amundsen* and the *Kossandra Centrella*. We lost the *Dr. Livingston* to a massive engineering accident three months ago. Hopefully, you'll find something besides empty hulks full of corpses. If not, feel free to salvage these ships of fools...because that's what we are. Amateurs. Sweet-talked into a crazy venture by a crackpot with too much money and time.

What were we looking for? Freedom from a war that hadn't happened yet, and maybe never would? Freedom from fear of the Clan bogeyman? To reclaim our birthright as denizens of the Periphery—that only we should ever live on the edge of inhabited space? Well, now we want out, only it's too late.

If you find our bones, say a prayer for us. Or raise a drink, whatever's your preference. Just remember us some way. Maybe we were a bunch of fools, but every human ever born deserves that much.

God bless and Godspeed, whoever you are...

[Fragment of a ship's log recovered amid the debris of two destroyed JumpShips, one registered to the Taurian Concordat, one with no known registry, found 10 parsecs spinward of Lastpost in the Taurian Concordat. The date-stamp was irretrievably corrupted, along with much of the log.]

...been shadowing us for almost 36 hours now. Who are they, and what do they want? We haven't got much. Three ships full of scientists and colonists, mostly folks who're hoping to find someplace they can farm. Plus food, water, fuel and supplies. Suppose those last four are always useful. Us, though...slavery may be the best we can hope for.

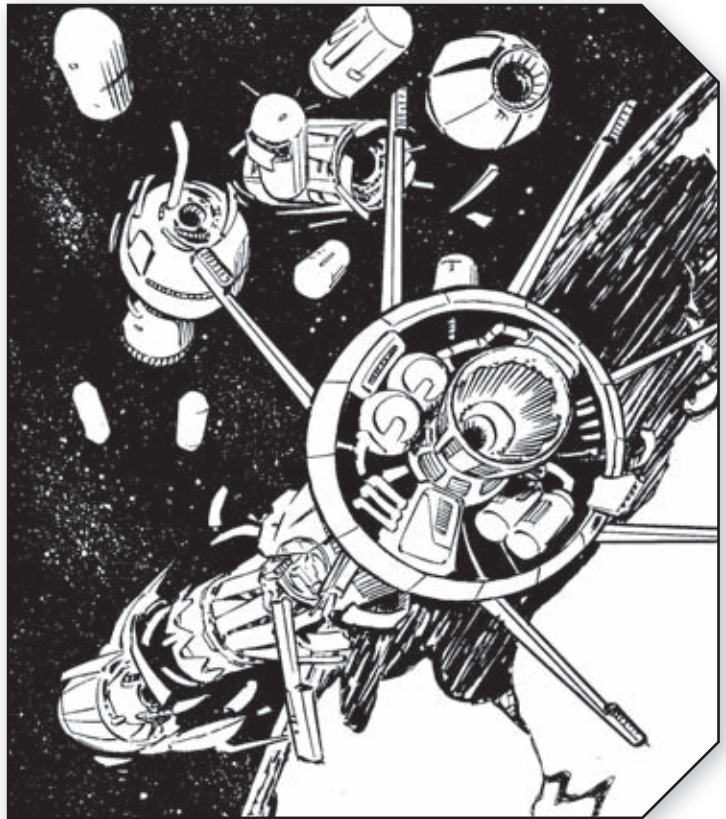
There's been some whispering that our "shadows" are pirates. That's not impossible—who knows how far ships from the Tortuga Dominions go wandering out here? Still, we did our best to stay far away from their beaten paths. I hope this doesn't turn out to be a case of "better the devil you know..."

[lost data]

...hailing us. Riders of the Storm, they call themselves. They want our ships. Not us. Just our ships. Apparently, we've violated some religious taboo by crossing into their territory, and our lives are forfeit.

I'd take slavery over that. At least there'd be a chance to escape.

There's two of them to our three—but they've got weapons. Still, if they don't want to damage our ships, then it looks like stalemate. They seem to expect us all to just calmly



walk out the airlocks on their say-so. Or is it their god's say-so? I could laugh at the absurdity of it.

I really, really hope they want our ships intact.

[lost data]

...firing! Near misses so far, but they're getting way too close. What the hell are we supposed to do?! How do you run away in a ship this size!

[sound of distant impact]

Engine hit. Goddamn. Losing power... They're gaining. Holy hell, are we going to have to fight off a boarding action?! The way these thugs are talking, they won't leave any of us breathing if they can help it...!

[lost data]

...turn the ship. Get the lead vessel. We hit that one, then maybe the *Zarantha* and the *MacKenzie* can get away...got to time this just right. We're big and slow, but they're not so fast, either. Got my people rigging up the reactors from the AgroMechs on board, to power up the RCS jets and give us some propulsion...our attackers won't expect a dead hulk to be able to move. Sayonara, you SOBs—you messed with the wrong people today!

Tomas, if they ever find this, remember I went out fighting. Just like Papa would've done. Have a good life, raise your horses and your children, and don't forget your big sister Marisol...

[End excerpt]



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SUMMITS AND SPIES

The Clans' return to the Inner Sphere in late 3051 prompted Magestrix Emma Centrella to propose a Periphery-wide strategic alliance against them, much like the "united front" cobbled together by the Successor States on the mercenary freehold of Outreach. Emma reasoned that the invaders' interest in the Successor States was not guaranteed to last—and that if they did overwhelm the Inner Sphere, the Periphery states were likely next on the list. The Magestrix got few takers, however. Thomas Calderon scoffed at the very notion of the Clan attack; it was a Davion ploy, he insisted, to distract the major Periphery realms from the real enemy. (Later events revealed Sun-Tzu Liao, then heir to the Capellan throne, as a primary agent behind this tale, which certainly made life interesting for him during negotiations with Thomas' successor to form the Trinity Alliance in 3058.) Neil Avellar saw Emma's point, but the Outworlds Alliance was too financially strapped to contribute to such an endeavor. Other Periphery powers invited to the conference likewise declined, pleading poverty or stating their belief that the Clans posed them no threat.

Caesar Sean O'Reilly of the Marian Hegemony, long a personal thorn in Emma's side, went beyond scoffing at the Canopian proposal. He leaked its details to the Successor States, in the vain hope of provoking retaliation against a realm he considered the up-and-coming Hegemony's rival. He also stepped up raids against Canopian targets, especially trading vessels that made regular runs between the Magistracy and the small but resource-rich Lothian League, which bordered his own realm—and on which he'd long cast a covetous eye as a "natural possession" of the Hegemony.

Balked in her attempt to forge a military alliance, Emma turned to Magistracy intelligence. The Magistracy Intelligence Ministry was the first Periphery intelligence agency to actively seek information on the Clan invaders, using the famed Canopian pleasure circuses and an informal network of Errants—lone MechWarriors often hired to protect outlying Periphery planets—to insert undercover operatives on worlds near and even in the Clans' invasion path.

In addition to information on Clan conquests, battle strategies, possible targets and the Successor States' response, Emma Centrella ordered her operatives to glean as much as they could about the one thing that held the greatest promise of future security: the Clans' formidable battlefield technology. Unfortunately, the Clans' string of victories left little opportunity for battlefield salvage. The best the MIM could do was report personal observations of Clan tech in action, along with commentaries on Clan tactics. The few victories won by Successor State forces—for example, the Draconis Combine's triumph on Wolcott—occurred on planets too far away from MIM operations to be viable sources of salvaged equipment, though a few Canopian agents did manage to glean important information on Combine efforts to reverse-engineer Clan salvage taken by the DCMS.

NEW POWERS, NEW FOES

Meanwhile, Magestrix Emma had other problems to contend with. The destruction of so many powerful bandit kings in 3049 had left the field of piracy wide open for Marian Hegemony and Circinus Federation privateers, and both these realms exploited their unexpected

advantage. Both also had pretensions to national legitimacy. The Circinus Federation, in fact, had moved from mere pirate raids to its first attempt at military conquest in the 3030s, when it attacked the Illyrian Palatinate. Poor planning and worse intelligence, however, doomed this problem-plagued effort almost before it started. A second attempt at conquering the Palatinate in 3041 similarly went nowhere, and within a year had sparked a civil war of sorts between President McIntyre's supporters and opponents in the Circinian military. By the early 3050s, the Federation had begun to recover, and financed its continued rebuilding through stepped-up raids against any and all convenient targets.

For his part, Caesar Sean O'Reilly began preparations to invade the Lothian League. The seven Lothian worlds boasted abundant—and valuable—mineral resources, the proceeds of which enabled them to hire good-quality mercenary units for their defense. Caesar Sean had no intention of repeating McIntyre's mistake with the Palatinate. Throughout 3052 and 3053, while the bulk of his forces trained and prepared, the Caesar sent out privateers to strike Lothian planets. These lightning raids gradually wore down the League's defenders, leaving the Lothian worlds ripe for takeover in 3054. Caesar Sean also kept up the pace of his raiding against the Magistracy of Canopus and the Taurian Concordat. Recently revealed records show "back-channel" communications between the Canopian and Taurian governments in which both sides are feeling their way toward a tentative military alliance against the growing problem of Hegemony privateers. Jeffrey Calderon emerges as an increasingly important player in these "private discussions," which may have made him more amenable to the full-fledged Taurian-Canopian alliance that did take place soon after he assumed the Protectorship in 3055.

Interestingly, another driving force behind these back-channel talks appears to be Hadji Doru, then commander of the Taurian Guard. By late 3051, Marshal Doru was already becoming the most eloquent voice in opposition to Thomas Calderon's fixation on the "Davion threat," with growing support throughout the Taurian Defense Forces as the months dragged by with no Davion invasion in sight. Recently declassified documents show Marshal Doru as instrumental in reaching out to the Canopians, apparently inspired by Emma Centrella's attempt at establishing a Periphery-wide defensive alliance. The marshal seems to have had a close personal friendship with the Canopian ambassador to the Concordat, and by mid-3052 had become the highest-ranking person willing to grant Ambassador Lia Chivavos the time of day. The Clans' defeat at Tukayyid in May of 3052 added impetus to these backdoor discussions, and also brought in Jeffrey Calderon as a full-fledged partner.

The Marshal and the Heir

Still in his twenties during this turbulent period, Jeffrey Calderon had begun his legally required military service in 3049 with a commission in the Taurian Guards, then commanded by Marshal Doru. He had met Doru some months earlier, when the marshal gave a guest lecture at the prestigious École Militaire that deeply impressed this studious young man. Quiet, thoughtful and inclined to play his cards close to his chest, Jeffrey Calderon was uncomfortably aware of his father's shortcomings



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as Protector. His own unexpected status as heir seems to have imbued him with an equally deep sense of obligation toward the Concordat. As early as 3050, he had begun to seek ways of changing Thomas Calderon's disastrous policies peacefully and behind the scenes. His desire to accomplish such major changes "below the radar" drew him to Marshal Doru, whose reluctance to openly challenge the Protector despite a groundswell of military support spoke of a similar personal struggle between honor and patriotism. By early 3052, Doru's support within and outside the TDF had grown to the point where he might well have succeeded at a military coup. That he did not apparently even contemplate such a step deepened Jeffrey's trust in him, and seems to have prompted the Concordat heir to take a more active role in the talks Doru had begun with the Canopian government.

Laying the Foundation

By 3053, Jeffrey Calderon had moved from Marshal Doru's cautious partner to leader in secret negotiations with the Magistracy of Canopus to form a loose joint-defense pact between the two nations. Later in the year, the negotiations expanded to include the Magestrix—the earliest known extended, personal contact between Emma Centrella and the Concordat heir. Marshal Doru remained involved, but increasingly took a back seat to Jeffrey. The young lieutenant's private papers indicate several motives behind the talks—not just a united defense against threats from the Marians and potentially the Clans, but also hope for economic benefits and increasing concern about Capellan machinations in the Periphery. Jeffrey had learned by this time of House Liao's deception regarding the Clan invasion, and he also knew of Sun-Tzu Liao's interest in closer ties with the Magistracy. He may have hoped to act as a counterweight; if Magestrix Emma could benefit her

realm militarily and economically through alliance with its nearest and most stable Periphery neighbor, she might be less likely to seek such benefits from the Capellan Confederation.

Thomas Calderon, meanwhile, remained unaware of his heir's doings, and of the extent of Jeffrey's friendship with Marshal Doru. Had he suspected either, the knowledge would almost certainly have prompted him to throw the popular marshal in prison. Both Jeffrey and Marshal Doru were aware of this risk, and knew that any such move would likely spark open revolt among the military. As neither man desired such an outcome, both took extra care to keep their talks with the Canopians under wraps.

TAURIAN CONCORDAT— CRISIS AND SUCCESSION

The simmering crises of the Concordat came to a head in 3055, when members of the Ministry of Trade and Colonization—the agency that had undergone a virtual purge back in the late 3030s—stormed a meeting of the Protector's advisory Privy Council. At their head was Erika Dryden, who had served as a junior auditor along with Loren MacKenzie back in 3035, and had remained in touch with MacKenzie throughout the ensuing Far Looker embezzlement scandal and MacKenzie's fifteen-year prison term. Dryden had emerged unscathed from the subsequent purge, and had since risen in the agency to Senior Assistant Minister for Resource Allocation. She brought with her that day, and read aloud to the astounded privy councilors, a manifesto demanding that Thomas Calderon change Concordat national security policy or else:

"On behalf of the Taurian people, and to preserve and protect the Concordat, we the undersigned demand wholesale change in the conduct of our nation's affairs. We can no longer tolerate egregious

10 March 3052

Dear Marshal Doru,

I'm hearing rumblings lately that concern me. Marian privateers're doing some damage out here—the Protector's Pride isn't happy about orders to stand pat. They want to give chase. The rhetoric's getting a little hot.

I know the old man doesn't care much to hear from you these days; I'm happy to talk to him on your behalf, about the issues we discussed when we last met. And since I'm the new kid on the block in the VI Corps, I can't do much to calm the waters out here...not till they take my measure. Some days I really miss the Guard...

Let me hear from you soon. I get the feeling time isn't on our side.

—JC

16 March 3052

Dear Subaltern Calderon,

Thanks for your note—and your offer. Any voice from any quarter that can get through to our Protector is welcome, especially yours. Maybe he'll listen to you. We can hope.

I'd like to discuss another matter that has some bearing

on our present difficulties. I know your unit is scheduled for rotation to New Vallis next month; can we meet? I will hold myself at your disposal.

—Marshal Hadji Doru

20 April 3052

Dear Marshal Doru,

Interesting meeting the other day. Your "associate" is a charming woman, with some ideas worth considering. I'm a cautious mover at the best of times, as you know...but I'd be willing to hear more. Let me know when you're available for another face-to-face—and your associate as well, if she's agreeable.

—JC

4 June 3052

Dear Marshal Doru,

You'll have heard by now about events on Tukayyid. This could mean several things for the Concordat, and for our own efforts on its behalf. Now that the Clans are barred from attacking the Inner Sphere for the next decade and a half, will they turn our way? My father's already worrying about

"renewed Davion aggression," but I'm figuring the Successor States will have their hands full just trying to catch up with the Clans during this little breathing space they've won. In my view, our priorities should be forming a united front in case the Clans do come calling, and seeing if we can get some of their tech for ourselves.

I'd be interested to hear your thoughts. How soon can we meet with your associate? To my mind, the Com Guard victory makes our present negotiations all the more urgent.

Contact me as soon as you can.

—JC

10 June 3052

Dear Subaltern Calderon,

I concur with your thinking, and am happy to follow your lead. We can meet as soon as is possible for you. As regards Clan technology, my associate has certain contacts that may be in a position to help us there—though not, unfortunately, as much as we might like. Still, any information is bound to be useful.

Let me know about convenient times and places. It eases my mind to know that the Concordat will one day rest in your capable hands.

—Marshal Hadji Doru

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errors of government, misapplied in the name of the people, but instead doing them great harm.

“Not in our name will you continue conscription of civilians to build unneeded planetary defenses against an ‘enemy’ that poses us no threat.

“Not in our name will you continue to keep the Taurian Defense Forces from engaging our real foes—the pirates and brigands that almost daily raid our worlds and despoil our cities.

“Not in our name will you continue to restrict trade that should profit the entire Concordat, in order to fill the coffers of a military that you will not permit to do its job in our defense.

“Not in our name will you continue to neglect the Concordat’s best hope of prosperity—exploration of space and settlement of new colony worlds, which alone can truly strengthen and preserve our beloved nation.

“We demand an end to conscription, to bloated military budgets, to neglect of vital defenses against pirates and to neglect of colonization efforts. You are the Protector; fulfill your office, or resign it.”

An outraged Thomas predictably refused, whereupon Dryden threw the manifesto down on the conference table and threatened to charge Thomas with unacceptable violations of civil liberties before the Court of Judicial Review. After the delegation’s departure, Thomas ordered Marshal Doru to send the Taurian Guard to arrest them. Doru declined, and abruptly left the chamber. He went straight to his executive officer and related the incident, whereupon the two of them gathered the Taurian Guard and informed them as well. Marshal Doru then declared the Protector unfit to govern, and requested volunteers to take Thomas into protective custody.

The privy councilors made no protest as members of the Guard’s Second Battalion led the Protector away. Marshal Doru then went alone to the Calderon family residence and reported the morning’s events to Jeffrey, Janice and Katherine Calderon. “We haven’t much time before the vultures move in,” he reportedly told Jeffrey. “You’ve got to take the throne, publicly and quickly, before anyone else gets any ideas.”

Four days later, with Janice at his side in a rare public appearance, Jeffrey Calderon officially assumed the office of Protector. He was barely twenty-nine. His first act in office was to appoint Janice Calderon as his senior advisor—a shrewd move that brought him considerable political capital, given Janice’s popularity for bearing up so bravely under the burden of her illness. The Taurian people cautiously began to hope for better days ahead.

FROM NEIGHBORS TO ALLIES

Not long after his ascension to power, the new Protector startled his fellow citizens with a bold proposal: a formal alliance with the Magistracy of Canopus. The years of back-channel negotiations had given both governments a keen appreciation of the mutual benefits such an alliance might bring them, economic and social as well as military. On a personal level, the young Protector and the Magestrix had gained an equal appreciation of each other’s political skills and integrity. Their two nations’ long history of cautious friendship greatly outweighed the occasional rivalry over this or that border planet, and

neither leader had much trouble selling the Treaty of Taurus to their respective publics.

Jeffrey and Emma signed the treaty in early 3056. In addition to providing for “mutual defense...full diplomatic cooperation, cultural exchange and the eventual lowering of trade barriers,” the treaty specifically committed both realms to pool “certain financial and technological resources” for joint colonization efforts. The co-colonization provisions met with particular approval in the Concordat, where the Far Lookers still held significant social and political sway.

The Treaty of Taurus failed, however, to deflect Capellan schemes involving the Magistracy. In fact, the treaty gave them new impetus. Co-colonization efforts bore fruit almost immediately, enriching the Magistracy and the Concordat even before the first expedition got off the ground—and heightening the interest of Sun-Tzu Liao, who was seeking friends anywhere he could get them in order to re-absorb formerly Capellan planets in the secessionist St. Ives Compact and the so-called Chaos March. Between 3056 and 3058, the Treaty of Taurus fostered significant improvements in the Canopian military, as well as in the economies of both signatory nations, making them much more desirable as junior partners in Sun-Tzu’s Xin Sheng (Rebirth) movement. He planned to reclaim every single planet lost to the Capellans since the Fourth Succession War, and he would need allies outside the Inner Sphere to do it. The Concordat and the Magistracy, both growing and thriving, could become those allies—or rivals, potential mini-Successor States sitting right on the Capellan border. There was no doubt which outcome House Liao preferred.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Sun-Tzu Liao launched his pet scheme in the spring of 3058, with a dramatic visit to Canopus IV accompanied by a mere dozen of the infamous Capellan Death Commandos. He had correctly assessed Jeffrey Calderon as more skeptical than Emma Centrella about Capellan intentions—and though the Magestrix was far from naïve, Sun-Tzu believed his unorthodox gambit would appeal to Emma’s vanity about her formidable political skills. His guess proved correct, though he owed his ultimate success to a sudden turn of events between the Magistracy and its longtime nemesis, the Marian Hegemony.

The Pirates’ War

Some months before Chancellor Liao’s appearance on Canopus, a spate of vicious pirate raids had struck several outlying Magistracy planets. Magistracy intelligence swiftly fingered the Marian Caesar, Sean O’Reilly, as the major force behind the attacks. Fragmentary evidence hinted that O’Reilly had support from the Word of Blake, reactionary schismatics of the former ComStar—though even the MIM had trouble finding solid proof. By the time of Sun-Tzu’s visit in early 3058, the raiders had assassinated three Canopian planetary governors, sending the populations of Gambilon, Palladix and Marantha into panicked near-riots. The prospect of military upgrades to aid the MAF against the Hegemony must have seemed like Fortune’s gift to Emma Centrella. If they came at the price of a jumpy Periphery ally and new military obligations across the Periphery-Inner Sphere border, so be it.



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Before the year's end, the Magistracy had agreed to unprecedented formal ties with the Capellan Confederation. Under the terms of this historic 3058 agreement—dubbed the Trinity Alliance—the Magistracy would provide troops to supplement House Liao's forces, in exchange for badly needed technological aid that the Taurians could not match. The arrangement benefited the Confederation far more than the Magistracy, of which Emma was fully aware—yet she clearly considered the bargain worth it. Indeed, Capellan upgrades to MAF units—along with a small force of Capellan troops—played a vital role in the Magistracy's retaliatory campaign of 3062 against the Marian world of Islington.

Emma hoped to draw the Concordat into the new alliance as well, if only to keep Sun-Tzu honest. With both Periphery realms tied to him, the Capellan Chancellor could not easily play one against the other—nor could he afford to neglect their interests, lest he lose their vital support.

Sound and Fury

Reaction in the Concordat was swift and outraged. The Taurian government formally objected to “unconscionable Capellan interference in Periphery affairs,” and Jeffrey sent Emma a stinging personal note through private channels. “You are the last person in the world I'd accuse of naiveté, or worse yet, double-dealing,” the note read. “Yet I have to ask: what are you thinking? Of all the Inner Sphere states to throw in your lot with, you've chosen the least honorable and most duplicitous. And for what—a few fancy 'Mechs and a little extra financing for our colonizing program? Do you really value our own alliance—and the Taurian contribution—so little?!”

Adding to Jeffrey's dismay was the recent appointment of his old friend, Hadji Doru, to the post of Senior General of the Magistracy Armed Forces. Doru had left the Concordat in the wake of Thomas Calderon's abdication, and rumors claimed he had spent portions of 3056 and 3057 in Federated Commonwealth or Capellan space. With no solid information to go on, the Protector could not help but wonder if Marshal Doru's remarkable shift in political allegiance owed anything to Capellan manipulation. The placing of a long-time Taurian citizen in such a sensitive Canopian military position was unprecedented, and had the appearance of a quid pro quo. Given time to think things through, however, Jeffrey Calderon softened his stance. He could not imagine Marshal Doru being party to any betrayal of his former homeland, and the Marshal's long-standing relationship with the Canopians might better explain events than nebulous fears of Capellan skullduggery.

Toward the Magistracy-Capellan alliance itself, he remained markedly cool. Among his first responses, in fact, was to pay extra attention to the St. Ives Compact, with which he had opened diplomatic relations not long after attaining power. Recalling popular rumors of a planned summit earlier in 3058 between himself, the Magestrix and Duchess Candace Liao of St. Ives, Jeffrey instructed Concordat personnel at the St. Ives consulate to sound out their counterparts about cultural exchanges between the Compact and the Taurian state. Meanwhile, Emma Centrella's best efforts at soothing ruffled Taurian feathers produced grudging acceptance of Capellan aid toward establishing settlements in the New Colony Region, which

lay between the Magistracy and the Concordat, along with a reluctant promise to consider deeper ties at some vague future point. A planned summit between Chancellor Liao, the Magestrix and the Protector on the New Colony world of Detroit, scheduled to take place in late 3060, represented Emma's best chance of changing her ally's mind.

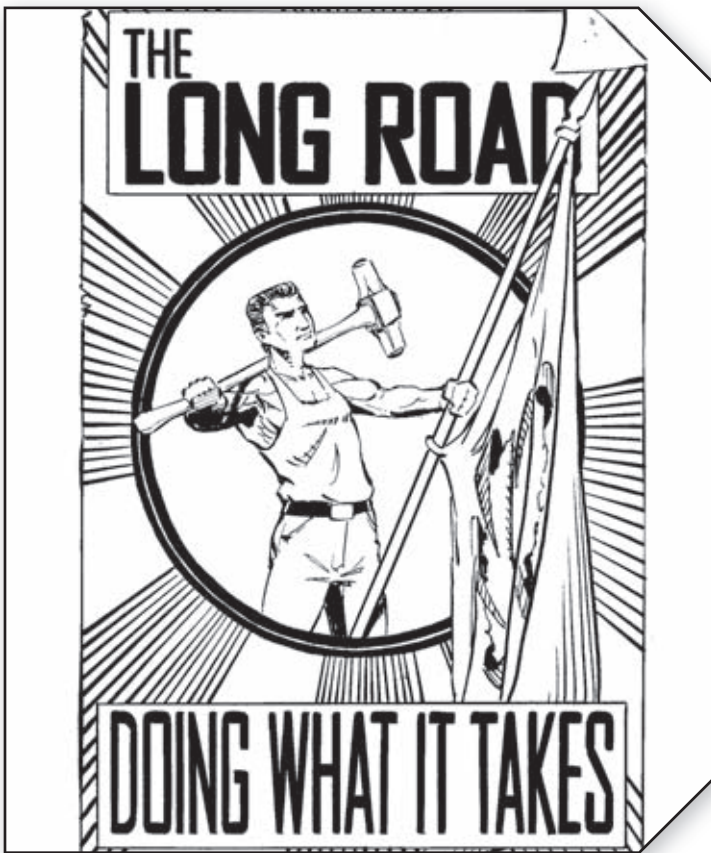
OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE— THE COMSTAR SCHISM

The Com Guards' victory against the Clans on Tukayyid meant relatively little militarily to the Periphery states, but the ensuing schism in ComStar had a greater impact—especially in the Outworlds Alliance, where ComStar had been the driving force behind a sharp increase in national literacy and sporadic economic recovery. The Explorer Corps, which had established several installations on the fringes of Alliance territory throughout the 3030s and 3040s, lost nearly a third of its personnel to ComStar's post-3052 reactionary offshoot, the newly named Word of Blake. In addition, the urgent need to rebuild Com Guard units shattered by war and split by the Schism meant deep budget cuts for all other ComStar branches. Fortunately for the Outworlds, the Draconis Combine began funding Corps operations in the summer of 3052, in exchange for a new emphasis on discovering the Clan homeworlds. The influx of Combine monies softened what would otherwise have been yet another body blow to the Alliance's still-struggling national economy. Personnel losses, however, took a toll that no amount of financing could correct. Though the Explorer Corps retained its HQ on Baliggora, it was forced to close bases on the outlying planets of Raldamax, Dneiper and Coraines. A fourth base on Risin narrowly escaped the same fate, saved by virtue of a lostech cache discovered on that world in 3035. Though little of the actual technology remained—most having been looted by the mercenary unit Blades of Death soon after its discovery—the installation where the cache was found later proved a valuable storehouse of Star League-era data and artifacts, and the Explorer Corps eagerly established itself there upon arrival in 3041.

The base closings sent a sharp shock through all three planetary economies, as the Explorer Corps' leases had included generous educational clauses and technology transfers. An emotionally and mentally exhausted Neil Avellar could offer his suffering people nothing more than the same tired speeches; as the 3050s drew onward, he retired further into his impressive library of scholarly works. Meanwhile, the normally stoic Outworlders were reaching their breaking point. The year 3054 saw death threats uttered against Avellar—from the political fringe, admittedly, but still a shocking first in Outworlds history. Neil and Rebecca saw the writing on the wall, and in early 3056 Neil formally turned over the Alliance Presidency to twenty-year-old Mitchell. The senior Avellars left the Outworlds shortly thereafter, their destination unknown.

Resurrection

The new President lost no time in pulling his realm back from the brink. Building on existing ties with business interests in the Federated Commonwealth and Draconis Combine, Mitchell Avellar launched his ambitious “Long Road” program of economic recovery. Ironically for



a nation built by those who despised the technologies of warfare, the Alliance gained the bulk of its hard currency from arms manufacturing. Heavy industry likewise enjoyed a significant boost, mainly as an outgrowth of technology influxes to support the nascent military-industrial complex. Though many Outworlds citizens regarded these changes with a wary eye, most were too grateful for the reprieve to worry overmuch about betraying the values of a past that seemed increasingly distant. "Like it or not, the universe has changed," wrote well-known pundit Donal Zakaria in the *Alpheratz New Freedom Journal* on 28 August 3056. "The Clans have invaded our peaceful neck of space, new and bolder pirate bands have arisen to replace the old ones, and we owe the food on too many of our tables to Inner Sphere corporations whose CEOs don't share our scruples against the misuses of technology. Our forebears tried to isolate themselves from realities like this, but it didn't work. We cannot afford to repeat their mistake, however noble many of us may find it. We must live with reality, and make the best of it—so that maybe some future generation can find a way to change it for the better."

This gradually increasing prosperity made Alliance planets richer targets for pirates. Far-sighted beyond his years, Mitchell Avellar looked at the tiny Alliance military and didn't like what he saw. Apart from the aerospace arm, whose pilots had a sterling reputation throughout the Periphery, the Alliance armed forces were in serious need of strengthening. Mitchell proceeded to do just that, using a portion of the new trade revenues to expand recruitment and purchase

equipment. The Alliance central government thus became one of its own arms industry's best customers, deepening the nation's reliance on the armaments trade and its ties to Inner Sphere corporations—especially Federated Commonwealth arms manufacturers. Various FedCom companies took full advantage of the Outworlds' increasingly educated workforce, which by and large remained willing to work for far lower wages than Federated Commonwealth citizens.

Mitchell also eagerly accepted Protector Jeffrey Calderon's offer to lend Taurian military advisors, made not long after the signing of the Treaty of Taurus. Concerned by Capellan meddling, Jeffrey seems to have tried to sow the seeds of a three-way alliance between the largest Periphery realms. His efforts ultimately failed, but greater military and economic cooperation between the Concordat and the Outworlds did make the latter a player on the Periphery's political stage—a new experience for the Outworlds Alliance, and a potential headache for House Liao given the extent of FedCom investment in the region.

Deepening business ties between the Outworlds and its Successor State neighbors also gave Mitchell Avellar new avenues for pursuing information about Clan technology—valuable in itself, as well as offering potential profit to the local arms industry. The small but effective Outworlds Alliance Intelligence agency had long relied on traders and businessmen as part-time operatives, and over the years grew particularly adept at industrial spying. That talent stood the Outworlds in good stead throughout the 3050s, enabling Mitchell Avellar to vastly improve his nation's military much more quickly than he had anticipated. It provided an equally swift economic boost to the nation, so much so that the Long Road program began to show solid results within half a decade of Mitchell's taking power. By the end of the 3050s, the Outworlds Alliance could no longer be dismissed as the Periphery's poor stepchild. Though not yet an economic or military powerhouse, this long-suffering realm had finally come into its own.

STAR LEAGUE REDUX?

As the 3050s drew toward their close, history had one more surprise in store for the Periphery. Against all odds, the fractious Successor States finally managed to unite in a reborn Star League—this one dedicated to permanently routing the Clan enemy. This unexpected development, hailed as a virtual miracle throughout the Inner Sphere, did little more than raise a few eyebrows in the Periphery. While the paid-pundit class debated such weighty questions as whether the Inner Sphere states would request aid from the Periphery nations, and whether it should be given if they did, the common citizen shrugged and changed the holoivid channel. Casinos and gambling parlors took tongue-in-cheek bets on how long the "unity of the Star League" would last ("more than six months" netted 200-to-one odds), but beyond that, few locals paid attention. This second Star League, if it lasted into the coming decade, would be in no position to inflict a second Reunification War on the Periphery realms, and so most Periphery citizens regarded it as irrelevant.

As for its military goals, local military analysts gave short shrift to the likelihood of the reconstituted SLDF actually driving out the Clan invaders. At most, the Star League forces might duplicate on a few other planets their 3058 victory on Coventry, in which



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a ragtag assemblage of Inner Sphere units led by the Federated Commonwealth's Prince Victor Steiner-Davion had triumphed over a weakened Jade Falcon strike force. And even that victory, many argued, would not have occurred without the convenient backstage machinations of the Falcons' powerful rival, Clan Wolf. The Clans already in the Inner Sphere were clearly there to stay, and though a genuinely cohesive Star League army might significantly bloody the Clans' collective nose, it was unlikely to drive all Clan forces back to deep space. The Clanners and the Successor States would keep each other busy for decades, and in the meantime the Periphery would tend to its own concerns.

This cavalier dismissal of the Star League took a jolt in 3059, when SLDF operations against Clan Smoke Jaguar drove that Clan's entire invasion force from its occupation zone in just four months. Operation Bulldog, as the assault was dubbed, included one Periphery unit: the First Canopian Cuirassiers, led by Emma Centrella's eldest daughter and heir, Danai Centrella. Included as part of the Capellan Confederation's troop contribution under the provisions of the Trinity Alliance, the First Cuirassiers acquitted themselves well on the Combine world of Meinacos, even beating back a fierce Jaguar counterattack. Danai Centrella's subsequent death in the Great Refusal on Strana Mechty came as a personal blow to the Magistratrix, but left the Canopian realm largely unaffected save for widespread displays of heartfelt mourning. The young heir had been popular, seen as a worthy successor to her formidable mother.

That Danai had died serving Inner Sphere rather than Periphery interests did cause sharp comment in some quarters. The tiny opposition newspaper *State of Affairs* openly questioned whether the Trinity Alliance proved that the Magistratrix was slipping: "For the first time in our nation's history, we have lost an heir in battle, not on our own behalf, but to aid those who have been (and still should be) our enemies. The Magistratrix willingly risked her own child, at the 'request' of the Capellan Chancellor. Major Danai Centrella and the First Canopian Cuirassiers did not even serve under the Magistracy banner—they fought the Clans in the name of the Capellan Confederation, shedding Canopian blood to spare Capellan lives. How does this happen in a sane universe? Is our Magistratrix so blinded by the baubles of advanced technology that she considers any price worth paying?"

"Blood for BattleMechs. Now there's a devil's bargain. How many more times will the Magistracy have to pay it—and what else will this Trinity Alliance claim from us? We had best wise up and chuck it, before we find ourselves an independent realm on paper, but 'the Canopian Commonality' in practice."

Such extreme views remained in the minority, but similar sentiments struck a chord with the general Canopian population. They had accepted the Capellan alliance, despite the troubled history and deep cultural differences between the two realms, largely on the strength of their trust in their Magistratrix—and at least initially, the gambit had paid off handsomely. Danai Centrella's death, though it posed no real threat to the realm's stability and security, reminded Canopians that every entanglement had its price. Most still believed their Magistratrix knew what she was doing, and sympathized with her loss, but public support for the Trinity Alliance went from moderately approving to

grudging. The upcoming Detroit Conference sparked a minor uptick in polls on the issue, reflecting the hope of many Canopians that the Concordat might join the alliance and provide a counterweight to Capellan power.

Events, however, would prove far less fortunate.

STORM WARNINGS

The new decade opened calmly enough for the major Periphery states. Protector Jeffrey Calderon continued to resist the Trinity Alliance, though he agreed to the summit on Detroit. The New Colony Region grew slowly but steadily, while its parent realms created and trained the Colonial Marshals to police and defend it.

In the Magistracy, Emma's younger daughter Naomi stepped relatively easily into her elder sister's shoes. Less the blunt soldier than the quiet diplomat, Naomi Centrella assumed her new duties with a steadiness and grace that swiftly endeared her to the Canopian people. Occasional rumors of her increasing fondness for the Capellan Chancellor made little dent in her growing popularity; the average Canopian loved a juicy story, but also knew better than to take such gossip seriously. If there was anything to it, most people reasoned, the Magistratrix would put the brakes on any unsuitable relationship before it could cause trouble. Meanwhile, the Outworlds Alliance kept up its rapid economic recovery along with its military build-up. Taurian-Outworlds military exchanges paid off, with Taurian expertise revitalizing the Alliance army.

Even the region's ubiquitous pirates seemed to settle down, their numbers somewhat depleted in the wake of the Pirates' War. The only real conflict in the Near Periphery centered—predictably enough—on the Marian Hegemony, whose belligerent Caesar faced sharp rebellion in the recently conquered Lothian League. Nothing in the opening months of 3060 offered any hint of the upheavals soon to come.

DETROIT DEBACLE

The Capellan-financed BattleMech factory on the New Colony world of Detroit made it the perfect location for a summit between Sun-Tzu Liao, Emma Centrella and Jeffrey Calderon. The Magistratrix meant to showcase the benefits of a deeper alliance with the Capellans, while reminding Jeffrey of just how much their two nations could accomplish together—either with Sun-Tzu or against him, depending on where their interests lay. Growing demands for Magistracy troops to aid Chancellor Liao's operations in the Chaos March were beginning to trouble Emma, and she felt a new urgency about bringing the Concordat fully into the Trinity Alliance. The conference was scheduled for December of 3060, and all three leaders promised to attend.

In mid-November, a sudden act of violence disrupted Magistratrix Emma's careful planning. The Blackwind Lancers, a mercenary unit working for the St. Ives Compact, went rogue and attempted to assassinate Sun-Tzu Liao on the world of Hustaing. The Chancellor's narrow escape later turned out to be a stroke of phenomenal luck. Forced to deal with this unlooked-for crisis, Sun-Tzu could not take the time to go to Detroit. Rather than postpone the summit, the Magistratrix and the Protector chose to meet on their own—a decision with fatal consequences.

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On Christmas Eve 3060, New Colony President Sherman Maltin and a sizable proportion of the Colonial Marshals took their two prominent guests hostage and proclaimed the New Colony Region's independence. Naomi Centrella immediately petitioned Sun-Tzu Liao to let her mount a rescue operation. He swiftly granted permission, but the weeks involved in equipping the joint MAF-Capellan rescue force and traveling to Detroit gave the NCR's defenders time to dig in. Naomi Centrella's strike force arrived on-planet in February of 3061, but only reached the hostages after weeks of hard fighting. The final battle for Government House liberated the Magestrix; Jeffrey Calderon died in the crossfire.

His death removed the major obstacle to full Taurian participation in the Trinity Alliance, which Sun-Tzu Liao had wanted as much as Emma Centrella did, though for different reasons. The debacle on Detroit also left the Magestrix in Sun-Tzu's debt—and left Naomi in his debt as well. Neither woman, therefore, was in much of a position to object when the conflict in St. Ives heated up and Sun-Tzu began shifting MAF units into that increasingly volatile region. The troop movements were less than popular in the Magistracy, with even some mainstream news outlets sharply questioning the expenditure of MAF resources to help retake Capellan territories:

"Why are we sending our soldiers to fight a Successor State's battles? What interest do we Canopians have in which flag flies over the spaceports on this or that planet in the Chaos March? None. Yet we've spent the past year and better serving as Capellan cannon fodder, reclaiming for House Liao what its Chancellor can't rely on his own armies to get.

"And now the so-called 'First Lord of the Star League' wants our fighting women and men to replace his 'Star League peacekeepers' in St. Ives. For those of you not up on the internal squabbles of our Inner Sphere cousins, the St. Ives Compact used to be part of the Capellan Confederation, until its resident duchess wised up and took herself and her fiefdom out of the grip of House Liao's crazier elements. The folks in St. Ives have been happily independent and bothering nobody for thirty-odd years. So why can't they stay that way? Because Sun-Tzu wants the family real estate back, that's why. And as with the Chaos March campaigns, the greater part of the burden won't fall on the Capellans. It will fall on us. Sun-Tzu Liao wants it that way. And he's got a piece of paper with our Magestrix's name on it that says he can get what he wants.

"Make no mistake—the proud soldiers of the MAF won't be in St. Ives to keep any peace. The civil war there is well underway, whether or not anyone in power cares to admit it. Fighting that war—on the Capellan side—will be our job. Heaven forbid the CCAF do its own dirty work; leave that to us Periphery rats, in our less-than-cutting-edge 'Mechs.

"Oh, but the Chancellor promised he'd make up our equipment losses! And he's giving us some really nice stuff, too! Plus there's all those new colonies, and that bright shiny 'Mech factory on Detroit. Couldn't have all that without

Capellan money. Isn't that worth a few troops here and there?

"No. We deserve more than some spiffy new 'Mechs and tanks—and as for the colonies, we'd have done just fine with only the Taurians as partners. We're being used, and the Magestrix—sad to say—either doesn't recognize it or is willing to trade our blood for the prestige of connections with a 'real interstellar empire.' Or maybe Sun-Tzu Liao just has her over a barrel, and she's as powerless as the rest of us to halt his little schemes. One thing is clear: the Magistracy of Canopus is facing one hell of a case of buyer's remorse."

—Editorial in *RealPolitik*, a prominent online poli-journal based on Canopus IV, 13 November 3061

ACHILLES HEEL— EVENTS IN THE CONCORDAT

The Protector's sudden death threw the Concordat government into disarray; Jeffrey Calderon had no known heirs, and Janice Calderon remained physically unable to rule. Lord Grover Shraplen, former governor of MacLeod's Land, soon emerged as the front-runner and swiftly took power with Janice Calderon's consent. Though a die-hard opponent of many of Jeffrey's policies, Shraplen was also known for his deep patriotism and impeccable integrity. Most importantly, from the viewpoint of many Concordat power brokers, Shraplen firmly supported the New Colony Region. Indeed, his tendency to suspect "foreign elements" in general—including the Canopians—guaranteed that he would do his utmost to protect and eventually extend Taurian investment in that still-troubled part of space.

Shraplen also shared one of the Calderon family's less desirable traits: a fixation on House Davion as the ultimate Taurian nemesis. Among the reasons for his desire to slow down colonization efforts and consolidate the Concordat's hold over its new possessions was a belief that the Davions still posed a threat that the Taurian state would need considerable resources to counter. This excerpt from Shraplen's first press conference as Protector clearly shows the direction in which he intended to take the realm:

[DZ]: Daniel Zvi, for the *New Chappelle Defender*. Lord Shrap—I mean, Protector, sorry. It's—it's just hard to—

[Shraplen]: I know that, son. This isn't easy for any of us.

[DZ]: Thank you, sir. I wanted to ask, we've heard all kinds of stories about how the late Protector Calderon died. Have you heard any of these rumors, sir, and do you put any stock in them?

[Shraplen]: I presume you're referring to allegations of Davion involvement in the tragic events on Detroit? [*Zvi nods*] Well, given the history of their behavior toward our nation, let's just say that nothing they might do would surprise me.

[TS]: Thomasin Savaiano, *Samantha Examiner*. Are you accusing Victor Steiner-Davion, or Katrina Steiner-Davion, of engineering Jeffrey Calderon's murder?

[Shraplen]: I'm accusing nobody—yet. Your colleague asked me what I think, not what I can prove.

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[KA]: Karan Amos, Concordat Public Broadcasting. Does that mean you think evidence will be forthcoming?

[Shraplen]: I prefer not to speculate. Political assassins tend to cover their tracks well, so we may never know for certain. However, let me share with you this thought—absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Look at history and make your own judgments.

[TS]: What about rumors of Liao involvement? Is there anything to those?

[Shraplen]: I haven't heard those stories.

[TS]: But surely you find it suspiciously convenient that Chancellor Liao couldn't attend the Detroit Conference at the eleventh hour. And it's well known that our late Protector opposed further entanglement with the Capellans, which—

[Shraplen]: As I said before, I prefer not to speculate. But I'd like to point out that the diplomatic and military emergency in Capellan space was real, not something trumped up. And it wasn't Chancellor Liao who decided to go ahead with the conference. As far as I can tell, that part of it was sheer bad luck.

[KA]: Does this mean you'll be negotiating with the Capellans about joining the Trinity Alliance?

[Shraplen]: I'm still studying the issue. You all know me by now; I'm not one to rush into things. If the Capellans really want us, they'll wait until I'm satisfied that making common cause with them is the right thing to do.

[TS]: What about the stories that Victor Steiner-Davion wasn't even in the Inner Sphere at the time—he was off leading an army in Clan space? Doesn't that blow a hole in the Davion theory?

[Shraplen]: Victor's sister just took over the entire Federated Commonwealth. She's half a Davion, no matter which part of her surname she prefers to emphasize. And despite her reputation as a peacekeeper, in my experience peacekeepers don't walk in and take over other people's nations. So no, that doesn't blow a hole in the Davion theory. Not to my mind.

[DZ]: How are you going to deal with the New Colony Region, sir? Shouldn't the rebels be punished?

[Shraplen]: Of course they should. But many of those rebels are also our Taurian brothers and sisters. And we don't know how much of this secessionist fever was truly their idea. I have it on good authority that outside agitators were responsible for much of the recent upheaval. So the first step is to find and punish them appropriately. As for those misguided Taurian citizens who fell prey to foreign blandishments, I'd like to give them a chance to show that they've learned from their tragic mistake. Colony President Sherman Maltin has already paid with his life. I'd rather not lose any more Taurian lives over this.

[DZ]: By "outside agitators," do you mean Davion agents?

[Shraplen]: Again, look at history. What do you think?

With Friends Like These...

Protector Shraplen signed the Trinity Alliance in August of 3062, to mixed reactions in the Concordat. Those who blamed the Davions for Jeffrey Calderon's death welcomed stronger ties to House Davion's Capellan nemesis, albeit with deep reservations. Others wondered if Sun-Tzu Liao had engineered the whole thing—including the Blackwind Lancers' assault on Hustaing—in part to drive the Concordat into the Capellan embrace. The bulk of the population wavered between a heartfelt desire to support their new Protector during a dangerous time, and fear that entanglements with a Successor State could only mean trouble.

The ink was barely dry before the Taurian people found out what "trouble" meant. Sun-Tzu Liao lost no time invoking the treaty's mutual-defense provisions, requesting TDF units to serve alongside MAF troops already operating in the Chaos March and the St. Ives Compact. As the fighting in St. Ives intensified, greater numbers of Taurian troops found themselves called up for duty in that hellish civil war. Support for the Trinity Alliance and the Protector—already resting on the shaky ground of "rally-round-the-flag-boys" sentiment—plunged as the casualty reports rose. People began to protest Concordat involvement in this "foreign war," frequently including the families of dead and wounded soldiers. Some TDF troopers gave up their commissions, or simply refused to fight outside their own borders. Planetary leaders blocked some military transfers, and a few even held up tax payments to get the Protector's attention. All this activity represented a minority view among Concordat citizens, but that minority grew larger and more vocal as the St. Ives war dragged on.

Rumblings of Rebellion: The Fronc Reaches

Eventually, the drain on Taurian resources took its toll on the New Colony Region. More money and soldiers for Capellan military adventures meant less for the colonial planets, including lower funding levels and less equipment for Taurian Colonial Marshals. The Marshals themselves were in disarray, demoralized by Shraplen's hunt for "Davion operatives" in their ranks while forced to absorb a sudden flood of new "loyalist" recruits. TDF troops sent to enforce martial law on Taurian colony worlds—and in Taurian enclaves on jointly held planets—initially aided the Marshals in keeping the peace, but withdrew to the Concordat proper in early 3063 to replace units sent to the various Capellan fronts. A concurrent push by the Magistracy for greater investment in the NCR subtly shifted the balance of power in that region toward the Canopian state. All these pressures increased "independence fever" among Taurian colonists.

The final straw was the ongoing imbalance between taxes imposed on the colonies and revenue spent to sustain them. Here too, the military obligations of the Trinity Alliance exacted a hidden price. Forced by the treaty to send TDF troops outside the Concordat, Protector Shraplen made up for the shortfall by attempting to expand the military. When fears of being sent to St. Ives kept recruitment numbers low, the TDF offered hefty signing bonuses and increased hazard pay. The advertising budget alone for recruitment grew by nearly a third, yet still the pace of volunteers could not keep up with the numbers Shraplen wanted. The outbreak of the FedCom Civil War in December of 3062 relieved some



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of the pressure, but Shraplen saw the respite as temporary. In his view, it made little difference which Davion emerged victorious. The winner would need something around which to unify a fractured realm—and what better rallying point than a common enemy? Shraplen believed the Concordat would be cast as that enemy, and was determined to prepare for the worst. Consequently, pleas from planetary leaders in the NCR to give back more of their tax revenues fell on deaf ears. Throughout the mid-3060s, Shraplen refused to consider colonial funding demands. By 3065, he was refusing even to meet with colonial delegations.

By the end of that year, NCR President Carver Trondel had had enough. In early 3066, he dispatched ambassadors to each of the Inner Sphere states, ComStar, the Star League, the Magistracy and the Concordat, with instructions to proclaim the NCR's independence. The official declaration presented to the Concordat government laid the blame for the split squarely at Protector Shraplen's feet:

WHEREAS, we the people of the former New Colony Region wish to claim for ourselves and our posterity the blessings of liberty that all by right should enjoy;

AND WHEREAS, we the people have honestly attempted to secure those blessings within the laws and values of our mother nations;

AND WHEREAS, those attempts have failed through no fault of ours, but instead have foundered on the intransigence of others, most particularly Lord Grover Shraplen of the Taurian Concordat;

AND WHEREAS, we the people do not consent to join pernicious foreign alliances, such as that with House Liao in which both of our mother nations unfortunately chose to enmesh themselves;

AND WHEREAS, said foreign alliances have resulted in policies that violate the most cherished values of our mother nations, most particularly the equitable allocation of tax revenues, to the detriment of the New Colony Region as well as our Taurian and Canopian brothers and sisters;

BE IT RESOLVED, therefore, that the New Colony Region from this day no longer exists. We, the citizens of the Fronc Reaches, do declare our independence, now and for all time. It is our fond hope that our mother nations will someday disentangle themselves from the concerns of foreign empires, so that we may restore our ties with them as friends and equals.

—Declaration presented on Taurus by Ciara Turner, Fronc Reaches ambassador to the Concordat, 28 February 3066

ComStar and the Free Rasalhague Republic swiftly recognized the new nation—as did the Magistracy, much to the Taurian realm's dismay. Calls for Shraplen's resignation abounded, along with demands to rescind the Trinity Alliance (or at least the Magistracy part of it) and to retake the NCR by force. The Concordat, however, was in no position to even attempt the latter. With its military already stretched dangerously thin, difficulty integrating the promised higher-tech 'Mechs from the Capellans and persistent low recruitment numbers, the TDF could

manage no more than small victories in a few incidents with the former Colonial Marshals. Ultimately, the Concordat was forced to accept the loss of its colonial investments—among the major inducements behind the Trinity Alliance and also the Treaty of Taurus.

The Fronc Reaches' secession also dealt a significant blow to Taurian prestige. The Concordat's elevation to membership in the Star League, which took place at the third Whitting Conference in late 3064, was not enough to salve wounded feelings—especially after the affronted Magistracy pulled its troops out of Capellan space in response. Sun-Tzu Liao immediately leaned on the TDF to make up the loss. Taurian troops in St. Ives, who had eagerly anticipated returning home as the Capellans finished reabsorbing their former province, now faced redeployment to yet another “foreign” front in the Chaos March. Though some units bought into the notion of Chaos March service as one Star League member-state aiding another, significant numbers of troopers balked at this latest demand. Some went AWOL; others exercised every legal option to end their service contracts. A few even risked court-martial by simply refusing to fight—though with his popularity dangerously low, Protector Shraplen could not afford to make those men and women an anti-war cause célèbre.

Restoration: The Calderon Protectorate

By early 3066, the only thing keeping Shraplen in the Protector's seat was the lack of a viable alternative. The sole remaining heir in the direct line was Erik Martens-Calderon, Jeffrey Calderon's young son by Captain Talia Martens of the mercenary unit Prey's Divisionals. Aside from his father, no one outside the Divisionals knew of Erik's existence until 3063, when Baron Cham Kithrong of the TDF's VI Corps publicly declared himself regent for the boy. Barely ten years old, Erik might grow up to fill the Protector's office—but clearly could not yet take Grover Shraplen's place. Kithrong, for his part, chose not to attempt a wholesale military coup on his young ward's behalf. Though he enjoyed solid support among the VI Corps, he remained unsure of how many backers he could count on outside it—and in the eyes of the public, any takeover attempt might easily look like one non-Calderon substituting himself for another. Though the Taurian people did not quite match the near-mystic faith of many Inner Sphere citizens in the bloodline of their ruling house, the Calderon name had nonetheless acquired considerable cachet over the centuries. In many quarters, the increasing troubles of the Shraplen administration merely bolstered growing sentiment that the Concordat did best when a Calderon held power. Anyone else faced a grim uphill battle for public confidence. That, coupled with the possibility of sparking a civil war, stayed Kithrong's hand for some time. Shraplen, for his part, dared take no action against the Baron; with the TDF at near-breaking point, he could not afford to further alienate the VI Corps or its commander.

This uneasy stalemate collapsed when the Magistracy of Canopus took military control of Detroit. Ostensibly done to safeguard the planet's valuable 'Mech facilities from pirates, the move came in tandem with official Magistracy recognition of the Fronc Reaches, and touched off a political firestorm in the Concordat. Sensing his moment, Kithrong gave the Protector an ultimatum: resign in favor of Erik Martens-Calderon, with Kithrong to head a Regency Council until the boy came of age, or



face the consequences. Shraplen, beset by fresh troubles stemming from an incident with the Fighting Urukhai mercenary unit, angrily refused. "I will not leave this realm in the hands of a general and a child while we're in the middle of a war!" he is reported to have shouted, during an emergency meeting of the Privy Council in late July. Not even a quietly emotional appeal from Janice Calderon—bedridden from an ugly flare-up of the Brisbane Virus—could persuade Shraplen to step down.

The "war" to which Shraplen referred had not yet begun, even in the Protector's vivid imagination. Shraplen and his sympathizers, however, fully expected it within a few months at most. They owed their sense of siege to an admittedly curious April incident, in which Taurian early-warning satellites detected two DropShips on a fast burn toward the capital. The ships belonged to the Fighting Urukhai, employed by House Davion at the time. That mercenary unit later claimed its representatives had been heading toward Taurus in hopes of negotiating a contract with the Concordat. In an eerie echo of Thomas Calderon, Shraplen became convinced they were acting as scouts for a Davion invasion force and ordered the ships destroyed.

The incident added strength to a Concordat-wide rumor mill already in high gear: the DropShips *were* Davion scouts, they were nothing of the kind, they belonged to a rogue merc unit, they were the last surviving Smoke Jaguar ships, and so on. Reality caught up with the rumors in August, when the rest of the Fighting Urukhai hit Taurus hard and fast. The merc unit's assault devastated entire neighborhoods of the planet's capital city and cut a swath through the Taurian Guard, though it ultimately ended with the mercenaries' destruction. Shraplen and others who believed in the Davion threat pointed to the assault as proof of their fears. Clearly, the Fighting Urukhai had intended to soften up the Concordat capital as a prelude to invasion. Others—Baron Kithrong among them—saw the entire tragedy as confirmation of Shraplen's unfitness for office. The general public remained hopelessly divided. Though fewer than ever fully supported Shraplen, many were reluctant to throw in their lot with Erik Martens-Calderon—a child backed by an army marshal, a situation reminiscent of military rule. And no rival claimant had yet emerged with even that much of a power base.

Spurred to action by the Urukhai assault, Kithrong made his move in September of 3066. He knew he lacked sufficient political support to oust Shraplen, and so he settled for the next best thing: secession. Drawing on considerable backing within the VI Corps, Kithrong proclaimed the worlds where his soldiers were stationed independent of the Concordat. He christened the new mini-state the Calderon Protectorate and publicly announced that the VI Corps held it in trust for Erik Martens-Calderon, until Erik came of age and assumed governance.

A furious Shraplen ordered an immediate attack against Kithrong's rebellious troops. Kithrong, however, had many friends in the TDF—and Shraplen's constant focus on the "Davion threat," coupled with quiet resistance to "the Liao wars," had long ago cost him most of his. Kithrong's colleagues used their positions to block key military transfers, and had little trouble convincing the troops that an attack against the VI Corps would bring civil war in its wake. Such a price was surely not worth paying for only a few planets, especially as the Protectorate's secession merely embodied in an extreme form what many a soldier—and citizen—felt about Shraplen's regime.

NEWSMAKERS INTERVIEW: MARSHAL CHAM KITHRONG

NM: Tell us a bit about yourself, Marshal. How did you get from loyal soldier of the Taurian Defense Force to leader of a secessionist movement?

Kithrong: I wouldn't call it a movement—though anyone who wishes to join the Protectorate is welcome to do so. And I remain a loyal Taurian. Despite what I've been forced to by the current government, I love the Concordat and I always will. And you'll not find a single trooper in the VI Corps who won't say the same.

NM: You began your military career...

Kithrong: In the Taurian Velites. Joined up in 3042, fresh out of the École Militaire. That was the year Ian Calderon up and joined the Green Mountain Boys, plus we were all on high alert for trouble from the Davions. Damned near everything was a Davion plot back then. I bought into it at first, just like most in the TDF. But it never let up. And then came the civilian conscription program, where so many people had their lives disrupted to build planetary fortifications that some of us were starting to suspect we didn't need...the amount of war profiteering was sickening. Well-connected contractors made out like bandits, while the average citizen could barely call his life his own. Caught up in Thomas Calderon's war machine, we neglected everything else. It got so bad that on Marknick, my homeworld, local mining concerns couldn't get spare parts for vital equipment. Now, these mines bring up radioactives and such necessary to industry and manufacturing, including military manufacturing. That should have safeguarded them, and for awhile it did. But by 3049, all the different parts of the military-industrial machine were starting to work against each other. High-tech armor and equipment production was absorbing so much of our manufacturing capacity that things like parts for mining equipment took a back seat—even though the stuff being mined was vital to that same manufacturing capacity. We were shooting our own feet off, and nothing seemed able to stop it. Until Marshal Doru met Jeffrey Calderon and helped steer him in the right direction.

NM: You and Hadji Doru served together for a time, yes?

Kithrong: That's right. He was already in the Velites when I joined up. A good man, rock-solid integrity. Jeff first met him at the École Militaire, where Hadji was giving guest lectures. I had the good fortune to cross Jeff's path a few years later, when he landed in my VI Corps to fill out his term of military service. I saw the same thing in him that Hadji had, right away—his intelligence, his vision for the nation. What we Taurians could be if we stopped obsessing over the damned Davions. Hadji and I both knew we had to shape that potential. So we did our best—and Jeffrey surpassed our highest expectations. [pause] Damned tragedy, losing him so soon.

NM: Rumor has it you helped along Jeffrey Calderon's relationship with Captain Martens, Erik's mother.

Kithrong: (chuckles) They didn't need much help. All



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I did was introduce them. To be honest, I had no thought of a romance there. Captain Martens had impressed me as an up-and-coming young officer in Prey's Divisionals, who were working closely with the regular TDF units in the VI Corps at the time. Given that the Concordat armed forces regularly rely on merc commands, I thought Jeffrey needed a chance to form some personal ties with one of our most solid units, get used to seeing the defense of the Concordat through the mercs' eyes. So we had a working dinner—Captain Martens, her CO Major Benderoth, Jeff and myself. The youngsters took it from there.

NM: Did you know of Erik's Calderon parentage when he was born?

Kithrong: Yes. Jeffrey and Talia did me the honor of coming in me.

NM: Yet you kept it secret because...?

Kithrong: They asked me to. Neither of them wanted their son to spend his formative years in a media goldfish bowl, and they both assumed there'd be time to introduce him slowly to life as a Calderon. Tragically, they were wrong.

NM: When word came of the Protector's death on Detroit, why didn't you speak up then?

Kithrong: And thrust a five-year-old child into that crisis? No one outside Prey's Divisionals even knew Erik existed, remember. Had I stepped up then, claiming power on behalf of a child even younger than Erik is now—a child no one had ever heard of—there was no way to predict the political consequences. Talia was also against it, and at that point her son and her work were all she had. I couldn't disrupt that relationship. And then Shraplen made his move, and he had solid support, so it seemed best to let him take the reins and see what transpired.

NM: So you spoke out in 3063 because...?

Kithrong: Because Shraplen's a disaster. I never expected things to get this bad. I'd always had a decent working relationship with the man, and for the first few years he gave me little reason to question his competence. Yes, he's always had Davions on the brain a tad too strongly for my taste, and I definitely disagreed with his decision to join the Trinity Alliance in 3062—but I thought there'd be more time to fix things. I spoke out, finally, because I didn't dare wait any longer. Someone had to act before the Concordat went completely to hell.

NM: So what happens now?

Kithrong: The Calderon Protectorate goes its own way, for as long as events make it necessary. If other Concordat worlds want to join us, we'll welcome them—though we will not invade our sister worlds in the Protectorate's name. It's our hope that our late Protector's son will not only come to rule these planets, but will one day take his rightful place as leader of the whole Concordat, should it have the luck to survive the troubles that currently beset it. Until that day, we remain committed to protecting and defending the last Calderon—and with him, the best hopes of all the Taurian people."

Unable to bring the baron or his mini-realm to heel, Shraplen soon gave up. Instead, he refocused his attention on the Davions. The last months of 3066 saw several TDF units rotated to the Concordat-FedSuns border, along with some mercenary commands under contract to the Shraplen government. As in the 3040s under Thomas Calderon, the expected Davion invasion never came.

The Pleiades Campaign

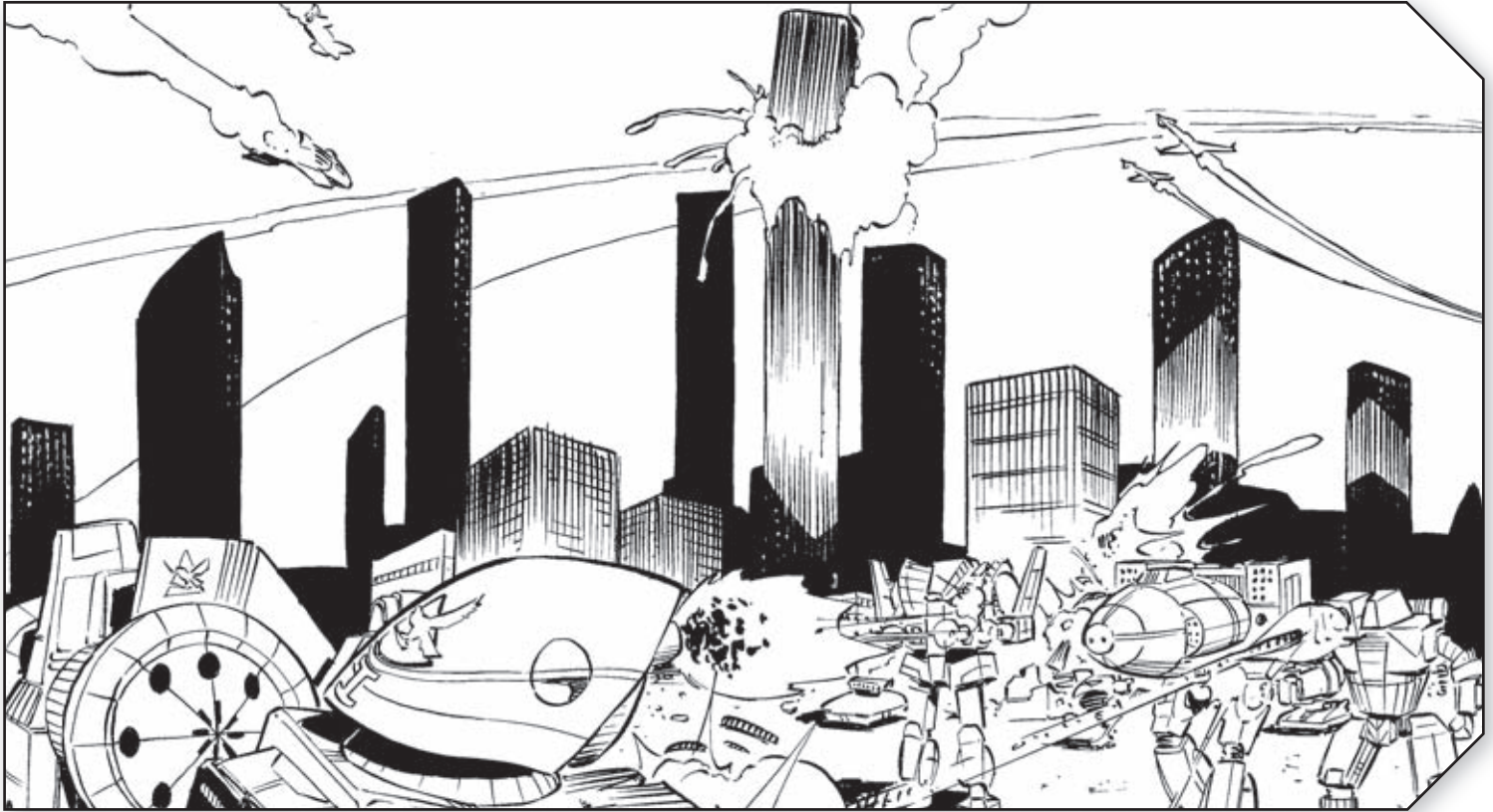
In the end, Protector Shraplen created his own "Davion invasion"—by sending TDF troops deep into FedSuns space in January of 3067. With the FedCom Civil War still tying down large numbers of Davion troops, the Taurian strike force initially made remarkable progress. Not long afterward, however, they ran into trouble. The TDF reached the Pleiades Cluster in March, where it struck a solid wall of Davion resistance. Duke George Hasek had assembled a massive force of AFFS and mercenary units dedicated to halting the Taurian advance. Despite Shraplen's best efforts to portray the Pleiades Campaign as yet another impending Taurian victory—this one just taking a little longer—word inevitably filtered back to the Concordat of its troops' actual fate. Units outside the Pleiades Cluster took heavy losses in rout after rout, while those still in the Cluster remain bogged down in losing battles. One embedded news correspondent, traveling with the II Corps' Hyades Light Infantry, had this to say about the fierce firefight that virtually destroyed the Light Infantry on Brockway:

"My God...this is awful. It's—I've never seen a rout this bad. So many dead. So many lives wasted. Even now, hours after the battle, I can still taste the bitter smoke of burning tanks and 'Mechs.

"We fled the battlefield through a wall of Davion weapons fire—lasers and PPCs lighting up the air like lethal fireworks, picking off unit after unit. I saw a Davion 'Mech slice through an infantry platoon with its autocannon. One minute our soldiers were running for cover like the rest of us, the next minute they'd been cut into ribbons of bleeding flesh. The Davions are hunting us down like rabid dogs, with no quarter asked or given. We fight back as best we can—but how can we stand against an enemy better armed and equipped despite all our vaunted Capellan military aid? An enemy fighting on his own territory, repelling us as invaders? An enemy, perhaps, that—dare I say it—we never should have roused in the first place?"

—From a report filed by Andreas McKellen, correspondent for the *New Chappelle Defender*, 18 February 3067

Initial reports of TDF losses prompted scattered anti-war rallies, most often on worlds whose home units had taken the worst beatings. Shraplen's popularity took another nosedive. Political gossip centered on the remaining members of the Calderon family, with rumors backing various candidates. The stories ran the gamut. Marshal Kithrong and the VI Corps were on the brink of invading Taurus and formally installing Erik Martens-Calderon; retired general Brenda Calderon intended to launch a coup with help from former comrades in the Taurian Guard; even a wild story tagging Amanda Sims, daughter of the late Marshal Nelson



Calderon-Sims, as using her civilian position in the Ministry of Trade to depose Shraplen through political maneuvering. That none of these speculations bore fruit made no difference to the rumor mill. Uneasy and conflicted over the Pleiades war, the Taurian public—and the Protector—badly needed a boost in confidence.

They got one in March of 3067, when the Pleiades Hussars and the Pleiades Lancers defiantly stood their ground against the Davion-affiliated mercenary forces sent to pry them loose. Determined to recapture their ancient homeworlds, taken from the Concordat by House Davion during the Reunification War, these two units fought the mercenaries to a bloody standstill on Hyalite and other Pleiades Cluster planets. This spirited against-the-odds defense of former Concordat territory proved a boon to the war effort and to Protector Shraplen's political fortunes. The average Taurian citizen could now take pride in TDF troops standing up to a merciless enemy. It also made a difference that the Hussars and the Lancers were battling for their homelands, which had been stolen by the Davion aggressor. Therefore, the war to reclaim those planets was no longer "a misguided paranoid's foolish overreaching, creating the very reality he has so long feared." Instead, many Taurians saw it as the righting of an ancient wrong. The near-destruction of the Pleiades Lancers after a fierce battle on Lindsay, and the incorporation of survivors into the Pleiades Hussars, deepened that unit's resolve and prompted the first large-scale public demonstrations in support of the war. Though unease remained about the ultimate end toward which it might be leading the Concordat, the strike into

Davion territory became far less of an albatross around the Protector's neck. Shraplen further helped himself on the domestic front by promising to lay the Pleiades dispute before the Star League Council at the upcoming Whitting Conference in November. "With right on our side and judicious support from our friends," Shraplen said in a public speech, "we will accept no less than the restoration of the Pleiades Cluster to Taurian control."

Whether this effort will succeed remains to be seen as this book goes to press. As a full-fledged member of the Star League, however, the Concordat has greater leverage than it did during the first Star League era—and Shraplen is likely to call in every chit owed him by Sun-Tzu Liao to accomplish his cherished goal. By reclaiming the Pleiades planets through a combination of military doggedness and diplomatic skill, the Protector hopes to teach House Davion a lesson it will never forget.

SHIFTING SANDS— THE MAGISTRACY AND ITS ALLIES

The Taurians' choice to join the Trinity Alliance relieved some of the pressure on the Magistracy military by providing Sun-Tzu Liao with a fresh source of Periphery "lend-lease" troops. Contrary to Canopian expectations, however, the Taurian Concordat did little to balance the unequal power relationship between House Liao and the Magistracy. With Protector Shraplen primarily focused on using his newfound Liao backing against the Davions, the Taurian government offered no more



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than token resistance to various Capellan demands—and frequently not even that. Shraplen’s concentration on the Davion menace also siphoned resources and attention away from Canopian-Taurian joint ventures, which forced Magestrix Emma into even greater reliance on the Capellans. Between early 3063 and 3067, the Trinity Alliance from the Magistracy’s perspective became more and more the Canopian-Capellan alliance, with the Concordat thrown in as an afterthought. The increasingly public personal attachment between Naomi Centrella and Sun-Tzu Liao, apparently with Emma’s blessing, perfectly symbolized this shift.

Taurian Troubles

With Shraplen preoccupied by House Davion throughout the early 3060s, Emma Centrella dealt with the dicey New Colony situation as best she could—though she, too, found her energies pulled in different directions. The brutality of the St. Ives conflict had prompted some public demonstrations against the war, and though the Canopian people still largely supported their Magestrix, Emma was not fool enough to take that support for granted. Instead, she focused her considerable politicking skills on minimizing Capellan demands for MAF units—often at the expense of her Taurian allies. She rationalized this through typically hard-nosed political calculation; whatever might exist in a treaty, her first duty was to her own people’s interests. Among those interests was to keep the Magistracy military from being stretched too thin, and ensure that it could absorb the new technologies and training methods granted it by the Capellans.

Consequently, as it became clearer that only independence would satisfy the NCR, Emma concentrated on salvaging the one thing it would cost her realm most dearly to lose: the high-tech ‘Mech factory on Detroit. Using stepped-up pirate raids in the NCR as an excuse, the Magestrix garrisoned Detroit with the First Magistracy Highlanders in February of 3063. The Concordat government protested, but the Protector declined to take any serious action, and so the MAF garrison remained in place. Shraplen may have hoped that the growing power of the Marian Hegemony, under its new and talented Caesar Julius O’Reilly, would eventually prompt the Canopians to draw down their numbers on Detroit and send the excess troops to guard against Hegemony inroads. If so, his calculations failed. The Magestrix recognized the Fronc Reaches in April of 3066 and kept her troops on Detroit.

Once again, the Taurian response was long on furious words. To the tirade directed toward “perfidious pleasure-seekers and their duplicitous ruler” by Protector Shraplen, Magestrix Emma sent the following stiff rebuke:

Sir:

I understand you take some issue with our recent decision to recognize the Fronc Reaches. I further understand that you lay the blame for not crushing this “rebellion” at our feet. If you will be so kind as to point out to me precisely which MAF units I should draw away from their pressing duties to safeguard the Magistracy against Marian raiders and pirate bands, or which MAF and TDF units we both might feasibly relieve of their treaty obligations to our Capellan allies, I will



be happy to revisit this question with your military advisors. Until then, I suggest you accept reality as best you may.
Emma Centrella, Magestrix

Relations between the two Periphery powers cooled considerably after this exchange, though both sides kept scrupulously to the letter of their commitments under the Treaty of Taurus. The loss of the NCR made liberalized trade between the two realms even more important, and Grover Shraplen at least had problems enough without further alienating the neighbors. For her part, the Magestrix kept whatever worries she had about the Taurian realm’s stability to herself, managing an exquisite balancing act between closeness and distance as the interests of her realm demanded.

As to the failure of her scheme to balance House Liao with the Concordat, the Magestrix adapted. Capellan aid had transformed the Magistracy military into the Periphery’s largest armed force, while the hard-fought campaigns in Capellan space had taught their survivors valuable lessons in warfare. These men and women brought their expertise back with them, and before long the MAF ranked among the best-trained armies outside the five Great Houses. With this kind of firepower, the Magistracy could easily fight off pirates and bandits—and Marian Hegemony forces, which struck at fewer Canopian worlds as the 3060s advanced. The O’Reilly family preferred softer targets. For these and other benefits, Emma Centrella was prepared to pay quite a price.

The one apparent blight on Canopian-Capellan relations came



in 3064, when the Taurian Concordat was elevated to provisional membership in the Star League Council. Many Canopians felt slighted that Sun-Tzu Liao had not pushed to admit the Magistracy first, especially in light of his debt to their realm.

A deeper look, however, reveals a certain calculation behind Emma Centrella's subsequent "protest" pullout of MAF forces from Capellan space. The gesture, intended to remind Chancellor Liao of just how much he had come to rely on Magistracy aid for his expansionist aims, succeeded in temporarily curbing them. The absence of MAF units slowed Capellan military operations throughout 3065 and delayed the re-absorption of the Tikonov region until early 3067—almost a year after the recalled Magistracy troops returned to Capellan service. Not until the end of March would Sun-Tzu Liao gain enough control to formally proclaim Tikonov a Capellan protectorate, thereby completing his long-cherished scheme to re-establish the Capellan Confederation's pre-3028 borders.

Her point made, Magestrix Emma permitted her troops to resume fulfilling their Capellan obligations. The Trinity Alliance remains on firm ground, with the Magistracy poised to continue reaping the benefits. The jewel in the crown is expected to come at the Fourth Whitting Conference later this year, with the Magistracy's elevation to membership in the Star League.

QUIET RENAISSANCE— THE OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE

Meanwhile, the Outworlds Alliance has quietly progressed under the able leadership of President Mitchell Avellar. His ambitious Long Road program has already paid enormous economic dividends, which are expanding into the political realm. Increased ties with the Federated Suns through its mining conglomerates, and with the Draconis Combine through Combine-subsidized aerospace production facilities, have raised several Alliance planets to solidly middle-class footing while bringing the Outworlds' historic balancing act between its powerful neighbors into an entirely new arena.

Recent turmoil in both Inner Sphere realms has slowed the boom economy somewhat, particularly the fallout from the FedCom Civil War. Several FedSuns companies on worlds hard hit by the fighting have since found their Outworlds ventures impossible to sustain, or have pulled out of the Periphery to help rebuild their own realm. Those that remain, however, seem genuinely committed to maintaining profitable ties with the Alliance, and President Avellar's economic advisers remain hopeful that the nation can weather the storm.

The Alliance has likewise strengthened its links with other Periphery realms, particularly the Taurian Concordat and the Magistracy of Canopus. Ongoing exchanges of military advisers between the Concordat and the Outworlds led to other opportunities, including jobs for Alliance citizens with Taurian companies on colony worlds. The secession of those colonies from their parent realms has not appreciably slowed the flow of cash from Fronc Reaches worlds to the Alliance economy, and Mitchell Avellar formally recognized the Fronc Reaches in early 3067 (with a muted apology to the Shraplen administration). Non-military technological exchanges, finalized with the Magistracy and the Concordat in 3062, have paid significant dividends over the

past five years—particularly in medicine, which has always been the exception to the Outworlds' general anti-technology bias. Magistracy medical practitioners have found abundant opportunities on Alliance planets, and the Outworlds is beginning to develop an impressive medical industry of its own.

The largest shadow across the Alliance's future is a disturbing increase in pirate raids, especially against its outlying spinward worlds. So far, the expanded and better-trained Alliance military appears capable of handling this new threat, thanks in part to recent technological exchanges with Clan Snow Raven. Known among the Clans for their aerospace expertise, at least some of the Snow Ravens appear to regard the Alliance aerospace force as a worthy project on which to focus their attention. These exchanges so far remain minor, but Mitchell Avellar is reportedly negotiating with Snow Raven representatives for an expansion of mutually helpful ties.

The Avellar government has so far failed to determine which pirate bands are behind the raids—or even to locate their bases of operations. President Avellar is currently in talks with the Concordat and the Magistracy about plans to deal jointly with these mysterious raiders, though the other two realms' military obligations under the Trinity Alliance make large-scale troop loans unlikely. President Avellar has also approached President Trondel of the Fronc Reaches, whose worlds have recently suffered more than their share of bandit raids. These latter negotiations are strictly back-channel in order to avoid offending the Taurian Concordat.

AVE, IMPERATOR— RISE OF THE MARIAN STATE

One major development of recent years is the remarkable transformation of the Marian Hegemony from pirate realm to conquering mini-empire, to something like a respectable nation. Though its leadership dreamed expansionist dreams as far back as the 3040s, the Hegemony underwent its greatest changes within the past decade, and now stands on a near-equal footing with the other three major Periphery powers. It owes this shift to a father and son of diametrically opposed temperament, viewpoint and ruling style: Sean and Julius O'Reilly.

Caesar Sean reigned like a typical autocrat, maintaining tight control through fear and rewards to political sycophants. He also harbored dreams of conquest. His Marian Legions had rolled over the Lothian League in the mid-3050s, a successful campaign that Sean saw as merely the first course in a hoped-for banquet of smaller and weaker Periphery states. The Lothian worlds, however, refused to digest easily. With the ruling Logan family alive and in hiding, Lothian resistance flared and ebbed and flared again. This constant rebellion posed a nagging problem for Caesar Sean, who lacked the military strength to simultaneously pacify the Lothian League, conduct major raids against Canopian planets and invade the next target on his list: the tiny Illyrian Palatinate. If he hoped to achieve all three of these goals—especially the absorption of the Palatinate—he would need an ally.

He got one in 3058, when the Word of Blake sent an official delegation to Alphard. The Blakists made an offer the tyrant Caesar found hard to resist; in return for an exclusive contract to manage the Hegemony's



HISTORY OF THE PERIPHERY

HPG system, they would help upgrade the Marian Legions. Though the full truth has yet to be confirmed, evidence from various intelligence sources suggests that the Word of Blake had already given Sean a taste of what they proposed. At least one Blakist faction appears to have provided 'Mechs for the abortive Marian assault on the independent planet of Astrokasz in mid-3057. That gambit ultimately failed, thanks to the Canopian-backed mercenary unit Avanti's Angels—but having seen what Word of Blake 'Mechs could do even on such a small scale, Caesar Sean was eager for more. He accepted the Blakists' offer and launched a crash military expansion program, determined to tighten his grip on the Lothian worlds and take over the Palatinate as quickly as possible.

Conscience of the King

Meanwhile, the Caesar was beginning to discover the limits of repression, at home and elsewhere. The new military hardware barely assuaged grumbling among the Legions, particularly about service on the Lothian worlds—and though the troops remained far from open rebellion, their restlessness gave an opening to the one person who could pose a genuine threat to Sean O'Reilly's regime.

Julius O'Reilly, a studious young man with a sterling service record, had long quietly opposed much of what his father was doing, especially in the Lothian worlds. Increasingly harsh repressive measures there were clearly backfiring, and the young heir-presumptive privately challenged the Caesar about them more than once. Given the O'Reilly family history of violently succeeding to power, Sean could not permit Julius' opposition to stand. The worsening Lothian situation offered the perfect opportunity to rid himself of the rebellious League and his potentially rebellious son. He transferred Julius from the First to the Second Marian Legion and sent him to the Lothian planets, assuming that either he would pacify the rebels (and shed his idealistic notions of ruling through anything but fear), or get killed in the process.

Julius arrived on the League world of Lordinax in June of 3060 and spent the next several months hunting down the Lothian resistance, all the while quietly building a power base amid the demoralized troops. When Julius finally captured the leader of the Lothian rebels, he bargained with her instead of executing her—an unexpected move that paid swift dividends. Aware more than ever that his father's regime must end, Julius promised the League a voice in the Marian government and took on Elena Logan as a personal advisor. In exchange for this and the end of harsh reprisals against the Lothian people, the rebels ceased their attacks against Marian targets. By year's end, Julius was ready to make his next move—a military campaign that would permit him to return home a conquering hero and buy him the public support necessary to claim the Marian throne.

He found his target in the Illyrian Palatinate, a tiny four-world realm primarily important as a trading hub. Local planetary militias and the few mercenary units that the Palatinate government could afford proved no match for Julius' much larger task force. The Palatinate fell to the Marian Legions within six months. Julius and his troops then

left for home, arriving on Alphard in mid-3063. With fiercely loyal backing from the Second and Fourth Legions, and little resistance from Caesar Sean's supporters, Julius took over the capital city of Nova Roma and publicly claimed the title of Caesar. The cheering crowds hardly needed to hear the litany of Sean O'Reilly's misdeeds, from the Lothian atrocities to the embezzlement of treasury funds. They had grown to detest their autocratic leader, and eagerly welcomed any promised change for the better. Even Sean's military support had dwindled; less than half of the First Legion obeyed his furious order to "put down this puppy's insufferable rebellion!" Those who did obey were swiftly cut down by the Second Legion. Sean himself died at the point of Julius' sword.

The Hegemony has since slowed its military expansion, taking time to digest the Palatinate and finish integrating the Lothian worlds into the Hegemony government. An abortive attempt to take over the rival Circinus Federation in 3066 went badly, and Caesar Julius recognized that his military was over-extended. He has reversed many of his father's policies, including the exclusive contract with the Word of Blake for realm-wide HPG maintenance. The Word of Blake remains a presence in the Marian nation, however, and its 'Mechs remain prevalent in the Hegemony military.

DAYS TO COME

As 3067 draws to its close, the major Periphery realms look set to both fulfill and transcend their history. The darers and dreamers who set out for the edges of known space centuries ago have more than achieved their wildest expectations, through the remarkably stable and prospering nations created by their descendants. These gains have not come without cost, and frequently the people of the Periphery have torn survival from the teeth of a hostile universe. Yet, left to themselves throughout the Succession Wars and after, these scrappy little realms often turned adversity to advantage, and have finally begun to achieve what some Inner Sphere nations can still only dream of: broad-based prosperity coupled with an ironclad commitment to individual freedom. Though pirate raids still threaten Periphery planets, internal struggles still bedevil governments, and the pace of technological change still lags behind the need for it, the Periphery as a whole more greatly resembles "civilization" than its earliest denizens could have imagined.

To some, this new reality represents a subtle betrayal of an idealized past where life could be brutal and short, but also had an intensity lost to the present "soft" generation. To most, however, life in the Near Periphery combines the best of civilization with the brightest of the old ideals. With the Magistracy of Canopus set to freely join the Star League, the Taurian Concordat reasonably confident of regaining its lost Pleiades worlds at the bargaining table instead of the battlefield, and the Outworlds Alliance evolving into a major political player, the Periphery faces a bright future—much to the amazement of its Inner Sphere neighbors, who may finally have to shed their prejudices and acknowledge the Periphery as an equal.

MAJOR PERIPHERY STATES



An Errant surveys the Periphery settlement he was hired to protect.

Magistracy of Canopus



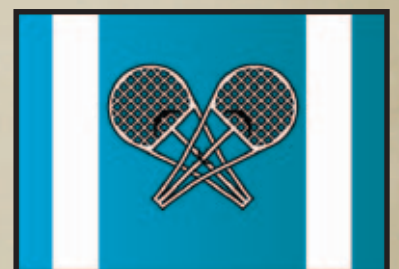
Magistracy of
Canopus crest

A day at Crimson's freewheeling
Midsummer Festival, Canopus IV.

Canopus IV Flag
















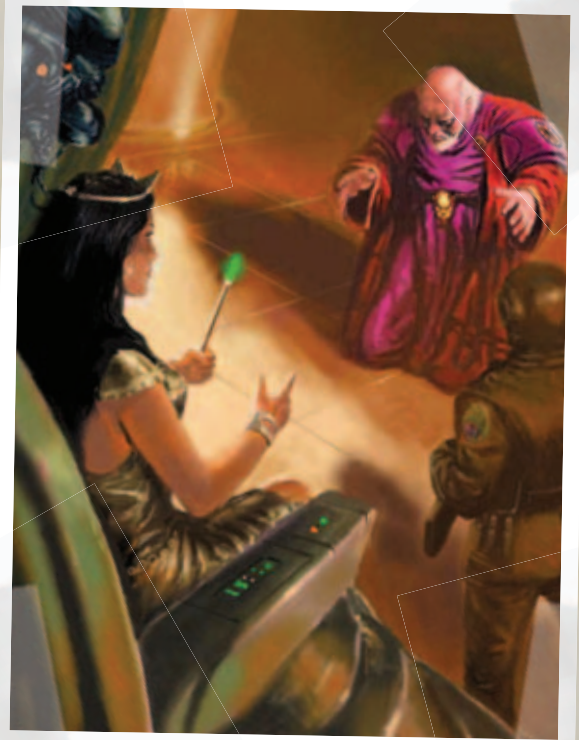
Thraxa Flag



MAJOR PERIPHERY STATES

Magistracy of Canopus Military Ranks

(Enlisted)		(Officers)	
			
Volunteer	Star Corporal	Ensign	Colonel
			
First Ranker	Command Sergeant	Commander	General
			
Lance Corporal	Banner Sergeant	Major	Senior General
			
		Force Major	



A noble petitioner appeals to Magestrix Emma Centrella

MAF Awards



Canopus Cluster



Fist of Raventhir



Ribbon of the Magestrix

Magistracy of Canopus Industries



Alliance Aerospace Group



Bio-Edge, Inc.



Precision Instruments of Luxen, Ltd.



Majesty Metals & Manufacturing



Mindstar Enterprises



Detroit Consolidated MechWorks

MAJOR PERIPHERY STATES

Taurian Military Ranks

(Enlisted)

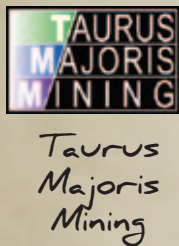
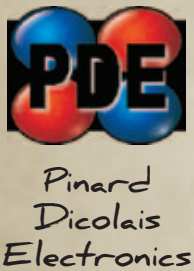
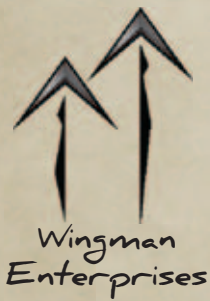


(Officers)



On patrol in the Hyades Cluster, Taurian Concordat.

Taurian Concordat Industries



Taurian Awards



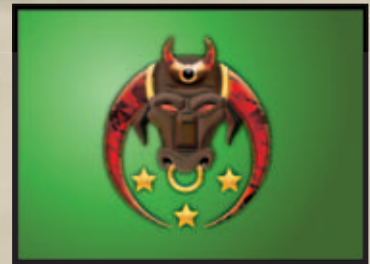
MAJOR PERIPHERY STATES

Taurian Concordat



Taurian Concordat crest

Tense days in the Taurian capital as fear of FedSuns invasion takes its toll.



Taurus Flag



New Vandenburg Flag



Erod's Escape Flag

MAJOR PERIPHERY STATES

Outworlds Alliance



Battling pirates in the Outworlds Alliance.



Outworlds Alliance crest



Alpheratz Flag



Brasha Flag

Alliance
Military
Ranks
(Officers) (Enlisted)



Defender



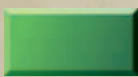
Protector



Guardian



Preceptor



Supervisor



Director



Section Leader



Chairman

Alliance Industries



Alliance Defenders



Lushan Industries



United Outworlders Corporation



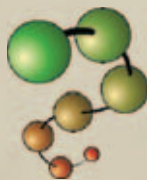
Alliance Industries Diversified



Arentlir Electronics



Praxton Fusion Products



New Worlds Media Products



Mountain Wolf BattleMechs

Alliance Military Awards



Gallucci Cross



Pitcairn Star

MAJOR PERIPHERY STATES

Marian Hegemony



Marian Hegemony crest



Guard duty for the Caesar, Marian Hegemony.



Alphard Flag



Lothario Flag

Marian Industries



Marian Arms

Alphard Trading Corporation



TechWizards

Marian Hegemony Military Ranks

(Enlisted)



Miles Probatus



Miles Gregarius

(Officers)



Legionaire



Principes



Centurion



Legatus



General



Caesar

Marian Hegemony Awards



Corona Gramina



Corona Civica



Corona Aurea

MAJOR PERIPHERY STATES

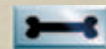
Circinus Federation

Gladiators duel to the death in a Circinian arena.



Circinus Ranks

(Enlisted)



Private



Corporal



Sergeant

(Officers)



MechWarrior



Lieutenant



Captain



Major



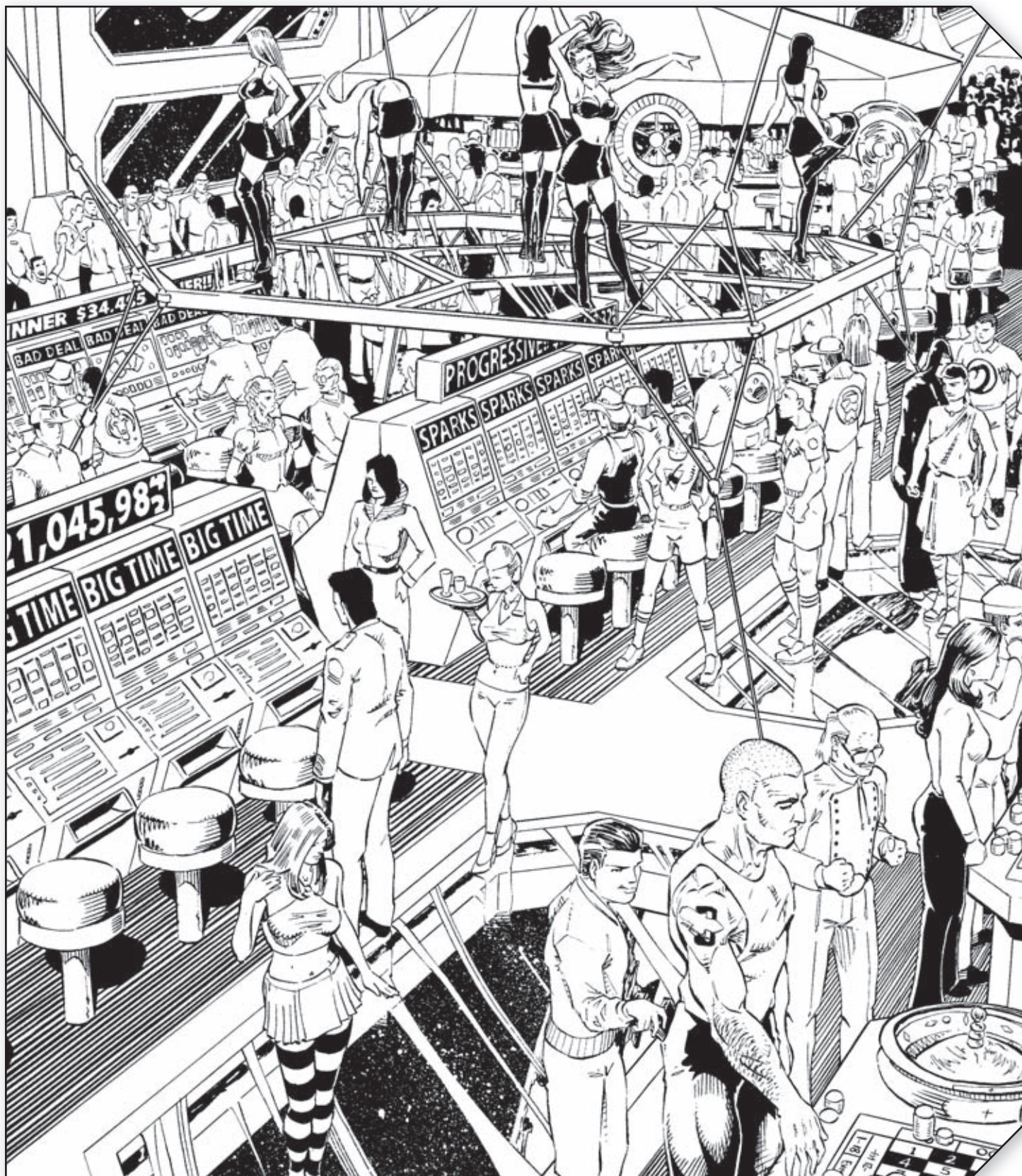
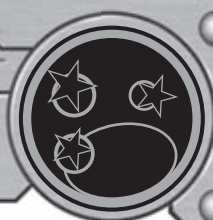
Colonel

Rim Collection

Citizens of the Rim Collection watch the final Presidential debate one month before Election Day, 3061.



MAGISTRACY OF CANOPUS



—From the soon-to-be published memoir of Emma Centrella, official release date 12 December, 3067. [Ed. Note: *The Magestrix was kind enough to let me view her galley copy of the memoir during my sojourn on Canopus. She graciously arranged with her publisher, Sophia Press, to permit advance publication in this volume of the following manuscript portion. I remain deeply indebted to the Magestrix and to Carlyn Llewellyn, CEO of Sophia Press, for their support.*]

CHAPTER 20: THE FRONC REACHES REBELLION

I suppose we should have seen the writing on the wall back in 3060, at that damned summit on Detroit. How many times in human history has one group of people or another claimed freedom from those it considers overlords? We should have known the New Colony rebellion wouldn't die with Sherman Maltin. Desires for liberty never do.

The thing is, we're not used to being seen as oppressors. If anything, we bent over backwards to make sure our colonists could run their own lives. Of course we arranged things to safeguard our investment—we'd have been fools not to!—but I thought Jeff Calderon and I had honestly done our best by the New Colony Region back when we first set things up.

I guess that was our blind spot.

I wish I could blame Grover Shraplen for the Fronc Reaches Rebellion. It's no secret he blames me. I had a pretty good mad on at him for quite awhile about that. Amazing in this day and age, how some men still don't think a woman can be trusted to run anything! But there's no percentage in staying angry at the leader of a realm you've signed a treaty with... not so long as the treaty still benefits you. Poor Shraplen, he's a bench-warmer of a Protector, and deep down he knows it. Nothing else explains that Pleiades stunt he pulled this past January. When in doubt, declare a war! We should feel grateful he decided not to pick on an enemy his own size.

The Fronc Reaches Rebellion started in late 3065, though the pattern was set about five years earlier. It blew up over the same damned thing they always blow up over: taxes, the allocation thereof. Shraplen likes to blame Davion agitators, and I'm not saying they couldn't have stirred the pot—but the fact remains that we created a pot to be stirred. Perhaps it was unavoidable. Nobody likes taxes, but everyone has to pay them. And when you live on a colony world, your planet's resources belong first and foremost to your home government, which put up the money and materials and transport for you to live there in the first place. A just home government tries to divide the spoils fairly, and I thought we had. A majority of the colonists clearly felt otherwise.

Maltin's successor as NCR President, a lanky gent with the blunt manner of the mining foreman he used to be, went by the name of Carver Trondel and hailed from the Canopian world of Cate's Hold. The Taurian government kicked a bit at the idea of one of us taking the NCR's helm—they'd have preferred another Taurian, like Maltin—but it was the Magistracy's turn to hold the rotating presidency, and my people were in no mood to play games with the Treaty of Taurus. That Trondel

also won office handily over a field of six Canopian-born candidates put the final lid on Taurian objections; nearly half the folks who voted for him were Taurian, and Shraplen recognized the hypocrisy in rejecting the free choice of so many Taurian citizens. The objections were quietly dropped, Trondel was sworn in, and Shraplen contented himself with keeping TDF troops on Taurian- and jointly-held colony worlds. He'd originally sent them to hunt for Davions; now he wanted them in place should Trondel cause any trouble.

The first year went all right, with the colonists getting back to their business and Trondel's administration making no waves. When we reached the end of 3062 without any major hitches, I let myself relax. Secessionist fever seemed to have subsided, the Colonial Marshals were nearly back up to full strength, and everyone seemed interested in going along to get along. Unfortunately, events weren't destined to play out so smoothly.

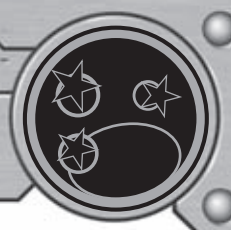
"I REGRET THAT I MUST DECLARE MARTIAL LAW"

Shraplen had dispatched TDF troops to the NCR by late 3061, over my strenuous (though private) objections. He was convinced there were Davion agitators under every barn roof and mining tunnel, and was determined to root them out—to protect good Taurian citizens, he said. Never mind that the agitators he sought would most likely have buried themselves amid those same Taurian citizens... and how is a TDF trooper assigned to root out "enemy agents" from among his fellow Taurians supposed to tell the difference? Especially since law-abiding Taurians are legendary for their willingness to talk back to power when they feel their rights are being ignored. Assume that every outspoken colonist is a closet Davion agent, and you're going to end up jailing a lot of angry innocents. Assume the opposite, that anyone too cooperative must be a Davion in hiding, and you risk radicalizing all sorts of ordinary people who were perfectly content to mind their own business until you got in the way. The damage that could be done wasn't worth the goal being pursued, and I told Shraplen so. He declined to agree.

The Taurian colonists were willing to go along with martial law at first; they'd just lost a popular Protector back home, everything felt unsettled, and they were willing to put up with a lot in the name of security. The TDFers, for their part, handled the situation reasonably well for the first several months. They did their best not to step too hard on anyone's toes, and were generally courteous and professional when they had to take people in for questioning.

After half a year or so of this, however, they'd found no leads, and that started to bother them. It bothered their boss as well. Shraplen began sending communiqués to the troops in the NCR, demanding results. The one scenario he refused to consider was that there were no Davion agitators to find—either they'd never been there, or they'd long since eluded his grasp. Neither idea appealed to him. He'd never been rational about the Davions, but now it seemed paranoia was taking hold. The Taurian colonists, unfortunately, paid the price.

The troops got less respectful, starting with rougher questioning at local police stations and ending up with some outright abuses of Taurian law. Rank-and-file soldiers tended to take their tone from their COs; the ones who still weren't sure about the "Davion agitators" theory



tried to put some brakes on, while the ones who bought it started seeing Davions in everyone who looked crosswise at them. More of the troopers were skeptical than not, and a lot of them clearly hated what they were being asked to do—but the anti-Davion diehards poisoned the atmosphere far beyond their numbers, and soon emotions were running high among soldier and civilian alike.

Before long, those paying the price included Canopian colonists on jointly held worlds. TDF troops weren't permitted to operate in Canopian enclaves, of course—a policy I insisted on—but there'd been free and open movement between Canopian and Taurian populations from the start, and most of the colonists had long since gotten over any mutual mistrust of "those foreigners." So when Canopian residents of planets like Rockwellawan saw their Taurian business partners, customers and often friends getting rough treatment from some TDF soldiers, they made noise about it. Town mayors publicly denounced it, local newspapers ran angry editorials, and common citizens protested in any way they could. The town of Peshtigo, just across the Silverlode River from its Taurian sister town of Port Jeffrey, even sent a delegation to the local company commander of the Red Chasseurs' Second Battalion, who'd built themselves a base from which to reach every Taurian settlement in the region. The base included a prison, from which it was said no one got out except by special transport back to Taurus, to stand trial in secret tribunals reserved for "unlawful enemy combatants." The deputy mayor of Peshtigo, Laurens Ranier, came to personally vouch for the innocence of two business partners who'd been tossed into cells as suspected spies for the Davions, and to beg Subaltern Geoffrey Millar to shut the place down. "There's no one here but hardworking folks," he's supposed to have said. "But if you keep this up, that won't be true for much longer."

The TDF commander took that as a threat, and promptly tossed Mayor Ranier into a cell between his friends. The rest of the delegation was invited to leave and keep their mouths shut or face the same fate. Being Canopians, they left—and promptly sent word to Canopian authorities back across the NCR border. My government lodged a strident protest, and the mayor and his colleagues were released by the end of the following day. That incident and others—including one in which a panicked Taurian trooper fired into a peaceful crowd of mixed Taurians and Canopians at a solidarity rally for accused "agitators" on Detroit—prompted me to seriously rethink my own policy of keeping Magistracy troops out of the NCR.

The TDF and the Marshals

The Colonial Marshals became a particular target of the increasingly nervous TDF—not the newer recruits, who were largely Taurians already vetted for loyalty to their home government, but the "old guard" of Canopians and those Taurians who hadn't joined Maltin's revolt. Still recovering from the split in their ranks, forced to cope with green newcomers who saw themselves as sent to clean house, and struggling to do their jobs despite drastic cuts in training and supplies from the Concordat government, the older Colonial Marshals reacted badly to hassling from TDF troops. Incidents and near-incidents flared up all across the NCR, with the worst of them on Detroit. The TDF apparently

assumed that any Davion agents lurking among the Marshals would try to stir up the most trouble on that world, the site of the Detroit Consolidated MechWorks. On 22 January 3063, a mini-riot broke out between a TDF company engaged in house-to-house searches for "Davion spies" and Colonial Marshals called to the scene by a panicked neighbor. The resulting firefight claimed three TDF soldiers and five Marshals, plus the Taurian civilian who'd made the emergency call. (His family was subsequently tossed in a local holding cell, presumably tagged as "pro-Davion" for trying to help out the luckless folks next door, until a cooler head at higher rank in the TDF overruled the company commander who'd started the ruckus.

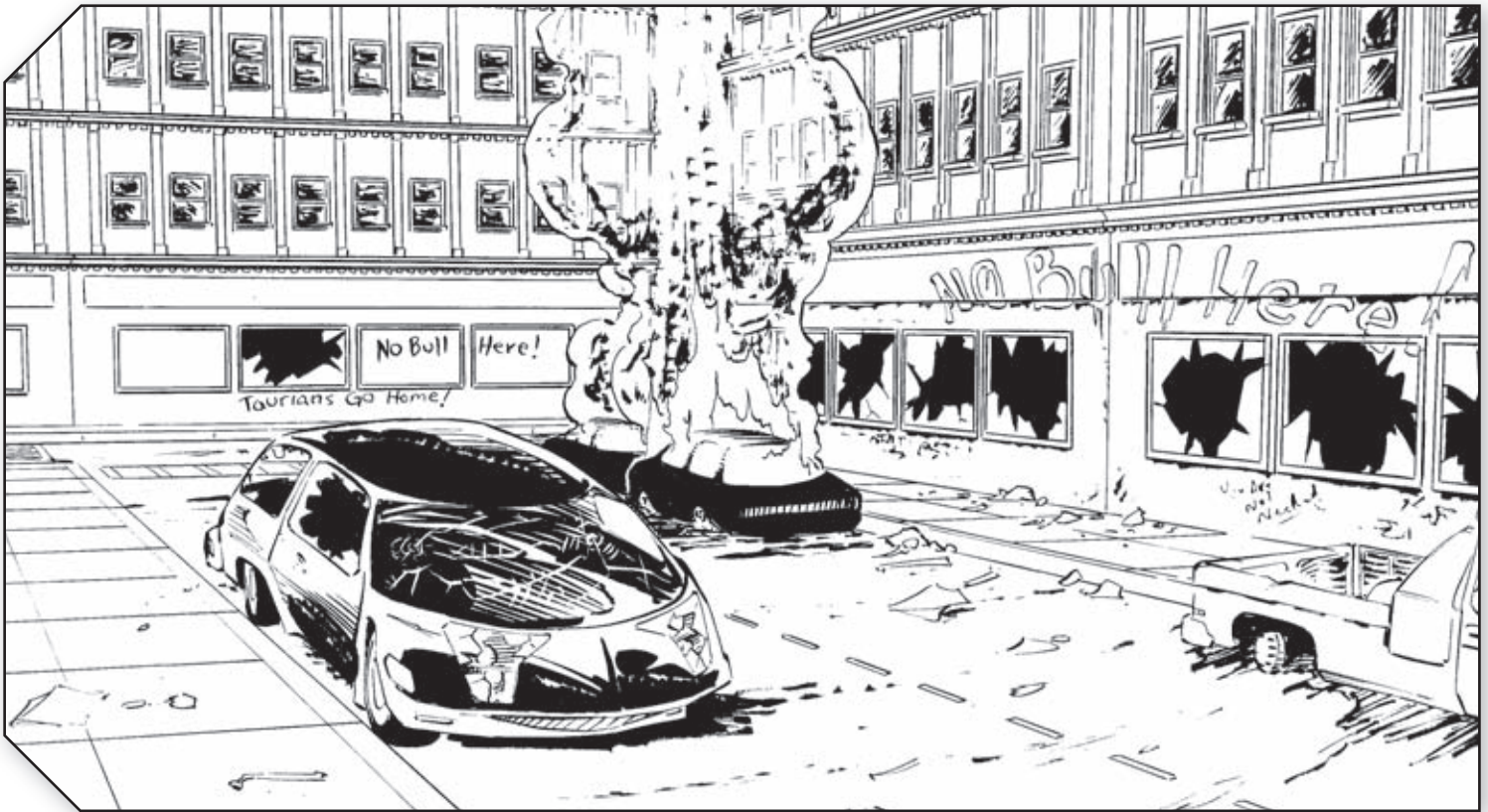
That tore it, as far as I was concerned. The company commander was recalled and cashiered, but that guaranteed nothing. Total withdrawal of Shraplen's Davion-hunters and compensation paid to the families of the dead Marshals would've been more like it, especially as two of the dead were Magistracy citizens on loan from a nearby Canopian enclave to help train Taurian cadets.

We got the compensation, but not the withdrawal. So I sent the Magistracy Highlanders to garrison Detroit. To save some face for Grover Shraplen, I emphasized the unit's mission to safeguard the planet from pirates—many of whom would've happily taken advantage of the situation to raid the MechWorks dry. In truth, I felt I had to protect the people of Detroit—Taurian as well as Canopian—from the consequences of Shraplen's disastrous choices. His government clearly couldn't keep the peace on Detroit, nor would his soldiers allow the Marshals to do so. Somebody had to—not only for the 'Mechs, but for the colonists as well. Otherwise, any number of thoroughly bad people might have walked in and waltzed off with whatever they pleased—and wouldn't that have been a fine waste of our hard-won investment?

BAD TO WORSE: 3063-3064

Of course, I got pilloried in the Concordat press for that move. Shraplen's administration wasn't too happy about it, either—but the Protector had signed the Trinity Alliance with House Liao less than a year earlier, and he didn't want to risk offending our mutual ally by publicly calling me a damned liar and a greedy you-know-what. He was also far more worried about the Davions than anything else, and maybe he figured Sun-Tzu would "persuade" me to remove the Highlanders before long. Plus, he had domestic problems to contend with. Not long after the Highlanders landed on Detroit, it came to my attention that Jeffrey Calderon had a son—and that son had a powerful backer who was no friend of Shraplen's. Within days of my learning this, the story broke in the Concordat media: Baron Cham Kithrong, Marshal of the TDF's Sixth Corps, was calling for Shraplen to step down in favor of a regency for seven-year-old Erik Martens-Calderon.

My own people generally approved the garrisoning of Detroit, and some even called for the Colonial Marshals to be replaced by MAF troops on Canopian-held worlds. These were largely the same people who'd kicked up a minor fuss about the Marshals back in 3057, when Jeff and I were still working out the bugs. "A potential rogue army in our midst" was one colorful phrase I recall from a particularly memorable petition against forming any type of colonial militia. I'd dismissed



such arguments then, and I did so now. So far as I knew (from various reliable sources), the Colonial Marshals were struggling to do a tough job under difficult circumstances. Putting the MAF into the mix would only exacerbate tensions and give Shraplen an excuse to keep his own soldiers there indefinitely.

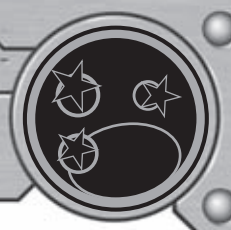
As 3063 became 3064, tensions between the TDF and the colonists—and between the TDF and the old-guard Marshals—started spilling over into incidents between Canopian and Taurian populations. When a TDF trooper on Rockwellawan roughed up an off-duty Canopian Marshal trying to break up a tavern fight, a few drunken Canopian locals drove to the nearest Taurian enclave and took revenge. Their mayhem amounted to broken windows and some snotty anti-Taurian slogans, but they'd started something that soon threatened to spiral out of control. Some young Taurian hotheads retaliated in kind, and before long the various towns along the Silverlode River were treating each other like enemy camps. Hate crimes took place on both sides, though fortunately no one was killed. Between would-be rioters, ham-fisted TDF troops, nationalistic bigotry and the ever-growing numbers of tax protesters on almost every NCR planet, the place was becoming a cauldron ready to boil over.

Around this time, Carver Trondel reached a decision. He approached me—and Shraplen—with a novel solution to the growing unrest: a trial period of independence for the NCR. During that time, the colonies would engage in free trade with the Magistracy and the Concordat, giving us both “most favored nation” status in recognition of our contribution to the colonies’ existence. (His proto-nation could

hardly afford to do anything else, dependent as it was on re-supply from its parent realms.) We'd get a huge potential problem off our backs, along with something close to the revenue stream we'd been getting from taxation. The independent NCR would get an end to martial law on its Taurian-held planets, complete freedom to manage its own affairs, and a larger share of its own resources. Trondel was also betting that nationalist tensions would die down, as people threw their energies into building a free state rather than squabbling with each other.

Shraplen wanted nothing to do with it. Trondel at that point morphed into yet another secret Davion stooge, trying out the latest diabolical plot to weaken the Concordat. I, on the other hand, was intrigued. I could see the entire NCR sliding off the cliff unless someone did something drastic—and I'd shot my quiver of drastic actions by deploying the Highlanders to Detroit. I couldn't see open war to keep the colonies in the fold, and they clearly weren't going to just settle down. Trial independence, granted in good faith, might be just the carrot to tempt them not to leave after all. And it wouldn't hurt for them to shoulder first-hand the burdens of the total freedom they sought.

I let Trondel know I was interested in talking, and my delegates single-handedly kept negotiations going for more than a year. But without the Concordat government at the table, it was a useless exercise. By the end of 3065, Carver Trondel had had enough. He sent me a note of apology, formally broke off talks, and left us awaiting his next move.



BIRTH OF THE FRONC REACHES

Official notice of the NCR's independence reached Canopus IV on 9 April, 3066. Trondel had sent emissaries announcing his new realm—the Fronc Reaches—to the Magistracy, the Concordat, the FRR, ComStar and every Inner Sphere state. ComStar and Rasalhague swiftly recognized the Reaches, which compelled me to do the same. I would have anyway, if only because it was the best way out of an impossible situation. It went against my grain to even contemplate military action against my own people, or the citizens of any legitimate Periphery realm—and the MAF was under enough pressure, with three regiments stationed in Liao space and the rest busy fighting the usual roster of bandits. And, thanks to the Magistracy Highlanders, we already had the most important colonial investment. So long as the Detroit MechWorks kept supplying the MAF with Capellan-tech 'Mechs, I couldn't grudge the citizens of the Reaches their liberty. Besides, playing nice kept the door open for future trade relations.

I made the Magistracy's recognition public, then waited for the storm to break. Domestically, there wasn't too much; most people had hoped we wouldn't need to send in the troops. I did hear some grumbling about "colonial ingrates," along with considerable speculation that it was all the Taurian colonists' fault—"Never happy, those Taurians, unless they're making trouble somewhere!"—but public opinion about the Fronc Reaches generally ranged from "Fine, let 'em go it alone and see how they like it," to active support for a young democracy peopled by Canopian pioneers. (Canopian citizens who felt possessive of the new nation tended to gloss over its sizable Taurian population.)

The one other piece of fallout from the formation of the Fronc Reaches was a minor flood of anti-independence refugees back across the Magistracy border. Not all of the colonists were happy about achieving liberty from their parent realms. Some—most vocally, those from jointly held worlds like Rockwellawan with a history of being disputed between the Magistracy and the Concordat—were all for sending in the MAF to annex the Reaches. Not that we could afford to do any such thing—and why bother, when there's trade to be had with a neighbor that has to buy damned near everything from Canopian merchants? My government recompensed the displaced former colonists for their losses, and President Trondel had been generous in permitting them to take various assets off-world. What little agitation there was died down within months.

I wish the Reaches well, though I regret the circumstances that impelled its existence. We should have foreseen the problems and acted to correct them before they got out of hand. Still, I can't truly say the Magistracy lost much out of the deal. With that in mind, Godspeed the folk of the Reaches—and we Canopians are proud to welcome them as neighbors and friends.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

—Excerpt from Professor Mara Delgado's annual political science lecture, given to the freshman class at the University of Canopus, 10 September 3065

Unique among interstellar nations, the Magistracy of Canopus is a matriarchy, with supreme power vested in the woman who holds the title of Magestrix. Though this position is theoretically open to any woman who can cobble together a two-thirds majority of the Canopian Central Committee, in practice the Magestrix has always been a member of the founding Centrella family.

That exception aside, things have loosened up a bit since the Founding Days, when all political offices were reserved for women—a reflection of the early Centrellas' personal bias against the male-dominated systems of the Inner Sphere. Floral Centrella, granddaughter of the first Magestrix, recognized that limiting the aspirations of nearly half the Magistracy's citizens simply because of their gender was a huge waste of human potential—so she gradually eased restrictions on public office-holding for men, permitting them to run for local offices first and then to serve at the planetary level. As men proved capable of handling these responsibilities without trying to run the whole show, Magestrix Crystalla Centrella continued Floral's reforms, permitting men to hold lower-level public positions in the national government starting in 2570. [Ed. Note: Sources listing Coranna Centrella as reigning from 2550-2582 are incorrect; Crystalla Centrella took office in 2569.] By the time of the Reunification War and the subsequent Star League occupation, male citizens of the Magistracy could legally serve as justices of the Provincial Courts, and were appointed just as often as women to lower-level administrative positions at all levels of government.

It took the occupation and the military governorship of Dame Melissa Humphreys to win for men the last few rights that made them women's political equals: the right of election to the Central Committee, the right to serve on higher courts and the right to vote in national elections. (Floral and Crystalla Centrella had already permitted male suffrage in local contests.) Ever since, Canopian men and women have stood as equals before the law in all respects. The habit of putting women in power, however, still prompts many Canopians to see a woman as "the best man for the job" when it comes to overseeing the welfare of others.

Tending to the general welfare is the primary duty of government in the Magistracy. Yes, that includes providing for a strong national defense; but government's obligation to ensure the well-being of all citizens goes far beyond financing a standing army. The government is

the servant of the people in every respect, and the people themselves determine the direction their government takes. Democracy is alive and well in the Magistracy of Canopus, with every branch of the national government—including the executive, in the person of the Magestrix—being ultimately subject to the electoral process.

[Student interjects]: But we don't elect the Magestrix. We never have.

Not directly, no. But any prospective Magestrix must earn the support of a two-thirds Central Committee majority... and Committee members *are* elected, one from each world by planetary popular franchise. So even over our highest public office, we the people have indirect voting control. That the Centrella family has had a lock on the job for more than five hundred years stems from their ability and our habit, not from law.

The Magistracy's return to independence in the late 28th century brought little change in the structure of government—mainly, the Magestrix reclaimed certain powers and privileges stripped from the office after the Reunification War, but otherwise left Governor Humphreys' political reforms intact. Crystalla Centrella worked with Governor Humphreys after the end of the war, and her successors during the Occupation era built on those changes that proved beneficial to Canopian society. We can count ourselves lucky that Dame Melissa genuinely believed in the Star League's ideals, unlike so many Inner Sphere nobles before or since. She truly wanted us to thrive as equals under the overall authority of the Camerons, and our nation owes much of its later successes to the legacy she and Magestrix Crystalla created.

Now I'll move on to brief descriptions of our various branches of government. Those of you who think you already know this—there are always a few—take notes anyway. You might learn a few things you didn't expect.

MAGESTRIX

The Magestrix serves as supreme head of the Canopian state and commander-in-chief of our armed forces. This office evolved in the mid-2540s, within a generation of the realm's founding. Beginning with the tenure of Floral Centrella, a revamped Canopian Constitution provided for a greatly strengthened central government headed by the Magestrix. Holding a lifetime office, the Magestrix is responsible for the welfare of all Magistracy citizens. Specific powers that enable her to carry out this duty include near-total control over taxation, the appointment of civilian officials and military officers, and the formation of domestic and international policy. The Magestrix also originally retained the sole right to grant patents of nobility, but this power subsequently shifted to the Crimson Council.

During the Occupation era, Governor Humphreys assumed many of these sweeping powers. After the official granting of Territorial State status in 2604, those powers went to the Star League Council on Terra. The Magestrix's job was to maintain civil order and promote Star League policies within the Magistracy—though as Council delegates and through informal diplomacy, the various Magestrixes

of the Occupation era strove to ensure that “Star League policy” genuinely served Canopians' best interests. Following the collapse of the Star League and our return to genuine independence, the Magestrix reassumed her pre-Occupation responsibilities, aided in the performance of these daunting tasks by a holdover of Star League-era government that had done the Magistracy enormous good: a Central Committee of legislative peers.

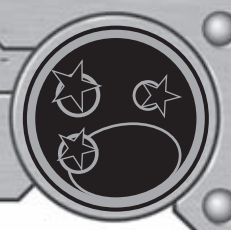
Currently, the powers of the Magestrix include a legislative veto as well as policy formation, command of the military, and civil and military appointment power. Unlike similar positions in the Inner Sphere, and even in some of our Periphery neighbors, the Magestrix does not have the right to appoint her own successor. At most, she can make her personal preference known and take steps to ensure that her prospective heir has the skills and temperament to win the office. Ultimately, however, the Central Committee and the Canopian Electors choose the next Magestrix. Upon the death of an incumbent, the Electors nominate a new Magestrix and forward their choice to the Committee. A two-thirds voting majority is required for any would-be Magestrix to legally assume power; if no such majority is forthcoming, the Committee tells the Electors to appoint another Magestrix, until both bodies finally agree on an acceptable candidate.

[Student interjects]: What about Magestrix Emma? Didn't she basically just take over, declaring her mother unfit to rule?

You've seen the holofilm *Tigress*. [Laughter] Initially, yes—and the Constitution provides for emergency situations like the one we faced in the 3040s, with an unstable Magestrix threatening the security of the nation. Emma Centrella subsequently submitted her self-appointment to the Electors and the Committee, who ratified her assumption of office according to law. Good question, though. Alert and informed citizens remain the best guarantee of a stable and prosperous Magistracy, regardless of who our Magestrix may be.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE

The Central Committee consists of representatives from every Canopian world, popularly elected by planetwide franchise. Governor Humphreys originally designed the Committee as a Board of Legislative Review, to do exactly what it sounds like—review legislation proposed by the Magestrix for whether or not it served Star League interests in the Magistracy. During the latter days of the Star League, Magestrix Janina Centrella revised and expanded the BLR to provide legislation for the Magestrix's approval as well. The review process thus went both ways, with the Committee and the Magestrix needing to reach mutual agreement in order for new laws to be passed or new policies carried out. In practice, of course, the Magestrix had a free hand when circumstances dictated—but every holder of that office since Janina's time has known that any “emergency policy” enacted without prior consultation would have to be justified to the Committee in the very near future. Thus far, very few have abused that trust—the last major exception being Magestrix Kyalla Centrella's secret negotiations with Duchess Catherine Humphreys that launched the Andurien-Canopian War in the 3030s. Magestrix Kyalla later claimed that the necessary two-



thirds majority of the Committee had approved her actions in private consultations—which turned out to be true, but which is still no excuse for not having followed the clear meaning of the law.

By 2750, Committee membership had been opened to all Magistracy citizens, with a five-year term of office. Post-Star League, that term was reduced to two years. Because they often pursue different priorities for the realm, the Magestrix and the Committee are frequently at odds... which serves Canopian democracy well by ensuring that neither side can get its way without at least some compromise.

CRIMSON COUNCIL

Created by edict of Magestrix Coranna Centrella in 2557, the Crimson Council serves as an administrative body for the nobility. They neither propose nor review legislation, nor are their rulings binding on citizens outside the noble class. The Magestrix appoints this six-member panel, which rules on the creation of new nobles, assesses noble privileges and responsibilities, and generally keeps Canopian nobles accountable to their fellow citizens. On rare occasions, the Council serves as a judicial review board in cases of misconduct involving members of the nobility. Membership on the Crimson Council is for life, and is considered a great honor; dismissal—at the Magestrix's discretion—is an equivalent disgrace. Council members traditionally wear robes trimmed in red-dyed ermine, a uniform of sorts that earned the Crimson Council its name.

ELECTORS

Canopian Electors have one job: to choose a new Magestrix after the incumbent dies or is incapacitated. (The latter is a reform enacted by Emma Centrella, in the wake of her mother's near-disastrous reign.) Each Canopian planet selects two Electors, chosen by popular vote and serving for life. Special elections are held for these offices whenever vacancies arise. For nearly three hundred years, only aristocrats could aspire to become Electors, until Michaela Centrella—the Reformer Magestrix—threw the post open to all adult Canopian citizens in 2840. Michaela herself was the compromise candidate of competing noble factions, some of whom backed her aunt Davina Centrella, while others—the radicals of their day—backed Michaela's older brother Aron. This tempest in a noble teapot convinced Michaela to further democratize the Canopian succession by including the common folk in the final decision.

Despite its limited function, the post of Elector carries enormous prestige—not least because each officeholder gains considerable potential power to influence succession to the ultimate executive authority. Nor is it unusual for Electors with lucky timing to acquire fortunes overnight, through “gifts” tendered by Magestrix candidates. With all this to look forward to, it's hardly surprising that aspiring Electors spend vast sums of money to secure popular support. The sole exceptions are the few Elector posts that have become hereditary in certain influential families since 2955. Unfortunately, this ever-growing “money chase” undercuts the primary purpose of opening up these positions to all Canopian citizens. In theory, anyone can become an Elector; in practice, the office has increasingly become the preserve of those wealthy enough to bankroll an expensive campaign. And yes,

before you ask, I'm a supporter of campaign finance reform. [Laughter] So take this part of the lecture with what grains of salt you will, and we'll move on.

JUDICIARY

The Canopian judiciary encompasses three branches: the Provincial Courts, the Star Courts and the Courts of Appeal. The Provincial Courts conduct most civil and criminal law at the planetary level, while the Star Courts handle corporate and business law. Any Canopian citizen has the right to sue in Provincial Court if she or he can provide a witness to corroborate the case. In general, the findings of the Provincial Courts are binding, enforced by Magistracy Field Officers—the equivalent of local marshals and deputies.

Individuals wishing to appeal a verdict can petition the Central Committee for the right to present their case to a higher court, at which point the Courts of Appeal come into play. Canopian law maintains a high regard for citizens' rights, but also protects the traditional privileges of the nobility. When different rights are in conflict, Magistracy courts typically favor private citizens over corporations or governments, with the balance between nobility and commoners slightly weighted toward the latter. No Canopian citizen can face trial unless due cause and corroborating testimony have first been presented to a judge of the Provincial Court, and no Canopian accused of a crime by a foreign government or individual can be extradited to a foreign state for trial without express permission from the Magestrix.

CANOPIAN NOBILITY

The Canopian noble class is unique in human-occupied space, the only such institution where noble rank is not hereditary. Even our neighbors in the Taurian Concordat, who follow our practice of awarding nobility based on service to the state, frequently permit that nobility to automatically pass on down the generations. Once bestowed, noble rank lasts forever—except in the Magistracy, where each successive generation must provide some special service in order to retain its position. Over time, of course, the definition of “special service” loosened up quite a bit—not every Canopian noble family can be expected to produce a brilliant heir in each generation, and those who become noble are loath to lose their privileged status. Still, those wishing to retain their family honors—no matter how far back those honors may run—must give at least some token service to the Canopian government or its people. Endowing libraries has become popular in recent decades, running a close second to opening new hospitals and clinics on less well-off Magistracy worlds. The Merlune family of New Abilene earned their noble rank just two years ago with a trademark hot sauce made from Abilene death peppers, which became one of the Magistracy's top three exports to the Capellan Confederation within six months after its market debut. The tax revenues on those sales went straight into the Treasury on Canopus IV, thereby qualifying the Merlunes for a patent of nobility. So as you can see, “special service to the state” can cover a lot of ground.

Among the many privileges of Canopian nobles are the right to hire a proxy to fulfill their military service obligations; the right of noblewomen to choose their own mates, who cannot refuse



under Canopian law; the right to conduct foreign trade outside the Magistracy; and the right to serve in specially appointed government or military positions, including military commands. Magistracy nobles (with a few exceptions) aren't that much beyond well-off commoners in purely economic terms; a financial gap does exist between this uppermost class and those below it, but it's not the chasm typical of most Inner Sphere states. The wealthiest nobles compared to everyone else tend to be those with outside trade franchises, who can make extra money from that noble privilege rather than relying on the grant of nobility itself.

Three major factions make up the Canopian noble class: the Froness, the Durachi and the Girin. The Froness are descended from families who settled the Canopian star systems in the first decade of colonization, and many of these regard themselves as the only true Magistracy nobility. The merchant princes of the Durachi and the "jumped-up commoners" of the Girin are, in the typical Froness view, mere pretenders to high rank, whose achievements can never match those of the nation's founders.

The Durachi are the corporate titans, whose enterprises developed trade with the Periphery and Inner Sphere, thereby enriching the nation and the office of successive Magestrixes. These families are the big-money players, and they often have an outsized influence in who becomes an Elector on the planets where they live. They can also make a difference in campaigns for Central Committee members, though fortunately the levels of money spent on those remain somewhat

within rational bounds. Being a Committeewoman offers somewhat less potential for personal enrichment, and so the sums spent on attaining Committee office aren't quite so fantastic.

The Girin, the last and most recent of the noble factions, are those rare individuals whose personal services to the state—civil or military—warrant special recognition. Scientists who make breakthrough discoveries, entrepreneurs like the Merlunes of New Abilene, talented artists of all stripes, soldiers who acquire themselves with special distinction on the battlefield—these types of people make up the Girin, which is the fastest-growing portion of the noble class. No one "becomes" a Froness, of course, and it takes time for a business entrepreneur to amass the fortune necessary to become a Durachi, but any Canopian citizen with sufficient ability can aspire to Girin rank. The overall percentage of nobles to commoners in the Magistracy remains small, and the regular influx of common people helps keep the noble class from ossifying as is typical of aristocracies throughout human history.

CITIZENSHIP

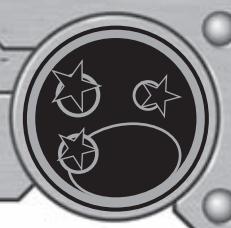
Since our nation's founding, our Constitution has granted citizenship to anyone who comes to the Magistracy seeking political, religious or social freedom. Anyone who can prove herself a victim of such oppression is granted full citizenship, as are her descendants in perpetuity. The inalienable rights of all citizens include the freedom to own land, to bestow their property as they see fit, and to pursue whatever goals or social rank they desire.

In return, all Canopian citizens must contribute toward the common defense. Given that the "common defense" includes tending to the people's general well-being, citizens can fulfill their obligation in a thousand different ways: traditional military service, a stint in the Medical Corps, donating land or materiel or even cash to the war effort in times of crisis. Our ongoing struggle to improve the literacy rate across the Magistracy provides another, fairly popular service area: teaching, especially in adult literacy programs on poorer planets. Government and private-sponsored teaching programs have gotten a huge shot in the arm from Taurian and Capellan funds in the past several years, and the number of citizens who choose to serve the nation in its classrooms is growing at an impressive pace.

Adult Canopian citizens are also required to vote in all elections, though no one is allowed to tell them whom to vote for. You can even vote for nobody, provided you get off your duff and check off the little box next to "None of the above" on the ballot. Most planets have cobbled together some kind of runoff system for those rare times when "None of the above" wins. The point of this requirement is to make sure that everyone's voice is heard—including those so disillusioned with the available candidates for office that they'd rather pick their local garbage collector. If enough of those people cast a ballot that "Nobody" wins, that's a pretty solid signal of something seriously wrong—and an excellent motivation to fix it.

All in all, we live under a pretty decent system—with a few warts, but every system's got those. We'll break for ten minutes; I'll take questions when we come back.

[END LECTURE EXCERPT]



POLITICS IN THE MAGISTRACY

(24 March 3067)

Canopus IV [ISAP] — Unlike the noisy ferment of the Taurian Concordat, the current Canopian political scene is remarkably quiet under the circumstances. The long-standing ban on political parties accounts for part of this unusual calm, but much of it comes down to a single charismatic individual: Emma Centrella, one of the most talented political rulers ever to come down the pike.

Since taking power in a de facto palace coup back in 3040—which she was careful to legally ratify after it had taken place—Emma Centrella has led her nation from strength to strength. She almost single-handedly revitalized the famous Canopian entertainment industry, and then parlayed the increasing wealth gained from it into profitable political alliances with the Magistracy's nearest neighbors: the Taurian Concordat in 3056 and the Capellan Confederation in 3058. Both the Treaty of Taurus and the Capellan-Canopian alliance were bold gambles. Emma worked tirelessly to retain and build on the trust of her citizenry, anticipating opposition and moving swiftly to contain it. Consequently, though opposition did surface (and remains) to both of these landmark agreements, it never amounted to a serious threat. Most Canopian citizens clearly see the economic benefits of their Taurian and Capellan ties, and trust in their Magestrix to ensure that neither alliance becomes a drag on the Magistracy's independence.

Dissenting factions exist, however, and the Magestrix can't exactly rest on her laurels. Beneath the general calm lie rumblings of discontent—usually mild, but capable of spiking abruptly given the right incident.

Ebb Tide: Relations with the Concordat

Ties to the Taurian state, stoutly forged and made stronger during the brief Protectorship of Jeffrey Calderon, have frayed considerably since his death. The rocky personal relationship between the Magestrix and Jeffrey's successor, Grover Shraplen, both contributes to and symbolizes the downward slide in relations between the two realms. Not that anyone here is itching for a fight, or seriously wants to rethink the Treaty of Taurus (yet)—but the Taurian leader's clear distrust of Canopians in general and the Magestrix in particular does not sit well with the average Canopian citizen. Trade and exchanges of civilian technologies between the two realms remain relatively healthy, but cultural exchanges and other such joint ventures have ebbed since their high point in late 3062. Old stereotypes are also beginning to surface, as exemplified by this excerpt from a popular online journal on Canopus IV:

"So we're allies with these people because why? Oh, right—it's time for the Periphery's two leading states to come together in friendship, for the greater good of both our peoples.' So said our Magestrix about ten years ago, when the Treaty of Taurus was signed. Well, ma'am, I'm sure it seemed like a good idea at the time, and we've given it our best shot... but honestly, aren't we all getting tired of being the senior partner in this arrangement? We got colonization off the ground, we brought in Capellan financing for the

Detroit Consolidated MechWorks, we pushed for creating the Colonial Marshals so that pirates couldn't just pick off colony worlds, we provided their training and a big chunk of the recruits—I've even heard rumors that we provided a lot of the Marshals' equipment from the beginning, even though that was supposed to be the Taurians' responsibility. And look where it got us. Our colonies are independent now, thanks to the Taurian Sherman Maltin and a whole bunch of Taurian Marshals back in 3060-61. Then, when we might have put a lid on it by treating the NCR decently, the idiot Taurian government decided to tromp on its own people there in a pointless search for evil Davions in their midst.

"You want my honest opinion? They're stiff-assed, Taurians. Stuffed shirts with way too high an opinion of themselves, just because they're the oldest interstellar nation. They can't adapt fast enough to changing situations, and they turn up their noses at us because we can. They call us untrustworthy, a nation of flip-flopers—but who do you trust more? The guy who can change when necessary and will deal straight with you about why, or the guy who claims to be all about freedom and then gives it away—or takes it—in the name of "security" against a phantom enemy? I know who I'd pick. And I'm damned proud to be a Canopian flip-flopper."

—From *Sing Out Sister*, a widely read current events journal, posted 18 February 3067

Conventional wisdom in the Magistracy says Taurians and Canopians are likely to limp along in harness for the foreseeable future, but the bloom is definitely off the rose. As always in the Periphery, no one can predict what additional blows fate may hold for this historic alliance.

Celestial Wisdom: Relations with the Capellan Confederation

In stark contrast to the Taurian leg of the Trinity Alliance, Canopian-Capellan ties are growing stronger. Initially wary of slow absorption by the Capellan state, most Magistracy citizens are letting go of that fear amid solid evidence that Sun-Tzu Liao prefers a partner to a new province. The Magestrix remains as cagey as ever in her dealings with the Capellans, but appears to have given at least her tacit blessing to the burgeoning relationship between Sun-Tzu Liao and Naomi Centrella, the Magistracy's presumed heir. Whether Emma truly supports the apparent romance between her daughter and the Chancellor, or is counting on the Canopian Electors to pass over Naomi at the last minute should the need arise, remains an open question. Rumors fly both ways, including some truly wild ones that Emma and Naomi between them intend for the *Magistracy* to eventually absorb the *Capellan* realm through the soon-to-be-announced royal wedding and subsequent half-Canopian children.

Militarily, the MAF continues to receive swifter and more frequent Capellan-tech upgrades than the TDF, a reality that threatens to become a major irritant between the two Periphery powers. Senior Commander Hadji Doru, himself a former Taurian citizen, has been pressing the Capellan military liaison to speed up the pace of technology transfers to TDF units, pointing out that the Trinity Alliance is healthiest when

its members don't play favorites. The elevation of the Concordat to the Star League ahead of the Magistracy, which prompted a temporary MAF pullout from Capellan space, is Exhibit A in this effort. Should the Concordat indulge in a similar pullout now, with the Pleiades Campaign as an additional excuse, both Capellan and Magistracy military strength would suffer.

The Fronc Reaches: Detroit and the Magistracy

Emma Centrella's recognition of the Fronc Reaches in 3066 came at a price: the world of Detroit, home of the Detroit Consolidated MechWorks. Emma formally declared Detroit a "Canopian protectorate planet" on 10 April, one day after publicly acknowledging the Reaches' independence. Though grateful for the Magistracy's recognition, the Fronc Reaches government has since discovered that gratitude only goes so far. President Trondel has met several times with Magistracy trade representatives since mid-3066, and each time requested that the Magistracy formally withdraw its troops from Detroit, "in acknowledgement of the Fronc Reaches' sovereignty over one of its most valuable worlds." The Magistracy, predictably, has demurred, but expressed general interest in some unspecified "compromise" to be reached via further negotiation. Watching the President spar with the head Canopian negotiator, Rebekah Bernays, "is like watching a verbal chess match," as one presidential aide put it. "Neither will give an inch, both have hidden agendas, and neither is up front about what they're willing to settle for." Word around the Residence is that Trondel doesn't really want the Magistracy Highlanders gone; he needs them as much as the Magistracy does to protect the vital MechWorks. What he wants is wiggle room, so that he can eventually agree to a "concession" in which the Highlanders stay put while the Magistracy publicly states that the "Canopian protectorate world" of Detroit has been formally relinquished to the Fronc Reaches, but that the troops will remain at the Reaches' request.

The Magestrix seems amenable to such a deal, reportedly in the works and likely to be announced within the next couple of months. One remaining holdup is Protector Grover Shraplen, who has been quietly pushing since the Reaches' formation for "acknowledgement of the Fronc Reaches sovereignty over Detroit." Far from helping the young realm, this ongoing pressure has made the Magestrix stubborn. She believes the Protector is acting out of resentment for what he calls her "high-handed move" to seize the MechWorks and the planet, and she intends to teach him a lesson in manners before the diplomatic process runs its course.

My Enemy, My Ally: The Marian Hegemony and the Circinus Federation

The long history of mutual hostilities between the Magistracy and the newly powerful Marian Hegemony seems to have turned a new corner, though the Magestrix remains wary of Hegemony intent. Julius O'Reilly, who succeeded his ruthless and corrupt father as Caesar in 3063, is by all accounts a genuine reformer who wants to complete his realm's transformation from pirate kingdom to legitimate nation. Unlike Caesar Sean, Julius is willing to engage other powers diplomatically as well as in battle. He agreed to a Magistracy-backed cease-fire in his recent campaign to conquer the Circinus Federation, an action unprecedented

in Hegemony-Magistracy relations to date. Various reports also hint at talks to explore trade links between Canopian and Marian worlds, though no one from either national government will confirm or deny such stories. Planetary authorities on the cited worlds, from Thraxa to Bass on the Magistracy's anti-spinward border, likewise refused to talk. The sole exception was the Duchess of Thraxa, who angrily denied any interest in "swapping anything but laser fire with those damned pirates in togas!" Memories of the 3057-58 Pirates' War run particularly deep on Thraxa, and its citizens view Julius O'Reilly as a wolf in sheep's clothing. That no definitive proof exists of Hegemony involvement in the assassinations and raids of a decade ago has not stopped Thraxa's people from assigning guilt to their long-time enemy.

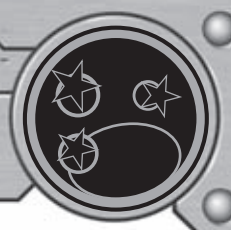
The Magistracy remains officially neutral toward the Circinus Federation, though the Magestrix has gone on record as supporting that nation's continued independence. The Federation still suffers from the stigma of its pirate origins, and the personal quirks of its late leader, President "Little Bob" McIntyre, did nothing to endear it to the Canopian people. The unofficial story says that the Marian invasion of Circinian planets in early 3066 prompted enough concern for the Magestrix to hire little-known mercenary companies "under the table" in response to President McIntyre's panicked request for aid.

The replacement of Little Bob with his son, Calvin McIntyre, has produced little change as far as the Magistracy is concerned, despite rumors that unnamed "Blakist forces" are calling the shots on Circinus. If true, such a reality would likely further complicate the already delicate dance between Emma Centrella and the Word of Blake inside her own realm's borders. As usual, however, proof of Blakist machinations tends to vanish like smoke in the wind.

Internal Affairs: The Word of Blake

Though ComStar runs the bulk of Canopian HPG stations, the central government leaves local decision-making up to planetary authorities, giving the Word of Blake responsibility for whatever HPG contracts it can scrounge. Sources tell me that the Blakists expected an upsurge in contracts following the alliance with House Liao in 3058, but it didn't happen. The straitlaced, self-righteous, often messianic-minded Word of Blake in general is not a good match for this freewheeling, enjoy-the-ride society, and average Canopians still remember that House Liao hasn't always been their friend. They may be willing to trust their Magestrix's ability to handle the Chancellor, but they don't have to give houseroom to the Chancellor's unsettling comrades. Consequently, the Blakists have only picked up HPG service contracts on poorer Magistracy worlds, whose leaders opted for the lowest bidder. Planetary authorities must petition the Magestrix before awarding such contracts—an innovation dating to the first years after the ComStar Schism—but Emma Centrella has so far vetoed very few applications, regardless of which group they favored. By all accounts, the Blakists do an adequate job and keep to themselves.

The only outward sign of Blakist influence at the national level is the regular presence of Precentor Helen Schlegel, officially serving as court liaison overseeing the administration of the Blakists' service contracts in the Canopian realm. Precentor Schlegel keeps a small apartment in Canopus IV's capital city, not far from the royal residence. She is a



frequent visitor at court, but my sources tell me that her movements inside the government complex are sharply restricted. The Magestrix meets with her on occasion, always in the public audience hall. Assuming there's truth to the long-standing stories about a Blakist assassination attempt against Sun-Tzu Liao when he visited Canopus IV back in 3058, these occasional meetings may be Emma Centrella's way of keeping one eye on Blakist doings—the other eye presumably belonging to the Magistracy Intelligence Ministry, whose alleged capabilities are becoming the stuff of Periphery legend.

Newsmaker Profile: Magestrix Emma Centrella

A one-woman powerhouse of charm, intelligence and inner steel, the formidable ruler of the Magistracy shows no signs of slowing down as she nears the end of her sixth decade. In her twenty-seven years on the Canopian throne, she has led her realm from economic stagnation and the near-disaster of the doomed Andurien alliance to a position of significant power and influence. Her diplomatic skills are second to none, and she thrives on the constant tightrope-walk of interstellar politics. Domestically, she enjoys the solid support of her people, who know a good thing when they see one. She owes this support as much to her own hard work as to any Inner Sphere-style "ruler's mystique"—everything she does is in the ultimate interest of Canopian citizens, and her government goes out of its way to keep those citizens informed. This information comes with a government spin, of course, but the Magestrix disapproves of outright fact-bending; she prefers to rely on her own unmistakable talent for honest persuasion.

More than anything, Emma Centrella is a gambler—a gifted one, with a finely honed sense of when to make the bold play and when to toss in the cards. The "quiet coup" of 3040 that opened her reign was a harbinger of equally daring moves to come—pouring her personal fortune into the flagging Canopian entertainment industry, formally allying with the Taurian Concordat, and signing the historic Trinity Alliance with the Capellan Confederation (a realm her mother had briefly invaded just twenty-eight years previously). The loss of her eldest daughter Danai in battle against the Clans came as a personal blow, but she has largely recovered and has since devoted considerable energy to grooming her second daughter, Naomi, for the heir's role. Though Naomi's selection is not a foregone conclusion, Emma is doing everything possible to ensure that her beloved realm will pass into the most capable hands.

MAGISTRACY ARMED FORCES

—From the *Magistracy Armed Forces Training Manual, 3066 Revised Edition*

Ever since the Magistracy's formation, soldiers of the MAF have taken pride in our long struggle to safeguard our realm against all outside enemies. For more than five centuries, the MAF has stood fast against all who would threaten it, from pirates to aggressive neighbors with superior firepower. Our current strategic alliance with the Capellan Confederation has greatly enhanced our strength, making ours the largest standing military in the Periphery for the first time in Canopian history. The following paragraphs briefly describe

the organization of the MAF and the duties of each department and service branch within it.

COMMAND STRUCTURE

For centuries, the MAF's relatively small size allowed for a streamlined command, with few distinctions between branches. The Trinity Alliance demands that multiple aspects of the MAF work alongside their counterparts in the Taurian Defense Forces and the Capellan military—a new paradigm that, combined with the MAF's overall growth, required expansion of the existing command chain. Changes have come gradually, however, and all actions have been taken with the full realization that a military whose conventions have worked well for half a millennium should not be radically altered overnight.

Magestrix Command Center

The heart, mind and soul of the MAF, the Magestrix Command Center (MCC) handles all strategic planning as well as defensive initiatives. Its personnel answer directly to the Magestrix. Originally, the MCC consisted of three senior colonels and two rear admirals. The current number serving in the MCC is nine, one of them the Capellan attaché to the MAF. The eight Magistracy officers are Senior General Hadji Doru; General Vernyce Alkobar of the Magistracy Royal Guards; General Cynthia Evans of the Chasseurs à Cheval; General Sandra Aupriz of the Canopian Fusiliers; General Oscar Long of the Canopian Highlanders; General Mavis Cooper of the Raventhir Cuirassiers; and admirals James Smithington and Karla Boeteshia, who jointly command the Magistracy Navy. The Capellan attaché is *Jiang-jun* Elliot Knight—he serves as coordinator of all Capellan military forces operating in Magistracy space. Initial adjustments to the *jiang-jun's* presence were required, but every member of the MCC knows his or her duty to the realm, and the MCC continues to run smoothly.

MAGISTRACY ARMY

All MAF ground forces—'Mech, armor and infantry—fall under the authority of the Magistracy Army. Though little distinction between branches was emphasized in the past, these differences have become more pronounced with the expansion of the armed forces. Senior General Hadji Doru commands the Magistracy Army and, by extension, the entire MAF.

BattleMech Forces

Ever since its first appearance on the field of war more than six centuries ago, the BattleMech has served as the core unit of every major army in human-occupied space. The Magistracy of Canopus is no exception. The MAF makes a point of conserving its 'Mech strength, rather than wasting a precious resource when armor plus infantry are sufficient to do the job. Soldiers and tanks are relatively abundant here in the Periphery, but 'Mechs have been somewhat harder to come by. The influx of Capellan 'Mechs via the Trinity Alliance, as well as consistent output from the 'Mech complex on Detroit, has begun to change this balance, but old habits die hard—and considering the vagaries of existence in the Periphery, continuing to conserve our most powerful battlefield assets is a prudent decision.

Always the hammer of the MAF, 'Mechs are still often held in reserve so that vehicles and infantry can wear down the enemy in preparation for the final blow. For centuries, this practice permitted the MAF to retain the Periphery's second-largest 'Mech force. The Magistracy has since fallen heir to the technological renaissance sweeping the Inner Sphere, via the Trinity Alliance. Consequently, the MAF now boasts a level of military technology never before achieved. Though not all MAF units have received upgrades, more than thirty percent of the 'Mechs deployed by Magistracy forces have undergone refits or are entirely new designs.

BattleMech deployment in the MAF follows a standard organization: four 'Mechs to a lance, three lances to a company, three companies to a battalion. Command lances are attached to each regiment, and a command company acts as a personal unit for the general of each MAF Combat Formation.

Armor

Every MAF regiment has at least one supporting armor battalion permanently attached. Many of these vehicles are older models that have survived hundreds of years, thanks to hard work and a knack for improvisation by generations of MAF technicians. Several premier units, including the Magistracy Royal Guards and the Chasseurs à Cheval, have fully integrated a second battalion of new vehicle designs: the Heavy LRM Carrier, the Light SRM Carrier and the Capellan Regulator hover tank. Other units are making excellent progress integrating their share of upgraded technologies.

Infantry

MAF infantry units have been among the least standardized for much of our military's history. Platoons have ranged in size from thirty to fifty troopers, companies from 120 to 180 troops. Since formally allying with the Capellan Confederation almost ten years ago, the MAF has made significant efforts to streamline infantry organization, following the standard set by our Inner Sphere compatriots.

Though they remain rare, the MAF has begun purchasing battle armor suits from Confederation manufacturers. As with aerospace assets, battle armor falls into a special branch of the Magistracy Armed Forces, under the direct command of Senior General Doru. Whenever an operation warrants their inclusion, battle armor platoons are temporarily attached to the appropriate unit.

MAGISTRACY NAVY

Though considerably smaller than the Magistracy Army, the Navy has nonetheless acquitted itself with distinction throughout its existence. The Navy's small size enables all its forces to fall under a single organization and chain of command, greatly enhancing operational efficiency. An expanded fleet of DropShips and JumpShips, along with their aerospace fighter complements, make up the Magistracy Navy, and large numbers of merchant vessels can be pressed into military service at need. The job of protecting Canopian borders remains a challenge, but the Navy has met and will meet it with skill and courage for the foreseeable future.

Aerospace Fighters

More than a hundred aerospace fighters serve in the MAF, many light or medium craft, but with increasing numbers of heavy and even some assault fighters. Operational command of them lies with the Navy, with individual fighters assigned as needed to the two Canopian fleets or attached directly to a line regiment. Only the Magistracy Royal Guards have permanent aerospace assets under their sole command. Senior General Doru has made continued expansion of the MAF's aerospace arm a top priority, arranging contracts for new aerospace fighters from Capellan, Taurian and Outworlds Alliance manufacturers to supplement output from factories on Detroit. He has also spoken with instructors and administrators at the Canopian School of War about revamping and expanding the aerospace pilots' training program. *[Ed Note: The proposed expansion includes "special naval duties" that remain unspecified. The hot rumor among pilot recruits is WarShip duty, but so far no hard evidence exists that the Canopian military has the resources to mount a WarShip program; indeed, the opposite looks to be true. Still, the rumors refuse to die.]*

DropShips and JumpShips

These valuable assets are divided into two fleets, each comprising two flotillas and each with a specific function. The Canopian Battle Fleet defends targets likely to be invaded first, the defense of which would therefore require the largest movement of troops. The Canopian Reserve Fleet is permanently stationed in the Canopus IV system, allowing for rapid deployment in response to any breach of Canopian space.

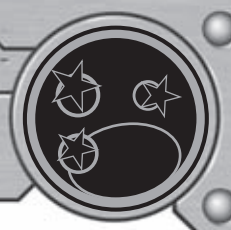
WarShips

A WarShip program remains purely theoretical for the MAF, according to a report commissioned by the MCC in 3062. The urgent need to pour still-limited funding into other service areas, such as upgrading the entire MAF aerospace arm, puts an operational WarShip program beyond the Magistracy's immediate reach. Should sufficient outside funding materialize in the near future, however, the MCC will certainly review plans for such a program.

[Ed. Note: A well-placed source in the MAF tipped me off to rumors that the Capellan government may be planning to construct another Feng Huang WarShip, with assistance from its Trinity allies, possibly intended for Canopian deployment. This story dovetails nicely with the rumors of "special naval duties" for new cadets—but any such plans, should they even exist, are doubtless far off.]

MILITIA DEFENSE CORPS

Previously known as the Militia Defense Battalions, these militia units were originally a division of the Magistracy Army. Senior General Doru separated the defense battalions into their own service corps, answering directly to the MCC. The Militia Defense Corps consists of around twelve battalions of planetary militia troops, though the precise number varies from year to year. Composed of reservists, the Militia Defense Corps represents the first line of defense for border worlds in the Magistracy that do not warrant a front-line unit, and



militia troops may likewise serve as a defense of last resort if necessary. These planetary militias field conventional armor and infantry, and their members receive MAF basic training. Their primary job is to keep any enemy bogged down long enough for reinforcements to arrive.

Magistracy citizens fulfilling their compulsory service obligation are typically assigned to a militia battalion. Promising recruits are offered a chance to join the regular MAF and assignment to a training battalion, a military academy or a front-line unit. The best and brightest may be offered an even more prestigious posting—a chance to attend the Canopian Institute of War. The MAF has strengthened its ranks with many a gifted soldier through this civilian-service recruitment program.

MAGISTRACY MEDICAL CORPS

The Medical Corps is the pride of the Magistracy, surpassing its counterparts even in the vaunted militaries of the Inner Sphere. Formed around the bedrock conviction that every wounded Canopian warrior is worth saving, the Medical Corps has more than earned its reputation as the finest military medical service in human-occupied space. Talented and dedicated personnel coupled with generous financing from the MCC permits a ratio of one medical specialist for roughly every seven MAF soldiers, considerably higher than in other militaries. So prestigious is the Medical Corps that Erde Centrella, youngest daughter of the reigning Magestrix, sought and received the honor of serving in it, until her recall to Canopus IV in late 3063.

MAGISTRACY SUPPORT CORPS

The Support Corps handles all administrative functions for the entire MAF, serving as quartermaster, supplier, paymaster and personnel office. Support Corps personnel oversee the training of all new recruits, as well as advanced officer training. The Corps also has jurisdiction over all mercenary contracts, assignments and organization.

R&D is the Support Corps' final area of responsibility. Since the late 3050s, its members have coordinated with their counterparts in the Capellan Confederation and the Taurian Concordat to acquire new technologies, primarily from the Capellan Confederation. Homegrown development programs are likewise the province of the Support Corps, and many of the latest innovations to roll off the production lines on Detroit are becoming more widespread throughout the MAF.

MAGISTRACY ALLIANCE LIAISON

Another recent addition to the MAF roster, this department serves as an oversight commission on the assignments, movement and actions of all foreign troops currently operating within and outside Magistracy space as part of the Trinity Alliance. The Alliance treaty provides for Magistracy, Concordat and Capellan military units to rotate through each other's territory, and the Magestrix concurred with Senior General Doru's proposal to create a department dedicated to managing Alliance troop movements.

The MAL receives reports from each of the alliance's military coordinators: Major Naomi Centrella to the Confederation and Major Sarah Slavak to the Concordat. Though not required under the terms of the treaty, the Taurian Concordat's Military Coordinator, Colonel William Heise, passes regular status reports through this department as well. The MAL has coped admirably with the stresses involved in its monumental task, more than proving its worth to the MAF over the past few years.

MERCENARY COMMANDS

Mercenary troops have always supplemented the Magistracy's military strength, and they continue to do so. Along with the MAF's greater size has come greater responsibility; consequently, quality mercenary troops remain valued assets. Eight mercenary commands currently serve in Canopian space, many of them veteran units. With three MAF line regiments fulfilling their Trinity Alliance obligations in Capellan space, mercenary troops play a vital role in defending Canopian planets against the ever-present threat of pirate raids. Two battalions of Harcourt's Destructors are deployed on Addasar, safeguarding that world from pirates operating in the nearby Fronc Reaches. On the other side of the Magistracy, the planetary government of Thraxa recently hired Markson's Marauders to supplement their homegrown regiment, the Magistracy Cavaliers, in fighting off bandits—and also to make the Marian Hegemony think twice about causing any trouble.

UNIFORMS

MAF uniforms are simple and straightforward, reflecting the spirit of a democratic nation that has historically relied more on the arts of peace than the arts of war to maintain its freedom. Since the accession of Magestrix Emma Centrella, the standard uniform for all ground forces, worn in the field and for day-to-day duties, has been a bullet-resistant black tunic, helmet, boots and gloves over a tight-fitting turquoise bodysuit. Naval personnel reverse this color scheme, wearing black bodysuits with turquoise helmets and other accessories. Support personnel, including technicians, administrators and members of special services, wear the standard uniforms of their line regiment counterparts, with blue piping added to denote their support status. For all personnel, camouflage fatigues are available when necessary. Rank insignia are worn on uniform lapels and cuffs.

MechWarrior battle dress resembles that of other militaries, and the somewhat larger neurohelmets of earlier eras are gradually giving way to more compact, upgraded versions. Older neurohelmets are primarily found among planetary militia troops, which are last (but not least) on the list for various technological improvements.

Canopian dress uniforms keep the standard turquoise-and-black color scheme, but are looser-fitting and made of lightweight material. Officers' dress uniforms feature silver piping on the trouser legs and cuffs.

RANKS AND INSIGNIA

The Magistracy Armed Forces offer six ranks for enlisted personnel and seven for officers. These ranks have remained largely unchanged since our realm's founding, with some minor exceptions in the past few years. Enlisted ranks in the MAF are: volunteer, first ranker, lance corporal, star corporal, command sergeant and banner sergeant. Officer ranks are: ensign, commander, major, force major, colonel, general and senior general.

Officer ranks in the MAF are purchased, though the Magestrix must personally approve any aspirant to the rank of major or higher. This practice prevents the undue advancement of incompetent or otherwise undeserving officers. Officer ranks in particularly prestigious units, such as the Magistracy Royal Guards and the Chasseurs à Cheval, cost 10,000 to 15,000 C-bills more than equivalent ranks in other line regiments.

Volunteer

This rank goes to all new recruits, whether citizens fulfilling their compulsory service requirement or would-be professional soldiers. Volunteers wear a green diamond-shaped pin with silver edges.



First Ranker

A volunteer automatically receives promotion to first ranker upon graduation from basic training, unless she or he received disciplinary action. First rankers enter advanced training programs in order to determine an appropriate field of expertise. Most citizens who are uninterested in a military career do not advance beyond this point. A first ranker's insignia is a silver-edged, green diamond pin with a second silver-edged diamond nestled inside the first.



Lance Corporal

Roughly equivalent to a sergeant in many other militaries, a lance corporal leads a squad or more of soldiers in battle. She also acts as a field instructor for all first rankers who show a disposition to stay in the MAF. A lance corporal's rank insignia resembles that of a first ranker, but with a third silver-edged diamond inside the second.



Star Corporal

Serving in a variety of enlisted roles, the star corporal is the core of the enlisted ranks. She is expected to lead in the absence of a more senior officer. In general, an MAF star corporal leads a full platoon of troopers. A star corporal's rank insignia—recently redesigned—is a silver-edged, green diamond pin with a silver star in the center.



Command Sergeant

Usually serving on a senior officer's staff, the command sergeant is equivalent to a sergeant major or other senior non-commissioned officer, and carries out the duties appropriate to that role. Command sergeants wear a solid silver diamond-shaped pin.



Banner Sergeant

Though they currently fill senior staff and field command billets, the banner sergeant's origins stem from the days when personnel at this rank were responsible for a unit's regimental colors—an honor still observed when in full-dress uniform. The banner sergeant's rank insignia is two small silver diamond pins, one placed directly above the other.



Ensign

The lowest officer rank, an ensign's commission costs anywhere from 10,000 to 25,000 C-bills. Rather than being assigned a specific number of troops, an ensign may find herself commanding as few as ten or as many as a hundred soldiers depending on the mission at hand. An ensign's rank insignia, in the Magistracy Army and the Navy, is a green diamond edged in gold.



Commander

A commander in the army heads up a company, and in the Navy serves as a department head. Historically, commanders in the Magistracy Army also occasionally led battalions, but the expansion of the MAF prompted changes in the officer corps that put an end to that practice. Commander rank generally costs from 16,000 to 35,000 C-bills, depending on the exact duties involved. A commander's insignia resembles an ensign's, with a second gold-edged diamond nestled inside the first.



Major

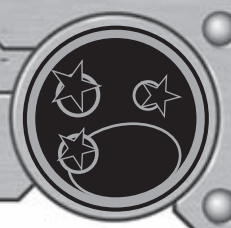
Until a few years ago, majors in the MAF almost always commanded regiments, while battalion leadership fell to commanders and colonels headed up regimental formations. Recent rank changes have shifted these responsibilities, so that battalion command now belongs to majors. In the Navy, a major is known as a comcapt—short for commodore-captain—and commands a single vessel. (Historically, comcaptains commanded entire flotillas.) The rank of major/comcapt costs 24,000 to 45,000 C-bills. Army majors wear a large gold diamond pin; a gold wreath below the diamond denotes a comcapt.



Force Major

This rank, added in the wake of the MAF expansion, recognizes majors whose prior careers give them significant prestige and





influence within the revamped chain of command. The Magistracy Navy holds no equivalent rank, nor is there any additional cost to purchase this honor. A force major's insignia is based on a major's insignia, with a large green star in the center of the diamond.

Colonel

Prior to the military's reorganization, colonels in the MAF commanded everything from single regiments to entire formations such as the Magistracy Royal Guards or the Canopian Fusiliers. Currently, a colonel leads a single regiment, holds a major command or heads up an MAF administrative division. Colonels in the Navy are known as rearads—shorthand for rear admirals—and command three to six vessels. These ranks cost anywhere from 33,000 to more than 50,000 C-bills. Rank insignia is two small gold diamonds, with a gold wreath below the bottom diamond for a rearad.



General

The second of three new ranks created by the MCC, generals command each of the five combat formations in the MAF: the Magistracy Royal Guards, the Chasseurs à Cheval, the Canopian Fusiliers, the Raventhir Cuirassiers and the Magistracy Highlanders. Navy generals are called admirals; holders of this rank command the two fleets that comprise the Magistracy Navy. The rank of general is also assigned to the various corps department heads in the MAF, though they do not serve on the MCC. A general's commission costs from 60,000 to more than 75,000 C-bills, and any individual seeking one is subject to exceptionally thorough vetting. The rank insignia is three small gold diamonds, with a gold wreath below the last diamond denoting an admiral.



Senior General

The final new MAF rank, the senior general is supreme commander of the entire MAF, subordinate only to the Magestrix. This rank alone cannot be purchased, but is personally awarded by the Magestrix. Appointees can be vetoed by a unanimous vote of the MCC. A senior general's rank insignia is four small gold diamonds.



AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

It is true that MAF soldiers with means can buy various lower-level decorations, though money alone is not sufficient; a soldier's record must indicate a certain degree of skill and bravery before her or his commanding officer approves any such purchase. Responsibility for determining who may buy a particular award falls to the colonels who command each MAF regiment or naval flotilla, or to the generals and rearads for colonels who wish to purchase additional decorations. In general, the higher the rank a soldier achieves, the fewer awards she or he buys.

The three awards described below either cannot be bought or require service to the Magistracy that goes well above and beyond ordinary skill and courage. They have come to represent genuine excellence in combat, and merit respect throughout the Magistracy.

Canopus Cluster

Though partly purchased, the Canopus Cluster can only be awarded for an act that spares the Magistracy harm. It is also the only MAF decoration given for acts of heroism outside the military arena, such as political, economic or artistic achievements.

The Canopus Cluster is an earring, molded in a twist and worn on the upper portion of the left ear. A platinum band denotes military heroism, gold denotes economic accomplishment, bronze denotes political achievement and brass denotes all other service. Once a recipient has been announced, she or he may donate a given sum to add a single precious stone to the Cluster: 10,000 C-bills for lapis lazuli, 25,000 C-bills for an emerald, 50,000 C-bills for a diamond and 100,000 C-bills for a ruby.



Fist of Raventhir

This award was created in 2997 to celebrate the unwavering loyalty of the Raventhiri bloodline, whose scions have provided centuries of service to the Magistracy. Each year, every commissioned officer in the MAF casts a vote for the soldier who best exemplifies such dedication. The Magestrix then deliberates for a month over each candidate's service record before making the final choice and bestowing the award.

The award is a titanium medallion on a red silk ribbon, showing an armored fist that holds the Magistracy crest in its protective grasp.



Ribbon of the Magestrix

A relatively recent award, the Ribbon of the Magestrix goes to any unit that has fought on a non-Magistracy world. Created to honor those units that took part in the Capellan-St. Ives War, the Ribbon has also gone to units involved in bandit-hunting raids outside the Magistracy border. This award remains somewhat controversial in those MAF units with a history of fighting against House Liao, but the MAF and the citizenry in general have come to recognize the Ribbon of the Magestrix as an appropriate addition to MAF honors.

The award is a black or white circular "battle banner" with a stylized Magistracy logo in the center, the different colors representing the type of mission completed. Individual unit members may also weave black or white ribbons into their hair when entering battle, though this part of the award is optional.



MILITARY ACADEMIES

Until the reign of Magestrix Emma Centrella, the Magistracy contained no premier schools of combat anywhere within its borders. Instead, each Canopian planet had its own provincial academy, which offered every specialty from armor to aerospace to MechWarrior training. Individual planets likewise funded and staffed these schools, while the central government husbanded its often-limited resources to finance much-needed mercenary contracts. Unfortunately, this somewhat jury-rigged system could not provide top-notch training in any area; in attempting to be jack-of-all-trades, it ended up being master of few. The soldiers of the MAF were highly motivated and willing to endure considerable sacrifice for their beloved nation, but these qualities could not compensate for less-than-adequate training. The realm's long tradition of on-the-job learning, via swift assignment of enlisted recruits to training battalions or front-line units, compensated somewhat for these flaws, but not enough.

Upon her ascension to power, our current Magestrix took steps to correct this problem. She began to earmark monies from the central Treasury for the various planetary academies, allowing them to undertake badly needed expansions and upgrades. At the same time, the Magestrix initiated longer-range plans to open a state-of-the-art training center on the Magistracy's capital, Canopus IV.

Canopian Institute of War

Modeled on the Draconis Combine's prestigious Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy, the Canopian Institute of War became a reality in 3057. Founded to provide the finest facilities and training, the CIW has more than lived up to expectations. Admittance into this premier school of warfare depends on an applicant's service and prior education, though much more on the former than the latter. Each year, every colonel in the MAF is required to forward the names of promising soldiers under her or his command, regardless of age or years of service, who have petitioned their superior officers for the right to enter the CIW. Since 3059, the top one percent of each graduating class of the provincial academies has received automatic permission to apply to the Institute. Of this relatively small number, only half initially passed the grueling entrance tests. Those numbers have increased each year as the provincial academies bettered their own training methods, but acceptance into the CIW remains a mark of the highest achievement. Unlike officer ranks, entrance to the Institute cannot be purchased. Select students from the Taurian Concordat have been allowed into the CIW starting in 3062, but the bulk of these coveted slots are reserved for Canopian citizens.

Basic training lasts six months and is designed to shock new cadets out of their previous conceptions of service in the MAF. Veteran warriors with a decade of combat under their belts may fare no better than the greenest academy graduate under this tough regimen, but all who

survive it without washing out acquire a degree of skill that puts them among the MAF's most talented warriors. Afterward, students can specialize in MechWarrior, aerospace or armored infantry training. The latter specialty is a recent innovation, made possible by the acquisition of battle armor under the Trinity Alliance. MAF personnel still teach the bulk of available courses, augmented by CCAF instructors in select areas since 3062. The number of students permitted to attend the latter was expanded in 3065, in response to high demand among the CIW student body.

The MAF's most prestigious line regiments—the Magistracy Royal Guards, Chasseurs à Cheval and Canopian Fusiliers—are allowed their pick of each year's graduating class. So impressive was the performance of 3062 graduates in the Third Canopian Fusiliers on St. Ives that all three of these regimental commands have drawn heavily from every graduating class since.

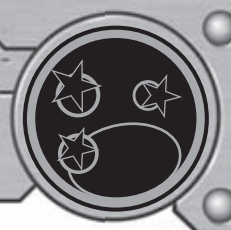
CLOAKS AND DAGGERS: THE MAGISTRACY INTELLIGENCE MINISTRY

(15 April 3067)

Fanardir [ISAP] — Intelligence agencies throughout human history have veiled many of their activities in secrecy, serving their governments and their people in the shadows. To the average person, the very phrase "intelligence agency" conjures up images of spies, saboteurs and hush-hush operations. Often, all a citizen knows of his government's intelligence apparatus is its name and the fact that it exists. Against this backdrop, the Magistracy Intelligence Ministry has managed to be even more mystery-shrouded than the usual—quite a feat for an organization that, until the past twenty years or so, seemed no more remarkable than any other Periphery intelligence agency.

The MIM originated in 2530, almost simultaneously with the founding of the Canopian state. Kossandra Centrella, formerly an officer in the Free Worlds League military, knew from personal experience just how vital solid intelligence was to a nation's armed forces—and how much damage faulty intelligence could do. An ill-informed military could hardly be expected to safeguard the free nation that Kossandra hoped to build, and so she cultivated an elite cadre of special operatives from the ranks of the fledgling Canopian military. Originally a typical special-forces branch, the early MIM engaged primarily in observation of neighboring states, plus the occasional covert operation against potential threats to the realm. The rise of the pleasure industry, however, was tailor-made for spying by agents outside the military, as diplomats and nobility from throughout human-occupied space came to indulge in the various delights of Canopian traveling pleasure circuses and casino worlds. MIM operatives often posed as gamblers, casino staff, nightclub performers and even prostitutes; almost anyone working in the nation's lucrative tourist trade could gather mountains of information on the activities of their customers. The central government then used this information to strengthen border defenses, secure lucrative trade agreements and "persuade" domestic political opponents to follow the administration line. (To its credit—reinforced by generations of





NewsMaker Profile: Hadji Doru

(29 March 3067)

Canopus IV [ISAP] — Senior General Hadji Doru is a rarity among military officers, let alone high-ranking ones—a genuine patriot in two nations, one the realm of his birth and one that has gladly adopted him. Throughout his career, Doru has embodied personal integrity along with considerable intelligence and skill, on the battlefield and in the minefields of high-level politics.

A native of the Taurian Concordat, Hadji Doru rose from green TDF recruit to Marshal of the prestigious Taurian Guard, where he served faithfully for years before events forced him to choose between his nation and its increasingly irrational leader. He chose the good of the Concordat, and helped remove Protector Thomas Calderon from power in 3055. Concerned that various factions might attempt to use him against Thomas's successor, Doru resigned his commission and left Taurian space for an unknown destination in the Inner Sphere.

The Periphery heard no more of him until 3059, when he surfaced as part of Operation Bulldog—the massive push to roust Clan Smoke-Jaguar out of Inner Sphere and Periphery space. Offered a chance to rejoin the military life he'd sorely missed, he petitioned to join the Second Donegal Guards RCT, where he aided in that unit's operations on Wolcott. The First Canopian Cuirassiers, led by Major Danai Centrella, encountered him when the Cuirassiers moved to Wolcott in preparation for departure to the Clan homeworlds. Aware of his history and recognizing what he could do for the MAF, Danai convinced Doru to resign from the Second Donegal and sign on with her own unit.

During the six-month journey to the Clan capital of Strana Mechty, Danai attempted to convince Hadji Doru of the contribution he could make to the MAF. "You belong to the Periphery," she is said to have told him. "The Inner Sphere doesn't need you half as much as we do—and you can't go back to the Concordat. Why not serve its interests by also serving the Magistracy's? The MAF needs you—and the stronger we are, the stronger the Concordat is. Our nations stand or fall together. You know that."

Ultimately, Danai Centrella's death affected him more than her words. Humbled by her willingness to sacrifice herself for her realm in a conflict that many would have called someone else's war, he journeyed to Canopus IV. Once there, he discovered a final act of sacrifice on Danai's part—she'd invested a substantial sum of her own money to buy him the rank of colonel. A year of careful negotiation between Doru and the Magestrix followed, after which he became the first Senior General in the history of the MAF.

The Senior General has since served his adopted homeland with as much loyalty and integrity as he once served the Concordat, shepherding the MAF through the profound changes wrought by the Trinity Alliance. He and the Magestrix have formed a close working relationship, based on mutual regard for each other's intelligence and ability.

Magestrixes who truly valued their open society—the MIM never devolved into a genuine "secret police," as is often sadly typical when such agencies are permitted to operate among their own people.)

During the Star League era, the Humphreys administration reorganized the MIM along the lines of SAFE, the Free Worlds League intelligence agency. Governor Humphreys placed the MIM under the jurisdiction of the Canopian military, but answerable exclusively to the head of state—at that time, Melissa Humphreys herself. When Governor Humphreys' term ended in 2604, authority over the MIM passed to the Star League Council. Rising taxation of Periphery realms to finance the House Lords' personal armies meant deep funding cuts for the MIM, along with diminished responsibility to "aid the Magestrix in keeping civil order in the Canopian Territorial State."

Post-Star League, the Magestrix regained her authority over the agency, and its mandate expanded along with the nation's needs. Foreign covert operations departments that had been fund-starved or

banned during the Star League era were revived during the Succession Wars, mainly to keep an eye on Inner Sphere doings and ensure that the fratricidal conflicts of those years did not spill over into Canopian space. Despite its small size, the MIM swiftly became the most potent Periphery intelligence agency, helping to ensure the state's survival despite the shortcomings of its military.

The MIM contributed mightily to initial Canopian successes against the Capellan Confederation during the ill-fated alliance with Andurien in the early 3030s, but top-notch intelligence work could not prevent the MAF's eventual defeat. An equally ill-advised attempt in 3039 by Magestrix Kyalla Centrella to assassinate her daughter, the present incumbent, revealed a fault line in the MIM that remains a cautionary tale among present-day operatives. The unstable Kyalla's supporters fortunately numbered few, all of whom were purged in the subsequent overhaul of the agency. Funding increased sharply, as did the number and talent level of new MIM recruits. Ministry operations likewise expanded, allegedly as far as the Lyrans Alliance and the Draconis Combine—though no agency representative charged with talking to the press will confirm or deny any such thing. Fragmentary evidence from the public record indicates stepped-up MIM efforts to monitor Inner Sphere response to the Clan invasion starting in late 3050, and it doesn't take much imagination to assume that information on Clan technology was a high priority. Factual evidence of MIM activities, however, remains thin on the ground.

Questions Without Answers: The MIM Today

The MIM's quantum leap forward in duties and expertise, begun in the early to mid-3040s, can only be partly explained by publicly recorded funding increases and reorganization. Much of the additional money trail simply vanishes in a maze of shell transactions too complex even for forensic accountants to ferret out. Rumors of resource-rich worlds or a long-lost Star League tech cache, discovered somewhere beyond explored space and kept secret by the Magistracy government, are favorite explanations across the Magistracy and beyond. Hard information, however, is tough to come by. Not even the barest hint has emerged of the solution to this mystery—indeed, the primary "evidence" of some secret resource or benefactor is the sheer speed of the MIM's transformation from a small and struggling department of the military to a formidable tool in Emma Centrella's hands.

The other juicy rumor about the MIM concerns the creation of the so-called Ebon Magistrate, a sub-department of the MIM so new and shadowy that it appears to exist only in speculation. The stories tag the Ebon Magistrate as an ultra-elite covert ops unit, drawn from Canopian soldiers and civilians, all with no close family or friends and all highly trained in every manner of lethal skill from martial arts to 'Mech combat. Operatives allegedly receive their missions directly from the Magestrix, and some rumors even claim that Ebon Magistrate agents have undergone "personal modifications" to better fit them for their assignments.

As with all rumors of super-secret operatives capable of amazingly lethal feats, most Canopians take these stories well salted. Still, the MIM has undergone remarkable changes in record time. Perhaps some of the rumors aren't far from the truth—or perhaps Emma Centrella

is undertaking yet another of her characteristic gambles, creating mirages of mysterious backers and shadowy ultra-operatives simply to keep the Magistracy's enemies guessing. Either is equally possible.

ECONOMY

(22 May 3067)

Luxen [ISAP] — The Magistracy of Canopus is enjoying an economic revival not seen since the halcyon days of the 27th century, when it thrived as a semi-autonomous Territorial State of the Star League. After nearly two hundred and fifty years of struggling to stay afloat while the Succession Wars tore the Inner Sphere apart and sent waves of refugees and pirates washing over the Periphery, the Canopian people welcome the new tide of prosperity. That they owe it in part to the Capellan Confederation, a sometime friend and many times foe down the years since the Magistracy's founding, is an irony that some relish, while others refuse to dwell on it. "You pick your devils," said one lance corporal with the First Fusiliers Armor Guard, shrugging as she downed a pint of Timbiqui Dark in a smoky bar on the outskirts of Genoa, Luxen's second-largest city. "If someone you used to fight wants to make you an offer instead, you hear them out, see what it's worth. If it's worth it, you take it—and you go fight some other bunch of sumbidges someplace else, because they're always out there. Why not make nice when you can, as long as the country gets something out of it?"

This pragmatic approach, in politics and in profit-making, pervades the Magistracy and partly explains its reputation for fickleness. Seen in a different light, however, Canopians are anything but fickle. They are remarkably consistent in the one area that matters to every citizen: the continued survival and prosperity of their homeworlds and their realm. The Trinity Alliance has done much to ensure this, and so Canopians in general back it no matter what private reservations they may hold about House Liao. Certainly the business community is eager to profit from Capellan and Concordat ties—and given the degree to which money can talk in Magistracy affairs, business support is one of the Alliance's strongest domestic underpinnings. The current Magestrix, something of a business magnate herself, has carefully cultivated the rest of the business world, from small local guilds to corporate titans, thereby strengthening the national economy and her own political support. In the Magistracy more than in any other Periphery realm, business and politics walk hand-in-hand.

RISEING TIDE: WEALTH AND POVERTY IN THE MAGISTRACY

The Magistracy has historically been a study in contrasts—a place where glittering casinos stand next to festering slums, where boom towns become ghost towns after one too many pirate raids, where a world with valuable resources can write its own ticket while a neighboring but less lucrative planet barely scrapes by. As the Canopian-Capellan alliance nears its tenth year and the Treaty of Taurus begins its second decade, the influx of trade revenues and Capellan subsidies is finally changing this ancient pattern. The current boom has expanded economic opportunity, to the point where the central government can finally afford to aid cash-strapped planetary

authorities in easing local pockets of dire poverty. Likewise, Taurian expertise and Capellan funding to improve the Canopian school system is finally paying off, removing a major drag on the Magistracy economy: the lack of a consistently well-educated work force. With these problems finally looking manageable, the Magistracy is poised to move from strength to strength. Many economists believe it will soon surpass the Taurian Concordat as the Periphery's economic and political powerhouse, especially as the Pleiades Campaign rages on.

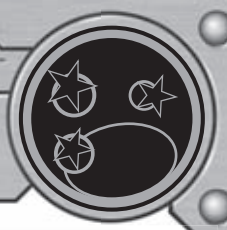
For all that money talks in the Magistracy, some safeguards exist against profit-making run amok. Seared by memories of the late Star League era, when rapacious Inner Sphere corporations wreaked havoc on Periphery worlds, generations of Canopian politicians have made certain those days can never come again. Regulations against fraud and sweetheart deals have plenty of teeth, and no Magestrix has ever failed to enforce them.

NATIONAL ECONOMY

The linchpins of the Canopian economy remain entertainment, tourism and the medical industry—the latter encompassing everything from biologicals to technology to the exceptional skills of Canopian healers. Increased trade with the Concordat and the Capellan Confederation over the past decade has nearly tripled export revenues, and even the small military-industrial complex has gotten a significant boost. In addition to the Detroit Consolidated MechWorks, start-up military manufacturers have sprung up on Marantha, Booker and Lockton. Output from these facilities remains minimal, but the owners are confident of expansion in the near future. Factories on Dunianshire that date from just after the fall of the Star League have likewise undergone upgrades, churning out tanks and 'Mech designs to supply the Militia Defense Corps.

As for the entertainment industry, the famed Canopian pleasure circuses now operate freely in Capellan space, opening up a whole new market for this already lucrative business. The Magestrix regularly turns over her personal profits from Mindstar Enterprises—once nearly bankrupt, now among the nation's premier entertainment conglomerates—to a special Treasury fund earmarked for micro-lending programs and improved school systems on the Magistracy's poorest planets. Tourist havens like Wildwood and Vixen are booming, though the Taurian Concordat's recent troubles have made a dent in the numbers of Concordat citizens taking Canopian vacations. Casino planets like Hardcore and Crawford's Delight are awash in money from foreign tourists and newly flush Canopians eager to spread their wealth. Even the violent pirate raids on Crawford's Delight haven't made much of a dent in the enjoyment business; rumor has it that casino patrons are taking bets on which pirate band will hit the place next.

The medical industry is likewise showing healthy profits. Canopian medtech and biotech companies do business with nearly every realm, from their Trinity Alliance partners to the Outworlds. Even mini-states like the Rim Collection take part, trading robust local grain genomes for much-needed medical supplies and personnel. Investment in poorer localities and worlds has heightened demand for trained healers at scores of brand-new medical clinics, making medical training a better career choice than ever.



General trade is up as well, in everything from rare minerals and luxury foods to local specialties like brandies from Early Dawn or New Abilene's trendy hot sauce. Trade with Capellan border worlds has grown especially brisk, though Canopian imports are subject to stringent quotas on interior Capellan worlds (quotas the Magestrix is pressing the Capellan Chancellor to loosen). The impact of the Fronc Reaches' secession is still playing out, but the overall health of the Canopian business sector is helping to cushion the shock—as is a steady stream of funds from the Capellan government, apparently designed to ensure that its new ally weathers the loss of colonial resources. The Magestrix is currently in talks with the Fronc Reaches government, and Canopian investors have expressed interest in several joint ventures on the erstwhile colony worlds.

All in all, the average Canopian citizen has seen a major upturn in living standards over the past quarter-century—all the more impressive when considered against the basket-case economy that Emma Centrella inherited back in 3040. The Magistracy is riding high, and nothing on the horizon looks likely to get in its way.

CASH AND CREDIT

The flow of cash and credit in the Magistracy depends on two institutions: the Treasury and the central bank, both located on Canopus IV. The Magestrix oversees their operations, though day-to-day running of them falls to loyal members of the nobility (and an able staff of nobles and commoners). Treasury Minister Bryna Kalka is a member of the Froness, descended from one of the Free Worlds League MechWarriors who followed Kossandra Centrella in the early 26th century. Deeply loyal to the Centrella family, Kalka took over the

post in 3041; her less-than-able predecessor, Joram Han, was rumored to be Kyalla Centrella's lover (which, more than any financial acumen, evidently qualified him for the job). Minister Kalka has performed admirably throughout more than twenty years of substantial economic growth, working with the central bank to manage the national money supply and balance tax revenues so that wealthy and poorer worlds alike can share in the Magistracy's new prosperity.

The National Bank of Canopus is the principal conduit through which money flows from the Treasury throughout Canopian space. Its Board of Directors sets the prime interest rate and works with the Treasury Minister to manage inflation and deflation. The current bank president, Arundhati Markandaya, is rumored to be distantly related to the infamous Selaj family, whose wealthiest scions fled the Free Worlds League for Canopian space in 2680 following a series of bloody terror attacks for which they were said to be responsible. Puraj and Rajneesh Selaj and their offspring soon disappeared from history, but local lore has it that succeeding generations of Selajes renounced all political activity, buried their family name and used their fantastic wealth to build a life in the Magistracy. Minister Markandaya refuses to discuss the subject, and substantial digging by interested parties has turned up nothing to support the claim.

Currency

Magistracy currency is based on the dollar. Kossandra Centrella and her followers deliberately disavowed the Marik eagle, currency of their former homeland, as a sign of their intent to sever ties with the FWL. Canopian dollars come in bills or silver coins, with bills covering denominations of \$1, \$2, \$5, \$10, \$20 and up. Five-dollar coins are gold;

smaller silver and copper coins represent sums of less than one dollar.

Whether metal or paper, Canopian currency is a work of art. Paper bills sport extravagant designs and are printed in every color of the rainbow, while the reverse sides of coins feature stylized animals and geometric designs from African, Celtic, North American and Meso-American tribal cultures. Coin faces are emblazoned with portraits of various notable Magestrixes: Kossandra, Floral, Crystalla (who resisted absorption into the first Star League), Janina (who shepherded the Magistracy through the early Succession Wars), Kyalla (who had “victory coins” prematurely struck in 3032, at the height of Magistracy gains during the Canopian-Capellan War) and Emma herself.

Cash and barter are the norm on poorer Canopian planets, and in economically struggling enclaves on worlds throughout the realm. Casino worlds like Hardcore will take money in any form; electronic transactions and credit vouchers see heavy use there, especially at the gaming tables. Traveling pleasure circuses make equally frequent use of electronic funds transfers, and are also stocked with every currency printed in known space for the convenience of their multi-national clientele. (All exchanges made for a fee, of course.) Personal debt, excessively high during the boom-and-bust years of Kyalla Centrella’s reign, has declined significantly since the economic revival truly took off in the late 3050s—though it remains considerably above debt levels in the neighboring Concordat, as Canopians tend to treat credit and cash interchangeably.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES

—From a prospectus at the New Frontiers Business Conference, recently held in Canopus IV’s capital city of Crimson, touting the Magistracy as “an ideal place for the serious investor to make a profit.”

The Canopian economy has greatly diversified over the past several decades, adding agriculture, mining and an enlarged military manufacturing sector to its historic economic powerhouses of entertainment, medical technologies and medical personnel. The following pages briefly describe several prominent companies, highlighting the variety that the Magistracy has to offer.

Military Industries

MAJESTY METALS AND MANUFACTURING

Main Headquarters: Canopus IV

CEO: Gavin Priest-McDonogh

Main Products (Canopus IV): *Locust*, *Stinger*, *Wasp* and *Marauder* BattleMechs; Heavy LRM Carriers; communications and targeting/tracking gear; fusion engines; jump jets; BattleMech armor; lasers and machine guns

Main Products (Dunianshire): *Shadow Hawk* and *Locust* BattleMechs; Manticore and Po tanks; Light SRM and Heavy LRM carriers; Pike support vehicles; *Sabre* aerospace fighters; *Leopard*-class DropShips; fusion engines; jump jets; BattleMech and tank armor; communications, targeting and tracking systems; various munitions

Profile:

The oldest military manufacturer in the Magistracy, Majesty Metals survived the fierce border disputes of the early 2800s and the economic ravages of the Inner Sphere’s Succession Wars. For a time, its production facilities on Canopus IV and Dunianshire were the Magistracy’s sole domestic source of armaments. Employees take great pride in the company’s history, as does the extended noble family that owns it. A recent influx of funds from private investors in the Liao Commonality has enabled Majesty to expand its production lines, significantly upping its output of Mechs and other war machines despite the added expense of importing large quantities of raw materials.

DETROIT CONSOLIDATED MECHWORKS

Main Headquarters: Detroit

CEO: Sylvia Ramey

Main Products: *Anubis*, *Ostroc*, *Stinger*, *Marshal* and *Wasp* BattleMechs; *Troika* aerospace fighters (produced by Detroit Consolidated Aerospace, a division of DCM); Trinity battle armor

Profile:

Despite its location in Fronc Reaches territory, the Detroit Consolidated MechWorks and its homeworld belong to the Magistracy of Canopus. Financed extensively by the Capellan Confederation and intended as Exhibit A for the benefits of membership in the Trinity Alliance, the company was founded and set up to produce armaments in equal numbers for the MAF and the Taurian Defense Forces—a charge it has so far kept, regardless of the turbulent events since its completion in 3060. As befits a state-of-the-art factory, DCM and its offshoot, Detroit Consolidated Aerospace, produce some of the Periphery’s most cutting-edge war machines. The Magistracy Highlanders take seriously their task of guarding this near-priceless facility while ensuring continued smooth delivery of weapons shipments to the Magistracy and the Concordat.

ALLIANCE AEROSPACE GROUP

Main Headquarters: Marantha

CEO: Grania Landynksi

Main Products: *Seydlitz*, *Lightning* and *Thunderbird* aerospace fighters

Profile:

The “Alliance” in this start-up company’s name refers not to the Trinity Alliance, but to our neighbors in the Outworlds. A joint venture between Canopian investors and Outworlds Alliance technical personnel, AAG is the first dedicated aerospace production facility built in the Magistracy since the first Star League era. Initial production runs have succeeded beyond expectations, and the company plans to add new lines for *Chippewa* and *Slayer* heavy aerospace fighters in the near future. Senior General Hadji Doru is a shareholder in the company, having put up considerable personal funds in an effort to speed the revamping of the MAF’s aerospace arm.

2571



2750



Magistracy of Canopus
after Age of War (2571)
and fall of the Star League (2750)

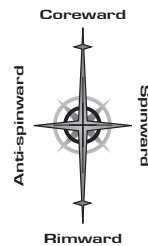
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LEGEND



90 LIGHT YEARS OR 20.1 PARSECS

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS



Other Profit Sectors

MINDSTAR ENTERPRISES

Main Headquarters: Canopus IV

CEO: Kamala Roy

Main Products (Canopus IV): Pleasure circuses, casinos, live theatre, nightclub acts

Main Products (Gallis): Hologrid series and hologrids, music distribution

Main Products (Hardcore): Hologrids, film and print erotica

Profile:

This resilient entertainment company has made a remarkable comeback over the past two decades, going from near-bankruptcy in 3042 to a powerhouse of the pleasure industry just ten years later. Offering everything from well-run casinos on Canopus IV to popular hologrids to high-end hologrids for the “serious art” crowd, Mindstar Enterprises covers all sectors of the vast entertainment market. Top-quality talent and hard-nosed business acumen combine to make Mindstar the Magistracy’s premier source for almost every leisure delight.

The pride and joy of Mindstar Enterprises are its pleasure circuses, which offer every kind of amusement for every kind of taste. If it’s legal and consensual, Mindstar can provide it, efficiently and at a reasonable cost. Mindstar’s pleasure circuses are among the best-run in the industry, with consistent five-star ratings from Baedeker’s Guide on everything from food to accommodations to the live entertainment offered around the clock on every Mindstar circus vessel.

PRECISION INSTRUMENTS OF LUXEN, LTD.

Main Headquarters: Luxen

CEO: Paolo Ciampa

Main Products: Surgical instruments, neurochips, medical scanners, blood analyzers, hospital life-support machines

Profile:

Benefiting from its proximity to the Canopian Medical Sciences research and training complex, Precision Instruments of Luxen continues to burnish its reputation as the Periphery’s leading designer and manufacturer of high-tech medical implements. Production facilities are located in the city of Genoa, while the company’s research and testing facility is in the nearby city of Angonia. Precision Instruments draws a large share of its talented researchers and engineers from the University of Luxen, which offers a specialty in technical design for the medical industry.

BIO-EDGE, INC.

Main Headquarters: Wildwood

CEO: Jeffrey Kirschner

Main Products: Pharmaceuticals, bio-ceuticals

Profile:

This cutting-edge biotechnology company is a recent addition to Wildwood’s planetary economy, and in just the past six years its

profits have placed it on a par with major concerns in Wildwood’s thriving agricultural sector. The Trinity Alliance has opened new doors for the Magistracy’s medical industry, and Bio-Edge pharmaceuticals are among the top sellers throughout human-occupied space. The bioengineering portion of the company remains in second place, largely because of higher R&D costs. However, recent advances in bioscience have put Bio-Edge within striking distance of several potentially profitable items currently under development.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

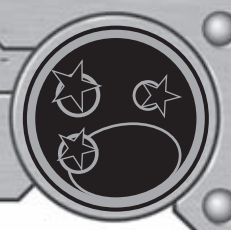
(28 June 3067)

Crawford’s Delight [ISAP] — An old line in a famous guidebook sums up the touchstone of Canopian life: “Other interstellar realms may excel at making deals or making war, but no realm in known space throws a better party than the Magistracy of Canopus.” The Magistracy’s historic tolerance, open immigration policy and thriving pleasure industry combine to make it a Mecca for Inner Sphere and Periphery citizens in pursuit of a good time. From Baedeker’s Guides to ComStar’s scholarly volumes, countless pages have been written extolling the sheer variety of amusements to be found here—Canopus IV’s vast casinos, the jeweled “leisure cities” of Crawford’s Delight and Hardcore, the unspoiled forests and abundant game of Wildwood’s western continent. Less well known to the average tourist, but a source of deep pride to Canopians, is the nation’s role as a haven for victims of oppression. The famous Magistracy tolerance applies to more than enjoyment. Reflecting the legacy of this realm’s libertarian founders, the Canopian government extends automatic citizenship to anyone who can prove himself a victim of political, religious or social persecution.

The status of women is another element that sets Magistracy society apart. Women here enjoy overwhelming political, economic and military prominence, which many believe bolsters the easygoing feel of Magistracy life. Women enjoy equal or near-equal opportunities for advancement in many other nations, of course, but only in the Magistracy are they superior. This societal bias toward women is a legacy of the realm’s early years, when Kossandra Centrella and her immediate successors enshrined female control of the levers of power. Canopian men received rights to office-holding and suffrage during the military governorship of Melissa Humphreys, but the habit of favoring women as movers and shakers remains. Prominent men do exist, and the local pundit class occasionally entertains itself by fretting over whether or not Canopian boys are doing as well as their sisters, but in many aspects of life it’s simply assumed that women do a better job.

ANYTHING GOES: THE ETHOS OF OPENNESS

Throughout the Inner Sphere, and in much of the Periphery as well, the Magistracy of Canopus is seen as a cesspool of decadence or a bastion of freedom, depending on the observer’s point of view. Both of these judgments hold some truth, and arise from the same source—Canopians’ willingness to accept just about any customs, beliefs, viewpoints and activities within Magistracy borders so long as they don’t involve harm to unconsenting others. With its emphasis on social



and cultural as well as legal and political freedoms, the Magistracy may be humanity's most open society—this despite the fact that the Canopian Constitution technically permits the Magestrix to rule like an autocrat. The dichotomy is explained by the scope and limits of the Magestrix's office, coupled with the sheer weight of long-standing social custom. The Magestrix is obligated to "promote the general welfare of the Canopian people," and tradition defines that general welfare as preserving each citizen's near-absolute right to live her life and express herself as she deems fit. The foremost duty of Magistracy government, seen from this standpoint, is to get out of its citizens' way. Any Magestrix or Central Committee representative who attempted to legislate things like morals, religious practice, artistic boundaries and so on would soon find herself out of a job and likely in exile somewhere.

The famed Magistracy ethic of tolerance brings other benefits as well, chief among them the vitality and energy of a large immigrant population. Every interstellar realm has at least a few ethnic and cultural variations, but the Magistracy of Canopus is easily the most polyglot of all. Throughout its history the Magistracy has attracted all kinds: Rasalhagians fleeing House Kurita's cultural cleansing, Skye exiles from Lyran space, and countless other ethnic, religious and political minorities. The modern-day Magistracy is a genuine melting pot, distinguished by unmatched appreciation for different cultural traditions. In few other places, for example, will you find anything like one of the hottest dining spots in the city of Joyeux on Crawford's Delight: Madhu's Pizza and Indian Specialties, where the South Asian proprietor gleefully serves up a North American variation of an ancient Italian flatbread, topped and spiced with ingredient combinations that reflect every ancient Terran cuisine from the Punjab to Shanghai to the Mediterranean basin.

"Only in the Magistracy" is an often-repeated phrase, in the tourist guidebooks and on the streets of many Canopian worlds. When spoken by Canopian citizens, it may come in any one of a hundred accents—but it nearly always rings with pride. The value Canopians place on their diversity helps hold this otherwise chaotic state together, binding its varied populations more closely than any shared language, religious tradition or customs. Ethnic and religious tension is remarkably low in the Magistracy; its many peoples have learned to live amicably together, and welcome new arrivals willing to do the same.

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

With the pursuit and selling of leisure so central to Canopian life, it's not surprising that the Magistracy serves as a haven for artists and freethinkers. Visual artists, writers, actors, filmmakers, composers, musicians and dancers can all make a decent living here, thanks to generous government subsidies. Even oddball "socio-artistic" experiments like the Whatever Commune on Wildwood's Dolphin Island—founded by freethinker Connor Henry in 3053 and entirely inhabited by people who regard loafing as a literal sacrament—receive small amounts of government funds... in this case, or so the story goes, purely for the amusement value.

Popular entertainment and serious art each have devotees among the citizenry, and Canopians are known to follow their favorite theatre company or dance troupe with the fervor other nations reserve for

professional sports teams. Celebrity gossip magazines are among the hottest sellers throughout the realm, and would-be paparazzi can make fortunes overnight with the right hard-to-get shot of an elusive holofilm star or lead null-grav dancer. Erotica is another proven moneymaker, with an emphasis on art over crudity. This portion of the entertainment business earns revenues from virtually everywhere, even realms where such items are officially banned. The Magistracy government turns a blind eye, regulating the industry just enough to ensure that everyone involved in it is a freely consenting adult and gets decently paid.

On a local level, Magistracy worlds abound with seasonal festivals and talented amateur performers. Many of the latter are scooped up by traveling talent scouts for the major entertainment conglomerates, like Mindstar Enterprises and Canopus Delights, Ltd. The Diamond Lake Film Festival on Crawford's Delight, entirely devoted to amateur holofilmakers, is one of the hottest tickets on the planet and is famous for launching many entrants on professional careers.

The other hot ticket in recent months has been an extensive exhibit of Chinese artifacts from ancient Terra, dating back to the reign of the Emperor Qu'ian Loong. Sponsored by the Capellan Ministry of Culture, this traveling collection of textiles, decorative furniture and objets d'art has played to sold-out crowds on Canopus IV, Gallis and Royal Foxx. Slated for Luxen later this year, the Qu'ian Loong exhibit looks likely to be a blockbuster on that planet as well. The show's backers are taking full advantage of a growing interest in all things Capellan, including the cultures and cuisines of ancient China (from which the Capellan Confederation takes its inspiration). The benefits of the Trinity Alliance, and of ties with House Liao in particular, have sparked a mini-fad in everything Chinese, from languages to calligraphy to food. Capellan-themed tchotchke shops are opening up in Canopian cities faster than grass can sprout, and skilled Mandarin, Szechuan and Hunan chefs are in high demand in restaurants all across the Magistracy.

EDUCATION

Ever since the collapse of the Star League, education has been this realm's Achilles heel—spottily available, haphazardly funded and completely given over to local control. All that is changing with the major influx since 3056 and 3058 of Taurian expertise and Capellan subsidies earmarked for upgrading the Magistracy's educational system. Universal primary and secondary school, starting at age four and ending at age sixteen, has become a reality for every Magistracy planet since 3062—even those worlds too poor and sparsely inhabited to offer it before. The struggling "hedge schools" of the poorest communities have given way to larger and better-equipped public facilities, staffed by graduates from the Magistracy's first teachers' college: the Royal College of Education, attached to the University of Canopus. Basic literacy is on the rise among adults as well; language-arts classes are popping up all over the place, in local schools and community halls and in neighbors' living rooms. Would-be teachers of these ad hoc classes can apply for a government grant and must undergo a three-month training course. The Canopian Authors' Guild recently used a sizable grant to expand its long-standing adult literacy programs; its highly successful Write-to-Read campaign now runs a



3025



3067

Magistracy of Canopus
after Third Succession War (3025)
and after FedCom Civil War (3067)

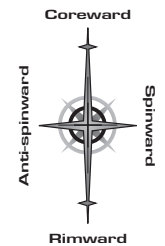
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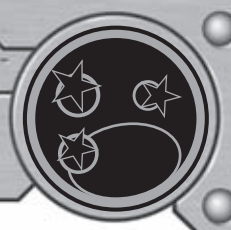
LEGEND



90 LIGHT YEARS OR 20.1 PARSECS

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS





short story and essay contest for unpublished writers, with a thousand-dollar prize for the top ten entrants.

Educational opportunities have expanded at higher levels as well. The University of Luxen, long one of the few bright spots on the Canopian educational scene, revamped and expanded its School of Engineering in 3059, and now offers engineering courses that go well beyond the medtech field to include everything from architectural to military applications. The school owes much of its success to Capellan engineering instructors, made available through Trinity Alliance exchange programs. The University of Gallis, opened with great fanfare in 3066, offers an undergraduate liberal arts degree and graduate-level opportunities in the sciences, literature and Canopian law. Nor are the arts neglected: since 3060, the Magistracy has founded two theatre schools, three musical academies and a School of the Visual Arts attached to the University of Canopus. The Thespians' Academy on Royal Foxx offers classical theatre training, while the Melora Duncan School of Performing Arts—named for a famous actress and dancer of the late 30th century—focuses on improvisation, avant-garde theatre and dance.

Even with these vast improvements, the Magistracy remains behind such educational powerhouses as the Taurian Concordat, and everyone involved in the educational system acknowledges that the realm has a long way to go before it reaches its full potential. But with the first crop of basic-school graduates since 3058 approaching graduation, the Magistracy seems set to exploit its new advantages to the fullest. The student population poised to graduate from secondary school in the next couple of years will be the best-educated in Canopian history, with unprecedented opportunity awaiting them in almost all fields of study. The impact on the Canopian economy should be huge, and is likely to launch this nation into the first tier of interstellar power players.

RELIGION

As might be expected of a realm that bills itself as open to all comers, the Magistracy of Canopus is home to every faith in the galaxy. The major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism—are well represented, in all their variations. Smaller faiths from old Terra thrive as well: Sikhism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, Native American and African tribal religions, and several variants on neopaganism. So colorful is the Magistracy's religious tapestry that one would be hard-pressed to cite a faith or spiritual philosophy that isn't present here: Confucians, Daoists, Taurian-style Deists, Unitarians and even an organized society of atheists co-exist more or less easily. To give readers an idea of the sheer variety of Canopian religious expression, I've highlighted a few of the more idiosyncratic groups below.

Goddess Religions

The prominence of women in the Magistracy since its founding has given rise to a robust collection of Goddess-centered faiths, from Wicca to neo-Druidism to revivals of ancient Greece's Eleusinian mystery faiths (with a pronounced emphasis on the feminine divine). Worshipers

of Demeter, Greek goddess of abundance, are a regular sight in the breadbasket regions of Wildwood, while Wiccan practitioners can be found in almost every settlement on the more verdant Canopian worlds. A small sect devoted to the Morrigan, Irish deity of war and death, has followers in the rocky landscapes of the Trznadel Cluster's mining enclaves, reflecting the miners' sense of being in a daily battle with their harsh environment for survival. Male deities are often part of these faiths, and frequently have important roles to play, but they remain secondary to the Mother Goddesses that animate these traditions.

Magdalene Church

A feminist twist on Catholicism, the Magdalene Church first arose on Terra in the late 21st century, taking its inspiration from the explosion in scholarship earlier in that era surrounding the Apostle Mary of Magdala and the development of early Christianity. The modern-day Magdalenes vary quite a bit in their beliefs about their patron apostle—some believe she was married to Jesus of Nazareth, others that she was simply his most prominent disciple—but all agree on the importance of her life and contributions to Christianity. They see their church as a redemption of the Catholic faith from errors introduced into it through collaboration with the Roman Empire, and especially as a pathway for restoring femininity to humans' sense of the divine. They ordain women and men as priests, but have no Pope; authority in the Magdalene Church rests with local bishops, who are chosen from among their own congregations every ten years.

Millennialists

The Millennialists can be described as an offshoot of Christianity, Judaism or Islam with equal accuracy. Drawing on selected symbols and concepts from fundamentalist versions of all three monotheistic religions, Millennialists believe that human existence may end at any moment, and that "false prophets of earlier End Times" (as they put it) were sent to test their faith. Depending on the particular bent of a given Millennialist group, believers may speak of an approaching Rapture, of Y-hw-h's final judgment over humanity, or of the return of the Hidden Imam—but all regard these events as essentially the same, a transcendent moment in which all living things will either be joined forever with the Creator in the Divine Realm or will cease to exist.

Millennialist settlements thrive in marginal climates—the edges of deserts, asteroid domes and so on. Adherents tend to seek out challenging environments, seeing them as tests of endurance until the Day of Judgment comes. Those who take to heart their faith's call to "live each day as though it were your last" are often remarkably ethical and compassionate people, determined to embody righteous action in their every waking moment. Some of them are also prolific proselytizers, who want to offer everyone an opportunity to be "saved" while there's still time. Others regard such efforts as a futile distraction from the real business of living, which is spiritual preparation for the imminent righteous judgment of their god.

CANOPUS IV

Noble Ruler: Magestrix Emma Centrella
Star Type (Recharge Time): F5IV (176 hours)
Position in System: 4
Time to Jump Point: 14.94 days
Number of Satellites: 2 (Cybele and Inanna)
Surface Gravity: 1.1
Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (Breathable)
Equatorial Temperature: 25° C (Temperate)
Surface Water: 60 percent
Recharging Station: Nadir
HPG Class Type: B
Highest Native Life: Fish
Population: 1,107,200,000
Socio-Industrial Levels: A-B-B-B-C

The first planet settled by Kossandra Centrella and her followers, Canopus IV soon became the capital of the Magistracy, its rapid growth and prominence fueled by rich deposits of valuable minerals. The leisure industry found a hospitable home on Canopus IV, whose hardworking miners and factory hands needed an outlet and had the money to pay for it. As increasing profits turned Canopian mine owners and manufacturers into rich titans of industry, their wealth fueled the growth of luxury entertainment: casinos, elegant hotels and swanky resorts. The side-by-side growth of the leisure business and heavy industry allowed the former to act as a brake on the latter, by providing an alternative way to strike it rich. The collapse of the Star League virtually crippled tourism, however, leaving exploitation of Canopus IV's natural resources as the planet's only viable source of jobs and revenue. Consequently, the 29th and 30th centuries saw an explosion of strip-mining and other ecologically questionable practices, as the Magistracy clawed its way out of the economic depths. These scars have yet to heal.



The most worrying consequence of this long-term environmental damage is the development of erratic weather patterns that increasing numbers of experts fear are permanent. In keeping with their knack for adapting to circumstances, Canopus IV's people have turned their homeworld's wild weather into something of an advantage. Canopus IV has become a Mecca for storm-chasers, and in 3063 the Canopian government established a major center for climate study in the planetary capital of Crimson. Based on the center's first major report, the planetary government began constructing a series of locks across the Bay of Altay, which forms part of the coastline of Salonika, Canopus IV's largest land mass. The locks are intended to protect Astarte, a major shipping center at the tip of the bay, from periodic flooding caused by massive ocean-born storm systems.

The capital city is also home to Mindstar Enterprises, the only Canopian entertainment conglomerate left over from before the

Succession Wars. Its huge facilities lie between Crimson and the Thistledown Fields spaceport, perfectly placed for visitors to Canopus IV interested in combining business with pleasure. The Mindstar compound is the size of a small city, with abundant hotels, convention centers, restaurants, theatres, auditoriums and casinos. Crimson's temperate climate is another attraction: guests at Mindstar can amble down miles of beautifully landscaped gardens, swim in the cool waters of the River Thetis, or take a pleasure cruise to the river delta in a sumptuously decked-out paddlewheel boat.

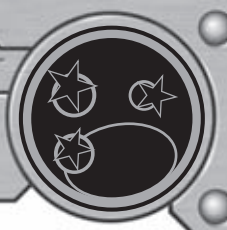
THRAXA

Noble Ruler: Duchess Molly Trussel
Star Type (Recharge Time): M1 (202 hours)
Position in System: 2
Time to Jump Point: 2.96 days
Number of Satellites: 1 (Niobe)
Surface Gravity: 1.03
Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (Breathable)
Equatorial Temperature: 22 degrees C° (Cool Temperate)
Surface Water: 80 percent
Recharging Station: Nadir
HPG Class Type: B
Highest Native Life: Mammal
Population: 19,100,000
Socio-Economic Levels: C-C-B-B-C

This border world near the Marian Hegemony has been virtually self-sufficient since the second generation after settlement, supplying its needs through a lucrative fur trade, forestry, coal mining and textiles. Thraxan textiles in particular have become all the rage since the 3045 development of a local sheep breed that produces cashmere-like wool in sufficient abundance to lower the price. Known throughout Canopian space as an especially independent-minded lot, Thraxans are proud of their reputation for stubbornness and make no apologies for putting their own planet's interests first. As far back as the Andurien-Canopian war, Thraxans have existed in uneasy tension with the Magistracy government, determined to do for themselves what they only intermittently trust their rulers to do for them. Their proximity to the Marian Hegemony has made them a frequent target of vicious raids, most recently in the 3057-58 Pirates' War. Such experiences only fuel local convictions that if Thraxans want anything done, they'd best do it themselves.



The mountains of Thraxa's northern continent are a draw for serious climbers seeking a challenge, despite a record number of injuries and even deaths in attempting to scale them. Winter storms in the mountains have sparked legends of snow-demons and killer blizzards, the latter allegedly animated by the spirits of the vengeful dead. Much of Thraxa's northern landmass is tundra, with large swathes of wilderness



deliberately preserved in between the planet's major settlements. Snow bears and herds of tazqan, a caribou-like native herbivore prized for its smoky-tasting meat, roam these wild preserves; the bears occasionally stroll into town when scarce forage thins the herds.

The planet's most dangerous predator, the Thraxan devourer, is native to Thraxa's vast southern ocean. This massive sea serpent outweighs a great white shark, with impressive swimming speed and a jaw that locks onto its prey with bone-crushing force. Thraxan devourers sometimes venture into shallow waters in search of food, and pose a particular menace to swimmers and fishing boats off the Crescent Archipelago during summer months. One such victim was Ian Calderon, eaten by a devourer during his five-day R&R from the mercenary Green Mountain Boys.

THE FRONC REACHES

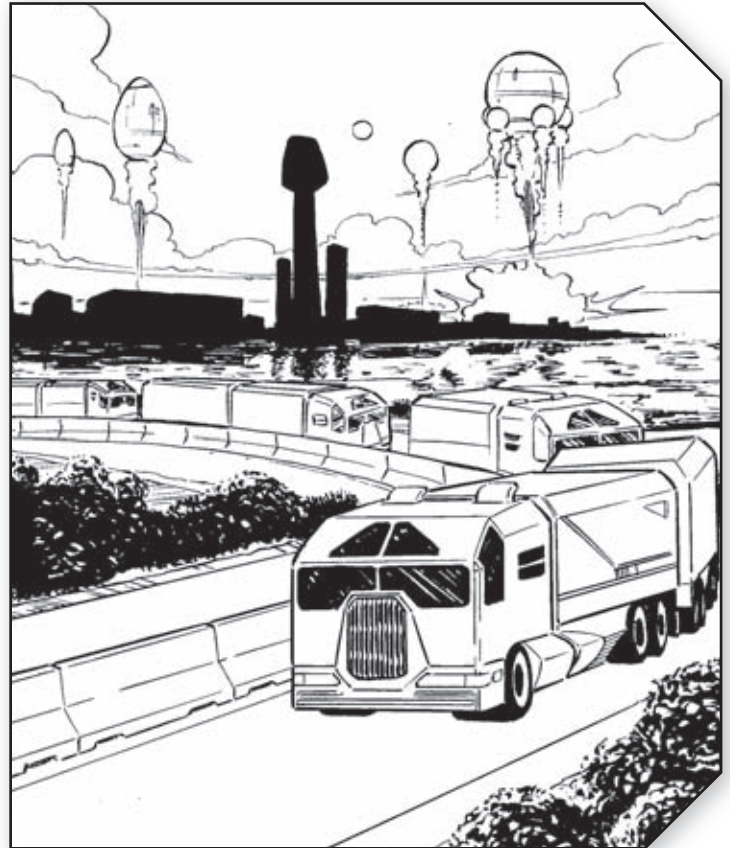
(29 August 3067)

Fronc [ISAP] — High summer in Freedom's Ring, Fronc's newly christened capital city. Up until April of 3066, its name was Paradiso—"paradise"—a sardonic comment on its locale in a semi-arid landscape amid vast mesas and towering red rock formations. The abundant terra cotta hue provides a marked contrast to the dazzling blue sky, which at mid-afternoon holds a hint of purple at its edges. Against this gorgeous wash of color, a flag is flying: blue bars on white, emblazoned with a circle of nine yellow stars. The flag is the emblem of the Fronc Reaches, waving in the hot breeze over the solar dome that tops the Residence, where the President meets with his Cabinet and the fourteen-member Planetary Council. The President also lives in a wing of this smallish but active government compound—nerve center of this newborn realm, which is just taking the first steps toward ensuring its continued national survival.

Everyone now knows the story of the Fronc Reaches: nine significant worlds lying between the Magistracy of Canopus and the Taurian Concordat, jointly colonized by those two allied powers starting in 3056, then boldly declaring itself independent just ten years later. That it pulled off such a coup despite its small size and equally small nascent military is either liberty's greatest success story or an inexplicable aberration, depending on one's point of view. Whatever the case, the folk of the Fronc Reaches are determined to keep the freedom they've won. Like the Periphery pioneers to whom they look for inspiration, they want to make it (or not) on their own merits.

ECONOMICS: THE POLITICS OF TRADE

The Fronc Reaches was born of a fight over revenue and resources—who controlled how much of each and who got to decide how to spend the money. This history, coupled with a small standing army, makes trade the literal lifeline for this tiny realm. The Trondel administration is eager to forge trade ties wherever it can, to guarantee present economic survival and future prosperity. Its location makes it a natural hub for trade between its former parent realms, as well as for commerce between the Magistracy, the Concordat and the rest of the Periphery. President Trondel even hopes to eventually extend his nation's trading network to the Inner Sphere, starting with the Capellan Confederation



and the Free Worlds League. (Trade with the FedCom, one government aide told me anonymously, will have to wait until relations with the Taurian Concordat are solid enough to withstand the blow.)

The people of the Reaches also value trade for their political survival; they hope to make their nation more valuable to the region's bigger players as an independent commercial hub than as a conquered province. The Concordat's initial fury at the Fronc Reaches secession briefly sparked fears of invasion, but strong backing from the Magestrix and the ongoing drain of war in the Pleiades made action by the TDF impossible. Swift recognition and support from the Free Rasalhague Republic and ComStar also played a role, likely persuading Magestrix Emma to come down on the side of the angels. Had she chosen differently, the Reaches might not exist—or would be clawing its way out from under the rubble of war.

Luckily for the future of commerce in the Reaches, the relative peace with which it gained independence left its communications system intact. ComStar and the Word of Blake are vying for influence here, as they do everywhere. At the moment, ComStar has the advantage. Though the Word of Blake landed some contracts through extremely low bids during the early colonization period, many settlements subsequently switched to ComStar. Its swift recognition of the Fronc Reaches bought ComStar a lot of loyalty, on which the organization has been quick to capitalize. A few Blakist-run HPG stations remain, though Word of Blake personnel stand out quite a bit amid the freethinkers and pragmatists common to the local folk.

Newsmaker Profile: President Carver Trondel

First president of the independent Fronc Reaches, Carver Trondel has the craggy looks and blunt manner of a lawman from an ancient Western. A native of Cate's Hold in the Magistracy of Canopus, he learned the metal-mining industry from the ground up, and raised two children on the strength of his job as foreman for Silverado Mining Inc. The loss of his wife of twenty years in 3058, along with the impending departure of his oldest son for military training, made him restless. When Silverado offered him a job at significantly higher pay in its new facility on Rockwellawan in the New Colony Region, he jumped at it.

Though he stayed neutral during Sherman Maltin's abortive rebellion, disenchantment with the state of local affairs prompted him to run for office in the early fall of 3061. His plain speaking and thoughtful demeanor helped him win out over six other Canopian-born candidates, and he took office as Colony President in January 3062. He did not seek independence for the NCR initially, but came to that position gradually as civil unrest refused to die down and neither the Magistracy nor the Concordat seemed able to meet the colonies' needs. Stubborn refusal by Taurian Protector Grover Shraplen to consider a "trial period" of independence for the NCR drove Trondel to make an open break with both parent realms in 3066. Since then, he has worked tirelessly to keep his young nation safe and prospering. Highest on his priority list is settling the fate of Detroit, site of the valuable Detroit MechWorks and currently claimed by both the Reaches and the Magistracy.

Irons in the Fire

Meanwhile, the Reaches continues to negotiate separate trade deals with the Taurian Concordat, the Outworlds Alliance and the expanding Marian Hegemony. The farmers of Portland are eager to reopen commerce with nearby Concordat worlds that prior generations helped feed during the first Star League era, before the economic pressures of the Succession Wars forced the Taurians to abandon the planet. The moribund fisheries on Spencer, revived by Taurian colonists, are gearing up to sell their delicacies everywhere from Taurus to Dneiper to Alphard. Rockwellawan's citizens hope to regain their planet's stature as a major shipping hub, and the opal mines on Cygnus stand to make that planet a hefty profit.

The national treasury will need every penny it can get, to build on its people's existing achievements and to beef up the nation's defenses. Several pirate bands routinely operate in the coreward regions of the Periphery, and the newly independent planets of the Reaches make inviting targets.

MARSHALS AND MERCS: THE FRONC REACHES MILITARY

Two battalions of Colonial Marshals—all that was left of the New Colony region's defense forces after the abortive coup of 3060-61—form the core of the Fronc Reaches' small military. The rest consists of those mercenary units the young government could afford to pay, hired in haste on Outreach and Galatea in the waning months of 3065 and early 3066. Together, these forces can barely hold off the worst depredations of local pirate bands, most notably the Shen-sè Tian and the small but lethal group known as the Calderon Commando. Both of these bands have struck more than once; the Shen-sè Tian, in fact,

are said to operate from a marginally habitable planet or asteroid somewhere inside the Reaches. Neither the Marshals nor any allied merc units have yet mustered sufficient force to track them down, and no one knows for certain if the rumors are even true. Attacks on shipping between Fronc and Portland, and on vessels bound from Rockwellawan to Detroit, give credence to theories that the pirates' "mystery planet" lies somewhere in that relatively empty region of space. Interestingly enough, no ships departing from Detroit to other destinations have yet been hit—possibly because neither of these raiding parties cares to provoke the Magistracy Highlanders.

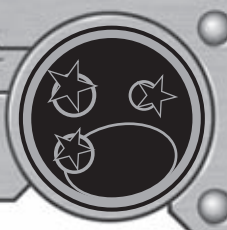
Force Marshal Dirk McEvans serves as overall leader of the armed forces and primary liaison to the allied mercenary commands. He has dispatched representatives to Galatea and Outreach, seeking to hire more mercs in the face of continuing pirate attacks. Meanwhile, the Marshals are beginning to find their footing as military leaders. Flooded with eager recruits throughout 3066, they've made definite progress integrating the new arrivals into the existing military structure. Given time, the Fronc Reaches Military promises to become a solid fighting force well capable of defending its small territory—with a little help from some friendly hired guns.

LIVING IN THE REACHES

The worlds of the Fronc Reaches reflect the cultural and social attitudes of their majority populations: some Taurian, some Canopian, and some worlds equally divided between the two. Jointly settled planets are home to culturally distinct enclaves—and though most inhabitants at least give a nod to the notion of common citizenship in their new nation, no one is quite sure what that means. Should the Fronc Reaches be more Canopian, more Taurian, or something else entirely? How individual residents answer these questions largely depends on where they live, and whether they are in the majority or the minority on their particular homeworld. What exists across the Reaches nowadays is a blend of Canopian and Taurian customs and attitudes—sometimes an easy mesh, often not. The more freewheeling Canopian settlers regard their fellows of Taurian origin as hopelessly straitlaced and prone to argue over every little thing, while former Taurians tend to see their Canopian counterparts as feckless and inconsistent. A common joke in Taurian settlements maintains that it takes ten Canopians to change a light bulb: one to notice that the lights are out, and nine to go off and do their own thing in some other room. The counter-joke claims that if you ask four Taurians how to change a light bulb, you'll get eight different opinions—before the barroom brawl gets going.

Tensions also remain from the martial-law years between 3061 and 3063, when Grover Shraplen sent the Taurian Defense Force to the then-colony region to hunt for Davion agitators. Many former Taurians blame "Canopian elements" in the Colonial Marshals for an alleged failure of nerve that helped botch Sherman Maltin's rebellion, thereby delaying independence and bringing the wrath of the Taurians' own government down on their heads. Former Canopians point to Maltin's Taurian citizenship as proof that the Taurian-led revolt failed all on its own—and some blame their Taurian neighbors in the Reaches for what they still term "the TDF occupation." Fortunately, these resentments

MAGISTRACY OF CANOPUS



generally come out as a refusal by those who hold them to have anything to do with “those people” unless absolutely necessary. The occasional hate crimes of the martial-law period have largely vanished, as the people of the Reaches spend their energies building their nation.

It also helps that both cultures place a high value on personal liberty. This commitment to individual freedom and the right to express different viewpoints acts as a social glue that ultimately binds these disparate peoples more closely together than their differences can push them apart.

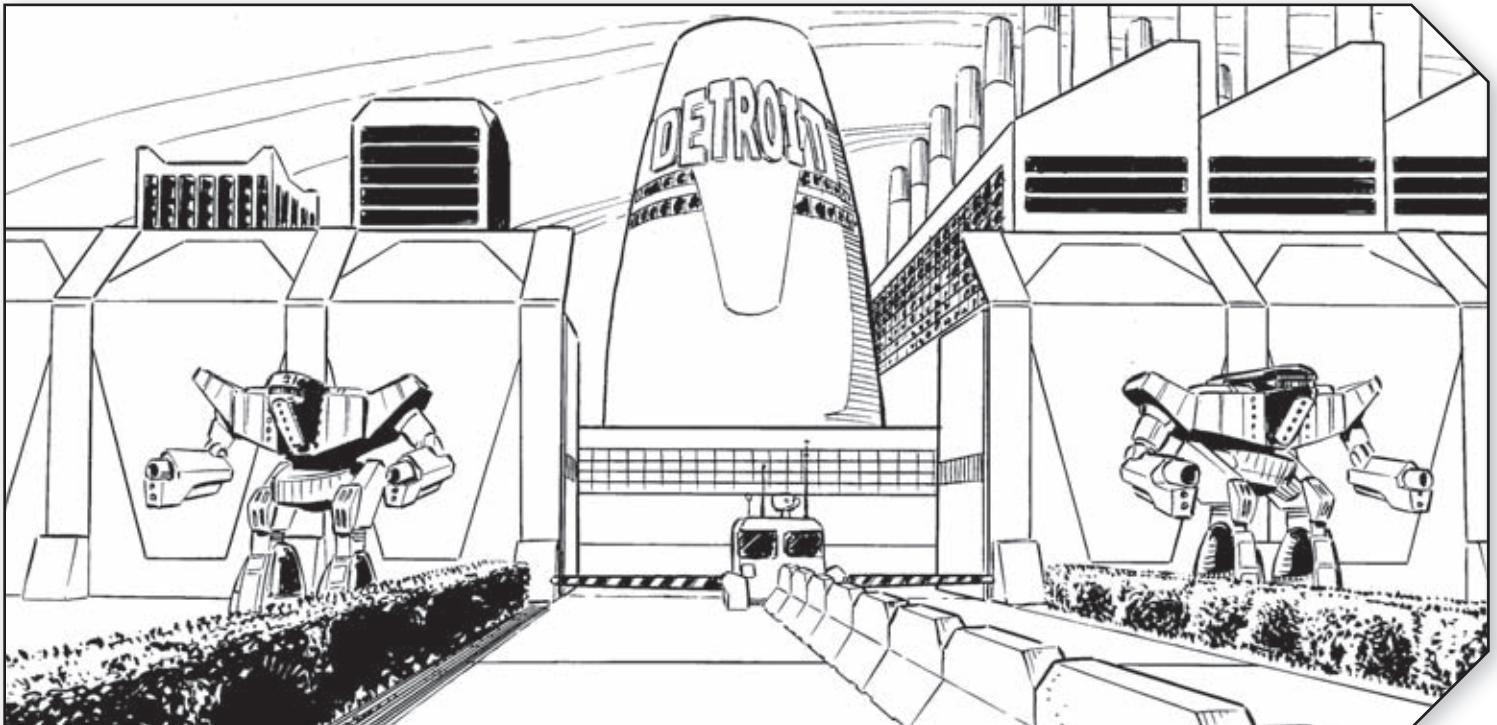
DETROIT

Planetary Ruler: Lenore McCabe
Star Type (Recharge Time): G1V (182 hours)
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 9.75 days
Number of Satellites: 2 (Livonia and Tecumseh)
Surface Gravity: 1.03
Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (Breathable)
Equatorial Temperature: 33° C (Temperate)
Surface Water: 78 percent
Recharging Station: Zenith
HPG Class Type: B
Highest Native Life: Amphibian
Population: 2,110,000,000
Socio-Economic Levels: B-B-B-B-A

The world of Detroit, site of the Detroit Consolidated MechWorks and Detroit Consolidated Aerospace, remains under dispute between

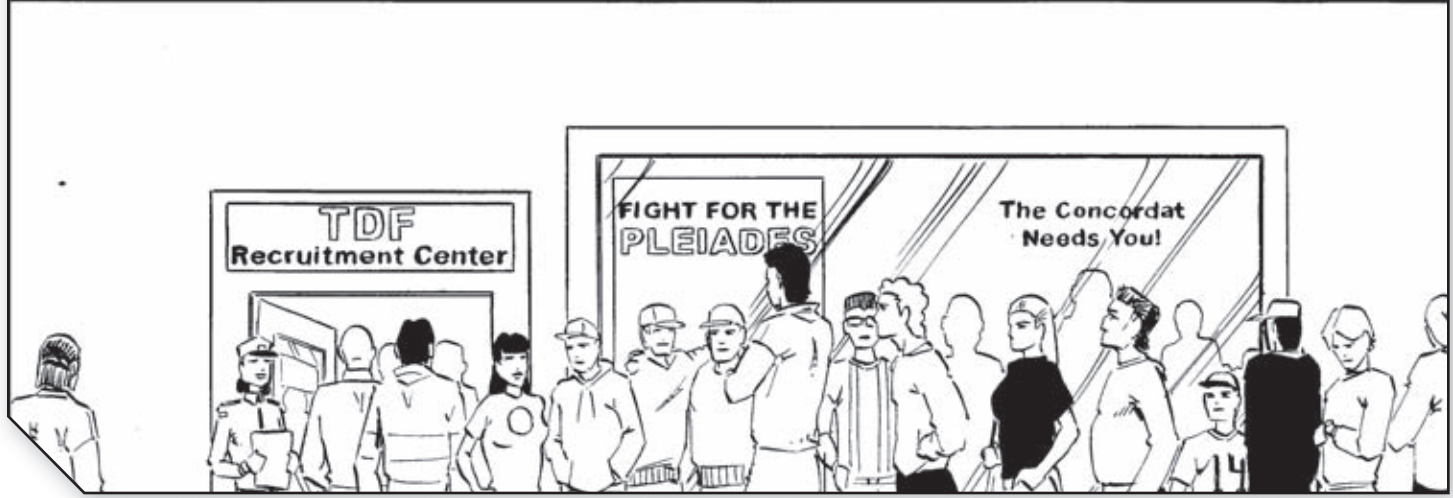
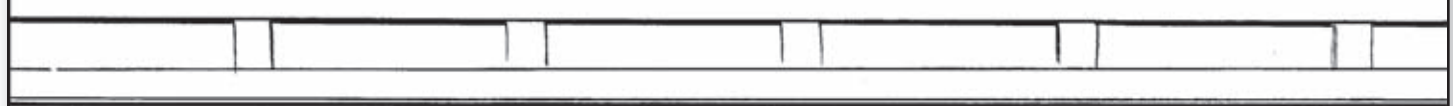
the Fronc Reaches and the Magistracy of Canopus. Despite being in Fronc Reaches space, the planet is officially a Canopian protectorate, and its military factories are garrisoned by the Magistracy Highlanders.

Though the ‘Mech and aerospace facilities are the best known on the planet, Detroit boasts its share of other local industries. Highly productive fisheries and abundant agriculture make the planet more than self-sufficient in foodstuffs, and the sparkling beaches of its southern White Sands archipelago may yet become a major tourist attraction. Another potential draw is the rainbow tree frog, a native creature whose multi-colored skin contains several chemical compounds that might be turned into profitable pharmaceuticals. The Canopian firm Bio-Edge Inc. reportedly considered opening a branch in Michiana, the largest city in Detroit’s northern hemisphere, but rising unrest in 3065 convinced company executives to put their plans on hold. With the Reaches settling into its independent status, the company is said to be interested in reviving talks with planetary authorities, regardless of whether Detroit remains a protectorate or is formally returned to Fronc Reaches control. *[Ed. Note: Shortly before this volume went to press, the Magistracy of Canopus formally annexed Detroit. The Magestrix has announced her intention to continue “equitable distribution of Detroit’s advanced military production” between the Taurian and Canopian realms. President Trondel of the Fronc Reaches could not be reached for comment.]*





TAURIAN CONCORDAT





(22 May 3067)

Taurus [ISAP] — Construction cranes still dot the horizon in Samantha's outlying neighborhoods, but most of the capital city has recovered from last year's assault by the Fighting Urukhai—at least on the surface. New construction shows everywhere, from the gleaming towers of the central financial district to the rebuilt armaments factories on the fringes of the North Quarter. Housing destroyed in the raid received equal attention; the numbers of Samantha's citizens still living in Quonset huts dropped below a thousand late last month. To all appearances, the people of the Taurian Concordat have once again met adversity and stared it down. They've buried their dead, rebuilt where needed, and are getting on with their lives. Yet beneath the surface, the scars of recent events remain.

"Davion bastards," says Mylo Turner, proprietor of the Has Beans coffee shop, famed across Samantha for its grapefruit-sized cinnamon rolls. Turner's establishment is a mere three months removed from rubble; the block in which the original building stood lay directly in the path of the mercenaries' bombing runs. Turner lost his eldest son and half a dozen employees in the attack, which occurred at the height of the lunchtime rush. A luckily timed trip to visit coffee suppliers in the islands of New Corsica spared Turner himself. "I've heard the stories about those (expletive) mercs—they'd quit the Davions, they were just looking for a contract. Hogwash. If that's all they wanted, why'd they send two armed DropShips?"

When pressed as to why the Urukhai would have attacked the Concordat unprovoked, Mylo cites the unsettled political situation in which the Concordat found itself in April of 3066—the same month that the Urukhai DropShips appeared over Taurus and were shot down by the TDF. "The Davions have spies everywhere," he says. "They knew what was going on, with Kithrong and the Sixth Corps getting restless, and everybody wondering how the hell we'd last with Shraplen in the pilot's seat. They also knew we don't have much alternative for leaders right now—a kid, a general in her seventies and a bedridden invalid. An invalid they could tell us how to cure, by the way. They have a cure for Brisbane—been sitting on it a couple years now. Maybe somebody figured a fast strike at Taurus'd be the final blow to bring us down." He drops a cinnamon roll onto my plate. "They were damned surprised when we walked into the Pleiades. And God bless our troops, they're still there. Hanging in against everything the Davion war machine can throw at 'em." His eyes mist over. "My boy Charles is with the Hussars. Putting in his service—but after those Davionista mercs killed Ben, Charles requested the first available posting that'd let him fight the Fedrats. He writes me letters...they're hanging tough, our boys and girls. Fedrats can't budge 'em."

The pride when he speaks of his son's military service stands in sharp contrast to the sentiment that prevailed here just a year ago. Taurian citizens have always valued their soldiers, who have historically stood as a bulwark against aggression by the realm's

neighbors—but the wars in which those soldiers have fought since Protector Grover Shraplen signed the Trinity Alliance in late 3062 prompted rising unease among growing numbers of Taurians. It is one thing to defend the homeland, quite another to serve in a foreign nation's wars of conquest. The "Liao Wars," as local media dubbed the campaigns in St. Ives and the Chaos March, never enjoyed widespread support—and the public's general willingness to trust their Protector's judgment eroded badly in the face of mounting TDF losses. Recruitment numbers dropped, and those who did sign on often requested duty "anywhere except Capellan space." Acts of public protest shifted from small groups outside government offices to ever-larger street-corner vigils, marches and rallies on almost every Concordat world. People openly commiserated with soldiers on leave from Liao campaigns—when they could get those soldiers to say where they were serving in the first place.

Then the Fighting Urukhai struck Taurus, and the Concordat struck back—and everything changed.

Nowadays, Taurians in uniform walk with a new lift in their steps, and their numbers are rising as fast as they'd been falling. The knots of protestors outside recruitment offices have given way to long lines of potential enlistees, nearly all of whom want to see action in the Pleiades Cluster. The sight of a TDF soldier now prompts eager inquiries as to where he or she may be serving, with a heartfelt "God bless you" when the answer is "In the Cluster." Those unlucky souls still fighting for House Liao receive instant sympathy, all the deeper because of the Pleiades Campaign—often along with tips on how to get out of service in Capellan space. "My brother-in-law's with the First Corps; he could put in a good word for you." "I know a military lawyer who could use the Military Code to put you where our soldiers belong."

This upswing in the Taurian mood, however, has a brittle feel. The nation remains uneasy, rocked by one too many tumultuous recent events and deeply uncertain about its future. That last sentiment is new to most Taurians, and decidedly unwelcome. As the oldest realm in human-occupied space, safeguarded by the asteroid fields of the Hyades Cluster as well as a dedicated and talented army, accustomed to long stretches of peace only occasionally punctuated by serious outside threats, the Taurian Concordat has always possessed a bedrock confidence about its existence. The upheavals of the past few years—Protector Jeffrey Calderon's assassination, foreign entanglements with the Inner Sphere, the loss of Taurian colonies in the newborn Fronc Reaches, the secession of the Calderon Protectorate, and several recent changes in the workings of government—have shaken that confidence like nothing since the long-ago Reunification War. Though the realm remains stable, with a slight uptick in Protector Shraplen's dismal polling numbers, the pro-Pleiades war fever cannot disguise the public's underlying malaise. More than anything, the Taurian nation is struggling to stay true to itself.



WINTER OF DISCONTENT?

Mylo Turner's remark about Janice Calderon speaks to the jitters that lie beneath the surface. He, like many of his fellow citizens, has heard rumors that Davion scientists know how to cure the Brisbane Virus—the pernicious microbe that so many years ago robbed Janice Calderon of her vitality and promise. The story takes several forms, but all are variations on the same theme: the utter perfidy of House Davion and the unnerving extent of Davion power to determine the Concordat's destiny on or off the battlefield.

RUMORS IN THE SHADOWS

—Chat room excerpt, Samantha, Taurus, 30 July 3066

EyeSpy: We need a Calderon back in office. Shraplen's an incompetent. What's next after the hit on Taurus—the Davions invade and we fight them off with half our army in the Chaos March?

Mugwump: It's not half. You're exaggerating.

EyeSpy: It's too damned many. And a lot of what's left here are running around in high-tech 'Mechs they haven't a clue how to fight in. I know; I train 'em.

Leeza1: So Eye, want to tell us which Calderon you have in mind? There's so many to pick from...

EyeSpy: Ha, ha. What about Brenda Calderon—the general? Used to command the Taurian Guard? Don't tell me she doesn't know how to get things done. Knows a bit about fighting wars, too.

Leeza1: She's sixty if she's a day. And if she wanted the job, she'd have taken it after Jeffrey died.

Mugwump: What about Jeffrey's kid? With a decent regency till he's old enough? If he's anything like his dad...

Batson: Aren't there some hyphenated Calderons running around out there? Maybe one of them would take it on.

Hari: Janice Calderon. What about her?

EyeSpy: She's damned near permanently hospitalized, from what I hear. When was the last time anyone saw her in public? Hell, she could be dead for all we know!

Hari: She's not. And she's not a hopeless invalid, either. There's a cure for Brisbane out there. We just need to get it to her.

Leeza1: ????? Where in the name of little green footballs did you pick this up, Hari?

Mugwump: I've never heard of any cure.

Hari: Of course you haven't. The people who found it don't want us to know. They've figured out a cure at the New Avalon Institute of Science. Two guesses why they're not sharing their data. Here's the link: infoclearinghouse.fs.studies.nais

Mugwump: If there's anything to this...

Hari: Think about it. What better way to keep us weak than to knock the Calderons off the throne? First they get Jeffrey on Detroit, then they foist Shraplen on us and let him drag the Concordat into the gutter. And all the while, they're sitting on

the cure that could give us Janice back...because they want us to have to choose between Shraplen and that little kid. Shraplen stays in office, the Concordat gets chewed up and spit out by House Liao and the Canopians. Little Erik gets in with a regency, we're looking at ten years of government by committee...in which at least one member of that committee has an entire TDF Corps at his back. Recipe for disaster. Look at history; regencies for child rulers don't end well. Either way, we're sitting ducks for a takeover whenever the Davions get done with their civil war. Common enemy and all that—we're the perfect target.

Batson: You make it sound like House Davion is pulling the strings of the whole dangd universe.

Hari: Check out that link, and then tell me the story's bogus.

Polymath: I've heard this rumor too. It's all over Brisbane, as you might imagine. Got nothing to back it up, myself... or to disprove it, for that matter.

Mugwump: I've just had an ugly thought. What if the Brisbane cure is bogus...but the Davions turn around and offer it to us? On the condition that Janice Calderon go to New Avalon for "treatment."

EyeSpy: And they poison her or something?

Mugwump: No. They send her back. Cured. Only it's not her. It's a puppet all ready to step into the Protector's shoes.

EyeSpy: Like that dust-up over Joshua Marik awhile back. And wasn't there something earlier? Something Max Liao dreamed up, back in the 3020s or 3030s?

[GRC has entered the conversation.]

GRC: You've all got it wrong.

Hari: Another skeptic.

GRC: Okay, let me restate. You've got it partly right—but you're missing the biggest piece. Of course the Davions have a "cure" for Brisbane. They created the damned virus in the first place.

Mugwump: Can you back that up? With anything?

GRC: My sister's a microbiologist. She's been studying this thing for years. According to her, the Brisbane Virus doesn't act like a normal microbe. She's convinced it was engineered. And who else would seed a Taurian planet with it, but some bunch of Davion eggheads testing their latest weapon?

Polymath: Doesn't mean they gave it to Janice, though.

GRC: That could have been blind luck. Or maybe they knew about her trip to Brisbane back in '38 and planted the bug then. Bottom line is, the Fedrats made this thing. And now they're leaking news of a cure through the rumor mill, to get us all twitching at shadows. And we're falling for it.

Batson: Explain one thing. With so many problems on their plate right now, WHY would the Davions pull something like that? I mean, I love the Concordat and I'm damned proud to be a citizen, but...do we really matter that much?

Mugwump: They're Davions, Bat. No one knows what they might do...

[END EXCERPT]



STAR LEAGUE? SO WHAT?

So we're part of the brand-new Star League now—this time as equal guests at the table. Or so the conventional wisdom goes. Invited first of all the Periphery states, in unspoken homage to the Concordat's history as the oldest interstellar nation. Or maybe as the Inner Sphere's toughest foe way back at the tag end of the 26th century. Or maybe just because some Spheroid politician threw a dart at a map of the Periphery. You never hear the same reason twice, only the exhortation to be proud of our "accomplishment." Great. I'd love to feel proud of something right now. Only I don't see how sending a few delegates to Tharkad every couple of years, to sit down and natter with Spheroid nabobs who've never understood Periphery concerns (let alone given a flying damn), quite qualifies.

This is an accomplishment how? Because we didn't have to lose a war to join? Because the big kids are finally letting us play in their sandbox? I got news for you—we don't need their sandbox. We've got all the stars in the night sky to play in, right here in our own neck of space—and no House Lords or other Inner Sphere muckety-mucks around to kibitz. We've built our own damned sandbox. *They* should be begging us to let *them* come play.

Such stories are not the stock in trade of a nation at peace with itself. They speak to a deep-seated fear, only partly driven by events. The other half of the equation appears not just in the active rumor mill, but in respected forums of public opinion.

Taken together, these two beats of the public pulse show a people at odds with themselves and their history. Still basically sound, but beset by troubles and forced to face entirely new situations, the Taurian Concordat in 3067 is a proud nation struggling to redefine its soul.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

—From a government pamphlet for new Concordat citizens; updated as of February, 3067

Government here in the Taurian Concordat functions on two levels: local (planetary, provincial, county and city) and national. Planetary governments are generally representative democracies, operating with the consent of their citizens. The people of each Concordat world freely choose the shape of their local governments, so long as each planetary authority retains a working allegiance to the Protector and the Concordat.

PROTECTOR

Chief executive of the Taurian Concordat, the Protector takes responsibility for the nation's general welfare. Unlike Inner Sphere heads of state, the Protector need not be a member of a ruling dynasty, though traditionally this high office has been held by a scion of the Concordat's founding family, the Calderons. The present incumbent, Protector Grover Shraplen, was chosen by the Privy Council in consultation with planetary authorities—an unusual circumstance, forced by crisis. In the judgment of the Concordat's elected leaders, Shraplen demonstrated the qualifications necessary to hold the Protectorship: governing experience, patriotism and a deep commitment to the welfare of his fellow citizens.

In addition to setting domestic and international policy on the nation's behalf, the Protector serves as commander-in-chief of the Taurian Defense Force. Under normal circumstances, the Protector rules

Did our national pride die along with Jeffrey Calderon back in '61? I know things feel shaky now, what with rebellion brewing in the New Colony Region and Marshal Kithrong of the Sixth Corps agitating for a regency on behalf of a young son that none of us knew Jeffrey Calderon even had—but are we truly so desperate for "good news" that Protector Shraplen's Propaganda Department would deign to play this up?

We must be. Otherwise, a lot more people in the halls of government would be asking the age-old question: "What's in this for us?"

What, indeed. The Star League Mark II kicked a Clan out of the Inner Sphere and halted the Clan invasion—but the Clans were never a problem for us. And what's so great about unified humanity, anyway? Just because the Spheroids need a centralized nanny government to make them behave themselves doesn't mean we do. So what, exactly, are we getting out of this "historic achievement"?

I'm still waiting for someone to tell me.

—Editorial from *All the News*, an online political journal widely read throughout the Concordat; 10 December, 3064

with the consent of the Concordia Courts, which periodically review statutes that the Protector enacts. In emergencies, such as our present time of war, the Protector can invoke emergency powers that permit complete authority over matters of state as needed to prosecute the war effort.

PRIVY COUNCIL

This body, originally comprised of members of the main families that bankrolled the Calderon expedition, has evolved over the centuries into an advisory board that aids the Protector in governing the realm. Each major department in the national government has a Council representative, and the Protector may appoint additional members as he or she sees fit. The Privy Council meets monthly to review matters of state and make recommendations to the Protector, who then follows his or her own best judgment in implementing Council input.

MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

This vital department coordinates national defense policy, overseeing everything from research and development to liaisons with the private sector for production of war materiel, to equipping TDF units and training new recruits. It serves as the primary tool through which the Protector exercises the most important function of his office: the protection of the Taurian people. The Taurian Defense Force falls under this ministry's jurisdiction, and is therefore ultimately subject to civilian control. Civilian and military specialists on the ministry staff function as an advisory board on all matters pertaining to national defense.

In an extension of policies begun under the late Protector Jeffrey Calderon, the Ministry of Defense is continuing to upgrade the TDF's technological level, with special emphasis on integrating new 'Mechs and tanks received under the auspices of the Trinity Alliance. These assets have played a major role in the ongoing reclamation of the Pleiades Cluster, a pre-emptive act of self-defense against the Taurian Concordat's historical enemy, the Federated Suns. The Ministry of Defense continues to oversee operations in the Pleiades with great care, knowing that a positive outcome is vital to the Concordat's well-being.



TAURIAN CONCORDAT

EXCHEQUER

Headed by the Treasury Director, the Exchequer maintains economic growth throughout the Concordat and manages fiscal affairs relating to member worlds. Among its most significant tools for accomplishing these tasks are the Concordat Bank of Taurus, the government mint and the Taurian Treasury Reserve. The Director and his or her advisors formulate policy in consultation with elected planetary authorities, and then pass on their recommendations to the Privy Council and the Protector. Protector Shraplen takes quite seriously his personal, final responsibility for those policies' enactment, in keeping with his prescribed duties as primary policymaker in both internal and external affairs.

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

Internal security is the province of this ministry, including the Concordat Constabulary. Formerly a paramilitary force, the Constabulary has evolved into a professional, national-level police force in the years since Protector Shraplen took office. The Interior Minister commands the Constabulary, whose members maintain civil order on all Concordat worlds. The Ministry of the Interior also guards against infiltration by foreign agents and gathers intelligence pertaining to domestic civil and military order.

MINISTRY OF TRADE AND COLONIZATION

The Ministry of Trade and Colonization coordinates with the Exchequer to foster healthy commerce within the Concordat's borders, and also takes considerable responsibility for charting and colonizing new worlds. Between 3056 and 3066, the ministry handled various aspects of operations in the New Colony Region, including joint Taurian-Canopian administration of the Colonial Marshals. The recent secession of the NCR, and its formal recognition as the independent Fronc Reaches by the Magistracy of Canopus, have presented the ministry with a delicate problem. Protector Shraplen only recently recognized the Reaches on behalf of the Concordat, and top-level personnel at the Ministry of Trade and Colonization remain divided on whether to revive fledgling trade links with former Taurian colonies in the region. The Protector has yet to issue formal guidelines on this question.

The Colonial Marshals pose another challenge. Many renounced their Taurian citizenship upon the formation of the Reaches, preferring to shift their allegiance to the new worlds they had learned to call home. Others resigned from the service. Many of these have since returned home, many bitter over their betrayal by Fronc Reaches President Carver Trondel and his fellow separatists. A small number have brought back disturbing stories of ethnically based riots and hate crimes, perpetrated against Taurian marshals by Canopian colonists—and occasionally by the marshals' own Canopian counterparts. The demise of the Colonial Marshals as an administrative entity controlled by the Ministry of Trade and Colonization is proving a bureaucratic as well as a political headache for Chief Minister Eliseer Murnane, whose staunch support of expansion in the NCR has spectacularly come back to haunt her.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

This ministry oversees the Concordat's educational system, from elementary school through the university level. Its members appoint and promote instructors and administrators throughout the public school system; coordinate planetary and national literacy and other educational standards with private, charter and home schools; and develop and maintain educational and research institutions throughout Taurian space. Among the crown jewels of the Education Ministry are the Concordat's six prestigious national universities, situated on Taurus, Samantha, Pinard, New Vandenburg, MacLeod's Land and Euschelus. Plans to break ground for a seventh university on Argos have been placed on hold until the satisfactory resolution of the campaign in the Pleiades Cluster.

CONCORDAT COURTS

The Concordat Court system comprises several civil courts—one for every ten thousand inhabitants on each Concordat world—and a Planetary Court of Appeal for every three planets. A separate Court of Judicial Review, also known as the Concordia Courts, serves as a balance to the power of the Protector, periodically reviewing all statutes and decrees promulgated by that office or by any other government department. This court has the power to strike down any legislation it deems incompatible with Taurian citizens' civil liberties.

FUNCTIONARIES

"Functionary" is the Concordat term for civil servants who carry out the central government's various administrative duties. Most functionaries hold the title Master of Requests, and they primarily handle the copious paperwork required to keep government departments functioning smoothly. Those serving as Auditors have powers and responsibilities similar to the historical office of Inspector General, investigating and reporting on various aspects of government operations.

CONDITIONS FOR CITIZENSHIP

As enshrined in the Concordat Charter, all levels of Taurian government—national and local—guarantee to their citizens "the manifold blessings of a free and open society." In practice, this means such vital individual rights as freedom of speech, assembly, association and religion; freedom of the press; the right to a timely, fair and public trial for those accused of wrongdoing; and the right to petition any level of government for redress. It also includes rights to a free and appropriate public education, free or low-cost health care and living-wage employment. Most importantly, Taurian citizens have the right to freedom from fear of enemy invasion.

To secure these rights—especially the lattermost—the Concordat government requires all Taurians to bear an equal share of responsibility for securing their nation. Concordat citizens are obligated by law to serve four years in defense of their homeland, either as soldiers or in some other capacity directly related to the good of the state. In imposing no further obligations upon the citizenry, the government of the Concordat reflects its founder's wise observation that "those whose country permits them to seek their own destiny will serve it best by doing so."



TAURIAN NOBILITY

In keeping with the democratic spirit of the Concordat, a patent of nobility may be granted to any citizen who renders special service to the nation—not to the government per se, but to the people. Once given, such titles are often (though not always) hereditary. Unlike their Inner Sphere counterparts, many of whom enjoy fantastic wealth in comparison to “commoners,” most Taurian nobles live in a manner indistinguishable from other members of the Concordat middle class. Small land grants, industrial or artistic patents, or onetime cash disbursements are typical material advantages bestowed with noble titles, few of which are sufficient to vault their recipients into the ranks of the super-rich. These modest benefits are mandated by ancient statute, reflecting the traditional Taurian value that vast disparities in wealth are ultimately destructive to a free society.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The rule of law is paramount in the Concordat, and everyone involved in the justice system—from police forces to the judges, defense lawyers and prosecutors who run the criminal courts—respects the statutory powers and limits of their particular roles. Bitter lessons learned under the iron hand of the long-gone Terran Alliance prompted the Concordat’s founders to enshrine in law the rights of the accused: to a trial by jury, to confront an accuser, to remain silent, to avoid self-incrimination, to competent counsel, to demand a valid search warrant before permitting police officers entry, and so on. Though the governments of Taurian member-planets may generally conduct their affairs as they see fit, all must grant their citizens these rights in municipal, provincial and planetary criminal courts as well as for proceedings under national law. Most also follow the precepts of the still-famous *Miranda* decision back in twentieth-century North America, and require local police to inform citizens of their rights immediately upon arrest.

Local police forces coordinate with the Concordat Constabulary when necessary, and the generally light hand of the national government keeps jurisdictional disputes low. Crime in general—everything from petty vandalism to premeditated murder—is left to local legislatures to define and punish, though crimes like murder, assault, robbery and so on are uniformly defined throughout the Concordat (and they carry similar penalties). Variations in the law tend to turn on local custom, such as the remarkably heavy fine for littering in the capital city on Amber Grove—a shimmering edifice of multi-colored native marble, with canals in lieu of streets and some of the loveliest architecture in human-occupied space.

Concordat citizens pay a small portion of their taxes into a government fund for indigent defendants, thereby ensuring that the right to competent counsel exists in practice as well as on paper. The word “competent” was added to the relevant statute in 2467, after an infamous death-penalty case on Jamestown in which the defendant’s alcoholic lawyer slept through the bulk of the trial. The defendant was posthumously proved innocent, convicted through prosecutorial misconduct so blatant that only the defending counsel’s inebriated stupor prevented him from challenging it.

CHANGING TIMES: POLITICS IN THE CONCORDAT

(25 May 3067)

Taurus [ISAP] — Taurian politics has always been a freewheeling combination of chest-thumping theater and verbal bar brawl. Political parties abound at local and planetary levels, and though the Concordat is unique among democracies in having no nationally elected assembly of representatives, its people nonetheless find various ways of making their opinions felt in the halls of government on Taurus. Journals, book publishers, salons, online and face-to-face discussion groups, plus a vociferously free press, all serve as avenues for Concordat citizens to influence the workings of their national government.

The multiple shocks of the past five years have only intensified the free-for-all. Opinions cover the spectrum from wholehearted support of Protector Shraplen and his policies to furious denunciations of Shraplen as “Liao’s lapdog” and “Sun-Tzu’s Taurian houseboy” (to quote some of the milder epithets common in anti-Shraplen chat-room diatribes). The current administration appears to be faring no worse than many of its predecessors, most notably the gloomy paranoiac Thomas Calderon (who was forcibly removed from office in 3055). Appearances are deceiving, however. During the past dozen years, especially the latter six, the Concordat has undergone upheavals unique in its history. The political response to them is likewise unique, though it may take some years to fully play out.

“No Foreign Entanglements”: Relations with House Liao

Protector Shraplen’s supporters with regard to House Liao are thin on the ground. Polls taken regularly since the signing of the Trinity Alliance show a nosedive in public approval of that landmark treaty, focused primarily on Taurian military obligations to its Capellan ally. In late August of 3062, with the treaty freshly signed and a full-bore PR offensive launched to promote it by the TDF’s Propaganda Division, approval stood at a mere 43 percent—and that figure owed quite a bit to government-sponsored spin emphasizing the greater benefits of full alliance with a larger military power versus a “mere trading alliance” with a small state closely tied to House Davion. By November, support had dropped to 38 percent—this even before the bloody Xin Sheng campaigns in St. Ives that claimed so many Taurian casualties. In the wake of those campaigns, approval of the Alliance dropped further, to a stunningly low 29 percent. The arrival of upgraded Capellan ‘Mechs and other sorely needed military hardware produced a slight uptick, erased by the end of the FedCom Civil War this past April. Since then, support for the Alliance has remained dismally stuck at 28 percent.

The Protector, by contrast, talks up the advantages of House Liao’s patronage every chance he gets—to his privy councilors, to the government press pool, to the public in periodic holo vid addresses on the state of the nation. Insiders speculate that Shraplen is less enamored of the Capellans than he appears, but that he is playing to the cameras for Chancellor Liao’s benefit. The more staunch an ally he seems, the more military aid the Concordat receives—and that aid, given by a fellow longtime foe of House Davion, is vital to Taurian security. Or so the Protector’s thinking goes. Without Capellan military technology, the Concordat would be a sitting duck for Davion aggression. So even if



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it costs the lives of Taurian soldiers, the upgraded materiel bought with those lives is worth every drop of blood spilt. That so much has been spilt on foreign soil is a regrettable reality, which the Concordat has no choice but to accept.

Public opinion against the "Liao Wars" shows itself in various ways, the most widespread being an informal boycott of Capellan products. Centered on Taurus and New Vandenburg, the boycott was sparked by university students in early 3063, but quickly spread to large segments of those worlds' urban populations—and from there throughout a string of planets bordering the FedSuns, from Laconis to Mithron. It is surely no coincidence that those worlds have felt increasingly under siege, with the armed forces tasked to protect them spread dangerously thin and "Fedrat" troops now hotly pursuing TDF units back across the turbulent border.

Critics of the boycott note that those most enthusiastically engaged in it live in regions where they have ready access to alternative goods and foodstuffs, produced in the Concordat itself or in the realm's other trading partners. The boycott also does not extend to Capellan military machines, for those participants among the TDF. "I'm not suicidal," said one soldier, home on leave from Ningpo in Capellan space. "I hate being cannon fodder for those Capellan bastards, and I won't give them my hard-earned pay—but my government put me in that *Snake*, and I'd like to stay alive long enough to go serve where it'll do the Concordat some good."

The boycott has clearly touched a nerve in the Taurian psyche, and

has spread even further since January of this year in direct proportion to the pro-military fervor sparked by the Pleiades Campaign. For many Taurians, the hard fighting in "Fedrat" space makes the stationing of Taurian troops on Capellan worlds even less explicable. "The Davion army is tough, disciplined and huge," said one military analyst, currently employed at the École Militaire. "We're fighting for our worlds, but in their territory—and they think those planets belong to them. How can our Protector justify keeping a single TDF trooper away from those front lines, or from our own borders should things go wrong?"

As for the soldiers themselves, the initial interest shown by many units in "real battlefield experience," access to Capellan technology and at least a backhanded chance to fight House Davion has waned in the harsh light of reality. Now that a real fight against the Davions is taking place on the Concordat's doorstep, increasing numbers of troops want to join the brawl over the Pleiades worlds. In response to this restiveness, Protector Shraplen has reduced TDF presence in Capellan space, from more than three regiments to two since the start of the Pleiades Campaign.

Fair-Weather Friends: Relations with the Magistracy

Public feeling about the Concordat's other ally, the Magistracy of Canopus, is hardly in the same league as the widespread detestation of House Liao—but as with the Capellan state, recent events have given relations with Canopus a few hard knocks. Magestrix Emma Centrella's swift recognition of the Fronc Reaches made any attempt at military reclamation of the secessionist colony worlds politically impossible for the Concordat, even had the TDF been capable of such a feat after the losses it suffered on House Liao's behalf. This in turn deprived the Concordat of the economic return on its joint investment with the Magistracy. That the Canopian state suffered similar losses somewhat mitigated public disapproval, but also cemented in many Taurian minds a long-held stereotype that Canopians are prone to bailing when the going gets tough. As one local politician put it, "The Canopies throw a great party, but you can't count on them for anything else." Some Taurian political journals linked the secession of the Reaches with the Magistracy's temporary pullback of its Capellan-allied forces from the Chaos March in 3064. That move prompted Sun-Tzu Liao to lean more heavily on TDF units, inflicting casualties serious enough to wound or even shatter such storied commands as the Taurian Velites and the Concordat Jaegers.

The Magistracy garrison on Detroit is another sore spot, even though the Concordat regularly receives 'Mechs and aerospace fighters from the industrial complex on that world. "She hadn't ought to've grabbed the place," said one woman in an interview—"she" meaning Magestrix Emma. "That 'Mech factory was meant for both sides. Our Protector"—Jeffrey Calderon—"died for it. We've as good a claim to Detroit as the Canopies; better, since it cost us the best leader we've ever had." Other Taurians voiced similar sentiments, if less starkly. The general view of the Magestrix balances uneasily between grudging admiration of her political acumen and cynicism about her motives. "She's the kind of ally you keep close, just so you know what the hell she's up to," said one privy councilor, after requesting anonymity.



Incidents between Concordat troops and the former Colonial Marshals, following the TDF's formal expulsion from the NCR in 3066, only added to growing tensions between the Concordat and the Magistracy. Many of the Marshals who most enthusiastically supported independence were Canopian—as was much of the force to begin with—and perceptions that TDF reprisals fell more heavily on the Canopian Marshals sparked a rash of hate crimes by both sides on jointly held worlds. Calls for calm by President Carver Trondel kept things from spiraling out of control, as did the sober realization that infighting might well cost the inhabitants of the Fronc Reaches their independence. Still, the incidents left their mark. Taurian opinion tends to emphasize Canopian culpability, reinforcing long-held assumptions about Canopians as inherently over-emotional and unreliable.

On the other hand, trade between the two Periphery realms remains robust, especially such Canopian favorites as Marantha brandy and luxury furs from Thraxa. Pleasure circuses abound in Concordat space, and the demand for Canopian medical technology has never been higher. Cultural exchanges have dropped off slightly, largely because of bureaucratic foot-dragging by Ministry of Education functionaries. Rumor has it that Education Minister Duncan Jencks is following an “unofficial directive” from Protector Shraplen to cause minor trouble for the Magistracy wherever possible, based largely on Shraplen's personal antipathy toward Emma Centrella. With a hot war just over the border, lost colonial revenues and the rapid expansion of the year-old Calderon Protectorate from two to six worlds, Shraplen cannot afford to alienate the Magistracy—but he doesn't have to like either it or its ruler, and is reportedly seeking ways to legally disavow the Treaty of Taurus without consequence to his own realm.

“A Protector, Not a King”—Domestic Dissent in Perilous Times

“After August 3066, everything changed.”

I heard this phrase repeated by staggering numbers of Taurian citizens, word for word—sometimes aggressively, often pensively, always weighted with regret. The phrase has become shorthand in a fierce, ongoing public debate over a hot domestic political issue: the lawful powers of the Protector in “times of national emergency,” and whether those powers extend beyond the literal waging of war to the entire field of domestic policy. The Concordat Charter grants the Protector “complete authority over matters of state as needed in times of war or insurrection”; at issue is whether this authority extends beyond the clearly military realm, and whether it enables the Protector to legally ignore the authority of the Concordia Courts for as long as the emergency lasts.

“The thing is, we weren't at war,” says Rhys McNair, executive editor of *All the News*. We're having lunch in his favorite diner on the outskirts of New Chappelle on Taurus, and the political discussion is getting intense. “Back in April of last year, when those two merc DropShips showed up and we blew them to shards—doing that didn't make us ‘at war.’ The Urukhai coming back in August, hitting Taurus like they did—that didn't make us ‘at war.’ It made us victims of an attack, and not an unprovoked one. Most folks in Samantha don't want to hear that, and I can't blame them—they lost thousands that day who didn't deserve to get fried by a bunch of angry mercs—but who made the Urukhai so

mad in the first place? The guy who gave the order to blow up those DropShips. Shraplen didn't even ask why those ships were heading this way. He just assumed they were Davion and ordered them destroyed. All the crew aboard them, dead. How would you feel if a bunch of your friends and colleagues got murdered?”

“A loaded word, ‘murdered.’ Wouldn't many of your fellow citizens disagree with you?”

“I use it advisedly. And sure—plenty don't see it that way.” A brief laugh escapes him, with little mirth in it. “I've gotten death threats for saying so. But someone has to. I mean, we didn't even give the folks on those ships a chance. What if they really were just looking for a job? That's what they say, and there's nothing to disprove it. Just the fact that they spent some time working for the Davions. Are we that paranoid about the Davion bogeyman? Who's next—Longwood's Bluecoats on Amber Grove? They're friendly with the Davions—are they on Shraplen's hit list too? We've gone back to the bad old days of Doubting Thomas Calderon. Which makes me wonder when civilian conscription is going to come down the pike again.”

“So when the Protector publicly labeled the first Urukhai incursion an act of ‘Davion aggression,’ he was implying a state of war that didn't exist, and laying the groundwork for a formal assumption of emergency powers?”

McNair nods. “Which he did after the August assault. In his first public address, with the ruins of Samantha's South Quarter still smoldering. ‘House Davion has declared war on the Concordat through the perfidious act of its mercenary agents,’ was the way he put it. And then he formally invoked his statutory authority to assume emergency powers ‘as needed until the crisis has passed.’ Trouble is, no one knows what ‘as needed’ means—or if this ‘crisis’ will ever end. Because the Davions are always out there, aren't they?”

“Presumably, the Concordia Courts have accepted the status quo. Doesn't that count for something?”

“No one knows if they have or not. Because no one's challenged it. The courts can't just up and declare the Protector to be in violation of the Charter; someone's got to bring them a case first. And no one has. Do the Concordia Courts even have the authority to tell the Protector, ‘No, sorry, it's not really a war so you can't invoke emergency powers?’ They can review decrees, but what about this specific one? We don't know. No one's ever tried to have such a decree set aside.”

“And you think no one will.”

A headshake. “Not after we invaded the Federated Suns last January. Because now we *are* at war. A war we started. A pre-emptive strike. We got glowing reports of TDF victories during the first few weeks—lots of them even true. Then the Feddies hit back. I have sources who tell me we took five Davion planets en route to the Pleiades Cluster. Five! And later we got pushed off every single one. Care to guess what people were still being told, courtesy of the Propaganda Division? ‘The brave soldiers of the Taurian Defense Force continue to do battle with the Davion enemy in defense of the Concordat, and are holding their own admirably against seasoned Federated Suns units.’ This, while our troops were being routed from every FedSuns planet outside the Pleiades Cluster that we'd set foot on. And the casualty counts...” He pushes his plate aside. “You have to see them to believe them.”



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"You mentioned conscription earlier. Is a draft—military or civilian—actually in the works?"

He shrugs. "It's rumor right now. I'm hoping it stays that way. With the uptick in recruiting since the start of the Pleiades Campaign, the TDF might figure it doesn't need one." He gulps cold coffee. "What worries me most isn't a military draft. Civilian conscription—that's the deal-breaker. Jeff Calderon got rid of that monstrosity from the last time we had a Davions-behind-the-curtains paranoiac as Protector... but who's waiting in the wings to do it this time, if Shraplen uses his emergency powers to reinstate it? He's made enough changes already that people aren't happy with, but most don't want to rock the boat in the middle of the Pleiades war. Oh, there's protest—and there are people like me, who get the word out—but it's not enough. If he goes further, we'll be right back to the bad old days, as if Jeff had never lived. I can't imagine anything sadder."

Civilian conscription. The phrase conjures up makeshift camps for the millions of workers torn from their ordinary lives to build planetary fortifications against a feared Davion invasion—row after row of pre-fab barracks surrounding half-constructed bunkers, barricades, surface-to-air missile platforms and other architectural blights. Small towns missing half their tiny police and firefighting forces, to say nothing of all the other citizens who used to have a place in the local order until conscription plucked them out of it. City hospitals struggling with vastly reduced medical personnel, as large numbers of civilian doctors and nurses come under the command of the TDF's Medical Division. An emergency stretching on, seemingly without end—because, as McNair said, the Davions are always out there.

"For the record, though—as far as you know, civilian conscription is rumor only?"

"At this point. But ask yourself—what happens if we lose those last few planets we're hanging onto in the Pleiades? Or if we can't get our claim to them validated at the next Star League conference? Does Duke George Hasek send his troops pouring over the border, to eliminate the 'Taurian aggressor'? Or do we defy the entire rest of the Star League if we don't get our way—and does more than one member-state send troops to kick us off the Pleiades worlds? I can't think of better excuses to conscript civilians. And then what happens to the Concordat? Presumably we survive...but at what price?"

The other side in this debate comes to me from Robard Kenniston, whose daughter Cilla died on behalf of House Liao in the St. Ives Commonality. A subaltern in the Second Taurian Lancers, garrisoning the world of Denbar, Cilla Kenniston was shot to death while on a weekend pass.

"December 21, 3063," Robard Kenniston says softly, one hand caressing the campaign ribbon his daughter once wore. "That was the day he killed her. Some dumb kid, all of nineteen, taking his shot at the 'occupiers' of Denbar. Whipped up to it, of course. There'd been a riot that day—Davion agitators in the crowd, stirring them up. Not caring who they might turn into a target." His tone never varies, his hand never stops moving. "The Second had to put it down, and some people got hurt. One of them was this kid's younger brother. My Cilla was the next Taurian uniform the kid saw—minding her own business, eating kung pao chicken in a little hole-in-the-wall restaurant. They told me

he followed her out of there, pretended to take sick in the street, then shot her point-blank when she went to help. She never had a chance."

I hardly know what to say in the face of his pain. Yet I've come here to ask certain questions, and he knows it.

He saves me the need to ask by raising the subject himself. "You want to know what she died for. If I agree with those who say we never should have been in St. Ives in the first place, that Taurian blood should be shed only in defense of Taurian soil." His voice wavers on the words 'Taurian blood.' "My Cilla did shed her blood in defense of Taurian soil. She died fighting the Davions and their proxies in Liao space, so they'd be too damned busy to come bother us here. She died upholding a promise our Protector made, that we'd help out Sun-Tzu Liao if he'd help us. Because of that promise, we have 'Mechs that are worth something, military tech we'd have taken years to engineer or scrounge on our own. Because of that promise, the TDF is ready to take on the Davions and maybe even beat the bastards, like we're doing in the Pleiades Cluster right now. Just in time, too. One of them Hasek-Davions paid a Taurian traitor—a pirate—for a secret route through the Hyades a couple years back. They know how to get through our last, best defense now; they can waltz right through the gas clouds and asteroid belts we've always counted on to protect our heartland worlds. So we'd best be ready for that invasion—and we will be. Thanks to my Cilla, and all the soldiers like her. The ones who served where they were sent, who didn't second-guess their commander-in-chief about the security of our nation. The ones who fought in so-called foreign wars, so that our foreign ally would hold up his end of the bargain."

His hand stills on the campaign ribbon. "It's all part of the same war—the good fight to stay free of anyone who'd take from us what's rightfully ours. I miss Cilla like hell—but I thank God for her sacrifice every single day. And so should all those folks who want us out of Liao space, out of the Trinity Alliance, out from under a Protector they dare call a bumbler and a fool. They can do what they do because my Cilla did what she did."

The story of the secret route through the Hyades Cluster is new to me, so I turn to McNair for confirmation. He has his ear to the ground in a remarkable number of places, and he's the likeliest to know if there's any truth to this one. "Just a rumor so far," he tells me, "but a remarkably persistent one. Where it comes from, I don't know. Of course, who in their right mind would want something like this to get out, if it is true?"

In the meantime, the great debate continues in every coffee shop, diner and bar all across the Concordat: What happens next? Where is the Concordat going—and what is it becoming along the way?

Outside Factions: The Word of Blake

Perennial fears of "Davion agitators" aside, only one non-Taurian group has any significant influence on the Concordat's current political scene: the Word of Blake, whose presence has slowly grown in the Concordat since 3058. Jeffrey Calderon, distrustful of the Blakists' penchant for keeping secrets, openly favored ComStar when it came to awarding Taurian HPG contracts. He tolerated the Blakists' presence on a small number of Taurian worlds—and even accepted WoB-run HPGs on outlying colony worlds when their bids came in well under ComStar's—but generally did what he could to limit their reach.



Newsmaker Profile: Grover Shraplen

Protector of the Taurian Concordat since the death of Jeffrey Calderon on Detroit in 3061, the former planetary governor of MacLeod's Land assumed leadership of the Taurian realm under crisis conditions, with virtually no let-up since. The past six years have taken their toll, transforming this proud patriot into a careworn old man. He has needed every scrap of his considerable eloquence and political skill to survive the challenges of his reign thus far, including sharp declines in job approval ratings as the true costs of the Trinity Alliance have made themselves felt. Interestingly, the widespread judgment that he is "in over his head" with regard to foreign wars and international politicking has made little dent in Shraplen's personal popularity. Most Concordat citizens believe that his heart is in the right place; they simply don't see him as up to the job of balancing Taurian interests with the claims of foreign nations. Even those who blame him for the loss of Taurian colony worlds and the secession of the Calderon Protectorate concede his good intentions toward the realm he governs, and frequently follow up their blunt criticisms with sympathy.

"He was a perfectly fine planetary governor," said one privy counselor, requesting anonymity. "That's where he should have stayed—dealing with local people and local concerns. The Protector's job is too big for him, and he doesn't know how to handle it—

especially having a major military force at his disposal. Smart move on his part to designate someone as Senior Marshal, but he's muffed everything else. He wanted to send troops into the NCR when [President] Trondel claimed independence; never mind that we were up to our necks in Alliance military commitments and couldn't possibly have managed it, let alone gotten Taurian troops to move against their fellow citizens. Same with the Calderon Protectorate. He still wants to slap down Kithrong and the Sixth Corps on the battlefield; he just about had cattle when Kithrong's fellow marshals wouldn't go for it. You ask me, the Kithrong thing is personal. Kithrong's a traitor in Shraplen's mind, fracturing the Concordat just when it needed unity most. Shraplen won't forgive that. Marshal Kithrong should thank his stars for the war in the Pleiades—we can't afford to send troops against a bunch of 'internal dissidents,' as the Protector calls them. But Shraplen sure as hell wants to."

It is a measure of the challenges facing the Protector that he is reportedly considering a military draft to cope with the worsening situation in the Pleiades. Rumors of plans for civilian conscription are far more vague, but even these have greater substance than they should in upper-level political circles. That Grover Shraplen, with his bedrock commitment to civil liberties and local autonomy, should even be considering such steps is a political and personal shift with potentially profound consequences, for the nation and for the man who leads it.

His successor has loosened this policy considerably, pointedly favoring neither side in the ongoing ComStar-Word of Blake struggle for dominance. Since the signing of the Trinity Alliance, some observers believe Protector Shraplen has tilted the balance slightly toward the Blakists, though others refute this claim. Facts on the ground show the Word of Blake slowly but steadily gaining on ComStar, though the number of WoB-run HPG facilities remains well below fifty percent. Rather than support one group over the other, Shraplen permits planetary governments to decide where to award their HPG contracts—a stance in keeping with his own history as a planetary governor, who often chafed at directives from Taurus. That this emphasis on local autonomy serves to undermine ComStar—with strong ties to House Davion through its Precentor Martial, Victor Steiner-Davion—is the proverbial icing on the cake. Increasingly prone to view ComStar as "pro-Davion," Shraplen appears to see the WoB as a potential counterweight.

As always where the Word is concerned, rumors fly thick and fast. Most have little to substantiate them, though a few have some basis in fact. The most sensational one claims ties of varying strength between the Blakists and the so-called Inheritors, an extremist faction of the Far Lookers. The Inheritors are said to believe that humanity's end is nigh in the Inner Sphere, with the enlightened folk of the Periphery destined to "keep the flame of human cultures burning in the long dark night of space." After the long-expected cataclysm destroys the Inner Sphere, the Periphery peoples will resettle those worlds, in the process creating a new and better social order.

Such beliefs mesh well with the inner convictions of many Blakist adherents, who likewise see themselves as the destined saviors of faltering, doomed humanity. Rumors about links between the two groups range from hints that the Word has infiltrated the highest leadership of the Inheritors, to tales of a formal alliance, to simpler allegations of Blakist monies financing supposed Inheritor "training camps" where adherents of both groups receive specialized instruction in post-disaster operations (civilian and military). None of those who related such stories to me, however, could personally vouch for any such training camp. Several stories allege the existence of one in the asteroid fields near Sterope, but this rumor likewise remains unconfirmed.

Still other tales merge the Inheritors-Blakist link with the activities of other Far Looker factions—most disturbingly, the Adaptors, who are big proponents of prosthetic adaptation to harsh planetary environments. Stories of unwilling "volunteers" being seized by the Adaptors, modified and then dumped on one of their small colonies have been circulating ever since the influx of Canopian medical technology made such feats possible. A few of these "urban legends" suggest an unholy alliance between the Adaptors, Inheritors and Blakists to create a post-apocalyptic army for deployment after the coming "Great Catastrophe." As with the training-camp rumors, these stories remain unsubstantiated. "The Inheritors are a spent force, pretty much," said one source who runs a well-known online site devoted to debunking sensational tales. "Sure, clumps of them exist here and there, but they suffer from the same problem that eventually nails every doomsday group—when doomsday takes too long to come, believers get a clue and fall away. My guess is it'll happen to the most extreme among the Word of Blake, too."

On firmer ground are stories of Blakist acolytes accompanying expeditions led by the Far Lookers' Explorer faction. The Explorers have been at the leading edge of Concordat colonial expansion, and may well have received a recent influx of funds by selling several of their JumpShips to the Word of Blake. Other rumors put Word members aboard Explorer expeditions out past the Concordat's rimward and spinward borders, presumably to investigate potential new colonies and get in on the ground floor of communications for any that prove viable. I personally confirmed one of these stories, concerning an Explorer expedition bound spinward out past Charleston. Nothing has yet been heard from this particular expedition, apart from an especially salacious (and wholly unsubstantiated) rumor that the expedition was actually a cover for the Blakist operatives aboard to secretly meet with Paula "Lady Death" Trevaline in the Pirates' Haven Star Cluster, which lies in roughly the same direction.



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Another favorite target of Blakist-themed rumors is the Calderon Protectorate. Stories are circulating that the Word is running guns to the Protectorate—with or without covert assistance from House Davion. The fact that Victor Steiner-Davion is currently Precentor-Martial of ComStar, the Word's "evil twin" in the Blakist view, seems not to impinge on those who hold that the Davions are helping the Word arm the Protectorate. They see no reason why the Blakists and the "Davion enemy" shouldn't make common cause to screw up the Concordat, all to destabilize the realm so that one or the other of these two strange bedfellows can ultimately take it over.

Some of the gunrunning stories go further than blaming the Word of Blake in general, instead fingering a radical offshoot of that organization. Dubbed the Sixth of June, the name said to be taken from the assassination of Primus Myndo Waterly in 3052, this Blakist subgroup is reportedly ruthless almost beyond imagination, bent on either claiming total power over humanity (or at least the Inner Sphere) or destroying it entirely. Local rumors about the Sixth of June tie this shadowy group to everything from recent pirate raids against Hellestport by the pirate band Calderon's Commando, to the Inheritor/Adaptor tales of kidnappings and forcible prosthetic surgery, to a stealth campaign to take over the Concordat-wide HPG network one system at a time. The stories are so wild and varied that almost no one believes them. Many Concordat citizens, in fact, doubt the Sixth of June's existence. A recent sighting of the Word's Precentor-Martial, Cameron St. Jamais, on Dicallus has given fresh fuel to this portion of the rumor mill; St. Jamais is alleged to be a prominent member of the Sixth of June.

CONCORDAT MILITARY

—From *Army and Aerospace Manual, Revised*; Government Printing Office, March 3067

Despite the demands placed on it in recent years, the Taurian Defense Force remains the best-trained military in the Periphery. Its personnel have risen magnificently to their vastly increased responsibilities, more than earning the deep-seated gratitude of the Taurian people they serve. No less than their predecessors, the soldiers of today's TDF stand ready to defend the homeland by any means the enemy may make necessary, with no quarter asked or given. This fierce pride in the Taurian military, coupled with an abiding love of country, is among the TDF's most valuable assets on the field of battle.

Arranged according to the principles of nineteenth-century Napoleonic armies, TDF BattleMech regiments are grouped into five operations corps. Naval elements are attached directly to corps commanders, with each fleet further divided into two demi-squadrons. The Concordat Constabulary, normally responsible for internal security, supplements regular TDF units and can be mobilized in time of war. Much as is done in all major states across the Periphery and Inner Sphere, numerous other secondary forces—planetary militias, paramilitaries, corporate-sponsored troops and even noble family regiments—also supplement the regular military when needed. Somewhat scattered and often poorly trained (at least by comparison), such forces are left off of the military rolls, though they may often be called upon for local defense and planetary security.

The late Protector Jeffrey Calderon's redirection of significant budget resources toward BattleMech production continues to pay dividends for the TDF, which has had to handle vastly increased military commitments since joining the Trinity Alliance in 3062. The multiple stresses on the Taurian military in the past five years—from heavy campaigning in St. Ives and the Chaos March to the defensive invasion of Federated Suns space—would surely have collapsed the military that Jeffrey Calderon inherited in 3055. Integration of upgraded technology from our Capellan allies likewise continues, with steady improvement visible in all affected service branches. TDF BattleMech regiments lead in this area, with aerospace units following close behind. Heavy reliance on armor units throughout the TDF's history, however, has left this branch of the armed forces less in need of technology upgrades from outside the Concordat. Indeed, some Concordat tank designs are greatly superior to any in the Inner Sphere, and are in high demand among some Inner Sphere militaries.

The TDF continues its efforts to acquire cutting-edge technology, whether recovered from the first Star League era or reverse-engineered from Clan machines. Rumors that the current Protector accepts—or even favors—unusual methods of acquisition are precisely that, and should be disregarded.

Mercenary units initially hired to help safeguard Taurian worlds in the former New Colony Region have shifted toward defense along the FedSuns border and protection from pirate raids, freeing up regular TDF troops to fulfill treaty obligations to the Capellans and join the action in the Pleiades Cluster. Gordon's Armored Cavalry serves as a bulwark against any aggressive moves by the Calderon Protectorate, though so far all of the Protectorate worlds have joined that breakaway region voluntarily.

RANKS AND INSIGNIA

Rank within the TDF is organized in a six-level tier for officers and enlisted personnel. Titles exhibit the influence of eighteenth-century French and English armed forces, and appear to be drawn from the predominant cultural groups on the Calderon family's ancient homeworld of Aix-la-Chappelle.

The six enlisted ranks are recruit, corporal, section leader, force sergeant, lance sergeant and battalion-chief sergeant. Officer ranks are cornet, subaltern, brigadier, colonel, comptroller and marshal.

Recruit

Under Concordat law, all citizens must serve in the TDF for four years—two in active service and two in the ready reserves—starting at age eighteen. Though the letter of the law defines this required service as under the TDF's aegis, in practice it covers civilian-oriented public service as well. Military-oriented recruits receive basic training and are assigned to provisional training battalions based on their home planet's geographical district, or canton. Those who wish to enter the military proper receive eighteen weeks of basic training before assignment to a regular-line field unit. A recruit's rank insignia is a hollow silver ring.





Corporal

In infantry formations, corporals lead five-trooper units called maniples. Two maniples constitute a squad. In armor units, corporals serve as tank commanders. In all other branches of the service, this rank denotes the junior grade of one or more specialist positions: techs, medical personnel and so on. Corporals wear a silver ring with a red center on each uniform lapel.



Section Leader

Section leaders in the TDF infantry command squads. In Taurian armor units, section leaders command maniples that comprise two armored fighting vehicles. In all other service branches, this rank denotes non-com senior specialist positions. A section leader's insignia is a silver ring with a single horn attached.



Force Sergeant

A force sergeant commands a platoon of thirty troopers (three squads). In TDF armor units, a force sergeant commands an armor lance of three maniples. This rank also denotes junior pilots in the Taurian aerospace arm and designates low-level management in support branches. Force sergeants wear the insignia of a section leader, with a red circle in the center of the ring.



Lance Sergeant

A lance sergeant has the same command duties as a force sergeant and also serves as assistant company commander. In the aerospace arm, lance sergeants are in charge of an air lance. MechWarriors in training receive this as an honorary rank. Lance sergeants wear a silver ring with two attached horns on each uniform lapel.



Battalion Chief-Sergeant/AirChief

Battalion chief-sergeants are the senior non-commissioned officers in all Taurian ground, naval and support units. The equivalent rank of air chief in the aerospace arm commands two air lances. MechWarriors are traditionally promoted to battalion chief-sergeant upon graduation. The rank insignia is a double-horned circle with a red center.



Cornet/Ensign

Cornets serving in ground units typically act as company commanders. In support branches or aboard ship, they serve as assistant department heads, and in the aerospace arm



they command wings of two flights. An organizational change in 3065 gave MechWarriors at this rank command of BattleMech lances. A cornet's insignia is a hollow gold ring.

Subaltern/Air Master, Junior Grade

Subalterns are battalion commanders in conventional ground forces, company commanders in BattleMech units and department heads in support units. In Taurian aerospace forces, air masters junior grade serve as assistant commanders of air divisions (consisting of two or three wings). Air masters JG act as department heads aboard naval vessels. Rank insignia is a gold ring with a red center.



Brigadier/Air Master, Senior Grade

Brigadiers act as executive officers in ground-based conventional units and support branches, and as battalion commanders in 'Mech units. Senior grade air masters may serve as a ship's executive officer or command aerospace divisions. Rank insignia is a gold ring with one horn attached.



Colonel/Space Master

A colonel serves as a regimental commander. Space masters act as ship captains aboard Taurian naval vessels and have authority over any aerospace officers. Rank insignia is a gold ring with one horn and a red center.



Comptroller/Commodore

Mainly an organizational rank among infantry and armor forces, a comptroller is usually responsible for large, multi-world military districts. In BattleMech forces, a comptroller may command a regiment with permanently attached support forces or serve as an administrative aide to a corps marshal. Commodores command demi-squadrons, collections of naval vessels assembled according to specific mission requirements. Rank insignia is a gold ring with two attached horns.



Marshal

Five marshals, one commanding each corps, currently serve the Concordat military. The rank of senior marshal is ordinarily reserved for the Protector in his capacity as commander-in-chief, but the current Protector has delegated this responsibility to Senior Marshal Boris Tharn.

A marshal's rank insignia is a double-horned gold ring with a red center. The senior marshal wears a stylized bull's head in gold on each uniform lapel.





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CONCORDAT ARMY

The Concordat Army fields nine regular BattleMech regiments, along with significant armor and infantry assets. Various units routinely train to perform duties common to Special Task Groups, such as local counterattack teams or deep-space raiders directed at vulnerable communication and supply points. The loss of the VI Corps to the breakaway Calderon Protectorate has forced other units to pick up the slack on border duty, and also cost the Concordat two of its line 'Mech regiments. The remaining corps divisions of the TDF have rallied impressively to meet this challenge, liaising with the mercenary unit Gordon's Armored Cavalry to keep a wary eye on their erstwhile compatriots who have thrown in their lot with the Protectorate.

With so many TDF line units involved in the Pleiades Campaign, responsibility for border defense has largely fallen to mercenary units, which have so far done a creditable job at this vital task.

BattleMech Forces

Heavily reliant on medium BattleMechs, Taurian 'Mech units follow a mostly standard organizational structure: four 'Mechs to a lance, three lances to a company, but four companies to a battalion rather than three. Independent command units generally exist only at the regimental and corps levels. A regimental commander typically fields an independent lance meant for protection duties as much as combat. A corps marshal often fields a mixed company of 'Mechs and armor, employing the armor for scouting purposes.

The TDF fields its share of light and heavy 'Mechs, along with the medium-weight machines that make up the backbone of the 'Mech forces. Assault-class machines are rare and highly prized. The TDF has historically favored more robust 'Mech designs, but this tradition has eroded somewhat in light of new technologies made available under the auspices of the Trinity Alliance. In battle, Taurian MechWarriors work themselves into positions where their support forces can grant them the greatest advantage, and also where they can best look after those same comrades-in-arms. Here the typical MechWarrior's training pays off, often conferring the limited advantages of a combined-arms unit.

Armor and Infantry

Every Concordat world is assigned at least one armor battalion for its defense—a tradition that remains unchanged even in the face of the hard-fought campaign to reclaim the Pleiades worlds. Strategically and economically vital planets boast one or more armor regiments. Cheaper production and maintenance costs earned the armored corps more and earlier technological upgrades than their BattleMech counterparts. In fact, some Concordat-produced vehicles are in high demand among Inner Sphere armed forces—mainly mercenary units, but also some House troops. The TDF employs armored vehicles ranging from light to heavy, with a preference for hovercraft. Tanks heavier than 70 tons are rare and most often deployed in garrisons on heavily populated worlds.

Armor is organized two tanks to a maniple, three maniples to a lance, three lances to a company and three companies to a battalion. Rather than employing a separate command unit, regimental commanders

operate amid the rank and file, acting in all respects like a regular unit. This tactic promotes survivability and has often permitted armored forces to turn the tide of battle unexpectedly against the enemy.

No Concordat citizen, least of all those in its military, has forgotten the heroic sacrifices made by infantry troopers during the Reunification War. That reputation deservedly follows and inspires present-day TDF infantry, who take intense pride in their service branch's history of fanatical defense to the last man. The infantry battalions attached to the currently embattled Pleiades Hussars are merely the latest in this long tradition, sticking it out against a powerful enemy despite near-overwhelming odds.

The regular infantry is organized with maniples of five soldiers, two maniples in a squad, three squads in a platoon and three platoons to a company. This regularly escalates to regiments of more than eight hundred fighting men and women. Because infantry forces rarely rotate offworld, they are most often trained as specialists. Each battalion claims an advantage in certain terrain types or in tactical maneuvers. Anti-'Mech training is provided to every unit at battalion strength or greater. Regiments always possess a commando platoon trained in anti-terrorism, sniping, demolitions and infiltration techniques.

Special Forces

In addition to regular infantry units, the TDF employs two types of special infantry: the Special Asteroid Support Forces (SASF) and battle-suited infantry troops.

A service branch as old as the Concordat, the five-thousand strong SASF consists entirely of volunteers, trained and deployed on zero-G assault platforms stationed throughout the Hyades Cluster's vast asteroid fields. Any invading force attempting to penetrate this protective shell will face SASF troopers in personal combat, or suffer successive hit-and-fade strikes that can cripple even a WarShip.

Battle-armored infantry are a new addition to the Concordat military, but their lethal effectiveness in the field makes them more than welcome. Though a few Concordat manufacturers have begun to produce homegrown versions of Inner Sphere battlesuits, the TDF relies mainly on the generosity of the Capellan Confederation, which sells its older suits as military surplus. Battle armor squads of four soldiers appear among higher-profile infantry regiments, but only those regiments operating along with BattleMech forces in a combat zone can count a sixteen-man platoon of these power-armored warriors among their number.

Concordat Constabulary

Long a paramilitary force used for internal security, the Concordat Constabulary is one step above local police, but not quite a professional military arm. These troubleshooters receive some battlefield training and can be called on in times of war. Under the Shraplen administration, they are gradually becoming a cohesive national police force. Typically, constabulary troops are trained in guerilla tactics, organizing irregulars and developing planetary resistance in case of invasion. Their successes are well documented from the Reunification War, and their ability to turn average citizens into a military headache for would-be conquerors gives them a battlefield strength far beyond their official numbers.



CONCORDAT NAVY

The Concordat Navy is currently divided into four fleets of DropShips and JumpShips, each fleet being assigned to a corps front commander. Taurian naval personnel are typically long-term volunteers, with officers serving from four to seven years. In times of invasion, the Navy frequently serves as the first line of defense. Standard strategic doctrine requires the fleet forces to engage the enemy as far forward as possible, sacrificing themselves if necessary to blunt any enemy thrust away from the Hyades Cluster. Enemy JumpShips, when part of an invading force, are considered viable targets. This strategy leaves relatively few vessels behind to defend the Taurian homeworlds, should any of the enemy slip through, but military analysts in the TDF High Command consider the trade-off of a strong offense worth that risk.

The most valued military treasure saved from the Concordat's past is the TCW *Vandenburg*, a *Vincent*-class corvette. Missed in the final assault on the Hyades Cluster during the Reunification War, the *Vandenburg* has since been kept hidden inside the nebula, until technological aid from House Liao via the Trinity Alliance enabled the TDF to begin restoring this ancient vessel. Repairs and refurbishment are continuing, despite higher than expected costs thus far. If all goes as expected, the *Vandenburg* should see service in the near future.

AEROSPACE ARM

The aerospace arm remains the weakest of the TDF's three principal service branches, despite considerable advances made in conjunction with experts on loan from the Outworlds Alliance. TDF pilots have made impressive strides in training and tactics, but the aerospace arm simply does not have enough of them—a topnotch pilot is tough to find and expensive to train. Thankfully, TDF aerospace forces no longer suffer chronic equipment shortages, in part because the average weight class of Taurian fighter craft has crept up from lightweight to heavy. Increased survivability of craft and pilot have mitigated many of the troubles historically suffered by this service branch, though it remains somewhat behind its counterparts in the Periphery and the Inner Sphere.

In addition to improving its ground-support role, the TDF has invested significant monies in defensive upgrades. The advent of the Pleiades Campaign prompted a slight shift toward offensive technologies, but these will take some time to spread throughout the TDF's line units.

Aerospace fighters are organized two to an air lance, two lances to a flight, two flights to a wing and two or three wings to an air division. In a combined-arms situation, pilots rarely require ground-based combat support, and so can concentrate on where best to deliver their firepower.

SUPPORT AND ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS

The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of the TDF's primary support and administrative divisions.

Administrative Corps

The Administrative Corps handles all matters pertaining to

personnel, procurement and other administrative functions, including disbursement of funds, record keeping, promotion review boards and the hiring and management of mercenary units.

Medical Division

The Medical Division recovers and rehabilitates wounded personnel in the field. Thanks to ongoing exchanges with the Magistracy of Canopus under the Treaty of Taurus, the medical service available to the average Taurian soldier is significantly better than in the Inner Sphere. This division emphasizes swift retrieval of wounded personnel close to the forward edge of battle, and can deploy emergency medical and surgical support stations via support craft at a moment's notice.

Propaganda Division

Charged with maintaining morale, the Propaganda Division functions as an independent arm of government that disseminates information regarding the positive aspects of Concordat life and discounts rumors instigated by enemy agents. This division has received several increases in funding since 3062, and regularly produces informational newsvids highlighting the benefits of the Protector's policies. Most recently, the Propaganda Division has ensured public dissemination of the TDF's hard-won victories in the Pleiades Cluster.

Transport and Service Division

The Transport and Service Division is responsible for transporting soldiers and materiel to the battlefield. It also provides equipment and personnel to recover and repair battle-damaged craft and machines, as well as transporting reserves to reinforce units in the field. Except for those vessels assigned to specific regiments, this division controls all military DropShips and JumpShips.

UNIFORMS

The Taurian Defense Force authorizes three uniforms: standard, dress and field fatigues. Utility uniforms, also called "undress blues" or "military undress," are not standardized and can range from overalls to clean-pressed dungarees. Local resources dictate the type of utility uniform worn. Differences between officer and enlisted uniforms are also purposefully subtle, making the uniforms easier to procure.

Standard uniforms consist of a colored tunic with silver buttons and trim for enlisted personnel, gold for officers. The tunic may be red (ground forces) or navy blue (aerospace). TDF ground troops have now fully adapted to the change in uniform color, officially prescribed in 3060. Officers tuck black trousers into calf-high boots, and female officers may wear high-heeled boots at social functions. Enlisted personnel wear industrial safety shoes. Most soldiers wear field caps (or forage caps), colored to match the tunic. Officers, including all MechWarriors and Special Forces, may wear black berets. Rank insignia is worn on the lapel. Decorations are not worn with the standard uniform.

A properly cleaned and pressed standard uniform is modified for dress uniform occasions, again for ease of procurement. All personnel are allowed black berets, though they may wear a forage cap instead. Officers wear white gloves and add a gold sash to the tunic. Enlisted personnel wear white leggings and a silver sash, slightly thinner than



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those for officers. Marshals wear gold aigrettes on both shoulders as well. All awards and decorations are displayed on the sash.

In the field, all troops wear camouflage fatigues with rank insignia on the lapel. Fatigues vary in design and coloration depending on local climate and terrain. The standard TDF field uniform consists of burgundy fatigues, good for most occasions and climates.

Battle Gear

Designs for personal gear such as neurohelmets, cooling vests and flight suits are based on older Liao and Davion models. They differ slightly from unit to unit, depending on available local resources. In general, such gear is red for ground forces and blue for aerospace personnel. With technological upgrades from the Capellan Confederation finally hitting their stride, many unit commanders are starting to replace standard gear with updated Liao designs.

AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

The Taurian Defense Force has never been much on empty pomp and circumstance. Campaign and special-achievement ribbons are commonplace and treated as such. Awards are rare and confer on the recipient recognition for a valuable level of accomplishment.

Taurian Brand

This award is based on a long-standing tradition in which soldiers may use body art to signify an important event. Older than the Concordat and thought to have its origins in the Native American ethnic group from Terra, it was introduced as a military tradition during the Taurians' first run-in with House Davion. During that battle, a popular naval commander took laser fire across his brow, the burn creating a mask-like scar and robbing him of his sight. To honor their commander and commemorate the event, many survivors tattooed a red mask around their eyes.

When a regiment or special command has performed a feat or been involved in an action that confers on them the instant acclaim of the Taurian people, a regimental commander may request the privilege of wearing the Brand. The senior marshal awards it to the entire unit, though recipients must also have the permission of their battalion commander. One direct, name-bearing descendant per generation may take the Brand. MechWarriors are also allowed to paint the Brand on their machines.

Hyades Heart

This decoration is given to individuals who have undergone great personal sacrifice in defending the Concordat. In the name of valiant final stands, it is often awarded posthumously. The few living recipients range from those left scarred and disabled to one soldier who was forced to lead a fight through his village, and so had to live with the fact that he was responsible for sacrificing his family and most of his friends.

The award is a white heart trimmed in gold leaf, dangling from a gold and blood-red ribbon.



Standard of Taurus

The Standard of Taurus—the Concordat emblem hanging from a gold bar—goes to those troopers who epitomize a standard to which all Taurian soldiers might aspire. Extreme bravery, proven dedication, exceptional talent, an unimpeachable moral code: all of these are possible inspirations worthy of this award. Indeed, a Standard of Taurus has been won for each of them many times over. The senior marshal or a corps marshal hands out this award.



Concordat Sunburst

This award is granted to an individual or dedicated to a group who won an awe-inspiring victory for the Concordat. Such victories usually occur in the face of seemingly impossible odds, are nearly thwarted by unforeseeable conditions, or are otherwise of such magnitude that their amazing success demands attention.

A request for the Taurian Brand often follows receipt of this award.

The sunburst is a gold disk with eight gold tines radiating outward (total diameter ten centimeters). The tines are edged in red enamel, and in the center of the disk is the Concordat emblem. The Protector presents this award.



MILITARY ACADEMIES

The Concordat maintains a military academy on every major world for training conventional garrison troops and their support forces. For more advanced training, the TDF has concentrated its resources into three distinct schools: the École Militaire, the Taurian Naval Institute and the Concordat Aerospace Flight School. The École Militaire on Taurus remains one of the top MechWarrior training facilities in human-occupied space, while the Naval Institute on New Vandenburg and the Concordat Aerospace Flight School on the world of Samantha likewise provide excellent training in their respective disciplines.

École Militaire

The École Militaire has a long history of producing top-notch MechWarriors along with armor and infantry troops. Foreign students may apply as well as Taurians, though Taurian applicants have a greater chance of admission and make up more than ninety percent of enrollees. Protector Shraplen has limited the numbers of non-resident students accepted, attempting to strike a better balance between needed revenue from student fees and a reluctance to spend Taurian resources on foreign nationals. Tuition is covered by the Concordat government, though a healthy endowment to the École can purchase points toward admission for any applicant. Such endowments are a vital source of revenue in order to keep the quality of instruction high.

As with Inner Sphere military academies, the École Militaire starts with a tough basic training regimen. The Concordat, however, places greater emphasis on this area, improving each recruit's knowledge of military history and allowing for a few martial electives. After completing basic training, each student chooses an armor, infantry or



MechWarrior specialty. Exceptional candidates may be offered a slot in the École's Officer Candidate School. Even though MechWarrior trainees automatically receive a commission upon graduation, gifted MechWarriors may be offered a place in the OCS anyway, to improve their command abilities. Graduating MechWarriors receive the rank of cornet; other non-commissioned graduates retain the rank of recruit.

Instructors at the École Militaire are mostly Taurian, though Capellan guest instructors have become more common since the Concordat joined the Trinity Alliance in 3062. Canopian guest lecturers have become considerably fewer, reflecting recent strains in relations with the Magistracy.

ECONOMICS

(4 June 3067)

Pinard [ISAP] — As with much else in the Taurian Concordat of 3067, perceptions and reality about the national economy tend not to match. The stresses of the past five years—especially the last twelve to eighteen months—have barely begun to make themselves felt, and many Taurians are bracing for an expected major recession as the loss of revenues from the former New Colony Region and the Calderon Protectorate worlds begins to bite more deeply. On the other hand, as many a local economist assures me, the fundamentals of the Concordat economy remain sound—and the war in the Pleiades, though an increasing strain on the government budget, is yet another boon for Taurian military manufacturers. The latter were already profiting from the TDF's extended campaigns in Liao space, for which Taurian factories provided considerable output—far more, in fact, than the politicians expected, given House Liao's obligations under the Trinity Alliance. According to a favorite story making the rounds on Taurus, Protector Shraplen is said to have wondered in private “whether Chancellor Liao would mind us borrowing the excess from his factories for awhile, since giving it to us appears to have slipped his celestial mind.”

NATIONAL ECONOMY

The Concordat economy depends heavily on inter-Periphery trade for key technologies, an assortment of businesses fueled by colonial expansion, and a manufacturing sector remarkable for its size and stability in this comparatively small nation. The military industry remains a pillar of this sector's profits, though still a distant second to finished goods of various types; Taurian electronics, civilian vehicles and household appliances are popular throughout the Periphery and even in some Inner Sphere states. Manufacturers in the Capellan Confederation and the Free Worlds League frequently purchase Taurian parts for use in their own products—partly because of their superior quality and partly to annoy the Federated Suns. Trade with the Capellans has become especially lucrative since 3062, with Sun-Tzu Liao permitting generous quotas of Taurian goods to be sold on several Capellan-Taurian border worlds. Free Worlds League corporations have made lucrative deals with Taurian firms as well, particularly in military manufacturing.

In the Periphery proper, the Concordat's largest trading partner

remains the Magistracy of Canopus. Political chill aside, no one wants to jeopardize the flow of profits between the two realms—certainly not the Taurian business community, which has a history of bucking the prevailing political winds if there's significant money to be made. The economic exchange provisions of the Treaty of Taurus remain in effect, and Taurian manufactured goods never lack for Canopian buyers. The Concordat also does business with the Outworlds Alliance, trading machined parts and finished goods for exotic fruits and other luxury agricultural products. The emergence of Outworlds industry over the past decade or so has slightly shifted the trade balance in manufacturing from finished goods to parts, which are then assembled in Outworlds Alliance factories. A few joint ventures between Taurian and Outworlds military manufacturers are capitalizing on this trend, producing aerospace fighters for the armed forces of both nations. The Concordat also trades with the tiny Mica Majority and the Rim Collection, exchanging finished goods for Mican and Rim Collection metals.

The hot rumor in Concordat business circles these days concerns the Marian Hegemony, with which the Taurian government broke off relations in 3055 after Hegemony forces conquered the Lothian League. Founded by Taurians in 2691, the Lothian state had long held a special place in Taurian hearts, and Taurian citizens did not take kindly to its demise as an independent nation. The ascension of Julius O'Reilly has reportedly made Protector Shraplen consider reopening relations with the Hegemony, especially as the Lothian worlds appear to have settled into their new role as Marian possessions. Talk around Taurus hints at a possible summit soon between Caesar Julius and the Protector, though Shraplen must tread carefully in order to avoid offending the Canopians (to say nothing of the Taurian citizenry, few of whom have much love for the Marians). Bad blood between the Magistracy and the Marian realm runs especially deep on the Canopian side, despite a significant drop-off in Hegemony raids against Canopian worlds since Julius O'Reilly's succession to the throne. As often happens in the Concordat, private business has rushed in where the national government has yet to tread. Alphard Trading Corporation recently launched a joint venture with Pinard Protectorates Ltd., Kali Yama Weapons and ATC's namesake in the Marian Hegemony to produce military vehicles and hardware in the Hegemony and the Concordat.

Despite its public chill toward the Fronc Reaches, the Taurian government is quietly exploring trading avenues with the worlds it still calls “our former colonies.” The Concordat's business community is far less shy; joint ventures and private companies are springing up on several border planets. The inhabitants of the Reaches are happy to take as much peaceful trade as they can get, and many worlds are willing to let bygones be bygones.

The Calderon Protectorate has so far received very different treatment. Protector Shraplen has proscribed all commerce with Protectorate worlds, and has authorized the Taurian navy to interdict any merchantmen attempting to cross the Protectorate border. In practice, however, this virtual blockade is less than effective. Marshal Kithrong's many friends in the TDF frequently turn a blind eye toward illicit trading vessels, halting just enough to keep the Protector's attention elsewhere.



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A Delicate Balance: The Government and the Market

The Taurian Constitution goes beyond many national documents of that name, guaranteeing not only political rights, but economic ones as well. Provisions obligating the Taurian government to ensure “the general welfare of Taurian citizens” have come to be interpreted as permitting—and in many cases, requiring—significant government regulation of private enterprise. Often described as “capitalism with a human face,” the Taurian system combines laissez-faire monetary policies and a healthy respect for the profit motive with strict enforcement of rules designed to make sure that everyone plays fair. Taurian citizens have not been shy about using these rules in the Concordat Courts to claim their fair share of the economic pie. Famous cases throughout the years have enshrined in law a minimum living wage, workers’ compensation, pensions, generous unemployment and health-care programs (funded by a combination of taxpayer and employer monies), and similar regulations intended to make socially responsible behavior by Concordat companies more profitable than the alternative. The Concordat’s business community in general takes its obligations seriously, motivated partly by self-interest and partly by the memory of rampant Inner Sphere exploitation during the last years of the first Star League. Though the average Taurian’s income cannot yet match that of larger economic powerhouses like the Lyran Alliance and the Free Worlds League, gaps between rich and poor on Taurian worlds tend to be smaller, and few Taurians have much trouble maintaining a middle-class standard of living.

Two government ministries oversee the nuts and bolts of the Concordat economy: the Exchequer and the Ministry of Trade and Colonization. The latter takes primary responsibility for drafting and enforcing market regulations, as part of its mandate to foster commerce within the Taurian realm. The Ministry of the Exchequer runs the Concordat Bank of Taurus, the Taurian Treasury Reserve and the government mint. All three of these major financial institutions are located in the capital city of Samantha on Taurus.

CASH AND CREDIT

Concordat currency is based on the bull, which comes in gold or silver coins and bills of varying denominations. Coins, all stamped at the government mint on Taurus, carry on their faces the image of a colony ship circa 2250, surrounded by eight stars representing the eight habitable systems initially discovered in the Hyades Cluster. The reverse bears a bull’s head, imprinted with a number indicating denomination. Paper notes carry the ship-and-stars image on the face, but individual worlds imprint the reverse sides with images that reflect local color: prominent native sons or daughters, famous events in planetary history, local products or industries, well-known landmarks, and so on.

Most transactions depend on hard cash, though the barter system sees frequent use on new colony worlds and outlying planets. Electronic transfers of funds are generally confined to major Concordat worlds, such as the capital or significant industrial centers. Many Taurians retain the hardheaded pioneers’ bias against too much reliance on credit, and levels of personal debt are remarkably low throughout the economic spectrum.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES

Manufacturers are the backbone of the Taurian economy, producing everything from tank parts to personal computers. Mining, agriculture and aquaculture have also carved out significant niches, and the eclectic Taurian publishing industry is renowned for variety and sales volume.

Military Industries

TAURUS TERRITORIAL INDUSTRIES

Main Headquarters: Taurus

CEO: Matthias Commager

Main Products (Taurus): *Thunderbolt*, *Warhammer*, *Marauder*, *Marshal*, *Locust* and *Wasp* BattleMechs; *Lightning* and *Thunderbird* aerospace fighters; *Leopard*-class DropShips; jump jets; fusion engines; BattleMech armor; personal weapons and small-arms ammunition

Main Products (Sterope): *Seydlitz* aerospace fighters, Hunter tanks, Maultier hover APCs, tracked APCs, *Union*-class DropShips, anti-personnel mines, static gun emplacements

Profile:

Though briefly eclipsed by the joint Taurian-Canopian BattleMech factory complex on Detroit, TTI has regained its status as the Concordat’s largest weapons producer since the formation of the Fronc Reaches. Created by government subsidy in the late 2700s and heavily infused with government cash ever since, it produces offensive and defensive war machines and weapons systems. TTI ‘Mechs, tanks, fighters and DropShips appear throughout the TDF, including a *Wasp* ‘Mech produced this year under license from the Capellan Confederation. In recent years the company has sold significant numbers of *Thunderbolts* and *Warhammers* to the Outworlds Alliance armed forces.

VANDENBURG MECHANIZED INDUSTRIES

Main Headquarters: New Vandenburg

CEO: Elena Cein Broza

Main Products (New Vandenburg): *Marauder*, *Archer*, *Stinger* and *Ostroc* BattleMechs; Hunter tanks; Sherpa armored truck; *Chippewa* aerospace fighters; jump jets; fusion engines

Main Products (Pinard): *Thunderbolt* and *Warhammer* BattleMechs, Vedette tanks, Heavy Hover APCs, artillery ordnance and munitions; endo-steel; standard and ferro-fibrous armor

Main Products (Illiushin): *Shadow Hawk*, *Stinger*, *Commando* and *Griffin* BattleMechs; *Union*-class DropShips; jump jets; missile weapons

Profile:

Vandenburg Mechanized Industries is a conglomerate of seven smaller military manufacturers that operated covertly during the Star League occupation of New Vandenburg after the Reunification War. Employees take pride in their company’s patriotic history, and in working for the largest Concordat weapons producer outside the Hyades Cluster. VMI’s most recent achievement was acquiring a sub-



license from the Capellan Confederation to produce the *Shadow Hawk* BattleMech, which has already begun appearing in some TDF units.

PINARD PROTECTORATES, LTD.

Main Headquarters: Pinard, MacLeod's Land, Organo, Perdition

CEO: Linus MacLeod

Main Products (Pinard): *Marauder* BattleMechs, Plainsman hovercrafts, energy weapons, munitions

Main Products (MacLeod's Land): *Clint*, *Locust* and *Stinger* BattleMechs; jump jets; machine guns; Trinity-Asterion battle armor

Main Products (Organo): *Sabre* aerospace fighters

Main Products (Perdition): *Wasp* BattleMechs, Vedette tanks, light SRM carriers, J. Edgar and Fulcrum hovercraft, Bulldog and Pitbull medium trucks, *Thunderbird* aerospace fighters, jump jets, fusion and IC engines, missile weapons

Profile:

Formed in 3020, Pinard Protectorates is privately owned, though it gets contracts from the national government. Much of its business comes from contracts at the planetary-government level, producing equipment for local militia forces. The company has done well over the past forty-plus years, and its Scorpion laser pistol dominates the market in small-arms energy weapons. Its factories on Perdition, a water world, are scattered across four miniature islands in an impressive feat of architectural engineering.

Contrary to accepted wisdom, the Rommel tank has never been produced on Perdition, though rumors to that effect have dogged PPL for decades. Katherine Steiner-Davion's decision to export the design in the wake of the Lyran Alliance's formation only served to entrench these rumors.

PPL is currently involved in a joint venture with the Alphard Trading Corporation, which briefly merged with PPL from the 3020s through the mid-3050s, and Kali Yama Weapons Industries in the Free Worlds League. ATC Perdition builds the J. Edgar and Fulcrum hovercraft, for which PPL provides engines and other parts.

ALPHARD TRADING CORPORATION

Main Headquarters: Perdition

CEO: Bruce Magliozzi

Main Products: J. Edgar and Fulcrum hovercraft

Profile:

This Taurian subsidiary of the original ATC in the Free Worlds League is one of the surviving "baby ATCs" formed during a major corporate expansion in the latter 2720s. Declining profits prompted a merger with Pinard Protectorates Ltd., also located on Perdition, between the early 3020s and the mid-3050s; since then, an upswing in arms sales via the Free Worlds League has allowed ATC Perdition to resume independent operations. The company recently began manufacturing the Fulcrum hovercraft with technical assistance from Kali-Yama Weapons Industries, which licensed the design from Cyclops, Inc.; ATC Perdition is a minority shareholder in Kali-Yama's plant on Kendall. Kali-

Yama has made noises about purchasing ATC Perdition outright, but so far the Taurian government has blocked any such deal—presumably to give the Protector time to study his options. Earlier this year, Bruce Magliozzi proposed expanding production of the Fulcrum to include the independent Alphard Trading Corporation in the Marian Hegemony, revived by the O'Reilly family after its abandonment during the First Succession War. Kali-Yama agreed to the deal, in hopes of additional profits on its Fulcrum sales from the Hegemony's lower labor costs. Insiders speculate that this move may have been intended to either forestall a Kali-Yama buyout or increase the final asking price. A recent trade agreement to buy several of Kali-Yama's *Trebuchet* BattleMechs is widely regarded as a deal-sweetener.

STEROPE DEFENSE INDUSTRIES

Main Headquarters: Sterope

CEO: Maxwell Gelfmann

Main Products: BattleMech, tank and hovercraft weaponry

Profile:

Sterope Defense Industries is among the Taurian Concordat's primary manufacturers of heavy weapons for the TDF's 'Mech and armor forces. It owes its reputation for excellence in part to its talented research-and-development division, which continues to receive a major portion of this company's profits.

WINGMAN ENTERPRISES, LTD.

Main Headquarters: Pinard

CEO: Orlana Ivers

Main Products: *Shilone* and *Slayer* aerospace fighters

Profile:

This joint venture between Concordat and Outworlds engineering firms has the enthusiastic backing of both realms' governments, and looks poised to eventually claim a significant share of the Periphery aerospace fighter market. The *Shilone* and *Slayer* fighters it produces have long been staples of the Alliance Air Force, purchased from Draconis Combine manufacturers until the 3020s and then supplemented by production from the United Outworlders Corporation facility on Ramora. With expanded production from Wingman, these fighters are expected to appear with even greater frequency in TDF aerospace units. Pinard-Dicolais Electronics, also based on Pinard, provides Wingman Enterprises with a full range of electronic components for its fighters, everything from advanced sensor suites to microchips used in targeting systems.



TAURIAN CONCORDAT

EDGE INDUSTRIES

Main Headquarters: Celano

CEO: Zakaria Neff

Main Products: Standard and ferro-fibrous vehicle armor, Streak SRM launchers, tank guns and ordnance

Profile:

Edge Industries is the successor to Lostech, Inc., which collapsed in 3037 amid the financial scandal surrounding the Far Lookers' attempt to build their own private slush fund. Charged with stepping up its existing production of ferro-fibrous armor, Edge has only recently begun to recover the ground lost almost thirty years ago—thanks mainly to a generous infusion of Capellan cash and engineering expertise, courtesy of the Trinity Alliance. The company's production facilities are located near the abandoned Star League-era armory where Taurian lostech prospectors discovered the ferro-fibrous armor samples back in 3019, and are extremely well guarded. Output is expected to exceed that of New Vandenburg Mechanized Industries, hopefully before the start of fiscal year 3068.

Non-Military Industries

PINARD-DICOLAIS ELECTRONICS

Main Headquarters: Pinard

CEO: Kelson Pinard Escobar

Main Products (Pinard): TAG systems, ECM, sensor systems for BattleMechs, hovercraft and aerospace fighters

Main Products (Landmark): Personal computers, PDAs, holoplayers, game machines

Profile:

Specializing in commercial and military electronics, Pinard-Dicolais remains the largest privately owned and operated manufacturer in the Concordat. Founded in the early 2500s by Fiona Pinard, the company saw most of its holdings seized by Star League forces during the Reunification War. Theodore Dicolais rebuilt the family business from scratch after the collapse of the Star League, and Pinard-Dicolais has thrived ever since. Its products can be found throughout the Periphery, and its poker machines are a staple of Canopian pleasure circuses as well as casinos and pubs on Taurian worlds.

TAURUS MAJORIS MINING

Main Headquarters: Laconis

CEO: Ricard deMaat

Main Products: Raw and refined ores, radioactives, tank and 'Mech armor

Profile:

With major holdings in the Laconis and Camadeierre star systems, Taurus Majoris Mining is the Concordat's largest commercial extractor and refiner of ores. The company expanded into radioactives in the 3020s and 3030s, but lost its facilities on Mirfak in the fighting over the secession of the Calderon Protectorate. It retains significant operations on New Ganymede, which remains a major profit center. Another significant product line is tank and BattleMech armor, both produced in the main facility on Laconis.

TMM has also expanded its commercial DropShip fleet, used for stellar prospecting expeditions as well as for transport of the company's valuable cargo. The DropShips are a common sight at TMM's mobile refinery stations scattered throughout Taurian space.

CONCORDAT FREE PRESS

Main Headquarters: Jamestown

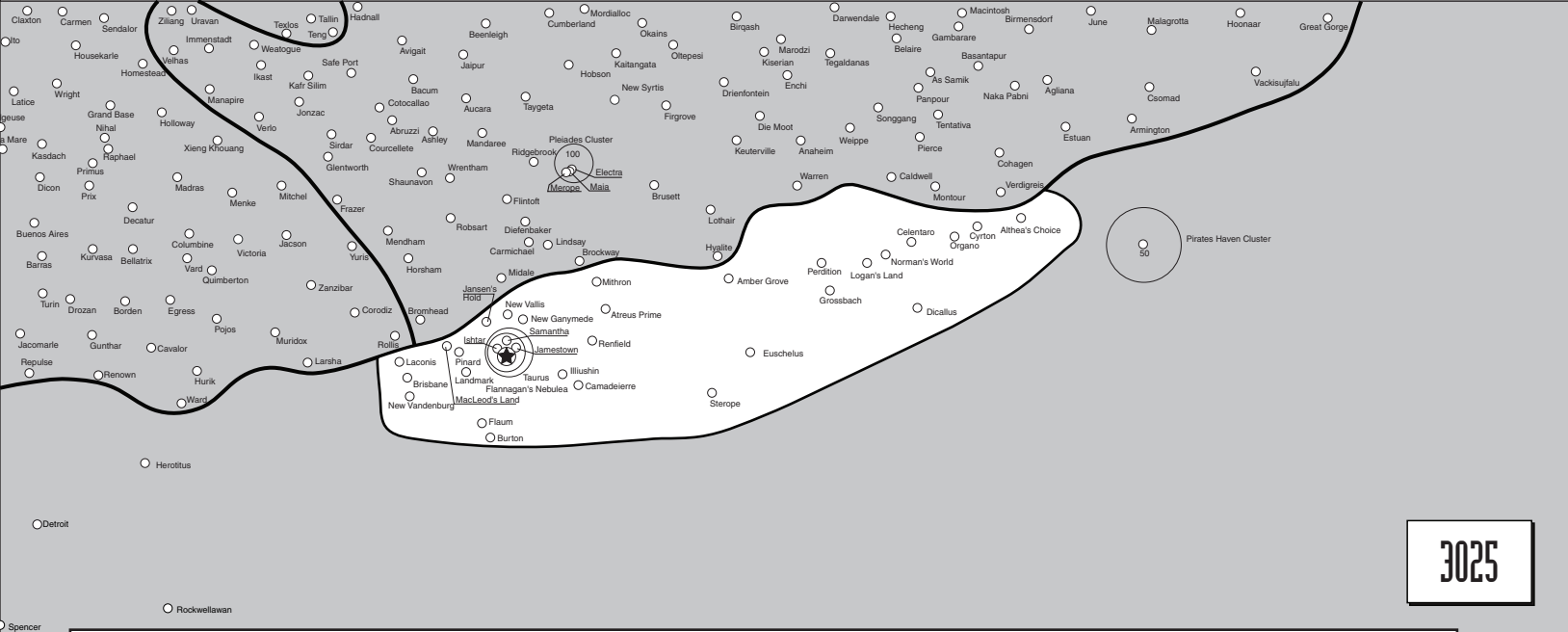
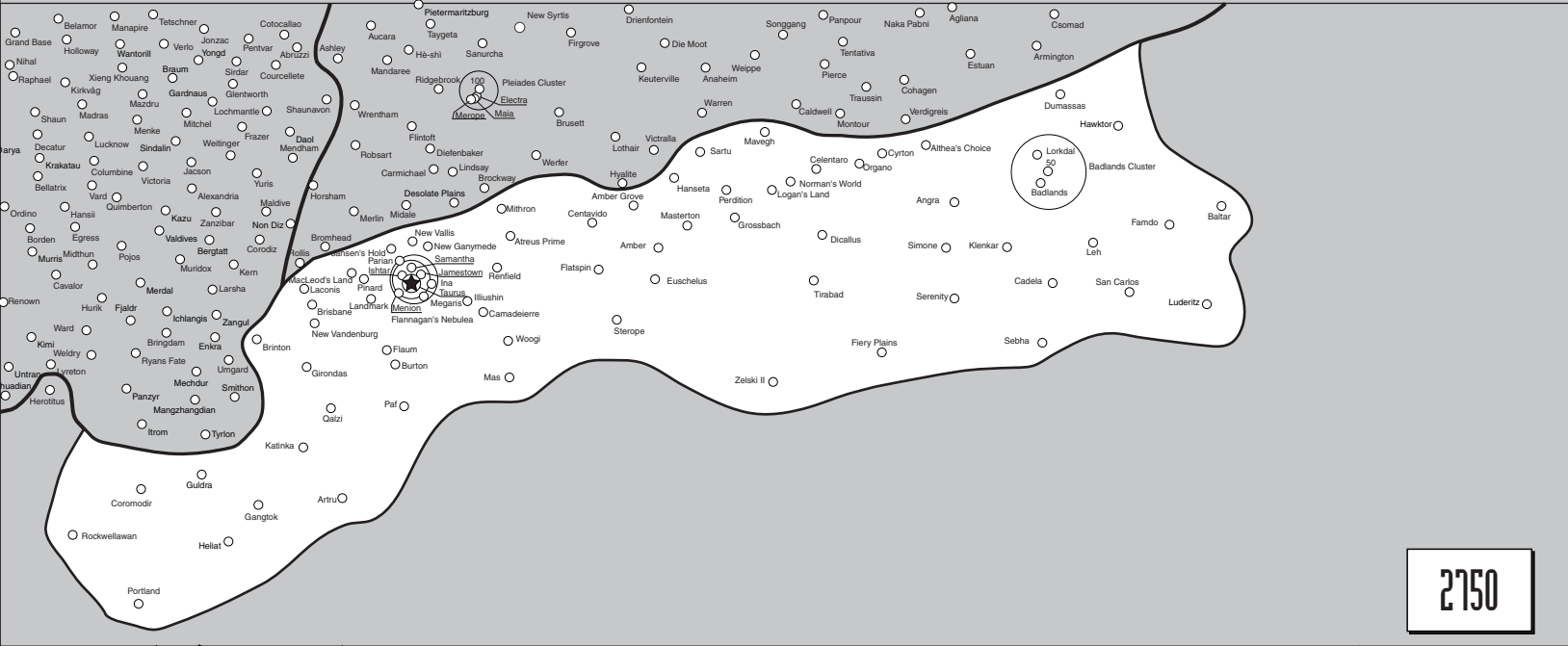
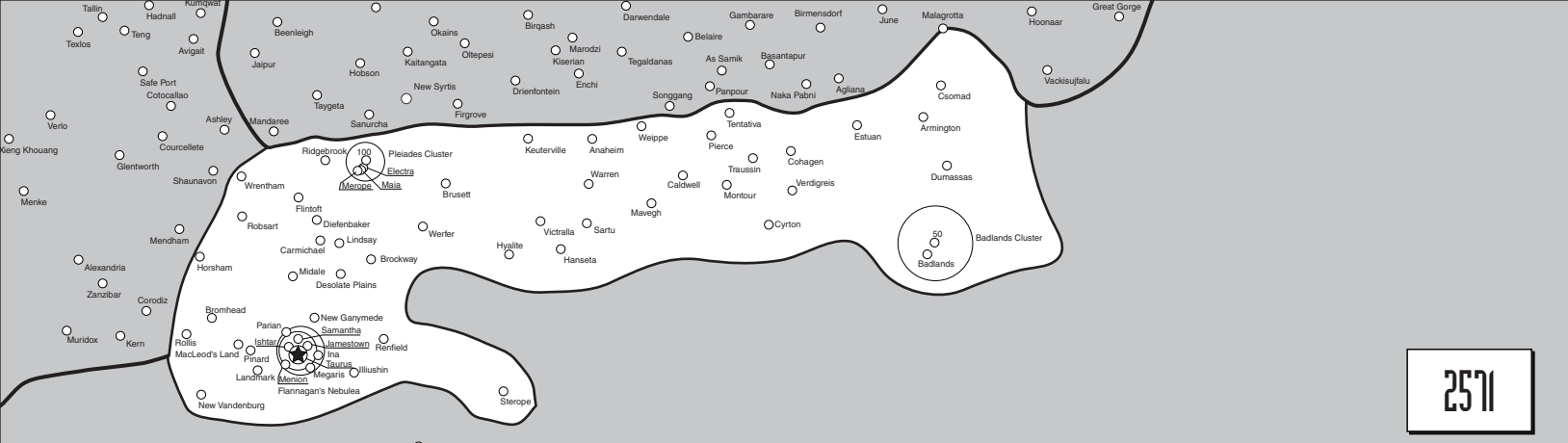
CEO: Adéoyé Masada

Main Products (Jamestown): Fiction and non-fiction paper and e-books

Main Products (Samantha): Hologrid programming, under CFP subsidiary Mindbender Productions

Profile:

One of the oldest publishing houses in the Taurian Concordat, the Concordat Free Press owes its longevity to business savvy and a willingness to take artistic risks. The company expanded into hologrid production in the late 3040s, but the bulk of its profits still come from print and e-book sales. Current CEO Adéoyé Masada continues the longstanding Free Press tradition of publishing just about anything, provided the writing meets exacting quality standards. No issue is too controversial, no fiction too cutting-edge, for this freewheeling publisher not to take a gamble on it.



Taurian Concordat after Age of War (2571),
 Fall of the Star League (2750)
 and End of the 3rd Succession War (3025)

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LEGEND



90 LIGHT YEARS OR 20.1 PARSECS

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS





SOCIETY AND CULTURE

(20 June 3067)

Jamestown [ISAP] — Hardheaded, practical and deeply committed to individual liberty, the Taurian people take pride in living in “the oldest surviving free nation in known space.” This same pride may well lie at the root of persistent (and famed) anti-Davion sentiment. Though mildly contemptuous of most Inner Sphere realms as hopelessly feudal, many Taurians regard the Davion state as particularly hypocritical because its leaders and citizens pay impressive lip service to individual rights while it essentially functions as a military dictatorship. “They’re just like the Terran Alliance,” said one woman during a freewheeling discussion of politics and history at a local tavern. She spoke of the ancient Terran Alliance—from whom the founders of the Concordat fled more than eight centuries ago—as if it still existed. “They talk a good game about freedom, about respecting people’s rights, but in the end the state matters more. House Davion and their giant military machine. You think for one second their military contractors’d go short for yet another lethal weapons system so that kids in the FedSuns can get a decent education?”

Memories of oppression, from the Terran Alliance through the first Star League, have shaped the Taurian character ever since its founding generation. Liberty is the ultimate value here, along with a profound respect for the responsibilities that go with it—and the education that sustains it. Virtually every aspect of Taurian life reflects this ethic, from the school system to the vibrant media and arts, to rock-solid support for the TDF as defenders of Taurian freedoms. Events since 3061 have shaken Taurian complacency about how well its people and government are living up to these values, but no Taurian citizen questions them. The only question—and it’s a big one—is whether or not the Concordat remains a bastion of liberty in a largely benighted universe...and how long it can stay that way.

TALKIN’ ‘BOUT MY GENERATION: POLITICS AND MEDIA

Politics and the media are deeply intertwined wherever human beings have planted themselves, and the Taurian Concordat is no exception. The biggest difference between the Concordat and Inner Sphere nations lies in the balance between state-run and private media outlets. The Concordat has no official “government” media arm—the closest equivalent is the TDF’s Propaganda Division, which for much of its existence primarily countered enemy disinformation and spread stories about Taurian life to (mainly) FedSuns border planets. Domestic PR received scant attention. Not until recently has it become the military’s job to reassure the Taurian people about the decisions of their leaders, and the Protector’s bedrock personal commitment to civil liberties prevents him from ordering the spinmeisters to tell outright lies. Where “official” story lines deviate from the truth, they do so by glossing over uncomfortable details, accentuating the positive, or shaping a story’s emphasis to match whatever message the central government wants to promote.

Outright falsehood would be impossible to sustain in any case, because the nation is saturated with alternative viewpoints—and the outlets through which to express them. Not a world exists in the

Concordat that can’t boast a dazzling variety of newsfeeds, public-access vid-channels, print and online journals, compnet chat rooms and so on. Many of these are devoted to politics and current events, though they can cover every subject from local government watch-dogging to bass fishing to null-g dance contests or poetry slams. Abundant local political parties all have their partisans eager to add their piece about how life is lived in the Concordat. Taurian worlds run the gamut, from planets that haven’t changed ruling parties in decades to those that form a new government every six months—an array that may look chaotic from the outside, but that the Taurians have turned into one of their realm’s greatest strengths. The very freedom to argue over just about anything—loudly and publicly—acts to stabilize the Concordat, by giving every citizen the sense that his or her voice is heard.

TOWARD THE STARS: THE FAR LOOKERS’ LEGACY

Among the loudest and most persistent voices in the Concordat are the Far Lookers, a philosophical faction devoted to colonizing the as-yet uninhabited stars. Inspired by the writings of Aramis Dunn, a Taurian noble of the late thirtieth century, the Far Lookers espoused the idea that humanity’s future—and the Concordat’s—lay in exploration and colonization. Dunn’s philosophy was a heartfelt response to the sorry state of the neighboring Inner Sphere after three vicious Succession Wars, in particular the ripple effects of economic near-collapse throughout “civilized” space: the drying-up of trade, periodic floods of Inner Sphere refugees, stories of riots and chaos driven by deprivation shocking even to bootstrap-minded Periphery citizens. As Dunn put it in his most famous essay, still studied by Taurian schoolchildren nearly a century after he wrote it:

“If the Inner Sphere, with all its worlds and resources, cannot come to its senses long enough to end the bloodletting, then the Periphery nations must take the lead in ensuring human progress. But we cannot do that as we are. Our existing worlds are sufficient for ourselves, and for a few generations after—but for any greater portion of the human race? We cannot support them. We cannot even come close. We must expand our holdings, thereby acquiring sufficient space and resource wealth to achieve humanity’s redemption.

“How, then, shall we accomplish this great task? Not for us the misguided methods of our Inner Sphere cousins, who war with each other over their own planets like squabbling children over toys. Such actions result in broken prizes no longer worth the battle—suffering survivors amid dead cities that take decades or more to rebuild. No—we will accomplish our work as our forebears did, by exploring the distant stars. The secrets they hold are ours for the finding, if we have the courage to dare them.”

—From “A Looker Far Afield,” *Collected Essays of Aramis Dunn*, Concordat Free Press, 2981

This “Far Looker” creed, as its adherents came to call it, struck several chords in the Taurian psyche: fear of instability in their militarily



powerful Davion neighbor, reverence for the courage of their founders, a sense of such endeavors as symbols of freedom, and age-old human aspirations to conquer the stars. By the 2990s, Dunn and his followers had convinced scores of well-heeled private investors to back several expeditions, and had even provoked interest from the ruling Calderons. Protector Zarantha Calderon found the Far Lookers a useful tool for channeling expansionist sentiments among some Taurian politicians, particularly those whose worlds bordered Davion territory. The planetary leaders of Mithron and Amber Grove were becoming unusually vocal in their public musings about whether to set aside the longstanding national bias against pre-emptive invasion, and take advantage of Davion difficulties with Houses Kurita and Liao to carve out a buffer zone on the FedSuns side of the Taurian border. Zarantha well knew the price her nation would pay for any such attempt. Far better to turn such territorial ambitions toward more potentially profitable efforts. Up through the end of her reign, Zarantha Calderon provided significant support for the Far Lookers' cause, through generous tax breaks and out of her private purse. Though most of the initial exploratory missions ended in failure, enough succeeded to keep the dream (and the investment) alive.

The Far Lookers' portrait of the Periphery nations as the truest heirs to humanity's potential—best exemplified by the freedom-loving Concordat—has since become pervasive among Taurian citizens, whether or not they consider themselves members of any Far Looker group. Not even the scandals that broke during Thomas Calderon's reign could dampen enthusiasm for the Far Lookers' cause—especially when sympathizers successfully spun the embezzlement of taxpayer funds as Robin Hood-like stealing from "Mad Thomas" and his bloated military build-up on behalf of the Taurian people's future. The sect pulled off an amazing comeback during the latter part of Thomas' reign, and ever since has generally enjoyed solid backing from the public. The exceptions to this rule are the Adaptor and Inheritor factions, whose love affair with prosthetic surgery (the Adaptors) and messianic fervor (the Inheritors) make many Taurians edgy. Wild rumors tying both of these oddball groups to the Word of Blake only add to the impression that they are best avoided—or, in the case of the Inheritors, closely watched. As put by Lianna Sura, founder of the respected political-action group ExtremistWatch: "Granted, WoB membership in the Inheritors isn't a lot right now. And there doesn't seem to be anyone important or high-level on either side; we're talking mostly acolytes, taking membership at the lowest level. But I get nervous whenever two groups who see themselves as humanity's saviors hook up—especially when one of them has a vast militia and a fleet of WarShips to call on."

For most Taurians, fears of cataclysmic action by the Inheritors are overblown. As with other major philosophical, religious and social movements throughout human history, the Far Lookers include their share of cranks—and if some of them like to portray themselves as the last hope for human survival, where's the harm? Taurians' general tolerance for differing viewpoints applies to the messianic-minded as much as to everyone else; and deep down, something in the collective Taurian mind may like the image of the Concordat as humanity's ultimate beacon of hope.

EDUCATION

Taurians have always taken seriously the adage that an educated citizenry is necessary to a functioning democracy, and educating oneself to the best of one's ability is seen as a deeply patriotic act. Free public education is provided by constitutional statute on every Taurian world, and the Ministry of Education has ample funds to ensure that even poorer planets can have a public school system worth the name. So successful is the Taurian system in providing an affordable, quality education that even less well-off Periphery states (and some regions in the Inner Sphere, including parts of the FedSuns) have used it as a model. Taurian children receive public education from ages three through eighteen, at which point they may opt for their years of public service, further education at the university level or specialized training in various fields at professional schools throughout the nation.

Private academies also flourish, many of them targeted toward immersion in a given subject area: the Stella Campbell Performing Arts High School in the city of Vernon on Pinard, the Sir Isaac Newton Math and Science Academy in New Chappelle on Taurus, even the Compass Rose Clown School in the town of Maqapa on Landmark. Most of these cater to secondary-school students, though small private elementary schools still thrive on many Concordat planets—the latter a legacy of the home-school movement that arose during the first Star League era.

The Concordat also boasts six flagship universities, with ground scheduled to be broken for a seventh in early 3068. The University of Taurus annually turns out high-quality graduates in the liberal arts, sciences and several professional fields. New Vandenburg University is noted for its School of Engineering; its students get snapped up by the local military industry almost faster than it can churn out diplomas. The University of Pinard has an excellent journalism program, complementing its equally strong science departments, and the Samantha Calderon Business School draws students to Samantha University from all over the Concordat. The University of MacLeod's Land specializes in mathematics, and Euschelus University can point to numerous graduates of its Fine Arts program who have made their mark in Taurian literature, visual arts and holofilm.

RELIGION

Religion in the Concordat is as eclectic as its politics, with every faith under the sun claiming at least a small town's worth of members. Humanity's major faiths are all well represented, flourishing in an atmosphere that pairs the free exercise of religion with a nearly equal reverence for a secular national government. Those interested in giving their religion the force of law can generally find some like-minded town or city or province on this or that planet where their fellow inhabitants will happily allow them their theocracy as long as they leave non-believers alone. The bulk of Taurian citizens gladly keep religion and government separate, content to believe or not as personal conscience dictates.

Deism

The Concordat is one of the few interstellar realms where the Deist faith still exists—a curious blend of Christianity and the rational



TAURIAN CONCORDAT

ideals of Terra's eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Its adherents acknowledged the existence and benevolence of the Judeo-Christian god, but conceived of him as a sort of cosmic watchmaker, who designed the universe, set it ticking and then largely left it to its own devices. Deists see human reason as the ultimate gift from their Creator, and believe he bestowed it on humanity so that we might work out our own understanding of morality and destiny. They have little use for organized religious institutions, and have built little of their own in the Concordat despite having existed here since the nation's founding. The so-called "Deist Church" often referred to in Inner Sphere sources on the Periphery is an informal network of social halls, taverns and coffee houses at which local groups of Deists like to meet periodically and have thoroughly enjoyable arguments over the nature of life, the universe and everything. Fueled by endless cups of strong coffee, these sessions can last for half a day or more, and are often entertaining enough to draw in other patrons. Accounts of "government support" for the "Deist Church" can be put down to Zarantha Calderon, who was an enthusiastic Deist throughout her life and who generously supported various Deist-favored meeting places out of her private funds. In addition to several well-known coffee shops and pubs on Taurus, Zarantha gave money to venues in which she spent time during her periodic progresses around the nation, thus giving rise to the false impression of realm-wide "state support" for this supposed religious institution.

ARTS AND RECREATION

This nation that so values individual freedoms has a predictably lively arts scene. Visual arts, music, theatre, dance and holoivid all have their practitioners, along with enthusiastic patrons. The Musée de Louvre Nouveau in Taurus' capital city is a must-see destination, with an impressive collection of artworks salvaged from the chaos that followed the long-ago Outer Reaches Rebellion. (The exhibit was proscribed as seditious under the Star League occupation, but the military governor of Taurus in those days could not bring himself to order these art treasures destroyed.) Government subsidies keep admission fees and ticket prices low, ensuring artists of a living while keeping their works accessible to the general public. Respect for and support of artistic endeavors pervades Taurian society; almost every town on every planet can boast its own writers' guild, symphony orchestra, or dance or theatre company. While you're unlikely to find any billionaire holoivid stars, most serious artists can make a decent enough living by local standards to give up that day job.

Even in the literary world—which has its share of incredibly wealthy authors cranking out cheesy bestsellers—profits tend to be widely spread. Literacy is virtually a sacred obligation in the Concordat, and Taurians are voracious consumers of words in any form: books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, online journals and so on. This powerhouse of the literary arts buys and sells almost as many print and e-books as the entire Federated Suns—a remarkable feat when you consider that the FedSuns dwarfs the Concordat in size. Taurian authors are exempt from taxes on any income derived from their profession, which enables even writers of small-audience literary fiction to live off the proceeds of their work.

The heart of the Concordat literary scene is Jamestown, home of the Concordat Free Press and an array of smaller publishers, many of whom specialize in various genres. Self-publishing is a booming industry as well, with small companies and individuals offering everything from do-it-yourself PR kits to copy editing to "manuscript doctoring." Local guilds keep lists of which among these are legitimate, with a short list of guidelines to which guild members must agree. Though anyone can set up shop as an editor or book doctor without guild approval, those without it rarely stay in business.

Other Amusements

Taurians spend their free time in a thousand different ways. Few pastimes here can truly be called national, aside from the never-ending "sport" of raucous political debate—though most larger Taurian cities have at least one sports team, and many Taurians play or follow sports like basketball, baseball and soccer. Amateur leagues are popular in many locales, including everything from fast-pitch softball to tennis to bowling. Most Taurian worlds also boast a computer network robust enough to support online gaming. Guerrilla-warfare games based on incidents from the Reunification War are perennial hits, as is just about any game with Davions as the enemy.

The Concordat Games, held every three years on a different Concordat world, come across like a throwback to the half-sport, half-combat competitions of ancient Sparta. It's impossible to mistake them for anything but war games, despite the lack of BattleMechs anywhere on the playing fields. The staged showdowns of the Concordat Games focus not on dueling war machines, but on far older fighting arts: hand-to-hand combat, sharpshooting, martial arts, even quarterstaves and swordplay. The highlight of the Games is an extended paintball competition, in which ten teams battle it out for the title of Concordat's Defenders.

Several Concordat worlds offer their own amusements to citizens and visitors. The white-sand beaches of Brisbane's archipelagoes are a popular draw, though only for those visitors who have provided documentary proof of vaccination against the Brisbane Virus. Other favored activities are deep-sea fishing and half-day cruises to spot Brisbane dolphins. Playful and intelligent like their Terran counterparts, Brisbane dolphins are nearly twice as large, with iridescent skin and a taste for human company. Rumors of aphrodisiac powers in the dried skin of the dolphins places them at risk from poachers, and patrol boats ply Brisbane's oceans to safeguard these creatures and their habitat. Penalties for poaching are stiff—loss of your boat and/or a heavy fine on the first offense, ten years in prison on a second.

Winter sports are the big attraction on Aea's northern continent, where the rugged Skytoucher Mountains and their foothills are home to ski resorts, frozen lakes suitable for ice-fishing, and small mountain towns graced with plenty of skating rinks, ice-sculpture festivals and friendly locals. On the other side of the climate spectrum, New Ganymede is famous throughout the Concordat for its camel races, on which unwary visitors can easily lose a staggering amount of money.



TAURUS

Political Ruler: Protector Grover Shraplen
Star Type (Recharge Time): G3V (184 hours)
Position in System: 4
Time to Jump Point: 8.53 days
Number of Satellites: 1 (Drusilla)
Surface Gravity: 1.0
Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (Breathable)
Equatorial Temperature: 30 degrees C° (Temperate)
Surface Water: 65 percent
Recharging Station: Zenith
HPG Class Type: B
Highest Native Life: Mammals
Population: 4,002,198,000
Socio-Industrial Levels: A-A-A-A-B

Profile:

The first planet settled by Samantha Calderon and her followers, Taurus eventually became the capital of the Taurian Concordat. In addition to fertile farmland, Taurus abounded in natural resources that made it an ideal center of industry. Fears of the Federated Suns prompted a tilt toward military manufacturing in the late twenty-fourth century, in which Taurus swiftly took the lead. Its military industries remain a vital part of the planetary economy, despite significant damage done to several manufacturing facilities outside the capital city of Samantha by elements of the Fighting Urukhai during their assault in August of 3066. Military-industrial profits took less of a hit than expected, thanks mainly to Capellan and Canopian aid in the wake of the mercenaries' attack, and Samantha is rapidly rising again.



The city of Samantha dominates a vast flatland at the juncture of two major rivers and a huge glacial lake. This location made it a prime port for planetary trade and also the ideal site for Taurus' major spaceport. Both the spaceport and the South Quarter—home to several military manufacturing compounds and industrial parks—took a pounding from the Fighting Urukhai's air wing, but Samantha Prime Spaceport is expected to reopen for business before the end of this year. Cargo and passenger traffic have been routed to New Chappelle and Hyades, smaller spaceports on two of Taurus' remaining three continental masses. The New Chappelle spaceport has undergone rapid expansion to meet heavy demand, and may rival Samantha Prime after that facility's reopening.

Beyond Samantha's southern edge, small suburbs give way to industrial parks and scattered farmsteads. The primary base of the Taurian Guard lies in this agricultural hinterland—presumably a target on the Fighting Urukhai's list, though the defending Guard decimated the mercenaries before they could do much damage. One Guard battalion is stationed on the planet at all times, two others in the giant gas-and-asteroid belts that shield the innermost Taurian worlds from would-be invaders.

NEW VANDENBURG

Political Ruler: Callina Malvena
Star Type (Recharge Time): F5IV (176 hours)
Position in System: 6
Time to Jump Point: 14.94 days
Number of Satellites: 2 (Jefferson and Locke)
Surface Gravity: 1.1
Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (Breathable)
Equatorial Temperature: 31 degrees C° (Temperate)
Surface Water: 68 percent
Recharging Station: Zenith
HPG Class Type: B
Highest Native Life: Birds
Population: 2,510,000,000
Socio-Industrial Levels: B-A-C-A-C

Profile:

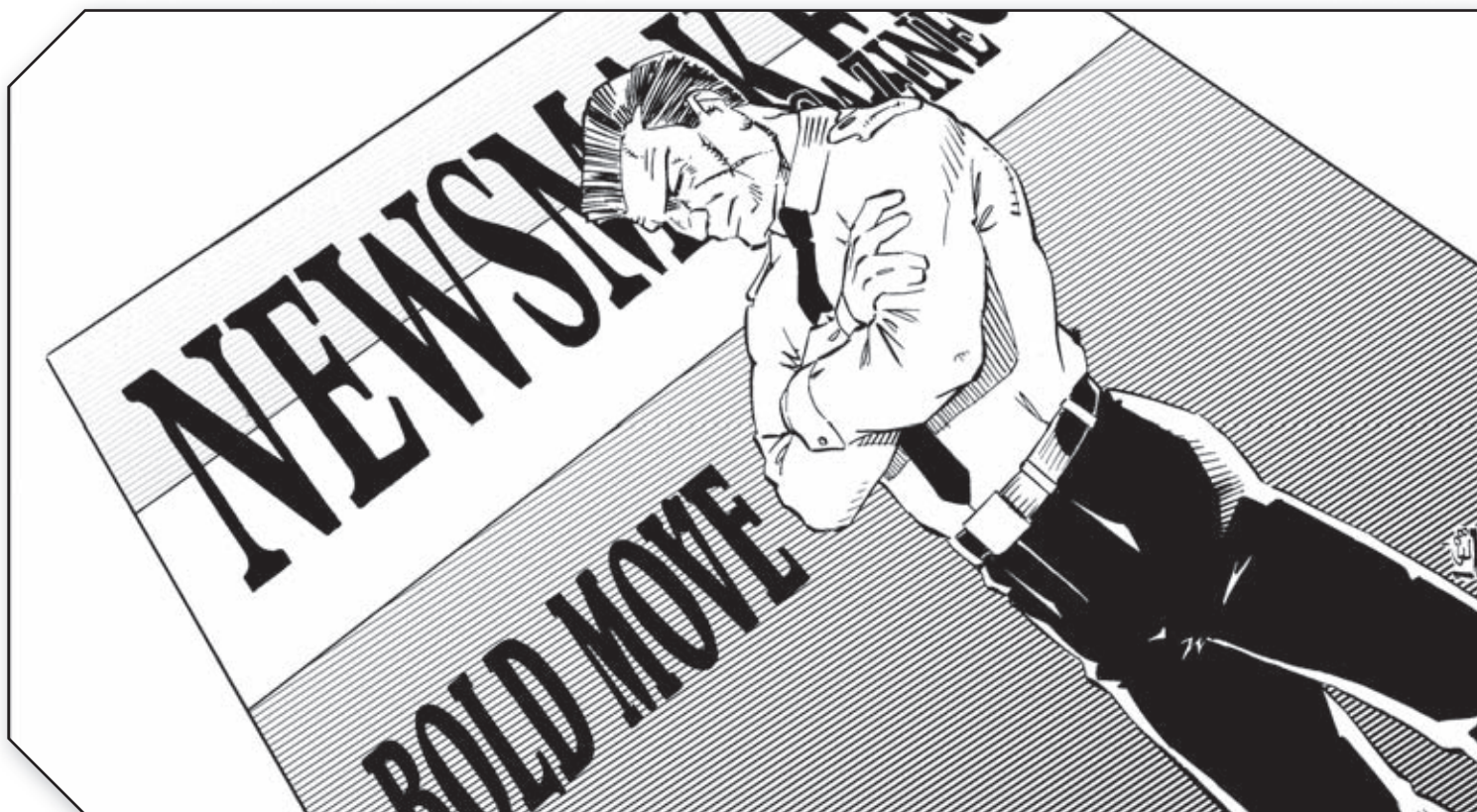
New Vandenburg is famed for its history and vital for its heavy industry—especially its military production, which remains a linchpin of the Concordat-wide military-industrial system. This planet of blunt talkers and straight dealers was the site of vicious fighting during the Reunification War, and its people suffered an especially harsh post-war occupation by Star League forces. New Vandenburg never forgot, and many of its citizens never forgave. Extensive planetary fortifications built post-Star League offer mute testimony to both sentiments.



This fighting spirit again came to the fore in the mid-28th century, when New Vandenburg's planetary government seceded from the Star League in protest over First Lord Richard Cameron's illegal tax policies. A subsequent massacre of stranded Star League troopers by the jittery New Vandenburg Militia touched off General Aleksandr Kerensky's campaign to once more subdue the Periphery—a bloody distraction that permitted Amaris the Usurper to take over Terra, assassinate the entire Cameron clan and declare himself First Lord of the Star League.

The planet and its denizens have led a far quieter existence since, though citizens of New Vandenburg take considerable pride in their world's legacy of staunch resistance to oppression. That legacy as much as anything else prompted successive planetary governments to make New Vandenburg a center for military production, intent on helping to preserve the Concordat's liberty through strength of arms. New Vandenburg's factory complexes, scattered across the northern hemisphere, remain the largest war materiel producers outside the Hyades Cluster.

The world's other claim to fame is its nature preserves, mostly located in the southern hemisphere, which contain a wide variety of rare and exotic birds. Specialists in avian biology and avid amateur bird-watchers flock to New Vandenburg every year to study and marvel at its colorful cornucopia of avian life.



CALDERON PROTECTORATE

(6 September 3067)

Marknick [ISAP] — The Calderon Protectorate lies in the spinward-most corner of the Taurian Concordat, stretching from Erod's Escape to Lastpost. Barely a year old, this tiny state is the youngest and most fragile of the Near Periphery's newborn independents. Initially, it was even smaller—a mere four worlds where elements of Marshal Kithrong's Sixth Corps were stationed, reduced to two when loyalist TDF troops pushed the First Taurian Pride off Mirfak and Belle Isle in October of 3066. (The Protectorate still claims Mirfak, as does the Concordat proper—but if possession is nine-tenths of the law, then the Concordat has won this particular round.) The First pulled back to Erod's Escape and Marknick, joining their counterparts in the Second Taurian Pride on the latter planet, and stoutly defended their remaining territory from their few TDF pursuers. Luckily for the Protectorate, Marshal Kithrong's former colleagues in the TDF had no desire to turn this small, localized rebellion into a full-out civil war, and managed to sidestep Protector Shraplen's furious orders to bring Kithrong to heel.

Given a breathing space, the soldiers of the Sixth Corps consolidated their hold over Erod's Escape and Marknick, publicly explained their actions and invited other Concordat worlds to join them. A *NewsMakers Magazine* interview with Kithrong, conducted in late December of 3066, made clear the newborn Protectorate's intentions toward its parent realm, as well as the motivation for seceding from it:

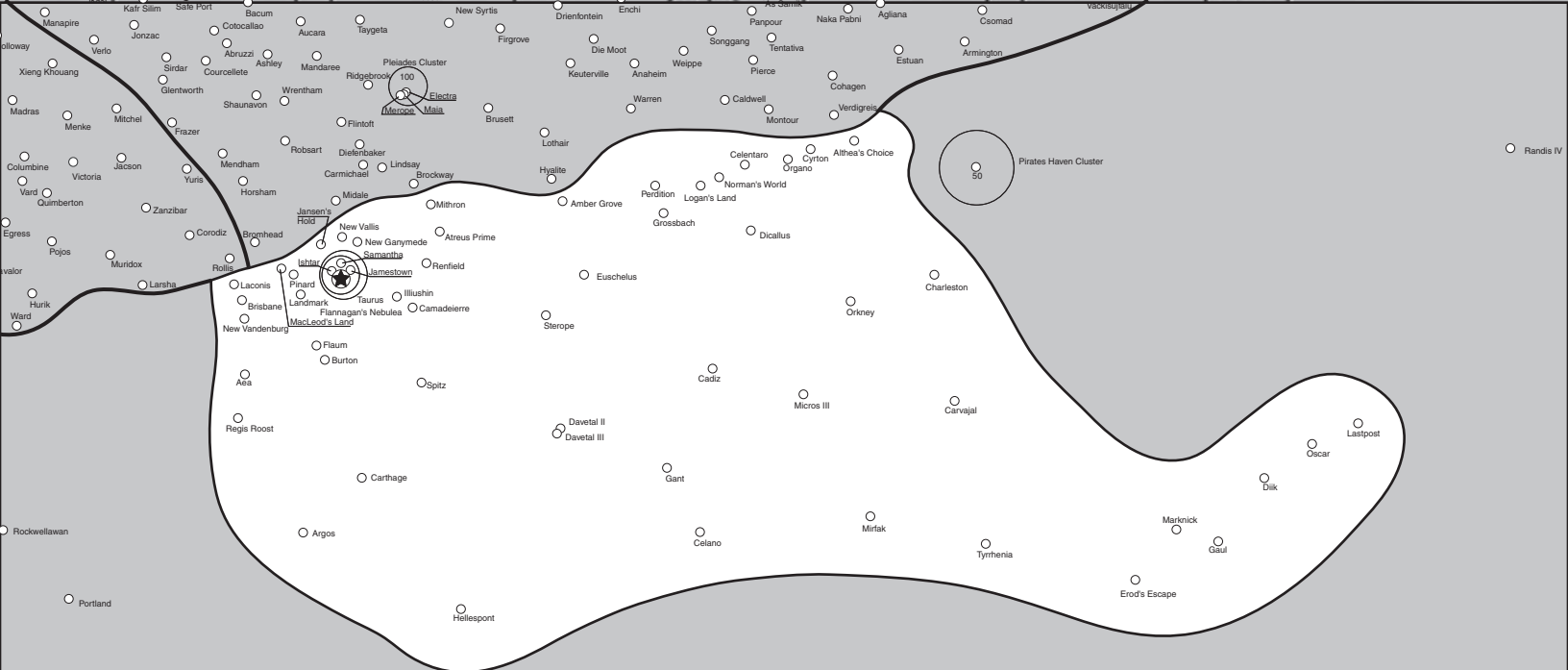
NewsMakers Magazine: You've taken an extraordinary step here, Marshal. Declaring planets independent of the Concordat. How does that square with the oath you swore when you joined the TDF, to "protect and defend the citizens of the Concordat against all enemies, wheresoever they may arise"?

Kithrong: I swore to protect and defend the Taurian people. In its phrasing, that oath specifically recognizes the supremacy of the citizens over their government—a choice our nation's founder made deliberately. My actions are fulfilling that oath, if in an unorthodox way.

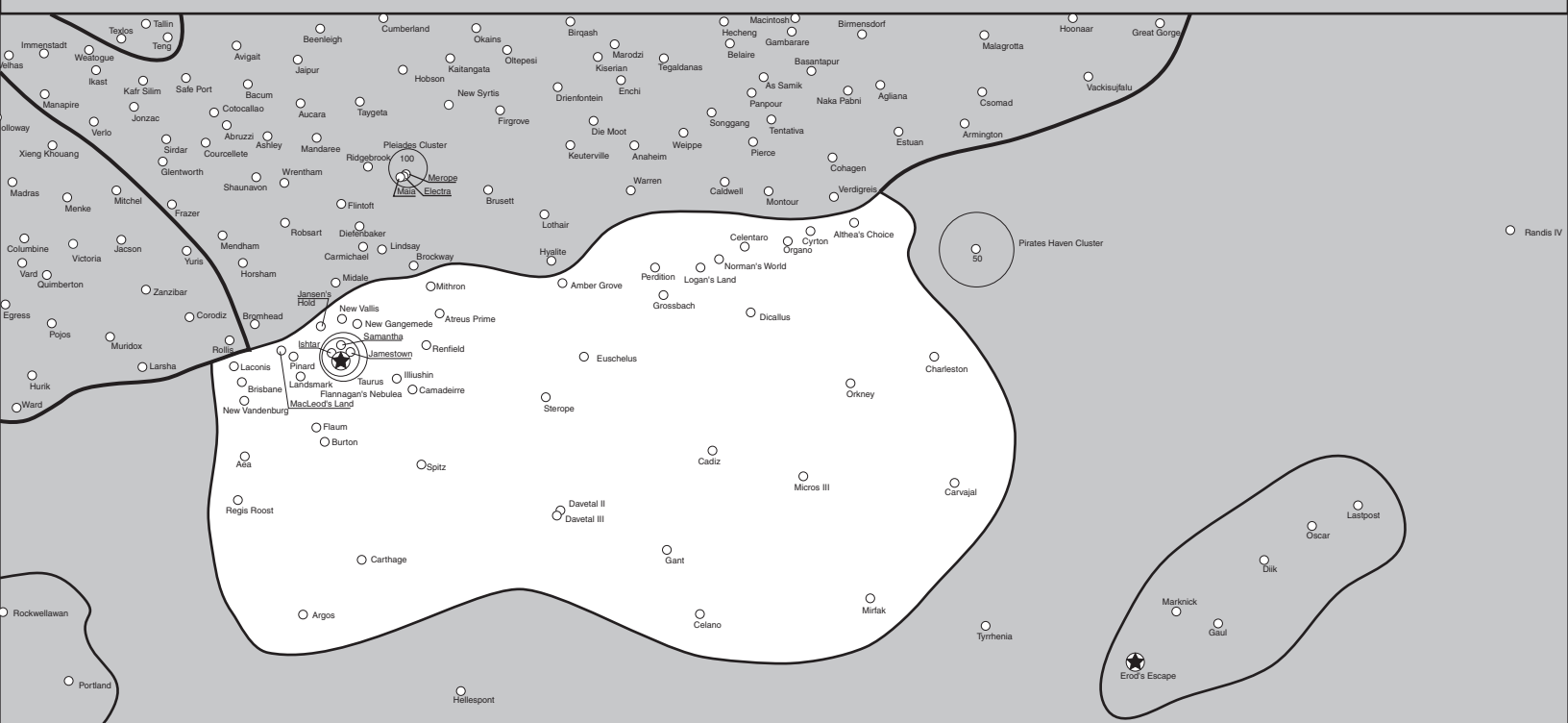
NM: How?

Kithrong: The Concordat has been floundering ever since Jeffrey Calderon died. Grover Shraplen means well, but he's a hopeless mess as a ruler. We need another Calderon on the throne, but the rightful heir is too young to assume that responsibility. Ideally, Lord Shraplen should resign in favor of a regency council, with competent members who recognize where the real threats to our nation lie and who will truly govern in the people's best interests until Erik Martens-Calderon comes of age. Lord Shraplen has so far declined to do that. Hopefully, the existence of the Calderon Protectorate will get Shraplen's attention—make him stop fretting over phantom Davions and think about how best he can genuinely serve the Taurian people.

NM: So this is a giant publicity stunt?



3040



3067

Taurian Concordat
 after modern colonization drive (3040)
 and after FedCom Civil War (3067)

© 3067 COMSTAR CARTOGRAPHIC CORPS

LEGEND

30 LIGHT YEARS

90 LIGHT YEARS OR 20.1 PARSECS

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS

Coreward

Spinward

Anti-spinward

Rimward



TAURIAN CONCORDAT

Kithrong: It's a principled response to the dire situation in which we Taurians find ourselves. The Sixth Corps—and the people of Erod's Escape and Marknick—have made real what many Taurians hardly dare acknowledge—that our beloved nation has lost its way, so badly that it's time for a fresh start. We stand as an example of how to accomplish that. The Protectorate will also be a training ground for young Erik as he learns to responsibly wield the power that's his by birthright.

NM: He's a ten-year old boy. With respect, Marshal, how can you know what kind of ruler he'll be?

Kithrong: No one can know for certain. But I knew his father very well. Jeffrey Calderon was an extraordinarily talented man, brilliantly suited to lead the nation. Look at what he accomplished in just over five years: economic revival, an unprecedented treaty with the Magistracy of Canopus, shifting of military resources from unconscionably wasteful spending to efficient and much-needed 'Mech production. Erik has similar potential. I've had a chance to get to know him, and he's already showing unusual intelligence and depth. I'd stake my life that he'll do the Calderon Protectorate proud—and the entire Concordat as well, should events give him that chance.

The inhabitants of the Sixth Corps' chosen worlds—and of Gaul, Diik, Oscar and Lastpost, all of which took Kithrong up on his invitation between January and June of 3067—strongly backed the secessionists' move. Those who opposed secession were granted permission to emigrate with their possessions and personal finances intact, and Kithrong offered to personally pay the way for anyone who couldn't afford ship passage to nearby Tyrrhenia and Colchis. Surprisingly few Protectorate citizens left their new realm; most opted to stay and build what Kithrong termed “a living reminder to the Concordat of what it truly is—or should be.”

EXILE NATION: GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

The Calderon Protectorate is an exile nation, pervaded with quiet pride and keen regret—pride in having chosen independence, regret for the circumstances that made it necessary. As a standard-bearer for the Concordat's deepest values and freedoms, the Protectorate has made a point of keeping alive as much of the Concordat as possible: freedom of planetary and local governments to oversee their own affairs, a justice system worth the name, equality for all under the law, and the cherished civil liberties of every individual.

The structure of government is considerably different, though no less democratic than in the Concordat. Marshal Kithrong refused to adopt the title of Protector, and only reluctantly agreed to take any title aside from his earned military rank. He serves as Acting President of the Regency Council, which includes Erik's mother, Captain Talia Martens; Colonel Peter LaCasse of the First Taurian Pride; Colonel David Summerheim of the Second Taurian Pride; and an elected representative from each Protectorate planet. The council currently numbers ten,

and there's lately been speculation that Marshal Kithrong intends to appoint an eleventh member as a tiebreaker. Candidates range from a member of Captain Martens' command lance, who accompanied her when she left Prey's Divisionals; the commander of various mercenary forces whose hire is said to be imminent; and the mayor of Shangri-La, the capital city on Erod's Escape, whose close friendship with Marshal Kithrong was forged during the Sixth Corp's tour of garrison duty there. As in the Concordat, planetary governments largely determine their own workings and oversee their own affairs, so long as they fulfill their obligations to the nation.

Politically, the people of the Protectorate are solidly behind Marshal Kithrong and the Regency Council. Kithrong's reputation as a straight talker is reinforced by every public appearance he gives, and his ironclad commitment to the welfare of his soldiers has expanded to include the welfare of every Protectorate citizen. A few years shy of fifty and in excellent physical shape, Marshal Kithrong exudes personal warmth along with a rocklike sense of integrity. One cannot imagine him cheating at cards, not even at solitaire—though the glint in his eye and a fine network of humor lines hint at a man who enjoys a good time.

The affection between the marshal and his young sovereign is almost tangible, and he is never too busy or harried to at least briefly give Erik his attention. Others around Erik at the Residency in Shangri-La are equally well disposed toward him, and his mother keeps a close eye on his welfare. Captain Martens and Marshal Kithrong clearly share a vision of Erik's future as a ruler, with few (if any) divisions for outsiders to exploit. The entire nation exhibits a similar unity, having barely existed long enough for real divisions to arise.

Average Protectorate citizens speak of Erik Martens-Calderon as if the boy were their own kin, taking personal pride in his intelligence and youthful accomplishments. Residual affection for his slain father accounts for some of it, but much of this emotional bond is down to Erik himself. When I requested an interview with him, Marshal Kithrong initially refused—but almost immediately thought better of it and decided to let Erik choose. Erik agreed to the interview, and on 4 September I found myself sitting across the schoolroom table from him. He wore a basketball shirt with the Shangri-La Tigers emblem on it, and his strawberry-blond hair stuck up in the back. Tall for his age, he had the slender grace of a boy before puberty hits, and a depth in his eyes that people normally acquire after several decades of joys and sorrows. Not even twelve, and he impressed me just sitting there.

We walked through the usual softball questions—when's your birthday, what subject do you like best in school, who's your pick for the Tigers' MVP this year. A slight initial nervousness soon gave way to quiet confidence, and he clearly thought about every word he spoke before he said it. He wanted to know about me as well—where had I grown up, did I still have a mom and dad, did I have a big dog as a kid (this in a longing tone—it turns out he's allergic to dogs, especially the fantastically hairy native wolfhound he wants). Then we moved on to more serious subjects, and I began to see what Marshal Kithrong had meant about this child's potential:

Tai Eleazar: How do you feel about all this, Erik—a mini-state formed because of you, on your behalf? What does it



feel like to know you're being groomed to lead these worlds one day?

Erik: (pause) Kind of weird. It's a big deal, that so many people put so much on the line for me. My mom says to just learn a lot and do the best I can, because that's all the universe can ask of anyone. So I've been trying to do that.

TE: Do you think the Protectorate will ever rejoin the Concordat?

Erik: I don't know. I know we're all trying to do the right thing. Of course, they probably think that, too. Protector Shraplen isn't a bad man; he just doesn't see what he's doing.

TE: What do you see?

Erik: I bet he never thought he'd have to be where he is. I wonder if he ever feels scared. He wants the Concordat to be strong, but I don't see how it can be strong by invading another realm and taking their planets away. Even if the Davions weren't real nice to us Taurians a long time ago, we should be better than that. My mom and Uncle Cham both say the strongest warrior is the one who knows when to walk away. I don't think Protector Shraplen knows when to walk away.

TE: What would you do, if you ended up as leader of the Concordat as well as the Protectorate?

Erik: Well...first, I'd make sure nobody hated anybody for the break-up anymore. We'd all have to be friends again. Then...I guess I'd end the war with the Davions, and maybe offer to trade them something for the Pleiades planets. Or no, I have a better idea. I'd get them to let the people there pick which realm they wanted to be with. And if they picked us, I'd have something to give the Davions so they wouldn't feel bad. And we could trade—with them and with lots of other people—so that they'd never want to invade us, because it wouldn't be worth what they'd lose. Then we'd both be strong, the Protectorate *and* the Concordat.

TE: What if the Davions did invade? Or what if the Concordat were to attack the Protectorate?

Erik: (pause, then quietly) I hope they won't. But if they do, they'll regret it.

TE: The Davions, or the TDF?

Erik: Both.

TE: Do you remember your father? You sounded a lot like him just now—a peacemaker, but one who wasn't afraid to go to war.

Erik: A little. I was only five when he died, and he couldn't be with us a whole lot because he was real busy being Protector. He had this great laugh. It felt like someone tickling me, right inside my stomach. It made me laugh every time I heard it, even if I didn't know what was funny. And he was tall, like me, and he must have been strong because I remember him swinging me up on his shoulders. (pause) My mom says I look a lot like him. And then sometimes she chokes up and can't talk for awhile.

TE: If you grow up to be anything like your father, Erik, you'll be a pretty amazing person. And an amazing ruler of the Protectorate as well.

Erik: I hope so. I'd like that better than anything—except maybe learning how to pilot a 'Mech. (grin) Or playing center for the Shangri-La Tigers.

[END INTERVIEW EXCERPT]

UNDER SIEGE: ECONOMICS IN A BREAKAWAY NATION

Economically, the Calderon Protectorate survives on free traders and smugglers—which, out here in the Periphery, are often the same people flying the same ships. Though everyone I met, including Marshal Kithrong, vehemently denied the prevalent rumors of gunrunning into the Protectorate, smugglers' vessels are a sight as regular and expected as the rising sun (or suns). They hail from sources as varied as their cargo: independent free traders, private concerns in the Concordat, every realm in the Inner Sphere, and almost every Periphery power with sufficient resources to finance them. They carry all kinds of goods that have become hard to get since Grover Shraplen declared a moratorium on trade with the Protectorate worlds and gave Gordon's Armored Cavalry the job of interdiction. The top three categories are foodstuffs, medical supplies and machine parts, especially parts for 'Mechs, fighters and vehicles. The Protectorate worlds barely produce enough food to sustain themselves, and the small military factories on Diik can't re-supply both regiments of the Sixth Corps with vehicle and fighter parts. As for medical technology, secession temporarily dried up the pipeline from the Canopians to the Concordat, but Canopian smugglers are beginning to pick up the slack. The deep jungles around Lastpost's equator are a potential treasure trove of medicinal compounds, which the Concordat had barely begun to fully exploit. If the Protectorate can get that industry up and running, it will have something of enormous value with which to bargain for its future.

The Protectorate's only official trading partner at this point is the Fiefdom of Randis, which exchanges surplus food for industrial-quality diamonds and small amounts of rare heavy metals mined on Oscar. The Fronc Reaches is rumored to be interested in trade ties, but the Reaches government has publicly denied this several times over. Marshal Kithrong sidestepped the question, and the current story has it that the Reaches won't admit to exploratory trade talks for fear of angering Protector Shraplen (who still is not entirely rational when it comes to the Calderon Protectorate).

PROTECTORATE MILITARY

The former Sixth Corps of the TDF is the backbone of the Protectorate's military strength: two BattleMech regiments, two aerospace wings, an armor battalion and two infantry battalions. Captain Talia Martens' company command lance, formerly of the mercenary unit Prey's Divisionals, rounds out the military roster. The fate of the Second Taurian Pride's infantry company, nicknamed Calderon's Commandos, remains unknown. That unit was engaged in a recon raid against the Pirates' Haven Star Cluster when the Protectorate formally seceded, and the rest of the Sixth Corps has so far



TAURIAN CONCORDAT

been unable to determine exactly what befell their missing comrades. The Second Pride has since reconstituted Calderon's Commandos, and this replacement battalion is currently at 99 percent readiness.

Some wonder if the original Commandos are the recently formed pirate band of a similar name, while others angrily dismiss such suspicions. The pirates call themselves the Calderon Commando, and are variously assumed to be remnants of the missing infantry unit, a band of Davion provocateurs intent on keeping alive Concordat anger toward the breakaway Protectorate, and the usual collection of punks with 'Mechs grabbing unearned prestige by approximating a well-known name. The only fact available about this group is their target list; they have so far confined their raiding to the Concordat proper and occasionally the Magistracy of Canopus, but have not yet raided a Protectorate world despite the young nation's inferior military strength.

Stepped-up raids by the pirates of Tortuga are another matter. Though the Sixth Corps is so far easily holding its own, any serious assault by Concordat forces would offer the pirates an opening wide enough to toss a 'Mech through. Marshal Kithrong is reportedly looking to hire mercenaries to deal with his growing pirate problem, and rumor has it that he'll soon sign a contract with Alex Keller of the Devil's Brigade.

EROD'S ESCAPE

Political Ruler: Baron Cham Kithrong, as president of the Regency Council for Erik Martens-Calderon

Star Type (Recharge Time): G0V (181 hours)

Position in System: 5

Time to Jump Point: 10.43 days

Number of Satellites: 3 (Maui, Kauai and Molokai)

Surface Gravity: 1.1

Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Equatorial Temperature: 43 degrees C° (Tropical)

Surface Water: 68 percent

Recharging Station: Zenith

HPG Class Type: B

Highest Native Life: Birds

Population: 17,250,000

Socio-Industrial Levels: D-D-B-B-A

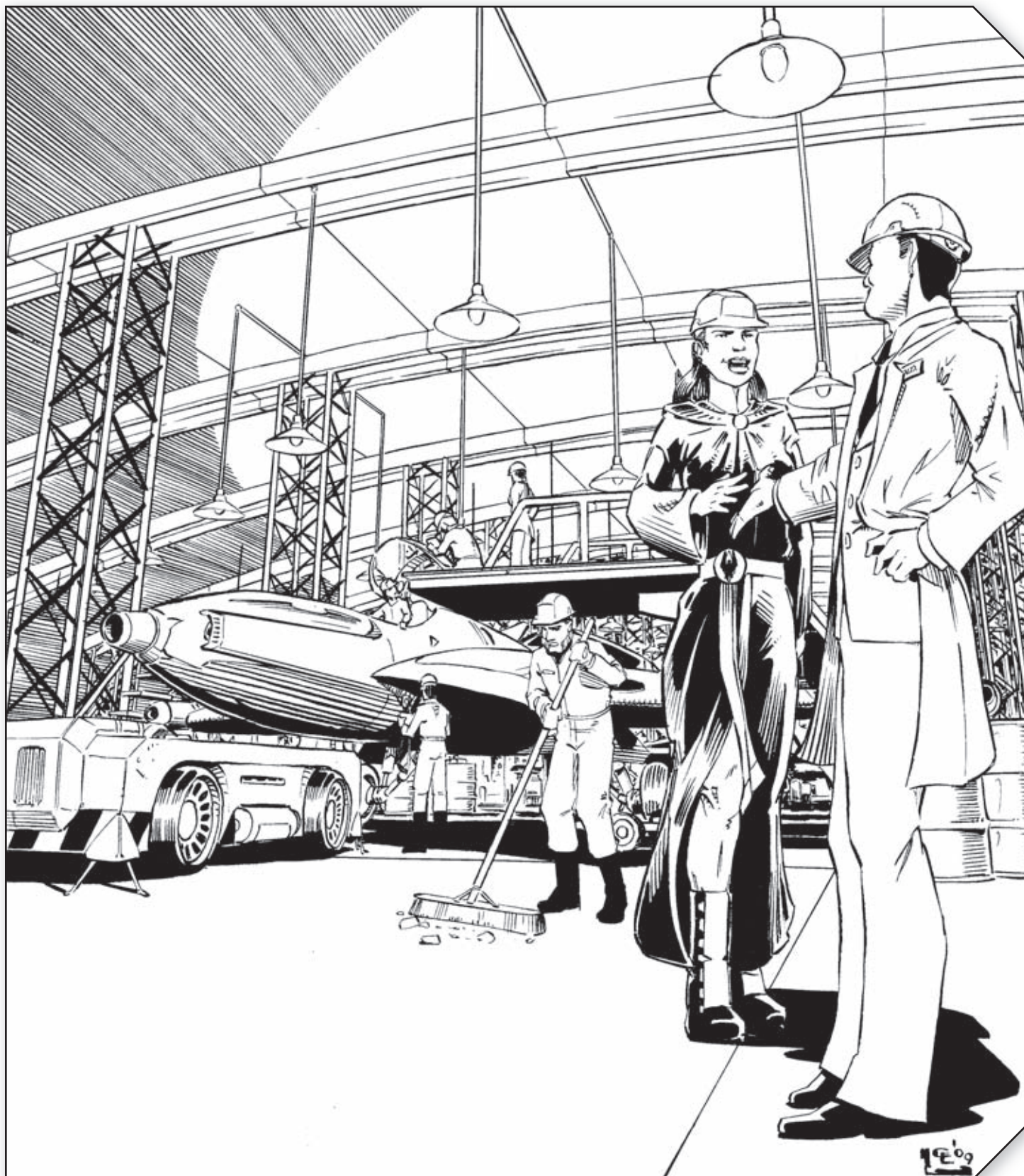
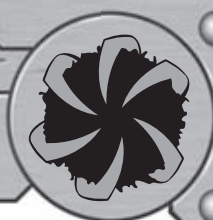
Profile:

Once a sleepy backwater best known for its verdant southern jungles and the fertile soil of its northern landmasses, Erod's Escape is adjusting to modest renown as the nominal capital of the Calderon Protectorate. The city of Shangri-La on the northwest continent of Elysium

is slowly transforming into a center of government, with new buildings going up and the population expanding. Its site at the confluence of three major rivers—the Lethe, the Naruda and the Wellspring—has made it a locus of agricultural trade ever since humans first settled Erod's Escape, and that same prominence made it the natural choice for an independent planetary capital.

The planet's three southern landmasses—Oahu, Majorca and Tenerife—are largely jungle, with scattered small settlements near the many large rivers that cut through vast stretches of wilderness. Avian life abounds in the jungles, along with spiders the size of dinner plates and other native insect life that locals take great joy in vividly describing to newcomers.







OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE

[Ed. Note: What follows is a transcript of a meeting that took place in mid-3064, between Outworlds President Mitchell Avellar and Senior Merchant Robard of Clan Snow Raven. Apparently, the Snow Raven merchant caste sent a communiqué to President Avellar, indicating their interest in making "a certain proposal, to our mutual benefit, involving the exchange of technologies much needed by your worlds." In the weeks preceding the communiqué, a Snow Raven military unit had engaged in a Trial of Possession for a JumpShip assigned to the pirate-hunting Fifth Alliance Air Wing. The Fifth's victory surprised and impressed the Snow Raven warriors, who subsequently turned to their merchant caste to explore forging ties with the Outworlds.]

Knowing that the Fifth's regular patrol pattern would bring them close to the Ravens' extensive merchant fleet, Merchant Robard invited President Avellar to meet aboard the OAS Acceptance in a region of the Periphery spinward of the Alliance and the Draconis Combine. The President agreed—and the rest is history, or will become so.

My colleague's anonymous source for this document gave this reason for procuring it: "I don't know if this agreement with the Ravens is a good thing or not. I do know that we all need to talk about it. Every citizen of the Outworlds, not just the President and a few of his trusted advisers. Whatever the outcome of these 'discussions,' we'll all have to live with the consequences. The people have a right to know, and a right to their say before their President makes any irrevocable decisions." In my own judgment, any alliance with a Clan will surely change the Outworlds in ways no one can foresee. I therefore offer this as a glimpse of a potential turning point in the Outworlds' history, for better or for worse.]

[BEGIN TRANSCRIPT]

[Section Leader Kyle Neffen]: They've docked, Mr. President.

[Mitchell Avellar]: Thank you, Mr. Neffen. I'll see them in your briefing room, if I may.

[Neffen]: Make yourself at home, sir. Good luck.

[Long pause; sounds of footsteps, doors opening and closing.]

[Drea Baker, Chief of Staff to the President]: We still don't know what this is about.

[Avellar]: We'll find out soon enough, Drea.

[Baker]: And then?

[Avellar]: We hear them out, go home and think about it, and send them an answer.

[Baker]: What if we say "no" and they want "yes"?

[Avellar]: We'll mend that wheel when the wagon breaks. But if they want something from us that they're willing to conquer to get, they'd likely have done that already.

[Baker]: Let's hope.

[More sounds of doors, footsteps. Long pause.]

[Avellar]: Coffee?

[Baker]: No, thanks. My jitters don't need any help.

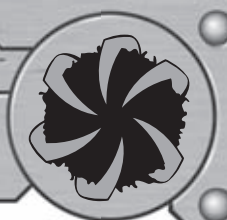
[Door opens.]

[Avellar]: Welcome aboard the *Acceptance*, gentlemen. To whom do I have the honor of speaking?

[Senior Merchant Robard]: I am Senior Merchant Robard, current Chairman of the Clan Snow Raven merchant caste. My associates and I thank you for the hospitality of your vessel.

[Avellar]: You are most welcome.

OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE



[Baker]: May we know the names of your associates?

[Robard]: This is Journeyman Sylla; she will serve as our recorder. Journeyman Terence is my personal aide.

[Avellar]: Drea Baker, my Chief of Staff. *[pause]* Would you care for refreshment?

[Robard]: Thank you. I have heard of the many beneficial properties of your "coffee"; I am eager to try some.

[Long pause.]

[Avellar]: Senior Merchant, your communiqué mentioned a proposal? Your offer of technological exchange was most generous, assuming the Outworlds can afford your price. What exactly can we offer you?

[Robard]: Straight to the point. Commendable. *[pause]* The coffee is...interesting.

[Baker]: Try a little milk or sugar. They usually help.

[Robard]: Our proposal is this. We wish to sell the Outworlds Alliance certain technologies that you presently lack, at a good price—in exchange for your permission to avail ourselves of certain re-supply facilities on selected Alliance planets. We wish to fairly contend for a share of the trade in this region of space and beyond. *[pause]* Use of your facilities for technology. Does this interest you?

[Avellar]: Forgive me, Senior Merchant, but...Deep Periphery trade is that valuable to your Clan? I wouldn't—would not have thought there was enough money in it.

[Robard]: You conduct the bulk of your own trade with the larger states of the Near Periphery, yes? And with the Inner Sphere as well. But not so much with your neighbors in the farther Periphery. With them, your trade is minor. Your viewpoint is influenced by your own situation. Ours is different.

[Baker]: You know quite a bit about our affairs, Senior Merchant.

[Robard]: We have observed the Outworlds Alliance for some time. Our findings have been most instructive.

[Avellar *(soft, aside)*]: Drea... *[louder, conversational]* What is your situation?

[Robard]: Let me just say that certain rivals have made swift progress in extracting trade wealth from the Deep Periphery. The honor of Clan Snow Raven demands that we match them—or better them.

[Avellar]: The Diamond Sharks.

[Robard]: I refer to them, yes. We also have other rivals among our fellow Clans.

[Avellar]: Which planets did you have in mind? And what types of technology?

[Robard]: Terence?

[Terence]: Baliggora, to begin with. If it should later prove acceptable to both sides, then also Dneiper, Risin and Valasha.

[Baker]: And the technology...?

[Robard]: Medical devices, to begin with. Also certain biotechnologies useful for increasing crop yields on your agricultural worlds. Improvements in education and basic medical care have increased your population in the past two decades. Greater yields of foodstuffs would ease those stresses considerably.

[Avellar]: Military technology? *[pause]*

[Robard]: That could be arranged. Perhaps some OmniFighter designs...? I will consult with my Khans.

[Avellar]: As I must consult with my government. My people must have their say in this, through their representatives.

[Robard]: It seems neither of us may make promises yet.

[Avellar]: Perhaps that is just as well. Lasting friendships take time to forge.

[Robard]: You speak truly, Mitchell Avellar. *[pause]* I will tell my Khans that you wish a lasting friendship with the Snow Raven, if such can be arranged to our mutual liking.

[Avellar]: And you may take this promise with you, Senior Merchant Robard. If your Khans and Clan are willing to help us meet *all* our most pressing needs, then—as they say—you will have yourself a deal.

[END TRANSCRIPT]

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

(2 June 3067)

Alpheratz [ISAP] — Government in the Outworlds Alliance has historically been haphazard, with each member world seeing to its own business under the chaotic aegis of a weak central authority. The Alliance Charter, hammered out in 2417 by Julius Avellar and some twenty of those who had followed him to Alpheratz over the previous four years, was a masterpiece of democracy—and a recipe for disaster. The President and the tiny central government had little more authority over the Outworlds as a whole than a town mayor over an entire planet. Predictably, individual communities and worlds blessed with talented leadership did well, while those who elected marginally competent glad-handers (a far more common occurrence) fared poorly. It took Rodrigo Avellar, brought to power as a Kurita-backed puppet in 2600, to turn things around.

Considerably brighter than his would-be puppet-masters expected, Rodrigo used his impressive diplomatic skills to fully exploit for the first time the greatest power of the Alliance Presidency: the bully pulpit. Like Franklin Delano Roosevelt of ancient North America, Rodrigo relied on the power of persuasion to appeal to the best in his people, and inspire them to work together for the benefit of all. Though the Outworlds under Rodrigo and his immediate successors hardly became a utopia, the President's frequent "fireside chats" (a term explicitly borrowed from the long-ago Roosevelt era) prompted a better class of politicians to run for office on many worlds. Rodrigo also persuaded the Executive Parliament, which controlled the national purse strings, to invest in a high-quality nationwide public school system. A better-educated population across the board, rather than just on this or that planet, made for a better-informed electorate capable of making better choices at the polls. By the time of Rodrigo's death in 2628, Alliance citizens had grown accustomed to local governments that worked—a state of affairs that served them well throughout the Star League era and beyond.

Unfortunately, the Alliance government remained heavily dependent on unanimous consent to function. When a President had the political skills and moxie to cajole the Executive Parliament into following his lead, and the intelligence and ethics to make responsible policy choices, the nation prospered. When he or she didn't, the Alliance suffered. This situation exists down to the present day. Mitchell Avellar is a gifted leader, with strong backing from a people and an Executive Parliament desperate not to return to the near-collapse of the state throughout the first half of the 31st century. Whether his successors will be anywhere near as talented, or as trustworthy, is anyone's guess. The coming years may see some strengthening of central authority, as the Outworlds Alliance grows accustomed to thinking of itself as a player on the interstellar stage. Or the status quo may stay entrenched, leaving the people of the Outworlds to continue staking everything on the personal qualities of their chief executives.

RIGHTS OF CITIZENS

Much like its fellow Periphery states, the Outworlds Alliance guarantees its citizens the valued rights of free expression, freedom of religion and the right to choose any lifestyle or economic pursuit so long as it does not infringe on the equal rights of other citizens. Citizenship is granted at birth; immigrants may be naturalized after ten years' residence and proof of productivity. Though some at the original drafting of the Alliance Charter pressed for rights to a living wage, health care and a free public education, the Outworlds has rarely possessed the resources to back up such guarantees. Economic and educational rights are therefore not mentioned in the Alliance Charter, though better-off planets frequently make every effort to guarantee these things on a local level.

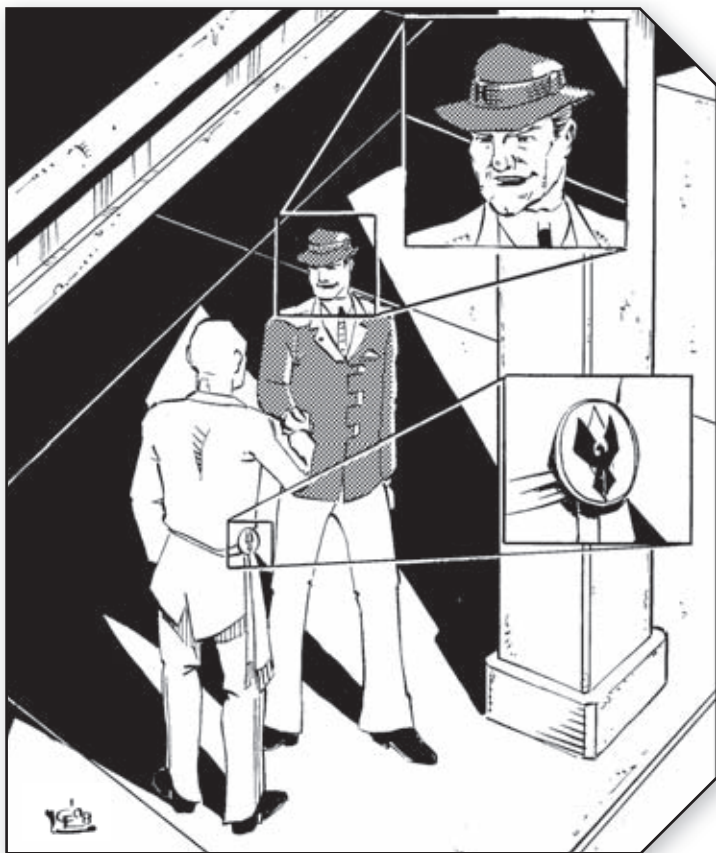
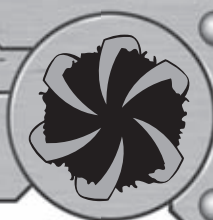
DEMOCRACY IN ACTION: THE WORKINGS OF GOVERNMENT

The Alliance Charter has undergone only one change in the 650 years since its signing: the creation of the Alliance Military Review Board, adopted in the mid-2800s as part of the Outworlds' establishment of its first standing armed forces. All other branches of the central government hold the same powers and serve the same functions as they did in the first years after the nation's founding.

Executive Parliament

The Alliance's principal governing body, the Executive Parliament consists of a Parliamentary President and one representative for every ten inhabited Outworlds planets. The Presidency is traditionally held by the senior member of the Avellar family, though on at least one occasion an incumbent President's sudden incapacity prompted the MPs to transfer power to the next Avellar in line. (Interestingly enough, the action they took was never subsequently enshrined in law; technically, even a clearly incompetent Avellar can continue to hold office.) Parliamentary representatives are chosen for a three-year term by the various Courts of Appeal, from names put forward by each world's Planetary Parliament. Through these more localized government branches, the Executive Parliament ultimately depends on the voice of the people.

The Executive Parliament conducts all foreign and domestic national affairs, with legislation subject to the unanimous vote of all members present. Intended to prevent dictatorship, this provision reduces the pace of lawmaking to a crawl, and mandates considerable skill at horse-trading among the President and MPs. Attempts to manipulate the voting rules have generally failed, though several were quite colorful. One famous story from the early 29th century claims that Simon Ellison, MP from the Outworlds' anti-spinward region, tried to pass a bill declaring Baliggora, Raldamax, Trimaldix and Ferris his personal fiefdom, after an all-night party at which he ensured that his colleagues all went home dead drunk. Upon their later discovery of the "passed" bill in the Executive Register, Ellison maintained that it was perfectly legal—he had been the only member present for that morning's parliamentary session, therefore only his vote was required. The Court of Appeal on Baliggora, Ellison's homeworld, threw the legislation out with a stinging rebuke. (Ellison was swiftly impeached, and went on to a lucrative career as a writer of racy political thrillers.)



Planetary Parliaments

These representative bodies govern every inhabited planet in the Outworlds Alliance. Members, one for every ten thousand citizens on a given world, are elected by annual popular vote. This yearly election cycle does not produce the “permanent campaign” one might expect; if anything, it fosters the opposite. Each member is acutely aware that his or her chances of remaining in office depend on how well he or she does the job—and that means proposing legislation, working to pass bills and showing up for votes. Wasting time on the campaign trail for more than the obligatory three weeks before Election Day tends to get an MP bounced by a skeptical electorate.

Planetary Parliaments have full authority to pass any legislation needed to govern their worlds, and so are only nominally subject to the Executive Parliament in many areas. No planetary legislation may infringe on the basic rights of citizenship outlined in the Alliance Charter, but beyond that each world has a fairly free hand in managing its own affairs. Planetary Parliaments also select one representative to serve on the Executive Parliament, with the final choice subject to ratification by the Courts of Appeal.

Courts of Appeal

Part law enforcement, part judicial branch, Courts of Appeal exist on every Alliance planet. Most worlds have several of these five-member courts, one for every five thousand Alliance citizens. Court judges have prosecutorial power to enforce local laws, and they also

review all directives handed down by the Executive Parliament. If a Court of Appeal decides that a particular law passed by the Executive Parliament is unconstitutional, it may declare that law null and void within its jurisdiction. This arrangement can make for a crazy quilt of laws between one Outworlds planet and another, or within different areas on the same planet.

Once every three years, representatives from each Court of Appeal meet on Alpheratz to fulfill the courts’ remaining function: to confirm or reject nominations to the Executive Parliament and the Military Review Board for the next session.

Military Review Board

Members of this four-person council are selected from each Alliance provincial capital: Alpheratz, Cerberus, Praxton and Ramora. The board regularly reviews the organization and deployment of the Alliance military. It succeeded the Executive Parliament’s Subcommittee for Military Affairs, which oversaw the raising, equipping and deployment of the volunteer brigades that defended the Outworlds before the establishment of a permanent military force. The Review Board can veto Executive Parliament decisions regarding any use of the military, except in an Alliance-wide state of emergency. The board’s creators gave it this veto power in order to prevent the rise of a military dictatorship—a fear that came close to derailing proposals for a standing army in the first place, and that persists in some pockets of the Outworlds to this day.

COMES THE RAVEN: POLITICAL REACTION

In July of 3064, in an extraordinary statement during a public press conference, President Mitchell Avellar confirmed what had been a hot subject in the Outworlds’ rumor mill for nearly three months: the existence of formal ties between the Outworlds Alliance and Clan Snow Raven. Avellar made it clear to his questioner—veteran reporter Elena Tomas—that there was no military alliance, as many worried posters in online chat rooms had hinted.

“In fact, to call it an alliance is a misnomer,” he said. “I’d call it a trade deal, and (I believe) a good one for the Outworlds. The Ravens want to use re-supply facilities on a few of our outlying planets, so that they can jump into Deep Periphery trade with both feet. They’re willing to pay us well, with useful peacetime technologies at an affordable price. I want to stress that there will be oversight of Snow Raven activities, at the national and local level. The Executive Parliament, in consultation with Baliggora’s Planetary Parliament, has chosen that world for a pilot project; should it go well, we may expand the deal to include a few more planets in which the Snow Raven merchants have expressed an interest. That depends on how much we like what we see. In any event, this ‘alliance’ you’ve all heard tales about is hardly that. It’s a simple swap, use of existing facilities for technology plus some cash on the barrel. Next question?”

The citizens of Baliggora initially neither rejoiced nor protested. Instead, typical of stoic-minded Outworlders, they watched and waited. The promised technological benefits were swift in coming: diagnostic equipment better than even the excellent machines already received from the Magistracy of Canopus, safer and more effective neuro-

Newsmaker Profile: Mitchell Avellar

Reformer and apparent savior of the Outworlds Alliance, Mitchell Avellar became President at the age of twenty-one—the youngest in Alliance history. A bare decade later, he can still pass for a gangly late adolescent, though anyone who looks him in the eye will swiftly revise upward any guesses about his age and intelligence. Foreigners are most prone to underestimate him, having had less personal experience with his governing style. Before he is anything else, Mitchell Avellar is a shrewd politician and a patriot, dedicated to ensuring his nation's survival and prosperity. Practical almost to a fault, he rarely lets his feelings interfere with his decisions, and because of this sometimes appears socially inept—though never when the need for persuasion counts.

Avellar's genius-level intelligence and extensive knowledge of Alliance history, as well as of the different needs of all its member-planets, makes him among the most talented leaders in the Periphery. The overwhelming success of his Long Road program has earned him deep loyalty from most of his fellow Outworlders, and the few storms on his political horizon remain small. Personal success as an aerospace pilot has glamorized him a touch among many Alliance citizens, despite what local tabloids call his "lean and hungry look." Outworlds celebrity-watchers on more urbanized planets have begun to take up the question of Mitchell's romantic prospects—the popular "Bachelorina" journal on Lushann recently called him "a three-star catch, even if he is kinda short... four if he'd fix his permanently mussed-up hair."

chemical compounds for treatment of various mental illnesses, a bio-engineered strain of high-yield golden rice suitably adapted to the temperate climate on Sevon. The latter came as an especially welcome reprieve from the hardships of recent years, which even the Long Road program had not yet fully addressed; Sevon had hit "peak oil" back in 3045, and its petrochemical industry was beginning a sharp decline when Mitchell Avellar took office. The golden rice both impressed and slightly worried President Avellar, who recognized just how much the Snow Raven merchant caste must have known about Alliance affairs in order to so perfectly meet an individual planet's need. Still, all the evidence pointed to the Raven merchants as being people of their word. In early 3066, the Planetary Parliaments of Dneiper, Risin and Valasha gave the go-ahead for Snow Raven shipping compounds to be built on their worlds, thereby holding up the Outworlds' end of the bargain (though no one outside of the Executive Parliament knew of Mitchell's 3064 meeting with the Ravens in space).

The biggest technological prize came within weeks afterward, and it was exactly what Mitchell Avellar had hoped for—or so prevailing rumors have it. The Outworlds' top aerospace designers received enough OmniFighter specs, more than likely from the Snow Ravens, to create the *Corax* OmniFighter, which made its official debut in mid-3067. After that, the pace of technological exchange slowed rapidly, but most Outworlders were content with what they'd already received. Some, however, saw a darker purpose at work.

"Prelude to Takeover"

The Separatist political faction, long opposed to the Avellars, had for decades sought either a charismatic leader or a hot-button issue around which to expand its support. In what they persistently termed "the Clan Snow Raven military-industrial alliance" with the Outworlds government, they thought they finally had one. When the land-for-tech

Newsmaker Profile: Barnabas Huard

Leader of the Separatists since the early 3050s, Barnabas Huard serves as chairman of Baliggora's Planetary Parliament, a position he has held for multiple terms. Hiding Machiavellian political skills behind an affable, malleable façade, Huard achieved his position despite the dirty tricks of the virulently corrupt family whose scions had held the Parliamentary Chairmanship for five generations. Huard himself has led the Planetary Parliament with rock-solid integrity, which has rubbed off on his fellow MPs; Baliggora's resident political pundits now regularly refer to the entire membership of their parliament as "the Incorruptibles."

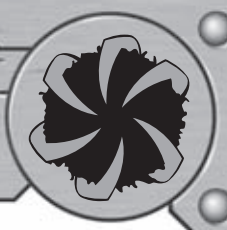
Huard's graying hair and gentle, careworn face help to soften the impact of his strongly stated opposition to hereditary rule of any kind, particularly by the Avellars. Though he respects Mitchell Avellar as a genuine patriot, he opposes just about every change the President has made since Mitchell's first day in office. In his mind, the strengthening of the Outworlds Alliance has only made it a richer target for the Periphery's malefactors, who come in many guises. He believes the Snow Ravens to be one such threat, and has become more vocal in his opposition to their presence as they have expanded it to other worlds.

Newsmaker Profile: Osmina Neruda

An oddball mystic whose only past claim to fame is a dubious career as the local "wise woman" for the central town of Sakkara on Quantraine, Osmina Neruda has risen to prominence among aficionados of the offbeat—and has begun to gain media attention in urban enclaves like those on Alpheratz, where local sophisticates enjoy discovering new fads. "Lady Osmina," as she bills herself, posts writings and multimedia "re-enactments" of her dream visions, in which she consistently urges the Outworlds' movers and shakers to "help our beloved nation live out its destiny, hand-in-hand with the White Birds from the Farthest Star, as the last refuge of suffering humanity after the Darkness falls. For the Darkness is coming, swifter than the whirlwind and more terrible than the endless fire." In late-night holoivid interviews, she frequently talks up deeper ties with the Snow Ravens, seeing them as partners in the salvaging of humanity's remnant from an unspecified evil lurking on the horizon. She claims to have begun seeing "patterns of the future" after a bad-tempered horse kicked her into a barn wall. "The horse's name was Merlin," she says with great drama whenever she tells this story. "The seer from Arthurian myth. More than coincidence, wouldn't you agree?"

Thin as a grass blade and slight-boned, with gray eyes too large for her face, Osmina Neruda certainly looks the part. Her "visions" are deeply symbolic to some, entertainingly absurd to many others. Scattered among her stream-of-consciousness writings are occasional pieces of eloquent poetry, indicating a glimmer of genuine talent underneath her eccentric façade. Her antics are becoming a minor embarrassment to the government and to other backers of the Snow Raven-Alliance venture. With certifiably crackpot friends, who needs enemies?

deal first became public, Separatist leader Barnabas Huard allegedly said, "Mitchell just handed us our best weapon since his daddy damned near drove the whole Alliance into the grave." (If true, this statement offers a clue as to why Huard permitted Baliggora to be the first site of a Snow Raven shipping facility.) Events have so far proved such words optimistic, but the Separatists' constant harping on the deal with the Raven merchants as "a prelude to takeover by the Birds' warrior caste" has nonetheless had an effect. Skeptical of outsiders' intentions at the best of times, many in the Outworlds remain wary about the Snow Ravens in their midst. The violent history of the Clans as a whole in the Inner Sphere, along with the clear superiority of Raven military



technology, makes even the many who implicitly trust their President wonder about this policy on occasion. The Separatists' proposed remedy, however, has few takers outside of that faction's true believers. Huard and his die-hard followers advocate the total dissolution of the Outworlds Alliance, on the theory that the Snow Ravens won't bother taking over a scattered collection of independent planets whose no longer linked economies cannot profit them anywhere near as much as an interstellar nation. Diehards brush off the economic damage that such a scheme would inevitably bring as "the price of keeping our freedom," but most Outworlders don't want to pay it. Memories of the Alliance's economic near-death are recent and vivid, and almost no one wants to go back to those bad old days.

A small splinter faction of Separatists has another take on the situation—same remedy, different problem. Having seen the benefits to those planets that welcomed the Snow Ravens' presence, they advocate secession from the Outworlds Alliance in order to strike independent deals with the Ravens. "We're tired of asking the Eppies [Executive Parliament members] pretty-please and waiting for them to tell us yes-you-may-dear," said Alyce Mencken, a native of Dormandaine and nominal head of this tiny group. "The Ravens want trade? We got plenty to trade. Best beef in known space, for one. We sell it all over the place, even in the Combine and the FedSuns. We'd be happy to share our trade contacts, if the Eppies'd just get out of the danged way!"

The larger portion of Separatists, however, poses the greater potential threat to continued ties between the Outworlds and the Raven Clan. Their call for dissolution and "a return to our humble roots" has struck a chord with more militant members of the Omniss sect, with their longstanding bias against many forms of technology. Already unsettled by the increasing militarization of the Alliance, the militants are no longer content to simply live their lives and let events in the larger realm pass them by. These people strike out in defense of their beliefs, and they strike hard. Acts of sabotage against military manufacturers and centers of heavy industry have been on the rise since 3058, and though large-scale damage or death have yet to occur, many experts on extremist movements believe it is only a matter of time. A potential alliance between the militant Omniss and the Separatists could pose a serious headache for the President and his Executive Parliament backers, working simultaneously through bombs on the street and backroom maneuvers to derail the Raven-Outworlds joint venture.

ALLIANCE MILITARY

—From the *Alliance Military Corps Training Manual, Revised Edition*, March 3067

The Alliance Military Corps is divided into three branches. Its nominal head is the President, but his aide and second-in-command functions as the day-to-day commander-in-chief. The current holder of this vital position is Senior Chairman Maurice Avellar, second cousin to the President and onetime commander of the Avellar Guards.

Entry into the AMC is determined by lotteries held on each Outworlds planet. Every able-bodied citizen must serve four years in the military, should his or her number be chosen. Volunteers are also welcome, and citizens who wish to serve longer are free to do so. Officer ranks often denote administrative duties, with officers serving a minimum of five years. All promotions to officer rank require a nomination from a commanding officer or Planetary Parliament and must be ratified by the Military Review Board.

Most Alliance soldiers outside the Aerospace Arm get their basic training and technical classes at a training camp. Located on every planet but Dante, the camps provide basic training for ground troops. The training camps on four worlds—Alpheratz, Lushann, Dneiper and Ferris—also teach basic MechWarrior skills and various technical classes. These four camps formerly trained aerospace pilots as well, but Columbia Academy has filled that role for the past ten years.

Alliance Aerospace Arm

The Alliance Aerospace Arm (AAA) has long been considered the most important branch in the AMC. When the nation first established the Alliance Military Corps, citizens voted to include large numbers of aerospace assets in it, believing that aerospace fighters would be cheaper and easier to maintain than BattleMechs. (Intense cultural prejudice against the "hulking monsters of death" also played a role; the people of the Outworlds have never forgotten Santiago, and many found a standing air force easier to stomach than 'Mech regiments.) This vote became the foundation for the AAA, which serves as the Outworlds' first line of defense. The aerospace arm has long received the lion's share of AMC funding; only recently have other branches come near to matching it.

Pilots in the AAA are some of the best trained and most highly skilled in human-occupied space. Other Periphery realms, most recently the Magistracy of Canopus, often request permission to "borrow" AAA officers in order to improve their own aerospace effectiveness. Retired officers are in high demand at war colleges throughout the Periphery and Inner Sphere, and most Outworlds citizens accord aerjocks the same respect and admiration that other realms give to MechWarriors. A reflection of this preference for aerospace over ground units is a reversal of the more common relationship between the two unit types; in the AMC, aerospace units receive the most assignments, and ground units are attached to them as support troops. This arrangement helps fulfill the AMC's primary purpose, the defense of the Outworlds Alliance. It is also in keeping with our national commitment to maintaining the peace unless attacked.

Five wings make up the AAA, each containing three regiments of three squadrons apiece, plus a command squadron. Each wing consists

of sixty fighters, a far larger contingent than the typical aerospace wing found elsewhere in inhabited space. The AAA's total strength numbers some three hundred pilots. Alliance aerospace craft range from battlefield salvage to fighters a generation old, to fighters equipped with Star League technology obtained from House Kurita and House Davion. Fighter designs from the Draconis Combine and the Federated Suns are common sights in AAA units, reflecting the Outworlds' strong trade ties with both of our Inner Sphere neighbors. Recent additions to some units include the *Corax* OmniFighter, newly rolled off the production lines. The AMC's DropShip and JumpShip fleet, including two *Vengeance*-class vessels, provides adequate transport for AAA fighter craft, and does double duty transporting the Alliance Mechanized Corps.

Alliance Ground Defense Arm

Until recently, this arm of the AMC received the smallest share of funding and support. Poorly equipped and often derided, it lagged well behind the other service branches, until the Long Road program began to turn things around. The program called for improved equipment and training, and also for expansion of the ground defense forces. At the start of the Long Road, the Alliance Mechanized Corps contained a mere three regiments; that number has since grown to five full regiments of BattleMechs, vehicles and infantry. The two new regiments, named the First and Second Long Road Legions after the program that brought them into existence, were formed around mercenary units—the first mercs to be employed by the national government since the temporary repeal in 3064 of the Outworlds' official ban on hiring mercenary troops. [Ed. Note: Planetary governments have always hired mercenary commands when necessary, despite the Alliance Charter's proscribing their use by "anyone in Alliance space." The national government generally turned a blind eye, content to let each planet determine its own affairs so long as no one used said mercenaries against a neighbor world. Officially, the merc ban is now back in effect.]

The Alliance Ground Defense Arm also encompasses the Planetary Militia, composed of active militia units stationed on every Alliance world except for the Omnis stronghold of Dante. These units range in size from two to four battalions, and many worlds also have sizable reserves. Citizen militias consisting of vehicles and infantry, these forces are designated strictly for home defense. Their task, should battle come, is to stall any invaders until reinforcements can arrive.

For most of its existence, the AGDA suffered from low morale along with inadequate equipment and training. Many soldiers joined the ground forces only after washing out of testing for a slot in the aerospace corps, and recruits frequently shared the overall opinion of ground troops as more barbarous than their aerospace-pilot brethren. Seeing themselves as inferior, few ground-pounders had much motivation to perform their best in the field. Things have begun to improve in the past few years, with increased funding, better equipment and training, psychologists attached to the various ground units to assess internal factors that contribute to poor performance, and the establishment of an award for ground troops—the Cerberus Cluster—that should soon earn the same prestige as the aerospace pilots' Gallucci Cross. A steady trickle of cutting-edge BattleMech designs, along with a few highly

prized battle-armor suits, has also made a difference in those units lucky enough to receive these prizes. [Ed. Note: *Scuttlebutt in the ranks says the new machines came from the Snow Ravens, who either designed them for Outworlds factories or gave Outworlds engineers enough data to reverse-engineer the best Snow Raven second-line equipment. Such conjectures remain unconfirmed, as neither the Ravens nor President Avellar's government are talking.*]

Alliance Service Arm

The final part of the triad that makes up the AMC, the Alliance Service Arm includes all the non-combatant services found in other militaries: quartermaster services, training, research and intelligence, medical personnel and so on. The Medical Corps currently receives the largest portion of funding earmarked for the ASA, reflecting recent changes that originated with the Long Road program. In addition to its army services, the Medical Corps also provides civilian medical care on worlds where its personnel are stationed, in an effort to lighten the load of the often-overstrained civilian health system.

The ASA has its own small transport fleet that carries almost everything its personnel might need (though the AAA fleet carries various units' individual supplies). In recent years, the Medical Corps has greatly benefited from training offered to select members at the Federated Suns' celebrated New Avalon Institute of Science; Chairman Vasily DeMille, current head of the ASA and a graduate of the NAIS, sponsors several promising candidates for such training every year.

RANKS AND INSIGNIA

The Alliance Military Corps has eight standard ranks: four for enlisted personnel and four for officers. Higher officer ranks found in other militaries are rendered unnecessary by the extent of civilian control over the Outworlds military; the Military Review Board, the President and his senior aide handle the duties common to those positions.

The four enlisted ranks are defender, protector, guardian and preceptor; the four officer ranks are supervisor, section leader, director and chairman. (This rank is drawn straight from civilian usage, in which "chairman" refers to the head of a Planetary Parliament.)

Defender

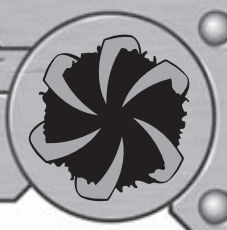
Each inductee into the AMC receives the title "Defender of the State," no matter what his or her duties. Aerospace pilots begin at this rank as well and are not granted automatic officer rank (as often happens in other militaries). Defenders wear a single green circle on each uniform lapel.



Protector

Enlisted personnel who have served at least one year of active duty and have a clean record are promoted to the title of "Protector of the Homeland." Protectors wear two green circles on each lapel of their uniforms.





Guardian

A soldier at this rank, officially titled “Guardian of the State,” has completed at least two years of active duty with a clean record. A green circle with a smaller brown circle centered in it, worn on each uniform lapel, denotes this rank.



Preceptor

The rank of preceptor is awarded after at least three years of active duty with a clean record. Preceptors wear two green circles on each uniform lapel, with a smaller brown circle centered in each one.



Supervisor

The first officer rank in the AMC, supervisors tend to command infantry platoons or lances of vehicles, BattleMechs or aerospace fighters. Supervisors wear a single green horizontal bar on each uniform lapel.



Section Leader

Section leaders typically command a company of BattleMechs, vehicles or infantry, or a squadron of aerospace fighters. They are the officer rank most often encountered on the front lines of battle. Section leaders wear two horizontal green bars, one above the other, on each uniform lapel.



Director

Functioning as staff planners or senior commanders in the field, directors typically take charge of an infantry, vehicle or BattleMech battalion, or a regiment of aerospace fighters. Directors are identified by a single horizontal brown bar on each lapel.

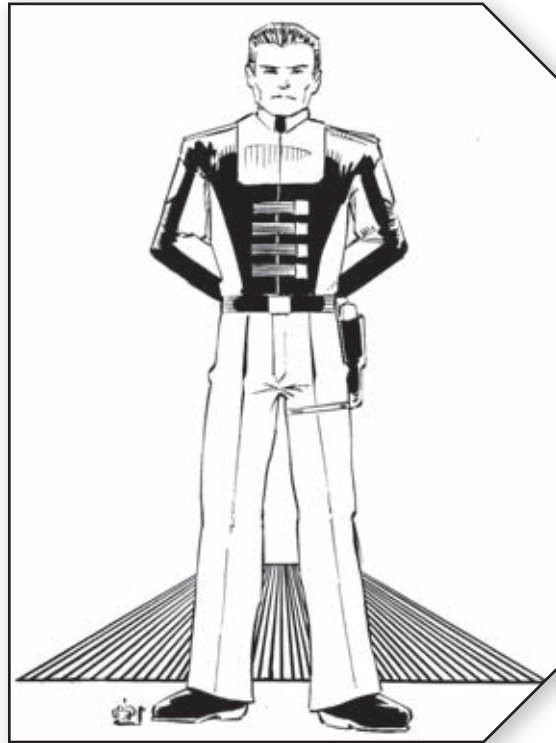


Chairman

Officers at this rank serve several functions in the AMC. Often used as senior staff and strategy specialists, they may also command a full regiment of BattleMechs, vehicles or infantry, or an aerospace fighter wing. Chairman-ranked officers wear two horizontal brown bars on each uniform lapel.



The chairman is the highest official rank in the AMC, though two honorary ranks exist above that. The president is known simply by his civilian title in his capacity as the head of the AMC, and his senior aide in charge of military affairs is addressed as senior chairman to show his higher status among chairman-ranked officers.



UNIFORMS

Soldiers in the Ground Defense and Service branches of the AMC wear simple and practical uniforms, dark green fatigues trimmed with gold piping. MechWarriors are equipped with the tools of their fighting trade as well—cooling vests and neurohelmets, often recycled from the early Succession Wars era. By contrast, uniforms for ground troops in the planetary militias vary considerably; each such unit is equipped by its Planetary Parliament, which frequently can allocate little funding for that purpose. Consequently, planetary militias often receive whatever used or surplus clothing and equipment is available. Many of them still use century-old equipment bought from the Draconis Combine and the Federated Suns, and model their uniforms after styles from House Davion or House Kurita.

DropShip and JumpShip crews attached to the AMC likewise have no standard uniform. Instead, the captain of each vessel decides on acceptable dress for his or her subordinates. Choices can range from casual wear to military-style jumpsuits, though true uniforms remain rare.

As befits the most honored branch of the AMC, aerospace pilots receive higher-quality uniforms than soldiers in the other branches (though with increased funding, this is changing). During flight operations, pilots wear olive-green flight suits with G-tolerance equipment and a green-and-gold helmet. Outside their fighters, pilots wear white blouses trimmed with gold piping and dark green trousers. In colder climates, this is augmented by a brown leather jacket, which harks back to an ancient Terran tradition. Individual pilots often adorn these jackets with patches indicating where the pilot has served, what kind of fighter he or she flies, the pilot’s rank and symbols of his or her wing, regiment and squadron.

OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE

AWARDS

Throughout its history, the Outworlds Alliance has been a proudly pacifist nation—and though its people long ago recognized the need for even peace-loving realms to have standing armed forces, the AMC is as reluctant as civilians to glamorize warfare. Consequently, the Military Corps grants only three awards, and the third is a recent addition. Every citizen of the Outworlds appreciates the sacrifices that soldiers may have to make in the nation's defense, but to honor those sacrifices too ostentatiously risks making warfare look like a glorious enterprise instead of the tough, often dirty and unfortunately necessary work it is. In keeping with the value placed on saving life rather than taking it, all three awards are given for actions that save lives, rather than by number of kills or for service in a particular conflict.

Within their own community, the pilots of the AAA grant their own informal award—the title of ace, bestowed on pilots with five or more kills. Though it comes with no medal or ribbon, it carries considerable prestige. In fact, nearly every Chairman of the AAA for the past two centuries has been an ace.

Pitcairn Star

The Pitcairn Star is named for Colonel Elias Pitcairn, who led his Pitcairn Legion repeatedly into the breach to ensure the safety of the Alliance during the Reunification War. Judged by the Military Review Board, the Pitcairn Star is awarded to members of any unit that defies enormous odds to keep civilians safe. With the constant bandit attacks that plague the Alliance, more than ten of these awards are granted every year, often posthumously.

The Pitcairn Star consists of a blue-steel disc an inch in diameter, with half-inch silver points extending from it in the eight cardinal directions. It hangs from a short white ribbon. Posthumously issued stars have a black central disc, and the ribbon is trimmed in black.



Gallucci Cross

This award is given once annually to aerospace pilots. Named for Preceptor Ed Gallucci, the first ace in the AMC, the Gallucci Cross goes to the AAA's most improved pilots for that year. The winner is determined by a vote of all the aces in the AAA; though the Military Review Board technically grants the cross, they always defer to the aces' collective judgment. In addition to recognition, the Gallucci Cross comes with a pay raise.

The award is a brass equi-armed cross, two inches by two inches, which hangs from a green-and-white ribbon. On the ribbon in molded silver is the year in which the cross was won.



Cerberus Cluster

The ground forces' equivalent of the Gallucci Cross, the Cerberus Cluster was introduced last year as part of a service-wide effort to improve morale and performance in the AGDA. It is awarded once a year to the AGDA soldier whose combat abilities show the greatest improvement, as judged by his or her commanding officer. Each director in the AGDA nominates one candidate for the award, assuming anyone is deemed fit, and then forwards the nomination along with the candidate's record and recent simulator scores to the Military Review Board. Members of the board make the final call on who receives each year's Cluster—though even nomination carries a certain cachet.

The Cerberus Cluster is a brass cloverleaf, two inches by two inches, hanging from a blue-and-white ribbon. The year in which it was won is emblazoned in the middle of the cloverleaf. Like the Gallucci Cross, this award brings a pay raise with it.

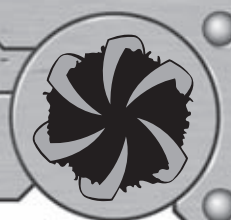


COLUMBIA ACADEMY

Columbia Academy, founded in 3057 as part of the Long Road program, is the only real military academy in the Outworlds Alliance (though several militarily useful science and technical classes are taught at the University of Alpheratz). Named for the first manned spaceship to use a fusion drive, Columbia Academy arose from the ashes of an abandoned school on Ramora. It provides training for all aerospace pilots in the AAA, as well as their technical crews and the crews of JumpShips and DropShips.

Each applicant to Columbia must be an Alliance citizen, be physically and mentally fit, and have a recommendation from his homeworld's Planetary Parliament or from an officer in the AAA. The school occasionally accepts students from outside the Alliance, provided such applicants hail from a state with most-favored-nation status and have received approval from the Military Review Board. Current favored nations include the Taurian Concordat, the Magistracy of Canopus, the Federated Suns and the Draconis Combine. (ComStar applicants receive the same status as applicants from a favored nation, even though ComStar is technically an organization rather than a realm.) Advanced fields of study at Columbia include aerospace pilot, basic and aerospace technician, and JumpShip and DropShip crew and piloting.

Upon graduation, students must join the Alliance Military Corps and serve for at least four years. No graduates automatically receive officer rank; every AMC soldier (in whatever service branch) is expected to earn promotion in the field. If no available posting exists for a Columbia graduate assigned to the AAA, he or she may spend several months taking care of paperwork until a billet opens up.



THE CONSTANT ENEMY: PIRATES IN THE OUTWORLDS

(18 June 3067)

Risin [ISAP] — As a pacifistic nation with two militarily powerful neighbors, the Outworlds Alliance learned early on to keep its peace by playing Houses Kurita and Davion off against each other. This gambit has worked successfully for centuries, enough that the Outworlds has not faced another nation's armed forces in battle since the long-ago Reunification War. Out here, the constant enemy is marauding bands of pirates. They strike, they take, they destroy, they disappear—and they never go away. This pirate band or that may overreach and be destroyed, or be ripped apart by infighting; but as sure as death and taxes, someone new will come roaring out of the dark void of space to hit the richest—or the easiest—target. Outworlds Alliance planets have rarely been considered the richest pickings, but as the most lightly defended Periphery state of any appreciable size, they provided plenty of the easiest. Now that the Outworlds is prospering, its planets are better defended, but not always enough against marauders tempted by all this new wealth.

Enter the Raven

Two well-known pirate bands that formerly threatened Alliance planets have ceased to be a factor since 3064, thanks in part to Clan Snow Raven. Vinson's Vigilantes, a rogue mercenary command, took control in 3059 of Port Krin on the lawless world of Antallos—a pirate haven located dangerously near Alliance worlds and shipping lanes. The Vigilantes' success roused unwelcome attention from a rival group of marauders: Vance Rezak's Band of the Damned. Though Rezak had built his primary base on the inhospitable planet dubbed Rezak's Hole, he possessed significant real estate near Port Krin, Antallos' major city-state, and was not happy to see the Vigilantes horning in on his territory. Several clashes ensued between the Vigilantes and the Damned, with neither side getting the best of it. Before the situation could advance beyond stalemate, however, fate intervened.

Clan Snow Raven, operating in the Deep Periphery, discovered Rezak's Hole and decided to rid it of the pirate scum who lived there. The Raven attack on the planet cost Rezak significant assets, though the pirate king himself escaped; he was at his Port Krin estates when the Clanners struck, and had to work overtime to build a new power base on Antallos. Soon afterward, Vinson's Vigilantes attempted another assault...or started to. Much to their leader's fury, Rezak had built up enough strength that the bulk of the Vigilantes came over to him without a shot fired. The Band of the Damned is still shaking out from its absorption of the Vigilantes, and though it's likely to become a major threat again before too long, the Outworlds Alliance armed forces are making good use of the respite. The next time the Damned come looking for a fight, the AMC intends to be ready for them.

Other Threats

Other continuing threats include the notorious Tortuga Fusiliers, whose scorched-earth tactics terrorize as well as destroy; and the Mark Brady Gang, a small band of smash-and-grab artists with 'Mechs. The Gang models itself after the desperados of the ancient American West;

its favored targets are local banks in isolated hamlets on Alliance worlds. The AMC's bandit-hunters can't yet put a name to the perpetrators of the most worrisome current pirate activity, however. Mysterious raiders operating from an as-yet unknown base have struck several Alliance planets in recent months, and the failure to track them to their staging world has Alliance leaders seriously worried. Expanded patrols in the usual regions where pirates abound have uncovered only a few bases, none of them large or well-equipped enough to make a plausible source for these raiders' devastating hit-and-runs. Military scuttlebutt says they must be hiding within someone's national borders: the Draconis Combine, the Federated Suns, even the Mica Majority. Each theory has its partisans, but genuine proof simply doesn't exist.

ECONOMICS

(26 July 3067)

Ramora [ISAP] — The Outworlds Alliance of 3067 is a far different place than it was ten years ago, or even just five years ago. Every piece of written material on the Outworlds up until now, from human-interest article to economists' white paper to ComStar's scholarly studies, has painted a picture of this nation as an economic basket case, beset by all the troubles one might expect, its center barely holding in the face of grinding poverty, illiteracy and pirate assaults. Almost universally, authors and readers came to assume that the Outworlds' demise was a matter not of if, but when.

People in the Outworlds have a different view of their hardscrabble history. They call themselves survivors, and take pride in having weathered economic woes that ought to have made their realm implode. That for the past dozen years it has done precisely the opposite—to the point where it has now become a serious player in the Periphery—is a testament to the brilliance of its current leadership and to the toughness and integrity of its citizens. It is a testament also to one of history's great ironies: That a nation founded as an avatar of peaceful living, expressly disavowing war machines and all other such "life-destroying" technology, should depend so heavily for its newfound prosperity on arms-makers and heavy industry. Even more ironic, most of its people are content to have it so.

"You do what you have to," was a common refrain whenever the subject came up. "So long as damn fools elsewhere want to fight, why shouldn't we make something on it?" was another. The most frequent comment was, "There's no shame in defending ourselves. Or in wanting better for our children." Generations of rough living in scattered hamlets on under-developed worlds have taken their toll on the utopian anti-technology bent of the Outworlds' founders, and Alliance citizens now aspire to the same achievements as most: a decent standard of living, security from outside attack, and the prospect that each generation will do somewhat better than the one before it. If it takes weapons-manufacturing deals with fortune hunters and wildcatters from the Federated Suns and Draconis Combine to accomplish these things, then so be it.

Whatever the rationale, the Outworlds' economic turnaround since Mitchell Avellar assumed the Presidency has been nothing short of astonishing. Avellar himself had expected his "Long Road" program to take at least ten years to even start showing results; much to his

surprise, it started taking off by 3061, and the expansion has since continued at a dizzying pace. Even the FedCom Civil War made barely a dent, despite the Alliance economy's initial heavy dependence on Federated Suns business interests. For every FedSuns firm that closed up shop in the Outworlds and turned those resources toward home, another stayed, convinced they'd be better off making their mark on the Alliance's boom worlds. Draconis Combine business interests also eagerly picked up slack, and Mitchell Avellar's efforts to build ties throughout the Periphery added yet another revenue source to keep the good times going. For the first time since its days as a Star League Territorial State, the Outworlds Alliance is economically strong, and looks likely to stay that way.

GOOD NEIGHBORS: TRADE WITH THE INNER SPHERE

The Outworlds has always carefully balanced its relations with the Federated Suns and the Draconis Combine, but on the ground the Federated Suns long enjoyed a certain advantage over its more insular rival (being more willing to do business with a realm full of upstart *gaijin*). Not until Theodore Kurita became Coordinator in the mid-3050s did the Combine's business community show serious interest in the Alliance, and then they had to play catch-up to House Davion. Consequently, when Mitchell Avellar went looking for foreign investors to launch the Long Road, he went to the Federated Suns (then the FedCom) first. Several FedCom firms had facilities already in Alliance space, left to languish whenever the stresses of war at home prompted economic retrenchment across the border. Most FedCom companies approached by Outworlds negotiators were happy to give Alliance business groups responsibility for reopening and refurbishing FedCom-built installations, at no more cost than a little start-up capital. Profits earned by late 3061 were sufficiently impressive to prompt new waves of FedCom investment, as well as some nibbles from Lyran Alliance firms (Katrina Steiner-Davion not caring to be upstaged by her brother Victor in any arena).

Not to be outdone, the Draconis Combine made efforts to expand its economic ties with the Outworlds. Late in his reign, former President Neil Avellar had signed an agreement with the Combine to allow construction of aerospace production facilities on selected Alliance planets; when Mitchell Avellar proposed expanding this arrangement to other Alliance worlds, he found Kurita negotiators quite receptive. The Combine also began subsidizing Alliance-run aerospace factories, bringing both realms additional profits. All of these ventures continue to run smoothly, unaffected by the rumblings of political turmoil beneath the surface of the Combine since 3062. The Combine business community solidly backs Theodore Kurita, and appears to have no fear of him losing his hold on power anytime in the near future. Interestingly, the recent clash between DCMS forces and Clan Snow Raven over the Combine world of Kanzaka has intensified the Combine government's interest in fostering yet more business ties with the Outworlds—because of, rather than in spite of, the Ravens' presence there. The Combine may be seeking economic means of preventing any deeper link between the Ravens and the Alliance, as well as keeping its foothold in the Outworlds.

Lately, the Capellan Confederation has shown interest in creating its own economic foothold in Alliance space. Though House Liao currently has its hands full managing the Trinity Alliance, the presence of a Clan on some Outworlds planets suggests that it may finally have grown prosperous enough to be worth exploiting—and the extent of FedSuns investment here, despite the FedCom Civil War, offers House Liao the potential to upset Davion interests by becoming a local player. Confederation overtures remain tentative, but the Capellans are nothing if not persistent, and fallout from the war in the FedCom left an opening on some Alliance worlds. Mitchell Avellar and the Executive Parliament remain suspicious of Capellan motives, as does much of the Outworlds business community. Indeed, the President expanded trade deals with the FedSuns and the Combine in part to counter growing Capellan influence elsewhere in the Periphery. The need to keep the economy in high gear, however, overrides many other considerations, making the Outworlds' central and planetary governments reluctant to dismiss the Capellan Confederation outright.

HOME FRONT: TRADE WITH PERIPHERY STATES

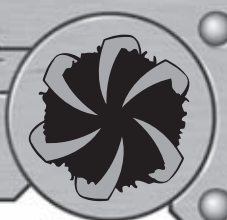
Mitchell Avellar has also sought investors from other Periphery states, principally the Magistracy of Canopus and the Taurian Concordat. Formal agreements with both nations have given the Outworlds much-needed medical technologies and wider markets for Alliance-built aerospace fighters, a solid foundation on which to build. Taurian manufacturers of all stripes have begun various joint ventures with Alliance companies to produce items previously almost unheard-of outside of a few major urban centers: high-end personal electronics, components for in-home environmental systems, personal vehicles and so on.

The Magistracy of Canopus has been similarly eager to forge greater trade links with Alliance worlds, beginning with the vaunted Canopian medical industry. Canopian entertainment conglomerates likewise jumped on the bandwagon, as soon as it became clear that the Outworlds' economic boom was more than a flash in the pan. Mindstar Enterprises recently launched a partnership with Alpheratz's major publishing house, creating a media production company to make and market holofilms and holovids for the emerging Outworlds leisure market. Other entertainment concerns are watching closely, and are expected to seek similar arrangements should the venture prove successful.

On the military front, Magestrinx Emma Centrella has quietly proposed expanding her realm's sales to and purchases from Alliance aerospace manufacturers—specifically, the *Corax* OmniFighter. Rumor has it that she wants a Periphery source for advanced military technology, to counterbalance the Magistracy's dependence on its Capellan ally. Thus far, the Alliance is keeping its *Coraxes* close to home, but mil-tech trade negotiations are ongoing.

CASH, CREDIT AND BARTER

Local currency is based on the escudo, though C-bills remain in wide use—a legacy of ComStar's arrival in the near-moribund Outworlds during the 3040s. The C-bill had already been the currency of choice



in urban and industrial centers, and ComStar's attempts to revitalize the economy and education in the Outworlds led to more widespread reliance on ComStar scrip. Prior to that, those Outworlds citizens fortunate enough to have cash on hand generally carried gold and silver escudo coins or bills of varying denominations. The past decade's economic boom has strengthened both currencies.

Because material prosperity is so new throughout so much of the Outworlds Alliance, it's unusual to see electronic credit systems typical of wealthier Periphery realms outside of major urban centers such as Alpheratz or industrial-powerhouse planets like Lushann and Ramora. Cash is somewhat less rare, though still not typical on many Alliance worlds; in the little towns and farming communities common to many planets, anyone regularly flashing C-bills or escudos around is either an off-worlder or one of the small but growing number of nouveau riche citizens looking to impress the neighbors. (The first types are routinely taken advantage of; any visitor possessing an ounce of common politeness would make an effort to fit in with local sensibilities. The second are ignored, the one response certain to eventually drive them away.)

Most people in the Outworlds accept cash payment for goods or services if offered, but large numbers of settled worlds still depend heavily on the barter system. This is changing as cash-paying jobs become the norm—but the realm's long-held bias toward a simple lifestyle has so far slowed the pace of cultural fallout from all this new wealth. True to its egalitarian origins, the Outworlds has spread its economic gains throughout its thirty-six planetary systems and at all levels of society. Though some citizens earn considerably more than others, there is no vast disparity between haves and have-nots, as in the Magistracy of Canopus or many Inner Sphere states. A few have more money than they know what to do with, mostly in the capital cities on Alpheratz or other major centers of profitable industry. Most other Alliance citizens are moderately well off or on the way to becoming so. There's even talk in the air of forming a central bank and stock exchange, to further spur economic development, but such institutions cannot be founded without the unanimous consent of the Executive Parliament—and its members are balking at the idea. Separatist Party activists have characterized such a move as "economic dictatorship," and though few in the Outworlds agree with the Separatists' overall agenda, such words resonate with many of the voters and the Planetary Parliaments from whose ranks come nominees for the Executive Parliament. In the meantime, local banks at the planetary level are adequately managing the money supply and serving the needs of the Alliance business community.

Despite resistance from three of the Executive Parliament's current four members, most economists believe it's only a matter of time before central-bank legislation passes. As one expert put it, "They dragged their feet about a standing military—but eventually, they faced reality and built one. They'll do it on this issue too, and then the Outworlds Alliance can finally finish joining the thirty-first century."

MAJOR INDUSTRIES

—Excerpted company listings from "Spotlight: Outworlds Alliance," *Investors' Weekly*, July 3067 issue

Military Industries

ALLIANCE DEFENDERS LIMITED

Main Headquarters: Alpheratz

CEO: Government-owned and controlled; day-to-day affairs are overseen by a three-member subcommittee appointed by the Executive Parliament

Main Products: *Locust*, *Stinger* and *Wasp* BattleMechs; Po and Rommel tanks; fusion engines; communications, targeting and tracking systems; BattleMech armor; lasers and machine guns

Profile:

The Outworlds' first and largest producer of ground-based military hardware, Alliance Defenders Limited has built 'Mechs since the early 2750s, near the end of the first Star League era. It still supplies a large number of 'Mechs for the Alliance Mechanized Corps. Though it is no longer the sole BattleMech manufacturer in Alliance space, it has held on to significant market share, and its governing subcommittee recently expanded ADL's production lines to include tanks.

ARENTHIR ELECTRONICS

Main Headquarters: Alpheratz

CEO: Erik Almadovar

Main Products: Communications, targeting and tracking systems for aerospace fighters, BattleMechs and tanks

Profile:

Founded in the mid-2800s to meet the needs of the newly established Alliance Military Corps, Arenthir Electronics has supplied communications, targeting and tracking systems to nearly every home-produced war machine in the Outworlds Alliance. The post-3056 military build-up has left the company awash in cash, and rising demand for small luxuries among some classes of Outworlds citizens has prompted CEO Erik Almadovar to consider starting production of consumer electronics.

LUSHANN INDUSTRIES, LTD.

Main Headquarters: Lushann

CEO: Grania Llewellyn

Main Products: Advanced laser weapons (regular, pulse and ER), flamers, munitions

Profile:

Formerly Lushann Industrials Limited, this company changed its name when it first accepted government subsidies under the Long Road program. CEO Grania Llewellyn regarded the name change as a symbol of hoped-for success, and the past several years have exceeded her wildest expectations. Technological exchanges with Taurian Concordat military manufacturers enabled Lushann Industries to upgrade its



OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE

lasers and produce them in all sizes, greatly expanding its share of the weapons market. So lucrative are these products that the company recently began trading a certain percentage of them for BattleMechs from factories on Robinson, a prominent planet in the Federated Suns.

MOUNTAIN WOLF BATTLEMECHS

Main Headquarters: Vendrell (Lyran Alliance), Alpheratz (Outworlds subsidiary)

CEO: Brandon O'Leary

Main Products (Alpheratz): *Night Hawk* and *Merlin* BattleMechs

Profile:

Mountain Wolf BattleMechs began in Lyran space, as a light 'Mech manufacturer for the Star League. Its *Night Hawk* BattleMech proved profitable enough for the company to open a subsidiary on Alpheratz, during the Outworlds' period as a Star League Territorial State. The Star League's fall and the relentless battering of the Succession Wars took a toll on both installations, culminating in the Vendrell factory's destruction by Marik forces in 2945. The plant on Alpheratz was abandoned.

The company's slow revival began in the Outworlds during the early 31st century, when Brandon O'Leary, great-grandson of Mountain Wolf's last President and CEO, spent considerable family monies to restore the Alpheratz facility. The Outworlds plant produced *Merlin* BattleMechs, but O'Leary always intended to revive Mountain Wolf's signature machine. In 3055, he finally got that chance. The Lyran plant reopened that year, geared up to produce the *Night Hawk*. Sales soon proved strong enough to pay for retooling the facility on Alpheratz, which likewise started producing the *Night Hawk* in 3063. Financial experts blame the company's still-shaky prospects on the sheer amount of funds expended to get both plants going again, in which even the recent brisk sales of *Night Hawk* and *Merlin* 'Mechs have yet to make much of a dent.

PRAXTON FUSION PRODUCTS

Main Headquarters: Praxton

CEO: Tori Wilbury

Main Products: Standard fusion and XL engines

Profile:

For decades, Praxton Fusion Products was the Outworlds' sole producer of power plants for 'Mechs and aerospace fighters manufactured by other Alliance companies. Though Alliance Defenders Limited has since entered the fusion-engine market, Praxton's facilities remain so vital to the Alliance military machine that almost no expense has been spared to arm and armor the complex, as well as the military and private security units guarding it. Throughout its existence, PFP has been a prime target for raiders, but none have inflicted more than minor, temporary damage. CEO Tori Wilbury has expressed interest in expanding her company's operations, provided a suitable site

can be had for the right price. With profits coming in from Mountain Wolf BattleMechs' *Night Hawk* and United Outworlders Corporation's *Seydlitz* and *Corax* fighters—both of which use Praxton Fusion's new extra-light engines—Ms. Wilbury may soon achieve her goal.

UNITED OUTWORLDERS CORPORATION

Main Headquarters: Ramora

CEO: Camden Avellar

Main Products (Ramora): *Lightning*, *Seydlitz*, *Shilone* and *Slayer* aerospace fighters, *Corax* OmniFighters, DropShip and JumpShip components, tank and BattleMech armaments

Main Products (Mitchella): Hunter and Vedette tanks, missile weapons

Profile:

The largest producer of aerospace fighters in the Outworlds Alliance, UOC has benefited from Draconis Combine aid in one form or another since the 3020s. The company was the beneficiary of two recent, major business coups: it won the Combine contract for increased production of its *Seydlitz*, and also received technological specs that enabled it to build the *Corax* OmniFighter. With these achievements under its belt, UOC looks set to dominate the aerospace industry for some time to come.

Non-Military Industries

ALLIANCE INDUSTRIES DIVERSIFIED

Main Headquarters: Sevon

CEO: Leon Pallas

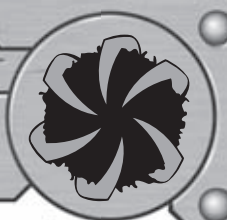
Main Products (Alliance Motors Ltd.): Farm implements, tractors, combines, tank engines

Main Products (Alliance Chemicals and Biofuels): Petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals

Main Products (Alliance Mining and Geology): Ore extraction and refining, tank and BattleMech armor

Profile:

The sole industrial concern to survive the scorched-earth battles of the Reunification War, AID began as a mining company, and expanded into new areas during the latter 2600s. The loss of Inner Sphere markets to the Star League's collapse and the Succession Wars, along with incessant pirate raids that severely damaged or destroyed many AID facilities, prompted a ComStar buyout of the ailing firm in 3043. Within three years, AID had gone from drowning in red ink to being solidly in the black. The company's several divisions have taken full advantage of the Long Road program, though Alliance Chemicals has struggled somewhat since Sevon hit peak oil. Recent expansion into biofuels shows promise, especially with growing support from Sevon's notoriously skeptical grain farmers.



NEW WORLDS MEDIA PRODUCTIONS

Main Headquarters: Alpheratz

CEO: John Hemmings Condell

Main Products: Holograms and holovids; print and e-book spin-offs and other merchandising based on film/vid projects

Profile:

This joint venture is a project of Mindstar Enterprises and Free Inquiry Publications Ltd., Alpheratz's oldest and largest publishing house. Increased profits earned over the past five years gave Free Inquiry's CEO, John H. Condell, the wherewithal to finally fulfill a long-held dream: branching out into holograms and holovids. A chance meeting with Mindstar executives aboard a Canopian pleasure circus near Luxen provided Condell with a source of expertise, as well as new investors, and within the year New Worlds was born. Its first hologram entry, a popular miniseries on the life of Outworlds founder Julius Santiago Avellar, was critically and commercially well received. Current projects include *Edge of Space*, a hologram series about an Explorer Corps vessel in the Deep Periphery; *Deep Green*, a horror film about the mysterious demise of unlucky lostech prospectors on an unexplored world; and *Genius*, a comedy about a teenaged girl with a knack for machines growing up in an Omniss commune.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

(1 September 3067)

Quantraine [ISAP] — By now, everyone outside the Outworlds Alliance thinks they know what life here is like. Unspoiled rural planets, their small settlements full of salt-of-the-earth folk who don't fear a hard day's work and who know the value of simple living. Or, for the more cynical, underdeveloped backwater worlds full of largely illiterate inhabitants, whose harsh lives admit no civilizing graces and who regard even the simplest advanced technology as tantamount to forbidden magic.

Vivid as these pictures may be, they are woefully out of date and hugely oversimplified. Yes, the Outworlds Alliance still boasts many planets with large swathes of unspoiled land; yes, for centuries its people struggled to provide a basic education for all; and yes, many of its inhabitants have valued a simple lifestyle, more dependent on the work they could do with their hands than on all the time-savers and luxuries that wealthier realms—especially in the Inner Sphere—can't do without. But the Outworlds has always had its urban and industrial centers, along with the less-developed worlds that are proving such a boon to scientific researchers and the nascent tourist industry. Alliance citizens have always valued education, and leaped at the chance to get it when ComStar made it more widespread during the 3040s. And the "simple lifestyle" has always had room for such sophisticated technological advances as up-to-date medical equipment, high-yield hybrid crops, non-polluting hovertrucks for transporting goods, solar panels and batteries for energy storage, and so on. An accurate picture of life in the Outworlds has always been complex, and the rapid pace of economic change since 3056 has only made it more so.

SIMPLE GIFTS: TECHNOLOGY AND ITS EFFECTS

Despite the Outworlds' reputation as "the anti-technology state," the only technologies persistently disavowed by large numbers of Alliance citizens were those used in war. This realm's founders fled the mighty BattleMech rather than worshipping it, and for roughly four hundred years the people of the Outworlds didn't even have a standing army or air force. Early on, of course, raids by pirates showed that even the most pacifist-minded couldn't afford to completely cast off "the technologies of death-dealing"; every settled planet whose denizens wished to survive had some sort of planetary militia for its own defense. Slender financial resources, combined with a perception of aerospace warfare as somehow "cleaner" and more precise in its death-dealing than the towering hulks of arms-bristling 'Mechs, led many Alliance planets to favor aerospace fighters over ground-based war machines—a bias that is only now starting to erode.

Within a generation of the Outworlds' founding, the "technologies of death" had come to mean not only military hardware, but many forms of technology that did violence to planetary environments. Citizens of the young realm made a point of exploring and settling fertile planets where they could farm, keeping such inherently polluting or outright destructive enterprises as mining, oil and gas extraction, and large-scale manufacturing to a minimum. Farming was likewise kept small-scale; factory farms remain almost unheard-of. Outworlds citizens developed an ethic of living lightly on the planets they inhabited, working with the environment to sustain themselves while doing as little damage as possible to the surrounding eco-system.

Emergence of the Omniss

A major force behind this ethic was the rise of the Omniss, a spiritual-cultural movement initially attracted to Alpheratz by Julius Avellar's eloquent screeds against war. Like the Amish and Mennonite sects of old Terra, the Omniss rejected nearly all forms of advanced technology as separating human beings from God's Creation, which in turn inevitably led to the kind of hubris that got the Archangel Lucifer booted out of Heaven. Humans, the Omniss believed, couldn't be trusted to remain aware of their connection to the worlds around them unless they spent their days in intimate contact with those worlds, making a living from the land through hands-on labor and sweat. Though Outworlders outside the sect were willing to use more technologies more often than sect members themselves did, the human-scale simple life that the Omniss practiced held enormous appeal for people scarred by war and the poverty that often goes hand-in-hand with massive industrialization. The Omniss-based prejudice against any destructive technology thus spread far beyond the sect's stronghold on Dante, reinforcing existing biases against heavily industrial societies. The widespread destruction of the Reunification War reconfirmed these attitudes, and successive Outworlds governments used their relative autonomy as a Territorial State to minimize Star League inroads on their way of life. The "resource grab" by Inner Sphere corporations during the late Star League era provided yet another lesson in the inherent evils of military-industrial empires, and made Outworlders determined to avoid such errors in the wake of the Star League's collapse.

Prosperity and Change

The Outworlds remained largely agrarian and technology-light all the way up through the mid-31st century, with the only major change being the establishment of a standing military. Life-saving technologies, like medical advances and judiciously applied bioengineering techniques, flourished on many planets—yet even these never made the leap to industrial-style mass use. Potential treasure troves of plant-based drugs on worlds like Ramora became staples of local folk medicine and were traded among neighbor planets—but the Outworlds was slow to develop biotech and pharmaceutical industries, largely because its citizens had ceased to think on that scale. If you lived in the Outworlds, you made do with what was at hand; what you couldn't obtain or accomplish by your own efforts or a little help from your neighbors, you did without. Material abundance itself became a sign that you'd forgotten what it meant to be truly human.

This cultural attitude served Outworlders well for some time, as national prosperity declined throughout the centuries of the Succession Wars. Eventually, however, the general stagnation took its toll. All the rhetoric in the known universe extolling "simple human values" couldn't stand up to settlements destroyed by pirate raids because the local militia couldn't afford enough equipment, a generation of children less educated than their parents, and widening inability for even the most hardworking souls to put food on the family table. Fragmentary economic deals worked out with the Draconis Combine and Federated Suns during the first few decades of the 31st century arrested the slide somewhat, and ComStar's arrival in the 3040s did much to revive the Outworlds' struggling educational system (which in turn aided the fledgling economic recovery). But the pace of change remained desperately slow until 3056, when Neil Avellar abdicated the Presidency of the Outworlds Alliance to his talented son Mitchell.

Mitchell Avellar's Long Road program of economic, military and social recovery—launched with unusually swift support from the Executive Parliament—began to show impressive results long before anyone had expected. By the end of 3062, the Outworlds' slow and fragile economic upturn had shifted to rocket speed. Jobs became more plentiful on many worlds, new businesses sprang up almost overnight, entire industries took off with the help of FedSuns and Combine venture capital. By the time the FedCom Civil War hit, Outworlders themselves often had the funds (or could raise them) to step into the gap. For the first time since the Star League era, citizens of the Outworlds Alliance could see their nation as something other than the "poor stepchild" of human-occupied space. It was a heady feeling, and many reveled in it.

New Money, Old Values

Many also reveled in their newfound prosperity, though not without qualms. The folk of the Outworlds are slowly adapting to their new reality—some gladly, some uneasily, most with a mixture of the two.

"Mirandy Amos put glass windows in that fine new house she built," says Old Joe Mayer, the oldest farmer still working his own land in the small settlement of Last Chance on Quiberas. The denizens of Last Chance aren't Omniss, but they made a conscious decision to mimic the tech levels and lifestyle of the 19th-century frontier—the few

exceptions being some hybrid crops and basic medical technologies. Frills like glass windows in a typical small-farmers' cabin didn't make that list—until now. "Real fine glass, machined in some factory god-knows-where. Hadta send for it special by DropShip." Old Joe spits, knocking a ladybug off a nearby leaf, and shakes his graying head. "Showing off, I call it. Shoulda put that money toward the new schoolhouse, or away for a rainy day. You never know what'll come from the skies. Weather, raiders." He refills my lemonade. "Window glass. She'll rue that choice when the next hailstorm comes. Folk're like that these days, though. Got more money than sense."

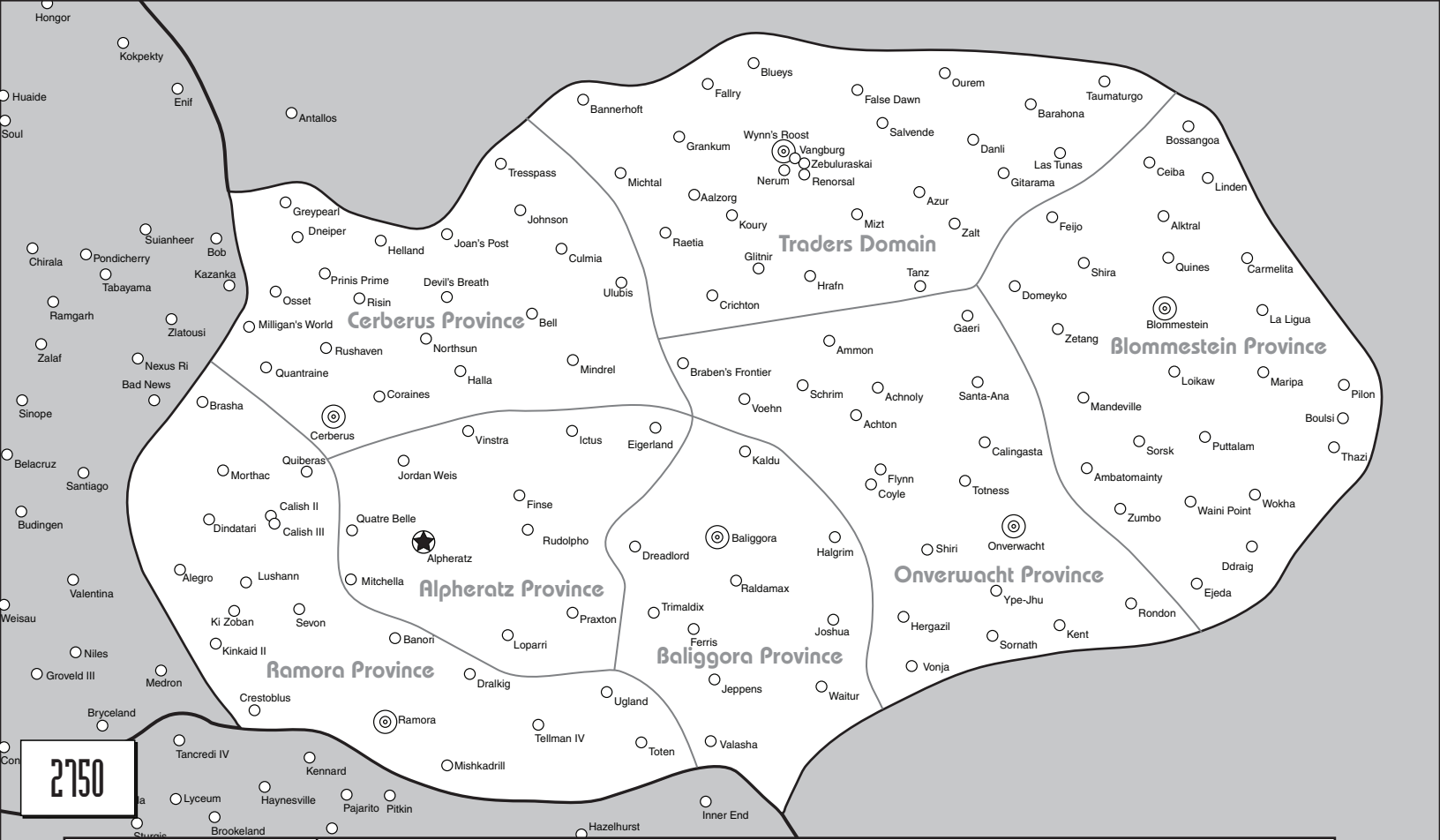
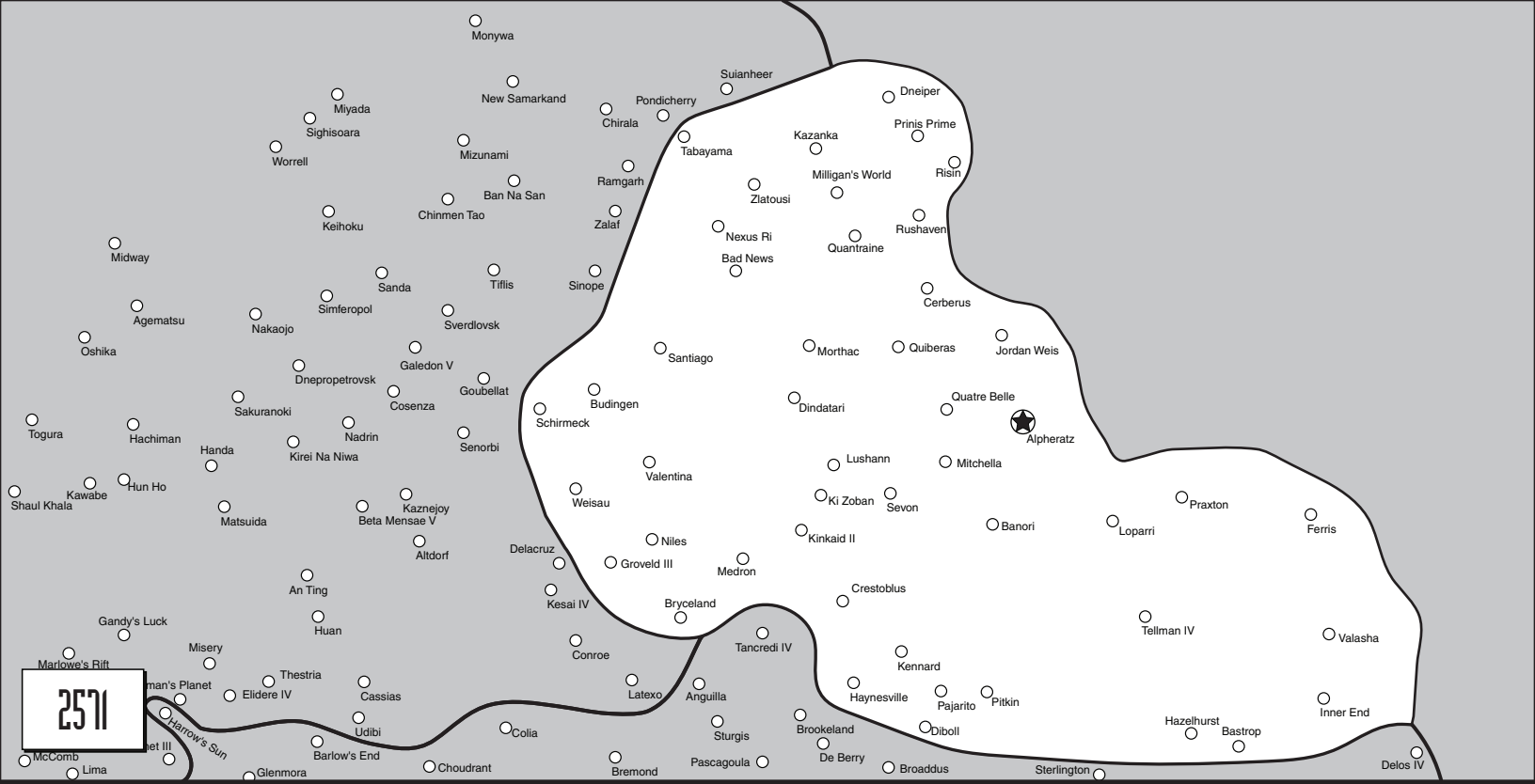
He goes on to speak of other small luxuries that "folk 'round here used to do without"—store-bought furniture from a new factory in the town of Norton a few miles downriver, a snazzy new hovercar purchased by the son of the local judge, a full-time restaurant that opened last month in the center of town. "Not just for travelers, mind. Locals go there all the time. Paying good money to eat out." He makes the last two words sound as if they're describing an impossibly alien ritual. "You want to tell me why I should pay good money so somebody else can cook me a chicken dinner—even if it does have some kinda fancy mushroom sauce all over it? You're from elsewhere...you prob'ly do that kinda thing all the time. What for?"

Old Joe isn't the only one to wonder what this brave new era of material comfort may bring to the people of the Outworlds. On more industrialized Lushann, parents in the cities shake their heads over their children's desires for personal music players and hand-held vidcoms, or the latest schoolyard status symbol of a mock MechWarrior cooling vest. That greater numbers of people can even consider such frills is both a promise and a threat—a promise that the coming generation will for once do better than its parents, and a threat that in doing so they may lose what it means to be an Outworlder.

Resistance: The Omniss Under Siege

"We will not go gently into history's night!" declares a pamphlet currently making the rounds on many of the Alliance's newly prosperous worlds. Available online and in print, this brief essay on the evils of swift wealth has turned up everywhere from Ramora to Dneiper. The Omniss author, Sister Mara Grafton, makes no secret of her identity—or her passion.

"We're losing our soul," she tells me, in a back corner of a coffee shop in Ramora's capital. Our meeting has been somewhat cloak-and-dagger; as a prominent voice for a newly militant segment of the Omniss, Sister Mara prefers to keep off the local authorities' radar. She has agreed to meet with me and permit publication of our interview only because she intends to move on soon, to preach her sermons somewhere else they're needed. "It's one thing to assure a roof over your head and enough for everyone to eat. No sane person could object to that. But the way the Alliance is going now...if it costs money, people buy it. And then the neighbors buy, so as not to be left out...and then everyone wants more money to buy more things they don't need, and they invite all sorts of industries to 'invest in the local economy,' without considering the good of their community or their planet. The farms and little towns give way to a copper mine, or a 'Mech factory, or something else that does violence to the land and separates the



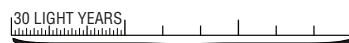
PLANET KEY

- NATIONAL CAPITAL
- DISTRICT CAPITAL
- PROVINCE CAPITAL

**Outworlds Alliance after
Age of War (2571) and
at the Fall of the Star League (2750)**

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LEGEND



90 LIGHT YEARS OR 20.1 PARSECS



people from it. And some earn enough money to build a fine big house, or send their sons and daughters to university on Alpheratz... while many others find their wages eroded by higher prices, poorer health, the need to buy food that they used to raise. We've seen this cycle throughout human history. We broke it here in the Outworlds. We Omniss pointed the way toward wealth of the spirit over wealth in the hand. We can't stand idly by and see that squandered."

Some of the Omniss who share such convictions have gone beyond words. Incidents of sabotage—largely focused on armaments factories, ore and petrochemical refineries, oil rigs, chemical plants and nuclear power facilities—have been on the rise since 3062, proudly claimed by the militant Omniss faction. Asked about these occurrences, Sister Mara turns coy. "I have no knowledge of such things. I know some of my brothers and sisters believe mere words are no longer enough—but those who take our protest to the next level don't tell the rest of us. As for those who condemn these actions, I'd remind them that only property has suffered. Their military machines have killed people; their plants and refineries are poisoning the soil and air. But no act of protest by any Omniss has taken a single life."

"Yet."

She holds my gaze, then drops her own briefly. "With luck, that should become unnecessary."

Sister Mara has not set foot on Dante since beginning her crusade in late 3062. She will not go home, she tells me, until she sees the Alliance's booming military industry slow down production and begin closing factories. "We're not insisting on a total shutdown. Obviously, we must defend ourselves against pirates, just as we always have. But the Outworlds can accomplish this with a tenth of the military production capacity we've developed since 3056. When we find our way back to sanity, then I can return."

Clearly, Sister Mara has no doubt that her homeworld will be the same. I find myself wondering how true that is. Though Dante has always kept itself somewhat aloof from the rest of the Outworlds—controlling the movements of offworld visitors and only permitting space traffic near the system once a month for trading—the degree of enforcement waxed and waned with whoever was in charge. In years past, any offworlder who satisfied local authorities that he or she carried no banned technology could move fairly freely on Dante. The locals themselves, though reserved, showed decent hospitality to all who appeared to respect their ways; wandering journalists looking for human-interest stories could always count on getting homemade pie and strong coffee somewhere. Since early 3063, however, Dante has effectively been a closed planet. Rumors of a large-scale pirate raid in late 3062, if true, may account for the unusually strict enforcement of regulations governing offworlders' movements since. Dante's authorities have remained close-mouthed about any such assault, but they did request a small amount of aid for rebuilding from the government on Alpheratz in early 3063. The world still permits trade ships to land, and the handmade goods for which Dante is famous are still selling briskly throughout the Periphery and Inner Sphere—but offworld visitors no longer make it past the "trade city" surrounding Dante's sole spaceport, and the lack of an HPG station sharply limits communications.

None of this troubles Sister Mara, and the government on Alpheratz likewise seems unconcerned. A long tradition of giving Alliance worlds plenty of leeway in running their affairs makes Dante a small problem—if, indeed, it's a problem at all. This deepened isolation may simply be the Omniss way of protesting the transformation of the Outworlds from sleepy backwater to potential power player. Sister Mara and those like her hope to reverse this change, in which they see little to rejoice and much to mourn.

Back to the Future?

Still, life hasn't changed much on many Alliance worlds. Urban centers like Alpheratz, Lushann and the larger cities on Ramora may more greatly resemble typical Inner Sphere metropolises these days, complete with a burgeoning class of "citified sophisticates," but they've been that way ever since the first few generations after the Alliance's founding. Many other Outworlds planets remain unspoiled and sparsely inhabited, blessed with clean air and water, dotted with small settlements amid stunning natural beauty. Some of the larger towns on rural planets can now afford to get fitted out for local computer nets, AgroMechs are making a comeback, and a lot more kids are heading off to college on Alpheratz or elsewhere in the Periphery—but wider prosperity has yet to fundamentally change the mindset of most Outworlders, Omniss fears to the contrary. What many citizens do have is a newfound confidence, an assumption of a brighter future rather than a bleaker one. For that change, the people of the Outworlds are profoundly grateful—and no matter what may be in the cards, it's a change they intend to keep.

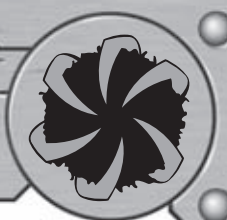
BRAVE NEW ERA: EVERYDAY LIFE IN 3067

The Outworlds Alliance of 3067 is redefining itself as it copes with unexpected good times after so many centuries of bad. Amid all the changes, some things remain the same—a blessing, a curse or just a fact of life depending on whom you ask.

Attitudes Toward Outsiders

One element of Outworlds culture that has only grown sharper with prosperity is the average Outworlder's nose for patronizing foreigners. Local citizens are quick to spot the inevitable bumptious outlanders—more and more of them drawn nowadays to the wonders of nature on many Alliance planets—who ooh and ahh over their "quaint" little towns full of "old-fashioned country folk." Many an Outworlds citizen has a grand time playing the bumpkin role to the hilt, just to put one over on thoughtless tourists. Among the tourists are often wealthy collectors of local handicrafts, which remain luxury items throughout the Inner Sphere. These "bottom-feeders," as they've been nicknamed, come to smaller villages and hamlets in search of hard-to-find artifacts at cheap prices. Many small towns on formerly isolated Alliance worlds have grown accustomed to such "city slickers" disturbing their peace, and quite a few normally honest citizens have few scruples about taking advantage of them.

On the other hand, those who show honest interest in (and respect for) the Outworlds way of doing things can count on generous



hospitality just about anywhere they go. In my own travels across the Alliance, I never stopped anywhere that I wasn't offered a meal; bar and tavern patrons generously bought me drinks and gave me their time; and once they knew I was a reporter, many people went out of their way to point me toward neighbors with the most colorful stories to tell. Local reserve can be a challenge to break through at times, but Outworlders are generally civil to visitors who take a little care for their feelings. Even here on Quantraine, a planet notorious for xenophobia since a terrible epidemic back in the 3020s, I found a welcome—generally over strong coffee, in the bazaars and tiny walled gardens that dot the irrigated settlements of this desert planet. All it took was a willingness to defer somewhat to local sensibilities. With that respect established, being an outlander was more of an asset than a hindrance. Any cultural errors I made could be put down to ignorance and were swiftly forgiven.

Education

The new national wealth has prompted enormous changes in the Outworlds' educational system, building on the foundation laid by ComStar less than two decades ago. The University of Alpheratz has more applicants than it knows what to do with, and the Executive Parliament is seriously discussing the establishment of a new university somewhere in the Alliance. Top contenders include Lushann, Risin and Baliggora; political scuttlebutt currently favors the latter as a sop to Barnabas Huard.

Elementary and secondary education have likewise received a major boost, especially on poorer planets. Larger and better-equipped school buildings are going up in towns on several worlds, and the demand for teachers has outstripped the available supply of candidates. Transplants from other nations are turning up to fill the gap—many of them émigrés from Federated Suns border worlds, exhausted by the FedCom Civil War and seeking a simpler life.

A typical Outworlds schoolchild begins formal education at age six; prior to that, young children learn letters, numbers and colors in "grandmother schools" run by a coterie of each town's older men and women. Public school runs from ages six to sixteen, at which point graduates leave to find work, go on to learn a trade, join the military or—for those who can afford it—attend the University of Alpheratz. Nowadays, greater numbers of Outworlds adolescents find themselves in the Alliance Military Corps or on the university campus, or learning one of a burgeoning number of skilled trades. Students who leave school to work the family farm, once the dominant pattern of life in the Outworlds, are increasingly becoming a minority.

Arts, Media and Recreation

Prior to ComStar's massive investment in HPGs throughout the Alliance in the 3040s, mass media in the Outworlds was a spotty phenomenon. Large numbers of worlds didn't even have HPG systems, and local broadcasting facilities were even more hit-or-miss. News and trends spread primarily through weekly or daily papers, or word of mouth. Giants of the news business established prior to the first Star League, like the *Alpheratz Examiner* and the Lushann-based *Alliance Voice*, survived every vicissitude Fate could throw at them down the

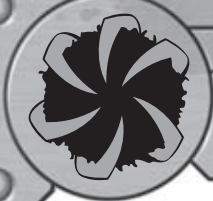
centuries, and remain leaders in Outworlds journalism. They have since been joined by broadcast media networks and online journals, many of which have branched out beyond their founding worlds in the past two decades. Since the late 3040s, public-access media channels, amateur webzines and such have become all the rage on more urbanized Alliance worlds, and have spread in fits and starts to less developed planets. It seems just about everyone in the Outworlds has a piece to speak, and the relative novelty of reaching an audience beyond immediate friends and neighbors has yet to wear off.

One of the most enjoyable local twists on these phenomena is the annual Jawbones Competition, a contest for yarn-spinners of every persuasion. The art of the tall tale remains alive and well in the Outworlds Alliance, a legacy from simpler days when people created most of their own entertainment. Storytellers are invited to submit holoivid entries of themselves spinning the yarn of their choice, and those deemed skilled enough by a panel of half a dozen prior winners are invited to the final round in the capital city on Risin—broadcast live across the Outworlds over three consecutive evenings. The winner and two runners-up are chosen by majority viewer vote, with a prize of ten thousand escudos.

The arts have likewise exploded across the Outworlds in recent years, especially since the Long Road program made greater funds available starting in the early 3060s. Local artistic standards have always been high in areas like music, with gifted amateur players and singers thick on the ground—but serious development of the visual, literary and theatre arts required more money than most communities had until recently. Now, for the first time since the Star League era, theatre companies, symphony orchestras, art museums and the like are moving beyond longstanding urban enclaves into smaller communities. Even a genuine small town on a backwater planet like Dormandaine has its own Drama Society, while local artisans are parlaying Outworlds handicrafts into a whole new genre of folk art. In the literary realm, the sudden influx of wealth has given a major boost to the publishing industry, as well as to a new breed of writer: the social critic, intent on picking apart the foibles of the "new rich" while examining the effects of prosperity on Outworlds society. The best of these resemble such greats of ancient Terran literature as Jane Austen, Sinclair Lewis and Upton Sinclair—all of whose works are enjoying a major revival among well-read Alliance citizens.

Religion

Given the Outworlds' founding as a haven for freethinkers and refugees, it's not surprising to find adherents here of just about every creed developed by human beings. The Ommiss brought their own variant of Christianity with them, and other branches of that faith are likewise healthy and strong. Judaism is also well represented, though many adherents of the Jewish faith are an exception to the general rule that different sects in the Outworlds Alliance tend to settle on separate worlds. A sizeable majority of Jews in the Outworlds live an itinerant life as peddlers, weavers, tinkers and the like, supplying vital services and word-of-mouth news to scattered small towns on various planets. Some prominent families, like the Kirschners of Rushaven and the Brukhartzes of Calish II, have parlayed this background into a planetary-scale version of the wandering-trader lifestyle, financing



OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE

their own small DropShip fleets and expanding their trade routes to small clusters of neighboring planets.

Islam is the predominant faith on the capital of Alpheratz, and different branches of it likewise thrive elsewhere in Alliance territory. The arid worlds of Quantraine and Brasha are strongholds of Sunni and Shia Islam, respectively, with large Sufi minorities on both planets. The Sunnis of Quantraine have undergone remarkable changes over the past twenty years or so, as the generation that survived the Great Blood Plague of 3020 gave way to its successors, who grew up under the resulting xenophobia and eventually rebelled against it. Though still wary of outsiders, Quantraine natives are simultaneously eager to engage them, and the planet has forged ties to its Shia neighbors on Brasha as a step in that direction.

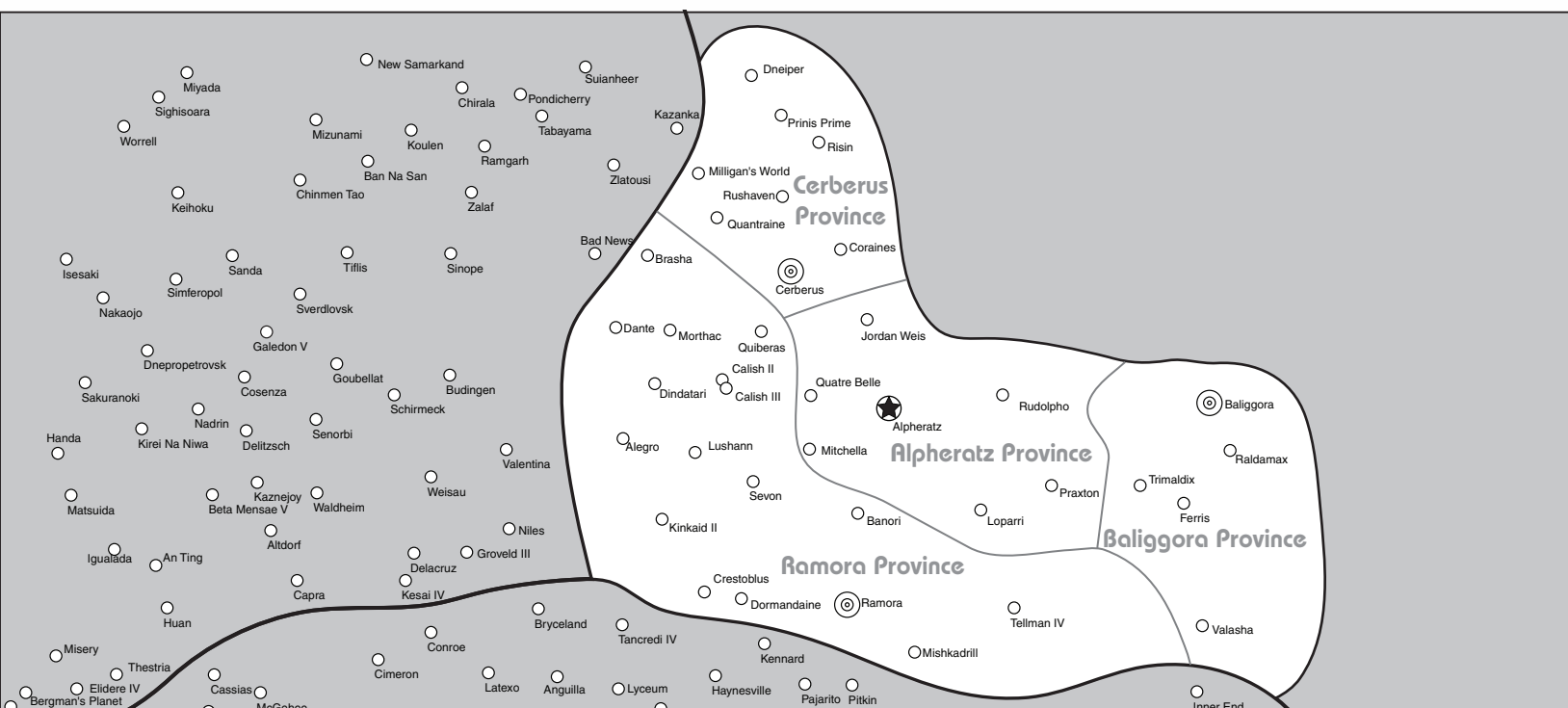
Of ancient Terra's Eastern religions, Taoism has particular vitality here; the philosophy of "the Way" meshes well with general Outworlds ethics about embracing life as you find it. Ramora remains the major stronghold of the Taoist creed; the tiny publishing house of Waley Press in Ramora's southern capital city makes a profit publishing nothing but differing translations of the *Tao te Ching*. Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians all turn up in the Alliance as well; there are even small Shinto enclaves on Brasha and Milligan's World, founded in the early 30th century by residents of Bad News fleeing vicious bandit raids that marred the final years of Coordinator Taragi Kurita's reign.

ALPHERATZ

- Political Ruler:** President Mitchell Avellar
- Star Type (Recharge Time):** K5V (196 hours)
- Position in System:** 4
- Time to Jump Point:** 4.12 days
- Number of Satellites:** 1 (Aisha)
- Surface Gravity:** 1.0
- Atmospheric Pressure:** Standard (Breathable)
- Equatorial Temperature:** 30° C (Temperate)
- Surface Water:** 70 percent
- Recharging Station:** Nadir
- HPG Class Type:** B
- Highest Native Life:** Mammal
- Population:** 3,200,000
- Socio-Industrial Levels:** B-A-B-A-C

Profile:

Capital of the Outworlds Alliance, Alpheratz is in many ways the opposite of what many might regard as a "typical" Alliance world. Heavily populated throughout



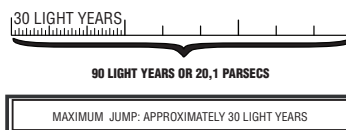
PLANET KEY

- NATIONAL CAPITAL
- DISTRICT CAPITAL
- PROVINCE CAPITAL

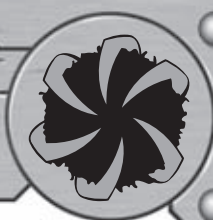
Outworlds Alliance (3067)

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LEGEND



Novo Franklin
Mica II
Mica V
Mica VII



its history (by comparison to other Alliance planets), it has always held the Outworlds' pre-eminent urban centers, as well as being the birthplace of the nation's heavy industry. A few farming communities are scattered across its northern continent, all within easy rail or waterborne transport range of Algolmarle and Famindas, the North Country's two major cities. Famindas, Alpheratz's capital, in particular has become known in the past twenty years as a center for artists and scholars, complete with thriving networks of Islamic madrassahs in the city's western sector. Algolmarle is the seat of national government, home to the Executive Parliament and the presidential residence.

Much of Alpheratz's southern landmass is given over to heavy industry; until recently, the capital was one of very few Alliance planets where such industry existed. Beginning in the mid-3040s, small numbers of investors in mining, manufacturing and high-tech operations took advantage of the Outworlds' unique circumstances: a decently educated population for the first time in centuries, coupled with general poverty and eagerness for development that kept costs and wages down. The Long Road program has since turned that trickle of investment into a flood, making Alpheratz a wealthy world for the first time in its settled existence. Much of that money is being invested right back into the planet, financing everything from construction of new housing, schools and needed infrastructure to the "cultural crown jewel" of Algolmarle's new Civic Opera House. The southern metropolis of Carolinas, itching to be known for some sophistication along with its industrial wealth, recently founded its own symphony orchestra and theatre complex; popular offerings this past season included Japanese kabuki plays and an exhibition of Javanese puppetry, as well as a revival of native composer Ali Ibn Masra's *Desert Symphony*.

BRASHA

Political Ruler: Caliph Ibn-Ali Jinnah

Star Type (Recharge Time): G4V (185 hours)

Position in System: 4

Time to Jump Point: 7.96 days

Number of Satellites: 2 (Iturea and Djerba)

Surface Gravity: 1.2

Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Equatorial Temperature: 55° C (Arid)

Surface Water: 20 percent

Recharging Station: Nadir

HPG Class Type: B

Highest Native Life: Reptile

Population: 548,000

Socio-Industrial Levels: D-D-C-C-D

Profile:

Scattered oases across the northern continent of this desert world are home to its roughly half-million inhabitants, most of them followers of Shia Islam. The first of these were ascetics who arrived on Brasha in the early 26th century. Their city, Alaikum, survived the Reunification War and the post-Star League centuries of decline; today it is a center of Shi'ite scholarship, and has doubled in size as its inhabitants gradually reclaimed a fringe of the desert surrounding the oasis on which it was first built.

Brasha's population and fortunes took a sharp upturn in the early 29th century, when the Outworlds Alliance first established a standing army. The needs of the new military—especially for fuel to keep the Alliance Air Force operating—made the petrochemicals and radioactives beneath Brasha's shifting sands a priceless commodity. Mining concerns and wildcatters flocked to Brasha between 2801 and 2832, building new towns wherever feasible and stringing pipelines across vast stretches of sand. Jury-rigged technology and difficulty getting spare parts kept operations well below peak efficiency for decades, but the planet produced enough to prosper (at least by Alliance standards at the time). The local culture kept its Islamic character, though refugees from the Draconis Combine founded a Shinto and a Buddhist community near the western edge of the Great Northern Expanse. These enclaves still thrive, producing remarkable artwork along with their quotas of radioactive ores.

The city of Qum'ran, at the eastern edge of the Expanse where the desert meets the mountains, is best known for its unique contribution to Brasha's planetary militia. The Qum'ran Guard are an elite infantry unit, mounted on tariqim—bipedal lizards native to the planet, that stand roughly six feet tall at the shoulder and whose ground-eating stride rivals the speed of some BattleMechs and hovertanks. Like the ostrich of old Terra, a tariq can run at truly amazing speed; fleshy deposits near the base of the tail serve them like a camel's hump, storing nutrients on which their bodies can function for several days in the absence of food and even water. Tariqim are predators, feeding on smaller lizards and the large waterfowl that frequent the oases. They are also highly intelligent and readily trainable if culled from their litters in the first three months after birth.





MARIAN HEGEMONY





(16 May 3067)

Alphard [ISAP] — My second day on the Marian Hegemony capital world, and already I feel like an extra in an old flat-vid Roman costume drama. Monumental architecture abounds; triangular-topped buildings festooned with columns loom over the streets of Nova Roma, their gold-tinged local sandstone and snowy marble facades glowing in the afternoon sun. The autumn sky is a pale rose, a lighter shade than the magenta glow of high summer. The line of pediments stands out against it in sharp relief. Later on, as the day moves toward evening, the Latin inscriptions in many of them will be rendered illegible by creeping dusk. Now, however, a mere hour past midday, many are clearly readable.

“IOHANNES CAESAR VICTORIOSUS,” reads one. “AVE IMPERATOR IOHANNES, QUI PRODUXIT HEGEMONIAE GLORIAM.” Johannes, of course, is Latin for Sean. Caesar Sean victorious; hail Emperor Sean, who brings glory to the Hegemony. Sentiments like these—in giant block lettering—once decorated buildings throughout the capital, as well as commemorative freestanding columns and gigantic arches on every Marian planet. The late Caesar Sean O’Reilly wanted every one of his subjects to know whom to thank for an era of unprecedented territorial expansion.

His son and successor, Julius O’Reilly, has little taste for immortalizing his ego in stone. Reportedly, he politely rejected the Alphard Patricians’ Council’s offer to commission a statue commemorating his ascension to the throne. He may have felt it inappropriate to honor an act of patricide, necessary or not. Whatever the case, Julius has lost no time curbing the worst of his father’s excesses—in politics, law and policy first, but before long in public architecture as well. The latter process has proceeded in fits and starts as the new Caesar found his energies pulled toward weightier matters, but has been ongoing since late 3063. Now, a bit less than four years later, it is finally nearing its end.

An incident I observed this morning provides a case in point. Walking down the tree-lined Via Appia, I noticed several workmen high up on a window-washer’s scaffold, apparently busy with a vast mosaic portrait of Caesar Sean O’Reilly. The former Caesar’s hawk-like profile, emblazoned on the side of the tallest structure on the street, dominates the intersection of the Via Appia and the Via Patria. At first, I thought the workmen were cleaning the portrait. As I moved closer, I saw that large chunks of the mosaic were missing. Are they restoring it, I wondered, and walked over to ask the remaining two workmen at street level.

“We’re takin’ it down,” says the first one, a stocky man with a wrestler’s build and skin burnished from several seasons’ exposure to Alphard’s sun. A thin film of stone dust coats his beard and clothes. “Caesar Julius figures we don’t need giant pictures reminding us who’s boss.”

His companion, slender-built and topping six feet, casts a glance upward. “Not much good anyway,” she says. “Those colors never did work right. Mornings he used to look seasick, afternoons like a vampire’d sucked him dry. Story was the artist left Alphard one jump ahead of an arrest squad.”

I ask what they’ll replace it with. Not a portrait of Julius, I’m guessing.

“Oh, it’s a beautiful thing,” the woman says. Her eyes light up in her weather-beaten face. “They held a competition for the best mosaic—‘All Who Serve the Nation,’ that was the theme. Larsen McDonough won. He’s getting a name for himself around Alphard these days. It’s a mural—one of the old privateers with its crew, a pleb farmer with slaves working the land, pleb workers going out from a ‘Mech factory, two Senators and a Tribune in front of the Forum... all surrounded by the constellations visible from Alphard. The colors...they’re exquisite.” She jerks her head toward the doomed portrait of Caesar Sean. “Loads better than that.”

“McDonough’s a pleb,” the other workman says, as he eyes their compatriots’ progress up above. “Got a lot of money, though. Everybody’s commissioning him. Next thing you know, he’ll buy himself into patrician-hood.” He grins, robbing the upcoming epithet of its sting. “Lucky bastard.”

This tidbit stuns me. Last I knew, buying your way into the patrician class was a relic of a long-bygone Marian era. “No, the Caesar revived it,” says my informant, after exchanging complicated hand signals with the workers overhead. He walks over to a truck parked on the Via Appia and roots through it for what looks like a giant chisel. “There’s land still available on some of the Lothian and Illyrian planets, and Caesar Julius wants more people to settle there. So if you earn enough to buy land in the provinces, you can become a patrician. Just like in the old days, before all this imperial nonsense.”

They’re clearly getting busy, so I move on. One thing’s for certain; times are changing in the Marian Hegemony. Again.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

—From *Citizens of the Hegemony*, a recently published multi-media online “textbook” for upper-grades civics classes, used for the first time in the 3067-68 school year

The Marian Hegemony has undergone many changes since its founding nearly 150 years ago, and its mode of government is no exception. Today’s Hegemony government both follows and improves on the pattern set down by founder Johann Sebastian O’Reilly, which our first Emperor in turn drew from the famed example of old republican Rome on Terra. From that wellspring of humanity’s ancient heritage, we continue to draw strength and inspiration as Marian Hegemony citizens.

HOW GOVERNMENT WORKS

Three different centers of power make up the Marian government: the Caesar, the Senate and the recently established Plebeian Tribune. The Senate is the Hegemony’s primary ruling body, though the Caesar also wields considerable personal power. The Tribune serves primarily as an advisory body to the Senate regarding plebeian concerns.

To access a one-on-one presentation on government and citizenship by Zephaniah Hagan, Senator Emeritus for Alphard, [\[click here\]](#).



MARIAN HEGEMONY

Spotlight: The Senate

[BEGIN PRESENTATION] “It has been my privilege to serve as Senator for Alphard, first as a junior and then as Senator Emeritus, for most of my forty years in public life. I first won election to the Marian Senate in 3027, at the ripe old age of twenty-nine. The patricians of Ostia, Alphard’s southernmost island continent where I hail from, did me the honor of choosing me to represent them, and have re-elected me virtually every year since. (One brief exception came in 3054, when public remarks about the ill-planned campaign against the Lothian League caused me to run afoul of then-Caesar Sean O’Reilly, rendering me temporarily ineffective as a voice for Ostia’s citizens.)

“Each Senator represents a district on his or her homeworld. Senatorial districts are geographical divisions roughly equivalent to a small continent or large island—like Ostia, for example. Each planet sends anywhere from ten to twenty Senators every year to Alphard, the exact number depending on land mass and local population. The rest of the Senate consists of our generals; one of the perks for leading a Marian Legion is senatorial rank, along with all the power and privilege that rank conveys. Not a bad year’s work, if you can get it—and those of us who do generally keep it. The patricians who elect us are a sharp bunch who want things to run smoothly, so incompetence tends not to survive the first re-election contest. Those who get re-elected once have generally proved themselves fit for the job of governing, so why not re-elect them over and over again? Or so the thinking goes. Certainly, the system has worked to my advantage, and I like to think I have worked to the Marian Hegemony’s advantage. Though I confess, sometimes it seems a drawback that we get fresh faces so seldom.

“The Senate meets in full twice a year, to discuss matters affecting the realm and cast official votes on proposed legislation and policy statements. We spend the rest of our time in office serving on various councils, each created to oversee specific functions of government—the Military Council, the Treasury Council, the Foreign Affairs Council, the Domestic Policy Council and its various subdivisions such as the Law Enforcement Council, and so on. The Emperor—sorry, the Caesar...I’m still not used to that title change, even after fifteen years of Caesar Sean—nominates the head of each council, who must then be ratified by the full Senate in order to assume the post. The council leader then chooses the other members from among his or her fellow Senators. The sole exception to this procedure is the Military Council, which has always been the Caesar’s personal bailiwick. No ratification needed there, of course.

“The various councils in turn may create and manage lesser government departments, on realm-wide and planetary levels. As an example, the Law Enforcement Council chooses magistrates and hires police officers, while military officers owe their posts to the Military Council. Officials who serve in these departments can be plebeian as well as patrician citizens—until recently, the sole form of public office open to any citizen below patrician rank. Since the accession of Caesar Julius O’Reilly four years ago, pleb citizens also have the Plebeian Tribune, to which they elect representatives from their own social class every four years. The first Tribune, whose members face re-election early next year, functions as an informal Council for Plebeian Affairs, playing an advisory role but without power to ratify legislation. It remains to be seen whether their role will change, and if so, how much.

“You will doubtless have heard rumors—in hushed voices over cups of wine at family dinner tables—that individual Senators are not above using judicious assignment of various government posts to shore up their personal power bases. You may also have heard that a hefty bribe rarely comes amiss. I wish I could say such stories are slander, but unfortunately they are not—yet. Under the late Caesar, the problem of corruption endemic to politics sank to embarrassing depths, and we have had less than half a decade to recover. Our own history is also somewhat to blame; when a large part of your prosperity for more than a century has come from privateering, moral niceties can seem like a luxury or an affectation. Still, the facts of where the Marian realm came from and where it is today prove beyond doubt that even a pirate nation can become a stable and prosperous state. Part of the price for that transformation is a willingness to play by the rules. Those among our citizens who understand this have a vital part to enact as our realm continues its transformation and grows in strength. You will keep us and your Caesar honest—a greater power than any I can ever claim or hope to wield.”

Spotlight: The Caesar

“Interestingly enough, our late Caesar Sean did little to change the powers of the Emperor when he changed the name of that office. Perhaps he did not feel it necessary. Whatever the title used, the overall ruler of the Marian Hegemony has always had considerable power to run things his way. So it was during Johann Sebastian O’Reilly’s time, so it was under succeeding Emperors Gaius and Marius O’Reilly, and so it remains. (Poor Gaius is primarily remembered for being Emperor Marius’ father, and for breaking his neck in 3009 when his horse stumbled into a chuckhole. So unspectacular was his reign that few people aside from scholars of local history even recall his name.)

“The Caesar commands the Hegemony military and presides over the Senate, where he may cast a tie-breaking vote or veto decisions he sees as incompatible with the best interests of the realm. He may also make declarations—a unique combination of legislative and executive authority that offers the Caesar his greatest political power. Through a declaration, the Caesar may propose a policy to the Senate, after which a mere one-third vote is needed to make it law. Needless to say, between ordinary persuasion, control of the military, the natural lure of power and a willingness to horse-trade, no Emperor or Caesar has found it difficult to obtain such a small ‘majority’. In effect, declarations give the Hegemony’s ruler an emperor’s power while retaining a semblance of republican government.

“It has been our good fortune that our supreme leaders have been men of vision and at least some character, who saw beyond their own present desires to build and sustain something greater. Even Caesar Sean O’Reilly had that vision and commitment, despite the personal flaws that ultimately proved his downfall. Though honorable men can and do quarrel with his methods, and some of us even with his imperial goals, there is no denying that he saw beyond his own fits of greed to a future for this realm. Our current Caesar sees a different future, and is willing to work with the Senate in order to achieve it. With his assurances in word and deed that the power of declarations will no longer be abused, the balance of power has been restored to the Hegemony government, and in time we may fairly call ourselves a republic once again.”

MARIAN HEGEMONY



Spotlight: Citizens and Slaves

"Inhabitants of the Marian Hegemony fall into three social classes: patricians, plebs and slaves. These classes generally pass from parent to child; the son or daughter of a slave, pleb or patrician is rightfully a member of that same class, unless he or she takes steps to change it. (I shall discuss that issue momentarily.) The first two classes possess the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, while slaves have more restricted rights and obligations. For example, a male citizen—whether pleb or patrician—must serve at least six years in the armed forces, or some related national service, upon reaching age seventeen or completing any higher education. (Women citizens may join the army if they wish, but are not obligated to do so.) Slaves, by contrast, do not serve in the Marian Legions. All Marian citizens are likewise entitled to a free public education from age five to seventeen; slaves may or may not be educated, depending on the desires of their owners and the needs of the job they fill.

"In the first decades of the Hegemony's existence, the patricians were those who owned land. Wealthy plebs in those days could become patricians by buying land, sometimes with a patrician title attached. By the early years of the 31st century, however, membership in the patrician class had become hereditary. All the viable real estate had been bought and built on, and the central government lacked the resources to launch a sustainable colonization program. Legal fictions that granted patrician status through purchase of unusable land—such as the case of Vanora Lindell, a celebrated privateer who "bought" two square meters of the Wastelands on Addhara in order to rise from the pleb class—were not open to most plebs, for the simple reason that such land buys offered no income on which to sustain a patrician lifestyle. (Lindell was an exception, having earned considerable spoils during her spacefaring career; income from her patch of desert was the last thing she needed.) Emperor Marius O'Reilly officially recognized this reality with his Declaration Concerning Patricianship, passed by a fifty-percent vote of the Senate in 3013. Membership in the patrician class remained hereditary for the next half-century, until our present Caesar nullified that declaration in 3064. Pleb citizens may now buy land in the Hegemony's recently acquired Lothian and Illyrian provinces, and thereby join the patrician class.

"Only patricians may vote in senatorial elections, hold elective political office (aside from the Tribunate) or attain the highest military ranks. Plebs may vote for their representatives in the new Tribunate, and may be appointed to lower-level public positions should a senator so honor them. They can also attain the lowest military officer ranks, but are barred from moving any higher. No citizen of either class may be bought or sold as a slave; inhabitants of the Marian Hegemony may occasionally move up in social rank, but never move down.

"Slaves are either the offspring of slave parents or prisoners of war. They fill many roles in the Hegemony, performing labor of various kinds for their owners. In return, owners are expected to treat them with decency: feed, clothe and house them adequately, see to their good health, permit them a certain number of rest days, honor whatever religion they may practice, and so on. Anyone who misuses another's slave pays a fine commensurate with the mistreatment and the slave's value; part of that money goes to the owner to compensate for any



labor loss, and part to the slave in recompense for the violation of his legal rights. (Those who mistreat their own slaves pay the full fine to the slave in question.) Offering physical harm to slaves is a grave social misstep as well as a legal one; those few patricians who earn reputations for such acts swiftly find themselves frozen out of business deals and important social partnerships.

"A slave manumitted by his or her owner automatically becomes a pleb citizen. A slave also may petition the Senate for citizenship, provided he can prove his worth to the Hegemony and his ability to sustain himself (and any family he may have). Successful petitioners become plebs, though it must be said that these represent a lucky few. Political corruption over the years has surely contributed to the low number of slave petitions—indeed, throughout much of Marius O'Reilly's later reign and that of Caesar Sean, the most important requirement for a slave to change his status was a hefty bribe to the right senatorial council. Given that slaves have few chances to earn money—mainly by hiring themselves out to interested employers after their unpaid labors are finished—amassing the funds for the petition fee, let alone the bribe, proved almost impossible. Our present Caesar has taken some steps to remedy this situation, creating a process for slaves to report the most blatant acts of corruption. As with every other reform since Caesar Julius assumed office, it will take time to judge the success of this effort.

"This concludes your introduction to Hegemony government and citizenship. Students interested in learning more are directed to the History and Civics, Level II sections of this module, with instructor approval." [END PRESENTATION]



MARIAN HEGEMONY

HEGEMONY POLITICS IN 3067

(18 May 3067)

Alphard [ISAP] — Politics in the Marian state have undergone a revolution of sorts since Caesar Sean O'Reilly's abrupt removal from power. From changes in government structure to restoration of the Senate's role to serious attempts to root out corruption in the civil service and the army, the new Caesar has lost no time putting his stamp on the realm he leads. Like his grandfather Marius before him, Julius O'Reilly is determined to preside over the transformation of the Marian Hegemony—not from bandit kingdom to nation this time, but from minor power to major player.

Julius the Reformer

According to a popular story among the soldiers of the Second Legion—which Julius O'Reilly commanded during the final pacification of the Lothian League—the current Caesar showed signs of his reformist temperament while still a student at the Collegium Bellorum Imperium. General Ambrose Kelly, a privateer-turned-MechWarrior who had masterminded several audacious Marian raids during the 3030s, was unwise enough during a Collegium lecture to comment on the dangers of military power overshadowing civilian authority. Kelly had for some time considered Julius his protégé, and the two had developed a close friendship. When reports of Kelly's statements reached Caesar Sean, he took them as a veiled critique of his leadership and ordered Kelly imprisoned pending execution for treason. Through eloquent and forceful argument, Julius convinced Sean to restore the general's freedom—though he wasn't persuasive enough to save Kelly's rank or his lecturer's post.

From that point onward, Julius O'Reilly quietly distanced himself from Caesar Sean's excesses—draconian reprisals against the Lothian resistance, the 3057 assault on the independent world of Astrokaszy, and regressive new taxes that fell most heavily on pleb citizens. Increasing restiveness among the plebs and slaves had begun to worry the more perceptive Senate members by 3059, and a few looked to Julius as the man who could save the Hegemony from Caesar Sean's harsh misgovernment. Julius himself gave little indication of how far he was prepared to go to oppose his father, but he quickly forged useful friendships in the First Marian Legion as well as among the Senate and the government bureaucracy on Alphard. Having gained his own position through patricide, Sean O'Reilly scented a potential power grab. He chose to scotch it by transferring Julius from the First to the Second Marian Legion, which was then bogged down in an ugly guerrilla war on the former Lothian world of Lordinax. Independent Periphery historians have little doubt about Sean's motives; he hoped to paint his son as an incompetent military leader or—even better—get him killed. The move backfired badly when Julius captured and then made a deal with resistance leader Elena Logan that resulted in the total pacification of the Lothian League by mid-3061. This development left Julius free to make the final move in the complex chess game that would end with one Caesar violently deposed and a new one on the throne: the lightning conquest of the neighboring Illyrian Palatinate. By early 3063, the Illyrian worlds belonged to Julius's troops—and Julius could return to Alphard as a conquering hero.

Cheering citizens greeted his arrival in July of that year, thronging the streets of Nova Roma. The Senate formally presented Julius with the Corona Graminea in recognition of his successful Palatinate campaign. An incensed Caesar Sean ordered his own First Legion to put down his son's "rebellion," only to find less than half of the First Legionnaires willing to obey. The final confrontation between father and son ended with the maddened Sean impaling himself on Julius's sword.

In the four years since those dramatic events, Caesar Julius O'Reilly has met every expectation of the Hegemony's reform-minded leading citizens. Among his first acts was to formally declare the Lothian and Illyrian worlds united territories within the Hegemony, permitting them cultural autonomy and giving them a voice in the Senate. This cagey move short-circuited potential rebellion in both regions far more effectively than the brutal repressions of Caesar Sean's reign. He also began working to shore up morale in the Marian Legions, and tackled pervasive corruption in the army and the civil service. The most significant domestic reforms were the establishment of the Plebeian Tribune and the Office of Citizenship Appeals—the latter responsible to the Senate Council on Citizenship Status. The OCA investigates claims by slaves of attempts to extort bribes in exchange for grants of citizenship, and also handles necessary legal work for appeals free of charge. With these venues for reporting corruption up and running, the numbers of citizenship petitions have begun to grow for the first time in Marian history. Though the increase remains a trickle, a successful outcome for several pending cases could change it to a flood within the next several years.

Bad Break: The Caesar and the Word of Blake

Another major shift from the prior regime lies in Julius O'Reilly's treatment of the Word of Blake. The Blakists set their hooks in the Marian realm in the late 3050s, with a reported offer that Caesar Sean couldn't refuse: 'Mechs and high-tech weapons to further his visions of conquest, in exchange for exclusive control over the Hegemony's communications systems (then administered by ComStar). Sean took the offer, expanded his military to five legions, and kicked ComStar out by 3061. Less than four years later, with the new Caesar firmly on his throne, the Word of Blake found itself on the other end of the PPC. ComStar was awarded HPG contracts on the former Lothian and Illyrian planets, while Word of Blake administrators on several Hegemony worlds got hauled into civil court on charges of "defrauding the Marian Treasury through no-bid contracts and bribes of a military nature." Pending the outcome of those cases, of course, Blakist personnel could not simply be allowed to go about their business. Instead, ComStar was invited to supply replacements on a "temporary, open-ended basis," while the Blakists were ordered to leave Hegemony space. As of this writing, the Word of Blake remains in control of HPG systems on Pompey, Marius' Tears and Algenib—and rumor has it that the stations are closely watched by "minders," either from ComStar or from the Ordo Vigilis (the Marian intelligence agency).

Privately, many Hegemony citizens blame the Word of Blake for the failure of the 3066 campaign to conquer the Circinus Federation. Though no hard evidence has yet appeared, popular rumor claims that the unexpectedly fierce defense of Circinus included high-tech 'Mechs



supplied by the Blakists, as well as Blakist-trained troops—possibly even elements from the Word of Blake Militia, masquerading as native Circinians and little-known merc units. The available record offers some intriguing hints. Hiring records from the Mercenary Review and Bonding Commission on Outreach, as well as from other legitimate hiring venues, show that Circinian President McIntyre tried and failed to hire several notable merc commands. Records of successful hires are non-existent, though doubters of the conspiracy theory point out that not every company-sized or smaller command is necessarily known to the MRBC. Further, many of the BattleMechs fielded by the Circinus Federation mounted upgraded equipment usually beyond the means of small Periphery states. These designs have since appeared in various Inner Sphere militaries, all traced back to a single corporation reputed (though not proved) to deal with the Word of Blake.

Whatever the case, the Circinus campaign netted the Hegemony control over two Circinian worlds after the signing of a formal cease-fire late last year. This minor victory has kept the grumbling within bounds, though some patricians with ties to III Legio (which fought in the campaign) are beginning to have second thoughts about their Caesar. Some prominent families on Alphard, who lost valuable real estate to the Circinians' surprise rearward assault on the Hegemony capital, are likewise less than enamored of the man they so recently hailed as a hero. The Caesar, however, has more than enough political talent—and support in other quarters—to weather whatever storms may arise from this source.

MARIAN LEGIONS

—From a printed transcript of an introductory officers' training lecture, given by guest instructor Legatus Robert Kron at the Collegium Bellorum Imperium, 20 January 3067 [Ed. Note: Headers were added to make the transcript usable as a classroom handout. Legatus Kron did not use them in his original text.]

"The Legiones Marianes, of which you are now members, have the honor of defending the Marian Hegemony against all enemies and of expanding Hegemony territory as our Caesar sees fit. We serve the Marian Hegemony: the Caesar, the Senate and the people. Patrician, pleb or slave, all are in our charge.

"Over the past hundred and forty-seven years, the Hegemony has grown from one man's dream to a true interstellar power. Colonization and conquest have expanded our holdings from one planet, to nine, to twenty-five. A realm once derided as a 'bandit kingdom' has joined its brother nations on the galactic stage—and the soldiers of the Legiones stand ready to do whatever is needed to sustain and succor it. As candidates for the officer corps, you will assume the lion's share of this responsibility. This training course is designed to make you fit for that job.

COLLEGIUM BELLORUM IMPERIUM

"First, let's talk about where you're sitting right now. The Collegium Bellorum Imperium is the only military academy in the Marian Hegemony that operates on a national scale, drawing its student body from across the Marian worlds. Most of you in this lecture hall are patricians, granted the privilege of automatic admission here. I urge

you not to waste this gift of your rank, but to make the most of it. To the plebeians among you, congratulations on passing the rigorous entrance exam. To have attained admission here from your local planetary academy or training program is a mark of distinction. You've done your patrician sponsors proud. Whichever service branch any of you end up in, remember that class distinctions play little role in your conduct as soldiers. What matters is the mettle of those who serve, not the social rank from which they came.

"The Collegium Bellorum offers specialized training in all types of ground combat. MechWarrior, tank commander or ground-pounder, you'll get the best training here that the Hegemony can give you. No matter what your eventual service, you'll also benefit greatly from mandatory classes in the history of warfare, which emphasize the campaigns of Ancient Rome. Those old guys may have lived untold centuries before the advent of the BattleMech or even the tank, but they knew how to fight, and they still have plenty to teach us.

FORCE STRENGTH AND ORGANIZATION

"Now let's cover some basics. The numbers you're about to hear follow our current Caesar's military reorganization, which began in the latter months of 3063. The smallest building block in the Legiones Marianes is the century, comprised of five 'Mechs or tanks, or one hundred infantry troopers divided into ten-man squads known as *contubernia*. Two centuries form a maniple, three maniples a cohort and three cohorts plus attached combat and support units form a legion. The Hegemony's military might currently consists of seven BattleMech-equipped legions, as well as more than three times that number of line auxiliary units. Other recent reforms instituted by Caesar Julius O'Reilly demonstrate the Caesar's trust in his field officers, investing them with greater decision-making power.

"Following the end of the Lothian rebellion, Caesar Julius gave each legion and cohort a Latin name and designation, reflecting their primary functions and raw strength (with the exception of the Praetorian Guard; I'll return to that subject later). *Cataphractii* are made up almost entirely of heavy and assault units and are used for planetary assaults. *Comitati* are fast, largely composed of medium and light units; they serve as rapid-response forces to quickly reinforce other formations or to quell large-scale disturbances. *Riparii*, generally composed of mediums and heavies, are drawn from the Hegemony's core systems to garrison the frontiers far from home. *Limitanei* are similar garrison troops, though their members hail from the frontier systems. *Auxilia* are the conventional forces attached to each legion, and finally the *Alae* are the Hegemony's aerospace forces.

"We'll move on now to our next subject, an overview of the various service branches.

BattleMech Forces

"Over the years, the Marian Legions have built up a respectable BattleMech corps, which together with conventional forces forms the backbone of our military strength. In our earliest years, we purchased what we needed—which was little enough, with only Alphard and then seven other planets to defend. A necessary turn to privateering for



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economic survival enabled us to capture 'Mechs, until the absorption of more territory through colonization and various campaigns gave us the resources to pay for our increasing military needs. Since 3058, we have incorporated highly advanced 'Mech designs into the legions, though at a price too steep to equip more than a fraction of our cohorts with such machines. Older but still serviceable designs therefore are the mainstay of the Legiones Marianes. Upgrades are planned for the majority of these 'Mechs, and several units have already received upgrade packages.

Aerospace and Conventional Forces

"Aerospace remains the one weak point in our armed forces, though Caesar Julius is taking steps to remedy this lack. Over-emphasis by prior leaders on expanding our BattleMech forces at the expense of aerospace strength unfortunately cannot be remedied overnight. Two classes of cadets have now graduated from the Alphard Air Academy, established by Caesar Sean O'Reilly in 3059; the Legiones are currently building them into Ala Aurea and Ala Argenta though a steady supply of aerospace fighter craft remains an elusive goal. When battle-ready, the new Alae are slated for attachment to II Legio and IV Legio, respectively, just as Ala Alba is attached to I Legio. Some of you may have the good fortune to include these forces in your commands; it would behoove you, therefore, to pay attention when we get to integrating aerospace into combined-arms campaigning.

"Speaking of combined-arms campaigning...though 'Mechs may carry pride of place, no good officer should ever forget the vital contribution of armor and infantry support to every BattleMech force. At least one auxiliary legion is assigned to support each 'Mech legion, while additional auxiliaries are raised as needed to defend Marian worlds against pirates and raiders. Current efforts to equip all the auxiliaries with new weapons and armored vehicles are ongoing, though completing the project will take time. Several auxiliaries are currently serving in the Lothian and Illyrian provinces, and the first all-Lothian auxiliary unit was formally established in 3064. Thus far, its service record has been exemplary.

RANK

"Prior to our current Caesar's reign, the Legiones Marianes used a rank system similar to that of ancient Terra's Roman Legions, though with a few significant differences. Soon after he assumed power, Caesar Julius adjusted this existing rank structure, in part to better recognize the contribution of enlisted ranks. Enlisted personnel are all members of the plebeian social class, and the new ranking system gives long-overdue recognition to the Hegemony's plebeian citizens. Patrician enlistees begin their military service as officers.

"New plebeian recruits receive the rank of *miles* upon enlistment. All pleb enlistees are routed to one of a dozen training camps throughout the Hegemony, where they receive basic training and limited opportunity to specialize. After completion of this initial training, new *miles* are assigned to an auxiliary legion for a two-year tour. They then may spend another four years in the regulars or eight to twelve years in a home-guard reserve auxiliary. Either choice fulfills the citizen's military obligations.

"Those who serve at least a year and who show leadership qualities are promoted to *miles probatus* and are often given charge of a contubernium or a work crew. The next rank up, *miles gregarius*, goes only to those soldiers who demonstrate outstanding leadership ability and complete loyalty to the Hegemony. Plebeians who distinguish themselves enough to earn a battlefield promotion or the attention of a prominent senior officer can be elevated to the lowest officer rank of *legionnaire*.

"All of you in this room who are patricians entering the Legiones Marianes have received *legionnaire* rank—as do all graduates of the Collegium Bellorum Imperium, regardless of social position. *Centurions* are the next officer rank and command battlefield centuries. A *principes* commands a maniple, while a *legatus* leads a cohort and a *prefect* commands a full legion. Many of you may aspire to these ranks; see that you do your best to achieve them.

"Six *generals* currently serve in the legions—four of whom spend the bulk of their time on Alphard, keeping the military running and directing major campaigns. The other two presently serve as military governors of the Lothian and Illyrian districts, commanding Hegemony forces and ensuring stability in those regions.

"The highest-ranking officer in the Hegemony military is the *Imperator*, a title revived by Caesar Julius and applied to the Caesar's chief military aide. The *Imperator* is the Caesar's right-hand man, given overall command of the Legiones Marianes. He also has nominal command of the First Legion, though that legion's senior *prefect* bears day-to-day responsibility for the unit.

UNIFORMS AND INSIGNIA

"The field uniform of the Marian Legions is a gray knee-length tunic cinched by a belt, worn over a collared shirt, and black trousers with flexible greaves of ballistic plate sewn into the shins. Black boots and protective or load-bearing gear, plus a standard-issue cassis helmet like those worn by ancient Roman legionnaires, complete the ensemble. Most combat troops, naturally, prefer a more modern helmet design that incorporates vision and hearing enhancements. The uniform is designed to reinforce Roman elements in Marian culture, thereby reminding individual troopers of their collective identity and responsibilities.

"Dress uniform keeps the gray tunic, woven of ballistic fiber and reinforced with subtle protective plating, and the white collared shirt. Trousers are gray. The tunic's left shoulder bears a large epaulet where rank insignia is worn, outlined in piping that denotes the trooper's service branch. Enlisted members wear darker piping over the right shoulder, while officers wear elbow-length gauntlets. All ranks wear a leather belt as well as a baldric draped from left shoulder to right hip, to which a gladius is commonly attached. The color of the shoulder piping and the baldric denote the wearer's service branch: silver for MechWarriors, light blue for aerospace forces, white for armor and red for infantry. Generals wear a bronzed ballistic breastplate over the dress tunic and spiked shoulder pads in place of epaulets.

"The uniform of a *miles* bears no insignia; simply wearing the uniform shows that they've passed basic training and are permitted to serve as soldiers in the Hegemony military. *Miles probati* and *miles gregarii* wear



chevrons on the sleeves of their field uniforms and on the epaulet of the dress uniform—one chevron for *probati*, two for *gregarii*.

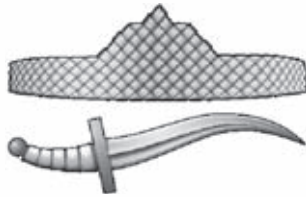
“Officers wear various insignia denoting their rank and station. *Legionnaires* sport a silver triangle with a black center. *Centurions* wear the same triangle, with a smaller silver triangle set within the black center. *Principes* wear a gold triangle with a black center, while *legati* add a smaller gold triangle. *Prefects* wear the gold triangle emblazoned with a gold eagle, while *generals* replace the eagle with a gold star. The *Imperator’s* triangle bears two gold stars inside its black center, the Caesar’s three.

DECORATIONS AND MEDALS

“The *Legiones Marianes* awards five decorations for sterling service to the realm. Some of these also bring financial rewards or social advancement, and all carry immense prestige. These awards represent the highest honors any Hegemony citizen can receive.

Corona Graminea

“The most prestigious award in the Marian Legions, the *Corona Graminea*—Crown of Grass—is bestowed in recognition of valor far beyond the call of duty; single-handedly saving an entire *Legio* or cohort in battle, for example, as in actions by *Secunda Cohors* of *IV Legio* that kept the Fourth’s *Prima Cohors* intact long enough to win out over stiff resistance on *Trondheimal* in the *Illyrian Palatinate* campaign. The award brings with it a land grant and a position in the Senate. It has been presented a mere five times in our history, and has yet to be won by a plebeian. The *Corona Graminea* consists of two pieces: a literal crown of woven grasses and a jade medallion carved to resemble a grass blade. When possible, the grass for the crown is native to the world or battlefield where it was earned. The crown is worn only at the ceremony in which it is given, and is afterward preserved in a place of honor in the recipient’s home.



Corona Aurea

“The *Corona Aurea*, or *Crown of Gold*, commemorates a single-handed victory over a superior enemy, or some other act that achieves a spectacular triumph for the Hegemony. This award is a gold medallion in the shape of a laurel wreath.



Corona Civica

“The *Corona Civica*—*Oak-Leaf Crown*—is awarded for acts of selflessness in service to others, whether fellow soldiers or civilians. The decoration is a silver oak-leaf cluster.



Aquilifer

“A position of honor within a military unit, rather than a medal, the *Aquilifer* carries a unit’s *aquila*—its standard—into battle. Fellow soldiers will rally to the *Aquilifer*, and the flag he carries from his ‘*Mech* or vehicle, in times of trouble. The soldier so honored wears a uniform patch depicting an eagle perched atop the unit’s colors. Troopers chosen for this post must exemplify the morals and standards of the professional soldier, exhibiting steadfast courage on the battlefield and pushing themselves beyond their limits when necessary.

Order of Scipio

“This award, named for the ancient Roman general *Scipio Africanus*, is given to an entire unit in recognition of an overwhelming victory in the battlefield—for example, taking an enemy capital. All members of the unit so honored are inducted into the *Order* and wear a pin depicting an eagle perched atop a Roman *gladius*. This award carries with it a small land grant and a pension for each recipient.

THE CIRCINUS CAMPAIGN: AFTERMATH

“Now that we’ve gotten the nuts and bolts out of the way, let me speak briefly on a subject I know is on many of your minds: our recent operations against the *Circinus Federation*. We *Marians* have grown used to conquest; many of you, in fact, are young enough to have known nothing but battlefield success. Wherever our legions have gone in your lifetimes, they have conquered. Why did this not continue? How could the tiny *Circinus Federation* have stood up to the mighty *Legiones Marianes*—and ultimately sent us packing, with a mere two planets taken?

“You’ve all heard the stories, of course. The *Circinians* had help, our intelligence was faulty, *President McIntyre* somehow kept secret his hiring of crack mercenary troops specifically to fool the *Marian intelligence community*. Some of those stories are even true, as far as they go. The *Circinians* had twice as many forces on the ground as we had been led to believe, many of them sporting highly advanced *BattleMechs* and equipment that the *Federation* should not have been able to afford. Rumors as to who these additional forces were are varied: extra companies of the *Black Warriors*, for centuries the *Federation’s* primary defenders; elements of the *Blakist militia*; *Canopian troops* wishing to check the *Hegemony’s* rising power; even pirate bands allied with the *Circinian government*. I cannot confirm or deny any of these tales. I can only tell you that clearly, not all can be true, and urge you to sort the wheat from the chaff so that you may better understand what challenges you will face.

“One lesson we have learned from the *Circinian campaign* is never to underestimate a foe. The *Caesar*, the *Imperator* and our generals are taking steps to beef up military intelligence, so that unpleasant surprises like the *Circinian rearguard assault* on *Alphard* cannot occur again. Despite the terms of a cease-fire, we remain formally at



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war with the Circinus Federation. Whether and when actual fighting resumes will depend on events and on the interests of the Marian Hegemony. In the meantime, we continue to consolidate our hold on the former Circinian planets of Maximillian and Blantleff. Should the time come again to face down the Federation in arms, the legions are prepared to do so. [Ed. Note: According to deep-cover sources in the Hegemony military, they've pretty well confirmed at least some Word of Blake involvement with the Circinians' surprising battlefield strength. Such machinations have surely not endeared the Blakists to the new Caesar, and have likely prompted his most recent moves against them.]

"Our time is up for this morning; those of you with questions, please feel free to send them my way or drop by my office during the afternoon free study period. Thank you for your attention; in the weeks to come, it is my sincere hope that all of you will prove a credit to the Marian state."

ECONOMY

—From *Investors' Monthly*, an online business journal produced in the Taurian Concordat; special issue, "New Frontiers: Emerging Economies in the Periphery"; May 3067

The Marian Hegemony is an unlikely bird: an economy in transition from piracy to a domestically-supported industrial base common to respectable nations. This expanding realm truly has come a long way from its early years of getting by on the Alphard germanium motherlode and the proceeds of privateering. For almost sixty

years now, the Marian Hegemony has been shifting its economic base from piracy to heavy industry, agriculture and export of local resources. This slow-but-steady process has nearly reached its end, and the Marian state is ripe for foreign investment—judiciously conducted, with an eye to local quirks of law, customs and attitudes. Smart investors looking for solid future profits should find the Marian Hegemony fertile ground.

Toward that end, this article provides an overview of the present-day Marian economy: its linchpins, growth sectors, weaknesses and growing pains. Profiles of prominent local companies are included; some of these are looking to expand, and might welcome friendly foreign partners.

COSTS OF CONQUEST

Investment in the Marian Hegemony remains a venture for those willing to take risks: specifically, the risk of sinking money into a state frequently at war. As of this writing, however, the Hegemony military seems likely to stay within its own borders for some time. Putting it bluntly, the Marian Legions have already invaded and conquered their nearest neighbors, and are still fully integrating those territories into the Marian realm. The sole exception—the Circinus Federation—gave a sufficiently good account of itself to forestall a second attempt at conquest any time soon. The two powers remain technically in a state of war, but political analysts expect the present cease-fire to hold, as a lull in the fighting serves the interests of both sides.

In the meantime, canny investors can use the ongoing integration of the former Lothian League and Illyrian Palatinate—as well as the former Circinian worlds of Maximillian and Blantleff—to get in on the ground floor of the coming Marian economic boom. Reconstruction on war-torn planets alone, especially in the four-world Illyrian district, offers profit-making opportunities for building contractors and companies involved in infrastructure repair: rebuilding roads, bridges, sewers, reservoirs, port and other shipping facilities, electrical plants, water-purification plants and various refineries on industrial planets. ComStar, of course, holds HPG maintenance and repair contracts with the Marian government, but private telecommunications companies can garner planetary communications and computer-net contracts in Illyrian and Lothian cities and towns. Military manufacturers can find a profitable niche as well, re-supplying the Marian Legions with equipment lost during the recent invasions. Officially, the Hegemony has no BattleMech producers within its borders, nor does it make aerospace fighters (though the hot rumor concerning its recently fielded *Locust* BattleMechs hints that they're coming from a small-scale 'Mech factory somewhere deep in Hegemony space). Its primary military contractors produce tanks, hovercraft, a few large-scale weapon systems and small arms, and even these are light on such battlefield necessities as 'Mech weapons and high-tech electronics. Companies in those fields should find the Marian Hegemony particularly lucrative territory.

The Illyrian district is proving something more of a headache to deal with than its Marian rulers anticipated, given prior strains on the Illyrian economy from large-scale settlement of Free Rasalhague refugees. Security appears largely under control, however, and increasing economic stability should trigger a self-perpetuating cycle



of growing prosperity and decreasing rebellion. The Lothian district has already undergone such a transformation; its seven resource-rich worlds have since added their lucrative mining industries to the overall Marian economy.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES

Today's Marian Hegemony holds potential profit centers in mining, petrochemicals, ore refining, agriculture, selected areas of military manufacture, and even a touch of tourism for those seeking something a little different. Battlefield salvage and repair is an industry here in its own right; the Marian state has always depended on scavenging for machinery and spare parts, and its "wizards with spit and baling wire" are in demand throughout the Periphery's often-struggling militaries. Marian technicians have carved out a niche in salvaged spacefaring vessels, including jury-rigging armaments for them—this last a legacy of the realm's privateering days, when survival depended on fast ships that could hit hard and fade away. (Actual shipbuilding, of course, lay far beyond the Hegemony's resources, let alone its technical know-how.)

Mining and Ore Refining

Mining in the Hegemony runs the gamut from valuable ores such as gold, silver, copper and iron to germanium, coltan, radioactives and gemstones. Two principal mining consortiums—Alphard Trading Corporation (ATC) on Alphard and Fidelis Metals on Addhara—control much of this industry within the Hegemony's pre-3055 borders, and are currently eyeing Lothian and Illyrian iron and copper mining concerns. Takeover rumors are rampant, which makes the owners of said Lothian and Illyrian interests highly receptive to outside investment in order to keep their independence. Trondheimal Iron and Steel Ltd. is a particular prize, given its profitable steel exports to the Free Worlds League.

Apart from those in its recently conquered regions, the Hegemony boasts only one major ore refiner, along with a small subsidiary of ATC. Octavian Steel Corporation, based on Suetonius, produces enough steel to adequately supply the Hegemony's tank manufacturers, but not enough for export outside Marian borders.

Petrochemicals

The petrochemical industry has its center on Horatius, a desert world rich in oil and natural gas. Pontifex Petrochemicals, Ltd. has designs on expanding its operations to Lordinax and Logan Prime, whose rich oil deposits in the tundras had barely begun to be tapped in the decades before the Lothian conquest. Now that they are part of a much larger realm, these Lothian planets are ripe for exploitation by foreigners with plenty of cash. Meeting the expanding needs Hegemony's chemical industry should land handsome profits, and tentative trade talks with the Taurians indicate some Marian interest in exporting surplus specialty chemicals to the Taurian market.

Agriculture

The Marian "breadbasket" worlds of Stafford, Islington and New Venice were joined in late 3066 by Blantleff, long a contested planet between the Lothians and the Circinus Federation. Presently under

Marian control, Blantleff is gearing up its luxury meats for what is now a domestic Marian market. Local farmers are also experimenting with hybrid grains, as cattle feed and for human consumption.

Tourism and Entertainment

Imperium Romanum Tours occupies an unusual niche, catering to denizens of the Successor States and the larger Periphery realms who want to experience "what ancient Rome was really like." Imperium Romanum cannot actually offer that experience, of course, but the "Roman Empire light" flavor on many Hegemony worlds is more than enough to satisfy customers who like their tourist destinations offbeat. Though not a major moneymaker, IR does well enough to consider a venture into winter-sports tours on the snowbound Lothian worlds. The Lothians never founded a tourist industry, preferring not to be—as one Lothian native put it—"overrun all year by the same folks we came out here to get away from." Consequently, this sector is wide open.

The Illyrian district will continue to sponsor its annual MechWarrior games, in which participants duel to the death for salvage and spare parts. The games fit right in with the Hegemony's Roman ethos; already, local media are referring to this year's contestants as gladiators.

Military Industries

Marian Arms, Inc. and Hadrian Mechanized Industries are the major players in the military-manufacturing sector, with the Alphard Trading Corporation's manufacturing division adding its own contribution. Marian Arms and HMI produce tanks, hovercraft, wheeled combat vehicles and various weapons systems from artillery to small arms. The Hegemony government is eagerly seeking investors to build BattleMech and aerospace factories, provided they can forge a sufficiently robust trade network to supply them. Caesar Julius O'Reilly's moves to change his realm's image from near-pariah status represent steps in the right direction, but fully accomplishing this shift is likely to take some time.

The biggest foreign-investment coup since 3064 is the three-way joint venture between the Taurian Concordat's Alphard Trading Corporation (an independent military contractor based on Perdition), its Free Worlds League partner Kali-Yama, and Alphard Trading Corporation of Alphard, to produce the Fulcrum hovercraft at ATC's factory outside Nova Roma. ATC Perdition and ATC Alphard recently bought minority shares of each other's stock, and Kali Yama industries stands to make extra profits on its Fulcrum sales by taking advantage of the cheaper Marian workforce.

ALPHARD TRADING CORPORATION

Main Headquarters: Alphard

CEO: Livia O'Reilly

Main Products (Alphard): Germanium, coltan, uranium, Alphard marble; J. Edgar hovercraft, Fulcrum hovercrafts

Main Products (Pompey): Industrial diamonds, fire opals

Profile:

Built on the ruins of the original Alphard Trading Corporation in the early 2920s, this latter-day reincarnation began in germanium mining and over the years steadily expanded its operations to other natural



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resources. ATC revived its military manufacturing capabilities in the early 3050s, supplying J. Edgar hovercraft to the greatly expanded Marian Legions. The company has always stayed in O'Reilly hands; its current CEO is Caesar Julius O'Reilly's aunt. In addition to managing Alphard's remaining germanium reserves, the company's mining division extracts uranium and coltan, refining the latter into the metallic elements niobium and tantalum, two metals with many useful industrial applications. In 3050 Livia O'Reilly launched the mining division into a lucrative sideline, quarrying Alphard marble from the White Hills that surround Nova Roma. Known for its alabaster-like luminosity, Alphard marble is eagerly sought by sculptors across human-occupied space. The major cities on Alphard remain the premier showcases for this stone, which graces public buildings throughout them.

ATC's most recent venture is a deal with its Taurian-based namesake and Kali-Yama Industries of Kendall to produce the Fulcrum hovercraft. Though most are intended for export back to Kali-Yama, some are earmarked for the Marian Legions at a discount. The first Fulcrum hovercraft are slated for deployment in early 3068.

MARIAN ARMS, INC.

Main Headquarters: Alphard

CEO: Monty McNair

Main Products: Gladius tanks, Maultier hover APCs, tracked APCs, anti-personnel mines, static gun emplacements, personal weapons and small-arms ammunition

Profile:

Marian Arms, Inc. is the largest armaments manufacturer within the Hegemony's borders. The company produces tanks, hovercraft and various weapons, from large-scale systems to sidearms. It also boasts impressive political connections, with fingers in a dozen different pies in the Senate. Lucius Gaius Davidson, the long-serving Senator Emeritus for Suetonius, is a major shareholder, and several other senators likewise hold healthy interests. The current CEO is rumored to be an illegitimate scion of the Humphreys family on Islington, but so far this story is mere unsubstantiated gossip.

Taurian Protector Grover Shraplen authorized the licensing of the Maultier design to Marian Arms shortly after Julius O'Reilly took power, and in 3066 also lifted the previous Protector's ban on importing the Gladius Pontiac 50 AC/10. Profits from the weapon sales are presumably going to finance the Taurian Concordat's ongoing campaign in the Pleiades Cluster.

TECHWIZARDS, LTD.

Main Headquarters: Baccaalieu

CEO: Robert Scogin

Main Products: Battlefield salvage and repair services

Profile:

TechWizards began in 2970 as a small group of gifted mechanics with a passion for tinkering, and has grown over the past century into a sizeable business whose talented personnel specialize in making salvaged tech useful again. No matter how battered and broken, the

technicians at TechWizards can fix it up and make it work. These talents are vital out in the Periphery, where jury-rigging is often the order of the day and spare parts can be hard to come by. The Marian Hegemony in particular still relies heavily on scavenged materiel to fully equip its growing military, as attested to by the activities of the First, Second and Sixth Marian Legions during the recent campaign against the Circinus Federation.

CASH AND CREDIT

Marian currency is based on the talent, with smaller denominations taken from ancient Roman coinage (introduced by Emperor Marius in 3012). Silver talents come in denominations of 1, 3, 5, 10 and 20; gold talents in denominations of 25, 50, 75 and 100. These denominations are available in bills as well. Below the talent is the denarius, a copper coin that comes in denominations of 1, 3 and 5; ten denarii make up a talent. All coins bear the faces of former Emperor/Caesars; each new ruler has coins struck to commemorate his reign, though older coins remain in circulation. A number on the reverse denotes what each coin is worth. Bills likewise bear portraits of the Caesars, with a Marian privateer superimposed over the Hall of the Senate on the back.

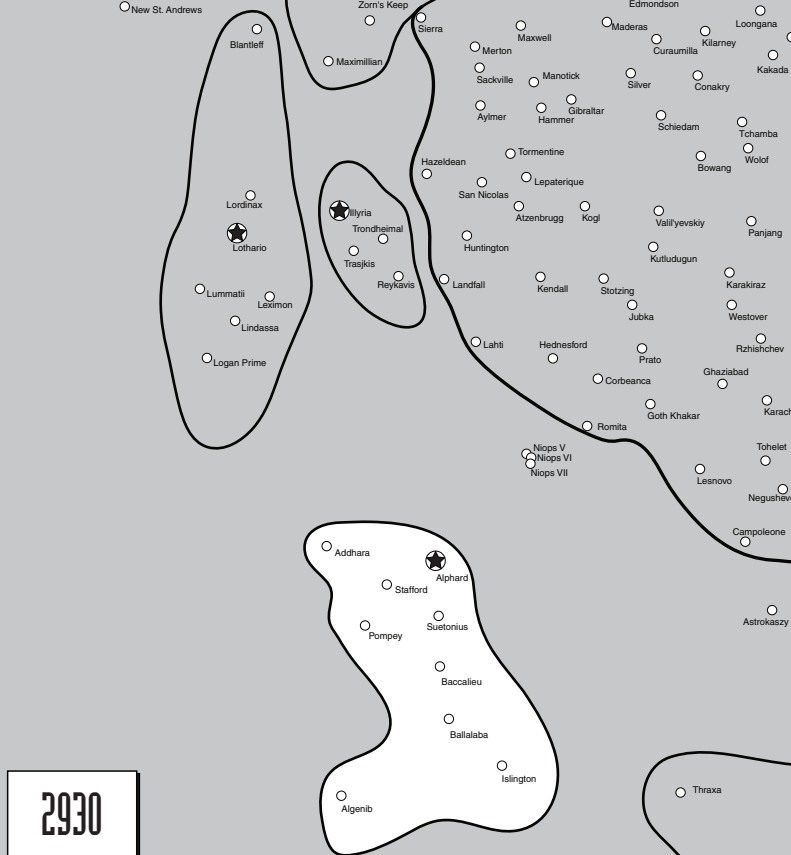
Credit and electronic transactions are common on Alphard and other centers of industry, though hard cash is still preferred on more outlying worlds like Addhara, New Venice and Marius' Tears. The Lothian and Illyrian provinces have fairly sophisticated credit and banking systems, a legacy of trade built on their resource wealth. Their absorption by the Hegemony has done little to change this, though the Lothian economy has yet to fully recover from brutal suppression of local resistance prior to 3062.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

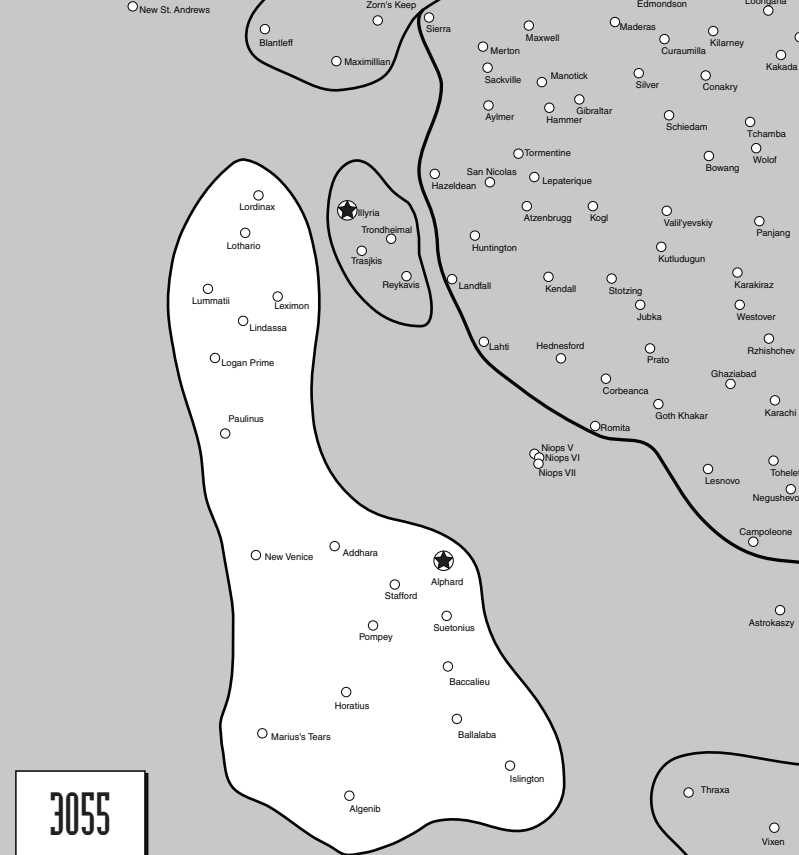
(24 May 3067)

Alphard [ISAP] — The Marian Hegemony today is a realm in recovery from a military dictatorship—or at least in transition to a more benevolent despotism, whose prime mover apparently hopes to permanently alter his own job description. Caesar Julius O'Reilly has occupied the throne on Alphard for not quite four years, but even in this brief time span he's already left his mark. Assuming Fate chooses not to intervene, the Hegemony he eventually leaves behind will be a far different place: a mature nation-state surviving on its own resources and labor, grown larger by conquest but stronger by integration, and with its people feeling free to breathe for the first time since Sean O'Reilly claimed power back in 3048. No small achievement for the eldest son of an autocrat, raised to rule an empire but more interested in running a republic. In truth, Julius O'Reilly's ambitions make a far better fit with reality than Sean's grandiose dreams. The Marian Hegemony may be evolving into a regional power to be reckoned with, but it can never hope to challenge the dominance of the true star empires across the Periphery-Inner Sphere border. Far better to finish its transformation from pirate kingdom to nation, and then keep that nation prosperous as best it may.

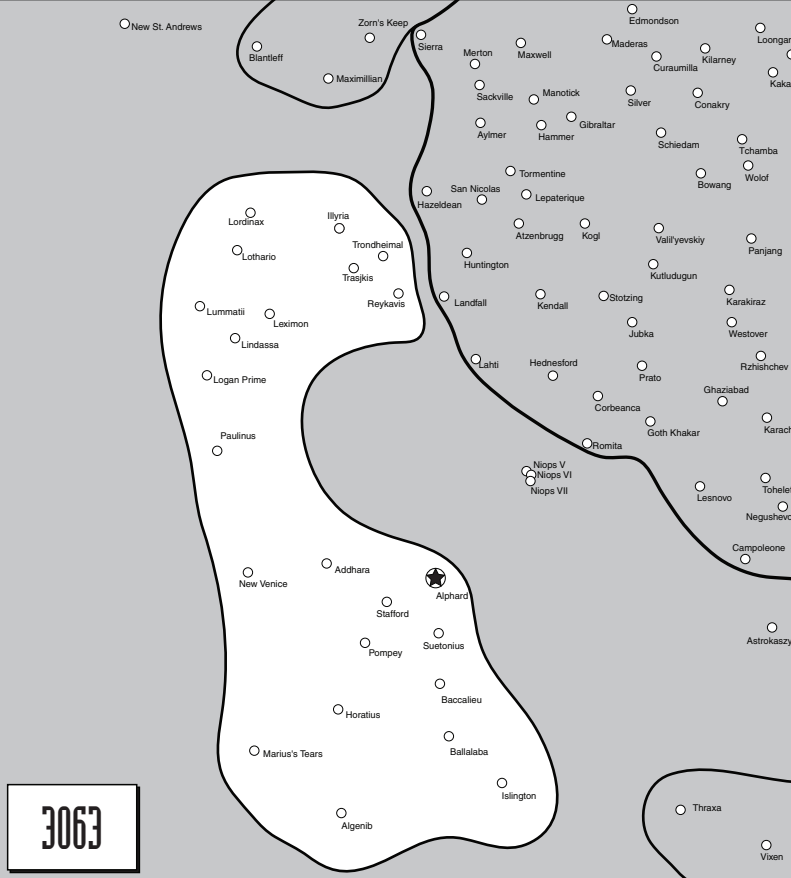
Signs of new hope—and old fear—are everywhere, but most especially among the plebeians and slaves. Pleb neighborhoods in Nova Roma and other cities on Alphard are festooned with yard signs,



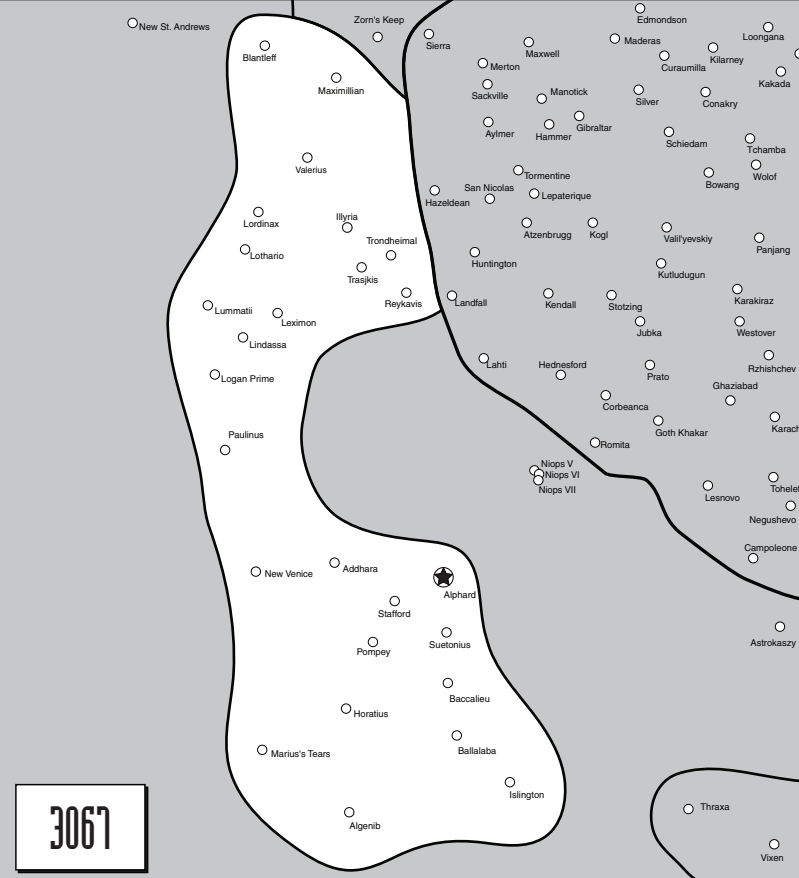
2930



3055



3063



3067

MARIAN HEGEMONY at various stages
 Founding (2930), Post Lothian Invasion (3055)
 Post Illyrian invasion (3063), Current (3067)

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LEGEND



120 LIGHT YEARS OR 26,8 PARSECS

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS





MARIAN HEGEMONY

window banners and other election paraphernalia—the kind of thing you’d expect to see in the Taurian Concordat or the Magistracy of Canopus, but not here. Until 3064, pleb citizens of the Hegemony had no right to vote. Now they do—not for the Senate, true, but for the Tribune whose members will speak more loudly and clearly for them than has ever been the case in the Hegemony’s halls of government. A sense of giddy excitement pervades the streets, and even the professional skeptics aren’t immune.

“It’s all window-dressing, you know,” says one, who won’t speak for attribution. Old habits die hard, and this man was nearly thirty when Caesar Sean took power. He’s seen quite a bit, and is trying to keep up his protective cynic’s shell. The look in his eyes betrays him—as does the button on his lapel, which reads “Think Big: Vote Marcellus”. “It’s not as if the Tribunes will have governing power. They’re there to complain. We elect them, they kvetch to the Senate about whatever’s bugging us, and the Senate likely ignores them. Unless someone wants to look magnanimous. That’s how the system works. Always has, always will.”

“Then why the button?”

“Oh, well, you know...” He trails off with a shrug, managing to look both sheepish and excited. “I could be wrong. Any chance is worth taking, when you’ve had as few as we’ve had these past twenty years.”

If the plebs are jazzed up over the coming Tribune elections, the sense of hope among the Marian slave class is nearly tangible—and with even less cause, at least on the surface. To understand the intensity of their hope, one must first know a little something about the history of slavery in the Marian Hegemony—especially recent history, which the average slave regards as a particularly dark time. The current era holds glimmers of light, and many slaves eagerly anticipate a new dawn.

SLAVERY IN THE HEGEMONY

The first generations of slaves were indentured servants, would-be settlers too poor to pay for passage or to have a viable grubstake in the new Marian realm. Many were refugees, fleeing the Succession Wars with scarcely more than the clothes on their backs. Johann Sebastian O’Reilly offered them a place to belong, albeit at a price. They would earn their stake in the Hegemony as bought laborers, serving those better off than they until they had proven their worth to the new realm. That done, they could petition for citizenship. The lucky few who scraped together enough money from meager outside earnings to buy a plot of land on a lightly settled Marian world could bypass petitions; land purchases made them citizens overnight. Either way, every Marian slave had at least a chance to better his lot. Work hard, went the ethos, and you can escape slavery—or your children can.

Throughout Johann Sebastian’s long reign, the system worked reasonably well. Slave petitions were granted more often than not, and those who proved adept at the privateering life often earned swift citizenship as a reward. The divvy system for valuables common aboard Marian pirate ships included slaves, many of whom in those days were highly trained in technical fields. Planetside, the “refugee generation” was more often educated than not, and many attempted to pass on their knowledge to their children. In addition, many owners trained their slaves to fill skilled niches such as mining expertise or

bookkeeping. As time went on, the slave class contained more and more prisoners of war; these, too, came from all walks of life, and frequently managed to better themselves. They in turn provided hope to the rest, which kept the slave population generally docile despite its political powerlessness.

Rot began to set in during the reign of Imperator Marius, whose attempt to change the Hegemony from a Roman-style republic to an empire brought large-scale corruption in its wake. Citizenship through land buys became a thing of the past, even with new land available on the planets colonized during this period. The moneyed patricians, who had become an aristocracy over the decades since 2920, entrenched their own positions at the expense of the slave class. Though slaves could still petition for citizenship, actually getting it meant ever-larger bribes or powerful patrons. Corruption worsened during the reign of Sean O’Reilly, whose profligate ways and utter lack of ethics led him to reward similar traits in his supporters. By the time of the Palatinate conquest in 3063, things had degenerated so far that some slaves were beginning to talk rebellion.

Before any such movement could gain traction, however, Julius O’Reilly returned home a conquering hero and deposed Caesar Sean. His social reforms since then, minimal as they are, promise a return to the “good old days” when slave status wasn’t permanent and honest toil could earn an honest reward. The Office of Citizenship Appeals is increasingly busy these days, as more and more slaves dare to trust the promise of this new era. Slavery will likely always exist in the Marian Hegemony—it’s as much a part of the cultural landscape as the shimmering white marble buildings of Nova Roma—but it no longer need be a lifetime sentence to the bottom of the social totem pole.

For this, the slaves are grateful to their Caesar. They speak of him with as much warmth as they used to speak of Sean O’Reilly with loathing (when they dared speak of Sean at all). The change is remarkable, and serves as the clearest sign yet that the Marian Hegemony is greatly changed.

WHEN IN ROME: LOTHIANS, ILLYRIANS AND THEIR CONQUERORS

The absorption of Lothian and Illyrian worlds has prompted another cultural shift, loosening the grip of Imperial Rome on the public imagination. The Illyrian district’s Scandinavian bent has heightened interest in those cultures and languages; patricians demonstrate their cosmopolitan credentials by taking up Swedish and Norwegian, while Norse myths are making a comeback in holovid series and printings of epic sagas. On the other hand, Illyrian rebels are the most favored holovid villains, displacing the “Lothian terrorists” of a few years back. The Lothians themselves have apparently adjusted to their new role as Marian citizens, though their Taurian-like tendencies to speak bluntly and act independently may cause a few headaches down the road.

One interesting reaction to this cultural awakening is a renewed interest in republican Rome—its history, literature, laws, ethics and so on. Latin-language publications have always been available here, of course, and the nightly news program *Acta Diurna* boasts a Latin name, but lately Latin literature and Roman history have grown into



something of a fad. Writers and philosophers from Ancient Rome are all the rage, and a small group of patricians and plebs on Alphard is even attempting to revive Latin as an everyday spoken language. The Hegemony's lingua franca is English, reflecting Johann Sebastian O'Reilly's origins on the English-speaking Canopian world of Booker, though Latin is taught in the schools and is commonly used for things like military ranks and government documents (printed in Latin and English). The Latin Revival Society's latest triumph can be seen throughout Nova Roma, where the street signs are printed in Latin above their English equivalents.

Religion: A Roman Revival

Religion in the Marian Hegemony has always been as diverse as in any other Periphery state, with many faiths represented among its people. The religious tradition unique to the Hegemony, however, is a revival of ancient Terra's Roman paganism. Established along with the realm's many other Roman-style trappings by Johann Sebastian O'Reilly, the *Religio Romana* has kept steady numbers of adherents down the years. Now, with the cultural renewal of interest in republican Rome, this faith is swiftly expanding. New temples have gone up on several Hegemony worlds, while others can now afford refurbishment through increased contributions by greater numbers of worshippers. The *Flamen Martialis*, chief chaplain of *Religio Romana* adherents in the Marian Hegemony Armed Forces, is reportedly seeking assistant chaplains to help minister to the increasing numbers of *Romana* recruits.

The festival of *Saturnalia*, always popular among slave adherents for its reversal of social roles, has become a significantly larger public spectacle since late 3063—the first year of its celebration since the present Caesar's accession. On Alphard, *Saturnalia* 3066 included a vast public dinner in downtown Nova Roma, at which slaves were served delicacies by their patrician masters. Liquor flowed freely, dice and card games abounded, and the whole raucous, joyful street party was presided over by a trusted slave from the Caesar's own household, designated as the evening's *Saturnalia princeps* (Lord of Misrule). Many Hegemony worlds also host *Saturnalia* markets during this week-long holiday season, at which small gifts are bought for exchanging with family and friends.

BUILDING A NATION: EDUCATION REFORM

Education in the Hegemony has always depended more on social class than anything else. Patricians run their own system of private schools, which are the academic equal of schools in the larger Periphery states; slaves receive whatever education their owners see fit to give them, depending on the skills needed for the positions they're expected to fill. The only stab at a universal public school system was established for the plebs, courtesy of Emperor Marius O'Reilly, who knew he would need a more uniformly educated citizenry if he hoped to build his realm into a state to be reckoned with. Shaky funding and the intermittent needs of the Marian military, however, undercut the school system time and again. Caesar Sean regularly raided the



MARIAN HEGEMONY

school budget for various expenses, among them the keeping of his many mistresses. Pleb citizens responded by creating their own neighborhood schools as best they could, or raising their own money to shore up crumbling buildings and buy vital supplies.

Starting just last year, Caesar Julius has funneled a small but steady amount to the pleb schools, folding the home-founded ones into the larger public system while upgrading them all. The expenses of conquest and integration of new planets have so far prevented him from changing things on a larger scale, but public-school employees have high hopes of raising the Hegemony's overall literacy rate within the next few years. The Caesar also recently established a pilot program of government grants to provide higher education—including stints at the Collegium Bellorum Imperium—to secondary students who score high on a rigorous Leaving Exam. Scorers in the top ten percent on this high-stakes test, scheduled to make its debut in 3068, will be offered incentives to join the Legiones Marianes beyond their years of compulsory service, or to serve as interns and appointees at various levels of the Marian government. Caesar Julius wants to raise the quality of his troops and his civil servants, and is banking on the talents of the large plebeian class to do just that. Should the pilot program prove successful, plans are on the drawing board to expand it Hegemony-wide.

ALPHARD

Noble Ruler: Caesar Julius O'Reilly
Star Type (Recharge Time): G3IV (184 hours)
Position in System: 4
Time to Jump Point: 8.53 days
Number of Satellites: 1 (Romulus)
Surface Gravity: 1.0
Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (Breathable)
Equatorial Temperature: 33° C (Temperate)
Surface Water: 55 percent
Recharging Station: None
HPG Class Type: B
Highest Native Life: Mammal
Population: 3,110,205,000
Socio-Industrial Levels: B-B-B-C-C

Profile:

Capital of the Marian Hegemony, Alphard abounds in desolate expanses of box canyons, rocky arroyos and arid mountain ranges that still hold considerable mineral wealth in their depths. Though much of it is hot and dry, Alphard boasts just enough arable land, primarily on the two northern continents of Alba and Gaul, to make it barely self-sufficient in food production. Modest industrialization in the early 31st century has grown considerably over the past forty-odd



years, and the addition of Lothian rare element mineral resources may be enough to vault Alphard's manufacturing industry to the next level.

The capital city, Nova Roma, is a throwback to the heyday of Terra's Ancient Rome. Many of its Roman-style buildings are constructed of local gold-colored sandstone and faced with gleaming white Alphard marble. Residents are proud of their city, which they consider a fitting monument to the anticipated grandeur of the Marian Hegemony as it continues its evolution from bandit kingdom to regional Periphery powerhouse.

LOTHARIO

Noble Ruler: Senator Emeritus Aurelia Marcus
Star Type (Recharge Time): M3III (204 hours)
Position in System: 2
Time to Jump Point: 2.67 days
Number of Satellites: 1 (Logan)
Surface Gravity: 1.1
Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (Breathable)
Equatorial Temperature: 20° C (Boreal)
Surface Water: 70 percent
Recharging Station: None
HPG Class Type: None
Highest Native Life: Mammal
Population: 2,622,000
Socio-Industrial Levels: C-C-C-C-D

Profile:

Formerly the capital of the independent Lothian League, Lothario now serves as capital of the Marian Hegemony's new Lothian province. The planet and its people are still adapting to their subordinate role, but the roiling dissent and guerrilla warfare of the past few years has begun giving way to acceptance among much of the population. The calming of unrest owes much to the regional autonomy granted to the Lothians by Julius O'Reilly, and to the prominent role of Dame Elena Logan as one of Caesar Julius' advisers.

This small world, like the other six Lothian planets, has a thin atmosphere and is almost perpetually covered in ice and snow, with marginally habitable zones centered on the world's equator. Lothario is known for the stark beauty of its wintry landscapes, especially the spectacular aurora created by the frequently intense solar winds of its parent sun. Most local inhabitants live in subterranean enclaves, though a few hardly souls scrape out a living on the surface, mainly by farming in the narrow equatorial zone. Lothario's primary resources are iron and copper ores, and its fur-trapping industry continues to benefit the local economy as well as adding a bit to Marian coffers on Alphard.



MINOR PERIPHERY STATES





MINOR PERIPHERY STATES

The two remaining powers in the Near Periphery are mini-states, comprising less than ten planets apiece. The Circinus Federation is a pirate kingdom attempting to turn into a real nation; the Rim Collection is a fledgling agrarian democracy, built partly on the ruins of the ancient Rim Worlds Republic. Neither is yet a power to be reckoned with, nor likely to become so; yet both exemplify in their own ways the self-reliance of the Periphery. From bandits who survived by taking until they found it no longer paid, to independent-minded farmers who trusted no power save each other to protect and preserve their dreams, the Circinus Federation and the Rim Collection show different sides of the Periphery ethos: depend on yourself and your nearest neighbors, because anyone else will likely let you down.

CIRCINUS FEDERATION

(31 July 3067)

Circinus [ISAP] — “A nation in transition” is the diplomatic nothing-speak usually trotted out to describe places like the Circinus Federation in 3067—places where things used to be one way, and then suddenly seem to be another way, even though the status quo appears little changed. The national mood verges on the schizophrenic: pride stemming from this tiny nation’s improbable victory last year over the powerful Marian Legions, coupled with pervasive unease at the events of the past few months. The sudden death of President “Little Bob” McIntyre, followed by the disappearance of the Black Warriors just days ago, suggests to the average inhabitant a universe turned upside down.

The Warriors’ vanishing act is particularly troubling to many here, though few will speak much of it. A mercenary command turned pirate, the Black Warriors left House Marik’s employ in 2770, apparently in protest against then-Captain-General Kenyon Marik’s refusal to permit SLDF use of military bases in Marik territory for the campaign against Stefan Amaris. (Kenyon Marik, in response, accused the Warriors of contract violation.) They arrived on Circinus in early 2772, where they obliterated a local pirate band that had made its home on the outlying continent of Madero. Unable to join the SLDF Exodus due to faulty communications, and unable to find lucrative employment in nearby space, they supported themselves for the next several years by launching raids from their new home on Circinus against nearby Marik agricultural worlds. The unit evolved from brigands to protectors of a fledgling nation after an influx of Lyran refugees reached Circinus in 2785, fleeing the destruction of the Amaris Civil War. These Lyran farmers made common cause with the Warriors, providing all the inhabitants of Circinus with a legitimate means of subsistence while the fighting men and women both protected the little state and further enriched it through raiding. This symbiosis between civilian and warrior continued down the centuries, only briefly interrupted by the Marik Occupation under the Eridani Light Horse in the mid-29th century. Before long, the Black Warriors became icons in the public imagination. To the targets of their attacks, the Warriors were ruthless bandits; their own people saw them as heroic defenders of a tiny nation in a bad neighborhood of space. The official classification of the Warriors’ raiding activities as a state secret—a position maintained to this day—kept this polite fiction intact.

Even the devastating factional war in the 3040s, which split the Warriors between loyalists and opponents of the increasingly dictatorial Little Bob McIntyre, made little lasting dent in this perception. Average people saw both sides, along with the newly created House Guards, as committed to the good of the Federation, if tragically misguided in attempting to settle their differences through combat. Given this history, the Warriors’ sudden departure after successfully fighting off the Marian Hegemony is as bewildering as a ‘Mech shooting roses in place of laser bolts.

On the surface, however, life goes on much as usual. The late President’s son, Calvin McIntyre, succeeded him in office following Little Bob’s fatal heart attack, and the McIntyre House Guards remain to defend the Federation against any renewed assault by the Marians. The recent conflict with the Hegemony cost the Circinians two worlds, one of which had been contested between the Federation and the Lothians (now part of the Hegemony) for years; those losses, though unwelcome, have not yet had a severe impact on most Circinians’ everyday lives. The most visible change, apart from the cutting-edge ‘Mechs in the Guards, is the number of Word of Blake acolytes visible on the Federation’s capital world. Blakist personnel in themselves are nothing new; they’ve administered Circinian HPG systems since shortly after the 3052 ComStar Schism. Several locals, however, commented on the increasing Blakist presence since Little Bob McIntyre’s demise.

“President Cal spends a lot of time with them folk,” one older woman put it as we chatted over home-baked muffins in her tiny but immaculate parlor. “Nobody much’d say so in public, mind. Who knows who’s listening out there? But lots of people think it, all the same.” She toys with her muffin, looking perturbed. “Not that there’s anything wrong with the Word of Blake. They do an OK job. It’s just...well, I don’t rightly know what. Something feels itchy, that’s all. When all’s said and done, they’re not our own—and our President ought to spend more time with his own. Don’t you think?”

I’m not certain how to answer, so I don’t. But I find it interesting that the ordinary folk of the Circinus Federation should feel leery of the Word of Blake, even with apparently little cause. That reaction has cropped up a lot—a sense of something off somewhere, only no one can put a finger on it. Several people seem to link it with the Black Warriors’ disappearance, though no one openly blames the Blakists. The connection seems based on pure correlation: the President’s heart attack, the Warriors’ departure and the uptick in Word of Blake personnel all happened at roughly the same time, ergo there must be cause and effect in it somewhere.

Rumors about the Warriors’ fate are spreading everywhere. The favorites are that Little Bob’s increasing paranoia and autocratic airs cost him his supporters among them, and that one of those who’d opposed him poisoned the President before the entire unit up and left; or that bad blood between the Warriors and Calvin McIntyre prompted them to take off rather than serve under him. One colorful tale claims that the anti-Little Bob faction was secretly in Marian pay, and the loyalists went to hunt them down. Another says Michael Cirion finally cracked under the pressure of his own bitterness toward the McIntyres and led the unit off on a futile quest for the One Star. (As far as anyone knows, Cirion is not a member of the One Star Faith, but that seems to

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make no difference.) Yet another rumor says the Warriors discovered some heinous scheme of either Little Bob's, Calvin's or the Blakists, murdered Little Bob (in the variant that pins guilt on him), and fled to the Magistracy border world of Thraxa in order to warn humanity of this mysterious impending doomsday plot. This last story is heavy on the fear factor but light on specifics, and like the others, has no substantiation.

When asked, the businesslike spokesperson for the Word of Blake at the Circinus HPG passes off the rumors—and the pervasive local jitters about the Blakists themselves—as “only to be expected from those outside our Order. People are always wary of what they don't understand, and outsiders truly don't understand the depth of our spiritual commitment to the vision of Jerome Blake.” His self-deprecating smile is a touch too smooth. “Spiritual and religious orders throughout human history have had to deal with this sort of thing. The Franciscans and Benedictines and Opus Dei on old Terra, the One Star Faith and the Exituri in our own times...why should the Word of Blake be immune? The stories will die down eventually, as our actions make it clear that we truly are only here to fulfill our HPG contract. Sooner or later, people will realize that. In the meantime, our best approach is to meet their anxieties with patience.”

I leave almost convinced, but not quite. Like the locals, I sense something off somewhere...though I'm damned if I know what.

GOVERNMENT

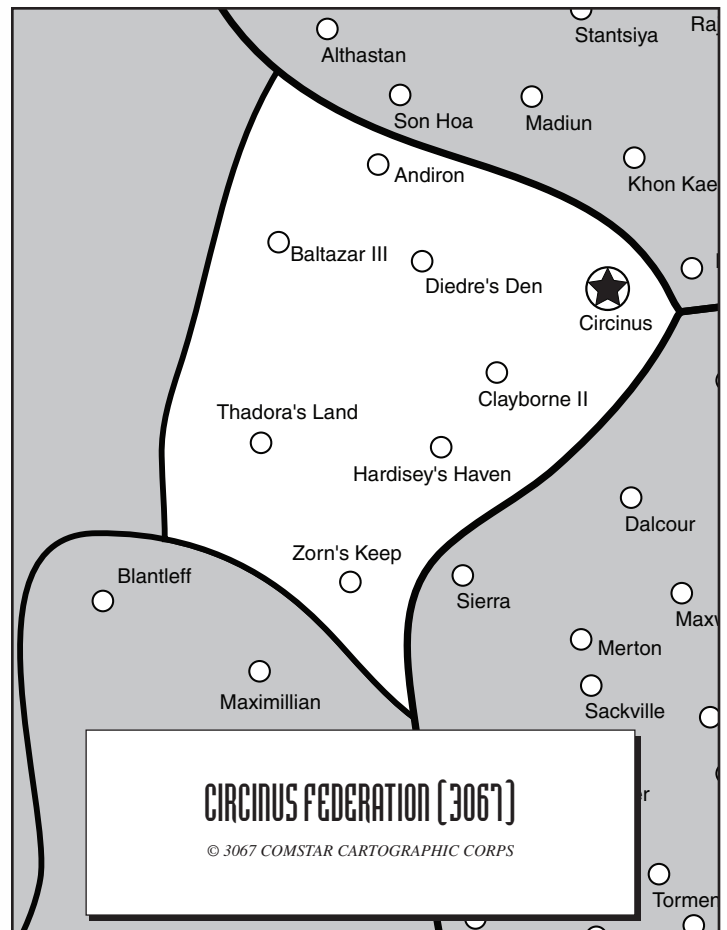
—From *Politicians and Other Vermin*, a popular online journal based on Hardisey's Haven in the Circinus Federation; edition posted 8 August, 3067

So you're wondering how we got to this point, where one president/dictator up and dies and the next one slides into his spot as smooth as a well-oiled gun bolt. Where said next customer spends all his time surrounded by white-robed gurus spouting the Vision of Blake in his ear...or at least, that's what it sounds like from the rumors. Where a big chunk of our armed forces takes off into the wild starry dark, leaving us all scratching our heads and trying to figure things out. Only we don't have enough information.

Here's a little that'll help. To figure out what's happening now—and what's likely to happen next—it's best to look at how things are supposed to work, and just how they got so loused up in the first place.

So, how does your government work? Ten points and a free weekend on the Haven for those who answered, “Like a 'Mech in mud...”. Seriously, we're supposed to be a democracy. Yep, you read that right. A representative dee-mah-cruh-cee, where the regular folks decide who gets to run things and then make sure they do it right. Okay, quit laughing. I'm not done yet.

We never bothered with a Senate or a Congress or a Parliament—nope, we figured the system'd work all right if we just picked a president and some planetary governors every so often and let them be in charge. Funny thing, for a long time it sort of worked. For almost 250 years, we paid close enough attention—or maybe just had the sheer dumb luck—to elect presidents every ten years and governors every five who knew what they were doing. Not only that, but they



remembered who hired them to do it. Us. Oh, sure, there was graft here and there, a shady deal or three...but then, by most other nations' lights, we Circinians were a bandit kingdom anyway, and as long as everyday folks got a decent share of the loot, we'd wink and nod if the chief execs lined their pockets a touch extra. Gotta be some perks to go along with all that responsibility. So the president—generally some guy named McIntyre—and the governors'd handle the day-to-day running of the national and planetary governments, and they'd meet on Circinus each month in the Federation Central Council to vote on law and policy and whatnot. In the meantime, local farmers' unions handled affairs in the counties and towns and smaller settlements. We saw to our own interests pretty well, and could generally trust the governors and the president to back them up.

Things started to go off the rails a tad under President C.J. McIntyre, who got us colonizing nearby star systems. Not a bad idea, and it ultimately made us richer by the resources of eight worlds. Trouble was, the “incentive program” for settlement had too few safeguards. What started out as a perfectly reasonable system—colonists paying off the cost of their transport by working for the government, some corporation or other licensed landholder on the new planets—pretty soon got to be your basic indentured servitude. C.J.'s government would literally rent out crooks, or poor saps who owed back taxes, for



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years and years and years. Which set a nasty precedent for abusing the rights of citizens...you see where I'm going with this, don't you?

Then along came Little Bob, the late unlamented. And things haven't worked right since.

"Mister Dictator"

H. R. "Little Bob" McIntyre became President of the Federation in 3032, and almost immediately afterward became something else: leader of the Black Warriors. He took them over when their commander and Little Bob's personal best buddy, Adam Cirion, died in a tavern brawl. This happened just before a planned invasion of the Illyrian Palatinate, Little Bob's pet scheme for "fulfilling Daddy's dream" of building a Periphery empire. Our boy Bob had spent his first few months in office intimidating all the governors, with some help from Adam Cirion, so by the time he proposed himself as the Warriors' new CO, no one much could stop him. The Warriors themselves were in too much disarray, and average people didn't care. We all took Little Bob for nothing but a blowhard, so we didn't see the danger.

So now we had ourselves a dictatorship, though the system still looked democratic on paper. And thus it remains. We still hold elections for president and governors, the Central Council still meets, and you can still write a letter or send an email to your planetary governor to voice your concerns. Trouble is, nowadays no one's listening. The Central Council's a rubber stamp for President McIntyre—the new one as well as the old one. The farmers' unions grumble and moan, but can't work up the gumption to actually hit the streets and kick the McIntyre dynasty out of office. As for the average Joe, he's too busy scraping a living from his farmland or digging stuff up in the mines to manage much more than the occasional abortive protest—honk if you want your democracy back, candlelight vigils for graft-free elections, the odd "Blakies Out" sign here and there. The Marian assault last year slammed the last nail into the coffin of our pitiful excuse for "domestic unrest." That gambit of Little Bob's, sending an invasion force to Alphard while we were barely holding off the Marian Legions in Federation space, was pure genius (much as I hate to admit it), and people who loathed him before started to think he wasn't so bad. Some of them might even have shed a tear when he died. Not even the loss of Blantleff and Maximillian to the cease-fire agreement could rouse us; we were all so abysmally grateful not to be shouting "Ave, Caesar!" at the business end of a gauss rifle.

We're either cowed, content, or just too danged bewildered to do anything more than complain. And even that not so much these days. Unless you're reading this, which I hope means you'd like to take some kind of action that'll bring back the freedom we used to have.

Once upon a time, we were a genuine democracy. Who can bring that lost gift back to us, save ourselves?

MILITARY

—From the "white paper" *Minor Periphery Militaries*, produced in early 3066 [Ed. Note: A bootleg copy was briefly distributed online throughout the Southwestern Worlds of the Free Worlds League, which border Circinian space. Independent analysts added some updates post-Marian invasion; these updates appear in italics. The white paper has since been removed from circulation.]

Though the people of the Federation routinely refer to their entire military as "the Black Warriors," the Circinian armed forces actually consist of the Warriors themselves and the McIntyre House Guards, a 'Mech regiment raised in 3041. As near as experts can determine, the Warriors proper are responsible for various raids and lightning assaults on target planets near Federation borders, while the Guards primarily defend Circinian worlds against potential invaders. The extent of the Black Warriors' raiding operations remains under dispute; this infamous unit's favored tactic of disguising itself in the colors of other commands makes it difficult to decisively pin any given assault on them. Rumor has it that they have made inroads as far as the Fronc Reaches, but confirmation is hard to come by.

Mercenaries

In addition to the Warriors and the Guards, the Federation employs several lance- and company-sized mercenary units to defend outlying Federation worlds. Units currently employed by the Federation range from poor to mediocre in troop quality and training. *[Some, however, have vastly improved since their "baptism of fire" by the Marian armed forces. The late President's hiring expansion seems to have played a role in the Federation's success against the Marian Legions earlier this year, despite several larger and more reputable merc commands having turned down Circinian offers.]*

[Military analysts are reasonably certain, however, that these merc units alone cannot account for the Federation's extraordinary achievement in beating the Marians to a standstill. Reports of additional, better-trained troops with cutting-edge equipment are rife, allegedly provided to the Federation from various sources. Favorite guesses include the Magistracy of Canopus, long opposed to the Marian Hegemony and certainly capable of delivering top-quality 'Mechs via its alliance with the Capellans; the Free Worlds League, some of whose border provinces may have secretly aided the Federation as a counterweight to Hegemony raiders; and the Word of Blake, which recently increased its presence in the Federation after a falling-out with Marian Caesar Julius O'Reilly. All of these theories have their backers, though none has yet broken from the pack in terms of hard evidence.]

Organization, Rank and Tactics

Reflecting the Black Warriors' origins as a mercenary force of Star League Army veterans, the Circinian military follows the first Star League's standard organization and rank structure. Majors command battalions, captains command companies and lieutenants command lances. Despite each lacking a third battalion to make them true regiments, a colonel commands the Black Warriors and another commands the House Guards. These two officers report directly to the Federation President. *[Since the end of the ill-fated Marian invasion, salvage from that conflict plus cutting-edge 'Mechs from the Federation's "mystery source" has allowed the Guards to add a full battalion of heavy and assault 'Mechs. They are now at full regimental strength. The Black Warriors likewise added a battalion of light and medium 'Mechs, which have vanished along with the rest of the unit.]*

The Black Warriors normally deploy their BattleMechs in company-sized units. They favor combined-arms tactics learned under a decade



of occupation by the Eridani Light Horse in the mid-2800s, and each company's captain augments his or her BattleMechs with lances of conventional forces assigned from various support units. In contrast, the McIntyre House Guards use battalion-sized formations and do not integrate their support units under company command. These differences in style, along with occasional infighting between the House Guards and the Warriors, often limits the Circinian military's overall effectiveness.

The Warriors field mainly light and medium BattleMechs, along with the heavier machines of the Black Hearts battalion. Their aerospace assets tend toward heavy fighters, suited to punching through enemy airspace in aid of their lighter-weight counterparts on the ground. Hovertanks, VTOLs, support vehicles and a forward company of special-forces infantry make up the bulk of the Black Warriors' conventional forces.

The McIntyre House Guards field mainly heavy and assault 'Mechs. Until recently, these were generally older Lyran or Free Worlds designs. Light and medium fighters make up half the Guards' aerospace assets, with heavies comprising the other half. Mechanized infantry, tanks and hovercraft round out the Guards' conventional forces.

Uniforms and Insignia

The McIntyre House Guards have dress and field uniforms, the latter a simple affair that reflects the basic necessities of each major combat specialty. Dress uniforms consist of black pants and a dark gray shirt over black boots. The Circinus Federation crest, a stylized skull-and-crossbones bearing fangs and a crown, is worn on the right-hand side of the chest, while the McIntyre family crest—a reaping hook—is worn on the left. Battalion and company insignia are worn on the right shoulder. Various combinations of skulls and crossbones denote rank and are worn on the left shoulder.

The Black Warriors neither conduct nor participate in public functions, and so have no consistent uniform. They are said to identify each other and mark rank through various other means: hand signals, black armbands, small Jolly Roger pins and artwork on leather jackets. In the field, they wear cooling vests, flak jackets, sidearms and other military accoutrements, as well as dress and equipment from various other militaries whose identities they may be using, but sport no insignia of their own. As for awards, reportedly they mark achievements from each raid through easily hidden tattoos.

Training

The Black Warriors draw new combat personnel from three sources: children of existing Warriors who inherit their parents' 'Mechs, fighters or vehicles; techs and other support personnel who demonstrate aptitude for various combat specialties; and former members of Great House or mercenary units who have left their employers. The Warriors make extensive use of their Star League-era training facilities on Circinus to maintain proficiency and test for new recruits. *[Since the Warriors' departure, the House Guards have fallen heir to these facilities.]* The most promising candidates join the Warriors, while the rest are offered commissions in the House Guards. Recruits for the Black Warriors also undergo hazing rituals, some reportedly quite brutal. No first-hand account of these rites exists, though experts guess their intent is to indoctrinate new troopers into the Warriors' secretive operations.

ECONOMY

—From *Investors' Monthly*, an online business journal produced in the Taurian Concordat; special issue, "New Frontiers: Emerging Economies in the Periphery"; August 3067

The Circinus Federation isn't the first place most investors think of when seeking new ventures in which to place their money. Its history of banditry gives many people pause, and its late President hardly inspired greater confidence. With the recent change in administration, however, plus the near-miracle of having fought the battle-hardened Marian Legions to a cease-fire, the Federation may be worth a second look.

Major Industries

This small realm—eight planetary systems, taking into account the loss of Blantleff and Maximillian—has little in the way of major profit-making enterprises when compared to larger states. This very reality, however, also makes it ripe for economic development.

The principal industry in Federation space is agriculture, with ore and gemstone mining distant seconds. The capital planet, Circinus, remains famed for its rare gemstones. (Our experts thoroughly investigated persistent rumors that the major lodes are all but tapped out, and found no evidence for these stories.) The major source of other extractable resources is Zorn's Keep, a less-than-hospitable world covered with copper, iron and coal mines. Federation planets in general are metal-poor, which offers exciting possibilities for a whole new market in finished metal goods and spare parts for farm implements. WorkMechs represent another growth area, as the Federation is unable to produce its own.

The "breadbasket" worlds of Andiron, Hardisey's Haven and Clayborne II deliver enough food aid to less fertile Federation worlds to prevent starvation, with occasional delicacies exported to Lyran border worlds. (Apparently, enough bad blood remains over the Free Worlds' 29th-century occupation of Circinus that few of the powerful farmers' unions care to trade with House Marik. The need for quick profits in order to rebuild from the recent hostilities, however, may prompt some rethinking.) The loss of herds and grain on Blantleff has thrown agricultural distribution into mild disarray, but that industry segment is expected to recover before the year is out.

Militarily, the Federation produces virtually nothing. A few factories on Circinus, normally devoted to making components for farm machinery, are rumored to contain production lines for spare 'Mech, fighter and armor parts; this appears to be the extent of the Circinian military industry. Stories about a "secret" 'Mech facility on Baltazar III have yet to be substantiated—and considering the relative dearth of appropriate natural resources for building such war machines, are likely untrue. The current political climate is not yet ripe for openly launching military production in Circinian space, but President Calvin McIntyre will likely be in the market for whatever war materiel his treasury can purchase. (The disappearance of the Black Warriors, whose incessant raiding is often credited with building much of the Federation's pre-3066 arsenal, seems to indicate that re-supply through banditry is no longer on the table.)



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SOCIETY AND CULTURE

(15 August 3067)

Andiron [ISAP] — In a region of human-inhabited space known for tough characters, the Circinus Federation stands in a class by itself. Hard living, hard playing and hard dying are all facts of life in this bandit kingdom slowly evolving toward nationhood. Whether or not the Federation ever truly joins the ranks of respectable states, it won't be shedding its tough-guy ethos anytime soon. And the locals wouldn't have it any other way.

The earliest Circinians were soldiers and farmers: the Black Warriors mercenary command, departing Marik space with a planet-sized grudge, and Lyran refugees fleeing the Amaris Civil War. Most of the refugees hailed from Alarion Province: crop and livestock farmers from a swath of planets between Sarikavak and Pencader, rice growers and fisherfolk from Poulsbo, ranchers from Teyvareb and Timbiqui. The denizens of all these worlds were used to self-reliance, and also to the hazards of life far away from centers of industry and government. Many had lost holdings before to pirate raids or border skirmishes (the latter even in the "peaceful" days of the old Star League), and few were strangers to starting over from scratch. The depredations of the Amaris Civil War drove them to Circinus, a planet that seemed to lie safely beyond the reach of the terrible conflict that many of them sensed would inevitably come in the wake of the civil war's end. The Black Warriors welcomed their presence, recognizing in these Lyran transplants a means to continued survival and prosperity that raiding alone couldn't give them. The bargain struck between those long-ago soldiers and civilians has shaped the Federation and its people ever since. Rugged independence; reliance on yourself, your immediate neighbors or your comrades in arms; and little inclination to question the source of good fortune; these are the hallmarks of Circinian character.

The third major element in Circinian society is the small but steady stream of rough-and-ready individuals who gravitated to the Federation throughout its history, drawn by the belief that in a bandit realm, anything goes. Those who came intending to fleece or intimidate the common folk soon learned their error. They either left or became Circinian citizens themselves, often out of sheer admiration for the locals' refusal to be bullied. Others came to make their fortunes on the Periphery's ultimate frontier, especially during the colonial expansion of 2990-3020. The mining corporations of Zorn's Keep and Thadora's Land date from this period, as do the vast cattle- and grain-farming collectives of Andiron and Clayborne II. Bolstered by the abundant arable land on many colonized planets, the farmers' unions grew immensely powerful during the four decades of expansion, providing a solid portion of the wealth that President C. J. McIntyre drew upon to finance an enlargement of the Black Warriors from one to three regiments. From homesteaders to lostech prospectors to coltan- and gold-panners, adventurers of all stripes came to the Federation, seeking a new start. Con artists also came, several of whom accounted quite well for themselves in the card dens, pool halls and blood-sport arenas of the colonial boomtowns. On Circinus itself, the urban underworld went through a turbulent decade as newcomers duked it out with established criminal enterprises for a piece of the action. The

Black Warriors played their own role in all this, though teasing out the specifics remains the province of dedicated—and brave—scholars of colorful Periphery history.

Modern Machismo: Circinians Today

The Circinus Federation continues to draw fortune hunters and carpetbaggers, and its tough-guy ethos hasn't faded a bit. Circinian machismo—by no means confined to men—comes out in varied aspects of local life: the blood sports people watch, the rotgut liquor they prize, and especially the rough justice meted out to transgressors on many Circinian worlds. Federation settlements tend toward the small, most numbering less than ten thousand inhabitants and many less than six thousand. Policing is generally left to sheriffs and a staff of deputies, chosen by direct election or by lot from among the local adult population. Though police chiefs in cities larger than ten thousand must be ratified by the planetary governor, sheriffs need no more authority than that given them by their townsfolk—and in practice, planetary governors rarely question "the people's choice" even when Circinian law permits them to do so. (One famous exception was the 3043 election of Jane Havel in the capital city of Meridian on Deirdre's Den; rejected by Governor Guiseppe Bartolli at Little Bob McIntyre's demand, Havel challenged Bartolli to a game of five-card stud with the police chief's office as the prize. After Havel won a best-of-seven series, Bartolli gave up—and so did Little Bob McIntyre, who had little wish to touch off another round of unrest after the recent infighting that had decimated the armed forces at his disposal.)

In general, Circinian justice is tit-for-tat. You filch something of mine, I take something of yours; you damage my property, I damage yours. Trespassers get one warning shot well over their heads, or maybe two if the property owner is feeling generous. The third shot leaves a wound, and the fourth—assuming there is one—leaves you dead. Circinian citizens are legally permitted to shoot first and ask questions later, unless the trespasser has identified himself as either law enforcement or a member of the military (in which case, the citizen may remain armed, but is expected to refrain from shooting long enough for the sheriff's deputy or soldier to state his business). Harming a law officer or soldier is a serious offense; it carries the standard local punishment for intentional injury or murder, plus the offender's family must pay a sizeable fine to the injured officer (or the officer's family, in the case of a death).

Injury to or murder of a fellow citizen not guilty of unlawful trespass buys the offender a world of hurt—literally. The injured party gets to choose between demanding hefty compensation in money or property, or inflicting an equivalent injury on the transgressor. Murder is a hanging offense, complete with a gallows in the public square. Draconian measures like these make Circinian towns and cities remarkably violence-free; even in large urban centers, underworld activity is heavy on such non-violent pursuits as rigged gambling and con games.

Gambling, in fact, is a fervent pursuit among Federation citizens—cards, billiards, dice games, slot machines and just about anything else Circinian citizens can dream up. The runaway favorite, though, is blood



RIM COLLECTION

(3 October 3067)

Gillfillan's Gold [ISAP] — For a nation less than twenty years old, the Rim Collection has already seen more than its share of drama and upheaval. These six sleepy farm worlds forged a national government, established viable trade with their Periphery and Successor State neighbors, suffered vicious pirate assaults, saw their national leader assassinated and their government transformed, and ultimately sent their most persistent bandit nemesis packing into the Periphery's depths. All this in less than two decades—quite a record for a moderately prosperous handful of worlds whose people want nothing more than to quietly pursue their own happiness free from raiders or war.

Beginnings

The Rim Collection first came to life in the early 3040s, when the six worlds of Slewis, Otisberg, All Dawn, Caldarium, Waypoint and Gillfillan's Gold began discussing what was then a radical notion: forming a political union to foster "our future prosperity, beyond bare survival" (to quote the Collection Charter). All six worlds had once been part of the Rim Worlds Republic, and each had maintained sufficient historical archives to look back on that ancient time with nostalgia. Granted an "independence" they had never sought with the Republic's collapse, the worlds that would become the Collection spent the ensuing centuries living hand-to-mouth, unable to defend what little they could build from the depredations of Periphery bandits. By the late 3030s, the people were fed up. Perennial movements to ally with this or that neighboring world—all of which had previously foundered on the inhabitants' hard-learned reluctance to wholly trust anyone but themselves—began to look like a viable option. Backers of this notion dubbed their platform the Unification Movement, and started working to convince their friends and neighbors that the time for a formal alliance had come.

Despite widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo, the Unification Movement initially had trouble gaining traction. Not until 3043 would it find its most eloquent spokesman: James Moroney, a university professor turned farmer. Moroney had come to Gillfillan's Gold in search of a quiet life, but his past caught up with him when his friend William Roberts ran across one of Moroney's vidtaped lectures on self-determination. Roberts also happened to be a town councilman on Gillfillan's Gold, and a passionate backer of the Unification Movement. He saw in Moroney the stirring speaker the movement lacked, and determined to bring Moroney into the Unification fold.

Though initially reluctant to once again embark on a public life, Moroney couldn't help sympathizing with the cause, and within a year was traveling from world to world on a whistle-stop pro-Union speaking tour. By 3046, momentum had shifted firmly toward the proposed alliance. Then, in November of that year, a devastating raid on Otisberg exposed a seemingly insurmountable obstacle: the lack of a military capable of fighting off pirates. Even pooling their resources, the six worlds of the proposed Rim Collection could not raise or hire sufficiently battle-worthy troops to take on the more powerful bandit groups—and if the new alliance brought the increased prosperity it



sports. It starts small, with cockfights or staged battles between native creatures—for example, the hand-sized carnivorous reptiles called raptors, native to Hardisey's Haven. More serious gamblers can move up to bullfighting (Andiron) or bear-baiting (grizzly-like carnivores native to Deirdre's Den, pitted against dog packs kept in a half-feral state by their owners). The ultimate blood sport is the gladiator-style fighting popular on Zorn's Keep, where contestants duel to the death for 'Mechs and other battlefield salvage. These grim contests appear to be inspired by similar deadly competitions in the nearby Illyrian Palatinate, now part of the Marian Hegemony.

A hundred and eighty degrees removed from this kind of savagery is Circinian folk music, an art form little known except to connoisseurs of the genre. Circinian folk music offers a rare outlet for deep emotion; its ballads about the tragedies of life on the rim have a stark beauty matched by few other human cultures. With music such an important element in local life, most Circinians can at least carry a tune, and it's the rare citizen who can't play at least one instrument passably well. The sheer work required of life on most Federation planets doesn't leave much time for poetry or painting or theatre or dance, but a fellow with a fiddle or a girl with a guitar are fixtures of the cultural landscape. Collectors of folk recordings on Lyran and Free Worlds border planets have recently begun to popularize Circinian ballads, much to the amusement of local artists (who find it hugely funny that a bunch of "soft-handed Spheroids" will pay so well for songs about a lifestyle most of them couldn't hack for two minutes).

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promised, the Periphery's heavy hitters would surely come to plunder. Why, then, people began to ask, should we reach for more than the little we've got?

"All we'll become are fatter targets," read a pithy phrase in one letter to the editor of the *Pitldown Gazette* on Slewis, printed on 5 August 3047. Many erstwhile backers of Unification were beginning to think the same thing. Those who still believed in the cause argued that stronger economies would soon earn the Rim Collection the resources to hire reputable mercs, but couldn't offer more than guesses about how long that might take.

Aces in the Hole

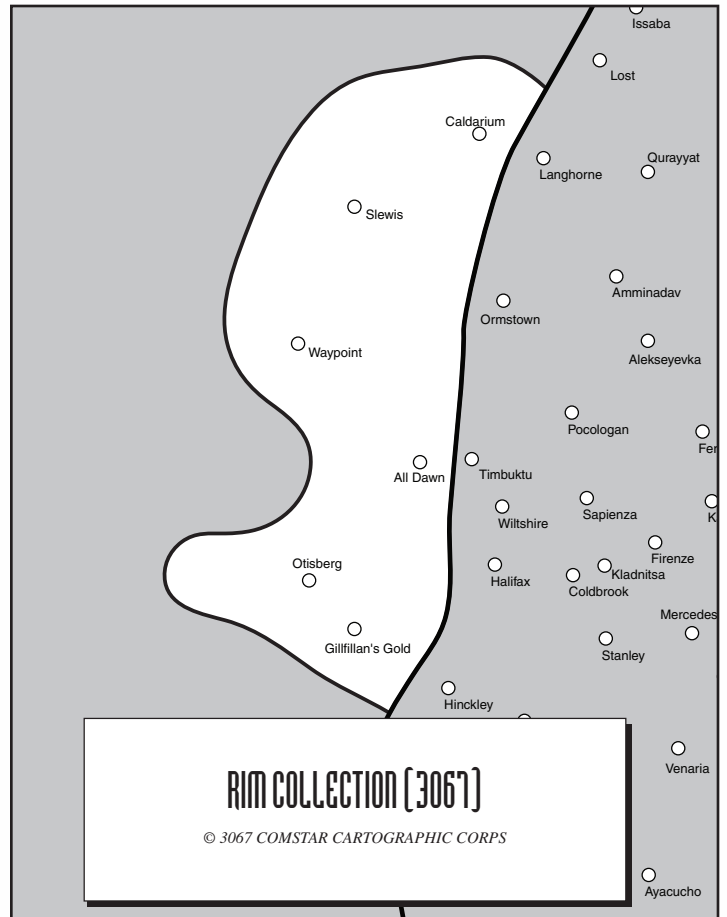
Then the pro-Union side caught a lucky break. Able's Aces, a mercenary unit led by a native son of Otisberg, came to Gillfillan's Gold on a re-supply run and chanced to hear one of Professor Moroney's Unification lectures. The speech so impressed Major Jerry Able that he offered his Aces as a volunteer military for the Rim Collection, and committed to training citizens of each Collection world as planetary militias. The Aces had sought a future in the Periphery, having been burned once too often by Inner Sphere employers. Working for the Rim Collection appealed to them, especially after Major Able offered to pay unit members out of his own pocket until the government could get on its feet.

Swift publicizing of the Aces' offer soon melted the remaining opposition, and in 3048 representatives from each of the six member worlds signed the Rim Collection Charter. A new nation was born, with James Moroney sworn in as its first President.

COMING OF AGE

Within five years of its formation, the Rim Collection began bartering with the Lyran half of the Federated Commonwealth. The 3057 Lyran secession merely strengthened these trade relations, which were swiftly followed by equivalent ties between Gillfillan's Gold and the border provinces of the Free Worlds League. The Collection Charter's guarantee of full sovereignty over each planet's own affairs slowed the pace of economic growth, as individual worlds could (and did) negotiate trade rights as they saw fit, but overall prosperity nudged steadily upward as the 3050s progressed. The relative weakness of the central government, however, posed a potential problem. Centralized authority existed in a Council of Planets, with one elected representative from each member world, presided over by the president (chosen by direct nationwide vote). As time went on, council members often found themselves at odds with the president, holding the rights and privileges of their homeworlds dearer than the overall good of the Rim Collection. The imbalance of power between president and council slowed government to a crawl, and even threatened to affect the Collection's overall military readiness if permitted to continue indefinitely.

Late in the decade, President Moroney and various political and business leaders began to push for alterations in the Collection Charter, seeking temporary expansion of presidential powers and the ceding of some planetary authority to a stronger central government. Through these measures, they hoped to further increase economic



expansion, ensure the equal spread of its benefits throughout the Collection worlds, and counterbalance many councilors' tendencies to put homeworld above nation. The ensuing political firestorm pitted the majority of the Council of Planets against Moroney and a large number of local politicians, as well as business leaders eager for a fast-track expansion of trade with other Periphery realms. The citizenry as a whole were evenly divided on the question, with passions running high among vocal minorities on both sides.

Those passions cost President Moroney his life in 3060, when a radical opposition group exploded a massive car bomb in the midst of the Presidential motorcade. Dozens of innocent citizens died along with Moroney, and the widespread destruction left many more homeless. This shocking act of violence, intended to bury Moroney's ideas along with his corpse, instead guaranteed their triumph. Councilman William Roberts, still a dear friend to the slain president despite heartfelt disagreement with his cause, easily won election to the presidency that year. When it became clear that powerful planetary councilmen were interfering with the investigation into Moroney's murder, Roberts underwent a profound change of heart. With staunch backing from Able's Aces and the very political and business leaders he had lately opposed, he placed the Rim Collection under martial law for half a year and rebuilt the central government from the ground up. At the same time, he did everything he could to foster closer ties between



Collection worlds and make clear to all citizens the benefits of the new order. The clearest signal he gave that the Collection had not started down the path to dictatorship was the bold gambit of calling for new national elections a mere three months after formally lifting the martial law decree. He subsequently ran his own campaign no differently than any other candidate, and mightily impressed enough of his fellow citizens to handily win re-election in mid-3061.

President Roberts has announced his intention to retire from office after the next national election, slated for January 3068. In the meantime, he continues to serve with vigor, determined to leave behind a stable Rim Collection with as bright a future as he can give it. Politically, militarily and economically, this tiny realm is already well on its way to achieving that dream.

MILITARY

The mercenary unit Able's Aces has so far admirably fulfilled Major Jerry Able's pledge to James Moroney and William Roberts nearly two decades ago. With the mercenaries' aid, the Rim Collection has gotten planetary militias up and running on all of its worlds. Top-notch training from many of the Aces' veteran warriors has enabled this small nation to field combined-arms units whose deadly competence in the battlefield far outweighs their relatively small size. Pirate raids remain troublesome, but more often than not the highly motivated militia soldiers manage to fight off the attackers. They did just that to the infamous pirate band Morrison's Extractors in 3062, in a campaign that ended with the Extractors beating a hasty retreat. Several militia soldiers expect the Extractors to come back for another round, and express grim confidence that the Collection's armed forces will be ready for them. So far, however, no new attackers have struck the Rim Collection. Several armed bands have passed through Collection space, their origins and destination unknown; the Aces and the Collection Militia have kept a wary eye on them, but so far these mysterious groups have confined their assaults to hit-and-run operations against Lyran Alliance border worlds.

For their part, the Aces have become more of a fixture in the Rim Collection. Paid for their services with a large landholding on Otisberg, they have come to see the Collection as their home, and fight hard to defend it. Major Able is a member of the Collection Council (successor to the Council of Planets), where he regularly weighs in on all matters regarding the nation's defense. In recent years, he has vocally opposed both the hiring of new mercenary units and proposals to open relations with the Word of Blake, who have repeatedly offered to release merc units under their contract to help defend the Rim Collection. The Aces as a whole express high confidence in the Collection Militia to protect their homeworlds without outside help—especially from the Blakists, whom Major Able is said to heartily dislike.

Battlefield Assets

Able's Aces and the Collection Militia together field four 'Mech battalions and a sizeable combined-arms unit that incorporates infantry and light armor. Militia infantry and armor troops excel at distracting and bogging down larger enemy forces until the 'Mechs can move in, and will frequently do so in order to avoid fighting in populated areas.

The Third Collection Armored Battalion recently finished its training on Otisberg and joined the ranks of the full-time militia. Built from salvage left behind by the Extractors, the Third contains several Star League-era 'Mechs from the pirate band's original lostech find.

ECONOMY

Since 3061, the six planets of the Rim Collection have coordinated their varied trade pacts with foreign states, opening up economic opportunity on a national scale rather than planet-by-planet. Trade in grain and rare minerals continues with Lyran and Free Worlds planets, and had reached respectable profit levels by 3062. The FedCom Civil War put a definite crimp in trade activity with the Lyrans, however, and the enormous costs of post-war reconstruction continue to affect that market.

The Free Worlds' five-planet Abbey District is a major customer for Rim Collection grain, fruit and livestock exports, and the so-called Southwestern Worlds are steady buyers of the native plumberrys so abundant on All Dawn. These thumb-sized, purplish fruits are gaining a reputation among gourmets for their unique flavor, a combination of blueberry and lemon. On Cerillos and its near neighbors, however, plumberrys are most valued when made into a potent wine.

The Rim Collection owes much of its increased trade to better HPG communications, the contract for which it finally awarded to ComStar in 3065. Though this apparent snub to the Word of Blake prompted the Free Worlds' Principality of Gibson to end trade negotiations, the Rim Collection has enough customers to feasibly supply with crops and ores at the moment, and easily weathered the loss of one. Periphery trading partners include the Taurian Concordat, which imports small quantities of iridium, and the Magistracy of Canopus, which buys native artisanal grains and other luxury foodstuffs from Slewis, Gillfillan's Gold and Waypoint. "Waypoint wheat," with its deep, nutty flavor, is particularly prized as a beer ingredient by the Magistracy's micro-brewery industry. Trade ties with the Illyrian Palatinate ended when the Marian Hegemony absorbed it, and have yet to resume.

Hunter's Paradise

This unusual planet, lying several jumps beyond the Rim Collection's borders in the Deep Periphery, has been a Collection protectorate since 3062, and has added considerable revenues to the national treasury. Strange and exotic predators abound on this world, a big draw in centuries past for Star League biologists and zoologists—and for wealthy big-game hunters seeking the ultimate challenge. Zookeepers and rich hunters from across known space converged on the planet to take down its impressively large and vicious predators, especially the dinosaur-like T-Rex II, until the Amaris Coup and the Succession Wars intervened. Abandoned to its native life forms, Hunter's Paradise slipped into obscurity.

When Rim Collection scouts rediscovered the world in the late 3050s, President Moroney reactivated its long-empty jump station, with an eye to eventually reopening Hunter's Paradise as the big-game resort it had once been. In the meantime, periodic hunting parties licensed by the Collection government bagged exotic animals for export to interstellar zoos, particularly those in the Lyran Alliance. After



MINOR PERIPHERY STATES



Moroney's untimely death, William Roberts successfully reopened Hunter's Paradise for big-game stalking. In the ensuing five years, the planet has begun to attract an ever-growing wealthy clientele, with all trade passing through the Rim Collection. Rumor has it that the visitors include Clansmen, who allegedly come to test their mettle against the planet's homegrown dangers.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Life goes at a slow pace in this agrarian mini-state, which suits the locals just fine. The level of prosperity they've achieved is more than enough for most; those few with a yen for brighter lights and bigger cities can easily afford to hop across the Lyran border or take ship to the Free Worlds League or some larger Periphery realm. Hospitality is freely given, and strangers are welcomed—albeit with a certain reserve until the natives are sure of your intentions. A few ugly incidents on Slewis and Waypoint between local women and the drunken crews of interstellar trading vessels have left their mark, and the “simple farmers” of the Rim Collection are a touch warier of outsiders than they used to be. (By all accounts, the women gave back as good as they got; after word got around, the number of incidents involving liquor and local girls dropped by some eighty percent.)

Ethnically and culturally, citizens of the Rim Collection are a mixed bunch, hailing from almost every realm in known space. The heavy Lyran contingent includes Germans, Dutch, Scandinavians and Scots-

Irish, while the Free Worlds League has contributed ethnic Italians, Bulgarians and Southeast Asians from the Principality of Regulus, as well as expatriate Anduriens. Han Chinese predominate among the latter, most of them dissatisfied with life in their native duchy but unwilling to live under the tight social controls of the Capellan Confederation. Illyrian Palatinate refugees came more recently, in large enough numbers to create their own small towns on Otisberg and Gillfillan's Gold. Immigration policies are relatively generous; President Roberts has been quoted as saying he “wouldn't mind doubling our eight-million-plus population over the next decade, if freedom-minded people want to come.”

Natives of the Rim Collection—those whose families trace their presence on its six planets all the way back before the Amaris Coup—tend to either embrace the newcomers as fellow liberty-seekers, or regard their attempts to adapt with quiet amusement (the latter especially with “citified Spheroids” who thought they wanted the simple life and now have to cope with its realities). Many of these “old-timers” cherish their ties to the ancient Rim Worlds Republic—“the real Republic,” they hasten to remind people, not the corrupted would-be empire created by the Amaris clan. A small faction of political junkies with pretensions to grandeur is pushing to revive the old RWR, using the Rim Collection as a starting point, but thus far they've found few takers. Most locals regard them as harmless cranks, and treat them accordingly.





RULES ANNEX

The following rules cover roleplaying settings as well as the *BattleTech* board game, allowing all types of players to emulate the unique qualities of Near Periphery inhabitants in their games.

A TIME OF WAR: THE BATTLETECH RPG

This section provides new rules to supplement those found in *A Time of War: The BattleTech RPG (BTRPG)*. These rules offer players and gamemasters additional features that can be used to enhance campaigns based in the states of the Near Periphery.

CREATURES

This section provides several new creatures native to worlds in the Near Periphery. All of them follow the rules for creatures presented in the *A Time of War: The BattleTech RPG*.



ALPHARD MUDSKIPPER (AMPHIBIUS ALPHARDIS)

The Alphard mudskipper resembles its Terran counterpart, except that it is wholly amphibious. Rather than using gills, it absorbs oxygen through the abundant capillaries just under its thin skin, as well as through blood-rich membranes between its fins and body. Its sturdy pectoral fins let it “walk” for short distances across its native mud flats, and two pairs of pelvic fins with suckers attached permit it to “climb” small obstructions in its path. It grazes on algae that grow on the mud flats of the Stella Maris, a giant inland freshwater sea that lies several kilometers outside Nova Roma. Over the years since humans began mining germanium on Alphard, the mudskipper has adapted to pollutants in the water supply, and has developed a high tolerance for toxins.

Alphard mudskippers are a local delicacy, tasting much like oysters. They are most often served in a fish soup or a ragout with local vegetables. Visitors to Alphard often describe the mudskipper as “an acquired taste.”

Homeworld: Alphard, Marian Hegemony

Environment: Shorelines of freshwater lakes

Type: Native

Body Shape: Six-legged with tail

Coloring: Deep brown with black spots

Length: 22 cm

Height: 10 cm

Weight: 0.2 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
1	1	4	4	4	3	2

Traits: Bad Vision, Good Smell, Shy, Toxic Immunity

Skills: AniMelee +0, Climbing +1, Swimming +3

Size: Tiny (−4)

Armor: —

Attack: [Bite: 0M (1)]

Movement: Ground 3/5/8; Sprinting 1 turn, Jumping 0.3 meter; Water 5/10; Diving 18

Notes: Amphibious creature.



BLUE RAPTOR (RAPTORUS AZURUS VANDENBURGII)

Native to New Vandenburg’s southern continent, the blue raptor is a small falcon, measuring about two handspans in length. It plays a vital role in the local ecosystem, keeping within bounds the teeming populations of large insects and small lizards that are its natural prey. The blue raptor is much prized for its brilliant plumage, which ranges from bright royal to deep midnight blue; the older the specimen, the deeper the shade of its feathers. Local artisans use them to decorate jewelry, or weave them into fans, belts, headbands and the like.

The blue raptor is likewise valued for what lies just under its colorful exterior: a thin biochemical film that scientists theorize is meant to help regulate internal temperature. This film acts as a potent hallucinogen, offering vivid waking dreams before sending users into a profound near-coma that lasts several hours.

RULES ANNEX



Homeworld: New Vandenburg, Taurian Concordat
Environment: Tropical woodlands and mountain areas
Type: Native
Body Shape: Winged
Coloring: Bright blue feathers, slightly deeper blue on the head; color deepens with age of specimen
Wingspan: 68 cm
Height: 34 cm
Weight: 0.9 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
2	1	2	7	3	5	3

Traits: Good Sight (2), Good Smell, Showy Coloring, Shy
Skills: AniMelee +4, Perception +5
Size: Extremely Small (-3)
Armor: Feathers [1/0/0/0]
Attack: [Beak, Talons: 1M (2)], [Poison: 0M (2D)]; Contact; 1 minute duration; 2 doses]
Movement: Ground 0.5/0/0; Air 60



CYGNUS CARIBOU (TAURINUS TARANDUS CYGNUSII)

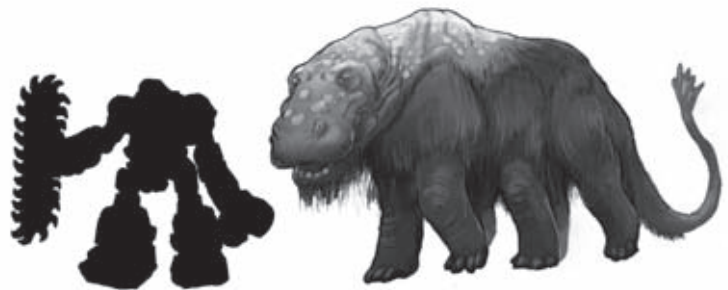
The Cygnus caribou travels in large herds across the tundras of its homeworld, subsisting on native grasses and flowers. When the first colonists arrived on Cygnus in 3057, they domesticated and bred the native caribou alongside cattle from their parent realms; the resultant offspring were better suited to the temperate lowland plains of the southern hemisphere, and have since become a staple of the local diet as well as a lucrative export. Domesticated Cygnus caribou meat has a distinctive tang, often compared to smoked deer. Gourmet cooks particularly covet wild caribou meat, whose stronger flavor makes a little go a long way toward spicing up a stew.

These peaceful creatures pose little threat, except when what locals call “the dream wind” is blowing—a rare confluence of weather patterns with the brief blooming season of the northern flower known as the tundra witch. Given the correct conditions, the flower’s mildly hallucinogenic pollen becomes airborne for several kilometers, and its effects can provoke a stampede if it crosses the path of a caribou herd.

Homeworld: Cygnus, Fronc Reaches
Environment: Tundra and temperate regions
Type: Native
Body Shape: Four-legged
Coloring: White or pale cream fur
Length: 245 cm
Height: 180 cm
Weight: 750 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
21	20	1	5	4	3	2

Traits: Bad Vision, Good Hearing, Good Smell, Quirk/Sensitive to Tundra Witch Pollen, Shy
Skills: Acrobatics +0, AniMelee +2, Perception +2
Size: Large (+1)
Armor: Furred hide [1/0/0/0]
Attack: [Bite: 1M (2)], [Ram: 2M (5)]
Movement: Ground 19/29/44; Water 2/3; Sprinting 12 turns; Jumping 4 meters
Notes: Cygnus caribou in ranch herds automatically receive the Domestic and Tamed Traits; When under Tundra Witch Pollen influence, Cygnus caribou receive the Aggressive Trait.



HIPPOSAUR (HIPPOSAURUS AMPHIBIUS VIXENIS)

The gigantic hipposaur is a big draw for visitors to Vixen’s famed nature reserves. The size of an apatosaur, its barrel-shaped body sits atop six elephant-like legs. Its broad, flat head is mostly snout, reminiscent of a Terran hippo’s, and a massive tail helps it keep its balance. A club-like, spiky bone deposit at the tail’s end provides defense against any fellow creature foolish enough to attack this giant beast.

The hipposaur lives in the dense forests along the Daana River, the longest river on Vixen’s southern continent. Rivaling Terra’s Amazon



RULES ANNEX

for size, the Daana offers vast amounts of vegetation for the hipposaur to eat, from algae and river weeds to the endless variety of plants on the riverbanks. Because it spends so much time partly submerged, the hipposaur sports two layers of fur: a short, dense inner layer that repels water, and a shaggier outer layer. Despite its size and deep, rumbling roar, the hipposaur proved docile enough to domesticate; tame hipposaurs often tow barges up and down the Daana, loaded with goods for the hunting settlements and science stations that dot the river's length.

Homeworld: Vixen, Magistracy of Canopus
Environment: Forests and rivers, moderate climates
Type: Native
Body Shape: Six-legged with massive tail
Coloring: Medium brown to black
Length: 2,200 cm
Height: 1,700 cm
Weight: 35,500 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
236	305	4	6	5	3	2

Traits: Good Smell (2), Shy, Terror
Skills: AniMelee (Ram) +3, Perception +3, Swimming +5
Size: Monstrous (+3)
Armor: Thick hide and fur [2/2/1/1]
Attack: [Bite, Tail Lash: 3M (10)], [Ram: 3M (25)]
Movement: 10/22/50; Water 15/35; Diving 3
Notes: Hipposaurs are amphibious. Tamed and Domesticated hipposaurs may be trained as pack animals or mounts.



KHOG (KHOGUS CANISOUS CIRCINUSII)

About the size of a large dog, this native lizard is a popular pet in the Circinus Federation. Its horns and armored hide make it resemble a small dinosaur, in odd contrast to its primate-like facial features. The adult male khog has three horns, two curving downward around its

head and a third upthrust from the center of its skull just above its heavy brow ridge. Adult females have only the central horn. Stegosaurus-like armored points continue down the creature's back, stopping at the base of the tail. The tail ends in a mace-like, bony appendage, a solid swing from which can break bone. The creature can also do damage with its thick claws and sharp teeth, though most khogs are gentler than they look and only fight when cornered.

Intelligent and trainable, khogs can carry message pouches in collars or transport items in small saddlebags. Circinian mechanics frequently use them to carry tools. Certain breeders with unsavory reputations train their khogs to fight—a popular blood sport at which money often changes hands.

Homeworld: Andiron, Circinus Federation
Environment: Temperate regions
Type: Native
Body Shape: Four-legged
Coloring: Pale green skin with gray mottling
Length: 120 m
Height: 90 m
Weight: 42 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
4	4	4	5	6	4	3

Traits: Cold-Blooded, Good Smell, Shy, Terror
Skills: AniMelee +3, Perception +4, Tracking +2
Size: Small (-1)
Armor: Hardened scales [2/1/0/1]
Attack: [Bite, Horns: 1M (3)], [Ram, Tail Swipe: 2M (4)]
Movement: Ground 7/19/55; Sprinting 3 turns; Jumping 2 meters
Notes: Tamed and Domesticated khogs may be trained as guard animals, trackers, hunters, and pack animals.

LEECH LOCUST (LOCUSTA CANIBALUS MARKNICKIS)

This strange insect lives in some of Marknick's least hospitable territory, migrating between the scattered oases of the Great Western Desert. The leech locust has a curving tail that ends in a hollow-point "stinger," used to absorb water and other fluids from whatever available source. Leech locusts travel in swarms in the hundreds, and when encountered at oases or other areas where water is plentiful, they are generally harmless. Migratory swarms, however, are another matter. Clouds of migrating locusts—often numbering in the thousands—frequently cover patches of sand at dawn, soaking





up the desert dew before Marknick's fierce sun burns it off. When this moisture source is unavailable, the locust swarms turn to others—often with deadly consequences.

Local miners love to regale offworlders with tales of “bug storms,” in which leech locust swarms converge on anything that crosses their migratory path. Drawn by the water in living cells, the locusts descend and attempt to suck the moisture out of any creature—or human—unlucky enough to get caught without protection.

Homeworld: Marknick, Calderon Protectorate

Environment: Desert, badlands

Type: Native

Body Shape: Winged

Coloring: Pale reddish-tan

Wingspan: 10 cm

Length: 7 cm

Weight: 0.04 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
0	0	4	6	1	1	1

Traits: Bad Vision (2), Good Smell (3), Night Blindness, Pack Hunter (300-1,800)

Skills: AniMelee +0 (bite), Tracking +2

Size: Tiny (-4)

Armor: —

Attack: [Bite: 0M (1)]

Movement: Ground 0.1; Air 85

Note: Aggressive and Blood Sucker Traits apply in the absence of open water bodies.



SELKIE (PHOCIDAE ARCTICUS LOTHIANUS)

Half again as large as the Terran seals they resemble, selkies are native to the arctic world of Lothario in the former Lothian League. These graceful beasts with soulful large eyes are gregarious among their own kind and deeply curious about humans, but become lethal predators beneath the waves. Their streamlined bodies and powerful, clawed flippers make them masters of the icy northern seas, where they prey on fish and small shore birds.

Selkie fur is among Lothario's best-known exports, though local trappers take care to keep their hunts within sustainable bounds.

Softer than cashmere and twice as warm, selkie pelts are naturally water repellent and come in gleaming white or deep brown. Since the Lothian League's absorption by the Marian Hegemony, the pace of hunting has stepped up somewhat, despite local regulation intended to protect these valuable animals. Lothian scientists have long debated the extent of the selkies' intelligence, and protestors are a regular sight at the breeding grounds where selkie hunts take place.

Homeworld: Lothario, Lothian Province, Marian Hegemony

Environment: Arctic and sub-arctic oceans

Type: Native

Body Shape: Two-legged

Coloring: White or dark brown fur

Length: 265 cm

Height: 90 cm

Weight: 112 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
5	6	4	7	6	6	2

Traits: Good Vision, Good Smell (2), Night Vision, Pack Hunter (2-6), Quirk/Curious

Skills: AniMelee +4, Perception +4, Swimming +5, Tracking +2

Size: Medium (+0)

Armor: Thick furred hide [1/1/0/0]

Attack: [Bite, Claws: 1M (3)]

Movement: Ground 5/10/15; Water 20/45; Diving 500; Sprinting 2 turns

Notes: -2 (-4 in packs of 4 or more) to Fight or Flight checks when encountered underwater.

SOLVENT VINE (VINEA DISSOLVERUS MILLIGANIS)

These carnivorous plants batten on the giant native trees of the southern jungles on Milligan's World, protecting them against wood-boring insects. Deep green and finger-thick, solvent vines are dotted with lavender “flowers” that are actually suckers. The suckers exude a sap that traps insects and small tree-dwelling creatures, while the vine exudes a dissolving compound that lets it ultimately absorb its trapped prey. Evolutionary adaptation has made the trees on which the vine grows impervious to these secretions.

The sticky sap causes no damage to humans, though it smells like rotting spinach and is hard to





RULES ANNEX

clean off. The vine itself gives a nasty burn wherever it touches, and can cut through bare skin in less than half a minute. Sap that gets through the skin in this fashion has the same effect as a mild snakebite. Vine juice in the eyes can cause permanent damage unless immediately flushed out.

Homeworld: Milligan's World, Outworlds Alliance

Environment: Tropical woodlands

Type: Native (Carnivorous Plant)

Body Shape: Plant

Coloring: Deep green with lavender "blossoms"

Length: 1,500 cm

Diam.: 2 cm

Weight: 80 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
0	3	0	0	0	0	0

Traits: Poisonous

Skills: —

Size: Very Small (-2)

Armor: —

Attack: [Vines: 0M (2)], [Vine Poison: 0M (3); Contact; 2 minute duration; 15 doses]

Movement: —



TARIQ (SAURUS TARIQUS BRASHAE)

This bipedal lizard stands just under two meters tall at the shoulder, and its ground-eating stride rivals the speed of some BattleMechs and vehicles. Like the ostrich of old Terra, a tariq can run with astonishing swiftness across the dunes and rocky flats of its homeworld. Fleshy deposits near the base of its short, thick tail allow it to store nutrients on which its body can function for several days in the absence of food and water. Its rough, wrinkled hide protects it from sand and grit, and a transparent inner eyelid likewise keeps desert detritus out of its eyes.

Tariqi feed on smaller lizards and the large waterfowl that frequent Brasha's oases. Highly intelligent, they are readily trainable if culled from their litters in the first three months after birth. Older tariqim are infamous for bad temper; when angry, they spit a viscous pinkish substance that stains whatever it touches and smells like rancid fish guts.

Homeworld: Brasha, Outworlds Alliance

Environment: Desert

Type: Native

Body Shape: Four-legged

Coloring: Sandy brown

Length: 275 cm

Height: 200 cm

Weight: 510 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
15	15	3	6	4	3	3

Traits: Bad Hearing, Cold-Blooded, Good Vision, Good Smell (2), Shy

Skills: Acrobatics +1, AniMelee +3, Perception +3, Stealth +1, Tracking +1

Size: Large (+1)

Armor: Scales [1/1/0/1]

Attack: [Bite, Claw: 1M (2)], [Spit: 0M (1)]

Movement: 35/70/100; Water 5/10

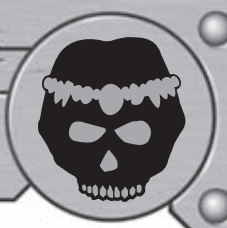
Notes: Tamed and Domesticated tariqim may be used as riding mounts. Older tariqim (7+ years of age) receive the Aggressive Trait (in place of the Shy Trait), whether or not they have the Tamed or Domesticated Traits.



THRAXAN DEVOURER (SERPENS MARES THRAXIS)

Native to its homeworld's vast southern ocean, the Thraxan devourer is a large sea serpent that weighs nearly a half ton at maturity, with impressive swimming speed and a hinged jaw that locks onto its prey with bone-crushing force. Thraxan devourers sometimes venture into shallow waters in search of food, and in summer pose a particular menace to swimmers and fishing boats. The devourer's pearl-gray hide can be cured into leather, and is much prized for its sheen and suppleness. Thraxan devourers molt twice a year, at the shift between the monsoon and dry seasons; the skins frequently wash up on beaches throughout the Crescent Archipelago. Uncured, devourer hide makes a handy substitute for sandpaper.

Thraxan devourers travel in schools of eight to fourteen, and each school has its own undersea territory. Adult devourers swim at



the edges of each school, keeping their offspring in the center for protection; devourers from other schools occasionally eat young not their own.

Homeworld: Thraxa, Magistracy of Canopus
Environment: Temperate and tropical oceans
Type: Native
Body Shape: Snakelike
Coloring: Pale gray
Length: 420 cm
Diam.: 95 cm
Weight: 480 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
36	65	2	6	4	6	1

Traits: Aggressive, Bad Vision, Cold-Blooded, Good Smell (3), Night Blindness, Pack Hunter (8-14), Terror
Skills: AniMelee (Bite Grip) +5, Perception +2, Stealth +3, Swimming +2
Size: Large (+1)
Armor: Scales [1/1/0/0]
Attack: [Bite: 1M (4)]
Movement: Water 30/50; Diving infinite
Notes: -3 to Fight or Flight checks when defending their school or territory



VETCHIN (AVIANUS ALAE QUADERIS SLEWESII)

This unusual bird is one of only a handful of known four-winged species in the Periphery, and is a favorite of bird-watchers throughout human-occupied space. Vetchin congregate in family groups of six to eight, roosting in large nests built in the bracken that covers the forest floor in Slewis' temperate woodland regions. Like Terran magpies, they

are attracted to shiny objects, and will appropriate anything they can carry in their dark blue beaks to decorate their hive-shaped bowers.

Vetchin plumage ranges from pale cream to dark brown, in mottled patterns that give excellent camouflage from predators. Males tend toward darker-tipped wing feathers, and vetchin chicks are covered in fluffy tan down. The male feeds his offspring, gathering and partially digesting worms and insects and then regurgitating them for the young. Female vetchin primarily warm and protect their chicks, attacking would-be predators with their sharp beaks and small, curved talons.

Homeworld: Slewis, Rim Collection
Environment: Temperate woodlands
Type: Native
Body Shape: Four-winged
Coloring: Mottled cream, tan and dark brown
Wingspan: 100 cm
Height: 50 cm
Weight: 1.3 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
1	1	3	6	2	5	2

Traits: Camouflage, Good Sight (2), Shy
Skills: AniMelee +1, Perception +5
Size: Extremely Small (-3)
Armor: Feathers [1/0/0/0]
Attack: [Beak, Talons: 1M (2)]
Movement: Ground 1/—/—; Air 95
Notes: -2 to Fight or Flight checks when defending their nests



WATER HORSE (EQUUS OCEANUS HARDISEIUS)

This Plesiosaur-like ocean-dweller has a horse-shaped head on a long neck and a pair of jointed front fins. Its vicious teeth and fantastic swimming speed make it one of the Circinus Federation's deadliest native carnivores; it earned its name from a mythical Celtic sea monster known for devouring hapless swimmers and sailors. The creature's size adds to its lethality; water horses often ram the gunboats that hunt them, sometimes breaking the vessels wide open and dumping their luckless crews into the chilly waters.



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The water horse ranges in length from three to nearly four meters, and measures roughly one to two meters from flipper tip to flipper tip. Each individual bears distinct mottling patterns of green and blue. Its natural prey are its fellow ocean-dwellers, from large fish to smaller aquatic mammals—though it will gladly make a meal out of an unlucky hunting party. Its tough hide makes it extremely hard to kill without specialized harpoons.

Homeworld: Hardisey's Haven, Circinus Federation

Environment: Cold-water oceans

Type: Native

Body Shape: Two-legged with massive tail

Coloring: Mottled greenish-blue

Length: 300 cm

Diam: 120 cm

Weight: 1,000 kg

STR	BOD	DEX	RFL	INT	WIL	EDG
27	24	1	5	4	4	2

Traits: Aggressive, Bad Vision, Blood Rage, Good Hearing (2), Good Smell (2), Showy Coloring, Terror

Skills: AniMelee (Ram) +5, Perception +4, Swimming +3

Size: Large (+1)

Armor: Hardened hide [3/2/1/1]

Attack: [Bite: 2M (2)], [Ram: 3M (4)]

Movement: Water 15/50; Diving infinite

PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

The equipment described below follows the standard rules for *A Time of War: The BattleTech RPG*.

PEQUOD MK I/MK II HARPOON GUNS

Adapted from mountain-climbing gear, Taurus Territorial Industries (TTI) manufactures two versions of its Pequod Harpoon Gun: a pistol-sized model for land and space use, and a rifle-sized, wireless version for use underwater. The smaller Mark I Pequod fires a hardened alloy bolt with a length of tensile cable attached. The user climbs up or rappels down the cable, after which he can disengage the bolt using tiny explosive charges near its barbed tip. The bolt can penetrate solid rock to a depth of 20 cm, and easily punches through most armor.

The wireless Heavy Pequod harpoon gun makes for a nasty weapon, and is frequently deployed by TDF forces in SCUBA gear. Like its smaller counterpart, it has a barbed tip packed with explosive charges, and can easily penetrate most 'Mech and vehicle armor.

Game Rules: Harpoon guns function as standard ballistic weapons, except that they are amphibious, and so penalties for attacks made while submerged (and based on *being* submerged) do not apply.

The Pequod Mark I's cable can extend to full length and be used to aid Climb Skill Action Checks as a Grapple Rod, providing a +3 roll modifier to such Actions. Reloading the weapon is a Simple Action, while disengaging the cable after firing is counted as an Incidental Action. When the cable is disengaged, the explosive tip will inflict additional explosive damage [3X (2)] to the target surface.

The Pequod Mark II does not use a cable, and so cannot deliver additional damage. Like the Mark I, reloading the weapon's two-shot magazine takes a Simple Action.

VIBRO-MACE

Circinians love their blood sports, the more brutal the better. A particularly vicious weapon of choice in Circinian "death brawls" is the vibro-mace, a high-tech version of its infamous medieval namesake. Unlike a vibroblade, which uses its rapid-vibration cycle to cut, the vibro-mace literally pulverizes whatever its spherical, spike-studded surface strikes. As few combatants in Circinian arenas can afford heavy-duty armor, it rarely takes long for a powerfully wielded vibro-mace to shred light plate, chain mail or boiled leather armor and reach vulnerable flesh.

Game Rules: Because it is much bulkier than comparable vibro-weapons (due to the cruder Periphery standards with which it was developed), the Vibro-Mace user suffers a -1 roll modifier to all attacks made using this weapon.

BREACHING FRAME

A joint design project between Clan Snow Raven and Outworlds Alliance engineers from Lushann Industries, the breaching frame is a deep-space rescue device for ships in distress. This collapsible framework of linear shaped charges folds up to fit into a large duffel that can be worn over the shoulder of a standard marine's spacesuit. Unfolded, the frame is attached to the ship's hull with magnets, and then detonated from a safe distance. The explosion cuts a rectangular panel out of the ship's armor, which is blown outward by the vessel's own internal air pressure. Marine units can then enter the ship through the opening.

Game Rules: When using a breaching frame as part of a boarding action, the user must spend a complex action setting the frame up and attaching it to the target hull (after successfully "landing" on the target, of course). A Demolitions Skill roll is then needed to successfully deploy the frame and create a breach. Failure means the frame may have cracked the hull but failed to blow a sufficient hole for marines to enter. On a fumbled Action Check, a premature detonation results, and the user suffers half the normal blast damage effect as though standing 1 meter away from the frame.

When using the Boarding Action rules in *Tactical Operations* (p. 199) and *Strategic Operations* (p. 25), units targeted by a successful boarding action using a breaching frame suffer 1 point of standard-scale hull damage from the frame's use. (Capital-scale armor is still breached, but the damage is not significant enough to be tracked against the unit's armor.) The use of a breaching frame also grants the marine boarding party a +1 to their control roll on the first turn after boarding the target vessel.

PATCHWORK ENVIRO-SUIT

The patchwork enviro-suit takes its name from the bio-polymer of which it is made, which was originally intended to patch up punctured environment suits. Developed by mining company scientists in the Marian Hegemony, this bio-polymer combines the standard material



for enviro-suits with a growth compound extracted from algae native to the Stella Maris. The resultant material is tougher than standard polymer and can “grow” like a living organism over worn spots until it reaches a predetermined thickness. While no HarJel (the bio-polymer is too flexible and thin for combat armor, and has a “shelf-life” of only 30 years at best—after which it is no better than standard light armor) patchwork polymer automatically repairs itself whenever its material begins to thin. This has proven to be a valuable property in the Periphery, where replacement enviro-suits are hard to come by and constant re-use of equipment is a way of life.

In addition to entire patchwork suits, patchwork repair kits for standard suits are available, at considerably reduced cost.

Game Rules: The patchwork bio-polymer compound only becomes truly active when an environmental suit suffers damage that reduces its personal armor BAR values. The regrowth rate for the polymers effectively recoups up to 1 BAR value per 10 full rounds, but only in for 1 damage type at a time (Melee, Ballistic, Energy, or Explosive) starting with the damage type taken, and then repairing other “types” at random. Thus, if a standard Patchwork Suit with an Armor Value of 3/2/3/2 suffers damage from a laser weapon (Energy) that reduces its BARs to 2/1/2/1, the bio-polymers will recover the suit’s Energy BAR point first after 10 rounds (50 seconds), creating a suit that has an AV of 2/1/3/1 before repairing another category (Melee, Ballistic, or Explosive) at random.

If the suit sustains additional damage before the regrowth process is completed, the repair time resets, and repairs start again, focused on the most recent damage (and damage type). If any of the enviro-suit’s armor values drop to zero, the suit loses its environmental protection capabilities, but will continue to self-repair until all of its BAR values are reduced to 0. A suit that loses all of its BARs is effectively destroyed, and will not restore any further BAR points.

Neither patchwork suits nor patchwork patch kits can attain a BAR value greater than 3 for any damage type. Furthermore, over time, both the kits and the suits themselves begin to lose their self-repairing capabilities as the bio-polymer starts to decay. For every 5 years after the suit or patch is first created, its repair time doubles (so, a 6-year old suit takes 20 turns to repair 1 point of BAR, while an 11-year-old suit takes 40 turns). At 30 years of age, patchwork suits and patch kits lose their self-repair feature altogether, and function as standard personal armor.

STASIS TUBE

These items are a holdover from the Magistracy of Canopus’ long-ago days as a Star League Territorial State. With advanced technologies dating from the mid-27th century, stasis tubes permit cryogenic preservation of human beings—most often terminal patients, whose lives can be prolonged until a cure for their condition exists. Even in the first Star League’s heyday, stasis tubes tended to be an option for the rich, including some of the Magistracy’s wealthiest noble families. Post-Amaris Civil War, several noble scions donated their tubes to major hospitals on Canopus IV and Luxen, where they remain to this day. (The Clans have likewise retained this technology, but use it only sparingly.)

Precision Instruments of Luxen still manufactures replacement electronics for these valuable artifacts as needed, but the First

Succession War cost humanity the technical knowledge of how to make many of the key systems that flash-freeze and thaw the patient without causing devastating cell-crystallization damage in the process. Without it, new tubes cannot be made, and so the stasis tube remains a rare and expensive item.

Game Rules: Stasis tubes are a miraculous technology, but can be extremely dangerous to their subjects, particularly during the freezing process, over extended periods of use, or when suffering from power loss. Functional stasis tubes can successfully freeze or thaw a single subject over a period of 24 hours, and maintain a subject in a state of suspended animation in which each year spent in stasis equates to a day’s worth of normal aging.

In gameplay, the subject being placed in a stasis tube must make special BOD Attribute Checks at the end of the freezing process, at the end of each full year spent in stasis, and in the event of a power failure. No check is required during the thawing process. Success in all of these checks means the subject suffers no ill effects from the stasis process, while failure can have grave consequences.

The Freezing Process: At the end of this freezing process, the subject in a stasis tube must make two successful BOD Attribute Checks to determine whether or not the brain and the body survived the freezing process. A –2 roll modifier applies to both Checks. The first check is for the subject’s brain, while the second is for the subject’s body. If either check fails, the corresponding Attribute (INT for brain, BOD for body) is reduced to 0 (and the subject is considered dead, either due to brain death—if INT is reduced to 0—or organ failure—BOD reduced to 0). If neither Check fails, the subject survives the freezing process without harm.

While in Stasis: While frozen (and as long as the stasis tube receives constant power), the subject continues to age, but at an incredibly reduced rate—roughly equating to 1 day’s worth of aging for every year spent in stasis. However, at the end of each year in stasis, the subject must make a single BOD Attribute Check, with a –1 roll modifier applied. If this roll fails, the subject’s body suffers a 1-point Attribute loss in both BOD and INT, reflecting damage to the subject’s body and brain. If, through this reduction, either the subject’s INT or BOD is reduced to 0, the subject dies as described above. A body or brain reduced to 0 Attribute points will not survive the thaw process—largely due to crystallization in the patient’s cells.

A subject successfully revived from stasis after suffering point losses in BOD or INT (either during freezing or while in stasis) may also suffer secondary effects such as localized paralysis, sensory damage, compromised immunity, and a variety of unusual ailments. The nature and extent of these effects must be determined by the game master, and can be reflected by an appropriate negative Trait (such as Compulsion, Glass Jaw, Handicap, Slow Learner, or Thin-Skinned).

Stasis Tube Power Loss: If, at any point, a stasis tube suffers any power interruptions longer than 1 day (including loss of any back-up power systems; most of the stasis tubes that have survived the Succession Wars have lost their backup power systems and therefore are reliant on local power grids and such), the subject within must make BOD Attribute Checks to avoid damage. A roll modifier of –3 applies to this roll as the stasis tube automatically attempts an emergency thawing



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process. Failure of this roll results in the subject's immediate loss of 1 BOD point and sudden death from "Sudden Stasis Shock" unless an attending operator (a character with a Medtech Skill level of 2 or higher) makes a successful Medtech Skill Action Check with a MoS of 4+. Either way, the stasis process is stopped and the subject must be fully revived before the process can begin again.

Note that most of the stasis tubes to survive the Succession Wars have operated for centuries without spare parts. To reflect the increased dangers of using these aging tubes, the game master may apply additional roll modifiers of -1 to -4 for all Attribute and Medtech Checks made by both the subject and any attending medical personnel.

NEW WEAPON TRAIT: AMPHIBIOUS (AMPH.)

While most modern military equipment has been adapted to function in various environments—many downright hostile to their delicate components—few can function normally outside of their intended ideal conditions. Most weapons, in fact, function perfectly

well in vacuums as well as in atmosphere, but experience a sharp decline in accuracy or range underwater (with some more primitive models ceasing to function at all). Amphibious weapons are built to function equally well underwater as well as in the open air (or in vacuum).

Non-Amphibious Weapons: If used underwater (not counting enclosed, airtight spaces such as within a submarine), any firearms or electronic equipment *without* this trait suffer a -2 roll modifier for all Action Checks made if they have a Tech Level rating of C or higher, reflecting difficult operating conditions. Firearms and electronic equipment used underwater without the Amphibious trait and a Tech Rating of B will suffer a -4 roll modifier for all Action Checks, and will malfunction on a fumbled Action Check (even if they do not have a Misfire feature). Firearms and electronic equipment without the Amphibious trait and a Tech Rating of A may not be used underwater (and will automatically fail if attempted).

Unpowered weapons without this Trait receive a -2 roll modifier (reflecting poor conditions).

PERIPHERY EQUIPMENT TABLE (BTRPG STATS)

Weapon	Skill	Eqpt. Ratings	Damage Ratings	Range (meters) S/M/L/E	Shots	Cost/Reload	Wt.	Notes
Pequod Mk I	Small Arms	B/B/C	3B (3)	8/12/25/30	1	350 / 2	2.3 kg	Amphibious, +5 Climbing
Pequod Mk II	Small Arms	C/B/D	4B (4)	18/35/65/90	2	700 / 5	4.1 kg	Amphibious
Vibro-Mace	Melee Weapon	D/E/E	3M (5)	—	3*	540 / *	6 kg	-2 to roll
Breaching Frame	Demolitions	C/C/D	10X (10)	—	—	250	3 kg	Blast (quarter radius)

Non-Weapon	Skill	Eqpt. Ratings	BAR (M/B/E/X)	Cost/Patch	Wt.	Notes
Patchwork Enviro-Suit	—	C/C/B	3/2/3/2	600/30	—	Patchwork patch kits are compatible with conventional suits; self repair time = 1 BAR per 10 turns (max 3 BAR for M and E; 2 BAR for B and X).
Stasis Tube	MED	D/E/D	—	500,000	1,200 kg	Power use: 10/day; Capacity: 1 person; BOD Check -2 to freeze/thaw; -1 BOD/INT per year (round up) on failed BOD Check -1; Freeze/thaw time: 24 hours.

*Power points per shot, not bullets in magazine; ammo cost is that of the power pack used.

CBT INFANTRY PLATOON CONSTRUCTION DATA

Item	Tech (Rating)	Class/Type (Damage Type)	Base Range	Damage (each)	Weight of Weapon/ Ammo (Shots)	Crew	BV
Pequod Mk I	IS (B)	Small / Standard (B)	0	0.02	2.3 kg / 0.3 kg (1)	1	0.02
Pequod Mk II	IS (C)	Small / Standard (B)	1	0.06	4.1 kg / 0.1 kg (2)	1	0.06
Vibro-Mace	IS (D)	Small / Melee (P)	0	0.26	6.0 kg / 0.3 kg (10)	1	0.26
Breaching Frame	IS (C)	Small / Support (B)	0	0.75	3.0 kg / NA (1-D)	1	0.75



Any normally non-amphibious personal items modified for amphibious use increase their cost by 10 percent and their weight by 5 percent (rounded up to the nearest kilogram). At the game master's discretion, some items may not be capable of supporting an amphibious modification.

SUPPORT VEHICLES

MAJESTIC-CLASS PLEASURE CRUISER

Though the Canopian economy has had its share of ups and downs over the centuries, a hallmark of the realm has always been its pleasure industries. It comes as little surprise, then, that many of the most famous oceangoing passenger liners in known space belong to the various pleasure fleets of the Magistracy of Canopus. And of these floating palaces, few can compare to the stately *Majestic* class, the first of which—the LPS *Majestic*—hit the ocean waves on Luxen in 3044.

Commissioned by the locally based Luxen Trans-Oceanic Enterprises (LTOE), the *Majestic* is based loosely on the much older *Atlantia*-class once manufactured on the Canopian pleasure capital of Hardcore. To date, over 20 of these vessels ply the oceans across Canopian space, shipped in parts and assembled by roving tech crews on site (for a modest additional fee).

Built for long, pleasant voyages with all the amenities (the typical voyage can run two weeks or more with occasional port-calls for supplies), the *Majestic* class uses an inexpensive internal combustion engine and has an operating range of 5,000 kilometers. Its one thousand guest quarters—available in First-class, Second-class, and even an economical “business class”—all have access to the services of a dedicated staff nearly 200 strong. Three fully stocked kitchens are located on the primary recreational decks, which also offer three separate community pools, as well as two spas, five saunas, three holoivid game rooms, two casinos, and even a self-contained shopping mall. The addition of a helipad and bays for two VTOLs have offered more affluent guests the luxury of private island tours or even unscheduled visits both on- and off-ship.

To deter the occasional sea-faring pirates, the *Majestic* features a small arsenal of weapons, mostly anti-personnel machine guns that ring the hull (but are typically concealed from the passengers' view), as well as a rear-mounted SRM launcher typically loaded with incendiary ordnance or flares. These weapons are in turn tied to an advanced fire control system on par with modern military technology, and backed up by a military-grade communications suite to call in coast guard aid if necessary.

Type: **Majestic-class Pleasure Cruiser**

Chassis Type: Surface Vessel, Large

Tonnage: 30,000 (Template D)

Equipment Rating: D/X-X-D/E

Equipment		Mass
Chassis/Controls:		5,865
Engine/Trans:	ICE (Petrochemical)	4,320
Cruise MP:	2	
Flank MP:	3	
Heat Sinks:	0	0
Fuel (5,000 km):		2,160
Armor Factor (BAR 5):	1,225	49
	<i>Internal Structure</i>	<i>Armor Value</i>
Fore	45	215
Fore-Left/Right	45	200
Aft-Left/Right	45	200
Aft	45	210

Weapons and Ammo	Location	Tonnage
2 Machine Guns	Front (1)	1
2 Machine Guns	Left/Right (2)	1
2 Machine Guns	Left/Right (3)	1
2 Machine Guns	Left/Right (5)	1
2 Machine Guns	Left/Right (6)	1
2 Machine Guns	Rear (7)	1
Ammo (MG) 600	Body	3
SRM 2	Rear (7)	1
Ammo (SRM) 50	Body	1

Crew: 12 officers, 58 enlisted/non-rated, 180 “guest support” crew

Life Boats: 40 (maritime)

Vehicle Bays

2 Light Rear (7) 1 Door

Helipads

1 Rear (7)

Cargo

Basic (6,500 tons) Body 2 Doors (1 Aft-Left, 1 Aft-Right)

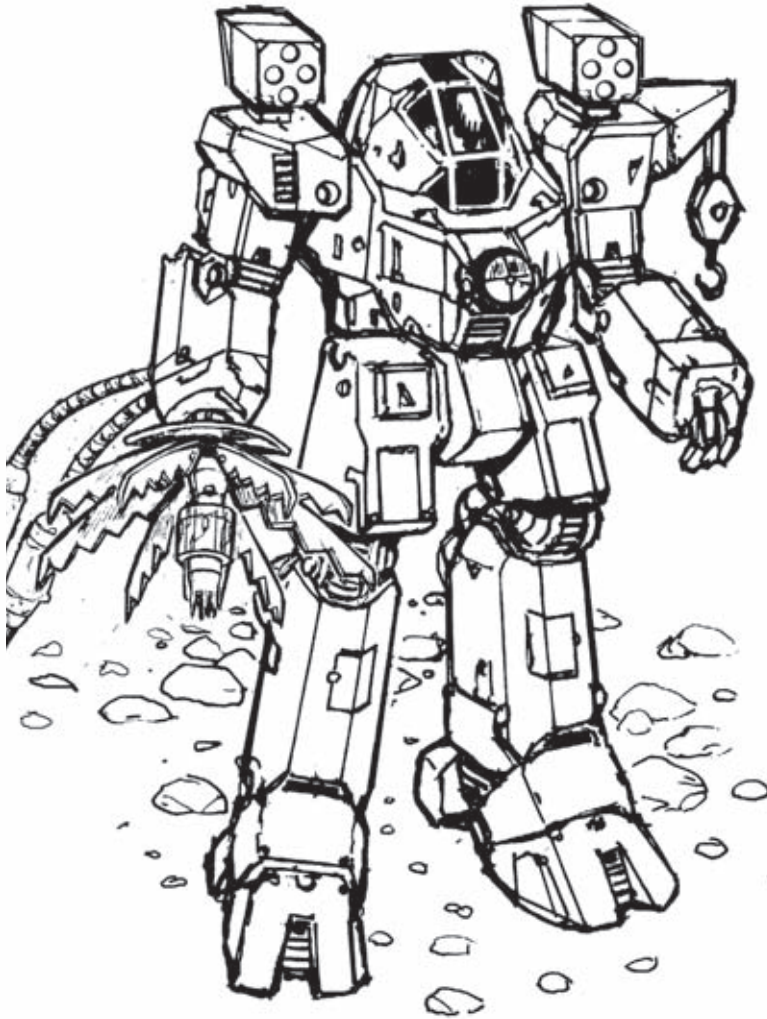
Liquid Storage Body 2 Doors (1 Front-Left, 1 Front-Right)

Notes: Features Advanced Fire-Control System (1 ton), Communications Equipment (2 tons), 3 field kitchens (9 tons), 1 MASH unit with 4 operating theaters (6.5 tons), 3 mounted searchlights (1.5 tons; 2 front, 1 rear), 200 First-Class passenger quarters (2,000 tons), 400 Second-Class passenger quarters (2,800 tons), 400 Steerage-Class passenger quarters (2,000 tons), 180 additional crew quarters (1,260 tons).





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AM-PRM-RH7 "ROCK HOUND" PROSPECTOR WORKMECH

Mass: 40 tons

Chassis: AML IndySteel PrM Series

Power Plant: Alliance 160 Fuel Cell

Cruising Speed: 43 kph

Maximum Speed: 64 kph

Jump Jets: None

Jump Capacity: None

Armor: StarSlab/6

Armament:

2 Shannon Fore SRM-4 Launchers

Manufacturer: Alliance Motors, Limited

Primary Factory: Sevon

Communications System: Garret T10B

Targeting and Tracking System: O/P 911-C

Overview

On the hardscrabble worlds of the Periphery, explorers and entrepreneurs have been drawn into the wastelands or ruined cities, seeking fortune in the lost riches of a bygone era, particularly on those worlds ravaged by the final battles between the SLDF and Periphery rebels. These same regions, and their promise of riches, have drawn more than their share of pirates as well, making such expeditions of "lostech prospecting" a dangerous venture, even in the best of times.

It is for the fortunate few prospectors who have turned to IndustrialMechs to aid them in these efforts that the likes of Sevon-based Alliance Motors' "Rock Hound" ProspectorMech was clearly built. As one of the biggest WorkMech producers in the Periphery, it is hardly surprising that the Outworlds Alliance would develop such a design, especially in an age and region where WorkMechs are often jury-rigged to carry weapons to deter bandits and deal with particularly dangerous local fauna.

Capabilities

The AM-PRM-RH7 "Rock Hound" ProspectorMech is a middleweight design built primarily for exploration in hazardous terrains where conventional vehicles may be hard-pressed to enter. Although built as an IndustrialMech, it is powered by a fuel cell engine, makes use of military grade armor, and is armed with twin 4-pack Shannon Fore SRM launchers (imported from the Taurian Concordat) slaved to a military fire control system. Combined, these systems enable the "Rock Hound" to seriously threaten the more common light BattleMechs favored by bandits, and is downright dangerous to hostile vehicles and infantry—even though the 'Mech's relative lack of heat sinks tends to force its pilot to use such weapons only sparingly.

A powerful rock cutter and a lift hoist help the "Hound" in its primary mission of exploration, however. A high-power searchlight is even incorporated for nighttime or underground work far from light sources, and the machine even features a pilot ejection system in the event of catastrophe—a capability not commonly seen on WorkMech designs.

Deployment

Alliance Motors has sold its ProspectorMech design to scores of private interests, but by far the biggest buyers have been major Periphery states like the Taurian Concordat and the Magistracy of Canopus, and the Interstellar Expeditions group (who—according to some rumors—largely funded the design's creation). Since its introduction in 3042, "Rock Hounds" (and variants thereof) have appeared in all corners of the Inner Sphere.

Variants

Numerous custom variants of the "Rock Hound" are known to exist across the Inner Sphere, but Alliance Motors only offers three main variants of this WorkMech: the RH7A "Rock Otter", the RH7C "Rock Possum", and the RH7S "Space Hound".

The amphibious "Rock Otter" expands on its utility with the inclusion of environmental sealing, enabling it to operate both underwater and in vacuum. The weight and internal arrangement of this design,



however, necessitates removing the pilot ejection system as well as the right side SRM-4, a heat sink, and a half-ton of armor.

The “Rock Possum” cargo variant likewise drops an SRM-4 and heat sink in favor of a right-torso internalized three-ton cargo bay.

The “Space Hound” is by far the most radical modification. Though visually similar to the standard model—right down to the centerline searchlight, this version sports a fusion engine instead of the Alliance 160 Fuel Cell, and trades the ejection seat, SRMs and lift hoists for environmental sealing, a pair of jump jets, and two tons of reaction mass specifically for use in microgravity vacuum environments. For weaponry, this model carries a small laser and a mining drill on its right arm, while its left torso contains a single-ton bay for cargo.

Type: **AM-PRM-RH7 “Rock Hound” ProspectorMech**

Technology Base: Inner Sphere IndustrialMech

Tonnage: 40

Equipment Rating: D/X-X-E/E

Equipment		Mass
Internal Structure:	IndustrialMech	8
Engine:	160 Fuel Cell	7.5
Walking MP:	4	
Running MP:	6	
Jumping MP:	0	
Heat Sinks:	2	1
Gyro:		2
Cockpit:	IndustrialMech	3
Armor Factor:	104	6.5
	<i>Internal Structure</i>	<i>Armor Value</i>
Head	3	8
Center Torso	12	12
Center Torso (rear)		6
R/L Torso	10	10
R/L Torso (rear)		6
R/L Arm	6	10
R/L Leg	10	13

Weapons and Ammo	Location	Critical	Tonnage
SRM 4	LT	1	2
Ammo (SRM) 25	LT	1	1
Ejection Seat	H	1	.5
SRM 4	RT	1	2
Lift Hoist	LA	3	3
Mining Drill	RA	4	3
Searchlight (Mounted)	CT	1	.5

Notes: Features Advanced Fire Control

COST OF LIVING IN THE NEAR PERIPHERY

The realms of the Near Periphery are a study in contrasts—some nearly as prosperous as parts of the Inner Sphere, others hardscrabble places where barter is the order of the day. Cost of living therefore can vary widely from realm to realm and even from world to world within a realm. On planetary capitals and major business centers in the larger states—worlds like Taurus, Canopus IV, Alpheratz, New Vandenburg, Luxen and so on—wages and prices are comparable to those on reasonably well-off Inner Sphere planets. Less economically developed regions like the Rim Collection and the Circinus Federation can boast modest prosperity on their capital worlds, but living standards remain somewhat rougher elsewhere. The Fronc Reaches and the Calderon Protectorate are in a class by themselves; both are new to independence, and the circumstances through which they achieved it are still playing out.

In general, living standards are comparable to the Inner Sphere in the Magistracy of Canopus and the Taurian Concordat—in the former through benefits derived from the Trinity Alliance, in the latter despite obligations imposed by that same agreement. The Taurians’ ongoing war with the FedSuns and the shock of the Calderon Protectorate secession have yet to inflict major economic damage, though consumer confidence is definitely shaky.

The Outworlds Alliance is beginning to reach economic stability comparable to moderately prosperous Inner Sphere regions. A nouveau-riche class has sprung up on Alpheratz and industry centers like Ramora and Lushann, fueled by the burgeoning armaments industry and all the endeavors that support it. This means that costs for housing, food and fuel can vary wildly in different areas on these worlds, depending on the intensity of local demand. The Typical Salary and Price Guide Table below gives rough guidelines for living expenses, but the gamemaster can deviate from these at his discretion.

The Marian Hegemony is just starting its own renaissance of sorts, prompted by the territorial conquests and reforming energies of the new Caesar. Though living standards remain generally lower than in the Concordat or the Magistracy, this former pirate realm is catching up to the newly prosperous Outworlds Alliance on certain worlds: most prominently the national capital of Alphard and the Palatinate Province capital of Illyria. Lothario, capital of the Lothian Province, remains somewhat behind as its people continue to rebuild after nearly a decade of guerrilla warfare against Marian forces.

The Circinus Federation, by contrast, is slowly sliding down the economic ladder. Never much to begin with, the Federation recently lost two planets to the Marian Hegemony, and the sudden death of President “Little Bob” McIntyre has not helped matters. President Calvin McIntyre remains an unknown quantity as a leader, and the realm suffers from near-pariah status among potential trading partners in the region. Life here is hardscrabble, with barter the primary means of exchange on worlds aside from Circinus.

The tiny Rim Collection and the Fronc Reaches are doing reasonably well, slowly building modest but solid economic bases through trade and ongoing planetary development. The Rim Collection lacks the



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resources to ever become an economic heavy-hitter, and the Fronc Reaches is too dependent on keeping the goodwill of its former parent realms to grow too big too fast, but the peoples of both regions aspire to nothing more than a decent living standard while staying free to work out their own futures. Living costs in these regions match those of poorer but stable Inner Sphere planets.

The Calderon Protectorate is a nation under siege. Too little time has passed since its break from the Taurian Concordat to seriously damage local living standards, but the Concordat continues to blockade Protectorate worlds, and spot shortages of various items are not uncommon. Smuggling is becoming an ever-greater part of the Protectorate economy, giving the black market immense importance. All of these factors are reflected in the Typical Salary and Price Guide Table below.

The table shows average salaries for various economic and social classes in the Near Periphery by realm, with percentage modifiers based on the location and importance of a given world, as well as the relative cost and availability of equipment in such regions. The equipment

modifier tables allow players to determine the cost, availability and legality of equipment and services in each region as well, with the cost expressed as a percentage of the item's listed price and the availability modifiers given in terms of rating levels. Positive modifiers increase the percentage of the item's cost, or its equipment levels as indicated, making items harder to acquire, while negative modifiers reduce cost or levels.

In many cases, the gamemaster determines into which categories a world may fall. Inner Sphere border worlds are those that lie close enough to an Inner Sphere state to have either significant cross-border trade, or (in the case of Taurian planets that border Davion space) beefier than usual military defenses. Major worlds consist of national capitals or major industry or trade centers. Backwaters, by contrast, are sparsely populated worlds largely lacking in major industries or even a native military defense force.

There is no limit to how much modifiers may change the percentage of an item's final cost, but availability and legality levels may not fall lower than A or rise higher than F.

TYPICAL SALARY AND PRICE GUIDE TABLE (Prices and Salary Rates as of Fiscal Year 3067)

Biweekly Salary (in C-bills)	Taurian Concordat	Magistracy of Canopus	Outworlds Alliance	Marian Hegemony	Minor State	Major World	Backwater
Slave**	NA	35.00	NA	20.00	NA	+5%	-15%
Minimum Wage	44.00	42.00	26.00	21.00	38.00	+5%	-10%
Lower Class	131.00	126.00	77.00	63.00	75.00	+3%	-5%
Middle Class	200.00	195.00	120.00	98.00	112.00	+3%	-5%
Upper Class	750.00	758.00	462.00	379.00	440.00	+5%	-10%
Baronet/Patrician*	1,075.00	1,060.00	NA	1,060.00	635.00	+6%	-12%
Baron/Patrician*	3,100.00	2,115.00	NA	2,120.00	1,440.00	+8%	-15%
Count/Patrician*	7,321.00	6,340.00	NA	4,240.00	2,877.00	+10%	-20%
Marquess/Patrician*	14,462.00	16,080.00	NA	8,480.00	9,612.00	+12%	-25%
Duke/Patrician*	150,770.00	144,231.00	NA	79,500.00	25,631.00	+15%	-40%

*The Outworlds Alliance, Rim Collection, Circinus Federation and Fronc Reaches have no established noble class; the Calderon Protectorate follows the conventions of the Taurian Concordat; Marian Patricians have subtle rankings that roughly correspond to comparable noble classes.

**Wages paid to slaves in the Marian Hegemony go to the slave's owner, who is legally required to hold a portion of them in trust for the slave. Slaves may engage in paid labor, or owners may "rent" them for paid labor, whenever they have completed their daily tasks for their masters.

Cost Modifier (%)/Availability Modifier/Legality Modifier (by Region/World Type), continued

Item/Expense	Taurian Concordat	Magistracy of Canopus	Outworlds Alliance	Marian Hegemony	Minor State	Major World	Backwater
<i>Weapons</i>							
Blades, unpowered	95/-1/-1	98/-1/+0	92/-1/+0	90/-1/+0	95/+0/-1	-5/-1/-1	-3/-1/-1
Blades, powered	110/-1/-1	108/+0/+0	115/+1/+1	105/+1/+0	110/+1/-1	-3/-1/+1	+3/+1/+0
Staves	95/-1/-1	95/-1/-1	90/+0/+0	95/+0/+0	95/+0/-1	-5/-1/-1	-10/-1/-1
Archery	95/-1/-1	95/+0/+0	93/-1/+0	98/+1/+0	95/+1/-1	-5/-1/+0	-8/-1/-1
Pistols, ballistic†	90/-1/-1	95/+0/+0	98/-1/+1	100/-1/+0	95/-1/-1	-10/-1/+0	-8/-1/-1
Pistols, energy	115/+1/+0	110/+0/+1	120/+0/+2	118/+1/+0	115/+1/-1	-3/-1/+1	+5/+2/+0
Rifles, ballistic†	95/-1/+0	100/+0/+0	98/-1/+1	98/-1/+0	95/-1/-1	-8/-1/+0	-8/-1/-1

RULES ANNEX



Cost Modifier (%)/Availability Modifier/Legality Modifier (by Region/World Type), continued

Item/Expense	Taurian Concordat	Magistracy of Canopus	Outworlds Alliance	Marian Hegemony	Minor State	Major World	Backwater
Rifles, energy	120/+1/+0	113/+0/+1	125/+0/+2	122/+1/+0	120/+0/-1	-3/-1/+1	+3/+2/+0
SMGs	105/+0/+1	100/+0/+1	105/-1/+2	98/-1/+0	100/-1/-1	-5/-1/+0	+5/-1/+0
Shotguns	95/-1/+0	100/-1/+0	103/-1/+2	95/-1/+0	98/-1/-1	-5/-1/+0	-8/-1/-1
Throwing weapons	105/+0/-1	100/+0/+0	105/+0/+1	100/+0/+0	98/+0/-1	+0/-1/+0	+5/+0/+0
Support weapons	115/+1/+1	118/+0/+2	120/+1/+3	115/+1/+1	115/+1/+0	+5/-1/+1	+10/+1/+0
Demolitions	125/+0/+2	120/+0/+2	130/+1/+3	115/+1/+2	120/+1/+0	+5/-1/+1	+8/-1/+0
<i>Weapon Accessories</i>	100/-1/+1	98/+0/+0	105/+0/-1	105/+1/+1	110/+1/+1	-5/-1/+0	+5/+1/+1
<i>Power Pack/Rechargers</i>							
Standard	95/-1/-1	95/-1/-1	100/+1/+0	102/+0/+0	110/+1/+0	+0/+0/+0	+8/+1/+0
High-Capacity	95/-1/-1	95/+0/-1	102/+1/+0	105/+0/+0	115/+1/+0	+2/+0/+0	+10/+1/+0
Quick-Charge	100/+0/-1	100/+0/-1	105/+1/+0	108/+0/+0	120/+1/+0	+5/+1/+0	+12/+1/+1
Rechargers	95/-1/+0	100/-1/+0	105/+0/+0	105/+0/+1	110/+1/+0	-5/-1/-1	+5/+1/+0
<i>Armor/Combat Garb</i>							
Flak	95/-1/+0	95/+0/+0	95/+0/+0	98/-1/+0	100/+0/+0	-2/-1/+0	+5/+0/-1
Ablative	95/-1/+0	98/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	100/-1/+0	105/+0/+0	+0/-1/+0	+3/+0/-1
Ablative/Flak	98/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	105/+1/+0	102/+0/+0	108/+1/+0	+0/-1/+0	+5/+1/-1
Ballistic Plate	98/-1/+0	105/+1/+0	103/+0/+0	98/-1/+1	100/+0/+0	+0/-1/-1	+5/+1/-1
Leather	90/+0/+0	80/-1/+0	95/+0/+0	95/+0/+0	85/-1/+0	-5/-1/-1	+0/-1/+0
Miscellaneous	105/+1/+1	110/+1/+1	115/+1/+1	120/+1/+1	125/+1/+1	+0/+0/+0	+10/+1/+0
Camo/Sneak Suits	115/+1/+2	110/+0/+1	120/+1/+2	125/+2/+1	130/+2/+2	-5/+0/+0	+15/+1/+0
Battle Armor	120/+1/+2	125/+1/+2	128/+1/+2	130/+2/+3	128/+3/+4	-3/+0/-1	+20/+1/+1
<i>Misc. Equipment</i>							
Communicators	98/-1/+0	95/-1/-1	100/+0/+0	105/+0/+0	110/+1/+0	-5/-1/+0	+5/+1/+0
Kits	90/+0/+0	95/-1/+0	100/+0/+0	102/+0/+0	105/+1/+0	-5/-1/+0	+3/+1/+0
Computers	105/+0/+0	103/+0/+0	110/+1/+0	108/+0/+0	115/+1/+0	-3/-1/+0	+10/+1/+0
Music Sets/Musi-chips	105/+0/+0	80/-2/+0	100/+0/+0	115/+0/+1	110/+1/+0	-3/-1/+0	+5/+1/+0
Tri-vid Sets/Cameras	110/+0/+0	80/-1/+0	115/+1/+0	105/+0/+1	120/+2/+0	-5/-1/+0	+10/+1/+0
Holovids	105/+0/+0	75/-2/+0	105/+0/+0	110/+0/+1	115/+2/+0	-5/-1/+0	+8/+1/+0
Print Media	80/-1/+0	80/+0/+0	95/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	110/+0/+0	-5/-1/+0	-5/+1/+0
<i>Personal Gear/Expenses</i>							
Clothing	100/+0/+0	90/-1/+0	105/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	+3/-1/+0	+5/+0/+0
Food	100/+0/+0	85/-1/+0	100/+0/+0	110/+0/+0	110/+1/+0	+3/-1/+0	+0/+1/+0
Housing, Rental	110/+0/+0	95/+0/+0	105/+0/+0	115/+0/+0	120/+1/+0	+5/-1/+0	+5/+0/+0
Utilities	105/+0/+0	98/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	115/+2/+0	+5/-1/+0	+5/+1/+0
Housing, Owned	115/+0/+0	105/+0/+0	108/+0/+0	120/+0/+0	125/+1/+0	+13/+0/+0	+10/+1/+0
Utilities	105/+0/+0	98/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	115/+1/+0	+5/+0/+0	+5/+1/+0
Hotel Rental/Expenses	100/+0/+0	110/-1/+0	105/+0/+0	135/+1/+0	110/+1/+0	+10/+0/+0	+8/+0/+0
Fuel	110/+0/+0	115/+0/+0	95/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	110/+1/+0	-5/-1/+0	+8/+1/+0
<i>Personal Vehicles</i>							
Civilian, Ground	105/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	103/+0/+0	105/+0/+0	98/+0/+0	-5/-1/-1	+0/+1/-1
Civilian, Air	110/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	98/-1/+0	110/+0/+1	110/+1/+0	-3/-1/-1	+3/+1/-1
Civilian, Seagoing	100/+0/+0	98/+0/+0	105/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	-5/-1/-1	+5/+2/+0
Civilian, Spacecraft	105/-1/+0	105/+1/+0	100/-1/+0	110/+1/+1	115/+2/+0	-2/-1/+0	+10/+2/+0
Military, Unarmed	110/+0/+1	115/+1/+1	110/+1/+0	120/+1/+1	120/+0/+1	+0/-1/-1	+0/+0/+0
Military, IS-Armed	115/+1/+1	125/+1/+1	115/+1/+1	120/+1/+2	125/+1/+1	+0/+0/+0	+5/+1/+0
Military, Clan-Armed	155/+3/+1	160/+3/+1	140/+2/+1	175/+3/+2	190/+2/+1	+0/+0/+0	+15/+1/+0
Fusion-Powered	+10/+0/+1	+8/+1/+0	+15/+1/+1	+10/+1/+1	+12/+1/+0	-3/-1/-1	+5/+1/+0
ICE-Powered	-2/+0/+0	+0/-1/+0	+0/-1/+0	-5/-1/+0	-3/-1/+0	-5/-1/-1	+0/-2/-1



RULES ANNEX

Cost Modifier (%)/Availability Modifier/Legality Modifier (by Region/World Type), continued

Item/Expense	Taurian Concordat	Magistracy of Canopus	Outworlds Alliance	Marian Hegemony	Minor State	Major World	Backwater
<i>Medical/Survival Gear</i>							
Medical Kits	100/+0/+0	85/-1/-1	90/+0/+0	105/+1/+0	103/+1/+0	-5/-1/-1	+5/+1/+0
Cybernetic Limbs	115/+1/+1	105/+1/+0	125/+2/+1	130/+2/+2	150/+2/+0	-5/-1/-1	+15/+2/+0
Bionic Eyes/Ears	125/+2/+1	108/+1/+0	115/+2/+1	140/+3/+2	170/+3/+0	-5/-1/+0	+15/+2/+0
Other Medical Gear	100/+0/+0	90/-1/-1	95/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	105/+1/+0	-5/+0/-1	+8/+0/+0
Medical Services	105/+0/+0	80/-1/+0	100/+0/+0	108/+0/+0	115/+1/+0	-3/-1/+0	+15/+1/+0
Survival Kits	95/-1/+0	95/-1/+0	95/-1/+0	100/+0/+0	102/+0/+0	-5/+0/-1	+10/+1/+0
Other Survival Gear	95/-1/+0	98/-1/+0	98/-1/+0	103/-1/+0	100/-1/+0	-5/+0/-1	+8/+1/+0
<i>Travel/Entertainment</i>							
Surface Travel	100/+0/+0	98/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	103/+0/+0	-5/-1/+0	+3/+0/+0
Atmospheric Travel	98/+0/+0	103/+0/+0	90/-1/+0	105/+0/+0	105/+1/+0	-5/-1/+0	+8/+0/+0
Oceanic Travel	105/+1/+0	95/-1/+0	105/+1/+0	108/+1/+0	103/+1/+0	-3/-1/+0	+5/+1/+0
Space Travel, In-System	98/+0/+0	100/-1/+0	95/-1/+0	105/+0/+1	110/+1/+0	+0/-1/+0	+10/+1/+0
Space Travel, Interstellar	110/+1/+1	103/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	115/+0/+1	120/+2/+0	+0/-1/+0	+10/+1/+0
Concerts/Theaters	105/+0/+0	85/-1/+0	103/+0/+0	115/+1/+0	105/+0/+0	+5/-1/+0	-3/-1/+0
Sporting Events	98/-1/+0	95/+0/+0	100/+0/+0	115/+1/+0	90/-1/+0	+10/-1/+0	-5/-1/+0
Slavest	NA/D/F	100/C/D	NA/D/F	95/B/C	100/C/D	+15/+0/+1	-20/-1/-2

†The base price for a slave is up to gamemaster discretion, based on the slave's age, gender, training (if any), and physical capabilities (or lack thereof). The Base Availability and Legality of slaves by region are posted in their letter codes for the major states. As slavery is illegal in the Taurian Concordat, Outworlds Alliance, and other realms, slaves receive no "official" price modifier (use the Black Market Modifiers Table instead, see p. 193), and have an automatic Legality of "F".

‡Ballistic weaponry includes all Gauss, gyrojet and needler weapons not classified as support weapons.

THE BLACK MARKET

Just as the location and relative industrial, economic or political importance of a world influences its economy, it also affects the local black market (if any). Prices found on the Periphery Black Market, however, are often noticeably different from those of the Inner Sphere Black Markets. Less concerned about legality and more about availability, some items may be found for less in these outer reaches markets than they may on a House world, while items that are harder to come by in the Sphere may prove even more difficult to find (and afford) in a Periphery Black Market.

As always, the efforts of local law enforcement and the predominant needs of the planet's inhabitants can vary the results wildly—at the gamemaster's discretion—but in general, players can find the price for any piece of hardware or service required by determining the item's availability and legality ratings, modified for the appropriate region (in the Typical Salary and Price Guide Table), and consulting the Black Market Base Cost Table below. Additional modifiers to the base costs are provided as well, based on the character's location in Periphery space. A character may negotiate these prices using the Negotiation/Commercial Skill, but gamemasters should also keep in mind that black markets are typically illegal, fly-by-night operations, and most who trade in illicit goods and services don't have the patience for a drawn-out bargaining process.

As with the cost of living modifiers above, prices fluctuate based on where one is in the Periphery, with all applicable modifiers multiplied together.

ROLEPLAYING IN THE NEAR PERIPHERY

The following information for gamemasters and players of *A Time of War: The BattleTech RPG* campaigns covers other aspects of Periphery characters and life in the realms of the major states of the Near Periphery, and should be used to add local flavor to such campaigns and characters.

FRONTIER VALUES: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Canopian, Outworlds and Rim Collection characters all prefer talking to shooting—Canopians because of their famed tolerance for all viewpoints, Outworlders because of their pacifist history and Rim Collection citizens because they generally just want to be left alone. Given their realm's ubiquitous leisure industry, Canopian characters have a special knack for putting others at ease, which can make for hefty negotiation bonuses. Outworlds and Rim Collection characters also rarely resort to violence first; however, they are anything but pushovers. The Outworlds has long been a hardscrabble nation of tough people who suffered a lot and survived it; likewise, denizens of the Rim Collection have paid a high price for the stability they've achieved. Though they prefer to talk things out, and should be rewarded for doing so, they will find a way to administer justice sooner or later wherever it may be deserved. Thus, when awarding experience to Canopian, Outworlds, and Rim Collection characters, gamemasters should increase the



BLACK MARKET BASE COST TABLE

Legality	Availability					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
A	0.5	1	1.25	1.5	2.5	5
B	1	2	2.5	2	4	7
C	1.5	2.5	4	3	6	12
D	2	3	4.5	6	8	18
E	3	4	6	8	15	25
F	5	6	9	11	18	30

Additional Modifiers

Taurian Concordat	x0.97
Magistracy of Canopus	x0.95
Outworlds Alliance	x1.02
Marian Hegemony	x1.00
Circinus Federation	x0.90
Fronc Reaches	x1.05
Rim Collection	x0.97
Calderon Protectorate	x1.10
Major World*	x0.98
Hot Zone World*	x1.20
Hostile Border World*	x1.10
No Man's Land World*	x1.00
Green Zone World*	x0.90
Backwater	x1.05

*Hot Zone, Hostile Border, No Man's Land, and Green Zone worlds are described in the Periphery Border Crossing Results rules on p. 196. Major worlds serve as national capitals, or as centers of major industry (such as worlds that host the companies described in this book, or that can locally manufacture items of Tech Level D or better).

of Blake or House Liao should receive a suitable bonus in experience versus the Taurian who consistently embraces an Inner Sphere mindset at the expense of his red-blooded Taurian nationalism.

Citizens of the Circinus Federation and the Marian Hegemony, by contrast, are more inclined to shoot first and ask questions later—particularly in the Federation, where a tough-guy attitude is key to survival. Among Marians, plebeians are more prone than patricians to settle things with blows; many (though not all) patricians will happily get ruthless when necessary, but prefer the subtle knife in the back over the hammer blow to the head. Years of political intrigue, especially for survivors of Caesar Sean's reign, make patrician Marians champion players of head games and other non-violent strategies for getting what they want before their opponents have even figured out the ground rules. To reflect these rougher lifestyles, game masters should reward Marian and Circinian characters who aren't afraid to get their hands dirty, particularly when threatened; no self-respecting member of either state, after all, would back down from a good fight.

Calderon Protectorate citizens are culturally Taurian and should be so treated, except that they are less likely to have the Davion Paranoia Compulsion. Characters from the Fronc Reaches may be culturally Taurian or Canopian, as this young realm is too newly independent to have developed a distinct cultural identity.

And yet, despite all their differences, a unifying principle among the denizens of the Periphery has always been the almost universal pride in being of the Periphery, standing without the help of the House Lords and their tainted Successor States. Though their realms are as likely to find themselves in conflict among one another, Periphery characters will welcome the aid and cooperation of other Periphery characters far more often than they may the "condescending support" of a Spheroid. This "Periphery unity" can strongly affect the dynamics of a group comprised primarily of Periphery characters.

NATIONALITIES

Though most denizens of the Near Periphery states share a surface "Periphery" identity (as opposed to being "soft-handed Spheroids"), beneath this shared self-image lie nationalist feelings somewhat similar those of Inner Sphere citizens. Taurians are proud of being Taurians, Canopians of being Canopians, Outworlders of being Outworlders, and so on. Nor do inhabitants of the Near Periphery always see each other in a positive light simply because they share living space on humanity's frontier. Most Canopians, for example, regard Marian Hegemony citizens as pirates with pretensions, while people from the Circinus Federation are near-pariahs on many of the more "civilized" Periphery worlds.

Citizens of Near Periphery realms tend to regard their own nation as best embodying the Periphery's cardinal virtues: liberty, toughness and self-reliance. That said, most are also willing to grant that their neighbors may have some good points. Having spent so much of their various histories minding their own affairs rather than warring with each other, the Periphery nations are remarkably free of the intense nationalisms and prejudices that frequently afflict their Inner Sphere counterparts. Not that prejudices don't exist in the Periphery—but biased assumptions and stereotypes tend to be milder, without the sometimes vicious edge of such attitudes in the Successor States.

experience reward for actions that best convey the "live and let live" philosophies of these realms, while reducing the experience awards for "brute force" actions that belie the character's origins.

For Taurian characters, how well they handle delicate situations—and how quickly they resort to threats or blows—depends on who they're dealing with. Taurians in general can give off a certain arrogance, based on their pride as inhabitants of the oldest continuously surviving realm in the Periphery (if not the entire Inner Sphere). This same pride gives them a bit of a chip; they work well with characters who deal respectfully with them, but react badly to any hint of patronizing (real or imagined). Many Taurians resort to violence much more quickly when dealing with Davions, especially given the Pleiades situation; a Taurian character with the Davion Paranoia Compulsion may find it almost impossible to control himself around citizens of the FedSuns. Dealings with Liao characters may also suffer, given the general souring of the public mood toward the Trinity Alliance since 3065; however, violence-prone reactions are most pronounced against those from Davion space. Game masters seeking to reflect this tendency should note the political climate between the Taurian characters and anyone on the receiving end of their actions; a Taurian character who reacts more harshly to a character from the Federated Suns than one from the Word



RULES ANNEX

PERIPHERY CURRENCIES AND EXCHANGE RATES

Realm	Unit Name (Value in C-bills)	Coin Metal (Image)	Paper Color (Image/Reverse Image)
Taurian Concordat	TC Bull (0.25)	Gold (spaceship and stars)	Blue (ship and stars/local image)
Magistracy of Canopus	MC Dollar (0.25)	Silver (Kossandra Centrella)	Lilac (Wheat sheaves/birds)
Outworlds Alliance	Escudo (0.15)	Silver (Julius Avellar)	Red (Julius Avellar/local image)
Marian Hegemony	Talent (0.13)	Silver (current Caesar)	Black (Caesar/privateer vessel)
Circinus Federation	Skull (0.05)	Copper (skull/crossbones)	Black (scythe/crowned skull)
Rim Collection	Lyran Kroner (0.85)	Gold (Peter Steiner-Davion)	Blue/Gray (Peter Steiner-Davion/The Triad)
Fronc Reaches	FR Dollar (0.10)	Silver (national flag)	Blue (national flag/Residence building)
Calderon Protectorate	CP Bull (0.20)	Gold (spaceship and stars)	Blue (ship and stars/local image)

Exchange Rates (1 September 3067):

	C-bill	TC Bull	CP Bull	MC Dollar	FR Dollar	Escudo	Talent	Skull
C-bill	—	0.25	0.20	0.25	0.10	0.15	0.13	0.05
L-bill (yuan)	2.01	0.50	0.40	0.50	0.20	0.30	0.25	0.10
S-bill (kroner)	1.18	0.29	0.24	0.29	0.12	0.18	0.15	0.06
D-bill (pound)	1.21	0.30	0.24	0.30	0.12	0.18	0.15	0.06
K-bill (ryu)	1.31	0.33	0.26	0.33	0.13	0.20	0.16	0.07
M-bill (eagle)	1.12	0.28	0.22	0.28	0.11	0.17	0.14	0.06
R-bill (krona)	1.66	0.41	0.33	0.41	0.17	0.25	0.21	0.08
TC Bull	4.00	—	0.80	1.00	0.40	0.60	0.50	0.20
CP Bull	5.00	1.25	—	1.25	0.50	0.75	0.63	0.25
MC Dollar	4.00	1.00	0.80	—	0.40	0.60	0.50	0.20
FR Dollar	10.00	2.50	2.00	2.50	—	1.50	1.25	0.50
Escudo	6.67	1.67	1.33	1.67	0.67	—	0.83	0.33
Talent	8.00	2.00	1.60	2.00	0.80	1.20	—	0.40
Skull	20.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	2.00	3.00	2.50	—

Attitudes toward foreigners are also shaped by the particular realm from which a Periphery character hails. Outworlds Alliance citizens, for example, meet visitors with considerable reserve, until they've had a chance to size them up. Canopians, by contrast, tend toward a more enthusiastic welcome—every foreigner is a potential customer for the ubiquitous leisure industry, and Canopians enjoy few things more than showing out-of-towners a good time.

Visitors from the Inner Sphere may find different receptions depending on where they came from and where they are. A Davion in Taurian space is in for a rough time, especially given the war in the Pleiades Cluster. Likewise, Free Worlds League citizens find little welcome on Circinian worlds, where memories of the long-ago Marik occupation of Circinus run deep. Outworlders, by contrast, show reasonable civility to the Davions and Kuritas who make up the bulk of their Inner Sphere visitors; a long history of placating their two powerful neighbors has left its mark. Magistracy citizens hold varying attitudes toward House Liao, based on a complicated mutual past that includes the 3030s invasion of Capellan space and the nearly decade-old Trinity Alliance. In general, Periphery characters treat Inner Sphere characters with a certain condescension, but are willing to deal straight with them unless given a concrete reason not to.

Clan characters in the Periphery receive wary respect, much as one

might treat a potentially dangerous wild animal. No Periphery character will go out of his way to cross a Clansman, but if a Clan character displays too much arrogance toward "Periphery bandit scum," he or she will get taken down a peg one way or another.

To determine the attitude of Periphery characters from one realm toward those from another (or from an Inner Sphere state), the gamemaster may make a 2D6 "attitude check" roll whenever such characters interact, using the Periphery Reaction Table below to find the appropriate modifiers. The result can be used to help determine the first impressions a Periphery NPC (the "reacting character") might have of a player character from a different region or nationality (the "receiving character"). Apply an additional -1 modifier for every level of a Compulsion where the reacting character hates those of the receiving character's region, such as the Compulsion/Hate Davions received by many citizens of the Taurian Concordat.

Gamemasters may also use this system to establish the "gut feeling" a Periphery player character might have under similar circumstances, by making the player character the reacting rather than the receiving character. Such checks should only be made if the character's origins are obvious or known, such as by sporting national insignia, wearing particular apparel or engaging in behavior that marks the character as a member of a Periphery subculture (for example, shunning technology



to the extent that many Omnis do, or wearing the saffron-shaded desert robes of natives on Quantraine), and so forth.

Characters who receive a negative impression may still help those they inwardly dislike, but will be more standoffish in their demeanor and less inclined toward idle chatter. Characters who receive an extremely negative impression will not be helpful at all, and may even act hostile, possibly to the point of hindering a mission thanks to their prejudices. Characters more positively disposed toward those of another realm may react with fascination toward the “out-of-towners,” eager to help with information or—when extremely impressed—goods and even their own services free of charge.

In addition to the above, a Reaction Result Modifier may be imposed on all social skill Action Checks made by the receiving character when dealing with the reacting character. This modifier reflects the degree of open- or closed-mindedness the receiving character experiences based on first impressions.

Nationality and the Newborn Realms

The Fronc Reaches and the Calderon Protectorate are in a class apart when it comes to national identity. Protectorate citizens see themselves as true Taurian patriots, and regard their independence as an unfortunate necessity rather than the foundation of a new nationality. Consequently, they share many of the attitudes and assumptions of their fellow Taurians in the Concordat—the major exception being anti-Davion sentiment, which currently runs much higher in the Concordat proper (and was a major factor in the Protectorate’s secession). Citizens of the Fronc Reaches, by contrast, are just now forming their national self-image. A mix of Canopians and Taurians, these hardy colonists want their young realm to embody the best of their parent nations while finding its own way forward. The “Fronc Reaches nationality” remains in flux, as the people of the Reaches determine exactly what it means to be a native of that region.

Crossing Borders

When it comes to civilian shipping traffic, the Near Periphery nations must strike a delicate balance between facilitating open trade with their neighbors (Periphery and Inner Sphere), and safeguarding trade flotillas from pirates. Even the wealthier and militarily stronger Periphery states, like the Taurian Concordat and the Magistracy of Canopus, possess limited military resources compared to the states of the Inner Sphere, and so what constitutes significant military/security escort by Periphery standards may be minimal when compared to what a Successor State would do. Shipping traffic with the lightest escorts are those that journey between Periphery and Inner Sphere border worlds, such as the well-traveled trade routes between Ramora (Outworlds Alliance) and Tancredi IV (Federated Suns), or Fanardir (Magistracy of Canopus) and Aspropirgos (Free Worlds League). These routes require no passage through uncivilized space, and so are less likely to run afoul of pirate bands. Other routes, such as between spinward Canopian worlds like New Abilene and Capellan Confederation border planets, involve travel through space unclaimed by any nation, and therefore riper territory for pirates to come hunting. The Fronc Reaches can so far provide little deterrent to bandits; indeed, pirates are known to

operate with virtual impunity somewhere inside the Reaches proper.

Periphery worlds lying within two jumps of uncharted space or Inner Sphere borders traditionally maintain close aerospace patrols, system sensor satellites and similar measures to watch for pirate (or Inner Sphere military) incursions, or to occasionally check suspect freight vessels for contraband. These security measures protect Periphery worlds with a variety of responses, ranging from a casual inquiry on cargoes and flight plans, to brief detention pending inspection, to a security force interception and possible seizure of the transport.

Any vessel that refuses to submit to a security search party is regarded as hostile and may even be fired upon by local aerospace forces (or, lacking a dedicated security force, flagged as a suspicious craft within the space of the nation where it was stopped). Those who submit (and have nothing to hide) generally find a customs search little more than a nuisance. Boarding parties in Near Periphery states that rely on robust trade realize that harassment of merchants and other civilian travelers harms the national economy, and so they do their best to make these inspections painless. Even the Marian Hegemony, in its ongoing bid to become a respectable nation, makes an effort to treat the merchant shipping that comes its way with a certain respect. Sustained more by local conquest now than by privateering, Hegemony vessels have begun to function more like a real defensive naval force and less like the biggest extortion gang in the space lanes.

The four smallest Near Periphery realms each work somewhat differently when it comes to foreign space vessels. The Rim Collection’s small military consists mainly of the mercenary Able’s Aces and planetary militias; it has no navy to speak of, nor ships and personnel to carry out customs inspections. The Rim Collection relies on ground security instead, with militia personnel serving as customs inspectors for the small number of trading ships that generally arrive. Citizens of the Rim Collection have no qualms about providing their own rough justice to any traders fool enough to cheat or abuse the locals (as a few shady customers lived just long enough to regret). The Circinus Federation gets little traffic from elsewhere, as few in the Near Periphery care to trade with pirates; most Circinian trade links are with Lyran Alliance border planets, where buyers can generally be found for Circinian gemstones and where local concerns are happy to sell whatever they can to their neighbors. Other than Lyran trading vessels, ships crossing into Circinian space are likely to run into trouble from the McIntyre Guards, whose recent equipment upgrades include sufficient aerospace forces to intercept and harshly interrogate interlopers. (The Black Warriors, until recently a perennial disruptive force in Periphery space, disappeared in 3066.)

Civilian ship traffic between the Fronc Reaches, the Magistracy of Canopus and the Taurian Concordat is on the rise as the tensions from the struggle for independence die down. Commercial traffic between the Reaches’ worlds and those of the Concordat and Magistracy provides tempting targets for pirates, and so these shipping runs often receive military escorts.

The Calderon Protectorate remains in a virtual state of siege. Blockaded by the TDF and the mercenary unit Gordon’s Armored Cavalry, Protectorate worlds rely on smuggling to get whatever they can’t produce within their own territory. Ordinary Taurians may



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sympathize with Protectorate citizens, depending on their attitude toward Lord Grover Shraplen; officially, however, denizens of the CP are *persona non grata* in Concordat space.

In game terms, a border crosser (either the JumpShip captain or the most prominent of the characters aboard the border-crossing vessel) may determine the likelihood of an encounter during an attempt to cross any of the Near Periphery's many national boundaries by making a modified form of the standard Reaction Check described under *Nationalities* (p. 193). For this roll, additional roll modifiers may apply based on various circumstances, including character traits belonging to the border crosser. Certain Action Checks, made before the vessel hops the border or soon after its arrival, may further modify the circumstances surrounding such travel.

This modified Reaction Check, generally made as soon as the border crosser enters a new system and completes any related Action Checks (unless otherwise noted), determines what kind of response—if any—the border crosser and his vessel arouse among local security forces. All modifiers made to the standard Periphery Reaction Table during a border crossing appear in the Additional Reaction Modifiers section of the table below.

To determine a specific encounter or reaction from local military or security forces, or even bandits present in the system, the border-crossing player should roll 2D6, then apply the appropriate reaction result modifier and consult the appropriate column of the Border Crossing Roll Results Table for the realm into which the vessel has just crossed. The encounter descriptions provide a more detailed explanation of each encounter type, allowing gamemasters to further develop whatever reaction the arriving vessel and its crew receive.

The Periphery Border Crossing Roll Results Table

The Border Crossing Roll Results Table in this book works a little differently than the standard version. Encounter types are determined not by regional border, but by the type of region into which player characters are moving: hot zones, hostile borders, no-man's land or green zones.

A hot zone is an active war zone, like the Federated Suns/Concordat border during the Pleiades campaign, or an extremely tense DMZ-type area such as the de facto "border" between the Marian Hegemony and the Circinus Federation (where recent hostilities have made a trigger-happy response to unauthorized ship traffic highly likely).

A hostile border is a notch down on the danger scale from a hot zone, but still tense enough to get interesting. There's no active warfare going on, nor is it on the brink, but the region has enough history of mutual hostilities between powers that player characters are likely to get hassled when they try to cross over. Good examples include the Circinus Federation/Free Worlds border, or the region between the Marian Hegemony and the Lyran Alliance (especially for ships crossing into Lyran space, which might easily be taken for Marian raiders).

No-man's land refers to regions that border uncivilized space, and which therefore are most heavily frequented by pirates. This label applies to the borders of Periphery states that lie opposite the Inner Sphere realms, and also to much of the Fronc Reaches border. A no-man's land may also exist between realms; a significant one, for

example, lies between the Reaches, the Magistracy of Canopus and the Capellan Confederation.

Finally, a green zone is any border region where relations between powers are fairly calm and pirate activity is low by local standards. One example is the Magistracy/Free Worlds border; Canopian support for the Andurien secession is several decades old by 3067, and neither power is prone to holding historical grudges against the other.

PERIPHERY STATES ADVENTURE HOOKS

The major states of the Near Periphery run the gamut from prosperous realms to tiny confederations to near-bandit kingdoms. Depending on local conditions, varying amounts of turmoil may be brewing beneath even the most placid surface, offering plenty of potential trouble in which player characters can become enmeshed. Below are some plot hooks for gamemasters and players to consider when campaigning in the Near Periphery (or with Periphery characters).

ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL

Internal politics makes for plenty of adventure hooks everywhere in the *BattleTech* universe, and the Near Periphery is no exception. The Taurian Concordat presents an especially rich environment in late 3067, but gamemasters and players can set this type of adventure just about anywhere else as well. The hot war with House Davion in the Pleiades Cluster, opposition to the Trinity Alliance (especially to House Liao's military demands with the Pleiades conflict raging), rising fear of "Davion agitators" meddling in Taurian affairs, and sharp divisions over the recent secession of the Calderon Protectorate all present backdrops for Taurian-themed campaigns. Characters may be hired to track suspected gunrunners to the CP, or to smuggle guns and other vital goods to that besieged region. They may uncover (or help to perpetrate) a plot against the young ruler of the Protectorate, Erik Martens-Calderon, or against Baron Cham Kithrong, who currently serves as Erik's regent. They may become involved in the machinations of genuine Davion agitators seeking to undermine Taurian efforts in the Pleiades Cluster. They may also get caught up in intrigues against Protector Grover Shraplen, whose popularity remains low despite an uptick in war support and whose political grip is correspondingly shaky.

Other Near Periphery realms have their political troubles as well. In the Magistracy of Canopus, the increasingly obvious intimacy between Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao and Naomi Centrella, heir to the Canopian throne, may inflame lingering anti-Liao sentiment; player characters may become embroiled in anti-Capellan political activity that could spell trouble for the Magistracy's ruling dynasty. Ongoing negotiations between the Magistracy and the Fronc Reaches over the status of sales from the Detroit MechWorks, meanwhile, have reached a delicate stage—one that either side may attempt to disrupt in order to gain advantage. The presence of Clan Snow Raven in the Outworlds Alliance has given President Mitchell Avellar's tiny opposition a cause célèbre around which to expand; the Separatist party or other anti-Clan groups may launch schemes against the Snow Ravens and/or the

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PERIPHERY REACTION TABLE

2D6 Roll	Reaction Type	Reaction Result Modifier
0 or less	Extremely Negative	-3
1-4	Negative	-1
5-8	Neutral	0
9-12	Positive	+1
13 or more	Extremely Positive	+2

Reaction Roll Modifiers

Reacting Character Origin	Receiving Character Origin																	
	Near Periphery					Inner Sphere					Other							
	TC	MC	OA	MH	CF	RC	FR	CP	DP	LA	DC	FW	CC	FS	FRR	CL	CS	WB
Taurian Concordat	+1	+0	+1	-1	-1	-1	-2	-1	-1	-1	-2	-1	-1	-3	+0	-2	-2	+1
Magistracy of Canopus	+1	+1	+0	-1	+1	+0	+1	+1	+0	-1	-1	+0	+1	-2	+0	-1	-1	+0
Outworlds Alliance	+0	+0	+1	-1	-1	+0	-1	-1	-2	-1	-1	-1	-2	+0	-1	-2*	-1	-2
Marian Hegemony	-1	-2	-1	+1	-3	-1	-2	-2	-2	-1	-1	-2	-2	-1	-1	-2	+0	-2
Circinus Federation	-1	-2	-1	-4	+0	-2	-1	-1	-2	-3	-1	-3	-1	-1	-1	-2	-1	+2
Rim Collection	-1	-1	-1	-2	-2	+2	-1	-1	-2	+0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-2	-3	-2	-1
Fronc Reaches	-1	+0	+0	-2	-2	+0	+1	+1	-1	-1	-1	+1	+0	-1	-2	+0	+1	
Calderon Protectorate	+1	+1	+1	-1	-2	+0	+0	+2	-2	+0	-1	-1	-2	-2	+0	-2	+0	-1
IS Border	-2	-1	-1	-2	-3	-1	-1	+0	+0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	+0	-1	-1	-1
Deep Periphery	-1	-1	-1	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	+0	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-1	-3	-2	+0

*(After 3060): +0 if the Clan is Diamond Shark; +1 if Snow Raven

Receiving Character Origin Key:

TC = Taurian Concordat	CL = Clan	CS = ComStar
MC = Magistracy of Canopus	DP = Deep Periphery	WB = Word of Blake
OA = Outworlds Alliance	DC = Draconis Combine	MH = Marian Hegemony
FW = Free Worlds League	CF = Circinus Federation	CC = Capellan Confederation
RC = Rim Collection	FS = Federated Suns	FR = Fronc Reaches
LA = Lyran Alliance	CP = Calderon Protectorate	FRR = Free Rasalhague Republic

Additional Reaction Modifiers (for Border Crossing)

Condition or Circumstance	Reaction Roll Modifier
Major Military Activity Underway in Region	-2
Border crosser is Commercial/Government-Employed	+1
Border crosser is Independent Vessel	-2
Border crosser is Mercenary/Friendly Military	+2
Border crosser vessel is Military Class	-1
Border crosser Connection Used*	+1/level
Border crosser has Enemy/Negative Reputation Trait	-1/level
Border crosser has In for Life/Dark Secret Trait	-2
Border crosser has Unlucky/Bloodmark Trait	-1/level
Border crosser uses Protocol Skill†	+1/2 MoS
Border crosser attempts pre-emptive bribery‡	+1/2 MoS
Border crosser attempts bribery at crossing‡	+1/3 MoS
Border crosser failed in bribery attempt‡	-MoF
Border crosser failed previous crossing§	-3 (+1/month since failure, max 0)

*To be relevant, the Connection Trait must be applicable to the Periphery in the realm where the border crossing occurs and must be extensive enough to influence the locals. The border crosser must make a successful Protocol Action Check, adding the value of the Trait to the roll result.

†Skill Checks are required for these efforts at the time of the border crossing, reflecting advance communications or responses to hails from local security agencies, with modifiers based on the margin of success (MoS).

‡Bribery attempts require a successful Negotiation or Performance Action Check with a -2 roll modifier (plus any reaction modifiers from the Periphery Reaction Table). This Action Check roll is modified by +1 for every 500 C-bills or 5 percent value of any cargo being smuggled (whichever is greater) by the border crosser(s), as well as by the relevant reaction roll modifiers from the Periphery Reaction Table. Double this monetary cost if the bribe is attempted at the time of crossing, rather than having been arranged ahead of time. A failed Action Check during a bribery attempt automatically applies the margin of failure (MoF) to the border-crossing check roll.

§Repeat the reaction roll for every world visited after the initial failure, regardless of location or border status. This modifier increases over time by 1 point per month (based on the time elapsed since the last failure) to a maximum of 0.



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PERIPHERY BORDER CROSSING ROLL RESULTS TABLE

Modified 2D6 Result	Encounters (per Region Type Entered by Border Crosser)			
	Hot Zone	Hostile Border	No Man's Land	Green Zone
0 or less	Attacked!	Attacked!	Pirates!	Pirates!
1	Attacked!	Raiders!	Pirates!	Pirates!
2	Raiders!	Raiders!	Pirates!	Attacked!
3	Raiders!	Pirates!	Pirates!	Bandits!
4	Pirates!	Pirates!	Bandits!	Interception
5	Pirates!	Bandits!	Bandits!	Interception
6	Bandits!	Interception	Bandits!	Conscription!
7	Interception	Interception	Raiders!	Inspection
8	Interception	Conscription!	Raiders!	Inspection
9	Conscription!	Inspection	Interception	Registered
10	Conscription!	Inspection	Interception	Ignored
11	Scrutiny	Scrutiny	Scout	Ignored
12	Scrutiny	Registered	Ignored	Ignored
13 or more	Registered	Registered	Ignored	Greetings!

ENCOUNTER TYPES

Type	Description/Effects
Pirates!	A veteran bandit force of equal or greater strength in aerospace and marine support attacks the border crosser(s) with the intent to cripple and plunder the vessel(s) and enslave everyone on board. Over major worlds, such as industrial centers or national capitals, treat this as an Attacked! result.
Bandits!	A bandit force of equal aerospace strength and average skill attacks the border crosser(s) with the intent to board and plunder the vessel(s). Over major worlds, such as industrial centers or national capitals, treat this as a Raiders! result.
Raiders!	A small strike force (of equal or lesser strength in aerospace and marine assets) from the nearest military power attacks the border crosser(s) with intent to disable or capture the vessel(s) and prevent them from warning local/regional security.
Scout	An unregistered and unknown JumpShip is discovered nearby. It does not respond to hails but may attack or flee if provoked.
Attacked!	A veteran local military/security force of equal or greater aerospace and marine strength attacks the border crosser(s) with the intent to capture, cripple or destroy the vessel(s), believing them to be hostile invaders or dangerous criminals.
Interception	A local military/security force of equal strength in aerospace and marine assets and average combat skills orders the surrender of the border crosser(s) and attempts to detain and board the vessel(s) on suspicion of subversive activities or the smuggling of contraband. Will attack with intent to cripple or destroy if provoked or if the border crosser(s) resist.
Inspection	A random customs inspection, backed up by minimal force, is requested of the border-crossing vessel(s). Any attempt to resist or stonewall the inspection may result in local security scrambling an interception force from the nearby jump station or patrol vessels, if any (see Intercepted!).
Conscription!	A current military crisis or emergency prompts local military/civil authorities to demand that the vessel(s) used by the border crosser(s) immediately surrender command to an appointed officer for possible transport of refugees or materiel. Any resistance will result in the scrambling of interceptors to take the vessel(s) by force (see Intercepted!). If there is no military or local crisis, treat this result as an Inspection.
Scrutiny	The vessel(s) used by the border crosser(s) are flagged by local security or military for further observation by other regional forces. Roll for an encounter in the next system, regardless of location and border status, with an additional -2 reaction roll modifier.
Registered	Local sensor probes or solitary patrol craft query the vessel(s) used by the border crosser(s) regarding their identification, nationality, destination and business, but otherwise leave the ships alone unless they engage in overtly hostile action or their responses to any inquiries fail to check out. In such cases, local authorities may call for an inspection (see Inspection).
Ignored	Aside from a casual scan by local sensor satellites or wandering patrol craft, the border-crossing vessel(s) are left alone and unacknowledged by local authorities and traffic.
Greetings!	Friendly vessels and/or patrols operating close by issue trusting hails to the border-crossing vessel(s). Aside from a genuine eagerness for conversation, news from beyond the system or trade, these greetings have no ulterior motive.



Avellar government. Player characters may also become enmeshed in inter-Clan conflict, as political maneuvering within the Alliance pits Snow Raven merchants against Snow Raven warriors. Finally, player characters may find themselves in a “conspiracy theory” adventure, in which the Snow Ravens really do want to absorb the Outworlds Alliance (a favorite charge of the Separatists, but with no hard evidence as yet to back it up).

CUTTHROAT COMPETITION

Corporate intrigue has become an ongoing element of life in the more prosperous Periphery states, especially the Magistracy of Canopus and the Outworlds Alliance. Fueled in the former by the Trinity Alliance and in the latter by Mitchell Avellar’s Long Road program, economic boom times in both realms are giving rise to increasingly cutthroat competition among local business interests. The Magistracy’s entertainment industry (where just about anything goes) and the Outworlds’ burgeoning military-industrial complex provide especially rich environments for corporate skullduggery. Player characters may be hired to sabotage a competitor’s manufacturing plant, or stage a bad-PR incident aboard a Canopian pleasure circus; they may take a job as casino security on a leisure planet like Crawford’s Delight, just in time for a major pirate raid bought by a rival operation; or they may become entangled with the criminal underworld as big-business clients go toe-to-toe using organized crime factions as proxies.

JOLLY ROGERS

Pirates are a nasty fact of life in the Near Periphery, offering plenty of opportunity for pirate-themed adventures. Player characters may be hired to protect just about any Near Periphery planet from bandit raids, particularly outlying worlds like Lastpost (Calderon Protectorate), Thraxa (Magistracy of Canopus), Dneiper (Outworlds Alliance) or the six planets that make up the tiny Rim Collection.

The Rim Collection has so far done fairly well protecting itself through the sterling efforts of Able’s Aces and local militias, but a few more bodies in ‘Mechs never hurts—and “King” Hopper Morrison’s pirate band, which got its nose badly bloodied in 3059, is likely itching for payback. In addition, mysterious armed bands have been traveling through the Rim Collection lately, many bound for raids in Lyran space; the player characters might easily be hired to find out who they are and where they came from. Pirate activity in the Fronc Reaches is at a disturbing high, and the newly independent realm has few homegrown military resources with which to defend itself. A player-character merc unit might easily land a contract with the Reaches, or might be hired by the Canopian government to track pirates that threaten vital shipments from the Detroit MechWorks. The Outworlds Alliance is also suffering an uptick in pirate raids, and the Alliance military has so far failed to find the raiders’ bases. An Outworlds-based pirate adventure can dovetail with a story line involving the Word of Blake, depending on whether or not the gamemaster wants to reveal the Blakist-sponsored takeover of the planet Dante—formerly a stronghold of the Omnis sect, now a virtual pirate haven in the heart of the Outworlds Alliance.

The Circinus Federation—a bandit kingdom with scant pretensions

to respectability—offers another type of pirate-themed adventure. Following the recent death of President H. R. “Little Bob” McIntyre, the Federation lost half of its military when the Black Warriors—long infamous for enriching their homeworlds through piracy—disappeared. The unit was last seen heading rimward, and rumor has it they were heading for the Magistracy of Canopus. They never turned up anywhere, however. Player characters may get involved in finding out what happened to them.

ENEMY WITHIN

The Word of Blake is everywhere in the Near Periphery, sometimes acting openly, more often working behind the scenes. Blakist machinations can cover various angles: Dante-based piracy intended to destabilize the Outworlds Alliance, power plays against Caesar Julius O’Reilly in the Marian Hegemony, the Word’s ultimate plans for the luckless Circinus Federation, or just about any other clandestine scheme the gamemaster can dream up. Player characters can easily get caught up in Blakist plots great and small, helping either to stop them or further them—or, worse, coming between elements of ComStar (or Word of Blake sub-sects operating on their own agendas) whose own efforts in the Periphery may often put others in the crossfire.

BATTLETECH RULES

The following rules supplement those in *Total Warfare (TW)*, *TechManual (TM)*, and *Tactical Operations (TO)* and cover combat in various terrain and environmental conditions that players may encounter in the *BattleTech* universe. All players should read through these rules and agree to their use before beginning play.

NEW UNIT TYPES

The following are new battlefield unit types available in the major Periphery states. Unless otherwise stated, they follow the rules laid out in *Total Warfare (TW)*, *TechManual (TM)*, and *Tactical Operations (TO)*.

Tariq-Mounted Infantry

Rarely seen outside the fringe worlds of the Periphery, beast-riding forces have nonetheless found a niche even on the modern battlefield. On Astrokaszy, for example, warriors have been known to ride into battle on horseback, even against ‘Mech-armed opposition. In the Outworlds Alliance, tariqim are a popular mount, especially in the deserts of Brasha. The local militias, noting the hardiness of the tariq, have adopted this lizard-like animal as a valued riding mount, and—in admittedly only the most desperate of times—have even fielded infantry platoons riding tariq mounts.

Although quite swift for ground troops, tariq-mounted infantry are unfortunately limited by their lack of armor and lighter weaponry. Indeed, the most common tariq-mounted troops employ bolt-action rifles, or light recoilless weapons for added reach. A brisk—and likely illicit—weapons trade with FedSuns supplies, however, has added the Federated Long Rifle to the arsenal, affording tariq infantry lucky enough to be so equipped a modicum of enhanced firepower.



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GAME RULES

Tariq-mounted infantry are fielded in platoons of 21 troops, at most, and have a movement of 5 Ground MP. Tariq infantry cannot enter any water terrain of Depth 1 or greater, and may enter buildings with no additional MP cost. Otherwise, they maneuver and attack as conventional infantry, and may be designated as standard infantry or Anti-Mech trained infantry.

The damage divisor for Tariq-mounted infantry is 1.0. Tariqim do not provide their mounted units with any additional damage bonuses in tactical combat.

The range modifiers, maximum damage by troop strength, weight, costs, and Battle Values for tariq-mounted infantry troops of all three indicated weapon types are shown in the tables below. These values are compliant with *Total Warfare* and *Tactical Operations* rules.

TARIQ INFANTRY RANGE MODIFIERS

Range	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
To-Hit Modifier (Bolt-Action Rifle)	-2	0	+2	+4	—	—	—
To-Hit Modifier (Federated Long Rifle)	-2	0	+2	+4	—	—	—
To-Hit Modifier (Light Recoilless Rifle)	-2	0	0	+2	+2	+4	+4

TARIQ INFANTRY DAMAGE TABLE

Number of Troopers	Maximum Weapon Damage*		
	Bolt-Action	Federated Long	Light Recoilless
1	0	0	0
2	0	1	1
3	0	1	1
4	1	1	1
5	1	2	1
6	1	2	2
7	1	2	2
8	1	3	2
9	1	3	2
10	1	4	3
11	2	4	3
12	2	4	3
13	2	5	4
14	2	5	4
15	2	5	4
16	2	6	4
17	2	6	5
18	3	6	5
19	3	7	5
20	3	7	5
21	3	7	6

*Infantry damage is always applied in 2-point damage value groupings

TARIQ-MOUNTED INFANTRY WEIGHT, COST, AND BV TABLE

Platoon Type	Tons per Platoon	Cost (C-bills)*	Battle Value*
Bolt-Action Rifles	15	400,500 / 2,002,500	40 / 49
Federated Long Rifles	15	534,900 / 2,674,500	53 / 75
Light Recoilless Rifles	15	802,440 / 4,012,200	60 / 88

*Number left of slash indicates Cost and BV without Anti-Mech Training. The number right of the slash indicates Anti-Mech Training.



MSF-42 BLUEHAWK/ASF-23 PROTECTOR COMBAT SUPPORT FIGHTER

The MSF-42 *Bluehawk* and the ASF-23 *Protector* conventional support fighters are a curiosity in the Periphery. Though produced by two different companies in two different realms, using two very different manufacturing philosophies, both craft are virtually indistinguishable in performance—their differences apparently being only skin deep. It is thus hard to say which of the two producing realms—the Magistracy of Canopus for the *Bluehawk* and the Outworlds Alliance for the *Protector*—actually originated the design, or if they shared specifications at some point. Even the introduction dates yield little clue, as both fighters entered service in 3019. Officials in both producing companies (Magistracy Metals and United Outworlders Corporation, respectively) aren't talking, though some have suggested that a secret backroom deal was made as the groundwork for a corporate alliance, if not a political one.

Bluehawks and *Protectors* are both designed for atmospheric fire support, and thus are not built so much for speed as they are for weapons. Wing-mounted LRM-10s enable these craft to saturate the battlefield with missiles, while close-in passes with the nose-mounted trio of machine guns can devastate conventional infantry in seconds. Bomb-laden fighters can bring havoc to a battlefield in short order, freeing up aerospace fighters for more dogfighting and DropShip interceptions.

Since their debut, both the *Bluehawk* and the *Protector* have appeared in the planetary air forces of the Magistracy of Canopus, Outworlds Alliance, Taurian Concordat and even some of the fringe regions of the Federated Suns and Draconis Combine. In many cases—particularly in the Concordat and Alliance, squadrons comprised of both fighters flying in tandem have been employed, taking advantage of their distinctly different appearance to confound enemy identification.

Type: **MSF-42 Bluehawk/ASF-23 Protector Air Support Fighter**

Technology Base: Inner Sphere (Conventional)

Tonnage: 50

Battle Value: 441



Equipment

		Mass
Engine:	250 Turbine	25
Safe Thrust:	5	
Max Thrust:	8	
Structural Integrity:	5	
Heat Sinks:	0	0
Fuel:480	3	
Controls:		5
Power Amplifiers:		0
Armor Factor:	48	3
	<i>Armor</i>	
	<i>Value</i>	
Nose	14	
Wings	12	
Aft	10	

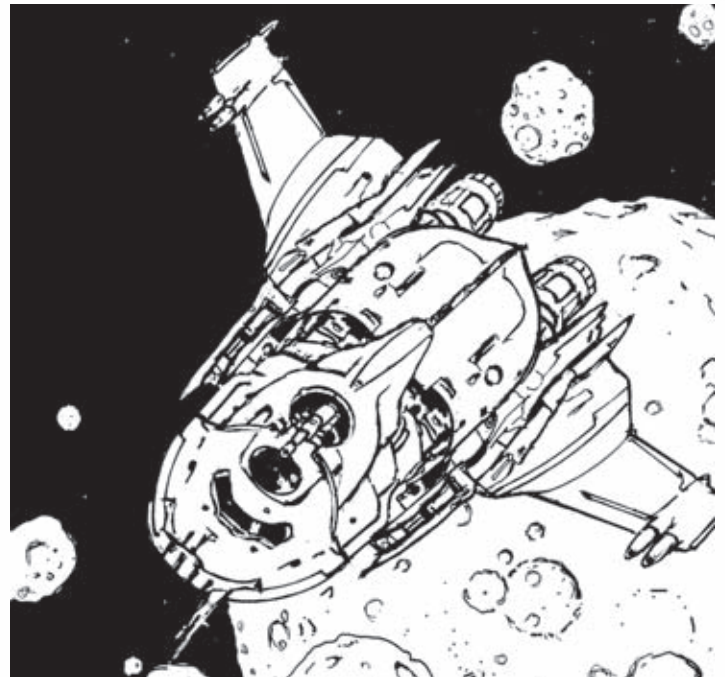
Weapons and Ammo	Location	Tonnage	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
3 Machine Guns	N	1.5	0	2	—	—	—
Ammo (MG) 100	—	0.5					
LRM 10	LW	5	0	6	6	6	—
LRM 10	RW	5	0	6	6	6	—
Ammo (LRM) 24	—	2					

TAURIAN TiG-15 "TIGRESS" CLOSE PATROL CRAFT (GUNBOAT)

For centuries, the Taurians have established themselves as a defiant and fiercely independent people, ever on alert for an invasion by larger neighbors such as the Federated Suns and the Capellan Confederation. The Hyades Cluster, home to the core of the Concordat, is thus one of the most heavily fortified regions in known space, seeded with various natural and man-made defenses against pirate raiders or worse. Integral to this defense are the gunboats—small craft aerospace units often minimally crewed and deployed on long voyages in the asteroid fields of the Hyades.

The TiG-15, originally introduced by Vandenburg Mechanized Industries soon after the fall of the Star League, was initially planned as a DropShip or WarShip escort craft in line with the rapidly declining *Lyonesse* and *Aquarius* designs, but shifting strategic priorities quickly placed the craft at the heart of a revitalization of the Hyades defense forces, as the increasingly devastating Succession Wars drove home the possibility of Successor State aggression.

The so-called "Tigress" is neither the heaviest nor the fastest of the Taurian gunboats produced expressly for local defense, but represents a typical approach to such craft. Built small, with respectable armor and enough fuel for a week of continuous patrol duties, this craft relies primarily on energy weapons for maximum endurance, though a well-stocked LRM launcher gives it some reach. Though nominally crewed by 3 pilots and a gunner, it is not uncommon to find these craft operating below this standard, a practice that has allowed the Taurians to field more of them amid the debris clouds of the Cluster.



TiG-15 "Tigress" Close Patrol Craft

Type: Military Aerodyne

Tech: Inner Sphere

Introduced: 2790

Mass: 150 tons

Battle Value: 1152

Dimensions

Length: 20 meters

Width: 22 meters

Armor

Nose: 64

Wings: 57

Aft: 46

Cargo

Bay 1: Cargo (7 tons) 1 Door

Fuel: 15 tons (1,200 points/8.15 burn days)

Heat Sinks: 20

Safe Thrust: 4

Max Thrust: 6

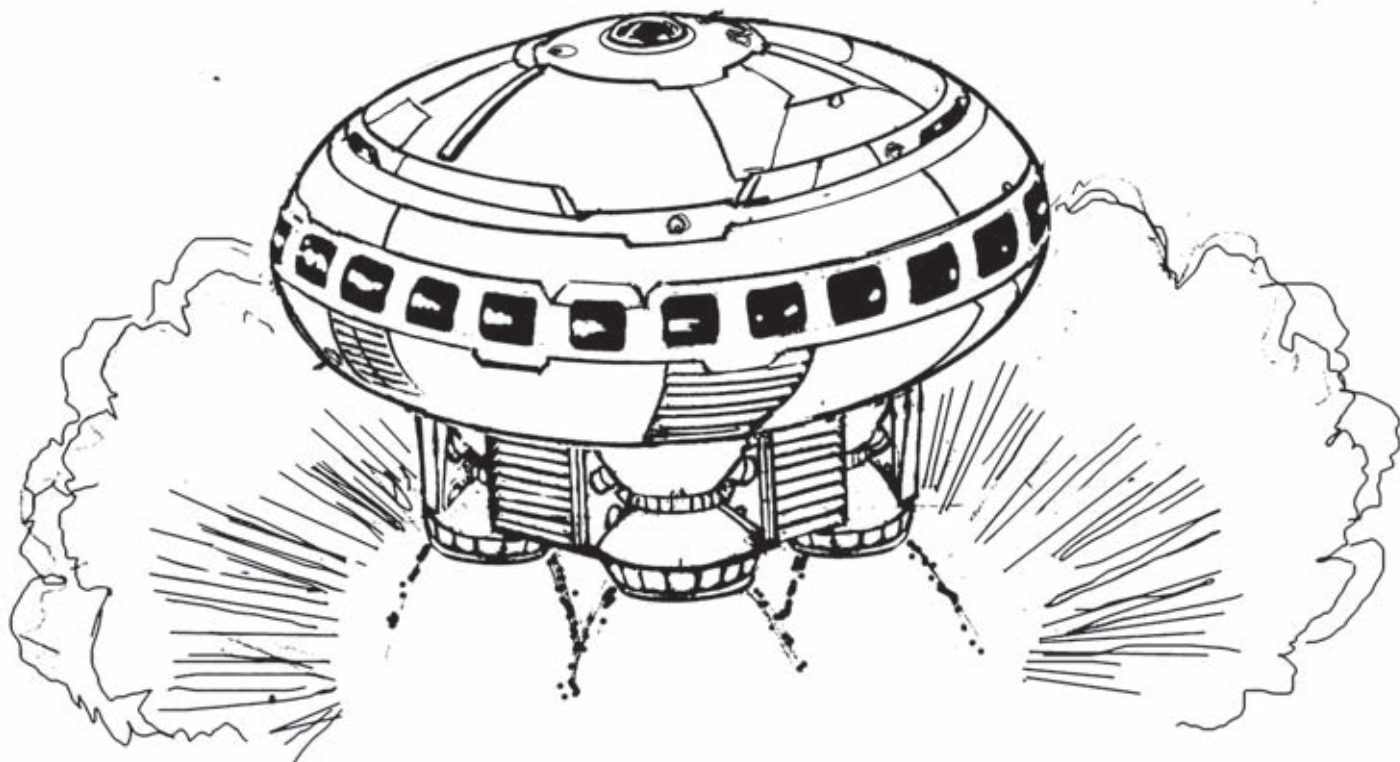
Structural Integrity: 6

Crew: 4

Weapons and Ammo	Location	Tonnage	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
PPC	N	7	10	10	10	—	—
LRM 15	N	7	5	9	9	9	—
Ammo (LRM) 32	—	4					
2 Medium Lasers	LW	2	6	10	—	—	—
2 Medium Lasers	RW	2	6	10	—	—	—



RULES ANNEX



PRINCESS-CLASS LUXURY LINER

In the late 27th century, the catchphrase “living like a king” would find itself challenged by that of “traveling like a princess”. Such was the fame of the ultra-luxurious *Princess*-class liner. Manufactured by Nicholas Space Craft of New Earth, and later licensed to Majesty Metals and Manufacturing in the Magistracy of Canopus, the *Princess* liners set the platinum standard for luxury travel across the Inner Sphere. Massing more the twice the more common *Monarch* liner, the *Princess* carried fewer passengers but did so in luxury so opulent; it rivaled and exceeded terrestrial resorts. While most passenger DropShips emphasized getting their passengers to their destination in comfort, the *Princess*-class often *was* the destination.

Although largely supplanted by the *Monarch*, a few *Princess* liners remain in operation today. The vessel carries only 200 passengers on average—a complement typically often seen on liners half its size. But what these quarters lack in quantity, the engineers made up for in quality, with even the smallest quarters (beyond those of the crew and staff) offering amenities not seen outside of the first-class staterooms of most other vessels. More prestigious and elite guests on boards a *Princess* can expect luxury and ultra-luxury suites, which offer even more amenities and living space, such as round-the-clock access to servants and waitstaff, a “basement” balcony onto the ship’s unique “Earth Deck”, and fully-stocked vintage wine lockers.

But what truly sets the *Princess*-class apart from its competition is its leisure and recreational offerings. The most prominent of these facilities—the massive “Earth Deck”—occupies the DropShip’s

entire central section, and combines natural landscape, holographic projections, and even a unique, arched-ceiling architecture designed to simulate a terrestrial garden. Compared to the view from a cold observation-deck window to space, many space travelers have lauded this as the *Princess*’ best feature.

Others, however, have noted the equally ambitious “Pool Deck”, which occupies the vessel’s lowest passenger deck. Virtually unheard of in a space travel age where water showers are considered a gold standard in luxury, under thrust, the *Princess*’ pool deck offers the features of a normal Olympic-sized pool, complete with diving boards and artificial sunlight for tanners. An ingenious series of pumps and pipes channel the pool into a toroid, enabling the pool deck to function even in microgravity.

The opulent luxury comes with a price, however. The cost to maintain and operate a *Princess*-class liner proved astronomical, even in the golden days of the Star League. The unique architecture designed to accommodate the ship’s special amenities led to unexpected strain on its hull and engines, and difficulty in maintaining these systems prompted many *Princess* owners to gut these luxury accommodations in favor of standard cargo bays, reducing them to mere freighters. Today, only the *Princesses* operating in Canopian space maintain their original features, supported by spare parts still produced by Majesty Metals. Although the main shipyards that produced the *Princess* were lost in 2805, Majesty has recently hinted about restarting a limited production, reflecting Canopus’ recent rise in economic and commercial status.



Princess-class Luxury Liner

Type: Civilian Spheroid

Use: Liner

Tech: Inner Sphere

Introduced: 2657

Mass: 11,800 tons

Dimensions

Length: 117 meters

Width: 117 meters

Height: 125 meters

Fuel: 850 tons (25,500)

Tons/Burn-day: 4.22

Safe Thrust: 3

Maximum Thrust: 5

Heat Sinks: 60

Structural Integrity: 10

Battle Value: 1,041

Armor

Nose: 87

Sides: 75

Aft: 71

Cargo

Bay 1: Small Craft (4)	2 doors
Bay 2: Pool Deck (1,400 tons)	0 doors
Bay 3: Earth Deck (950 tons)	0 doors
Bay 4: Cargo (952.5 tons)	4 doors
Bay 5: Pumps and Circulation Equipment (50.5 tons)	0 doors
Bay 6: Cargo (450 tons)	0 doors

Life Boats: 35

Escape Pods: 15

Crew: 10 Officers, 40 enlisted/non-rated, 3 gunners, 70 guest support staff, 8 security staff, 20 bay personnel, 100 first-class passengers, 75 "luxury-class" passengers, 25 "ultra-luxury class" passengers

Ammunition: 600 rounds of machine gun ammunition (3 tons)

Notes: Carries 18 tons of standard armor; "Luxury-class" quarters computed at 15 tons per person; "Ultra-Luxury class" quarters computed at 20 tons per person

Weapons:

Arc (Heat) Type	Capital Attack Values (Standard)				Class
	Short	Medium	Long	Extreme	
Nose (8 Heat)					
1 Large Laser	1(8)	1(8)	—	—	Laser
2 Machine Gun	0(4)	—	—	—	Point Defense
FL/FR (3 Heat)					
1 Medium Laser	1(5)	—	—	—	Laser
2 Machine Gun	0(4)	—	—	—	Point Defense
AL/AR (3 Heat)					
1 Medium Laser	1(5)	—	—	—	Laser

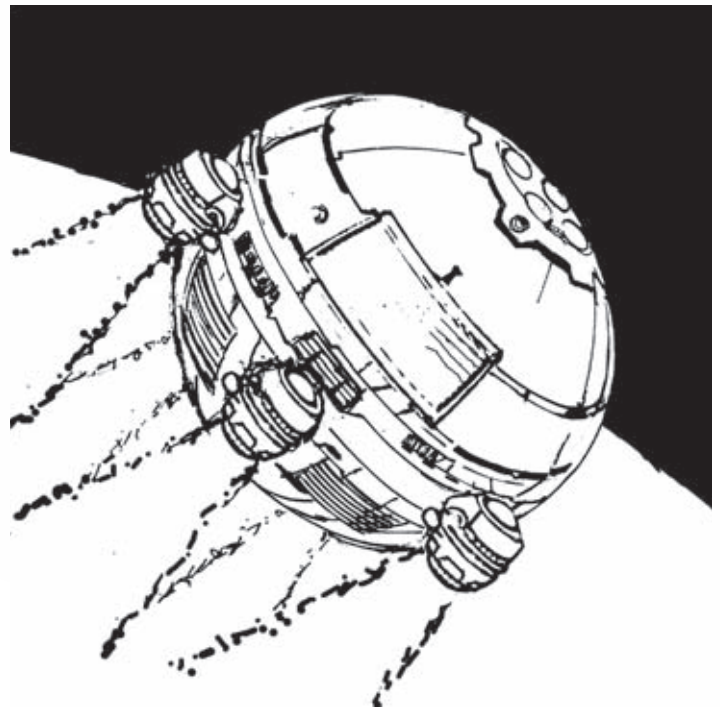
2 Machine Gun	0(4)	—	—	—	Point Defense
Aft (3 Heat)					
1 Medium Laser	1(5)	—	—	—	Laser
2 Machine Gun	0(4)	—	—	—	Point Defense

AQUEDUCT-CLASS LIQUID CARRIER

To many, the *Aqueduct*-class tanker is "the most common DropShip, no one has ever heard of". A ubiquitous vessel that has been in service since the mid 27th century, when Kresters Ship Construction laid the first keel, the *Aqueduct* was once the largest DropShip ever built, until the *Behemoth*-class cargo carrier was introduced in 2782. With similar lines to the *Mammoth*—right down to the externalized engine pods that would become the *Mammoth's* hallmark—the *Aqueduct's* specialized mission role and smaller capacity would eventually leave it lost among the civilian transport fleets of the post-Star League era.

Originally designed to compete for a lucrative Star League fleet refueling contract, the *Aqueduct* lost out to an alternative concept, but rather than allow their vessel design to die, Krester turned to the civilian merchant marine market. At the height of the Star League, these merchant convoys often numbered dozens of JumpShips and scores of DropShips—the refueling of which often taxed the existing tankers of the day. A single *Aqueduct*, hauling over six thousand burn-days' worth of fuel for the typical civilian cargo transport, could easily handle these refueling needs, transiting to and from a system's fuel depots instead of forcing squadrons of lesser tankers to do the same.

Krester also found another market in the Periphery, where mining colonies, research stations, and spacebound settlements and stations often relied heavily on outside shipments to operate. Even burgeoning colonies on the best worlds benefited from the *Aqueduct*, allowing the colony to focus on early population growth instead of spending the time to build out costly infrastructure such as transportation networks, refineries, and water purification plants. The timely arrival of an





RULES ANNEX

Aqueduct on many periphery worlds quickly became another vital link in the Inner Sphere's control over the Periphery.

Featuring a reinforced superstructure for durability, and a minimal amount of advanced technology equipment—beyond the ship's sophisticated liquid transfer systems—many *Aqueduct*-class DropShips managed to survive the Succession Wars. Though this vessel's visual similarities to the *Mammoth* (despite its size and having five engine "pods" to the *Mammoth's* four) left it often overlooked, a surprising number of these tankers remain in service today, particularly in the far-flung reached of the Periphery.

Aqueduct-class Tanker

Type: Civilian Spheroid

Use: Cargo Carrier

Tech: Inner Sphere

Introduced: 2638

Mass: 45,000 tons

Dimensions

Length: 112 meters

Width: 112 meters

Height: 99 meters

Fuel: 600 tons (6,000)

Tons/Burn-day: 7.71

Safe Thrust: 3

Maximum Thrust: 5

Heat Sinks: 118

Structural Integrity: 30

Battle Value: 919

Armor

Nose: 73

Sides: 62

Aft: 53

Cargo

Bay 1: Small Craft (2)	2 doors
Bay 2: Liquid Cargo (7,143 tons; 6,500-ton capacity)	0 doors
Bay 3: Liquid Cargo (7,143 tons; 6,500-ton capacity)	0 doors
Bay 4: Liquid Cargo (7,143 tons; 6,500-ton capacity)	0 doors
Bay 5: Liquid Cargo (7,143 tons; 6,500-ton capacity)	0 doors
Bay 6: BattleMechs (2)	1 door
Bay 7: Cargo (2,850 tons)	2 doors

Life Boats: 0

Escape Pods: 6

Crew: 6 officers, 30 enlisted/non-rated, 2 gunners, 14 bay personnel, 20 steerage-class passengers

Ammunition: 200 rounds of machine gun ammunition (1 ton)

Notes: Carries 13 tons of standard armor

Weapons:

Arc (Heat) Type	Capital Attack Values (Standard)				Class
	Short	Medium	Long	Extreme	
Nose (8 Heat)					
1 Large Laser	1(8)	1(8)	—	—	Laser
AL/AR (3 Heat)					
1 Medium Laser	1(5)	—	—	—	Laser
Aft (8 Heat)					
1 Large Laser	1(8)	1(8)	—	—	Laser
2 Machine Gun	0(4)	—	—	—	Point Defense

SNOWDEN MINING FACILITY

The *Snowden*-class is a semi-mobile, self-contained space-based mining and refining station typical of many across the Inner Sphere, but particularly common in the Taurian Concordat. The first *Snowden* was placed deep within one of the numerous asteroid belts along the coreward edge of the Hyades Cluster on 10 August 2390. Though intended for civilian use, and to operate far from support for extended periods of time, its debut came at a time when Taurian concern over the "Davion menace" was particularly high. As a result, its design incorporated thicker armor plating and more firepower than commonly seen on a civilian platform.

The *Snowden's* design is visually distinctive, with its twin grav decks located one over the other along the station's long axis, giving it the look of a giant, armored bicycle and giving rise to its unofficial nickname "Biker Station". In the connecting segment between these grav wheels—often referred to as the station's "waist", the *Snowden* originally featured fighter and small craft decks for local defense, but later designers modified one of these massive launch bays to accommodate a small army of IndustrialMechs instead, to support the station's primary mining, refining, and cargo handling needs. Today, in fact, many *Snowden's* maintain an army of vacuum-capable IndustrialMechs, such as the Outworlds Alliance's "Space Hound" ProspectorMech.

Remote locations and their semi-mobile design have allowed many *Snowden*-class stations to escape centuries of warfare relatively unscathed, though the decline in technology and difficult access to spare parts led many to close down. Currently, only Taurus Majoris Metals—the largest mining concern in the Taurian Concordat—maintains the most operating *Snowdens* at a mere eighteen stations (including the original *Snowden*). While currently unable to construct new *Snowden* stations, the Concordat nevertheless manufactures sufficient spare parts to keep their own operational (with some extras for export).

Snowden-class Mining Station

Type: Space Station

Tech: Inner Sphere

Introduced: 2390

Mass: 51,000 tons

Dimensions

Length: 650 meters

Width: 300 meters

Fuel: 510 tons (5,000)

RULES ANNEX



Tons/Burn-day: 0.977
Heat Sinks: 79
Structural Integrity: 1
Battle Value: 2,798

Armor

Nose: 22
Fore-Sides: 22
Aft-Sides: 22
Aft: 22

Cargo

Bay 1: IndustrialMechs (30) Cargo (5,000 tons)	4 doors
Bay 2: Small Craft (22) Cargo (5,100 tons)	3 doors
Bay 3: Pressurized Repair Facilities (5,000 ton capacity)	1 door
Bay 4: Unpressurized Repair Facilities (15,000 ton capacity)	1 door
Bay 5: Cargo (15,412 tons)	0 doors
Bay 6: Ore Processing Equipment (6,000 tons)	0 doors

Grav Decks: 2 (one 250-meter diameter, and one 150-meter diameter)

DropShip Capacity: 0

Life Boats: 150

Escape Pods: 0

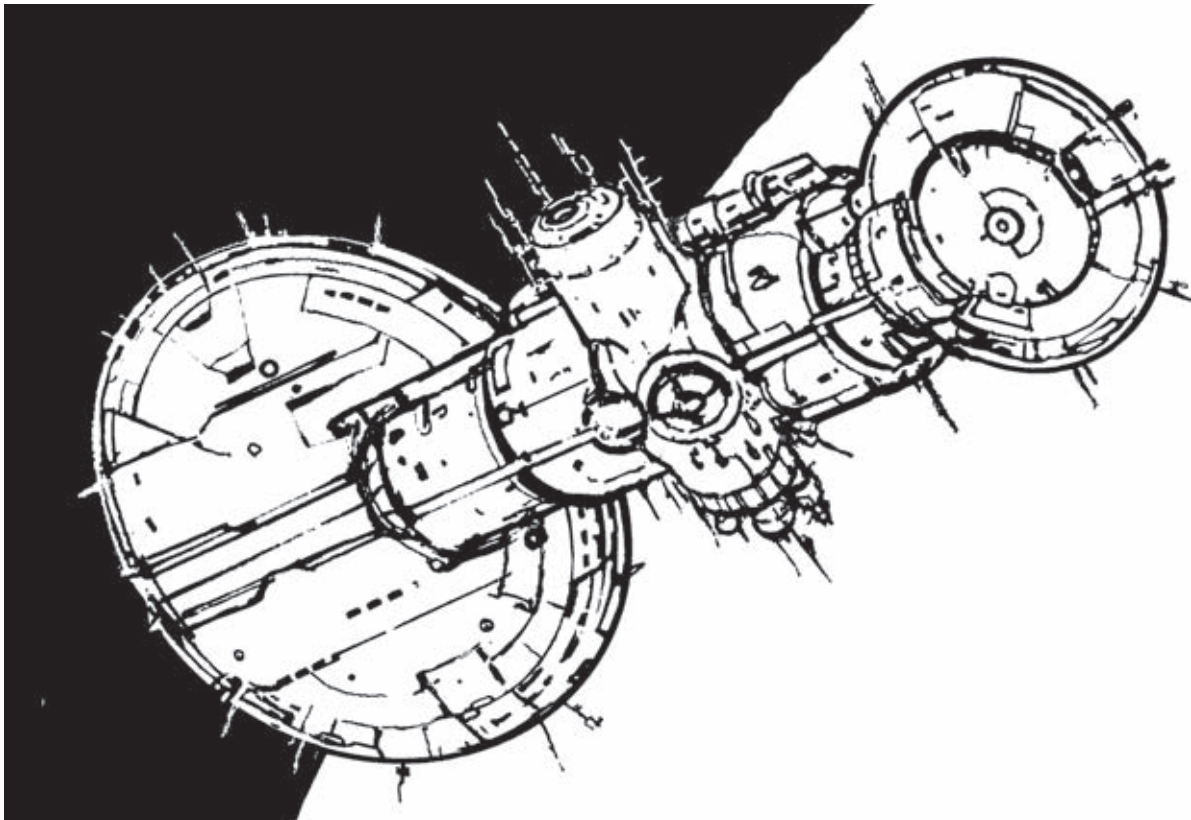
Crew: 20 officers, 60 enlisted/non-rated, 14 gunners, 90 marines, 170 bay personnel, 250 second-class passengers, 750 steerage-class passengers

Ammunition: None

Notes: Carries 166 tons of standard armor

Weapons:Capital Attack Values (Standard)

Arc (Heat) Type	Short	Medium	Long	Extreme	Class
Nose (18 Heat)					
2 Large Laser	2 (16)	2 (16)	—	—	Laser
2 Small Laser	1 (6)	—	—	—	Point Defense
FL/FR (18 Heat)					
1 PPC	1 (10)	1 (10)	—	—	PPC
2 Medium Laser	1 (10)	—	—	—	Laser
2 Small Laser	1 (6)	—	—	—	Point Defense
AL/AR (26 Heat)					
4 Medium Laser	2 (20)	—	—	—	Laser
4 Medium Laser	2 (20)	—	—	—	Laser
2 Small Laser	1 (6)	—	—	—	Point Defense
Aft (18 Heat)					
2 Large Laser	2 (16)	2 (16)	—	—	Laser
2 Small Laser	1 (6)	—	—	—	Point Defense





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BATTLETECH

LARGE NAVAL VESSEL RECORD SHEET

VEHICLE DATA

Type: MAJESTIC-CLASS PLEASURE CRUISER

Movement Points: Tonnage: 30,000
 Cruising: 3 Template: D
 Flank: 5 Tech Base: Inner Sphere
 Movement Type: Surface Vessel, Large 3044
 Engine Type: ICE

Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
2	Machine Gun	F(1)	0	2 [DB, AI]	—	1	2	3
2	Machine Gun	L/R(2)	0	2 [DB, AI]	—	1	2	3
2	Machine Gun	L/R(3)	0	2 [DB, AI]	—	1	2	3
2	Machine Gun	L/R(5)	0	2 [DB, AI]	—	1	2	3
2	Machine Gun	L/R(6)	0	2 [DB, AI]	—	1	2	3
2	Machine Gun	A(7)	0	2 [DB, AI]	—	1	2	3
1	SRM 2	A(7)	0	2/Msl	—	3	6	9
2	Searchlight	F(1)	—	—	—	—	—	—
1	Searchlight	A(7)	—	—	—	—	—	—
2	Light Vehicle Bays	A(7)	—	1 Door	—	—	—	—
1	Helipad	A(7)	—	—	—	—	—	—
1	Basic Cargo (6,000 tons, 2 Doors: 1 AL, 1AR)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1	Liquid Storage (1.890 tons, 2 Doors: 1 FL, 1 FR)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Advanced Fire Control
 Communications Equipment (2 Tons), 3 Field Kitchens,
 1 MASH (4 operating theaters), 200 First-class passengers,
 400 Second-class passengers, 400 Steerage-class
 quarters, 2 additional Officers Quarters, and 199 additional
 Crew Quarters.

Ammo: MG (600) SRM 2 (50)

Cost: 132,535,780 C-bills BV: 15,648

CREW DATA

Crew: 250 Life Boats: 40
 Gunnery Skill: ___ Driving Skill: ___

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incp.

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Engine Hit
 Sensor Hits +1 +2 +3 D

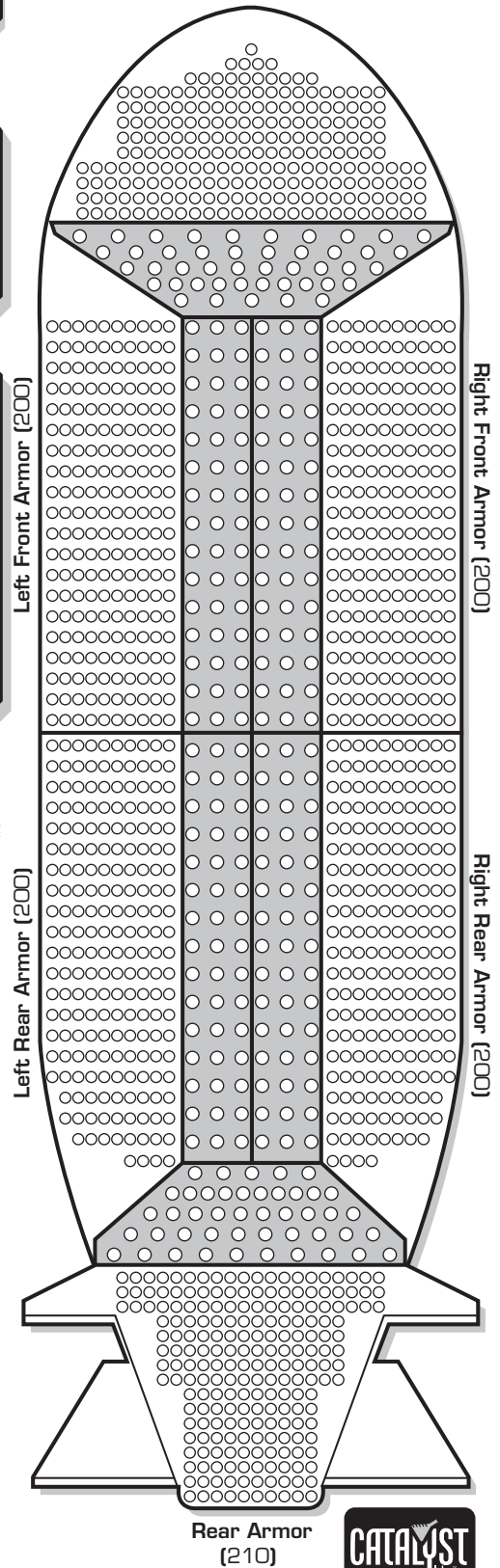
Stabilizers
 Front Left Right
 Rear



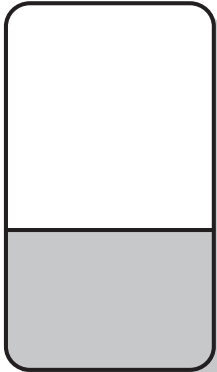
ARMOR DIAGRAM

BAR: 5

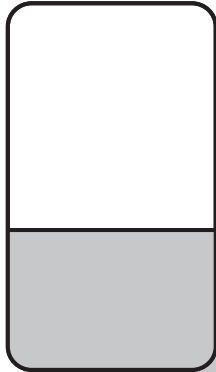
Front Armor
(215)



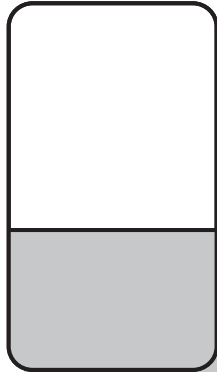
Turret 1 Armor
(0)



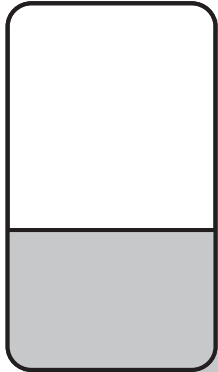
Turret 2 Armor
(0)



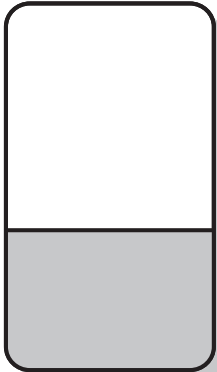
Turret 3 Armor
(0)



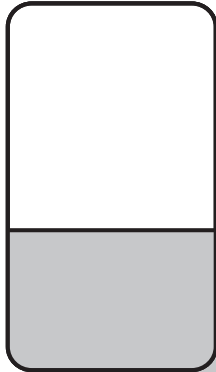
Turret 4 Armor
(0)



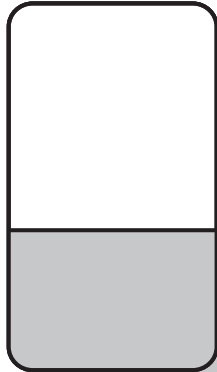
Turret 5 Armor
(0)



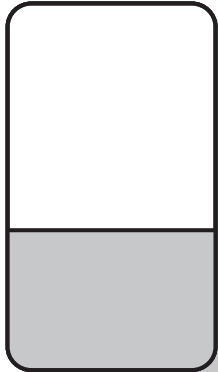
Turret 6 Armor
(0)



Turret 7 Armor
(0)



Turret 8 Armor
(0)



DEPTH TRACK

Turn	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Depth										
Turn	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Depth										



BATTLETECH

'MECH RECORD SHEET

'MECH DATA

Type: AM-PRM-RH7 "Rock Hound"

Movement Points: **Tonnage:** 40
 Walking: 4 **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere
 Running: 6 (IndustrialMech)
 Jumping: 0

WARRIOR DATA

Name: _____
 Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____
 Hits Taken:

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Consciousness#:

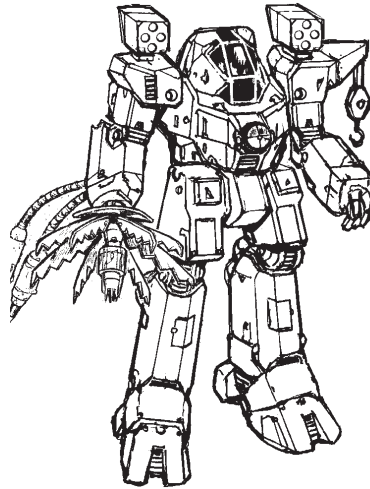
3	5	7	10	11	Dead
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Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

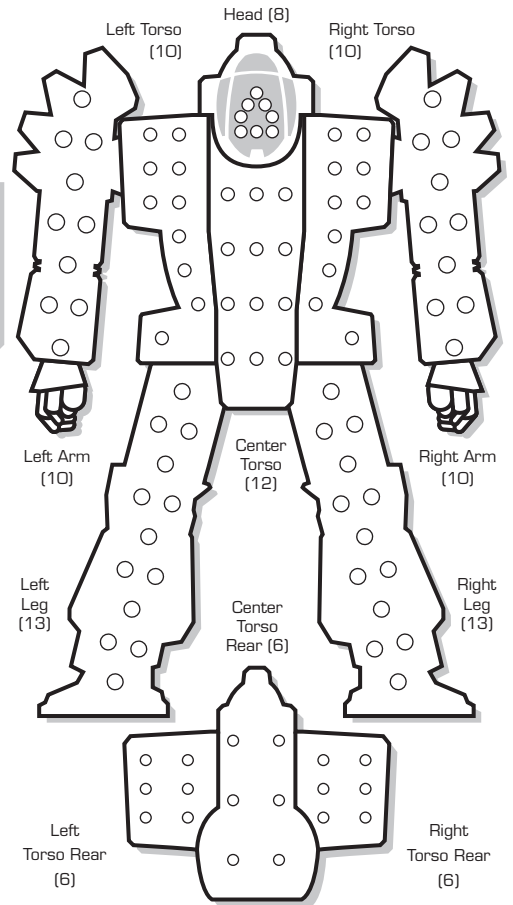
Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
1	SRM 4	LT	3	2/Msl	—	3	6	9
				[M,C,S]				
1	SRM 4	RT	3	2/Msl	—	3	6	9
				[M,C,S]				
1	Mining Drill	RA	—	4 [PD]	—	—	—	—
1	Lift Hoist	LA	—	[E]	—	—	—	—
1	Ejection Seat	H	—	[E]	—	—	—	—
1	Searchlight (Mounted)	CT	—	[E]	—	—	—	170

Advanced Fire Control
 Standard Armor

Cost: 1,936,074 C-bills BV: 577



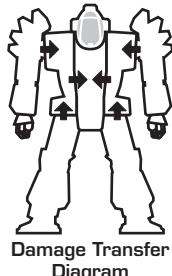
ARMOR DIAGRAM



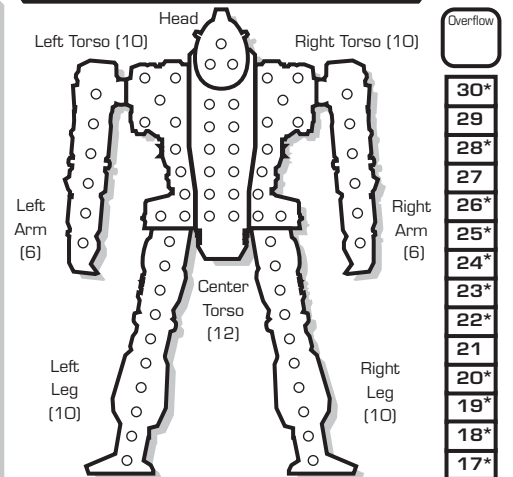
CRITICAL HIT TABLE

Location	Hit 1	Hit 2	Hit 3	Hit 4	Hit 5	Hit 6
Head	1. Life Support	2. Sensors	3. IndustrialMech Cockpit	4. Ejection Seat	5. Sensors	6. Life Support
Left Arm	1. Shoulder	2. Upper Arm Actuator	3. Lower Arm Actuator	4. Hand Actuator	5. Lift Hoist	6. Lift Hoist
Right Arm	1. Shoulder	2. Upper Arm Actuator	3. Lower Arm Actuator	4. Hand Actuator	5. Mining Drill	6. Mining Drill
Center Torso	1. Fuel Cell	2. Fuel Cell	3. Fuel Cell	4. Gyro	5. Gyro	6. Gyro
Left Torso	1. SRM 4	2. Ammo (SRM) 25	3. Roll Again	4. Roll Again	5. Roll Again	6. Roll Again
Right Torso	1. SRM 4	2. Roll Again	3. Roll Again	4. Roll Again	5. Roll Again	6. Roll Again
Left Leg	1. Hip	2. Upper Leg Actuator	3. Lower Leg Actuator	4. Foot Actuator	5. Heat Sink	6. Roll Again
Right Leg	1. Hip	2. Upper Leg Actuator	3. Lower Leg Actuator	4. Foot Actuator	5. Heat Sink	6. Roll Again

Engine Hits ○○○
 Gyro Hits ○○
 Sensor Hits ○○
 Life Support ○



INTERNAL STRUCTURE DIAGRAM



Heat Scale

Heat Level	Effects
30*	Shutdown
29	
28*	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+
27	
26*	Shutdown, avoid on 10+
25*	-5 Movement Points
24*	+4 Modifier to Fire
23*	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+
22*	Shutdown, avoid on 8+
21	-4 Movement Points
20*	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+
19*	Shutdown, avoid on 6+
18*	+3 Modifier to Fire
17*	-3 Movement Points
16	Shutdown, avoid on 4+
15*	+2 Modifier to Fire
14*	-2 Movement Points
13*	+1 Modifier to Fire
12	
11	
10*	
9	
8*	
7	
6	
5*	
4	
3	
2	
1	
0	

HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks: 2 Single
30	Shutdown	
28	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+	
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+	
25	-5 Movement Points	
24	+4 Modifier to Fire	
23	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+	
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+	
20	-4 Movement Points	
19	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+	
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+	
17	+3 Modifier to Fire	
15	-3 Movement Points	
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+	
13	+2 Modifier to Fire	
10	-2 Movement Points	
8	+1 Modifier to Fire	
5	-1 Movement Points	

BATTLETECH™

'MECH RECORD SHEET

'MECH DATA

Type: AM-PRM-RH7C "Rock Possum"

Movement Points: **Tonnage:** 40
 Walking: 4 **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere
 Running: 6 (IndustrialMech)
 Jumping: 0

Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
1	SRM 4	LT	3	2/Msl	—	3	6	9
				[M,C,S]				
1	Mining Drill	RA	—	4 [PD]	—	—	—	—
1	Lift Hoist	LA	—	[E]	—	—	—	—
1	Ejection Seat	H	—	[E]	—	—	—	—
1	Searchlight (Mounted)	CT	—	[E]	—	—	—	170
1	Cargo Bay (3 tons) LT	—	—	[E]	—	—	—	—

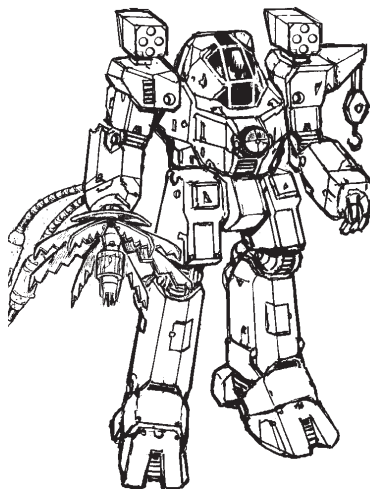
Advanced Fire Control
 Standard Armor

Cost: 1,796,373 C-bills BV: 534

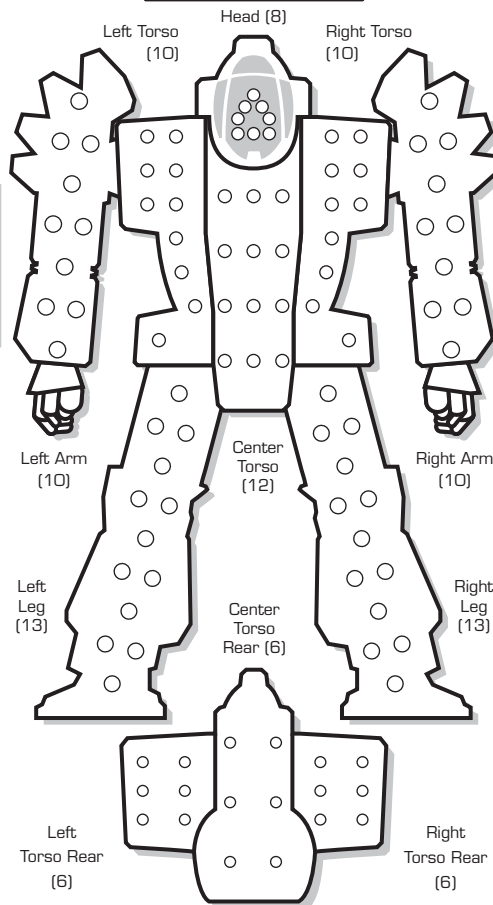
WARRIOR DATA

Name: _____
 Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consciousness#	3	5	7	10	11	Dead



ARMOR DIAGRAM



CRITICAL HIT TABLE

Left Arm

- Shoulder
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- Hand Actuator
- Lift Hoist
- Lift Hoist

- Lift Hoist
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

Left Torso

- SRM 4
- Ammo (SRM) 25
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

Left Leg

- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

Head

- Life Support
- Sensors
- IndustrialMech Cockpit
- Ejection Seat
- Sensors
- Life Support

Center Torso

- Fuel Cell
- Fuel Cell
- Fuel Cell
- Gyro
- Gyro
- Gyro

- Gyro
- Fuel Cell
- Fuel Cell
- Fuel Cell
- Searchlight (Mounted)
- Roll Again

Engine Hits ○○○
 Gyro Hits ○○
 Sensor Hits ○○
 Life Support ○

Right Arm

- Shoulder
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- Hand Actuator
- Mining Drill
- Mining Drill

- Mining Drill
- Mining Drill
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

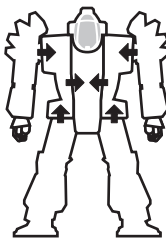
Right Torso

- Cargo Bay
- Cargo Bay
- Cargo Bay
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

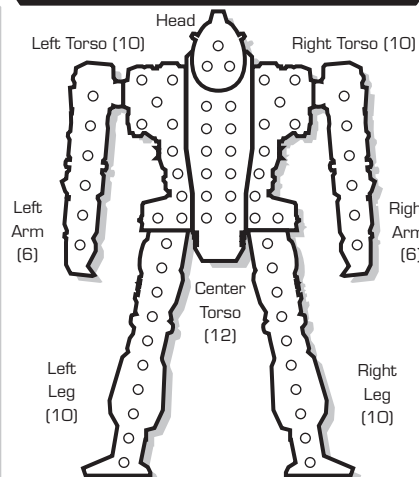
Right Leg

- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- Heat Sink
- Roll Again



Damage Transfer Diagram

INTERNAL STRUCTURE DIAGRAM



Heat Scale

Overflow

30*
29
28*
27
26*
25*
24*
23*
22*
21
20*
19*
18*
17*
16
15*
14*
13*
12
11
10*
9
8*
7
6
5*
4
3
2
1
0

HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks: 1 Single
30	Shutdown	
28	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+	
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+	
25	-5 Movement Points	○
24	+4 Modifier to Fire	
23	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+	
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+	
20	-4 Movement Points	
19	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+	
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+	
17	+3 Modifier to Fire	
15	-3 Movement Points	
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+	
13	+2 Modifier to Fire	
10	-2 Movement Points	
8	+1 Modifier to Fire	
5	-1 Movement Points	

BATTLETECH

'MECH RECORD SHEET

'MECH DATA

Type: AM-PRM-RH7A "Rock Otter"

Movement Points: **Tonnage:** 40
 Walking: 4 **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere
 Running: 6 (IndustrialMech)
 Jumping: 0

Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
1	SRM 4	LT	3	2/Msl	—	3	6	9
				[M,C,S]				
1	Mining Drill	RA	—	4 [PD]	—	—	—	—
1	Lift Hoist	LA	—	[E]	—	—	—	—
1	Searchlight (Mounted)	CT	—	[E]	—	—	—	170

Advanced Fire Control
 Environmental Sealing
 Standard Armor

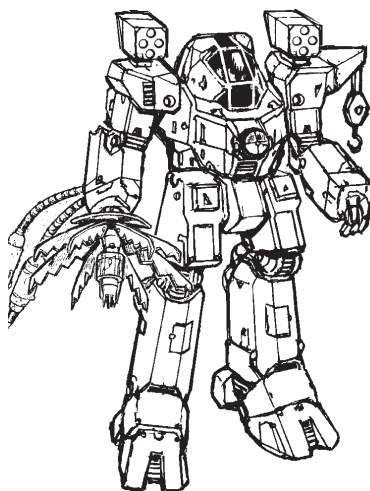
Cost: 1,782,486 C-bills BV: 510

WARRIOR DATA

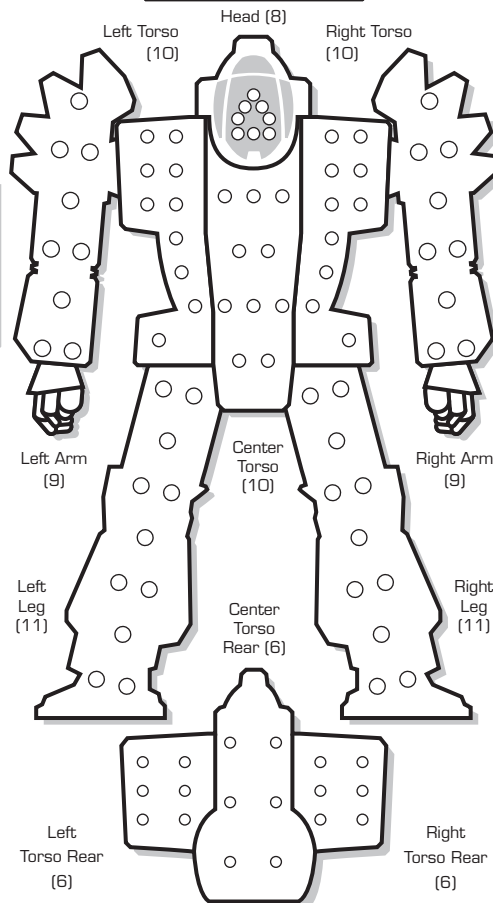
Name: _____
 Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____
 Hits Taken:

1	2	3	4	5	6
3	5	7	10	11	Dead

 Consciousness#



ARMOR DIAGRAM



CRITICAL HIT TABLE

Left Arm

- Shoulder
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- Hand Actuator
- Lift Hoist
- Lift Hoist

- Lift Hoist
- Environmental Sealing
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

Left Torso

- SRM 4
- Ammo (SRM) 25
- Environmental Sealing
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

Left Leg

- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- Environmental Sealing
- Roll Again

Head

- Life Support
- Sensors
- IndustrialMech Cockpit
- Environmental Sealing
- Sensors
- Life Support

Center Torso

- Fuel Cell
- Fuel Cell
- Fuel Cell
- Gyro
- Gyro
- Gyro

- Gyro
- Fuel Cell
- Fuel Cell
- Fuel Cell
- Searchlight (Mounted)
- Environmental Sealing

Engine Hits ○○○
 Gyro Hits ○○
 Sensor Hits ○○
 Life Support ○

Right Arm

- Shoulder
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- Hand Actuator
- Mining Drill
- Mining Drill

- Mining Drill
- Mining Drill
- Environmental Sealing
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

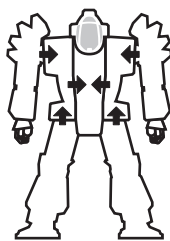
Right Torso

- Environmental Sealing
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again
- Roll Again

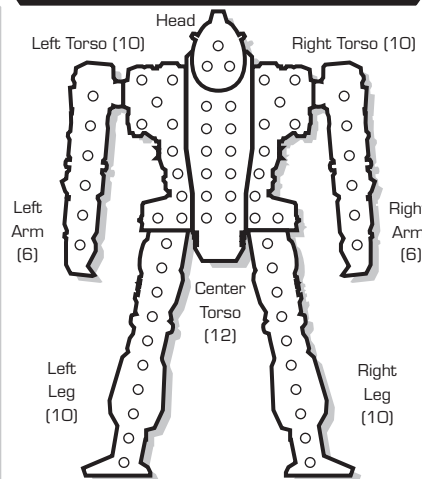
Right Leg

- Hip
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- Heat Sink
- Environmental Sealing



Damage Transfer Diagram

INTERNAL STRUCTURE DIAGRAM



HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks: 1 Single
30	Shutdown	
28	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+	
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+	
25	-5 Movement Points	○
24	+4 Modifier to Fire	
23	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+	
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+	
20	-4 Movement Points	
19	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+	
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+	
17	+3 Modifier to Fire	
15	-3 Movement Points	
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+	
13	+2 Modifier to Fire	
10	-2 Movement Points	
8	+1 Modifier to Fire	
5	-1 Movement Points	

Heat Scale

Heat Scale	Overflow
30*	
29	
28*	
27	
26*	
25*	
24*	
23*	
22*	
21	
20*	
19*	
18*	
17*	
16	
15*	
14*	
13*	
12	
11	
10*	
9	
8*	
7	
6	
5*	
4	
3	
2	
1	
0	

BATTLETECH™

'MECH RECORD SHEET

'MECH DATA

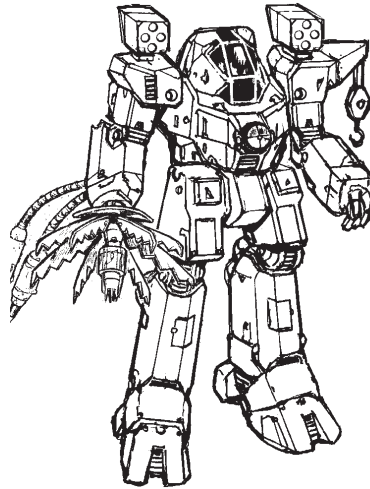
Type: AM-PRM-SH1 "Space Hound"

Movement Points: **Tonnage:** 40
 Walking: 4 **Tech Base:** Inner Sphere
 Running: 6 (IndustrialMech)
 Jumping: 1

WARRIOR DATA

Name: _____
 Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consciousness#	3	5	7	10	11	Dead



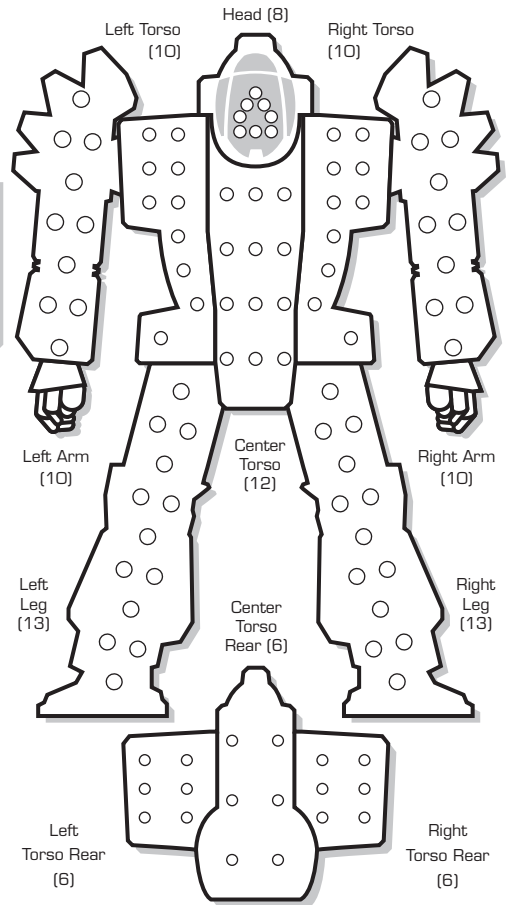
Weapons & Equipment Inventory (hexes)

Qty	Type	Loc	Ht	Dmg	Min	Sht	Med	Lng
1	Small Laser	RA	1	3 [DE]	—	1	2	3
1	Mining Drill	RA	—	4 [PD]	—	—	—	—
1	Lift Hoist	LA	—	[E]	—	—	—	—
1	Searchlight (Mounted)	CT	—	[E]	—	—	—	170
1	Cargo Bay (1 ton)	LT	—	[E]	—	—	—	—

Advanced Fire Control
 Environmental Sealing
 Standard Armor

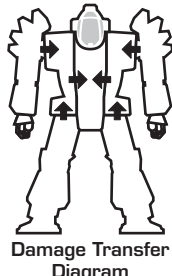
Cost: 1,843,948 C-bills BV: 517

ARMOR DIAGRAM

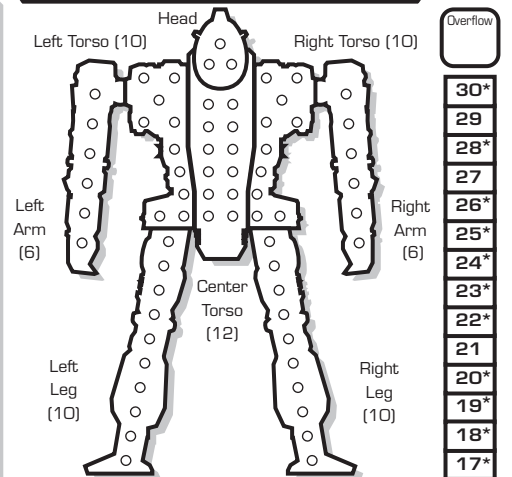


CRITICAL HIT TABLE

<p>Left Arm</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Shoulder Upper Arm Actuator Lower Arm Actuator Hand Actuator Lift Hoist Lift Hoist <p>1-3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lift Hoist Environmental Sealing Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again <p>4-6</p> <p>Left Torso</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Cargo Bay Environmental Sealing Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again <p>1-3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again <p>4-6</p> <p>Left Leg</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hip Upper Leg Actuator Lower Leg Actuator Foot Actuator Heat Sink Environmental Sealing 	<p>Head</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Life Support Sensors IndustrialMech Cockpit Environmental Sealing Sensors Life Support <p>Center Torso</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Fusion Engine Fusion Engine Fusion Engine Gyro Gyro Gyro <p>1-3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Gyro Fusion Engine Fusion Engine Fusion Engine Searchlight (Mounted) Environmental Sealing <p>4-6</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>Engine Hits ○○○</p> <p>Gyro Hits ○○</p> <p>Sensor Hits ○○</p> <p>Life Support ○</p> </div> <p>Right Arm</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Shoulder Upper Arm Actuator Lower Arm Actuator Hand Actuator Mining Drill Mining Drill <p>1-3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mining Drill Mining Drill Small Laser Heat Sink Roll Again Environmental Sealing <p>4-6</p> <p>Right Torso</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Fuel (40) Fuel (40) Jump Jet Heat Sink Environmental Sealing Roll Again <p>1-3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again Roll Again <p>4-6</p> <p>Right Leg</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hip Upper Leg Actuator Lower Leg Actuator Foot Actuator Heat Sink Environmental Sealing
---	---



INTERNAL STRUCTURE DIAGRAM



Heat Scale

Overflow
30*
29
28*
27
26*
25*
24*
23*
22*
21
20*
19*
18*
17*
16
15*
14*
13*
12
11
10*
9
8*
7
6
5*
4
3
2
1
0

HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks:
30	Shutdown	10
28	Ammo Exp. avoid on 8+	Single
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+	○
25	-5 Movement Points	○
24	+4 Modifier to Fire	○
23	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+	○
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+	○
20	-4 Movement Points	○
19	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+	○
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+	○
17	+3 Modifier to Fire	○
15	-3 Movement Points	○
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+	○
13	+2 Modifier to Fire	○
10	-2 Movement Points	○
8	+1 Modifier to Fire	○
5	-1 Movement Points	○

BATTLETECH™

CONVENTIONAL FIGHTER RECORD SHEET

FIGHTER DATA

Type: MSF-42 BLUEHAWK/ASF-23 PROTECTOR
AIR SUPPORT FIGHTER

Thrust: _____ Tonnage: 50
Safe Thrust: 5 Tech Base: Inner Sphere
Maximum Thrust: 8 3019

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

Standard Scale		(0-6)	(6-12)	(13-20)	(21-25)		
Qty	Type	Loc.	Ht	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
3	Machine Gun	N	0	2	Point Defense		
1	LRM 10	LW	0	6	6	6	—
1	LRM 10	RW	0	6	6	6	—

Ammo: LRM 10 (24) MG (100)
Fuel: 480 Points

Cost: 799,917 C-bills BV: 441

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Nose Damage
Threshold (Total Armor)
2 (14)

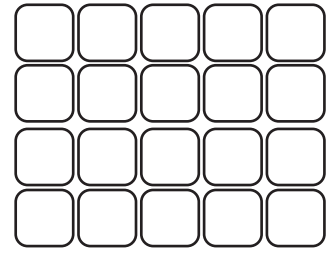
Left Wing
Damage Threshold
(Total Armor)
2 (12)

Right Wing
Damage Threshold
(Total Armor)
2 (12)

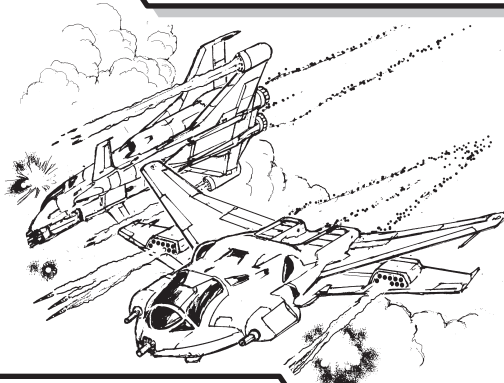
Structural
Integrity:
5

Aft Damage
Threshold
(Total Armor)
1 (10)

EXTERNAL STORES/BOMBS



Key:-
HE - High Explosive
LG - Laser Guided
C - Cluster
RL - Rocket Launcher



CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Engine	2	4	D
FCS	+2	+4	D	Gear	+5		
Sensors	+1	+2	+5	Life Support	+2		

PILOT DATA

Name: _____
Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consciousness #	3	5	7	10	11	Dead
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	

GROUND MAP STRAIGHT MOVEMENT

VELOCITY	MINIMUM STRAIGHT MOVEMENT (IN HEXES)	
	FIGHTER	SMALL CRAFT AND FIXED WING SUPPORT VEHICLES
1	8	8
2	12	14
3	16	20
4	20	26
5	24	32
6	28	38
7	32	44
8	36	50
9	40	56
10	44	62
11	48	68
12	52	74

Velocity above 12 is not possible on ground maps.

VELOCITY RECORD

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

Turn #	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

FIGHTER RETURN TABLE

SAFE THRUST	TURNS BEFORE RETURN
1-4	3
5-8	2
9-12	1
13+	0

BATTLETECH

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Standard Scale



AERODYNE SMALL CRAFT RECORD SHEET

CRAFT DATA

Type: TIGRESS CLOSE PATROL CRAFT

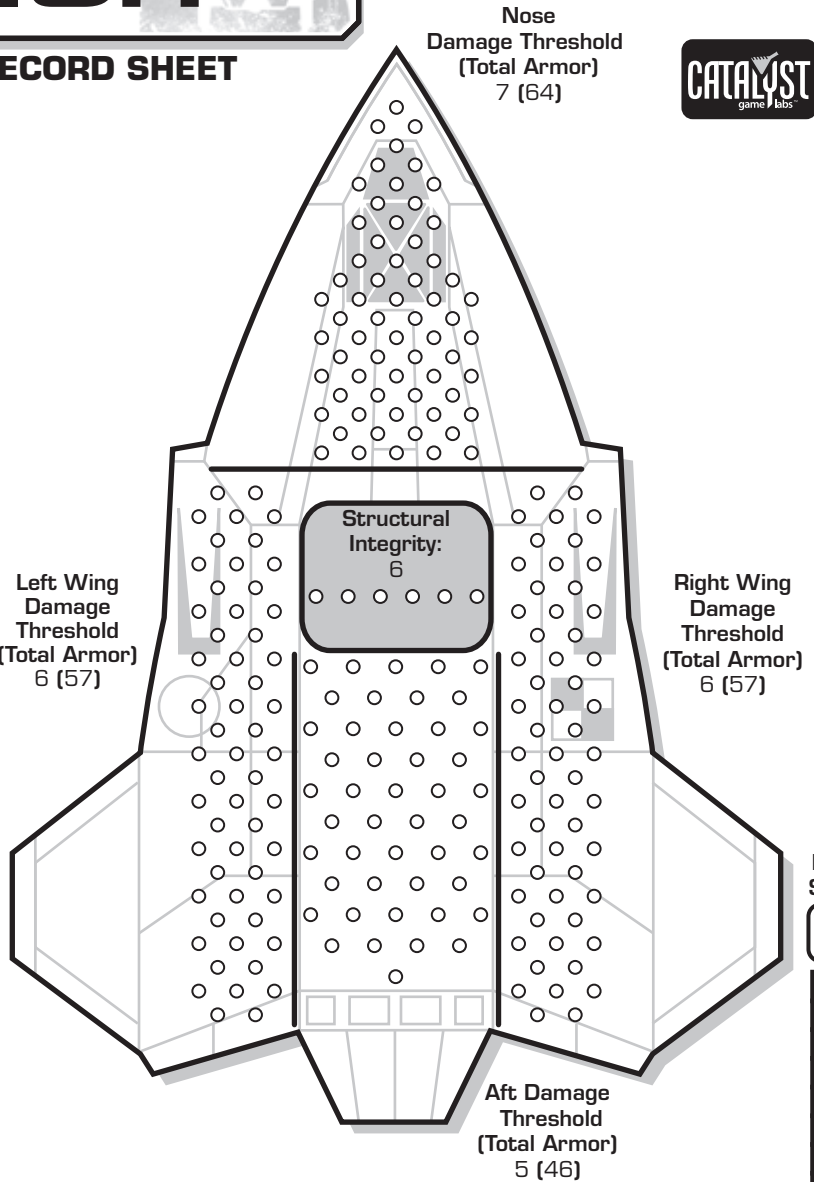
Thrust: Tonnage: 150
 Safe Thrust: 4 Tech Base: Inner Sphere
 Maximum Thrust: 6 2790

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

Standard Scale Qty Type	Loc. Ht	(0-6) SRV	(6-12) MRV	(13-20) LRV	(21-25) ERV
1 PPC	N 10	10	10	—	—
1 LRM 15	N 5	9	9	9	—
2 Medium Laser	LW 3	5	—	—	—
2 Medium Laser	RW 3	5	—	—	—

Cargo: Bay 1: Cargo (7 Tons, 1 door)
 Ammo: LRM 15 (32)
 Fuel: 1,200 Points

Cost: 8,500,240 C-bills BV: 852



Heat Scale

Overflow
30*
29
28*
27*
26*
25*
24*
23*
22*
21*
20*
19*
18*
17*
16
15*
14*
13*
12
11
10*
9
8*
7
6
5*
4
3
2
1
0

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Engine	2	4	D
FCS	+2	+4	D	Gear	+5		
Sensors	+1	+2	+5	Life Support	+2		

PILOT DATA

Name: _____
 Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Consciousness #	3	5	7	10	11	Dead
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	

HEAT DATA

Heat Level*	Effects	Heat Sinks:
30	Shutdown	20
28	Ammo Exp. avoid 8+	Single
27	Pilot Damage, avoid on 9+	○ ○
26	Shutdown, avoid on 10+	○ ○ ○ ○
25	Random Movement, avoid on 10+	○ ○ ○ ○
24	+4 Modifier to Fire	○ ○ ○ ○
23	Ammo Exp. avoid on 6+	○ ○ ○ ○
22	Shutdown, avoid on 8+	○ ○ ○ ○
21	Pilot Damage, avoid on 6+	○ ○ ○ ○
20	Random Movement, avoid on 8+	○ ○ ○ ○
19	Ammo Exp. avoid on 4+	○ ○ ○ ○
18	Shutdown, avoid on 6+	○ ○ ○ ○
17	+3 Modifier to Fire	○ ○ ○ ○
15	Random Movement, avoid on 7+	○ ○ ○ ○
14	Shutdown, avoid on 4+	○ ○ ○ ○
13	+2 Modifier to Fire	○ ○ ○ ○
10	Random Movement, avoid on 6+	○ ○ ○ ○
8	+1 Modifier to Fire	○ ○ ○ ○
5	Random Movement, avoid on 5+	○ ○ ○ ○

VELOCITY RECORD

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

Turn #	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

BATTLETECH™

Nose Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 9 (87)

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Standard Scale



SPHEROID DROPSHIP RECORD SHEET

DROPSHIP DATA

Type: PRINCESS LUXURY LINER

Name: _____ Tonnage: 11,800
 Thrust: _____ Tech Base: Inner Sphere
 Safe Thrust: 3 2657
 Maximum Thrust: 5
 Fighters/Small Craft: 0/4 Launch Rate: 4/Turn

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

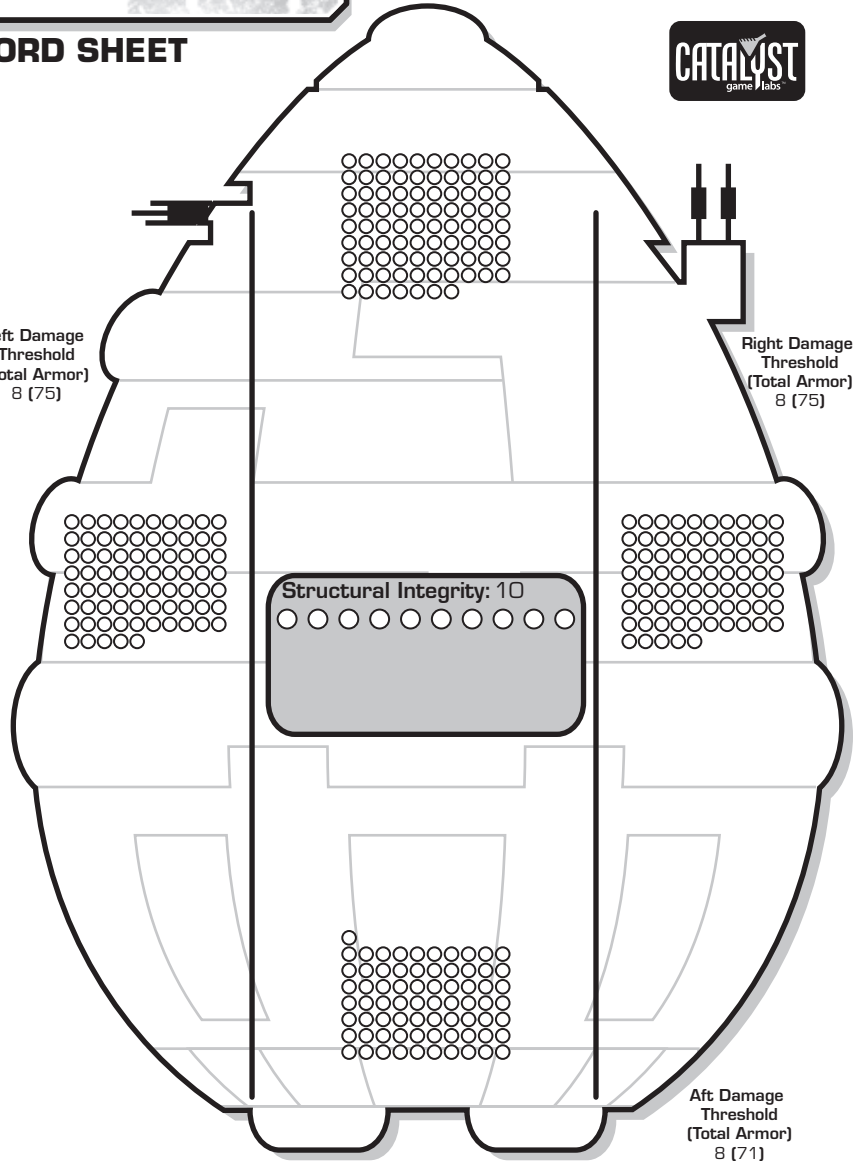
Standard Scale	(1-6)	(6-12)	(13-20)	(21-25)		
Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
1 Large Laser	Nose	8	1(8)	1(8)	—	—
2 Machine Gun	Nose	0	0(4)	Point Defense		
1 Medium Laser	FL/FR	3	1(5)	—	—	—
2 Machine Gun	FL/FR	0	0(4)	Point Defense		
1 Medium Laser	AL/AR	3	1(5)	—	—	—
2 Machine Gun	AL/AR	0	0(4)	Point Defense		
1 Medium Laser	Aft	3	1(5)	—	—	—
2 Machine Gun	Aft	0	0(4)	Point Defense		

Cargo: Bay 1: Small Craft (4) (2 doors)
 Bay 2: Pool Deck (1)
 Bay 3: Earth Deck (1)
 Bay 4: Cargo (952.5 Tons, 4 doors)
 Bay 5: Pumps and Circulation Equipment (1)
 Bay 6: Cargo (450 Tons)

Ammo: MG (600)

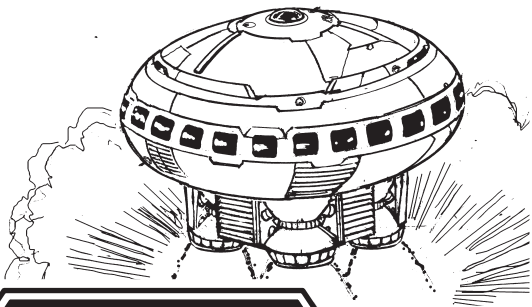
Cost: 673,288,000 C-bills **BV:** 1,041

Left Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 8 (75)



Right Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 8 (75)

Aft Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 8 (71)



CREW DATA

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incp.

Crew: 123 Marines: 8
 Passengers: 200 Elementals: 0
 Other: 20 Battle Armor: 0
 Life Boats/Escape Pods: 35/15

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Gear	+5	
FCS	+2	+4	D	Life Support	+2	
Sensors	+1	+2	+5	K-F Boom	D	
Thrusters				Docking Collar	D	
Left	+1	+2	+3	D		
Right	+1	+2	+3	D		
Engine	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	D

VELOCITY RECORD

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										
Turn #	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

HEAT DATA

Heat Sinks: 60 Single

Heat Generation Per Arc

Nose:	8	Aft:	3
Fore-Left:	3	Aft-Left:	3
Fore-Right:	3	Aft-Right:	3

BATTLETECH™

Nose Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 9 (87)

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Standard Scale



SPHEROID DROPSHIP RECORD SHEET

DROPSHIP DATA

Type: PRINCESS LUXURY LINER CARGO REFIT

Name: _____ Tonnage: 11,800
 Thrust: _____ Tech Base: Inner Sphere
 Safe Thrust: 3 2657
 Maximum Thrust: 5
 Fighters/Small Craft: 0/4 Launch Rate: 4/Turn

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

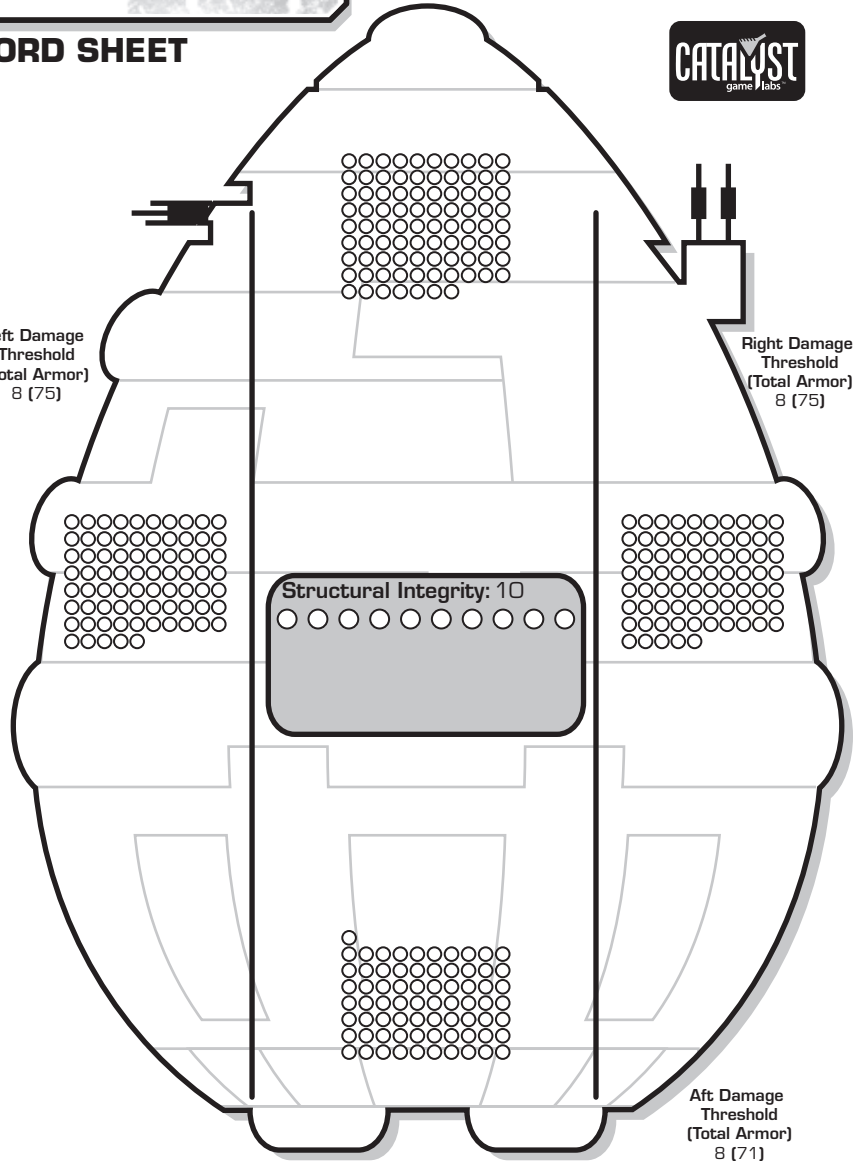
Standard Scale		(1-6)	(6-12)	(13-20)	(21-25)	
Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
1 Large Laser	Nose	8	1(8)	1(8)	—	—
2 Machine Gun	Nose	0	0(4)	Point Defense		
1 Medium Laser	FL/FR	3	1(5)	—	—	—
2 Machine Gun	FL/FR	0	0(4)	Point Defense		
1 Medium Laser	AL/AR	3	1(5)	—	—	—
2 Machine Gun	AL/AR	0	0(4)	Point Defense		
1 Medium Laser	Aft	3	1(5)	—	—	—
2 Machine Gun	Aft	0	0(4)	Point Defense		

Cargo: Bay 1: Small Craft (4) (2 doors)
 Bay 2: Liquid Cargo (1,400 tons; 1,274 ton capacity, 0 doors)
 Bay 3: Cargo (2,363 Tons)
 Bay 4: Cargo (2,086 Tons, 4 doors)
 Bay 5: Cargo (450 Tons)

Ammo: MG (600)

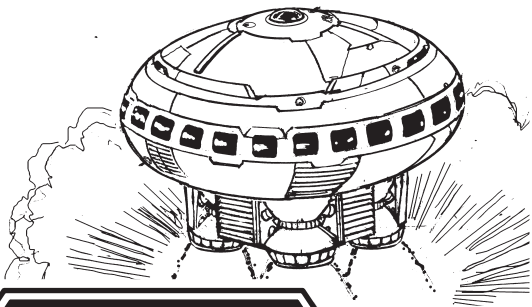
Cost: 175,868,000 C-bills **BV:** 1,041

Left Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 8 (75)



Right Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 8 (75)

Aft Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 8 (71)



CREW DATA

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incp.

Crew: 53 Marines: 0
 Passengers: 100 Elementals: 0
 Other: 20 Battle Armor: 0
 Life Boats/Escapes Pods: 10/15

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Gear	+5	
FCS	+2	+4	D	Life Support	+2	
Sensors	+1	+2	+5	K-F Boom	D	
Thrusters				Docking Collar	D	
Left	+1	+2	+3	D		
Right	+1	+2	+3	D		
Engine	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	D

VELOCITY RECORD

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										
Turn #	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

HEAT DATA

Heat Sinks: 60 Single

Heat Generation Per Arc

Nose:	8	Aft:	3
Fore-Left:	3	Aft-Left:	3
Fore-Right:	3	Aft-Right:	3

BATTLETECH™

SPHEROID DROPSHIP RECORD SHEET

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Standard Scale



DROPSHIP DATA

Type: **AQUEDUCT LIQUID CARRIER**

Name: _____ Tonnage: 45,000
 Thrust: _____ Tech Base: Inner Sphere
 Safe Thrust: 3 2638
 Maximum Thrust: 5
 Fighters/Small Craft: 0/2 Launch Rate: 4/Turn

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

Standard Scale	(1-6)	(6-12)	(13-20)	(21-25)		
Bay	Loc	Heat	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
1 Large Laser	Nose	8	1(8)	1(8)	-	-
1 Medium Laser	AL/AR	3	1(5)	-	-	-
1 Large Laser	Aft	8	1(8)	1(8)	-	-
2 Machine Gun	Aft	0	0(4)	Point Defense		

Cargo: Bay 1: Small Craft (2) (2 doors)
 Bay 2: Liquid Cargo (7,143 tons; 6,500 ton capacity, 0 doors)
 Bay 3: Liquid Cargo (7,143 tons; 6,500 ton capacity, 0 doors)
 Bay 4: Liquid Cargo (7,143 tons; 6,500 ton capacity, 0 doors)
 Bay 5: Liquid Cargo (7,143 tons; 6,500 ton capacity, 0 doors)
 Bay 6: BattleMechs (2)
 Bay 7: Cargo (2,850 Tons, 2 doors)

Ammo: MG (200)

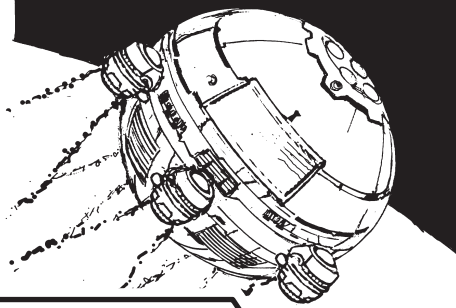
Cost: 427,851,200 C-bills BV: 919

Left Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 7 (62)

Right Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 7 (62)

Structural Integrity: 30

Aft Damage Threshold (Total Armor) 6 (53)



CREW DATA

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incp.
Crew:	38	Marines:	0			
Passengers:	20	Elementals:	0			
Other:	14	Battle Armor:	0			

Life Boats/Escape Pods: 0 / 6

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Gear	+5	
FCS	+2	+4	D	Life Support	+2	
Sensors	+1	+2	+5	K-F Boom	D	
Thrusters				Docking Collar	D	
Left	+1	+2	+3	D		
Right	+1	+2	+3	D		
Engine	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	D

VELOCITY RECORD

Turn #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										
Turn #	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Thrust										
Velocity										
Effective Velocity										
Altitude										

HEAT DATA

Heat Sinks: 118 Single

Heat Generation Per Arc

Nose:	8	Aft:	8
Fore-Left:	0	Aft-Left:	3
Fore-Right:	0	Aft-Right:	3

BATTLETECH™

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Capital Scale



SPACE STATION RECORD SHEET

SPACE STATION DATA

Type: SNOWDEN MINING STATION

Name: _____ Tonnage: 51,000
 Thrust: _____ Tech Base: Inner Sphere (2390)
 Station Keeping Only

DropShip Capacity: 0

Fighters/Small Craft: 0 / 22 Launch Rate: 16/turn

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

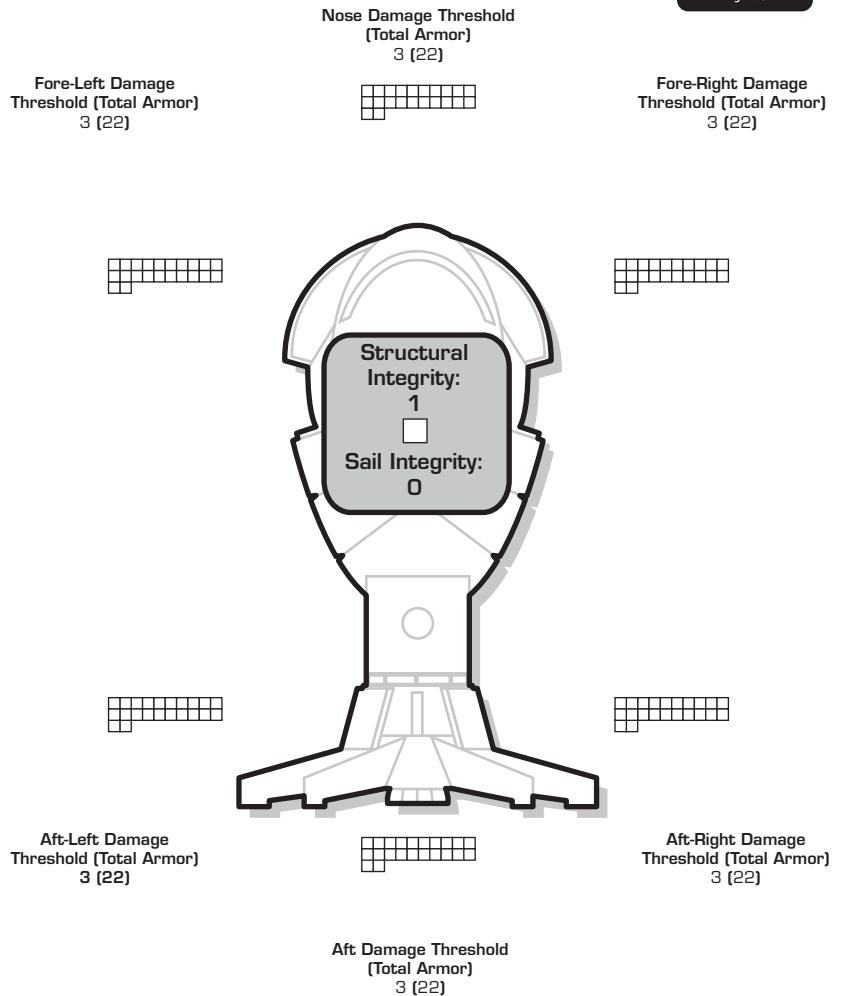
Standard Scale	Loc	Ht	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
2 Small Laser	N	2	1(6)	Point Defense		
2 Large Laser	N	16	2(16)	2(16)	—	—
2 Small Laser	FL/FR	2	1(6)	Point Defense		
1 PPC	FL/FR	10	1(10)	1(10)	—	—
2 Medium Laser	FL/FR	6	1(10)	—	—	—
2 Small Laser	AL/AR	2	1(6)	Point Defense		
4 Medium Laser	AL/AR	12	2(20)	—	—	—
4 Medium Laser	AL/AR	12	2(20)	—	—	—
2 Small Laser	A	2	1(6)	Point Defense		
2 Large Laser	A	16	2(16)	2(16)	—	—

Grav Decks: Grav Deck #1: 250-meter
 Grav Deck #2: 150-meter

Cargo: Bay 1: BattleMechs (30) (4 doors)
 IndustrialMech Storage Facilities (5,000 Tons)
 Bay 2: Small Craft (22) (4 doors)
 Shuttle Hanger and Facilities (5,100 tons)
 Bay 3: 5,000 T-Press Rep Facil. (1 door)
 Bay 4: 15,000 T-Press Rep Facil. (1 door)
 Bay 5: Cargo (7,706 Tons)
 Cargo (7,706 Tons)
 Bay 6: Ore Processing Facility (1)

Ammo: None

Cost: 4,383,284,000 C-bills BV: 2,798



CREW DATA

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incp.

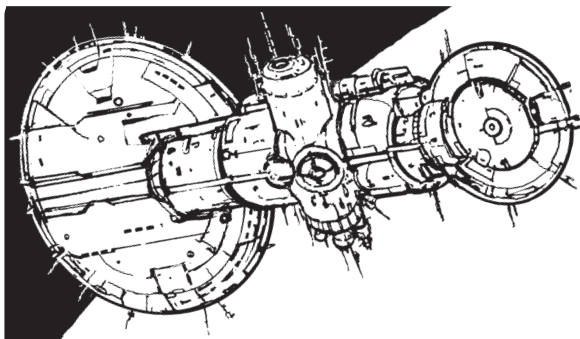
Crew: 94 Marines: 90
 Passengers: 1,000 Elementals: 0
 Other: 170 Battle Armor: 0
 Life Boats/Escape Pods: 150/0

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Life Support	+2
CIC	+2	+4	D		
Sensors	+1	+2	+5		
Thrusters					
Left	+1	+2	+3	D	
Right	+1	+2	+3	D	

HEAT DATA

Heat Sinks:	Heat Generation Per Arc	
79	Nose:	18
Single	Left/Right Fore:	18 18
	Left/Right Aft:	26 26
	Aft:	18



BATTLETECH™

ARMOR DIAGRAM

Capital Scale



SPACE STATION RECORD SHEET

SPACE STATION DATA

Type: SNOWDEN MINING STATION Mk.I

Name: _____ Tonnage: 51,000
 Thrust: _____ Tech Base: Inner Sphere (2390)
 Station Keeping Only

DropShip Capacity: 0

Fighters/Small Craft: 0 / 44 Launch Rate: 16/turn

Weapons & Equipment Inventory

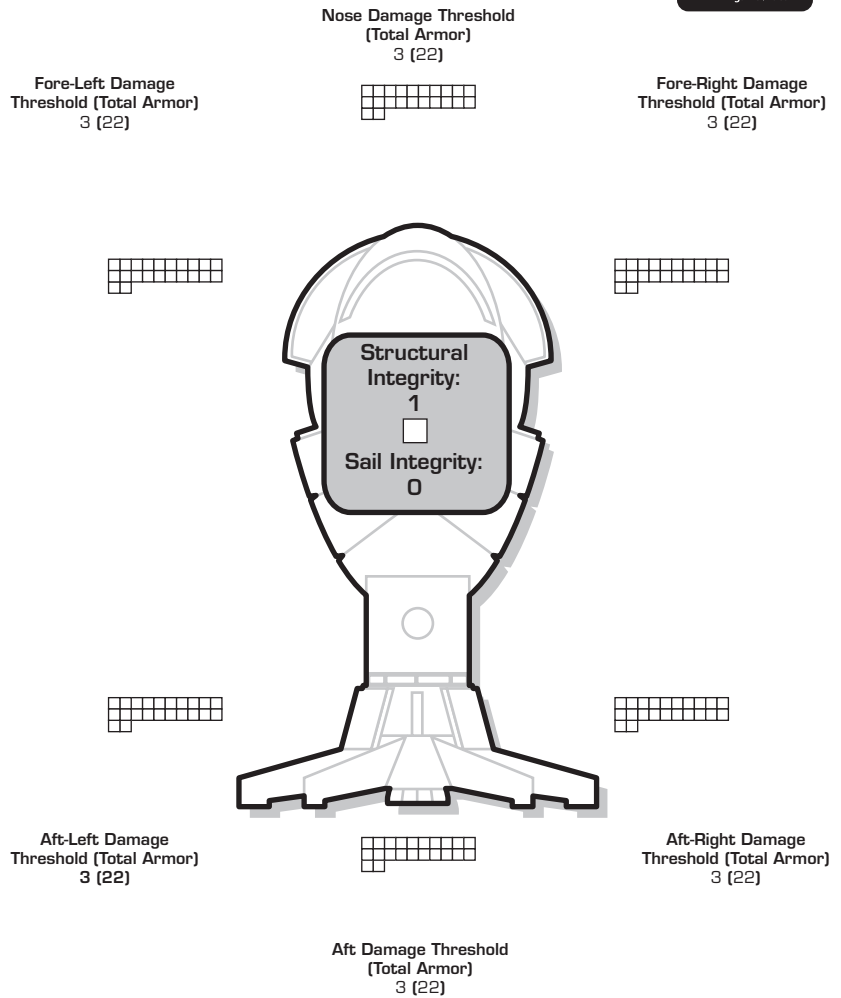
Standard Scale	Loc	Ht	SRV	MRV	LRV	ERV
2 Small Laser	N	2	1(6)	Point Defense	—	—
2 Large Laser	N	16	2(16)	2(16)	—	—
2 Small Laser	FL/FR	2	1(6)	Point Defense	—	—
1 PPC	FL/FR	10	1(10)	1(10)	—	—
2 Medium Laser	FL/FR	6	1(10)	—	—	—
2 Small Laser	AL/AR	2	1(6)	Point Defense	—	—
4 Medium Laser	AL/AR	12	2(20)	—	—	—
4 Medium Laser	AL/AR	12	2(20)	—	—	—
2 Small Laser	A	2	1(6)	Point Defense	—	—
2 Large Laser	A	16	2(16)	2(16)	—	—

Grav Decks: Grav Deck #1: 250-meter
 Grav Deck #2: 150-meter

Cargo: Bay 1: Small Craft (15) (4 doors)
 IndustrialMech Storage Facilities (5,000)
 Bay 2: Small Craft (20) (4 doors)
 Shuttle Hanger and Facilities (4,400 Tons)
 Bay 3: 5,000 T-Press Rep Facil. (1 door)
 Bay 4: 15,000 T-Press Rep Facil. (1 door)
 Bay 5: Cargo (15,412 Tons)
 Bay 6: Ore Processing Facility (1)
 KF Boom

Ammo: None

Cost: 4,385,084,000 C-bills BV: 2,798



CREW DATA

Gunnery Skill: _____ Piloting Skill: _____

Hits Taken	1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	Incp.

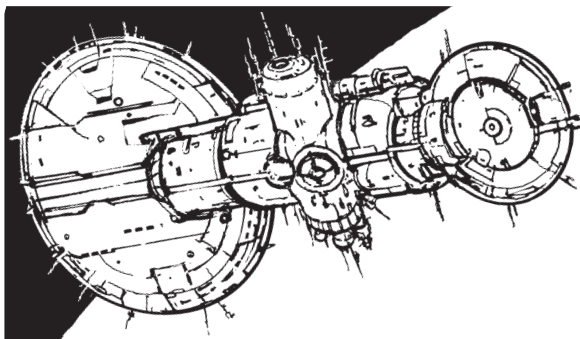
Crew: 94 Marines: 90
 Passengers: 1,000 Elementals: 0
 Other: 220 Battle Armor: 0
 Life Boats/Escape Pods: 150/0

CRITICAL DAMAGE

Avionics	+1	+2	+5	Life Support	+2
CIC	+2	+4	D		
Sensors	+1	+2	+5		
Thrusters					
Left	+1	+2	+3	D	
Right	+1	+2	+3	D	

HEAT DATA

Heat Sinks:	Heat Generation Per Arc	
79	Nose:	18
Single	Left/Right Fore:	18 18
	Left/Right Aft:	26 26
	Aft:	18



BATTLETECH™



TARIQ-MOUNTED INFANTRY RECORD SHEET

TARIQ-MOUNTED INFANTRY PLATOON (RIFLE)

Experience: _____
 Gunnery Skill: _____
 Anti-Mech Skill: _____
 Max Weapon Damage* _____

21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1		
3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0		
RANGE IN HEXES (TO-HIT MODIFIER)																						
Range	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Range Modifier	-2	0	+2	+4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Damage is always applied in 2-point Damage Value groupings

Movement MP: 5 Type: Foot (Mounted)

TARIQ-MOUNTED INFANTRY PLATOON (FED. RIFLE)

Experience: _____
 Gunnery Skill: _____
 Anti-Mech Skill: _____
 Max Weapon Damage* _____

21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1		
7	7	7	6	6	6	5	5	5	4	4	4	3	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	0		
RANGE IN HEXES (TO-HIT MODIFIER)																						
Range	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Range Modifier	-2	0	+2	+4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Damage is always applied in 2-point Damage Value groupings

Movement MP: 5 Type: Foot (Mounted)

TARIQ-MOUNTED INFANTRY PLATOON (LRR)

Experience: _____
 Gunnery Skill: _____
 Anti-Mech Skill: _____
 Max Weapon Damage* _____

21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1		
6	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	0		
RANGE IN HEXES (TO-HIT MODIFIER)																						
Range	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Range Modifier	-2	0	0	+2	+2	+4	+4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Damage is always applied in 2-point Damage Value groupings

Movement MP: 5 Type: Foot (Mounted)

NOTES

BURST-FIRE WEAPON DAMAGE VS. CONVENTIONAL INFANTRY TABLE

'MECHS, PROTOMECHS AND VEHICLES

WEAPON	DAMAGE vs. CONVENTIONAL INFANTRY
AP Gauss Rifle	2D6
Light Machine Gun	1D6
Machine Gun	2D6
Heavy Machine Gun	3D6
Small/Micro Pulse Laser	2D6
Flamer	4D6

BATTLE ARMOR

WEAPON	DAMAGE vs. CONVENTIONAL INFANTRY
Light Machine Gun	1D6/2 (round up)
Machine Gun	1D6
Heavy Machine Gun	2D6
Flamer	3D6
Light Recoilless Rifle	1D6
Medium Recoilless Rifle	2D6
Heavy Recoilless Rifle	2D6
Light Mortar	1D6
Heavy Mortar	1D6
Automatic Grenade Launcher	1D6/2 (round up)
Heavy Grenade Launcher	1D6

NON-INFANTRY WEAPON DAMAGE AGAINST INFANTRY TABLE

WEAPON TYPE*	NUMBER OF CONVENTIONAL TROOPERS HIT†
Direct Fire (Ballistic or Energy)	Damage Value / 10
Cluster (Ballistic)	Damage Value / 10 + 1
Pulse**	Damage Value / 10 + 2
Cluster (Missile)	Damage Value / 5
Area-Effect (AE)	Damage Value / .5
Burst-Fire	See Burst-Fire Weapons Table
Physical Attacks††	Damage Value / 10
Heat-Effect Weapons	See Heat-Effect Weapons‡

*See *Combat*, p. 113 in *Total Warfare*, for weapon terminology.

**Except for Small and Micro Pulse Lasers, which are treated as Burst-Fire Weapons.

†This equals the number of conventional infantry troopers hit and eliminated, regardless of armor protection. Attacks by non-infantry weapons against mechanized infantry double the number of troopers eliminated; round all fractions up.

††Unless the physical attack weapon has a stated anti-infantry value (like the Combine), treat any physical attack as a Damage Value/10.

‡Each Heat-Effect Weapon has specific damage against conventional infantry, as noted on either the appropriate Weapon and Equipment Tables or in *Other Combat Weapons and Equipment* (see p. 129 in *Total Warfare*).

