1620

HOUSE KURITA

The Draconis Combine

BATTLETECH®

FASA CORPORATION

HOUSE KURITA

The Draconis Combine

PREFACE 5
HISTORY 7
Introduction 7
Early Kurita 8
Kearney and Fuchida 9
Politics and Technology 9
Exodus 10
Colonizing Space 12
Water Shortage 12
Expansion and Autonomy 13
Terran Politics 15
The Beginning of the End 16
The Outer Reaches Rebellion 17
The Terran Hegemony 19
The Ozawa Clan 20
Birth of a Dynasty 20
Alliance of Galedon 21
Show of Force 22
Political Maneuvers 23
Conquest of Resistance 24
Growth of the Combine 25
Shiro Relents 25
War Against Rasalhague 26
Tenno's Reign 28
A Lukewarm Leader 28
A Race to Arms 29
The Age of War 30
Controlling Warfare 30
Advances Against Tamar and Skye 31
Robert and Parker Kurita 31
Turmoil and Treachery 32
The Von Rohrs Dynasty 34
Battles in the Age of War 35
McAllister and the Rebellion 36
Siriwan McAllister-Kurita 37
Star League Era 40
Preparations for War 41
The Prodigal Son 42
The McAllisters, Part Two 42
The Good Years 43
Peace and Progress 43
Economic Unification 43
Pulling Up Roots 44
Old Ways and New 45
Urizen II 46
Bushido and BattleMech Dueling 46
The Resurgence of the ISF 47
Death of the Star League 48
Open Season 48
Takiro Kurita 48
Gutting of the Star League 49
Misplaced Trust 49
Stefan the Usurper 50
Into the Darkness 51
Masterless Warriors 51
The First Succession War 52
Bujitsu 53
The Dragon Strikes 53
Kentares IV 55
The Massacre 56
Rising Suns 57
Military Realities 57
Collapse 58
Blown Back to the Stone Age 59
Purging 59
Second Succession War 60
Gearing Up 61
Chain Gang Missions 62
The Minnesota Tribe and the *Chahar Profit* 62
Round Two Begins 63
The Dahar Incident 63
Jinjiro's Last Years 64
Yoguchi Kurita 64
Planet-Hopping and Sunstroke 66
Roweena Kurita 66
Divine Sacrifice 67
The Sting of Snow Fire 68
Divine Retribution 68
The Marathon Offensive 70
Early Successes 71
Slow Down 71
The Third Succession War 72
Shadow War 72
Is War the Natural State of Man? 74
Military Hot Spots 75
Good Plan, Unexpected End 75
The Rise of Taragi 76
The Battle for Skye 77
Regrets 78
The New Century 78
Operation Freedom 78
Tamar 79
The ISF Since the Shadow War 80
Sinjiro and the ISF 81
On Two Fronts 81
Hugai Kurita 81
Xhosa VII 82
Abduction of an Acolyte 82
The Steiner Quagmire 83
Decline and Fall 84
Hohiro Kurita 84
The Dragon Renewed 84
The New Millennium 85
Assassination of Hohiro 86
Takashi's "Benevolence" 86
Military Revival 87
Attitudes Towards His Rivals 87
The Halstead Station Affair 88
Attitude Towards Mercenaries 89
Recent Developments 89
When Enemies Unite 90
Internal Squabbles 90

PILLAR OF GOLD 91
Sociopolitical Structure 91
The Ruler 91
The Nobility 93
Court Ritual 93
Privileges 95
Governmental Structure 95
Ministries 96
Interior 96
War 96
Treasury 96
Justice 97
Court 97
ISF 97
Government Districts 97
Rasalhague 97
Pesht 98
Galedon V 98
Benjamin 99
Dieron 99
Interstellar Relations 99
Liao 99
Marik 100
Davion 100
Steiner 100
Comstar 100
Strengths and Weaknesses 100
PILLAR OF IVORY 101
Religion and Philosophy 101
Doctrines of Kurita 102
Pillar of Ivory 102
Mythology of Ivory 102
The Sanctum Arcanum 103
Keeper of the House Honor 103
The Order of the Five Pillars 104
The Dictum Honorium 104
Origin of the Dictum Honorium 105
Death of Shada Kurita 105
The First Keeper 105
The Third Keeper 105
The Underground Decades 106
Restoration under Siriwan and Marhta 106
Controlling the Ki 106
The O.5.P., the Military, and the ISF 107
The Art of Vendetta 110
Vendetta Lines: Within the Draconis Combine . 112
Vendetta Lines: Outside the Draconis Combine 112
Wisdom of the Dragon 113
The Mysticism of Five 115
Belief Systems of the Five Classes 116
Minority Religions 117
Off-Brand Sects 119
PILLAR OF STEEL 121
Military Forces 121
Organization of Military Unit 121
Uniforms 122
Structure 127
Deployment of Combine Military Forces 131
Weapons Industries 136
Major Military Academies 137
Medals and Decorations 140
Selected Regiments 141
Strengths and Weaknesses 149
PILLAR OF TEAK 151
Daily Life and Culture 151
The Draconian People 151
Codes of Conduct 151
Structure of Society 151
Militarism 152
Xenophobia 152
Education 153
Distinctive Features 153
Universities and Other Higher Learning Institutions 154
Arts 155
National Treasues School 155
Social Problems 156
PILLAR OF JADE 157
Economics 157
Economic Structure 157
Military Ends 158
Conservation and Waste 158
The Corporate Structure 158
Important Corporations 159
Trade 163
Intracombine Trade 163
Interstellar Trade 163
Strengths and Weaknesses 164
PERSONALITIES 165
A BRIEF ATLAS 179
Pesht Military District 179
Galedon Military District 181
Benjamin Military District 184
Dieron Military District 186
Rasalhague Military District 188
MAP OF THE DRACONIS COMBINE ..... Foldout
KURITA FAMILY TREE ..... Foldout

HOUSE KURITA

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PREFACE

The Draconis Combine is the warlike Successor State located in the northeast quadrant of the Inner Sphere. The history of the region is a long and bloody one, dating back even before the formation of the Combine in 2319. From all apparent indications, the violence of this House will continue into the future.

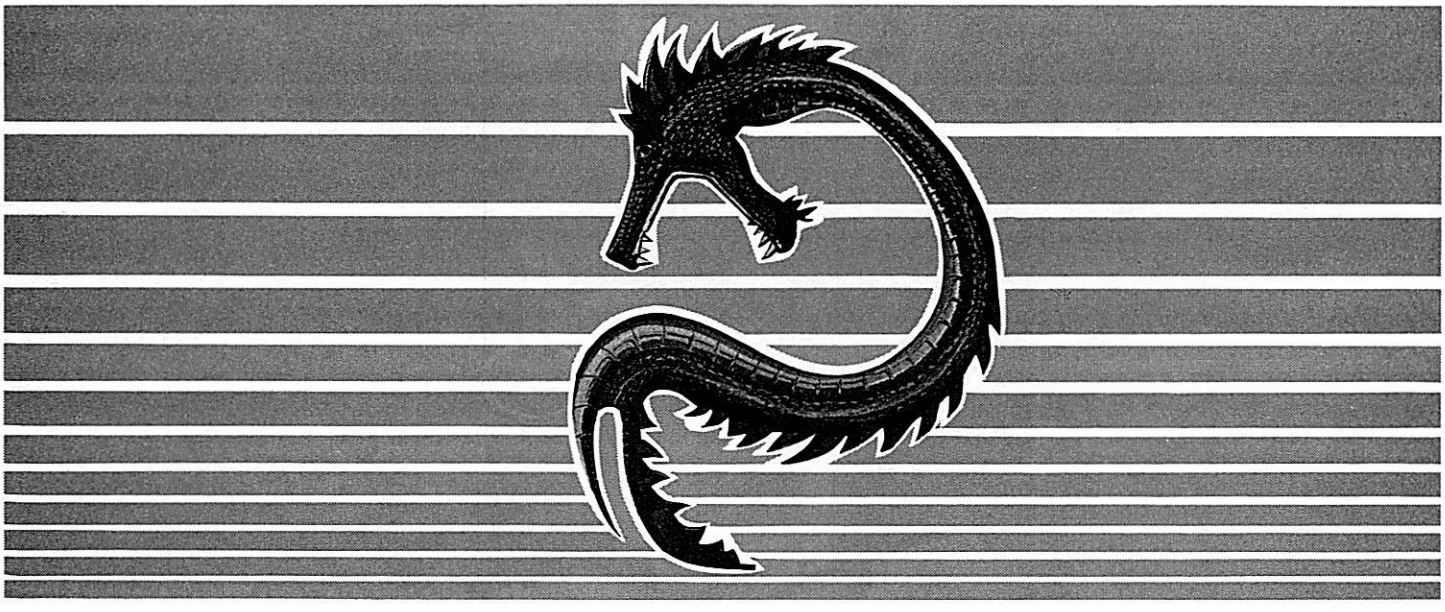
From the time of the Combine's founding, its leaders have believed themselves destined to conquer all of Human space, a goal still to be achieved some 700+ years and three Succession Wars later. Bordered by House Davion's Federated Suns on one side, House Steiner's Lyran Commonwealth on the other, and no-man's land of the Periphery on the third, the Draconis Combine is surrounded by hostile forces. Until now, however, the balance of power among the rival Successor Houses has tipped in favor of one over the other. With the recent Steiner-Davion alliance, it may be that House Kurita has missed its chance at seizing dominion. The Steiner wealth, combined with Davion's military prowess, may be too potent a combination even for the Kuritans' fanatic devotion to their cult of the Dragon. Those who consult this work may judge for themselves.

This volume is one in a series of studies of the five Successor Houses of the Inner Sphere. The series was commissioned by the First Circuit to give the members of our Blessed Order insight into the workings of the five realms. Though many observers believe that the Combine has missed its chance at conquest over all humanity, ComStar must remain ever vigilant. If the ruthless leaders of House Kurita were to achieve their goal, they would certainly attempt to extend their domination to our own Blessed Order.

This history has been compiled from many sources, including old and rare documents whose existence is known only to ComStar. As these materials were written, interpreted, or pieced together by various past and present authors and ComStar researchers, there may be minor inconsistencies or ambiguities that simply could not be resolved. ComStar has made every effort to verify the accuracy of all material included here, making this volume the only complete reference work available on the Draconis Combine. Indeed, not even the Combine's own historians or archivists could have pieced together a study as exhaustive as this one made possible by ComStar's resources.

In this volume, we trace the history of House Kurita from the 24th century to the present, with additional pertinent background dating as far back as the late 20th century. There is also full information on the economic, political, military, social, and cultural aspects of life under the rule of the Dragon. Though it is not possible to typify the lifestyle of each ordinary citizen in such a vast interstellar realm, we have been able to identify the cultural myths that bind the public to their government and to describe the institutions that shape the average Kuritan's daily life. There are also briefings on key worlds and key personalities of the current era.

—From Gillian Sorenson-Hague, ComStar Archives, Terra



MAJOR TAKASHI KURITA
(2997)

HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

History shows no force so strong, no statement so persuasive, as a people's belief that they are the best, that they are destiny's progeny, and the chosen rulers of mankind. They fall for it every time.

—From *In the Belly of the Dragon: My Service in the Draconis Combine,* by Ambassador Carl Glessen, Lyran Commonwealth Historical Press, 2928

The Draconis Combine was founded in 2319 by Shiro Kurita, who used persuasive statesmanship, treachery, and bloody military conquest to forge it almost from nothing.

Raised in a military and social tradition dating back more than six centuries, Shiro embraced and embodied the "way of the warrior." Through the forcefulness of his personality, he first managed to become leader of New Samarkand and then went on to form a group of petty kings and lords into the Galedon Alliance. This Alliance, created to oppose the great Ozawa Mercantile alliance, was his starting point for the military conquest of dozens more planets. By 2319, Shiro Kurita controlled a domain stretching from the border of the Federated Suns to the Principality of Rasalhague, a realm he renamed the Draconis Combine.

Shiro Kurita's legacy continues to this day, in both the devotion to the way of the warrior and in the belief that House Kurita will one day reign over all inhabited space. The Draconis Combine's combination of an all-pervasive military tradition and a self-reliance easily mistaken for xenophobia contributes to the constant belligerence of past and present Kurita leaders.

The most obvious legacy of Shiro Kurita is the Kurita family dynasty. The Draconis Combine could not have summoned such single-minded devotion from its people without the focus of Kurita leadership. Only the existence of an all-powerful Coordinator has been able to mobilize such often-fanatic military determination from its troops.

More than in any other Successor State, the history of the Draconis Combine has a continuous tone and theme to it. The names may change, the tactics and internal organization may change, but the Kurita dynasty continues to covet universal domination just as its founder did some 700 years ago.

EARLY KURITA

The family name of Kurita existed for centuries before one Shiro Kurita managed to forge several principalities into the Draconis Combine. The following excerpt from a 24th-century fictional videodrama is loosely based on the life of Takeo Kurita, a Japanese admiral during the Second Terran World War of the mid-20th century.Though it is likely that certain historical facts have been altered or lost in the dramatization, we do learn something about Kurita ancestry.

THE RIGHT MOMENT

Scene I

SETTING: The flag bridge of the *IJS Yamato*, near Samar Island, The Philippines. Gathered there are Admiral Takeo Kurita, Flag Captain Sobu Kuna, and several officers.

TIME: Dawn, 25 October 1944

KURITA: Gentlemen, it has been a long and most unsatisfying war, but I see an opportunity to seize a valuable victory.

KUNA: Then we shall continue to press the attack. I shall ring up the engine room and order more speed, if possible. [Just then the WIRELESS OPERATOR bursts into the room and remains at salute.]

KURITA [*annoyed*]: Yes, what is it?

OPERATOR: Excuse me, your Admiralty, but I have just received word from Northern and Central Forces. I thought you would wish to know immediately.

KURITA: Has it been decoded?

OPERATOR [*handing papers to Kurita*]: Yes, your Admiralty. They are ready for your examination. [*Pause.*]

Will there be any response?

KURITA [h*unching down*]: No.

[OPERATOR salutes and exits.]

KURITA [*muttering*]: I thought the worst had come with the sinking of *Musashi*. I see I was mistaken. [*Straightening up, he speaks aloud in a normal tone.*] Gentlemen, the Northern Force under Admiral Ozawa has been destroyed; all carriers lost. Ozawa's defeat has left a stain on my own honor, and one I hope to live down. [*He brightens visibly then.*] There is some good news, however. Nishimura's fleet has doubled back and now threatens the entire American invasion force in the Gulf of Leyte.

KUNA: Then we still advance?

KURITA: We advance!

Scene II

SETTING: Takeo Kurita is alone now on the flag bridge.

TIME: Late morning.

KURITA [*speaking thoughtfully to himself*]: We have finished losing the war that we began to lose nearly two years ago. After being shelled for several hours, the Americans have lost a small carrier, a few escorts. What of it? They have dozens more to replace them. We have lost three cruisers that we could ill afford to sacrifice. We could press on, but to what avail?

No, they are no fools, these Americans—Halsey and Sprague and Kinkaid. They would never, *never* leave such valuable ships as a target...unless they hoped to use them as bait to trap what is left of my command. Though my head tells me to fight to the death on the high seas, my heart tells me to withdraw in hopes of meeting them another day. I would rather lose face now while there is still a chance to retreat than suffer the ignominious defeat that came to Jisaburo Ozawa.

KUNA [*enters*]: Admiral.

KURITA [*subdued*]: Sobu.

KUNA: You wish to change our course? Don't you intend to pursue?

KURITA [*croaks*]: No, I have something else in mind. Set course for three-five-five. Flank speed.

KUNA [*shocked*]: Three-five—that will take us right back through the Strait, Admiral!

KURITA: I know. We are going home, if we can survive that long.

KUNA: May I ask the reason?

KURITA: I owe the men one last look at Fujiyama, one last cherry blossom, one last walk along the seashore. I have had enough of death and destruction, especially if it is to be our own.

KUNA: But Admiral! A force of small carriers lies before us, nearly untouched and practically without escort. Surely we could obliterate them before moving off?

KURITA [*sadly*]: The Americans have fooled you, have they? Well, they nearly fooled me as well. No, we must withdraw immediately. Perhaps, when the moment is right, we shall strike again, but we must wait for that moment. In the meantime, change course for Yokohama.

KUNA: It shall be done. [He turns to leave.]

KURITA: And Sobu?

KUNA [*turns back*]: Yes, Admiral?

KURITA: You might wish to light a prayer candle. It cannot hurt.

[CURTAIN]

—From *Hell in High Water: A Dramatic Re-Creation in Five Acts*, by Marsalis Coye, produced by the Stellar Lights Theatrical Troupe, 3012

KEARNY AND FUCHIDA

Every ComStar Adept learns of the relationship between technology and history. It is now clear that certain advances in technology often create events that may alter the future of the entire galaxy. A discovery that occurred millennia ago might only now begin to have its full impact. This complex, yet fascinating, correlation is one of the most important "inner mysteries" known to ComStar. The 21st century, in particular, was filled with the seeds of many of these race-changing events

In August of 2014, an unmarried professor of theoretical mathematics named Takayoshi Fuchida left Kyoto University in Japan to pursue a five-year research assignment at Stanford University in the United States of America. Once there, he would join forces with Thomas Kearny and the California Research/ Design Team, a multi-university cooperative think-tank.Their joint assignment was to develop solutions to some of the problems that hindered the still-unfinished fusion reactor. Kearny, himself an applied physicist and nuclear engineer, looked forward to meeting the world-renowned Fuchida. As it turned out, the two developed a working rapport almost immediately.

Work progressed for almost four years, and the two scientists (with generous assistance from other members of the CRDT) were able to solve all technical problems related to the fusion reactor. When a working prototype was ready in June 2018, a team of Harvard-MIT engineers took over. By 2020, the first full-scale reactor had been completed.

Meanwhile, Kearny and Fuchida made an unexpected discovery in late July 2018. While studying the data of one of their tests, the two researchers noticed a slight anomaly in the prototype reactor's reading. Though both men rechecked their work for fundamental errors, they found none. The fusion reactor was simply not operating in accordance with Einstein's theories, now universally accepted as valid. Using the university's fully equipped nuclear physics lab, including the newly completed "quarkatron" accelerator, Kearny and Fuchida began an unauthorized and unanticipated series of experiments. These dealt with the "true" and "relative" velocities of certain subatomic particles under various states of excitation.

Kearny and Fuchida were shocked and excited by their findings. Using immense power from a fusion reactor to create a certain energy state, it appeared to be theoretically possible for an object possessing mass to exceed the speed of light. Unfortunately for their experiments, even the most powerful reactors in operation generated insufficient power to validate the Kearny/ Fuchida hypothesis. It would also have been politically and economically inexpedient to use several less-powerful generating systems to accomplish the same task. Several earnest attempts to produce the required energy met with complete failure. The two men nevertheless decided to hastily co-author a series of papers that outlined their recent work and the conclusions they drew from it.

The first articles, published in the Fall 2018 issue of the *Western Alliance Journal of Theoretical Physics*, were an objective report of observed facts. When the only response was minor—and scornful at that—Kearny and Fuchida began to take a more aggressive tone as they continued to publish articles. When they began to directly challenge the Einsteinian concept of General Relativity, it did not further endear them to their contemporaries. Though both scientists had previously solid reputations, and despite their work on the fusion reactor, they soon became known as a pair of crackpots. The credit for fusion reactor design went instead to the Harvard-MIT engineers and to General Motors, who patented the design.

Meanwhile, Takayoshi Fuchida had made another, more personal discovery. While working at Stanford, he met Katherine Kurita, an American-born research technician of Japanese descent. She was both lovely and 20 years his junior, as well as the great-great grand-niece of Japanese Admiral Takeo Kurita.

In the course of their work together on various projects, Takayoshi and Katherine eventually fell in love. It happened that her family still had influential political friends in Japan, which they used to have Takayoshi's five-year American assignment renewed in 2019. In Spring 2021, the lovers were married.

By 2024, all of Kearny and Fuchida's papers had been published and critically attacked, leaving the two men's reputations destroyed and their academic credentials revoked. A broken man, Fuchida returned to Japan with his wife, where they opened a small origami shop. Having lost any hope of ever working again as university professor, Kearny eventually found employment as a cook. Fuchida died in 2038 from heart failure, and Thomas Kearny died in 2047 from food poisoning. Their passing went unnoticed, and their great contributions to science lay dormant for more than 80 years.

POLITICS AND TECHNOLOGY

As late 20th- and early 21st-century technology continued to improve and expand on 5,000 years of inventions, certain political trends also became clear. With the advance of technology, the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" also widened, particularly in the Soviet Union of the early 21st century.

By the year 2005, the Soviets were unofficially admitting that their socioeconomic adaptation of Marxism-Leninsim had failed.They had made subtle efforts to introduce selected concepts of capitalism into their political system, but these changes were too slow in coming and too restricted in their application. The only ones to benefit from the few slight improvements in the economy were a fortunate handful of government officials at the top of the pervasive but unacknowledged oligarchy.

Besides, demographic, cultural, and religious pressures had been building inexorably in the Soviet Union for the previous four decades. Various ethnic and religious factions among the Soviet population had decided that peaceful attempts to resolve their grievances no longer sufficed. When a Moslem fanatic assassinated Premier Oleg Tikonov in January 2011, the act ignited an internal political struggle among the Soviets, just as the murder of Arch duke Ferdinand in 1914 had led to a world war. Once all parties had declared their alignments, a bloody civil war began in earnest. It lasted three years, leaving in its wake at least 15 million Soviet citizens dead, with millions more injured. Only speedy intervention by Western forces prevented a full-scale nuclear exchange.

After the Second Soviet Civil War of 2011-2014 (the first having taken place almost exactly a century earlier), the Western Alliance emerged as the undisputed political and military power on Terra. With its position strong and secure, the Alliance and its Parliament decided to adopt a benevolent role that would "aid its citizens and improve the quality of all life on the planet." This included strongly encouraging member-states and private corporations to engage in non-military scientific research and space exploration. Indeed, the Western Alliance was the first government to ever actively pursue those objectives as its highest priority.

The next 90 years led to myriad technological achievements. These included a permanent lunar settlement; manned space missions to Mars and the asteroid belts; practical, on-site fusion power plants; an interplanetary fusion drive; orbital shipyards; full-scale asteroid mining; and interstellar (but slower-than-light) probes. Also, developed during this period were bioelectrical polyacetate myomer fibers, though they had no immediate practical application.

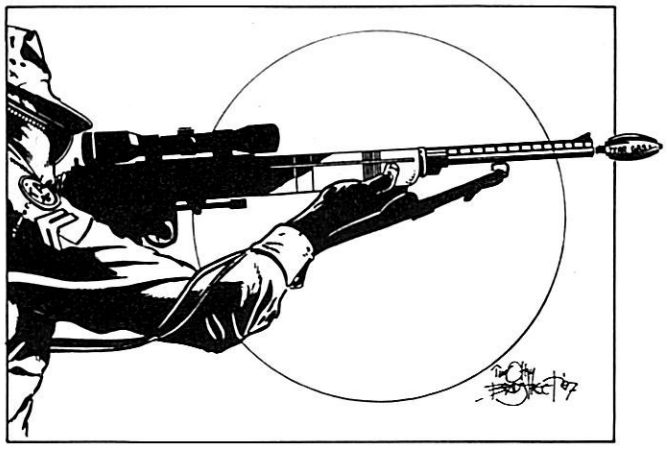
These developments did have their price, however. The amount of capital that the government and corporations were devoting to scientific and technological projects increased almost geometrically. At the same time, the standard of living for the average individual also improved, but only slightly in comparison. Many civilians began to grumble that the government was pouring far too much money into pure (and to them, useless) endeavors that did not improve the quality of their own lives one whit.

The first clear indication that the Terran Alliance (as it was called after 2086) was in jeopardy came in July 2098. When a group of Brazilian semiconductor factory workers began a revolt over working conditions, it sparked a general riot in Sao Paulo and several other major Brazilian cities. These workers felt that the 35-hour work week constituted "a condition of slavery," especially when compared to the 30-hour work week enjoyed by many other industries at that time.

Matters soon escalated beyond the local authority's ability to control the situation. By the strike's third week, production of certain critically important components had ceased throughout much of Brazil. The Alliance reluctantly sent in two divisions of paracavalry, under the command of Major General Leonard McKenna, to resolve the situation. This marked the first divisional-scale deployment of Alliance military forces since the Second Soviet Civil War.

It was fortunate that the Brazil riots did not result in the loss of many lives, but the crisis marked a dangerous trend. Once more, the "haves" and "have-nots" were in violent dispute. Indeed, this problem would carry over into the next century, with implications reaching even further into the future.

Incidentally, Takeo Fuchida, grandson of Takayoshi Fuchida and Katherine Kurita, was a Lieutenant Colonel and Battalion Commander in one of the paracavalry divisions sent to Brazil. After the engagement, Colonel Fuchida was commended for his bravery under hazardous conditions, but disciplined for "use of excessive force against unarmed civilians." With this, we see the emergence of another ominous tendency that would echo down through time.



EXODUS

Before the formation of the Draconis Combine, chaos reigned as Man drifted aimlessly among the stars. It took the inspired hand of Shiro Kurita, First Lord and Citizen, to forge a dynamic and noble path from which we still derive strength and to which we must still pledge obeisance.

—From *Observations of Greatness*, by Subhash Indrahar, Red Dragon Press, 3021

Mankind had always dreamed of reaching for the stars, though the vastness of interstellar space had made that dream seem impossible. Only a few visionary scientists, hard-core romantics, and science-fiction fanatics continued to believe that somehow, some way, someday, man would discover the means to travel to another world revolving about another star.

On May 25, 2102 (within 24 hours of each other), two teams of research scientists—one from the University of Auckland, and the other from the University of Ottawa—made nearly simultaneous announcements. (Neither team knew of the other's efforts, a coincidence that seems to occur only in high science and pulp novels.) They announced an unexpected breakthrough in Einsteinian physics. Through study of the Kearny/Fuchida experiments of almost a century before, it seemed possible to create a hyperspatial field around an object possessing mass, which would permit that object to travel instantaneously to a distant location.

In an uncharacteristic show of scientific camaraderie, both teams credited their discoveries to the two long-forgotten scientists whose brilliance had led the way. Scientists of both universities immediately decided to combine their efforts.

During the summer of 2102, researchers continued to evaluate the discovery of hyperspace, while staff experts went to work writing a formal request to the Terran Alliance for an override funding grant. By September, the scientists felt confident enough of their findings to submit the proposal. Thus was laid the groundwork for the development of the Kearny-Fuchida FTL drive.

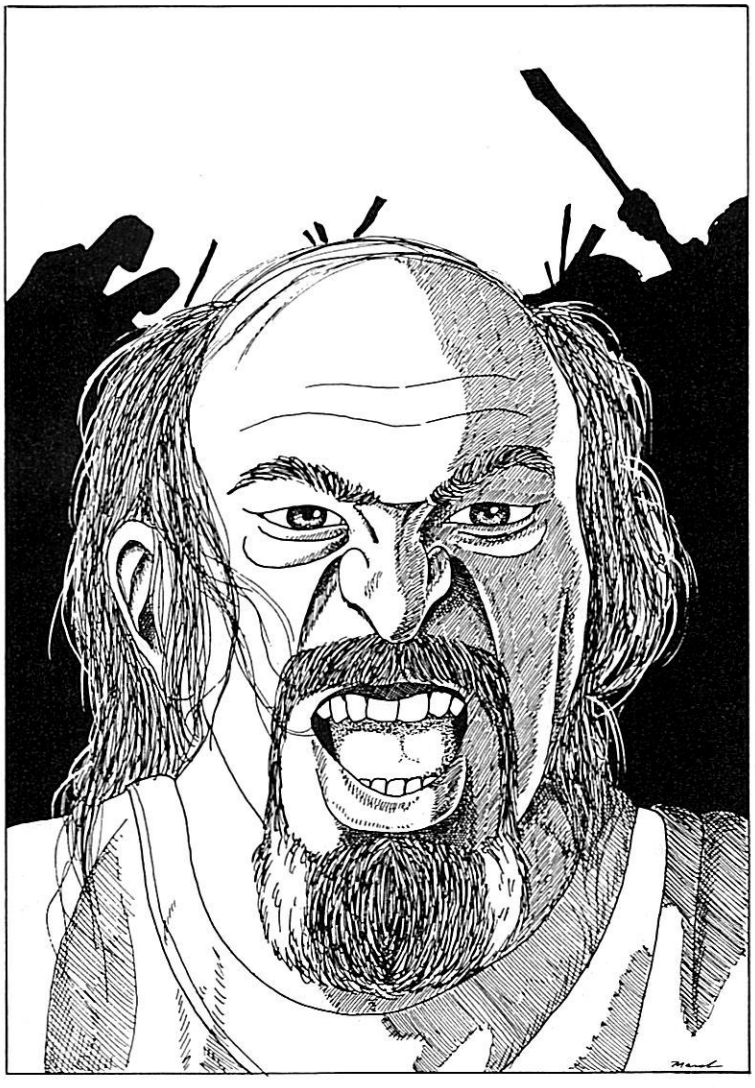
The Terran Parliament debated and argued the issue for 14 months. Proponents of both sides were vehement in their positions. They often walked out of sessions, swearing never to return, only to do so a few days later. Pro-FTL advocates voiced the optimistic belief that exploring and utilizing the resources of an entire galaxy would relieve the pressures of overpopulation on Terra. Protestors included environmentalists who feared that mankind would now begin to despoil on a larger-than-ever scale. The anti-FTL movement also included representatives of poorer nations, who resented the cost of FTL research while the living conditions of their constituents were still inadequate. In November 2103, funding was finally approved by a very slim majority of three votes.

The project, now known as the Deimos Project, had a single objective: to develop an FTL drive that worked. It was the most expensive project ever undertaken up to that time. Expenses for the first year alone totalled over 400 billion credits, a huge slice of the entire gross world product. To compensate, the Parliament raised taxes dramatically throughout the Terran Alliance (now consisting of virtually every nation on the globe) on a per-capita basis. Such a system meant that the least-developed nations with the highest populations had to pay an inordinate proportion of the new tax, while richer, less populous nations got off more easily.

Resentment grew as more and more nations found themselves unable to afford their contribution to the Deimos Project. In July 2105, numerous riots broke out around the world, from Sao Paulo, Mexico City, and Bogota to Nairobi, Cape Town, Addis Ababa, and Nueva Ciudad. In less than four months, half of South America and Africa was under a state of martial law, with several corps of Alliance troops on patrol to maintain a modicum of control.

At the same time, member-nations began filing notices of secession from the Terran Alliance. This finally forced the Parliament to change its taxation method for funding the Deimos Project to a straight percentage based on individual member-nation affluence. It was too late, for the harm had already been done. More than 3 million civilians and at least 70,000 Alliance soldiers were killed or wounded in the so-called Deimos Tax Rebellion, and more than two dozen nations actually did secede from the Terran Alliance. From this time on, the growing rift created between the "haves" and "have-nots" would haunt the Alliance.

Fortunately, the Deimos Project was successful. Regardless of the total cost or any individual's political view of the matter, before long no one on Terra could now deny the truth: the discovery and use of FTL travel would revolutionize the course of civilization as much as had the discovery and first uses of fire in the pre-dawn of history.



FTL SHIP EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

It's green...and it's beautiful! Look at that beautiful little world orbiting its own beautiful sun!

Thirty seconds ago, no, wait a minute—the ship's chronometer doesn't show any time lapse. Zero time? Is that—I mean, that's what some of the scientists told us to expect. Still, they're not here and we are. Wherever we are.

Well, it felt like 30 seconds ago, to my biological clock if to no other. Engineer Land set the hyperspace field generator for one second, and aligned the field for right ascension, declination, and distance. Then he snapped the relay.

Very little happened, except that the ship seemed to shudder minutely. We were forewarned about that, too. But no one told me to expect this brief, strange sensation of wrenching nausea. It's almost as if the outside of my body had weight but my insides were completely weightless and trying to drift loose. Or like my body was trying to turn itself inside out, or something. The feeling doesn't last long, fortunately, and there are no lingering after-effects. The accompanying jolt of adrenalin sure comes as a surprise.

I am very glad we brought along the spectrum analyzer and computerized spectrograms of all stars within 50 light years of Sol. Otherwise, we might have had a real chore in figuring out where we are go—I mean, where we are.

Hmm. The first rule of order is to grab some protective goggles and take a quick look at the ex-cams. Only one blindingly bright spot in the sky, with a negative visual magnitude I'd estimate in the minus 20s. Wherever we are, it is definitely not a binary or multiple-star system. Working in silence, I quickly aim the 'lyzer at the sun, wait 15 seconds, watch the four-laser color printout, and voila! We are in the presence of a G8V spectral class star.

We have, indeed, travelled to another star, and are the first men and women to ever see its light at close range.

A G8 main-sequence is a fairly rare class of star. There are less than a dozen within half-a-hundred light years of our home sun. This is making it unexpectedly convenient for me. I run a quick comparative analysis on the 'comp, and it confirms that we are in the Tau Ceti system—just as we had hoped, planned, dreamed! I re-aim the scope up a little and to the right (where is up and right from here, anyway?) and run another analysis. Merry old Sol, right where it's supposed to be. Incredible as it seems, we really have traveled 3.46 parsecs in no time at all!

Observing the orbiting planet, I note that it appears to be just a touch smaller than Earth. It is also a little closer to Tau Ceti than Earth is to Sol, say around 0.8 AU, which would be just about perfect. It's a little higher on the ecliptic plane than I had expected. (Another detail that depends entirely upon one's frame of reference.) Looks like it might be the fourth in position. The planets are really bunched up around this star.

It's a little soon to tell, but my first guess is that it may be square in the middle of Tau Ceti's life zone. It does have continental land masses, and could those be—bodies of liquid water? Yes, the albedo is right, absorption lines, hmm... everything seems to check out. If it is habitable, we've got to call this planet "New Earth." Maybe it means our race is going to get a second chance. Oh, brave new world that looks so much like home!

—From Transcription of Official Spaceship Log, *TAS Pathfinder*, 5 December 2108, Captain Norm McKenna, Commander/Astrogator. Courtesy of ComStar Archives

COLONIZING SPACE

The Kearny-Fuchida hyperspatial drive is a scientific hoax. The concept of going from one star to another in a nanosecond is not science...it's a bloomin' Grade-A religious-type miracle, and I, for one, am gonna treat it as such!

—From *Wisdom from The Universe*, by Homer Kellogi, Explorer, Celestial Spheres Publications, 2821

The successful round-trip voyage of the *Terran Alliance Spaceship Pathfinder* proved two important points. Other Terran-like planets did exist around nearby stars, and mankind now had the means to reach them. Tooled up for the new technology by June 2109, Alliance shipyards began producing exploration vessels and colony ships equipped with the new Kearny-Fuchida FTL drive. Government factories in the United States of North America, the United States of Europe, and the Nippon Confederation led the way, but several corporate coalitions also expressed some interest.

As quickly as the starships were being built and given cursory trials, they were sent out to explore and colonize. Though FTL movement was literally instantaneous, it took time to travel to and from the jump points. Even so, a well-trained crew surveying spectral Class M stars could manage about two per week, their endurance limited only by the amount of reaction fuel and supplies aboard.

Exactly three years (by Terran reckoning) after the *Pathfinder*'s first visit to Tau Ceti, a scientific outpost was established on New Earth. Back on "Old Earth," engineers continued their efforts to lower the costs of the FTL propulsion system. Though technicians had not yet discovered any innovations for mass-production, they remained undaunted.

Meanwhile, most of the stars within 40 light years of Terra had been, or were being, explored. As expected, few Class M red dwarfs possessed planets, and few planets near Class O, B, or A giants would be tolerable for Humans. Fortunately, there was a smattering of Class F, G, and K stars and an unexpectedly high percentage of colonizable (though scarcely perfect) worlds.

On March 8, 2116, New Earth became the first interstellar colony under the control and authority of the Terran Alliance. Elaborate ceremonies, filled with pomp and high-sounding speeches, took place on both Earths. Though the event went routinely for most citizens, it served to sharpen the resentment of certain political groups. There were a few arrests after protestors marched on the Alliance capital buildings in Geneva. "The Alliance holds out its noose for the necks of the less fortunate," their placards read. Twenty-four hours later, the government released the marchers in a rare moment of bureaucratic compassion, and the issue was closed. Or so the Terran Alliance thought.

By 2123, the diligent work of propulsion engineers paid off. The cost of the Kearny-Fuchida drive had been reduced by a factor of roughly 100, thus bringing down the production price of FTL vessels to levels that corporations and other private concerns could afford.

Free enterprise now entered the interstellar market, with commercial shipyards building starships for commercial users. Because the K-F drive had been developed under a government program, no one could patent its principles and hardware, which gave access to anyone who wanted the information. For about five years, work continued at the kind of feverish pitch possible only in an unrestricted capitalistic market.

In April 2128, however, freedom took a back seat to political expediency. The Bolivar Foundation, a private political organization, purchased a colony ship from the McDonnell/Lockheed shipyard. Naming it the Liberator, the Foundation selected volunteers from Spain and South America, who would travel aboard ship to colonize a new world. On 26 April, the Foundation's ship reached the jump point, sent one last message back to Terra, and then vanished. The *Liberator* was never heard from again.

COLONIZATION LAW PASSES

In a surprise move, the Terran Parliament narrowly passed a bill to severely restrict interstellar colonization and non-governmental uses of the new Kearny-Fuchida interstellar drive. Sources in Geneva report that voting was extremely close, but have not released the exact vote count. Copies of this new law are not yet public, either, but it is believed to contain the following provisions:

1: All extra-solar colonization falls under the sole authority of the Terran Alliance's Foreign Ministry. Colonization within the solar system is not affected.

2: All colony ships, regardless of origin or manufacturer, must register with the Terran Alliance, and be equipped with an identification transponder. This ID beacon continuously broadcasts a unique message to identify each ship.

3: No person whose name appears on a composite list of known subversives may book passage aboard a colony ship unless he has obtained a special governmental waiver.

4: An armed ship of the Terran Alliance will escort every colony ship departing from Terra.

5: All colonies settled by citizens of the Terran Alliance automatically become part of the Terran Alliance and its jurisdiction. An Alliance-appointed governor will rule each colony, with authority to use force if necessary.

6: These provisions take effect immediately.

A spokesman for the Alliance candidly admitted that "this should bring an end to all them [sic] troublemakers runnin' off in all directions." The same spokesman refused to be named for the record.

—From *Washington Post-Times,* 25 May 2128

WATER SHORTAGE

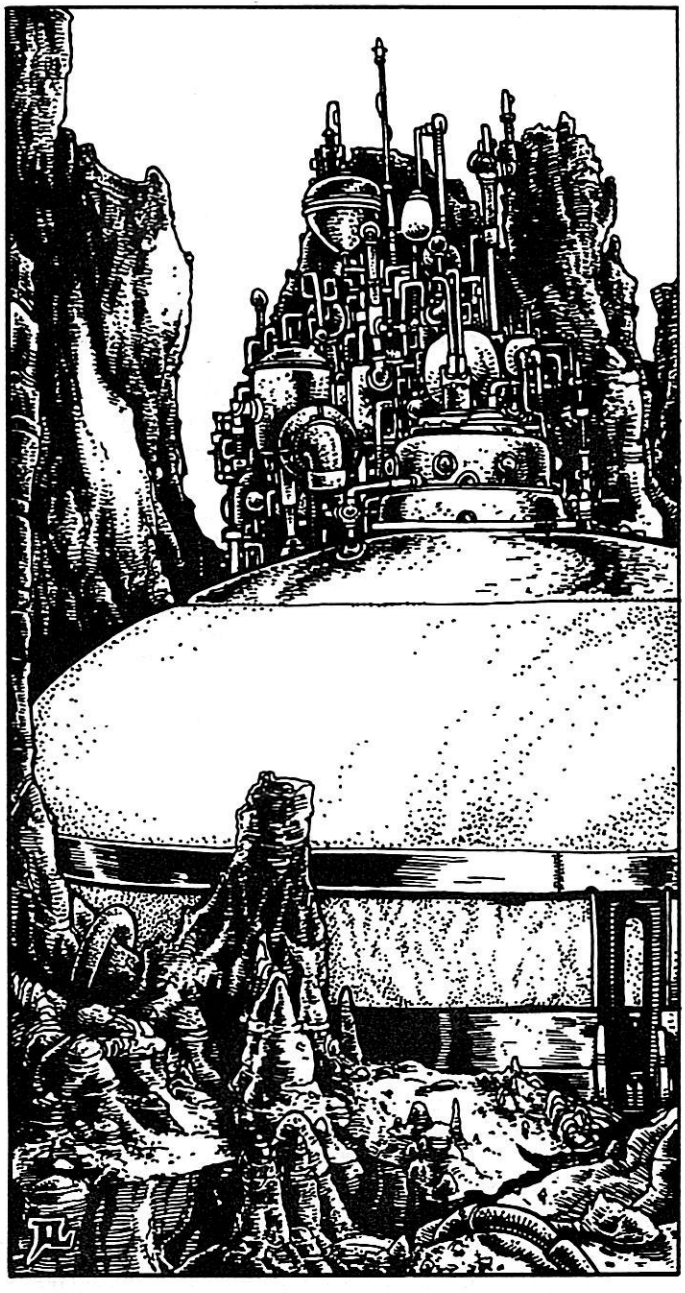
In spite of the Terran Alliance's strict new laws on colonization, interstellar growth continued at a remarkable rate. The government, as well as commercial and private groups, sponsored and organized colonizing expeditions. Acquiring a ship was only the first step, however, for colonists had to be selected, trained, and prepared for their ordeal. Good physical and mental health and knowledge of fundamental skills such as mechanical engineering, agriculture, and planetology were vital.

Progress came so quickly that an average two new planets a year were being colonized. "For the first time," said one contemporary author, "mankind could quench its incredible thirst for adventure among the stars."

More than a few colony ships were lost to human error, equipment failure, or other unknown (presumably horrible) fate. The greatest problem, however, was a lack of potable water on the new space colonies. Before the *Pathfinder*'s historic voyage, most astrophysicists believed that very few planets would be capable of sustaining Human life. To their chagrin and the surprise of almost everyone else, literally hundreds of planets existed within acceptable gravitational, atmospheric, climatic, and radiation limits. What many of these worlds did *not* possess was an adequate supply of water suitable for drinking, manufacturing, or agriculture.

Biological toxins, light and heavy metals, soluble radioactives, and other poisonous substances permeated large bodies of water on many distant, but otherwise hospitable worlds. On some worlds, limited supplies of "fresh" water often became so polluted by industry, agriculture, and sewage, that it was no longer fit for Human use. Many colonists learned this lesson the hard way when their water supply ran out and they died from dehydration or from the toxins in the local supply. Other worlds, perfectly suitable except for a lack of water, remained undeveloped and uninhabited.

Water purification equipment, though available, was bulky, massive, expensive, difficult to maintain, and generally impractical for colony worlds. Fortunately for the cause of space development, Rudolph Ryan invented a solution in 2177. Within months, a second boom in colonization began. Everyone now agreed that the galaxy was the limit.



EXPANSION AND AUTONOMY

What is a homeworld, you ask? I'll tell you; a homeworld is any chunk of rock in space where man can live, whether it is Terra or New Terra or Some Other Terra. And I can promise you, if there are any Little Green Men who try to push us off, they are going to have a real fight on their hands.

—From *Wisdom from the Universe,* by Homer Kellogi, Explorer, Celestial Spheres Publications, 2821

Throughout Terran history, there have been numerous examples of successful colonial empires. Spain and Portugal used a system of viceroyalties, and England had its colonial governorships. Though each had a strong, centralized government, the colonies depended on local rule, enforced by strong and loyal countrymen and backed up by a capable military.

Communication is one of the most pervasive problems with this form of rule, however. Maintaining control over far-flung colonies or outposts is difficult, and the longer a directive takes to reach the farthest reaches of the empire, the greater the risk of a breakdown in communications. This time lapse could result in colonies misinterpreting the message, receiving instructions that were no longer timely, or even losing the communication altogether.

After extensive tests and trial and error, the Terran Alliance discovered that most KF-powered FTL ships could not travel more than 18 to 20 light years in a single jump. Advances in technology permitting 30-light-year jumps were still some decades away, and any greater distances would require successive jumps. Though this was a limitation, it seemed insignificant when compared to the previous limitations of mere interplanetary flight.

As long as the most distant colony was within one jump from Terra, the Terran Alliance had no difficulty in keeping all colonized worlds under scrutiny. Once its colonies extended beyond this distance, problems in maintaining the Alliance's authority began to develop. This was because a starship could not travel directly from Terra to a distant colony, or vice versa, without at least one layover. The time required to recharge the vessel's drive core forced ships to remain in-system for weeks, even when seawater-filled tankers were on hand for on-board deuterium-fusion reprocessing. If no such tanker was present at the jump point, the ship would have to spend days or weeks more in reaching (and returning from the jump point of) a planet where fuel could be collected and reprocessed.

On rare occasions, the Alliance would assemble an entire relay of FTL-ships for transmission of special high-priority messages between Terra and a frontier world. Such an arrangement was incredibly wasteful of resources, however, and required arrangements could be made well in advance, which was even more difficult.

Conventional communications techniques, such as radio or modulated x-rays, were completely useless because of the inherent limitations of the speed of light. Even Kearny and Fuchida's work seemed to lack a workable solution. There was some talk about creating a kind of neutrino-transceiver, but it remained an unproven hypothesis, more suited to fiction than to solving a very real problem.

RYAN ANNOUNCES INNOVATIVE WATER TRANSPORT

I called this little get-together because I have some pretty important things to say. I do have a prepared statement to read first. I hope to answer all questions at the end of the session; please hold them until then. If I tell you anything you already know, bear with me. I'd rather make my point and insult your intelligence than wind up talking to myself. [Laughter.]

The last few years have been important ones for all of us, though they might not have seemed that way. In only a few short decades, man has been able to colonize several dozen planets. Maybe it's getting to be old hat now. Ho hum. Another world populated. That's nice. What's new in the sports playoffs? [Laughter.]

Perhaps we are spoiled. We need to be reminded that for millennia upon millennia, mankind only had one world: Earth. I don't think any of us were even around when the *Pathfinder* travelled to Tau Ceti and orbited New Earth for the very first time. No one among you gathered here today can remember when Humankind was *not* venturing among the stars. Oh sure, there were problems occasionally, but we could and would persevere.

Provided we had something to drink. [Lifts up glass of water and drinks from it.] Water. Nothing but a little hydrogen and oxygen mixed up in a liquid arrangement of molecules. Plus, of course, any extra additives we Humans seem to put into everything. [Laughter.] Just water.

Humans, consisting of about two-thirds water by weight, can go weeks without food, but only a few days without water. We need a minimum of two quarts per day to enjoy good health, and it doesn't matter whether the water comes in the food we eat or in liquid form. I might add, death by dehydration is an extremely unpleasant way to go, or so I've been told.

Even so, only a small fraction of total water usage goes for personal consumption. Much more is used for agriculture and hydroculture. Finally, industry uses tremendous quantities in the manufacturing process, particularly heavy industry. It can take as much as 240 tons of water to make just one ton of medium-grade steel.

Yet water—pure, clean, potable water suitable for running a factory, irrigating a crop, or cooling the throat of a young and thirsty child—is hard to find out there. [Points up.] Though not unique in its habitability, our Terra is more blessed than we ever realized, with its oceans of drinkable, easily-distilled water.

During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, scientists discovered the first practical process for the bulk purification of seawater. The equipment was quite expensive and used enormous amounts of electricity. It was also large, fairly complex technically, and its filtration system required constant attention. All in all, it was barely cost-effective.

Still, the need was vital in certain parts of the world, and the process did provide a necessity of life: clean water. Later improvements allowed the removal of more than just chloride compounds. We could now remove certain metals, foreign particles, and other undesirable elements, leaving drinking water.

Of course, with the advent of interplanetary space travel during the middle of the last century, our water problems in this solar system were over forever. Fusion-powered mining vessels and tugs entered our solar system's asteroid belt and removed as many megatons of almost pure water-ice as we needed. Even though industrial pollution and other ravages had contaminated many of our oceans and rivers over the the decades, the ice asteroids were still around, as yet untouched.

Not every solar system has an asteroid belt, however, and not every asteroid belt contains asteroids composed of water-ice. No matter how far we travel, humans still cannot drink ammonia or methane. Nor can humans or plants drink poisonous water. Even machinery can suffer corrosion, or worse, from contaminated water. So what choices do we have when we arrive at a world that is habitable, but possesses little free potable water and no icy asteroids to tap into? It is simply not practical to ship water-purification equipment throughout the galaxy. It is far too expensive, massive, and delicate.

We are left with one possibility. Again, we go back to the "space icebergs" in the asteroid belt. Instead of moving them around within a particular solar system, we move them from one system to another, just as our FTL ships move through space. I came here to announce that I have just obtained a patent on a design to convert interplanetary tankers into KF-powered iceships. I can hear you asking how much a single tanker can hold and whether the idea is practical. Probably not, or we would have already begun doing it. Nor is that exactly what I have in mind. Here is how my plan will work.

The tankers will operate in squadrons of 16 ships. A mining ship will cut a block of water-ice about two kilometers square, and a tug will tow it to the jump point. Once there, the enormous ice cube will be encircled by the tanker squadron. Each ship, operating in exact formation, will then generate its hyperspatial field. The cube, in the approximate center of this roughly globe-shaped formation, will become suspended with the squadron in the hyperspatial field they create. Navigational controls and KF-drives of the entire convoy will be computer-controlled from the tanker flagship. In less than an instant, the water-ice and escorts will move from wherever they are to a distant star whose planet is water-poor. Tugs already in-system can then move the ice to any desired location for any desired purpose.

Using this technology, tankers can transport enormous quantities of water-ice anywhere that mankind chooses to go. Dozens of otherwise uninhabitable star systems will now have the water supplies needed to make them livable. Best of all, no one can complain that we are robbing our own solar system's asteroid belt. My ships will only use ice asteroids from the belts of star systems that could never be made habitable.

There are a few minor technological problems to work out, mostly in control circuitry for sustaining interlapping hyperspatial fields and for jump-directional navigation. I'm confident my engineers can overcome these minor obstacles in short order. Using this patented process, I expect to start making deliveries within six months to any party or parties who request my services. I'll even supply the Alliance with water, if they ask politely. [Laughter.] For a reasonable fee, I might add. [More laughter.]

Now, are there any questions? [Applause.]

—Rudolph Ryan, at the media conference announcing his development of iceships, Los Angeles, Terra, 10 January 2177. Courtesy of Terran Broadcasting System

It was not long before colonization efforts had passed beyond the single-jump distance from Terra, however. As early as the 2140s, colonists were settling on worlds 35 to 40 light years from Terra, and they never looked back. To keep track of this somewhat alarming growth, the Terran Parliament authorized a census in 2168, to be completed within four years. Boldly referred to as the Alliance Grand Survey, its declared objectives were to locate and count the number of Human colonies and to provide a rough estimate of total Human population.

Some have said that the true motives for the Grand Survey were considerably less pure. According to contemporary accounts by some of the colonists, the surveying vessels paid no attention to population tallies. Instead, the crews seemed more interested in "showing the Terran flag" and in making unreasonable and irrelevant demands on the colonists "to prove their loyalty." Many agreed it was merely a propaganda trick to prove that the Terran Alliance would enforce its authority, no matter how far the colonists traveled from the homeworld. In any event, the government never released the population figures (if ever determined), but other statistics were forthcoming in August of 2172. Mankind had settled more than 100 planets in a Sol-centered sphere roughly 80 light years in diameter. Perhaps even more important, it now took more than three months for messages to travel via FTL between Terra and its new frontier.

During the same year, the Terran Parliament passed a resolution giving increased powers to colonial governors, because it was even more difficult for its Navy to be everywhere at once. Meanwhile, the growing time lag between the center of the Alliance and its outer rim required creation of a system of appointed colonial governors. Lacking the continuous presence of armed Alliance warships, the governors could not claim much power, and so had to delegate some of their cherished authority to the colonists themselves. The leaders of the Terran Alliance realized that they had no choice. Either they lessened their hold to maintain a semblance of authority, or they would lose their position completely.

There is one additional note of interest. The term "homeworld" no longer referred only to Terra, as it once had. This had deep psychological implications, as many colonists had begun to think of themselves as other than Terrans. By 2170, New Earth had already been a colony for 54 years, and so many of its inhabitants were native-born and knew of no other world as home. Step by step, Terra was inexorably losing control over her far-removed subjects.

Ironically, this problem of control worsened after Rudolph Ryan's invention led to fleets of iceships. Now that more worlds had become available for colonization, the boundaries of the Terran Alliance had stretched even further. The Ryan Cartel did enormously well in terms of profit, and almost as well in terms of its public relations image (despite its huge profits).

Now fueled by transportable supplies of water, the number of inhabited worlds rose sharply. To see this development graphically, one needs only review the survey reports of the late 22nd and early 23rd centuries. The Grand Survey of 2195 listed over 200 colonies in a 90-light-year sphere. The Grand Survey of 2219 listed over 300 colonies in a 100-light-year sphere. Finally, the Grand Survey of 2235 listed over 600 inhabited worlds in a 120-light-year sphere.

TERRAN POLITICS

When man goes anywhere, even into outer space, he takes all his bad habits with him. Even politics. Come to think of it, especially *politics.*

—From *Wisdom from the Universe,* by Homer Kellogi, Explorer, Celestial Spheres Publications, 2821

From the Western Alliance's formative years in the first two decades of the 21st century until the early years of the 22nd century, Terran politics underwent a series of ideological "big bangs." Parties first organized, then fractionalized, with new parties representing new political coalitions coming into power in a constantly evolving process. By 2238, two major power blocs and a handful of minor coalitions had emerged from the rampant political in-fighting on the homeworld. The lesser parties, though given their share, mustered fewer than 5 percent of the Parliament's entire membership, making them suited only for the role of spoilers.

The Terran Alliance style of government most closely resembled the old English system. Elections were infrequent, but the incumbent party could call for a reaffirmation whenever it seemed appropriate. Also, hastily organized "snap" elections could always take place on a vote of no-confidence.

The Expansionist Party tended to be the Parliament's majority. Its members wished to maintain a strong imperialist position, hoarding newly colonized planets and assuring Terra's political dominance throughout inhabited space. The Expansionists were pro-space, and tended to be somewhat authoritarian in their view of how to rule the colonial worlds.

The Liberal Party, in the majority during most of the Exodus years, preferred a less assertive stance. Its members advocated independent reign for any planets whose colonists felt they could do better on their own. The Liberals were not anti-space, as their opponents claimed. They merely saw the galaxy as being large enough for more than one central government. Besides, they claimed that the laws of physics and the logical impracticality of centralized authority were on their side. Except for brief majority reigns of three or four years, however, the Liberal Party was eventually forced to step back in favor of the Expansionists.

Of course, both political parties had their share of extremists, and minor adjustments on points of party doctrine took place over the decades. Still, the strong two-party system continued to perpetuate a centuries-old tradition.

After the so-called "Outer Reaches Rebellion" of 2235–2237, the Expansionist Party received a resounding vote of no-confidence. In a classic overnight election, the Liberals quickly seized the majority and took power the next morning. After implementing a radical—and equally unpopular—isolationist policy, the Liberals lost their majority in 2242, with the minor parties picking up the additional seats.

Terran politics now took on a gruesome aspect. Both major parties, unable to establish a simple majority, jockeyed crazily for political position. Numerous scandals took place, many of them contrived for the purposes of extortion and slander. Geneva, the Alliance capital city since the early 21st century, was the center of desperate rumors, baseless allegations, and investigative inquisitions.

After 2242, neither party could establish a majority for more than two years at a time. These pendular swings continued for more than 70 years, until the Terran Alliance fell in September 2314. Well before that time, however, many Terrans had given up the government as lost. For all practical purposes, it was true. Anarchy now the ruled the planet.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Two major events in the technology of KF-drive vessels occurred during the early part of the 23rd century. Both advances affected interstellar range and operational endurance. The first involved an increase in drive core efficiency. Space ships could now travel up to 30 light years in a single jump, a level of performance that has never been exceeded.

The second improvement consisted of a new recharging system for the drive core. Recent advances in monomolecular polymers and metal alloys led to the invention of the jump sail, a 50-kilometer-wide net that is deployed aft of the starship.This device would act as a huge (though inefficient, by later standards) photovoltaic cell, capable of absorbing solar energy and converting it to recharge the drive core. This replaced the deuterium-fueled fusion reactor, and allowed the core to be recharged in less time than before. Though the jump sail was a hindrance in tactical situations and often failed to survive a jump intact, its principle was sound. Additional advances in technology eventually reduced the size to more manageable proportions, making it more practical and less subject to incidental (or combat) damage.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The time has come for a change, and the winds of fate now blow cold across the plains of this, our home. The warmth of our sun has been lost by 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 our soul has been lost. 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.

[section omitted]

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 [Freedom] Press,* 27 May 2235

Even as the fundamental technology of interstellar travel was improving, the political situation was further deteriorating. There now was a time-lag of eight months from the center of the Terran Alliance to its rim. Never was this delay more painful than when a number of colony worlds declared their independence from the Alliance in May 2235. The Parliament on distant Terra did not hear of the development until January of the following year, some eight months later.

WORD OF REBELLION REACHES TERRA

Once the Freedom declaration was received on Terra, things began to move quickly. Major Renault Ygon, a top-echelon military courier, verified the message's contents, and then delivered a hardcopy by gyrocopter from the Matterhorn transceiver station to the Geneva complex. After we became friends, Ygon confessed that he had never been so nervous in his whole life. After showing identification, he interrupted an ongoing Parliament floor discussion on allocating additional funds for aquaculture farming.

At first, I was unimpressed by Major Ygon's purpose or credentials and I nearly threw him out of the council hall, until he began shouting, "The rebellion has begun! The planet Freedom has seceded!" Ygon had a powerful baritone voice, lending good effect to his unexpected proclamation.

An unearthly silence came over the council chamber as Ygon explained the nature of his message. The faces of the ministers showed outrage mixed with a sense of controlled panic. Within hours, briefings were called, military officers were informed, and plans were discussed.

Most senior military officers saw the secession as a golden opportunity to show the flag, flex some muscle, and test the Alliance's yet-unproven ability to conduct interstellar warfare. Some of the more rabid even sought to make an example of Freedom. After three hours of debate, two officers had had enough. I watched as they excused themselves for a few moments "to place some calls." Less than half an hour later, they returned to quietly observe the debate, which continued throughout the day and well into the evening.

Those two officers were none other than General Armando Luchesi and Admiral Leondard Julliard, senior commanding officers of Terra's 2nd Interstellar Strategic Combined Assault Force [INTERSTRATCAF]. As it happened, three squadrons of KF-equipped strike cruisers, assault carriers, and attack transports were already on maneuvers near Saturn. After Luchesi and Julliard gave the orders, instructions were transmitted from Terra and the force quickly dispatched to the nearest jump point. Pleased with themselves, the two men returned to the debate, knowing that the matter was already well in hand. In less than three days, warships had arrived in-system and were moving toward the worlds of Freedom, Ryde, and Sevren.

Their plan had several general steps. First, to block both jump points of each seceding system, cutting off all interstellar travel, trade, and supplies. Second, to land detachments of Terran marines at each colony of each seceding world to establish a state of total martial law. Third, to severely limit the availability and use of arms by unauthorized personnel (i.e., civilian colonists). Four, to replace—by force, if necessary—any civilian leadership with military officers serving on active duty. It was an ambitious plan, if I may say so. As we were all soon to discover, even the best-laid plans can fail.

—From *Parliamentary Procedures: An Autobiography,* by Kendal Mannhauser, Terran Parliament Master-At-Arms, Cole-Wittkowski Publishing Co., 2257

When Terra received the colonists' rambling, semi-coherent declaration of independence, military leaders saw it as a revolt, and Parliament took some semi-coherent action of its own. Armed, troop-carrying naval vessels moved quickly from Terra to the system's jump points and beyond. Upon arriving at the frontier, they carried out their orders. System jump points were blockaded, detachments of Alliance soldiers patrolled the streets, and colonists possessing weapons were summarily detained and harassed. Smuggled reports carried at great danger by blockade runners spread from rebel world to rebel world. Obviously, the Alliance would not acknowledge a peaceful act of secession. This could only mean war.

THE OUTER REACHES REBELLION

If the vocation of soldier isn't mankind's oldest profession, it's got to be close.

—From *Wisdom from the Universe*, by Homer Kellogi, Explorer, Celestial Spheres Publications, 2821

As the Terran Alliance's blockades and occupations began, the nature of everyday life on colony worlds changed. With curfews, weapons checkpoints, internal passports, and other tactics now commonplace, the colonists began to fight back. Military vehicles would disappear while the soldiers they transported were off on foot patrols and searches. Explosives turned up in some of the most unlikely places, especially as booby traps wired to police barracks. Woodworking and metalworking tools almost vanished from public view, and quantities of hand-made weapons (quarterstaffs, spears, maces, crude swords, and so on) were manufactured in increasing numbers.

It was a strange war, if such it could be called. Most combat-age civilians left their cities and melted into the surrounding fields, forests, mountains, deserts, or hills. Terran military forces controlled many of the population centers, but were rarely able to exert much authority beyond. Transportation networks (mostly surface highways) were often disrupted by the defenders' guerrilla tactics. The military did carry out some prearranged ritual executions, such as shooting every twentieth colonist once a week, but that also failed to have the desired effect.

Against the primitive weapons of the civilian colonists, the Terran Alliance wielded the most advanced weapons of war known to mankind. Despite this, not all of the technology proved practical or valuable. The Alliance Parliament immediately ruled out use of weapons capable of mass genocide. The leaders on Terra wanted to subdue the colonists, not to obliterate colonies. This, of course, limited the military's options.

In another example, atmospheric aircraft were effective in fighting conventional ground warfare, but guerrilla tactics limited their strike potential and made them far from cost-effective. Though capable of conducting long-range reconnaissance and counter-insurgency missions, aircraft also required extensive maintenance, support equipment, and personnel.

One major advantage in the colonists' favor was their familiarity with the terrain. They had cleared the wildernesses of their worlds to build towns and villages from the ground up, and so knew the best locations for ambush or retreat. The Alliance troops could not possibly fathom the intricacies or eccentricities of combat in these unfamiliar reaches of space.

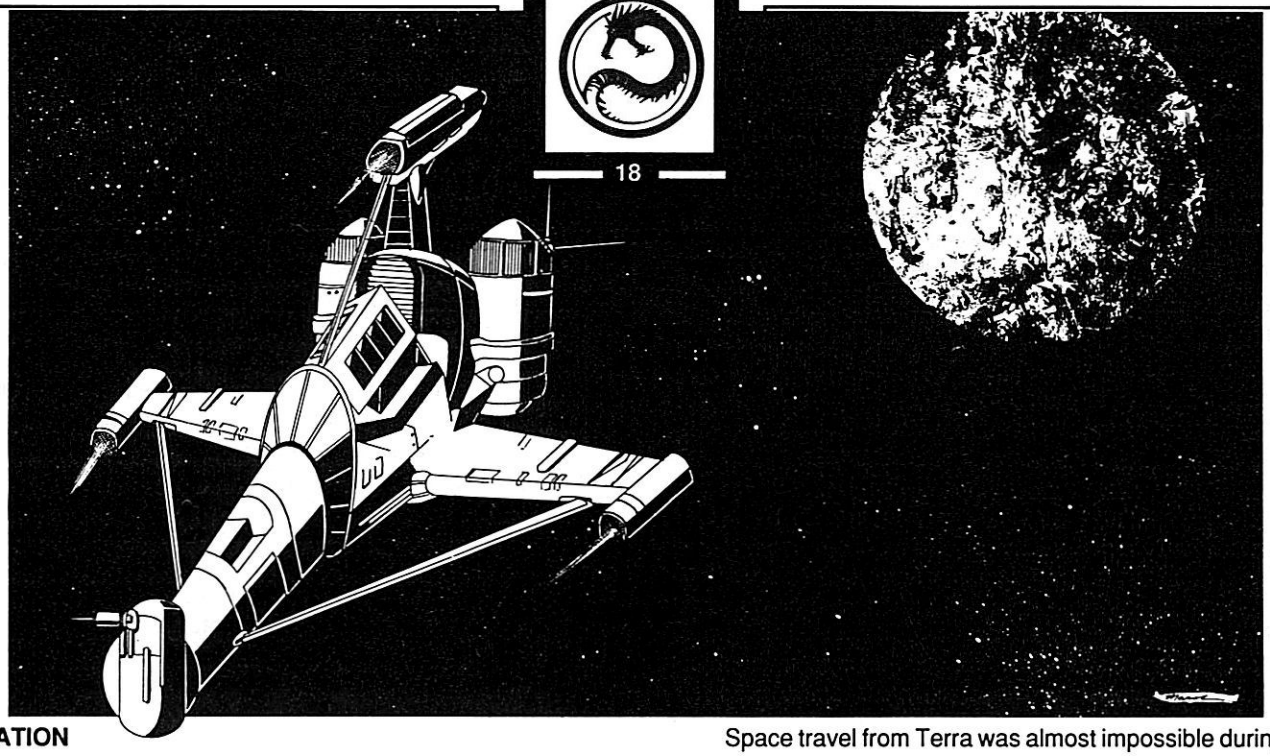
Ironically, the success of the Outer Reaches Rebellion was due to a single, unexpected factor that had nothing to do with combat on any field or battle. Many colony worlds still needed water from the Ryan Cartel's iceships for survival. The Alliance Parliament, having refused a policy of colonial genocide, had to recognize the ships as neutral vessels. As a result, the ships were allowed, with certain limitations, to enter and resupply interdicted systems. What the Terran Alliance did not know was that certain crewmembers of these vessels were smuggling battle reports from colony to colony.

As the conflict on Freedom and nearby worlds quickly escalated from martial law to full-scale guerrilla warfare, the Alliance's military response to the situation grew increasingly unpopular. When word of the fighting slowly spread throughout inhabited space, many still-loyal colonies expressed extreme dissatisfaction. Within a matter of months, what had begun as a mere handful of rebellious colonies had grown to several dozen.

The Alliance military, which had been having enough trouble coping with the colonists' unorthodox tactics on just a few planets, now suddenly found its resources being stretched throughout known space. The sheer cost of mobilizing and transporting personnel and materiel to the frontier, not to speak of the actual costs of combat, rose to astronomical levels. Reports of colonists being executed (true but exaggerated), rumors of biochemical agents used (completely untrue), and Alliance casualty reports (increasing hourly) led to discontent on Terra.

After a year of running battles on more than 50 worlds, the minority Liberal Party—and many Terrans normally disinterested in politics—made their feelings known. Describing the war as "unwinnable," this group managed to vigorously block all efforts to obtain additional military funding. It is not likely that Terra could have won this type of war, regardless of funding. Low on supplies, manpower, and vessels, the Terran Alliances forces were slowly being forced to withdraw on most worlds. On the other planets, only a few small garrisons remained.

The colonists had "won," if either side could win such an insidious conflict. Military and civilian casualties numbered in the hundreds of thousands. As for the material cost of the rebellion, it was estimated in the tens of billions. There was one ironic footnote, however. General Armando Luchesi later wrote in his memoirs that he was "avidly opposed to a military response against the colonists, on the grounds that it was a conflict that could not have a successful resolution for any parties involved." His book, incidentally, was not a best seller.



MIGRATION

As a result of the Outer Reaches Rebellion, the sociopolitical structure on Terra unraveled. With the Expansionist and Liberal Parties struggling viciously for political control, individual freedoms suffered enormously. "The Terran Alliance has lost control of the stars," one contemporary political analyst stated, "but its leaders are not about to lose control of Terra."

When the Expansionists held sway, they passed new laws intended to oppress man's creative spirit. Strict limitations were placed on all artists (now also construed to mean attorneys, physicians, and certain categories of laborer), and their works were regulated by at least three separate Alliance agencies. Restrictions included the actual number of hours the artist could work, the amount he could charge, and the quality of work he must perform. Enforcement of these laws fell to a new branch of security police called "artistic administrators," created especially for the occasion. These police would take the artists into custody at special rehabilitation facilities, though the nature of the rehabilitation was not divulged. The AA, as they were known, wore elaborate black uniforms that closely resembled another well-known black uniform from three centuries before.

When the Liberals were in control, they too passed laws. First of all, the government took over all credit establishments and sharply devaluated Terran currency. This gave the government complete control over the price of all Terran goods merely by changing the going rates. It then became a criminal offense to speak of offworld colonies or of anything associated with the Outer Reaches Rebellion. Though these laws were difficult to enforce, there were severe penalties for violations. The most convenient technique consisted of devaluing a person's electronic credit balance. After a few millionaires spoke unwisely one day and woke up impoverished the next, many others decided to hold their tongues.

Space travel from Terra was almost impossible during the first few years of this "Exodus" period, especially under the Liberal-controlled Parliament. A change in policy took place by 2247, however, when politicians decided to make Terra into a political paradise. This was most easily accomplished by giving any dissidents the freedom to migrate if they so chose. By this time, there were enough hyperdrive-powered ships available to remove the troublemakers from the homeworld.

Before long, the government went from "permitting" these people to leave to actively helping them. The rehabilitation camps were now filled beyond capacity, and the devaluation of currency had begun to have wide-scale negative effects on the entire Terran economy. As a direct result, increasing numbers of starships were constructed, and it became politically "correct" to work in any industry that was directly or indirectly related to the colonization effort.

This, too, came at high price, though many did not realize it then. All research and development efforts ceased as both Liberals and Expansionists cut government funding for new technology from their budgets. Instead of investing in design improvements in starship technology, for example, the government earmarked all funds for mass-producing ships of proven design and equipment. Though the strategy was eminently practical at the moment, the policy slowed technological growth to a crawl.

Another factor contributing to stagnation on Terra was that those most oppressed under the current regime were among Terra's brightest, richest (at least, formerly), and most talented. Those of second- or third-rate intelligence resented their loss of freedom to a lesser degree but were also less-equipped to make up the technological losses. Before the 23rd century ended, the elite few thousand who were most at home in a fully stocked laboratory or library instead found themselves fighting for survival on new, hazardous, but politically unrestrictive colony worlds.

—From "The Role of the Terran Political System During the Exodus," an essay by S. Galpin, in *Notes From the Past,* Levis Simmons, ed., Star League Historical Press, 2608

THE TERRAN HEGEMONY

From the ashes of political divisiveness, Terra rose once more like a proud phoenix. If the analogy holds true, Terra may one day rise again in political importance, capable of casting her shadow over House Kurita and the Draconis Combine. This is something we must not let happen, even if we are forced to attack Terra directly!

—ISF internal memorandum from Theodore Kurita, Prince of Luthien, to Subhash Indrahar, Director of the ISF, ComStar Archives

On July 22, 2315, Fleet Admiral James McKenna issued the following proclamation:

"For almost 100 years, Terra has been devastated by political struggles, bloodshed, hardship, and alternating periods of totalitarian dictatorship and anarchy. The Terran Alliance, originally a body of well-intentioned, skilled political administrators, has become tainted with corruption, graft, and an unhealthy taste for revenge. The Expansionist and Liberal parties, initially struggling to control only the hearts and votes of its constituents, have long since turned to fighting to control our hearts and minds.

During this period, hundreds of civilians have been killed by soulless police officials. Thousands more have been impoverished, and hundreds of thousands imprisoned—often for life—for imagined, falsified, or politically contrived crimes. Sporadic incidents of hyperinflation, currency devaluation, staggering unemployment, Parliament-authorized firing squads, political oppression in the arts and sciences—all these have led our world to the brink of catastrophe.

"Only a few short months ago, the two leading political combatants suffered the same fate as that of any two cannibalistic tribal chieftains. With nothing left to eat, they turned upon each other tooth and nail. To the surprise of everyone, including myself, both Expansionists and Liberals had acquired secret detachments of trained soldiers, utterly loyal and capable of carrying out any act of inhumanity. It is small consolation that they targeted most of their thrusts at each other; the many deceased citizens of Geneva are unable to appreciate the fact that only 'a small quantity' of biochemical agents were used.

"Fortunately for Terra, most of the Alliance's regular military forces remained politically neutral. And I do wish to compliment these fine men and women who performed their sworn duties under the most trying of conditions. They were especially heroic at the Battles of Zurich and Bangkok, in the defense of the ocean liner *SS Prince Albert*, and during the raid on L-4.

"More importantly, though, I am pleased to announce that the remaining senior echelon of the Expansionist Party has been captured in the Caribbean. After refusing surrender, they were executed less than four hours ago. With the arrest of the Liberal Party's key leaders over the last two weeks, we have now eliminated both parties as political forces. In addition, I hold in my hand the resignation of every surviving member of the Terran Parliament who was affiliated with either major party or any of the lesser parties. The few members who refused to resign have been taken into custody. As prisoners, they will receive far better treatment than they bestowed on their own hostages.

"In other words, I declare that as of today, the Terran Alliance and its Parliament are in a state of dissolution.

"Having dealt with the criminals of the past, I now say we must look to the future. The Outer Reaches Rebellion of almost a century ago marked the end of Terra's influence over the inhabited planets of the galaxy. I contend that we need to reassert our control. Not to dominate or dictate, but to lead, nourish, and provide aid to our fellow human beings. Terra, and Terrans, can still offer much to colonists on distant, often-unfriendly worlds.

"Because colonial expansion has taken place all around our solar system, Terra's location is ideally suited as *the* center for trade, mutual defense, culture, and scientific development. Facilities and resources unique to Terra can—and should—be made available for the use of all humans, everywhere. More than this, though, Terra is the only homeworld of our species. To some of us, this respect for heritage still means much.

"Perhaps mankind has evolved from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo stellaris*—star man. But even a 'star man' must have a place he calls home. Many colonists, never having visited Terra, feel they are unwelcome on our world or are unwilling to risk its political dangers. Many others were driven away during the 'Exodus' and might never think of returning. I intend to make Terra a world they can again call home, without shame or fear. Terra must be proud of its place in the galaxy, and once again earn a place in the hearts of all mankind.

"As the ranking, politically unaffiliated military leader on the planet, I now declare the establishment of a 'Terran Hegemony.' This will be a brand-new government whose primary goal is to reunify our planet with as many colonial worlds as possible under a single, Terran banner. Though membership will not be compulsory, we will offer independent colonies many incentives to rejoin us. I am currently accepting applications for positions in all levels of this new government...and if it would not seem too anachronistic, I would like to wish us all the best of luck."

THE OZAWA CLAN

After the Outer Reaches Rebellion ended in 2238, almost every colony world found itself on its own, dependent solely on the resources of its own system and limited interstellar trade. Formal political, economic, or military alliances between worlds did not exist until Lucien Davion conceived and negotiated the Crucis Pact, the first legitimate mutual defense treaty, in 2317. In the meantime, colonists fended for themselves, did not make trouble, and hoped no one else would, either.

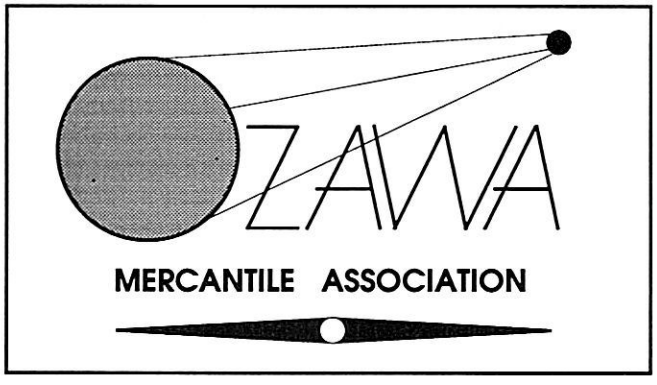
The only frequent contact between worlds came as a few shipping and mercantile associations gradually evolved from smaller corporations that had acquired KF-driven ships. These were loosely organized coalitions of merchant brokers and starship crews that provided semi-regular passenger traffic, small-scale cargo transport, speculative trading in both luxuries and necessities, and information of the most unofficial sort. Even at their height, during the second half of the 23rd century, fewer than a dozen of the coops existed, due mostly to limitations in JumpShip availability. At this time of Exodus, most vessels were transporting Terran colonists under Alliance control, limiting the number of ships on hand for other commercial uses.

As the vastness of space became available over the years, each association carved out its own territory of dominant influence and amiably left the others to do the same. Occasionally, a conflict would take place on a world where two territories overlapped, but bloodshed was rare. In most cases, one side would withdraw peacefully, or the two groups might even consent to share the cargo or profits.

For the most part, these associations were valuable for disseminating goods and information (including rumors) that would otherwise have been impossible to obtain. The merchants generally charged respectable fees, but carefully avoided excessive price gouging. After all, they wanted to be able to return and sell again.

Such was the policy of the Ozawa Mercantile Association, a typical example of such loosely organized coalitions. This particular coop served the "northeast" quadrant of the Inner Sphere, including the worlds of New Samarkand and Galedon. As the name implies, the Ozawa clan led the association, owning several ships outright and leasing a handful of others.

Though not outrageously wealthy, the Ozawas had done well enough for themselves at a time when many colonists were barely able to scratch out a meager living. They were not subtle about their wealth and this rubbed off on their merchants, whose professional politeness was *always* tinged with arrogance. On more than one planet, their customers would have been happier trading with someone else, but the Ozawas had a virtual monopoly in their territory. The underlying resentment toward them would eventually set set the stage for important events to come.



BIRTH OF A DYNASTY

Not with dreams but with blood and iron,
Shall a nation be moulded at last.
—Algernon Charles Swinburne, 1837-1909

Shiro Kurita was born in 2270, in the city of Yamashiro, on the colony world of New Samarkand. Kamaro, his father, was a strict disciplinarian and devout follower of the 17th-century Japanese samurai culture. In fact, much of young Shiro's upbringing reflected this structured spartan existence. Swordsmanship and martial arts training were fully as important in his schooling as the arts of literacy and statesmanship.

New Samarkand, one of the most heavily populated colony worlds, contained a half-dozen city-states ruled by as many feudal lords. At that time, some of the city-states still permitted strictly regulated slavery, though it was becoming somewhat less common. Each lord, supported by a small army, claimed authority over the entire planet, with the net result that no one had clear control. An intricate web of intrigue, subtle threats, and displays of military might made New Samarkand's politics both interesting and hazardous.

As Shiro grew older, he developed a keen interest in the political workings of his own city-state and planet. Realizing that he must set the stage for bigger and better things that seemed to beckon from the future, he entered local politics. Urizen Kurita, born in 2273, soon followed in his older brother's footsteps, though he would prove to be more skilled in the arts of war than diplomacy.

Having challenged, cajoled, and outmaneuvered all political opposition, Shiro quickly rose to power. With his incisive mind, great skill at ritual dueling, enthusiasm for political extortion, and exceptional cunning, he became the self-proclaimed Lord of Yamashiro at the age of 24. Urizen also advanced, attaining the rank of Captain in the Yamashiro Guard, the private army of that city-state.

The youngest of New Samarkand's feudal lords, Shiro Kurita was also the most innovative. In less than a year, he had obtained enough evidence to discredit the reputation of each of his political counterparts. Using the planet's media facilities, he first played the gracious host and invited the other five city-state lords to a central meeting place. Three were suspicious and so declined Shiro's offer, to no one's surprise. Undaunted, Shrio proceeded with a public presentation of a plan to create a single ruling government over all of New Samarkand.

The two lords who accepted his invitation reluctantly agreed to the proposal, though it is not known whether it was because Shiro confronted them with whatever blackmail he had up his sleeve. The three absent lords were bitterly against any such radical changes proposed by a comparative political fledgling, and expressed their dissenting opinions by video within minutes of Shiro's address.

Before dark fell, Shiro and Urizen had made the necessary arrangements. They had planted specially selected members of the Yamashiro Guard in locations where they might carry out any special instructions. By the next morning, many planetary residents were saddened to hear of the three absent lords' untimely, and oddly coincidental, deaths. The two lords who cooperated did not suffer the same fate, though they realized what might happen if they failed to continue to support Shiro.

Having persuaded his fellow lords—one way or another—Shiro was ready to pursue larger quarry. In January 2296, he declared himself New Samarkand's "First Citizen," and promptly contacted other nearby worlds. Meanwhile, Urizen had purged all the individual armies of potential subversives and reorganized them into a single army under his command.

Terra's demands for JumpShips had begun to decrease slightly by this time, as the Exodus neared its end. As a result, hyperdrive ships were more readily available to individual worlds or private groups who sought to purchase them. To Shiro's way of thinking, that meant two things: he could assemble his own fleet of starships to make interstellar war possible and to make New Samarkand far less dependent on the Ozawa Mercantile Association and their ilk.

Shiro Kurita despised the Ozawa family and their trading alliance. Perhaps he was jealous of their great wealth or of their passive, peaceful means of accumulating it. Whatever the cause, he hated the presence of Ozawan merchants on "his" world, because they wore bright, exotic clothes and jewels, carelessly consumed intoxicating beverages, told dubious tales of adventure, and openly flaunted their riches before the astonished natives. Shiro shrewdly honed his own hatred into a rallying cry for other similarly affected planets in the vicinity. With control of New Samarkand and a worthwhile cause, Shiro and Urizen Kurita were now one step closer to building an empire.

URIZEN KURITA

ALLIANCE OF GALEDON

What surprising rivalry? The Kurita-Ozawa family dispute only surfaced *publicly during the late-23rd and early 24th centuries. The way I see it, Shiro Kurita was trying to get even finally for the way Jisaburo Ozawa made Takeo Kurita look bad at Terra's Battle of Leyte Gulf—three and a half centuries ago.*

—From *Wisdom from the Universe*, by Homer Kellogi, Explorer, Celestial Spheres Publications, 2821

By the early years of the 24th century, Galedon V was a major colony. Its sizeable population, vast mineral resources, and adequate supplies of uncontaminated water had combined to make the planet one of the most important inhabited worlds, and Galedonians were enormously proud of the fact.

Galedon had had its share of problems with the Ozawa Mercantile Association, however. Although that organization maintained several large facilities onworld and provided many benefits, they had also made substantial profits in trade. Occasionally, those profits were won to the economy's detriment and the righteous indignation of Galedon's finance minister.

Shiro Kurita, the young First Citizen of neighboring New Samarkand, let it be known that he, too, bore a grudge against the Ozawas. The Galedon government could not know then that Kurita wanted their world as a psychological and strategic springboard for further offensives. They only knew that here was a forceful, dynamic leader who also did not appreciate the OMA, and so warmed toward him.

Kurita and Nathaniel Imura, Governor of Galedon, corresponded at length, but also at a distance. Galedon's Colonial Board was in session during March 2302, when it received word that Shiro was arriving via KF-ship. The first meetings were very fruitful, with Kurita offering to pool his world's technological and military resources with Galedon's. If it worked well for the two planets, Shiro said that he would attempt to recruit other worlds to join the alliance as well. The Board was astonished but intrigued. An eloquent speaker, Shiro Kurita had enthralled them. They felt he was a kindred spirit, and even the most skeptical listened patiently.

A member of the Board asked who would direct the combined forces. Kurita looked around shyly, and humbly offered to take on that duty. As the modest Director of the "Alliance of Galedon," he would be in charge of protecting both worlds. Someone asked him to repeat what he had said, and Kurita replied, "That is the only proper name for such a gallant confederation." The Galedon board was ecstatic at the opportunity for their world to receive a prominent place in mankind's history.

Shiro then explained that after he left Galedon, he would visit the nearby worlds of Dnepropetrovsk and Sverdlovsk to offer them membership in the Alliance. Dnepropetrovsk sided with Kurita's plans and accepted the offer, while the other world's leaders remained noncommittal. Meanwhile, Kurita's brother Urizen continued expanding and training the army—on New Samarkand.

With Galedon's blessing as well as the title of Director of the Alliance of Galedon, Shiro Kurita proved to be as much of a statesman and orator as a strategist. As reports came in and more worlds joined the Alliance, the Ozawa Mercantile Association tried to punish the Alliance by raising transport fees for member-worlds. If they needed any further proof, most Galedonians were now utterly convinced of the Ozawa Mercantile Association's evil intentions.

However, Kurita had his own plans. Armed Galedonian ships began to board unarmed Ozawan merchant vessels and to confiscate their cargoes. In support of the cause, a large percentage of each cargo went directly to financing further operations, though few civilians were aware of that element of the plan. The members of the Colonial Board did know, however, and privately supported Kurita's actions while remaining publicly ignorant. This technique of fund-raising worked well for a number of months. By the time the Association caught on, the Alliance of Galedon was operating its own government-controlled merchant fleet—armed and well-escorted, of course.

The Ozawa Mercantile Association was not about to accept Kurita's actions without a fight, however. After tracing the source of their losses, the Ozawa family's response was prompt and predictable. Their vessels were hastily equipped with weapons, and now Kurita's board-and-seize missions turned into running gun battles.

To gain popular support for its position, the Association began to reduce the rates for all services, including cargo transport fees. An effective media campaign on Alliance worlds did help to improve the organization's public image. Unfortunately, the lurid exposure also shed some light on Shiro Kurita's unsavory secret tactics.

Even on Galedon, there were a few malcontents who did not agree with the Alliance's official standpoint toward mercantile associations. Some of these people had the money to purchase special offworld goods, and they wanted them. Unusual foodstuffs, entertainment products, and objets d'art were especially popular with these unpatriotic segments of the population. These people considered Shiro Kurita to be a political strongman and meddler, and the Ozawan-sponsored reports only added to their animosity.

The Galedon Governor and Board defended Kurita as an ally and friend. It was true, they said, that because of his background, he considered many entertainments and artforms to be frivolous, even corrupting. This made it difficult for him to understand how others might crave such things enough to swallow their pride to obtain them.

Once Shiro started something, he saw it through until the end. When he realized that his popularity was slowly slipping, he responded viciously. During the month of November 2303, every known Ozawa Mercantile Association office and support facility was bombed, including at least a dozen complexes on Galedon V itself. Galedon was as much taken by surprise as was the Association.

Kurita was not through yet. By December 2303, detachments of heavily armed soldiers from New Samarkand, supported by small numbers of newly indoctrinated Galedonians, began to move across the "neutral" planet Sverdlovsk. At the same time, squadrons of atmospheric aircraft flew support missions against mobs of unarmed, but potentially dangerous, civilians. The first full-scale interstellar military operation ever seen in the Inner Sphere was about to begin in earnest.

AUDIENCE FROM SVERDLOVSK

SHIRO KURITA [*mock-genial*]: I am pleased to be among you again, citizens of Sverdlovsk.

1ST VOICE: Why don't you go back where you came from?

KURITA [*disdainfully*]: Identify yourself, peasant.

2ND VOICE: We meant you no harm...why did you attack our world?

KURITA: I offered your leaders a chance to join with me. They refused—

3RD VOICE [*interrupting*]: They didn't refuse. You gave them no choice.

KURITA [*screaming*]: Any government that does not side with me is against me! Any man who does not help me, hurts me! Anything that does not provide aid is in my way and must be destroyed! How many of you imbeciles must I kill before you begin to understand this?

—Excerpt of live dialog between Sverdlovsk citizens and Director Shiro Kurita, transmitted via satellite from Chyornyy, Sverdlovsk, 23 December 2303

SHOW OF FORCE

When Shiro Kurita invaded Sverdlovsk in late 2303, the military operation required his entire KF-drive fleet and the vast majority of his battle-ready ground forces. Some reports indicate that only school-age military cadets and retirees were left behind to police New Samarkand and Galedon V. Even so, Urizen Kurita's army was not large, either by Terran standards or when compared to armies of two centuries later. Most accounts agree that roughly four divisions, perhaps 50,000 officers and men, landed in the cities and towns of Sverdlovsk.

Of course, Sverdlovsk had no organized militia, which Kurita knew full well. Moreover, its leaders never expected to face an interstellar invasion, and so were completely staggered by the presence of nervous, but grim-faced soldiers on their peaceful world. Within weeks, the planetary officials (who could barely control their panic) had shakily signed a treaty of complete cooperation.

Not one to remain in the safety of a rear area, Shiro Kurita personally visited several regions of the garrisoned world. During these visits, he seemed to enjoy meeting with the vanquished natives in small meeting halls and assembly areas. During these closely guarded encounters, which he called "audiences," he claimed to have as many more soldiers available for each world that defied him, a patent falsehood.

In fact, Kurita had no other armies at hand. He was hoping that his single, lightning-quick capture of Sverdlovsk would place enough doubt in the minds of other planetary leaders that they also would fall easily. To this end, he had his speeches transmitted live to relay stations and then beamed into space so that offworld ears might take heed. Kurita realized that he was putting all his horses in one race, as they say. If anything should happen to his army or his fleet, he would be back where he started, or worse.

However, no one dared to call Shiro Kurita's bluff. He was the first leader in the quadrant to mobilize, train, equip, and launch an entire invasion force, and that was intimidating enough. Many planets were still in the colonial stage, just trying to survive, let alone attempting to field an army to ward off invasion. A handful of worlds deigned not to cooperate, but the leaders of numerous others quickly agreed to sign treaties with Shiro.

Even with his thirst for power, Kurita was cagey enough to continue to refer to his group as the Alliance of Galedon. Rather than give the appearance of seeking to create an empire (which could have unified the colonies to stand against him), he slowly and meticulously annexed one planet after another (both inhabited and uninhabited) in no particular pattern or order. The strategy of "divide and conquer" had worked on Terra for centuries, and apparently the idea was as good as ever. Though his brother Urizen favored full-scale war, Shiro carefully avoided it for as long as he could.

In the meantime, each populated world agreed to send a certain percentage of its citizenry to New Samarkand for indoctrination and military training. On one occasion, the planet Kirei Na Niwa failed to do so, falling short of its total quota by fewer than 20 persons. Before three months had passed, the world had lost exactly double the requisite percentage of its population in mass executions orchestrated by Shiro Kurita and carried out by Urizen. No world ever missed its quota again.

POLITICAL MANEUVERS

A prince should therefore have no other aim or thought, nor take up any other thing for his study, but war and its organization and discipline, for that is the only art that is necessary to one who commands.

—Niccolo Machiavelli, 1469-1527

After dropping all pretense of peaceful rule, at least among his own staff, the still-youthful Shiro Kurita followed a tradition dating back to the ancient Terran leader, Alexander the Great. By combining political genius and strategic insight, Kurita slowly conquered, besieged, or (more often) persuaded the inhabited nearby planets to join him. Much like Alexander, he personally led his forces in numerous battles, sometimes shoulder to shoulder with his brother Urizen. When things went well on a single front, he would quickly shift his own attention to other matters. If the battle did not progress according to plan, he did not hesitate to intervene and bring inspiration to his followers.

By early 2309, Shiro Kurita had assumed complete control of the Alliance of Galedon, and no longer pretended to seek counsel from other leaders. He was the Alliance, and his word was law. Now he wished to learn how far his word could extend. At this time, his coalition controlled only seven significant populated worlds and fewer than a dozen others, almost all acquired through relatively peaceful means. Yet both Shiro and Urizen agreed that it was not enough.

Using the Alliance as a guise, Shiro made a year-long tour of several major colony worlds, including Dieron, Junction, Benjamin, Worrell, Luthien, and Pesht. The leaders of each of these worlds also controlled several of their respective neighbors. Some styled themselves as nobles, and more than one mentioned having imperial goals of his own. They did not trust one another, and so were wary of some act of treachery. The treachery arrived, but from an unexpected source.

These men were no match for Shiro's skill in political manipulation, either individually or collectively. Indeed, long before embarking on his extended tour of these worlds, Kurita had obtained as much intelligence as possible on each of the planetary leaders from his spies and informants. Then, there were also spies ready to brief him at the time he arrived at each world. Though not without its hazards, the plan worked. As each king and duke received him, Shiro showed the man documents "proving" that a nearby rival had intentions of invading and taking over his territories.

He then reluctantly agreed to mediate the dispute, as "a disinterested third party." To each, he also suggested another alternative. By joining the Alliance of Galedon and uniting his resources with the Kuritas, that planetary leader would have nothing more to fear from his "aggressive" neighbors. Shiro explained that the Alliance was far enough away to be uninterested in conquest, thus posing no threat. On the other hand, it was close enough to provide direct support or to meet an attack on a second front, if it came to war. Of course, the leader would have to agree immediately, or Kurita could not guarantee protection.

This ploy, used with subtle variations for each leader, succeeded on more than a dozen occasions and failed not once. When Shiro Kurita returned to New Samarkand in June of 2310 with a pocketful of signed treaties, the Alliance of Galedon had virtually exploded to encompass more than 30 inhabited worlds. There would be repercussions, however, and they would not be long in coming.

SHIRO THE CONQUEROR

Dear Kyoodai [brother]:

Things proceed well on this grand tour. So far, I have visited many worlds. Most of their leaders have wisely chosen to cooperate with us. The others will agree eventually, too, or else they will die.

I know your constant travels between New Samarkand and Galedon have been hard on you. I have your letter saying that the duties are going well, that the army is still growing, that the Alliance munitions facilities have increased their production. This is good, for we may need them at any time to convince reticent parties of our earnest goal.

Also, you must continue to convert light industrial factories to build weapons of war. The colonists may suffer, but the cause is far greater than their petty pain. Be of strong heart. Our accomplishments shall prove the worth all our efforts.

Though I am satisfied with my results, we still cannot know the final outcome. War may begin in this instant, the one after, or an eternity from now. Maintain a strong sense of discipline, and we shall always be greater than our enemies. I see you have found that the whip and the electronic bullhorn, when combined, make effective weapons of motivation.

—From a letter written by Shiro Kurita to his brother Urizen, quoted in *Son of the Dragon*, Abner Jenkins, ed., University of Pesht Press, 2917

CONQUEST OF RESISTANCE

It was a good thing that Urizen was dedicated, competent, and enthusiastic, because Shiro Kurita would need his brother's army sooner than he had dreamed. Though Shiro's extended tour and its various meetings were an unqualified success, the lords who individually swore allegiance to the Alliance resumed their petty rivalries almost instantly. In June 2311, a dispute broke out between Dieron and nearby Altair. The leader from Dieron promised swift action in response to some imagined insult. At one point, he even threatened to call on his distant but trusted ally, Shiro Kurita, only to discover that Shiro had also promised the Altairian the same protection. Within a few months, each major planetary lord had learned of the means Kurita had used to win their pledges.

To some, this was an outrage. Others simply continued to honor and accept the Alliance of Galedon as an official ruling body and ally. In effect, Shiro Kurita had bought a few months' time while making only a few enemies. To his way of thinking, this was a worthy trade. Resistance to Kurita's authority was greatest on the worlds of Benjamin, Telos IV, and Asgard. The local leaders of these three worlds were indignant and felt that they had been both manipulated and betrayed. Instead of taking out their aggressions on their neighbors, as had been the custom, they became hostile toward Shiro Kurita, sending numerous communiques expressing their resentment in explicit detail.

This led to the famous Council of One summit meeting in September 2311. Shiro Kurita cordially invited every known lord in the northeast quadrant to attend. More than a thousand leaders, dignitaries, representatives, and political hangers-on accepted. Ever the devious statesman, Kurita made an impassioned speech condoning cooperation between worlds for the betterment of all. While he spoke, Urizen Kurita ordered two companies of his best troops to surround the meeting hall. A vote was taken on Shiro's measure. Those in favor returned home safely; those opposed were shipped home to their next of kin. All in all, less than half survived.

Later that month, the fleet and army of the Alliance of Galedon invaded Benjamin, Telos IV, and Asgard. Though none of the three planets mustered a substantial army, the citizens of each were devoted to their freedom and refused to submit peaceably. Casualties were enormous on both sides, as the defenders adopted old Terran guerrilla tactics, and the attackers used every known contemporary weapon except CBR (chemical, biological, and radioactive) warheads. In the end, Benjamin fell in October, Telos IV in April, and Asgard in August of 2312.

For some worlds, this invasion was like a rallying cry to rise up in arms against the Kuritas. For others, it was a painful lesson that they did not want to experience first-hand. Furthermore, some even sided with Shiro Kurita and joined Urizen's army because of its admirable success in military conquest.

During the next seven years, a handful of individual worlds momentarily asserted their independence—offering increasingly disjointed resistance—then caved in as the Alliance forces moved in to decimate their homes and factories. Many worlds, completely unprepared for full-scale warfare, had only half-trained police and scattered militia to contend with Urizen's battle-proven forces. The total number of defending casualties, civilian and military, numbered in the millions and would surely have been greater had the planetary populations been larger.

After 2317, more and more planetary leaders (survivors of the Council of One meeting and the subsequent invasions or their successors) had sworn oaths of allegiance to Shiro Kurita. All was going according to his plan. By November 2319, Shiro Kurita had achieved his objective of controlling a narrow empire of planets stretching from near Terra to the Draconis Rift. A single, tenuous spur of controlled worlds also branched off, reaching as far as his homeworld of New Samarkand. Only the Rift limited his growth outward, it being a partially explored region of space within which, presumably, there were very few habitable worlds.

THE WAY OF THE DRAGON

Dear Musuko [son]:

You are 14 years old now, and a man. Though I am still well and fit to lead, you will serve the Kurita line in the event of my demise. You are also old enough to learn some things that I could not tell Tenno-the-boy.

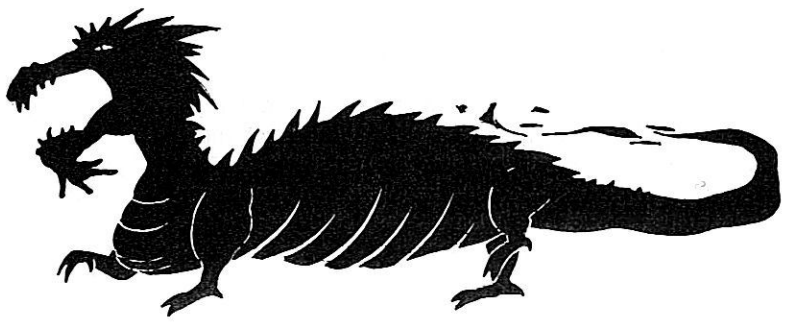
Our forces have paid the price in blood, valor, and high honor to help me create a domain...a kingdom...a dynasty. I charge you, my son, with its protection after my death, on whatever day that may come. I am the Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. My brother Urizen is the Warlord. But you are its future, and your children and their children. Remember this.

I have chosen the dragon as our standard and our symbol, reflecting many facets of our existence. We must never forget the ancient Terran heritage of our line, with its samurai greatness. I remind you, too, that in many mythologies, the dragon is feared and respected for its strength, cunning, and willingness to destroy for the sake of its own power. Always keep the virtues of the dragon in mind, and use them to defeat your opponents.

You may recall that I have spoken much about the treacherous Ozawas and their wealthy merchant fleets. You may now know that the Ozawas no longer concern me. Having met our forces, they were forced to concede defeat after many losses. We, not they, are now the power with whom all in our quadrant must reckon. The Ozawa Mercantile Association must now abide by our rules. Give them no thought or care. A debt nearly four centuries old has been paid in full. From now on, we have the advantage and shall press it whenever we choose. If one wishes to show who is master and who is the victim, it is better to inflict a lingering pain upon an enemy than a quick death.

Always preserve the dragon, and its magic will keep you strong.

—From a letter written by Shiro Kurita to his son Tenno, as quoted in *Son of the Dragon,* Abner Jenkins, ed., University of Pesht Press, 2917



GROWTH OF THE COMBINE

During the first two decades of the 24th century, Shiro Kurita created the Draconis Combine, a relatively large totalitarian empire whose "member" worlds he had united through force. Meanwhile, the Terran Alliance had finally collapsed in 2314. In its place was the newly formed Terran Hegemony, led by Fleet Admiral James McKenna. McKenna had his own dreams of empire, but he wished to achieve them through less violent means.

McKenna's Hegemony pre-dated Kurita's Draconis Combine by only five years, but McKenna had used the time well in ambitious projects to promote technological improvement and mutual defense. Just as Kurita was openly declaring his leadership, a number of worlds near Terra were signing (or had already signed) treaties with McKenna.

Though Kurita would never admit it openly, the surprising success of McKenna's newly formed Hegemony led to a major change in his growth policy. Kurita had at first intended to expand his domain in the direction of Terra, but a number of the planets he had coveted were already spoken for. The Draconis Rift proved an even more tenacious obstacle, leaving him only three directions in which to grow: toward the Federated Suns of House Davion, toward the regions controlled by the Federation of Skye and the Tamar Pact, or toward the loosely knit Principality of Rasalhague.

In 2320, Shiro Kurita made a wise, though unusually conservative, decision. Instead of attempting a major thrust into a neighboring empire, he proceeded to choose worlds that were within easy striking range of his own. At the time of its establishment, the Draconis Combine was much like a scattered collection of islands in a huge archipelago. Kurita did not yet control every "island" in his own island chain, let alone any islands elsewhere. By expanding slowly but consistently, he planned to take most of the remaining independent worlds that existed in the gaps of space between now-loyal member planets. Ever the brilliant military strategist, Shiro developed the process of interstellar war into a fine art.

Individual worlds went through the gradual process of isolation, subjugation, and consolidation, as their respective leaders were "persuaded" to join the Draconis Combine. By the late 2320s, even Shiro's enemies (of which he now had fewer and fewer, thanks to Urizen's efforts) grudgingly admired his methods. Having suppressed opposition and redirected it into unification, he had enhanced the overall prosperity of his domain. Still, something was lacking. Realizing that his new empire would need a cause to preserve its unity, Kurita elected to move against the Principality of Rasalhague in 2330.

Though the campaign against Rasalhague would go poorly for many years, Shiro Kurita would see the other areas of his dynasty expand to include more than 60 major worlds. The approximate borders ranged from near Terra to the Draconis Rift, and from the edge of the Principality of Rasalhague to the border of the Federated Suns. By 2348, the Draconis Combine was perhaps the second-most powerful interstellar power of the ten existing states. Only the Terran Hegemony stood above it.

SHIRO RELENTS

I offer you an opportunity to join with the Terran Hegemony and to add your resources to our own.

—Official transmission from James McKenna, Director-General of the Terran Hegemony, to Shiro Kurita, Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, circa 2325

The eel rarely seeks the same prey as the goldfish. The eagle flies not with the pigeon. The tiger needs no friendship with the goat. Such are the paths of the Draconis Combine and the Terran Hegemony.

—Shiro Kurita's immediate response

Except for one brief message in 2325, Shiro had never recognized the authority of James McKenna, Director-General of the Terran Hegemony, and refused to communicate with him. In 2340, Michael Cameron succeeded the deceased McKenna. With the change in leadership, Shiro was willing to make the expedient move. He signed a limited trade pact with the Terran Hegemony, openly stating his hope that Cameron "would be satisfied and seek no more." Though this opened the way for limited trade, economic exchanges, and substantially financed the Combine's expanding industrial base, he secretly reaffirmed his vow that one day he (or his descendants) would rule all of space. Shiro Kurita died in 2348 from natural causes, but his oath lived on.

SHIRO KURITA

WAR AGAINST RASALHAGUE

The Draconis Combine should not have chosen a dragon for its symbol. Instead, it should have taken for its standard the image of an octopus, with its venomous tentacles reaching throughout the northeast quadrant, sucking the life from everything they touch.

—From *Wisdom from the Universe*, by Homer Kellogi, Explorer, Celestial Sphere Publications, 2821

The Kuritas are always mouthing about their honor. However, if you pay strict notice, they never attack a party that is their equal; they only strike against weaker opponents, knowing when they bear an unfair advantage. New Bergen served them right.

—From an anonymous anti-Kurita pamphlet distributed in the Principality of Rasalhague, circa 2340

After consolidating the worlds immediately surrounding his Draconis Combine, Shiro Kurita again looked toward his neighbors in his plan to expand the Combine's influence. Though the Federated Suns controlled a number of attractive worlds, Kurita felt that the Davion sphere might be too distant for an easily won campaign. At this time, in 2330, the Draconis Combine did not yet share a common border with the Federated Suns.

Meanwhile, the Protectorate of Donegal, the Tamar Pact, and the Federation of Skye were in the midst of discussions to unite their three territories. Instead of directly attacking any of the three before the group had joined together, Kurita made one of his very few strategic errors. For unknown reasons, he shied away from that region and dispatched his brother Urizen, now Warlord, to move against the Principality of Rasalhague. Had he attacked the Tamar Pact at this stage, before it helped to form the Lyran Commonwealth, House Steiner would likely never have come into existence. Instead, Rasalhague fell victim.

During the first three years of the campaign, Urizen encountered only token resistance. After a few months, he even sent for his sons Victor and Isaac, also warriors in the Kurita tradition. Urizen's health was slowly deteriorating, and he wanted to ensure that the Kurita bloodline would remain in battle. The younger Kuritas relished combat and quickly rose within the ranks.

Several Rasalhague member-worlds fell in a matter of months, with Combine advances limited more by logistics than by the minimal opposition. Using "leap-frogging" techniques, the Kuritans seized planets in a seemingly erratic sequence. In this

THE PRINCIPALITY OF RASALHAGUE

We Rasalhagians were a noble collection of proud peoples. We asked little, except to be left to our own destiny and devices. Though life was hard on the new and often forbidding worlds during the Exodus, we managed. It was no harder for us on those strange new planets than for our own ancestors of a millennia before. The freedom to live or die—by our own choice, and not the choice of our government—that is all we sought.

During the Exodus, many of us left our homeworld, never to return. With heavy hearts and a deep sense of regret, thousands of colonists ventured from the Federal Democratic Republics of Sweden, Finland, and Norway. It seemed that our ancestors saw the shape of things to come and decided to abandon Terra even before the main wave of emigration had begun.

Our reasons for leaving were as much geopolitical as they were economic. It was not so much that we wanted to go, but that conditions forced our departure. Our nations had suffered extensively as a result of the Second Russian Civil War in the early 21st century. The hordes of displaced civilians fleeing across the border from their destroyed Soviet homes created severe economic dislocation and near-anarchy in our homelands. As late as the mid-23rd century, nearly 150 years later, these once-prosperous nations were still paying the exorbitant social and financial costs of rebuilding the splintered Soviet states. The assessments, assigned by the Terran Parliament and cruelly enforced by Alliance authorities, ensured the economic and psychological bankruptcy of our once proud lands.

When our chance came, we chose to flee. At that time, the unexplored planet of Rasalhague was about as far away from Terra as anyone could imagine. Thus, it was the perfect refuge for a people who had developed a deep and lasting resentment for oppressive, impersonal bureaucracies supported by a strong military. The Terran homeworld seemed bent on depriving our people of their dignity and their means of survival. Thus, we found our sanctuary in Rasalhague and other nearby worlds. Here we looked forward to autonomy and as much physical distance as possible from the authority of Terra.

The worlds settled in this region during this time were organized into a loose structure of clan-oriented families. Family heads took responsibility for their own, and annually elected a single head for each planet, known as a *varldherre*, or world-lord. In turn, each world-lord paid lip service to the Prince of Rasalhague, elected once every ten years (hence the name "Principality"). We were loyal to our Prince, but not fanatical.

The prince, often referred to affectionately as the "High Chieftain," was nominally responsible for the safety and well-being of every Rasalhagian. In practical terms, though, this protection amounted to little more than verbal agreement to a mutual defense pact. For all intents, every family was on its own and would live or die by its wits and the resources at hand.

Aside from petty family in-fighting and inevitable minor disagreements in planetary politics, we minded our own business. Surviving, we found, was a difficult chore. It became a standard political joke for commentators to add that "the Principality of Rasalhague was generally conspicuous by its absence." As a rule, our citizens showed little interest in interstellar politics, other newly formed governments, or the activities of Terra.

In fact, we might have kept entirely to ourselves until population pressure built up to the point that we needed to expand our vision and our territories (not necessarily in that order). Judging from current trends and if left to our own ways, this might have taken several centuries. Unfortunately, our independence would be forever crushed in 2330 by the heavy boots of the armies of the Draconis Combine.

—From *Under the Dragon's Claw: A History of Rasalhague*, by Rebekka Rogers, Tamar Interstellar Press, 2561

way, Urizen would continue to keep the enemy off guard while always creating an advance staging base for upcoming attacks. Other planets would then be taken during a second wave, sometimes two to four years later.

Moderately large Combine garrisons and enormous weapon caches were stationed on the advance bases, as Urizen and his forces seized worlds and continued to penetrate deeply into the Principality. In fact, by late 2333, they had actually bypassed the planet Rasalhague, having seized and subjugated New Bergen in its place. This move surprised even the Rasalhagians, who felt sure Urizen Kurita would strike for their capital. In retrospect, he should have.

In January 2334, Victor and Isaac Kurita made up a small part of the Draconis Combine occupation force on New Bergen. The troops there were preparing for action against the planet Outpost, but, for the moment, were enjoying an extended R&R period before the next battle. During this state of lessened attention, a powerful defending force dropped onto the world and combined their might with a prearranged uprising of local citizens. In an unprecedented massacre, the defenders wiped out the occupation force to the last man. Huge stocks of armored ground vehicles, personal weapons and artillery, munitions and equipment, and even a handful of parked JumpShips were captured and quickly distributed among the Rasalhagians.

Combined with the natives' own resourcefulness and sense of economy, these new weapons provided them with a means to fight the Draconis Combine on their own terms. In fact, the seizure of this single supply depot prolonged the fighting for at least two full decades. On a more personal note, the loss of his sons at New Bergen nearly drove Urizen Kurita mad. Though he was coordinating battle plans elsewhere, it did not take long for him to hear of the debacle. Some say he turned almost purple upon receiving the news. In view of his heart condition, that is entirely possible.

Urizen never saw his revenge fulfilled, however. Though he did continue to lead his forces for the next two years, his health continued to worsen. In April 2336, he died from congestive heart failure. Upon learning of his brother's death, Shiro took the news with characteristic stoicism, reportedly saying: "Branches of the tree die, but the tree lives on." Fortunately for that side of the Kurita family line, Urizen's third son Adam was safe at home on New Samarkand, as was Victor's own son Vladimir. The Kurita dynasty was never seriously jeopardized, to the disappointment of its enemies.

After Urizen's death, Shiro's son Tenno personally took command of the Combine forces in Rasalhague. Though he was no general, Tenno maintained tenuous control until Urizen's son Adam replaced him in 2342. This freed Tenno to return to his training for the position of Coordinator, which he took over in 2348 upon his father's death. Adam Kurita held the position of Warlord of Rasalhague until 2385.

Thanks to the New Bergen raid, guerrilla fighting continued in the Principality of Rasalhague for three decades. In 2367, Tenno finally declared the Rasalhague menace "vanquished," and withdrew most of the Combine's armed units present. In reality, the Principality remained officially neutral and an independent state until 2510, almost a century and a half later.

NEW BERGEN BATTLE REPORT

Dear Kyoodai:

With an inflamed heart, I write to you.

I have suffered heavily from an attack made by the rebellious subversives who reside in the Principality of Rasalhague, and I seek blood vengeance for an eternity.

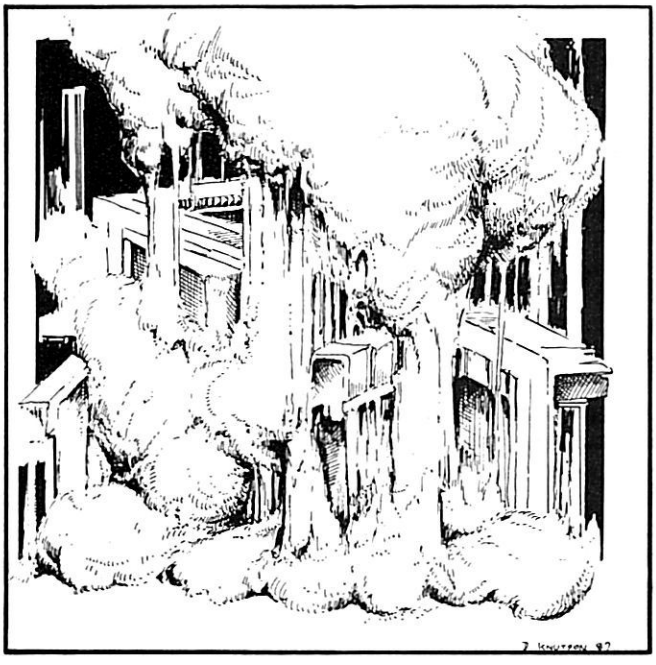
My sons Victor and Isaac are both dead, killed by cowardly villains who would strike blows with stones at children.

A vicious attack has just occurred on New Bergen. Catching our forces unaware, the enemy massacred the entire garrison and also made off with the contents of the supply depot. It was the main storage facility for our entire Rasalhague offensive, billions of yen in equipment stolen. Everything—EVERYTHING—is gone, even a flight of our newest JumpShips!

Rage overfills my heart, and I now see the faces of my dead sons in nightmares. Shiro, I have had the same dream four nights running: Isaac stands in a circular pit of flames, and Victor, standing above, stretches out his hand, trying to reach him. I can see everything, but am too far away to help or cry out a warning. I think this vision comes to me from that stanza of *Kokinshu* that touched us both so much.

These losses in munitions and equipment will delay the war against Rasalhague for months, or even years. I assure you that I have created some of the most exquisite tortures possible, should I ever capture those responsible. Weep for Victor and Isaac, as I do.

—From a letter written by Urizen Kurita to his brother Shiro, as quoted in *Son of the Dragon,* Abner Jenkins, ed., University of Pesht Press, 2917



This night of no moon
There is no way to meet him.
I rise in longing—
My breast pounds, a leaping flame,
My heart is consumed in fire.
—*Kokinshu* by Ono no Komachi, ninth century

TENNO'S REIGN

Tenno Kurita, elder son of Shiro Kurita, was born on New Samarkand in 2305. He became the Second Coordinator of the Draconis Combine upon his father's death in 2348. Though a skilled organizer and administrator, he was mild-mannered and no match for his father in statesmanship or military strategy. He spent the first two-thirds of his reign promoting industrial development (to eventually produce weapons and munitions), forging closer diplomatic relations with the Terran Hegemony, and organizing the Combine into a workable administrative government. Tenno divided the Combine into military districts and prefects. Though exact district and prefecture borders changed on numerous occasions to reflect battle gains or losses, the system is still in use today.

A pragmatist in his own way, Tenno knew the Combine's best chances for growth lay in sheer numbers of people. To encourage an expanding population, he awarded merit citations and rewards to mothers of large families. In conjunction, he also developed mandatory indoctrination training for citizens of all ages, beginning as young as four or five years of age. His sole motive was to boost the number of Kurita-loyal colonists on thinly populated worlds. It worked, and families with 10 or 15 children became common.

The greatest crisis during Tenno's reign occurred near its end, when a terrorist raid took place on Rasalhague in December 2375. An unknown number of guerrillas evaded the guards and attacked the Draconis Combine RMD housing complex. Vladimir Kurita, Rasalhague Military District Governor, and almost every member of his family (as well as Tenno's own sister Omi, who was visiting) were killed. In addition, the body of Vladimir's 18-year-old daughter Oma was not found. Jason, Vladimir's oldest son, was on New Samarkand where he was attending military school, and so escaped death.

Tenno found such terrorism revolting. As the incumbent Coordinator, he was responsible for the well-being of his family, and so his sister's untimely death was a profound disgrace and loss of honor. Tenno contemplated *seppuku*, or ritual suicide, a decision his son Nihongi supported wholeheartedly. When Omi's body arrived at the capital of New Samarkand on March 10, 2376, Tenno immediately carried out his intentions. Nihongi joyfully stepped in, becoming the next Coordinator.

TYRANT OF RASALHAGUE

Tragedy struck during the last week with the return of Jason Kurita. Why couldn't he have stayed on New Samarkand, or gone elsewhere?

He has replaced his father Vladimir as Military Governor, and the new reign of terror has already begun. One day a week, at dawn, randomly selected civilians are taken (or carried or dragged) to a field adjacent to the Governor's Palace in New Rasalhague. As soon as I heard about it, I hid myself there to secretly witness what was going on.

Jason was having the poor people executed, though they were not charged with any crimes. Some were still wearing their nightwear, trying to get their eyes to focus, as they were placed back to back in a rude huddle. Then the slug-throwers opened up. That patch of ground is already being called the "killing field." Last week, a dozen. This week, two dozen. How many next week?

Our esteemed Governor was in attendance, clothed entirely in black. Sources indicate that he plans to attend as often as possible. His expression showed grim determination rather than enjoyment, which is curious. One wonders why he is ordering these murders, but no one will question him directly.

Every day, Jason makes his two-hour planet-wide radio address, making insults and veiled threats, then wailing and weeping at the loss of his family. Rumor has it that if the Military Governor learns of any citizen who does not listen to the address, he will add him to the executions.

With Jason Kurita as Military Governor of Rasalhague, we may soon think of Vladimir's reign as the "good old days."

—Anonymous editorial from the *Rasalhague Freedom Caller,* [a subversive alternate media publication] December 2375

A LUKEWARM LEADER

Nihongi Kurita, the only son of Tenno Kurita, was born on New Samarkand in 2336. He became the Third Coordinator of the Draconis Combine in 2376, after his father's suicide. A vain and petty little man without the capacity for long-term visions, Nihongi treated his lofty position like an attractive toy. While his father lived, the son had coveted the position desperately. Once it was his, Nihongi could find no use for it.

Though his reign lasted 20 years, he launched no major offensives, signed no meaningful documents, and only whined and sulked about wanting everyone to obey him. However, he was an excellent horseman and maintained an enviable stable of high-quality breeding stock. He was often seen riding a splendid stallion around the palace. Unfortunately, he often let pressing affairs of state go unresolved while he enjoyed his jaunts.

Nihongi took little notice, in fact, when word came of Oma Kurita's fate. In 2377, Kurita intelligence sources learned that Oma was not killed on Rasalhague with other members of the Kurita family. Instead, she was alive, and possibly well, on Trondheim. Adam Kurita, the current Warlord of Rasalhague and sole surviving son of Urizen, led the rescue party. After several harrowing encounters and a rather lengthy firefight, Oma and her newborn son, Daniel Sorenson, were returned safely to New Samarkand. Apparently, Oma had fallen in love with Jan Sorenson, the High Chieftain of her captors, and in a strange twist of fate had married him. The elder Sorenson was killed during the rescue mission. Nihongi's only reaction was to withdraw several military units from the Rasalhague Military District.

During the early years of his reign, Nihongi's one positive act was the transfer of a number of the Rasalhague units to duty stations along the Kurita/Tamar and Kurita/Skye borders. The Skye and Tamar leaders became seriously concerned, believing that this was the prelude to an invasion. Nihongi ignored any possible opportunities for advance, however, and Combine attacks never went beyond minor border raids. Some raids were for the sake of capturing supplies or stocks of raw materials, while others had only nuisance value.

As Coordinator, Nihongi's lukewarm leadership caused consternation throughout the Draconis Combine. Factions began to form, some with the purpose of obtaining his resignation, others offering a more permanent solution. Even the most patient could not accept their leader's political indifference or ineptitude.

The situation had deteriorated completely by November 2393. Robert Kurita, Nihongi's eldest son, discovered his sister Marika had also been enjoying her father's horses and stables, but had slightly different breeding plans in mind. Robert discovered, purely by accident, that Marika had become pregnant by Werner Von Rohrs, one of the stable hands. In a fit of rage, Robert killed him with a shovel, but Marika eventually bore the child, Nihongi Von Rohrs, in May 2394.

Werner's death was not enough to slake Robert's anger. He sought out his father's advice, but the elder Kurita was no help. For almost two years, the political turmoil grew within the Combine. Meanwhile, the Coordinator remained blissfully unaware that his political future was nearing an end. Several parties, including his son Robert, were planning his demise when, coincidentally, he fell from his prize racehorse while riding up a steep incline. He broke his neck and died instantly, saving Robert the trouble of executing him. Robert Kurita assumed the throne in April 2396, becoming the Fourth Coordinator of the Draconis Combine.

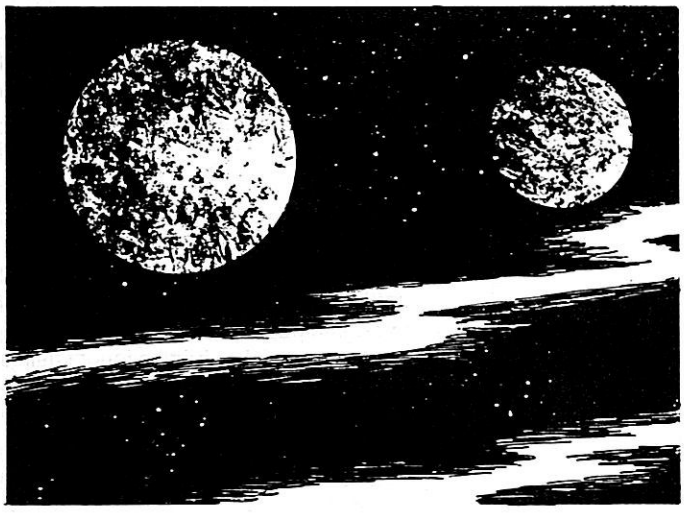
Oma Kurita never recovered from grief for her husband, who died as she was rescued. She turned to absinthe, but it did not relieve the pain in her heart. She died in 2397 from chronic liver failure and related complications at the age of 40 years.

A RACE TO ARMS

During the 24th century, ten separate states with strong central governments evolved within the Inner Sphere. Some were formed through mutual cooperation and consent, while others were created through conquest and military domination.

Many of these new political powers faced the same problems that had confronted individual colony worlds during the previous century, only multiplied tenfold. Treachery and political Darwinism flourished, as the richer or more populated planets dominated, and even exploited, their less fortunate neighbors. Now, instead of two worlds fighting between themselves, two powers (each responsible for many worlds) might face off, and these struggles were not always confined to diplomatic channels.

With a relatively large population base, easily obtained raw materials, and a tradition of many centuries of scientific research, the Terran Hegemony maintained technological superiority over the other states. This in turn enhanced its political influence, especially when dealing with governments whose worlds still lacked such fundamental necessities as water. Trade, both of goods and information, flourished between the Hegemony and the more cooperative governments.



This did not mean that peace was an uninterrupted luxury, however. As the century progressed and each state attempted to define its borders more emphatically, border disputes heightened in frequency and intensity. Struggles over strategically valuable planets escalated from verbal disputes to small skirmishes to battlefields covering an entire world. Scientific research veered away from improving the quality of life, now at comfortable levels on most worlds, and took aim at weapons research and development.

Over the 24th century's last three decades, many border worlds in sensitive areas underwent a remarkable change. They progressed from being equipped with navigational aids and glorified police officials to having sophisticated ship detection equipment, fully armed KF-driven JumpShips, a variety of system defense craft, and large garrisons of crack troops. Many border worlds even began to resemble encampments under siege, because their mineral or hydrological wealth made them prime targets for their neighbors. The Age of War would soon rear its ugly head.

THE DYNASTIC GOVERNMENT: A DISCUSSION

TORINA: During the 24th century, the dynastic form of government reappeared in force. This "dynacracy" reached its previous peak in ancient Egypt and China, among other Terran nation-states. Now, can anyone tell me what was the major advantage of the dynastic government?

SULLIVAN: To create a rigid ruling caste by virtue of birth?

TORINA: Not exactly. Aoki?

AOKI: The dynasty provided each citizen with an instant means of identifying the powers-that-be. Name recognition, ease in determining persons of authority.

TORINA: Correct, but what single major factor led to its reappearance?

MARDIPEN: The anarchy on Terra and the Exodus?

TORINA: Right. Can anyone tell me how we can be sure the dynasty is still working?

AOKI: Because that governmental form inherently leads to good government.

TORINA: What is good government? Never mind. The dynasty was chosen because some system was needed and it was the most viable, given the circumstances of the time. It still works, and that is proof in itself. There have not been any attempts to alter the governmental form for centuries.

JIGLICH: How does that explain the Succession Wars?

TORINA: Those wars are essentially family feuds, involving five competitive dynastic lines. Each Successor State advocates the supremacy of its own House over all others. There are no democracies, republics, or theoretical sovereignties even in the running, at least not within the Inner Sphere.

MONTROSE: What effect is there when the leader of a House is killed?

TORINA: You have had your biology and classical mythology classes. Like the mythical hydra or common flatworm, when a House loses its head, it grows a new one.

D'ANCONIA: How does one destroy a dynasty, then?

TORINA: When you have mastered that secret, you will have learned how to unravel the greatest fallacy inherent in the Successor States.

—From a ComStar lecture in pre-League political history by Precentor Adam Torina

THE AGE OF WAR

During the 25th century, Death and Destruction threatened the end of the Human race. The ten states of the Inner Sphere rediscovered the Arts of War anew, with ever-improving weapons. Only the Ares Conventions and its strict codes of battlefield honor saved man from himself. Yet, these same codes also fostered the use of war to resolve every disagreement. Not since the height of the almost-forgotten Terran Roman Empire had man fought so much for so little reason.

The invention and widespread use of a new multi-functional weapon system known as the BattleMech only added to this image. More importantly, it brought the zenith of war back from the most impersonal form of mass destruction to deliberate acts by individual combatants—sin-filled murderers, if you will. How ironic that we had come full circle. Once again, the greatest 'sport' in the universe consisted of gladiatorial games. This barbaric caricature of life, no matter how carefully concealed or rationalized, proved that we were even more base than animals.

—unpublished diary entry by ComStar Director Jerome Blake, as revealed to Conrad Toyama

CONTROLLING WARFARE

In 2398, a territorial dispute between the Capellan Confederation and the Free Worlds League erupted into open warfare, the first such war in over a century. In the next 14 years, dozens of extremely bloody, destructive wars were fought over frontier worlds. In 2412, a fierce battle in the Tintavel system resulted in thousands of civilian casualties. With such rampant destruction threatening civilization, representatives of all ten states met on New Olympia to sign the Ares Conventions. Realizing that war could not be eliminated, these representatives drew up a body of interstellar laws to regulate warfare and to minimize its impact on humanity.

The Ares Conventions banned warfare in heavily populated areas and prohibited military destruction of civilian economies. Though war became an almost continuous fact of life in the 25th century, it was a less destructive event. It had been transformed into a more chivalric contest of maneuver and tactics. Forces would surrender rather than fight against unfavorable odds, with the knowledge that another contest would soon arise. All governments recognized the necessity of preserving the civilian populations, in order to have something left to fight for. This agreement would only last as long as all signers adhered to the guidelines, and so compliance with the Ares Conventions was universal. Warfare became far less destructive, but leaders were now more willing than ever to use war as a means of resolving even the most minor dispute.

Another development in the 25th century changed methods of warfare more permanently than did the Ares Conventions. In 2439, scientists working on New Earth unveiled the first combat-ready battledroid. Using myomers to power artificial legs, these giant, human-shaped battle machines, called BattleMechs, were more mobile than wheeled or tracked vehicles. Their size, firepower, and armor made the BattleMechs invincible on the mid-25th century battlefields. At first, the Terran Hegemony controlled all BattleMechs and used this advantage to subdue every opponent.

In 2455, several 'Mechs were captured in a raid on Hesperus II, and the technology quickly spread throughout human space. Despite the 'Mechs of other states, the Terran Hegemony maintained the upper hand, with constant improvements in its battlefield technology that others could not match.

The appearance of 'Mechs reinforced the Ares Conventions. Highly skilled warriors could fight complete battles in a small area, reducing the risk to civilian populations. Even using BattleMechs, very few battles fought at this time were decisive. Most battles established temporary control over a small territory, control that could be challenged at any time by another small battle force.

ADVANCES AGAINST TAMAR AND SKYE

If war is such hell, why does man enjoy it so much?
—Wisdom from the Universe, by Homer Kellogi, Explorer, Celestial Spheres Publications, 2821

After several decades of smoldering hostilities and minor skirmishes, open warfare finally broke out in 2398 between the Capellan Confederation and the Free Worlds League. No one was more disappointed than Robert Kurita, who sincerely wanted to be the first to start a war. In January 2399, he began making his own plans for an attack and called in his staff for a briefing.

> Hordes of red dragons attack us from space
> Threat'ning with missile and fireball
> Killing our worlds, destroying our race
> Gleefully watching our Skye fall!
> —Steiner graffiti, circa 2410

All agreed that House Steiner's provinces of Tamar and Skye were better targets than House Davion. At the moment, however, the Lyrans were better-equipped than the highly disciplined Combine forces. Knowing that even the best-trained troops cannot survive against superior firepower, Lord Kurita agreed that he must first provide his army with more powerful new weapons. That meant postponing any major military action for at least several years.

Not known for his patience, the waiting was hard on the young Coordinator. Despite his anxiety and continued chafing, however, the time was well spent making his men and equipment ready. In the meantime, he ate, slept, and dreamed about war, while frequently reconsidering his overall strategy. What little Kurita did know about strategy, he learned from studying Terran history.

The Terran tactical concept of dual encirclement and pincer movements so intrigued him that he wanted to give it a try. He did not realize that ground tactics do not necessarily work for the purposes of strategic-scale interstellar war. After much discussion and some second thoughts, Robert finally settled for an attack against the Federation of Skye.

One pincer would strike near the Tamar/Skye border and swing down deep into Skye territory. The second pincer, to be launched a year later, would move through the Kessel-Dromini area and link up as quickly as possible. The combined sweeps should isolate a large portion of the Federation and leave it in Combine control. If all went well, Robert promised everyone, the advances might even threaten Terra itself.

In November 2407, forces from the Draconis Combine crossed over into the Tamar Pact just above its border with the Federation of Skye. Kurita and his generals directed these forces to make at least two diversionary strikes, then to aim toward Terra in a flanking motion. The second complete force was already in position and awaiting orders.

Fighting was fierce. The defenders, unable to match their opponent's ferocity on the battlefield, deliberately destroyed much of their worlds, rendering them useless to the advancing invaders. Unfortunately for the Federation, these tactics were only partially effective and led to a major shakeup in the leadership of Skye.

After almost two years of fairly consistent advances on both flanks, the Combine suffered a major defeat on the planet Meachem, stopped its progress. Shortly thereafter, a devastating sneak raid against a massive Combine supply depot on Vega severely depleted munitions and materiel for the southern flank's forces, halting its progress more or less permanently.

Some three years later, Robert Kurita was among those who signed the Ares Conventions in June 2412. These new codes of conduct for "limited engagements" opened a whole new chapter on war within the Inner Sphere.

ROBERT AND PARKER KURITA

Many historians agree that, had Robert Kurita lived longer, he might have become skilled at conducting the intricacies of a strategic war. However, the young Coordinator was demonstrative, impetuous, and hot-tempered—not ideal traits in a leader of men. His behavior was his undoing in many instances, for he could rarely keep a clear head in a tight situation. The cold-blooded murder of Werner Von Rohrs, however justified, was only a single, vivid example of this side of his nature.

Robert's children also inherited his "strength of will." His eldest son, the 17-year-old Jason, was killed in a duel in 2418, the victim of his own lover's quarrel.

Robert's hot temper probably led to his demise. In December, 2412, he fell to an assassin's bullet. Though it was never proved, many court followers believed that Robert's sister, Marika, had hired the assassin to avenge Robert's murder of her lover, Werner Von Rohrs.

Parker Kurita, Robert's younger brother, was born in deep space between New Samarkand and Benjamin in 2380. He became the Fifth Coordinator of the Draconis Combine in 2412, after the assassin put a bullet through his brother's brain. A weak leader by Kurita standards, Parker did little more than maintain the status quo while he reigned. Robert's strong personality had completely dominated the younger brother, who had obeyed Robert's every whim. When Robert died, Parker continued to behave accordingly, scrupulously attempting to follow his predecessor's will. When in doubt, he did nothing at all.

TURMOIL AND TREACHERY

There is always something to upset the most careful of human calculations.
—Ihara Saikahu, 1642–1693

It's not the people who are freely called 'bastards' that worry me; it's those few who are that make me very, very nervous. Never trust a genuine bastard. You don't know where he's been.
—attributed to Martin McAllister

He who complies with the ways of the world may be impoverished thereby; he who does not appears deranged. Wherever one may live, whatever work one may do, is it possible even for a moment to find a haven for the body or peace for the mind?
—Kamo no Chomei, 1153–1216

During 2421 and 2422, both major lines of the Kurita family suffered a series of treasonous and corrupting reverses. Coincidentally, illegitimate offspring were responsible for the misfortune of both clans. As a result, the Kurita family despises, to this day, the idea of bastard children in its bloodline.

Nihongi Von Rohrs, progeny of Marika Kurita's relationship with Werner Von Rohrs, grew up under the cloud of his origin. Raised mostly in secret, he learned of and came to hate Coordinator Robert Kurita, the man who had killed his father. Although Robert was assassinated in 2412, Nihongi still sought revenge, settling on a guiltless but helpless target: Parker Kurita. After Saigo Kurita's battlefield death in 2419, Nihongi realized he was the eldest surviving male in the New Samarkand Kurita bloodline. This made him next in line after the incumbent Coordinator, even though he was a mere whoreson.

Nihongi decided to act on this. After serving in several low-grade House units, he made friends with some ambitious and greedy officers. His promises of high positions persuaded them to assist him in a coup against Parker Kurita. One dark evening in March, 2421, elements of another unit replaced the Kurita Household Guard. The next morning, Nihongi was Coordinator, and Parker was executed with speedy dispatch. Several of Nihongi's accomplices joined Parker after they inquired about Nihongi's promises for promotion.

Nihongi possessed a tremendous instinct for self-preservation, but also suffered from a healthy paranoia. After eliminating some of his less-reliable colleagues, he ensured his position by immediately exiling all immediate members of the Kurita line. It is not known why Nihongi chose exile rather than execution for his enemies. It may be that he wanted them to live and know that he reigned—in his mind, and perhaps in their own, a fate worse than death.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF WAR

LENNOX: Since approximately the mid-19th century, the relative offensive firepower of trained, individual soldiers increased exponentially, while their defensive ability increased only linearly, at best. It thus became harder and harder to survive the intensity of conventional combat, a problem that grew even worse by the 25th century. Every state that fielded an army realized that it had the potential to wipe out entire populations, even without using chemical, biological, or radioactive weapons.

Full-state warfare could—and would—destroy civilian populations, industrial targets, delicately balanced economies, and entire cultures. Mankind was thus faced with two choices. What were they? Anyone?

KY-TANG: One: Cease to fight wars entirely—with all the sociological implications that would have. Or two: Somehow to make wars less dangerous.

LENNOX: And which did man choose?

PALMERSTON: He chose to make wars less dangerous.

LENNOX: Right. In their typical wisdom, the powers-that-be opted for the second alternative.

Granted, the Ares Conventions drastically changed the rules of war. After they were enacted by all ten major political signatories, battles were less a life-and-death struggle of resources and men, and more a game of maneuver, minimal casualties, and surrender or withdrawal. In some cases, both parties agreed upon secluded battlefields—at safe distances from factories and population centers— before the fighting actually began.

A few commanders even went so far as to draw up lists of 'victory conditions,' detailed guidelines for determining the winner of a particular engagement. Many conditions dealt with one side reaching a particular objective, either side suffering a certain percentage of casualties, or other battle-related details. After one or more victory conditions were met, the battle was declared over, and both sides could regroup, advance, withdraw, or surrender, based on their relative successes. When used, these parameters often led to temporary gains or losses in territory, transferral of booty, or other substantial assets in exchange for a hard-fought but relatively bloodless victory. Sometimes, an entire planet might even change hands. Days later, the next battle might completely reverse the previous battle's outcome.

LI-PO: But what if the commanders refused to abide by the victory conditions?

LENNOX: My best guess is that the commanders would not cheat, because they loved the game of war too much. Admittedly, it makes little sense, but then, war seldom does. One warning: you should never examine the military mind or its motives too closely. There is an inherent degree of insanity present.

Anyway, literally hundreds of these small-scale skirmishes, which some officers refer to as scenarios, were fought between the major states during the century-and-a-half Age of War. These mock wars did preserve the continuity of each major state, permitted populations to grow, and allowed various societies, cultures, and civilizations to thrive.

The Conventions also affected the fundamental concepts of war. The degree of strategic skill needed to win battles attained new heights. Commanders had not only to fight, but to be victorious in compliance with very structured parameters. War was no longer a vocation for the unskilled or undisciplined. Indeed, after the introduction and widespread acceptance of the BattleMech, war was also no longer for the technologically untrained. War had become complicated, more so than in any period of Terra's past. Now, can anyone tell me what all these battles of the Age of the War accomplished?

NORDWALD: They encouraged *esprit de corps* among members of the various armies?

LENNOX: That's absolutely true, but totally irrelevant. War, even in its most insane capacity, has more merit than to give a

Philip Kurita, a potential successor, remained in hiding for almost four years. He was eventually rooted out in late 2425 and forced to join his brothers in exile. Von Rohrs also had a perverse sense of the macabre. In 2421, he secretly sold his mother's youngest sister, Lenore Kurita, into slavery. After 15 years of unspeakable treatment, she was killed for sport by her new owner, a minor "noble" of the Periphery.

Having removed all potential rivals, Nihongi began a series of intensive and bloody purges. These mass executions cut deeply through many levels of Combine society, including the military and mercantile leaders, and created economic instability and near-anarchy.

On the other side of the Draconis Combine, another story was unfolding. Daniel Sorenson, like Nihongi Von Rohrs, also grew up stigmatized by his unacceptable origin. Despite this, his mother Oma Kurita raised him at the court on Rasalhague, where Daniel remained until he was 18. At that time, Oma's alcoholism had progressed so far that she could no longer care for herself, let alone anyone else. After his mother's death, Daniel left Rasalhague and joined the local military. He did this partly to learn more about the universe beyond his homeworld, but mostly to get out from under Jason Kurita's baleful gaze. He also realized that without his mother's intervention on his behalf, his life was in danger on Rasalhague.

Meanwhile, Jason Kurita, Governor of the Rasalhague Military District, had been continuing his tyrannical rule since 2375. He was alternately bitter and despondent over the deaths of his father and family, which he called "acts of terrorism." Daniel's mere existence provided Jason with a daily reminder of the hated Sorenson clan. He never referred to Daniel as a nephew, and always called him "that trash of sub-humanity," or something even less complimentary. For their part, Jason's own family hated and despised him for his depravity as much as his subjects hated and feared him.

As Daniel traveled through the Principality of Rasalhague on his duty tours, he was relieved to be free of the insulated world of Jason Kurita's court. Here, among the people, he could see the true effects of the dictator whose food he had shared. Daniel witnessed torturings, physical and psychological indignities, and the gradual destruction of the Rasalhagians' morale. With his background, he was always sensitive to the emotions of others, and he could not allow innocent civilians to endure much more. Thoughts of treason entered his mind.

When Nihongi Von Rohrs made his move on New Samarkand, Jason followed his depraved instincts and supported the usurper, even sending troops to fight against loyal Draconis forces. These actions shocked Daniel and inspired him finally to act against the demented Governor. Upon learning of Daniel's

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small percentage of the population a feeling of false superiority over the remainder of the population.

In practical terms, however, all these battles accomplished almost nothing. No major political alliances were permanently formed or broken, few appreciable gains in territory were sustained, and no massive military superiorities were achieved. In retrospect, the battles only vented man's own violent instincts through a partially controlled and ostensibly safer alternatives to total war and utter destruction. That is the only good that may be said for them.

However, one must not presume that even these limited battles were without some cost. Valuable and highly skilled men—both military and civilian—died, expensive machinery was destroyed, and even the most insular of battles had a negative impact on the surrounding countryside. The Ares Conventions simply minimized the overall effects of war and kept casualty totals in the thousands, instead of the millions or tens of millions who might have otherwise died.

Even so, the Age of War had a direct impact on the Draconis Combine's ruling families. Who can name an important personage who was a casualty of the Age of War?

MYCHALS: How about Saigo Kurita?

LENNOX: Correct. Robert and Parker Kurita's brother Saigo was killed in battle in 2419. Also, three decades later, Lord of Rasalhague Daniel Sorensons' only son Erik was killed in combat in 2449. Though Saigo's death had little impact on New Samarkand politics, the loss of Erik forced Daniel to retain the Lordship longer than he had originally intended.

Every major state leader signed the Ares Conventions, although not every leader agreed that they were needed. In particular, Robert Kurita of the Draconis Combine found the provisions to be demeaning, too restrictive, and simply not bloody enough.

The Ares Conventions did take some of the horror out of war and made it an acceptable substitute for interstellar diplomacy and peaceful relations. Perhaps it was for their own good reasons, but Robert Kurita and his Combine armies did abide scrupulously by the provisions. Kurita still possessed the right to execute traitorous citizens of his own domain, however. Therefore, he immediately made violation of the Conventions a treasonable offense, for which the punishment would be severe. Whether it was blood-lust or honor that motivated this law, Kurita invoked it often and well.

Does anyone know Robert Kurita's ulterior motive for signing the Ares Conventions?

POLTER: So he would not lost face with his own people?

LENNOX: Reread your House Kurita history. Kurita would lose more face at home by signing than by not signing. No, he had a more urgent reason. If he refused to sign, the united forces of the signatories would go to war against the Draconis Combine. As bloodthirsty as he may have been, he knew his own forces could not defeat the entire Inner Sphere at one time.

By the mid-25th century, the BattleMech became a front-line weapon system, gradually replacing more conventional equipment. This change revolutionized the technological aspects of warfare as much as the Ares Conventions affected the strategic and tactical aspects. It also made it easier to abide by the Ares Conventions. Fewer combatants were needed, which invited fewer potential violations. Military training evolved into a proud tradition, with intensive preparation required to become a skilled warrior. Though regular foot infantry and armor would continue to have their secondary roles, the concept of 'quality of manpower' forever replaced the advantages of sheer numbers.

LI-PO: That explains why it is such an honor to be a MechWarrior.

LENNOX: That may be so, but as far as I'm concerned, becoming a soldier—especially by volunteering—is an incredibly stupid way to live...or die.

—From a lecture in pre-League military history, Precentor Shandar Lennox instructing

intentions, cousins Toshiro and Hanako Kurita (twin sons of Adam Kurita) came to his support in a revolution against Jason Kurita.

As word spread, the rebellion grew in size and popularity. As a result, Jason recalled his troops from New Samarkand, and a miffed Nihongi removed him from office. While guards forcibly removed Jason from the throne room, the compassionate Daniel offered him one last chance to accept exile. Before several stunned revolutionaries, Jason pulled a slug thrower and aimed it at his nephew. Luckily, Daniel's reflexes proved superior, and he killed his uncle and ex-Governor in self-defense.

After Jason's death, Daniel Sorenson seized control of the Principality of Rasalhague, assuming the title of Lord. His goals were to end all oppression of its citizens and to offer opposition to the Von Rohrs, who now controlled the position of Combine Coordinator. As a whole, the populace of the Principality accepted him as their rightful leader, the son of their former High Chieftain, Jan Sorenson.

Though Daniel's efforts to remove Nihongi Von Rohrs were unsuccessful, the new Lord of Rasalhague received great popular support as a leader, and allied his own troops with military units loyal to the Kurita family line. A competent and vigorous leader, Daniel Sorenson died in a mountain climbing accident in 2487, at the age of 110.

Ironically, Daniel Sorenson, the illegitimate offspring of a one-time terrorist clan, proved more faithful to House Kurita than Jason Kurita, a pure blood relation.

THE VON ROHRS DYNASTY

When the 27-year-old Nihongi Von Rohrs assumed the title of Coordinator, many of his subjects were stunned. It was true that Nihongi was next in line for the throne, but everyone whispered, "What horrors might befall the Draconis Combine with such a leader?" They would learn the answer perhaps all too soon.

Unlike Nihongi's predecessors, who controlled only the political and military elements within the Combine, the new Coordinator wanted total economic control of House Kurita. He had competent corporate and mercantile leaders removed and executed, and replaced them with inept but loyal friends and stooges. Political turmoil would have resulted, but the new tyrant dealt in the harshest possible manner with the slightest criticism from any quarter. Entire families, from grandparents through grandchildren, were executed if a single family member spoke out against the Von Rohrs government.

NIHONGI VON ROHRS

Where Robert Kurita had called for an execution or torture perhaps once a month, these now became a daily occurrence. Yet, by all the rules of dynasty set down by Shiro Kurita and a century of ongoing tradition, Nihongi was the Combine's rightful ruler. Until an eligible Kurita descendent emerged, Von Rohrs would remain at the helm, and would command obedience from his subjects.

Of course, scientific testing had evolved to such a degree that genetic tissue analyses could prove or disprove any claims of ancestry, and so there would be no problem in verifying any claim for reestablishment of the Kurita line. Thus, the people of the Combine could do nothing but wait, endure, and let time heal the wounds. They only hoped that one of the exiled Kuritas would step forward...soon. Any other drastic action, such as an attempted assassination or efforts to stage an open election, might mean the collapse of the dynastic form of government. That course of action was simply unthinkable.

Von Rohrs did reaffirm the House Kurita policy of territorial advances against the Lyran Commonwealth. He also made occasional plans to attack the Federated Suns, which some described as "a dangerous supernova on the veriest edge of the Draconis Combine." For the most part, however, the previous House Kurita leadership agreed that House Steiner (and its predecessors) presented less formidable opposition. Moreover, a two-front war would still be far too risky and likely to fail disastrously. Even Von Rohrs, in his usurpation, agreed to leave House Davion more or less untouched, except for a diversionary raid now and then.

As far as it mattered to the average Combine citizen, the 89-year-long Von Rohrs reign may have been under a single leader, or a dozen different ones. From the standpoint of policy, the period was a single, bloody blur, with no tangible changes from one Coordinator to the next. Even court observers had difficulty determining exactly who was in charge or when one man's term ended and another's began.

This was because Nihongi stopped using his own name within a year of his accession. Throughout the rest of the Von Rohrs period, the Coordinators of that family went only by their surname. Always fearful of possible retaliation, Nihongi and his descendents lived out their lives in the strictly guarded seclusion of the New Samarkand palace grounds.

The court chain of command during the reign of the Von Rohrs must have been convoluted and confusing. Presumably, subordinates would report to their superiors, who would, in turn, report to theirs. After passing through three, four, or even five levels of administration, a message might reach one of a half-dozen persons who actually knew and met regularly with the incumbent Coordinator. Or, at least, someone whom they *thought* was the Coordinator.

After Nihongi's own death, this was especially true. Kozo Von Rohrs was *never* seen in public, and his closest aides were the only persons in the entire Inner Sphere who knew what he looked like! For perhaps as long as 60 years, the subjects in the Draconis Combine could have met their Coordinator on the surface of any world and no one would have recognized him. Yet the paranoia continued.

To the best of anyone's knowledge, Nihongi ruled from 2421 until mid-2400s. It is not known how many offspring he had. One son, Kozo, is believed to have ruled next, from approximately mid-2450 until the late 2460s or early 2470s. Kozo apparently had several sons and daughters; Yama served next, until the mid- to late-2500s. Finally, Kruger Von Rohrs (Yama's brother?) led the Draconis Combine as its Ninth Coordinator, until his own death during the successful McAllister Rebellion.

BATTLES IN THE AGE OF WAR

Fear is our most powerful weapon—and a heavy regiment of BattleMechs is a very close second.
—attributed to Kozo Von Rohrs (?)

All's fair in love and war.
—Francis Edward Smedle, 1818–1864

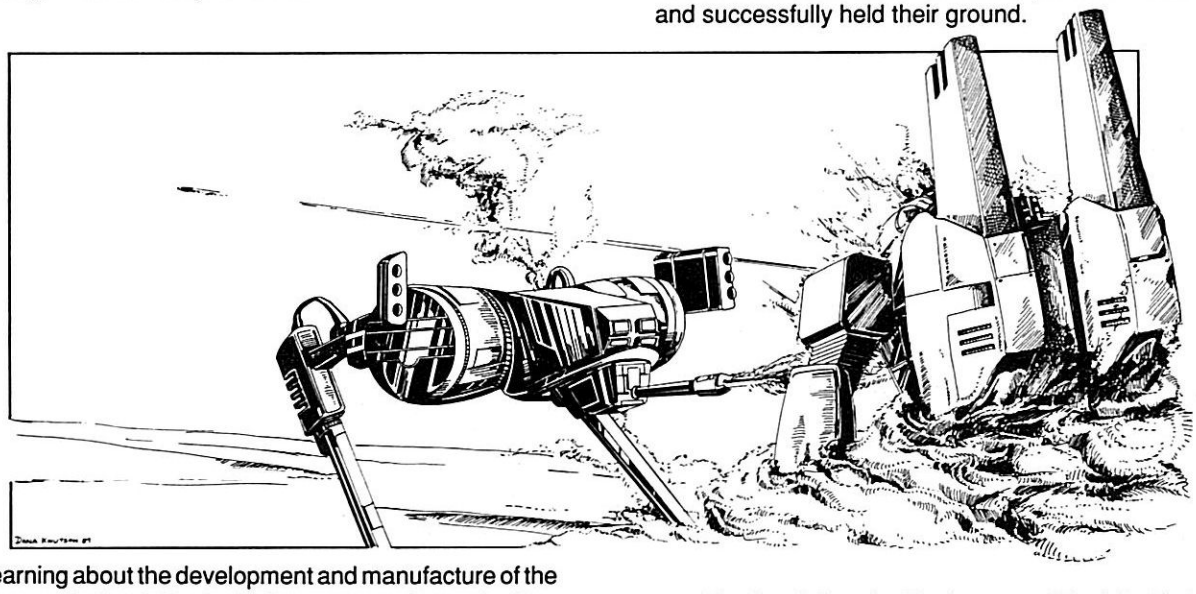
Though Coordinator Parker Kurita initiated few new policies, he did carry out some of the operations his deceased brother Robert had left unfinished. This included a successful campaign and seizure of the Lyran Commonwealth world of St. John in 2414. In 2340, the Federation of Skye, the Tamar Pact, and the Protectorate of Donegal had united to form a single government called the Lyran Commonwealth. While the new Lyran government was attempting to set its affairs in order, the Draconis Combine forces only added to its internal troubles by capturing the resource-rich world of St. John. In 2417 and 2418, House Steiner launched counterattacks to retake the planet, both of which were disastrously unsuccessful.

Members of the Von Rohrs dynasty, though extremely secretive, maintained an obvious enough foreign policy. The new ruling family intended to attack weak lines in House Steiner's political leadership, while "annexing" worlds that were inadequately or incompetently defended. By 2445, approximately one-fifth of the worlds in the former Tamar Pact now belonged to the Draconis Combine, a significant accomplishment.

Thus did the Lyran Commonwealth launch its offensive against the Draconis Combine in 2463. When it looked as though the target would be the hotly disputed world of St. John, the Von Rohrs stripped border garrisons of their troops in order to fortify planets in the target area. The Steiner forces proved to have other targets in mind, however seizing Skondia and Nox in short order. Taken by surprise, the Combine forces at first offered little resistance, but their defense became more tenacious as the Steiner offensive progressed.

By 2465, the battle had shifted to the planet Caldrea, with House Steiner still on the offensive, but just barely. A combination of exhausted attackers, worn equipment, determined defenders, and extremely rough terrain created an impenetrable defense. In desperation, the Lyran Commonwealth used tactical nuclear weapons, barbaric even by the Combine's bloodthirty standards. House Steiner did capture Caldrea, however.

A variety of internal problems continued to plague the Lyran Commonwealth. By 2468, their offensive into Combine space had stalled, and they withdrew most of their forces while garrisoning the worlds they had taken. BattleMechs also began entering service in Combine combat units during this period, readjusting the balance of power. Over the next three years, the Combine attempted to retake the planets they had just lost, but House Steiner's forces maintained their expertise in BattleMech tactics and successfully held their ground.



After learning about the development and manufacture of the Terran Hegemony's BattleMechs in the 2430s and '40s, the Von Rohrs agreed that the Draconis Combine needed its share of these formidable new weapons. House Steiner had already raided a Terran BattleMech facility, seized the necessary computer data, and begun to set up their own factories. Combine officials agreed that it was time to pay the Steiners in their own coin by stealing BattleMech technology from one of their facilities. In 2461, the Combine launched a sneak raid against the Steiner BattleMech facility on Coventry. The success of this attack now gave the Draconis Combine the technology to design and manufacture its own fearsome 'Mechs.

After every major House had acquired this new technology, it was clear that House Steiner's narrow but tangible lead in military science could not last. Though they had produced BattleMechs several years before the Draconis Combine had, that margin of superiority would likely vanish within the next several years. Steiner leaders, including General Kevin Kelswa, Duke of Tamar, decided to act while they still maintained some advantage.

The first full-scale 'Mech-versus-'Mech battle took place on Nox in 2475, as an attacking Kurita Sword of Light regiment met Steiner occupation forces. Though this Kurita attack was neither successful nor strategically significant, it marked a major turning point in armed warfare. The few confrontations in military history that compar to it include the Monitor-vs-Merrimack engagement in March,1862 and the Battle of Coral Sea in May, 1942.

Political confusion continued to hinder the armies of the Lyran Commonwealth, as each of the three original powers sought to build up their own 'Mech force. The Von Rohrs took advantage of the internal dissension in the Commonwealth. During the last two decades of the 25th century, all Combine worlds lost in 2463 offensive were returned to the banner of the dragon.

DIPLOMATIC MISSION TO RASALHAGUE

McALLISTER: I wish to thank you, Lord Sorenson, for your most gracious audience and excellent hospitality.

BLAINE SORENSON: Quite all right, Captain. I would not have it said that we were rude, even to those with whom we have political differences. Now that our meal is finished, why don't you tell us something of your background and how you came to be chosen for this assignment? I'm sure you much have had many exciting adventures.

McALLISTER: I think you flatter me, sir. However, as you request. I was born on the planet Echo in July 2474—

ILLIYANA SORENSON [interrupting]: So young, yet so important! Please tell me, what is your birthday, Captain?

McALLISTER [smiles]: Please call me Martin. My birthday is the 4th; just a few days ago.

ILLIYANA: How wonderful. Father, may we have a party for Martin?

BLAINE: We shall see, daughter. [To McAllister] What was Echo like?

McALLISTER: It always seemed a backwater world to me, and so I was glad to leave. Anyway, I joined in the army when I was 15.

BLAINE: Kurita takes them that young?

McALLISTER [chuckles]: No, sir. I confess I lied about my age. I served for two years before I acquired a BattleMech. What with the war and all, I was a lance commander before long. My superiors seemed to think I was a natural-born leader. Because my service record was good, they made me a captain.

BLAINE: And how did you come to Lord Von Rohrs' attention?

McALLISTER: Earlier this year, I met with a senior representative of Lord Von Rohrs on New Samarkand. I had proven my loyalty to the Draconis Combine, and we talked on numerous occasions. Finally, I was given the chance of becoming the Draconis Combine's emissary to the Principality of Rasalhague. They reassigned me, and here I am.

BLAINE: What is Lord Von Rohrs like?

McALLISTER: I've never actually met him, sir. I've only dealt through his representatives.

BLAINE: Well, as I said earlier, we would flatly refuse to accept a lasting peace by uniting with the Draconis Combine under the Von Rohr's dragon banner. Other possibilities for peaceful solutions may yet exist. If you wish, remain here on Rasalhague for a time. Visit our land and learn something of its charms. Meanwhile, this is my family. My wife Diana. Illiyana, my elder daughter; Katherine, my younger daughter. This is Jarod, my son.

ILLIYANA [bows while remaining seated, and smiles]: Martin.

McALLISTER [stares at her, then blushes]: Illiyana.

—From conversations at a Principality of Rasalhague State dinner, 9 July 2494. Guest of Honor: Captain Martin McAllister, diplomatic envoy from the Draconis Combine, Rasalhague Government Archives

McALLISTER AND THE REBELLION

Some historians have credited Illiyana Sorenson as the driving force behind the McAllister Rebellion. Though the connection may seem peculiar, her charm and presence did have an undeniable and immediate effect on Martin McAllister. Indeed, it is unlikely that Martin would ever have entertained the notion of attempting to overthrow the Von Rohrs had it not been for that fateful dinner party in July 2494.

Illiyana was a mere 15 years old at the time, but she was fully a woman in terms of poise and physical beauty. Forgetting duty, the Draconis Combine, and the Von Rohrs, Martin McAllister fell madly in love and remained on Rasalhague to spend every waking moment with her. In fact, he stayed for two full months before he reluctantly admitted his predicament to her father. Blaine was more than a little surprised, but consented to give his blessings to their marriage, provided Martin submitted to genetic analysis. Martin agreed.

For the time being, the actual results of the test remained a secret between Blaine and Martin, and Illiyana Sorenson married him during a private ceremony in October 2494. After becoming close friends, McAllister and the elder Sorenson began making plans to reunite the Draconis Combine with Rasalhague, but also to oust the Von Rohrs tyrants and return rule to the Kurita line. Meanwhile, Martin himself had to return to New Samarkand and report that his mission was unsuccessful. Martin's new wife remained on Rasalhague.

Except for occasional diplomatic visits to Rasalhague, Martin McAllister spent the next seven years serving at New Samarkand in various capacities. Though his trips were ostensibly for further contacts with Lord Blaine Sorenson, they were, in reality, secret visits with his wife, about whom he had never told the Von Rohrs.

These years were punctuated by a great joy and a great tragedy for Martin McAllister. In February 2496,Illiyana gave birth to their daughter, Siriwan McAllister, and Martin managed to be on Rasalhague at the time. Illiyana, herself only 17, took instantly to the role of a doting mother and gave the infant all her care. Unfortunately, Illiyana drowned in a waterskiing accident in April 2499, when her daughter was only three years old. Martin did not discover her fate until he arrived from the Draconis Combine in August. Realizing Siriwan's importance, Blaine took over her care, raising her with his own daughter Zarabeth, who was born only a few months later.

Devastated by the loss of Illiyana, Martin threw himself into his work. By 2501, the Von Rohrs had given up on a peaceful resolution with the Principality of Rasalhague, and Martin was transferred back to a military assignment along the Combine/ Rasalhague border. He secretly passed information to Blaine Sorenson, who was slowly gathering and repositioning the Rasalhague forces in preparation. Another seven years passed as Martin continued to rise through the ranks, making powerful friends within the military and at court.

With the secret help of some of these friends, Martin McAllister helped to maneuver the imprisonment of Coordinator Yama Von Rohrs in 2508, leaving Yama's brother Kruger with the title of Coordinator. Kruger knew that Martin had been instrumental in his own promotion, but he did not know in what capacity. Even then, Martin had still not been introduced to the Von Rohrs family. Meanwhile, all available Rasalhague forces were poised for a diversionary attack against the Draconis Combine, if necessary. After displacing Yama, Martin's own political influence skyrocketed. He continued to make more friends and more secret agreements.

In mid-2510, Blaine Sorenson launched a powerful, but very brief, assault into the Combine. The reports of enemy advances prompted Kurita commanders to send units from all over the Combine, including half the Household Guard, to repel the attackers. By November, security at the palace on New Samarkand was at its lowest state of awareness since the Von Rohrs took over.

Late that month, Martin McAllister, now Colonel of the Household Guard, made his move. Martin, Blaine Sorenson's elder son Jarod, and several score Kurita-loyal Household Guards entered the palace and opened fire. Unsure of many individual's identities, McAllister's forces took no prisoners in a very quick but intense firefight. The entire Von Rohrs family and most of the servants were wiped out to the last woman and child. Even Yama, cruelly imprisoned in the palace dungeon, received the same treatment; his death brought an end to the Von Rohrs line. Jarod was also killed in the fighting, the price in blood that fate extracted from Blaine Sorenson.

Hours later, after seizing the planet's communications facility, Martin McAllister publicly broadcast the results of his genetic analysis taken on Rasalhague 16 years earlier. He was, without doubt, a direct blood descendent of Shiro Kurita, and his sequestered daughter Siriwan would most likely be his heir. The Draconis Combine would once again be ruled by a Kurita!

Arrangements were made for a meeting of great pomp and ceremony on the centrally located world of Pesht. Rasalhague's Lord Blaine Sorenson became Duke of Rasalhague, and the two powers were formally united. Though some degree of mistrust would continue between them throughout the coming centuries, it was an important step toward peace in the quadrant. Perhaps more important, it gave the Draconis Combine a very long and strategically exploitable border with the Lyran Commonwealth.

With the McAllisters ruling the Draconis Combine, an age of relative peace ensued. Though the Combine commanders began a new campaign for conquest, it employed gradual, subtle attacks and psychology as much as it did military hardware. Full-scale battles near the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns took place only infrequently, leaving the borders fairly quiet. The only significant activity involved an occasional attack along the Periphery frontier. Thus did the Age of War gradually come to an end for the Draconis Combine.

SIRIWAN MCALLISTER-KURITA

Siriwan McAllister-Kurita is the most remarkable woman in Combine history, not just because so few women have played prominent roles in House Kurita but because she was extraordinary by any standard.

A healthy, bright baby, Siriwan learned to walk at an early age, and was soon getting herself into everything around the palace. Her father was rarely able to visit, but Siriwan always seemed to remember him, and greeted him with a smile. In fact, the frequent separation from her father probably helped Siriwan cope with her mother's death. At first, the toddler would just say "Mommy be back soon." It was not until she was five that Siriwan realized that her mother would never return. By this time, her father had been transferred out of his diplomatic position, and so was able to visit Rasalhague even less often. His rare visits were usually spent in endless private conferences with his father-in-law. Little Siriwan was present at these meetings, so that she and her father could enjoy each other's presence. They made her promise to keep her father's visits a secret, and the girl kept her word. Identifying her beloved father with important secret planning made a deep impression on Siriwan, and helped her keep her own counsel later in the scheming Kurita court.

Life on Rasalhague was pleasant for Siriwan. Blaine Sorenson and his wife Diana had a child, Ariel, who was only a few years younger. Their daughter and granddaughter thus grew up as sisters. An extremely bright, curious child, Siriwan received the best education possible and absorbed a variety of subjects, especially history. The Sorenson family was warm and close, and the court of Rasalhague, while full of intrigues, was far less paranoid than that on New Samarkand. Siriwan McAllister had the most "human" upbringing of any Kurita Coordinator. At the same time, she was always viewed as an outsider. Thus, although Siriwan learned warmth and caring, she remained guarded in one-on-one dealings with people.

After Martin McAllister led a successful coup against the Von Rohrs Coordinator, he sent for his daughter Siriwan to come to New Samarkand to live with him at court. Siriwan was sad to leave her grandparents and home on Rasalhague, but was excited at the prospect of a new life at court. When she arrived on New Samarkand, she found a much different world than she expected. People at court treated her warmly, only when they wanted something from her, which usually was a favor from her father. Although many lords were pleased with the reign of Martin McAllister, others felt threatened by the court outsider and by his daughter, with her Rasalhague accent and odd, friendly manner. Most people saw Siriwan's overtures of friendliness as manipulation, and the girl found herself quite lonely for companionship on this strange, hot, stifling new world.

Unable to establish close ties with anyone in the court, Siriwan used her position as an outsider to her advantage by watching all court proceedings with a detached air. She studied everything available on the history of the Combine and the Kurita family, and learned how to use her position as the Coordinator's daughter to get what *she* wanted out of people. In short, she learned how to play the game.

McAllister told his daughter that she could not succeed him as Coordinator because she was a woman. He recommended that she find a distant Kurita man somewhere, and marry him so that at least her son would become Coordinator. There is some evidence that, when Siriwan turned 18 in 2514, her lady-in-waiting began to research the Kurita family tree to find a suitable mate among young distant relatives.

A FEMALE HEIR

My father, Martin McAllister, became the Tenth Coordinator in 2510, after he executed the entire Von Rohrs line. He may have been a vain man, but he had earned the right. Though he died young (only 41), he had enjoyed life to the fullest, and won the love and respect of his people. In April 2515, he was murdered in his sleep by a female assassin.

Father's sudden and untimely death created problems among Draconis Combine nobles because my father had left no male heir. My maternal grandfather, Blaine Sorenson, was popular among his own people of Rasalhague, but the other Military District Governors certainly did not trust him, nor did the rest of the Combine. Thus, he was ruled out.

Someone had to take over. I think a handful of nobles thought they could install me and then push through their own plans with little opposition. The end result was that they named me "brevet" Coordinator. I was quite young at the time, only 19, but not as naive as they expected. Moreover, the other nobles did not trust me much. The Draconis Combine had been ruled as a patriarchy for two centuries, and so having a female leader was almost beyond the comprehension of most nobles. Women may have had their place in the Combine, but it was not in any position of high influence. The nobility were not too fond of having "a daughter of Rasalhague" on the throne either. In fact, efforts to remove me from office came on the heels of my accession.

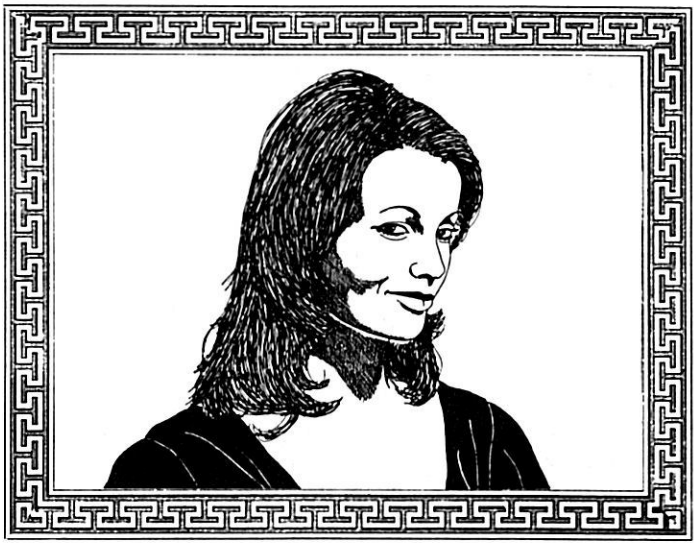
If Father had sired a son, I never would have become Coordinator, and if Warren Kurita had not emerged, I probably could not have stayed at court. Warren was the great-grandson of exiled Grant Kurita, and he happened to show up on New Samarkand "in the nick of time," to use an old cliche. There have been stories that I sent notices throughout the Draconis Combine in search of a suitable Kurita-line spouse. A fascinating tale, I'm sure. We married within days, and, five weeks later, Warren succeeded me as the Twelfth Coordinator in May 2515. The nobles seemed satisfied, and political unity was restored to House Kurita.

No longer tied down to the stressful duties of Coordinator, I settled into a very domestic existence. Warren and I had a very good personal relationship, and our son Hehiro was born in February 2516. Early the next year, though, Warren came down with a peculiar ailment and died after only a few days. Court physicians attributed the death to "mysterious causes," and some actually suspected me causing Warren's death. I simply ignored the rumors.

Because my infant son was a legitimate heir to the Kurita line, no one opposed my ruling as regent, although I was not terribly enthused. After all, I was only 20 and wanted to enjoy life outside court. Knowing my duty, however, I accepted my destiny. Just as my father would have done.

—From *Lords I Have Known,* by Siriwan McAllister-Kurita, Carp of Truth Press, 2628

Before Martin McAllister had made any definite plans for the line of succession, he was murdered by a woman in his bedchamber, leaving no heir but Siriwan. There were no close male Kurita relatives, all Kuritas in the realm were equally far from a claim to the throne. Mostly to avoid a bloody struggle for the throne, the nobles of the court agreed that Siriwan should hold the throne as brevet Coordinator. Siriwan accepted the title with a show of great reluctance, but many nobles were concerned that the young woman actually intended to rule. It was bad enough to have a woman sullying the great Kurita throne, but for her to exercise the power of the Coordinator was unthinkable. Why, they asked, was she not using her talents to their best ends, raising proper heirs to this great seat of power? Even more worrisome, was she not a descendant of the rulers of Rasalhague, raised in the capital of that rebellious realm? When the concerns of the nobles seemed ready to burst into open rejection of Siriwan's reign, Warren Kurita appeared in court to be decorated for military service.



Warren was the great grandson of Grant Kurita, who was exiled during the Von Rohrs purge. Although he carried the Kurita name proudly, he had never imagined himself inheriting the throne. The only son of an overbearing widow, Warren had devoted himself to military studies. He was not a great leader of men, but he was a fair tactician and had an affinity for the constantly changing BattleMech technology. In fact, he came to New Samarkand to be decorated for work in joint engineering-military projects. He had no reason to suspect that the decoration's criteria had been specially arranged so that he would be the only man qualified to be so honored.

Siriwan liked the intelligent, quiet, unambitious Warren, and Warren was apparently dazzled by the self-possessed young ruler. They were married a few days after their meeting, and in May, 2515, Warren Kurita was installed as full Coordinator.

Warren slowly settled into his office, learning his way around the court with the help of Siriwan, who was sympathetic to the plight of an outsider suddenly plunged into that pit seething ambitions and hidden agendas. Siriwan was the picture of the helpful, devoted wife, and Warren, who never quite recovered from the sudden transition to Coordinator, depended on her advice. They seemed to get along well, and in February, 2516, three days after his mother's 20th birthday, Hehiro Kurita was born. At Siriwan's suggestion, Warren declared Hehiro Heir-Designate at the naming ceremony a week after his birth.

Some members of the court commented that Siriwan seemed cooler to Warren after Hehiro's birth, but most dismissed it as a new mother's absorption in her child. Without his wife to guide him in decision-making, Warren seemed droopy and more confused. He wanted his mother to come to the royal palace to help care for Hehiro, but Siriwan would have none of it. Instead, she asked the court physician to look at Warren, who seemed to be suffering from "inexplicable depression and disorientation." The physician agreed that Warren seemed unhappy, but attributed it to the stress of his high office, and suggested a quite family vacation.

Warren, Siriwan, Hehiro, and a minimal retinue of retainers went to Normandy, a fashionable seaside resort on New Samarkand. There, on February 9, 2517, Warren Kurita died of uncertain causes. Siriwan and a local physician attributed the death to eating bad shellfish. The official coroner's inquest could not pinpoint a cause of death, and it was officially noted as "mysterious."

Because Hehiro Kurita was only one year old, Siriwan reluctantly became Regent but was dubbed the 13th Coordinator. Apparently, a woman serving as regent to a male heir was acceptable to the nobles of the court. As Siriwan pointed out, she had more experience in the Coordinator's office than anyone else in the court.

SIRIWAN MCALLISTER-KURITA

Such pointed comments were the first sign that the Coordinator was more than a grieving widow and doting mother. Although Siriwan continued to formally mourn Warren for the prescribed year, she dropped the "reluctant regent" pose almost immediately.

Taking a firm grasp on the throne, Siriwan would not relinquish her hold for nearly 40 years. She made friends with those lords who seemed amenable and gradually took power away from those who opposed her. Her five years of quiet observation paid off, for she knew the strengths and weakness of the lords of the court, who continued to underestimate her.

Siriwan also took pains to treat the ladies of the court well, suspecting that many of them were the powers behind their husbands, as she had been Warren's. It would not have been proper for the Coordinator, even a woman Coordinator, to befriend the ladies, but Siriwan was the first Coordinator to lend as ear to what these women had to say. She impressed some with her image as young widow and mother struggling with the burden of rule and others with her position as outspoken, influential woman.

The only gap in the Siriwan's education was real military experience. Rather then hide this flaw and expose herself to criticism, she admitted her ignorance and tried to surround herself with the best military advisors she could. Instead of leading the Combine into battle situations she could not judge or turning control of the military over to others, Siriwan strove for peaceful solutions to conflicts. The Draconis Combine started few armed conflicts during this time and concentrated its forces to repel any incursion into Combine space.

Siriwan herself would not negotiate with other leaders, but assembled a canny ambassadorial staff to achieve the results she wanted. According to one observer, she had developed a style of leadership based on "a steely eye, an acid tongue and an ear that did not hear what she did not want to hear." No one in court wanted to face humiliation before this small, iron-spined woman. What she wanted, she almost invariably got. One of her favorite tactics was asking the "pre-answered question"; for example, "Who is accompanying the weapons shipment? rather than "Will the weapons be shipped?

Siriwan taught Hehiro the ways of court as she herself had learned them. When he was still too young to understand fully what was going on, Hehiro sat in on sensitive meetings, soaking up the atmosphere. Hehiro had tutors for every academic discipline, but only his mother taught him political science. He absorbed from her the preference for negotiation over physical combat and the use of both subtlety and bluntness.

Possessing his father's temperament, Hehiro could never adopt his mother's abrupt manner, which had earned her the whispered nickname of "the dragon lady." He was not weak, but preferred to issue requests in urgent whispers rather than by his mother's style of often unanswerable demands.

Hehiro was intelligent, able to grasp the lessons of history and apply them to the Draconis Combine, but Siriwan detected in him an inability to believe the worst. Trust and optimism are fine qualities in a youngster, but a monarch, they should be tempered with a realistic eye. "Hehiro," said his mother in her journal, "had to be hit on the head with a dead fish" before he would realize that someone was plotting against him. Siriwan wanted a position where she could watch over Hehiro, and the only possible position was on the throne. She stepped down as Coordinator when Hehiro was 40, but remained an active advisor to Hehiro until his death.

STAR LEAGUE ERA

As the people of the Inner Sphere were becoming battle-weary, Terra knew it was simply a matter of time before the leaders of various states would agree to limited concessions. By the end of the 25th century, impartial Hegemony advisors were being called in sporadically to negotiate situations that would have led to battles only a few decades earlier.

With a dream of human unity greater than just the end of war, Ian Cameron had become leader of the Terran Hegemony in 2549. In 2551, he served as mediator between the Capellan Confederation and the Free Worlds League in the dispute over control of Andurien. While negotiating this peace treaty, he gained the respect and trust of the two leaders, Terrance Liao and Albert Marik. In 2556, those three powers, the Terran Hegemony, the Capellan Confederation, and the Free Worlds League, signed a secret trade and non-aggression agreement. This pact was Ian Cameron's first step toward creating a unified Star League.

For the next 13 years, Cameron secretly negotiated with the leaders of the other states in the Human Sphere, hoping for treaties between Terra and all the other states as the next major step toward unified human space. Eventually, the Draconis Combine, the Federated Suns, and the Lyran Commonwealth signed similar pacts with Terra, indicating a willingness to join in a Star League. The leaders of the powers along the Periphery would not be swayed to join with Terra, and never became part of the Star League.

After Hehiro Kurita, the last leader to agree, signed the Treaty of Vega in 2569, agreeing to join in a Star League, leaders of all six states (the Terran Hegemony, the Draconis Combine, the Federated Suns, the Lyran Commonwealth, the Capellan Confederation, and the Free Worlds League) met for two years to hammer out an agreement that would be the charter of the Star League.

In 2571, the Star League was formally established as a new, unified entity. Ian Cameron was recognized as First Lord of the Star League and arbiter of League foreign policy. The League Articles granted each of the other five leaders a seat on the High Council, autonomy over all domestic policy matters, and official sanction of the existing line of succession. Most importantly, all now had free access to the Terran military research apparatus.

This is not to say there was no skepticism regarding the Star League's chances. Many felt that the fundamental differences between the warring states ran too deep and that too much blood had flowed too freely for a long-lasting, peaceful resolution. Questions about freedom of trade were raised. Questions about what loyalty to this new league meant were raised. Now that everyone was on the same side, against what (or whom) could the Star League fight? The only remaining target that could unite all parties in a common cause existed far beyond the Inner Sphere, in the vastness of the Periphery. These far distant realms did not want to give up their autonomy by joining the Star League. Thus was born the Reunification War.

THE TREATY OF VEGA

It is resolved whereby the parties who sign and come into accordance with the provisions and conditions of this treaty shall be jointly agreed to abide by the provisions and conditions contained therein.

Condition 1) At which time all parties and States to be concerned have become signatory members, and within a reasonable administrative period not to exceed five years immediately thereafter, the existence of a new hegemony will be created and recognized. This new hegemony, to be known as the Star League, will:

A) consist of founding parties and States, or any subsequent parties and States who accept a bona fide offer to become signatories,

B) recognize, individually and equally, all parties and States as Member-Federates within the Star League.

Condition 2) The signatory members of this Star League shall, as their first concern, while chartering this League, provide for the rulership and control of said League in a manner agreeable to all. This rule may include, but is not bound by this treaty to require:

A) a single administrator of the Star League, and

B) a body of ruling persons representing each founding Member-Federate

Condition 3: The individual ruler of the State now known as the Draconis Combine, and the rulers of other Member-Federate States, shall maintain control over the internal affairs of their separate states, beyond the control of the Star League, within whatever limits are arrived at in the charter of the Star League, including

A) complete autonomy over all matters of policy that in no way exceed the borders of the State over which he and/or his government rules, the definition of such matters as exceed these borders to be arrived at by agreement of all Member-Federates, and

B) preservation of the internal political structure within the borders of that state.

Condition 4: The Member-Federates shall arrive at a mutual agreement of protection and alliance in the case of attack from outside, non-member states, and a formula for negotiation and/or retaliation in the event of attack by one Member-Federate against another for whatever reason.

Condition 5: The individual signers of this agreement shall not, publicly or privately, discuss, disclose, or otherwise reveal or open the contents herein, until such time as the Terran Hegemony representative, Ian Cameron or his heir or assign, shall deem it meet to open the chartering negotiations of the Star League among all signers of such treaties of intent.

Condition 6: If, within two years from this date, no convention or concordance shall be announced whereby a charter for the aforementioned Star League shall commence, or, if no agreement shall be forthcoming from such convention by five years from its commencement date, this treaty of intent shall become null and void.

Signed this August 15, 2569, Standard Terran Calendar

Ian Cameron, Thirteenth Director-General, Terran Hegemony
Hehiro Kurita, Fourteenth Coordinator, the Draconis Combine

[EDITOR'S NOTE: A similar document was also signed by the Lyran Commonwealth (House Steiner), the Federated Suns (House Davion), the Capellan Confederation (House Liao), and the Free Worlds League (House Marik).

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

When word came from the Star League in 2577 that there would be a war against the rebellious outworlders, many within the Combine were skeptical that the League would show itself to be that aggressive. It was not until after the First Lord Cameron announced the suspension of the Ares Conventions that interest began to mount. In fact, of all the states, the Combine was alone in its enthusiasm for a good, all-out confrontation. The Ares Conventions had taken much of the sheer brutality out of combat, and so many in the Coordinator's inner circle welcomed the opportunity to show their true, ruthless mettle. The leadership of House Kurita did indeed know their history: the people of the Draconis Combine were often at their peak when confronted by a worthy opponent.

Most Combine regiments volunteered for combat assignments to battle areas. Those ordered to remain behind grumbled at drawing dull, but essential, garrison, nobility-protection, and special-operations duties.

The Draconis Combine's economy had always been among the most isolated in the Successor States. Its nearly constant state of hostility toward neighboring powers did not make for good trade relations, but it did teach the citizens to utilize wisely what they had. Though many Combine worlds were poor in resources, they were particularly well-exploited. What a planet might lack in raw materials, its people made up for in overall efficiency.

As soon as the word was confirmed, the economy went into gear for war to a degree not seen since the time of Shiro Kurita's initial conquest. The shortages of material goods did affect the quality of life to a certain degree, but the essentially stoic Draconians took such hardships in stride.

With the Rim Worlds Republic near one frontier border and the Outworlds Alliance near another, troops from the Draconis Combine had no lack of opportunities for combat. The Reunification War lasted for 20 bloody years, finally ending during 2597. At that time, units from the Lyran Commonwealth captured Terra Prime, the Rim Worlds Republic capital, and Star League forces took the Taurian Concordat capital in the Hyades cluster. Resistance trickled to a standstill, and peace was inevitably declared. For the next century and a half, the Draconis Combine would have little means of venting its aggression; but then, not every story can have a happy ending.

HEHIRO KURITA, PEACEMAKER

Hehiro Kurita was born in 2516 on New Samarkand. The next year, his father died "mysteriously," leaving only the infant boy as heir to the Combine throne. His mother Siriwan was to rule as regent, which she did for almost 40 years. She did not relinquish the throne until 2556, a few months before Hehiro's 40th birthday. Even after her son assumed rule, Siriwan continued to be a major, positive influence on his reign and style of leadership. This is not to say that he was totally dominated, however. Indeed, most historians consider Hehiro to have been one of the most influential and capable leaders in the Combine since Shiro Kurita's reign two and a half centuries earlier. Siriwan may have been a "kingmaker," but only her son Hehiro could be the king.

Like his noteworthy ancestor Shiro, Hehiro also believed in militant self-reliance and the inherent ideological superiority of his subjects, when compared with any other State in the Human Sphere. However, Hehiro's judgments were significantly influenced by his mother, herself a strong proponent of peaceful expansion and administration. Being raised by his mother rather than by his father undoubtedly made Hehiro a bit more charming than many Kuritans, but he also possessed her cunning mind and skill at matters of state.

Many questions have been raised as to why Hehiro permitted his mother to act as regent until he was 40 years old. In all honesty, he never wanted the position of Coordinator. He married at the age of 19, and his wife died in childbirth. He spent the next decade raising his son Martin, before remarrying. Some informed sources indicate that Siriwan offered to step down on several occasions, but Hehiro only accepted after Martin turned 20. Sadly, Martin died just two years later in a battle along the Periphery.

A skilled and convincing orator, a just arbiter, and an iron-willed leader, Hehiro constantly strived for his ideals of perfection, and sought means to attain them. He may be most famous for signing the Treaty of Vega in 2569, which made the Draconis Combine a member of Ian Cameron's brainchild, the Star League. For this, some members of the military and the nobility angrily accused him of trusting his enemies more than his friends. In response, Hehiro only smiled.

In 2577, he backed the Star League on another major issue: the Unification War against the Periphery worlds. Having rejected the Star League's offer of membership, these outer worlds formed their own alliance to protect their autonomy. A bloody, 20-year-long war between the Star League and the worlds of the Periphery then followed. These two decades would prove to be more costly in human lives than even the 150-year long era known as the Age of War. Despite some political pressure and significant casualties, the general populace threw its support behind Hehiro.

On issues closer to home, he did condemn many of the court nobles for using bribery, favoritism, blood vendettas, and other similar means to promote their own personal interests. While his action drew considerable hostility from those same nobles, it endeared Hehiro to his subjects to a degree rarely seen in the Draconis Combine before or since. This probably explains the popular support he was able to muster for participation in the Reunification Wars. Though he had inherited his position, Hehiro liked to believe that he would have been the people's choice had they been given one. However romantic this notion, Hehiro was certainly no fool. That he tripled the size of the Household Guard is an illuminating footnote to the story of his reign. It shows that Siriwan managed to teach him the difference between gullibility and trust. This well-protected man would ultimately die by accident in 2591, when he tripped and fell down a long palace staircase, breaking his neck instantly. Witnesses confirm that no one else was near enough to have pushed him, completely ruling out the possibility of foul play. Hehiro's son Leonard was next in line.

—From"Hehiro The Peacemaker," a bulletin compiled by ComStar reseacher Joanna Green

THE PRODIGAL SON

The accidental death of Lord Hehiro Kurita left a momentary power vacuum in the Combine court. Though his eldest son Leonard was sworn in as the Fifteenth Coordinator, trouble appeared to be brewing at the palace. Hehiro's mother, Siriwan McAllister-Kurita, led the mourners at Hehiro's state funeral, with Leonard nowhere to be seen. This was regarded as an ominous note for the beginning of a new reign.

On learning of his father's death, Leonard had immediately left New Samarkand, and spent the first two months of his reign on a planet-hopping orgy. Court insiders publicly admitted that Leonard had left a note saying he was going to "ensure that worthy descendents of Leonard Kurita the First" would be found in seraglios throughout the Combine. Presumably, he was implementing such a plan.

Leonard's premeditated excesses and corrupt nature could not have been more unlike his father's dignified stature. Even before his succession, the middle-aged playboy behaved more like some frontier bindlestiff than a head of State. Once he ruled, he only grew worse, nullifying the political and social advances of his father's reign.

After Leonard's return, state gatherings and family events quickly deteriorated into raucous, wild, week-long debauches. District Military Governors, particularly of Pesht and Rasalhague, saw their individual powers increase beyond their wildest dreams. While Leonard spent much of his time in a state of inebriation or unconsciousness, these governors were forced by circumstances to take over direction of the Combine's participation in the Unification War.

Even during his rare periods of sobriety, Leonard created severe political and military tension for the Draconis Combine, especially during the early and mid-2560s. Among other things, he would order large contingents of Kurita BattleMechs to land on planets near Terra. The MechWarriors had fanciful orders to search for and retrieve any children who looked like their Coordinator.

This use of military force was considered to be a flagrant violation of the Star League Articles. More importantly, it came at a time when the Unification War was still in progress, and the BattleMechs wastefully deployed on Lord Kurita's mindless operations were of vital importance elsewhere. Leonard paid little attention to increasingly strong warnings from the First Lord of the Star League.

The Unification War finally did end in 2597 (with no thanks to Leonard Kurita), ushering in a new era of peace for the members of the Star League. Large garrisons remained in the Periphery, but most would be withdrawn within a decade. In the meantime, Leonard was not satisfied. In the midst of his drunken rages, he threatened to attack Terra itself. His antics, rarely seen as amusing, now endangered the entire Draconis Combine. As frontier garrisons were reassigned homeward over the next few years, the Star League forces on Terra began to mobilize for possible strikes into the sphere of House Kurita.

Where he had once been merely a family embarrassment and little more than a nuisance, Leonard became a genuine public menace as Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. Elaine Kurita, the younger of his two sisters, became so despondent over the dishonor of her brother's behavior that she tearfully begged him either to cease or to resign. Leonard, of course, ignored her, and barely noted the fact that Elaine committed *seppuku* in December 2604. Her suicide disk implicated by name her deranged brother. By February 2605, the overall political situation had deteriorated to the point that some action had to be taken or else the Star League could—and would—attack from along both Steiner and Davion borders.

Within a few weeks, Leonard Kurita contracted one of those "mysterious" ailments that had afflicted certain of his forebears, and he died within a matter of days. Leonard's son Blaine Kurita became the Sixteenth Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. Aside from Siriwan McAllister-Kurita, still alive at the ripe age of 109, there were few living persons who could recall Warren Kurita's death from mysterious causes 88 years before.

THE McALLISTERS, PART TWO

My great-grandson Blaine was very ill when he became Coordinator in March 2605. Though only 20 years old, he was already in the final stages of cardiac myasthenia gravis. Even with the most advanced life-support technology available, he finally succumbed to the illness in October of that year. This saddened me, for he was a beautiful child and I enjoyed his gentle company, which was such a sharp contrast to his demented father Leonard. That man almost brought down our honored House, both through the shame brought on us by his debauchery and because of the trend toward decentralization of the government created by his total lack of political leadership. Blaine's rule was too brief to reverse either dangerous trend.

I could not stand by and watch the realm and the dynasty fall into ruin, and so I reclaimed the throne immediately after Blaine's death, becoming the Seventeenth Coordinator. The only reason I took over again was to examine very carefully all the potential candidates for Coordinator, in order to make the best possible selection. But I had forgotten how wonderful is the exhilaration associated with power, a feeling I had not known for half a century. I may have been on the high side of 100, but I could still rule.

The court nobles, however, were far from exhilarated to see me again in power, and so a number of them began meddling into my personal affairs. My ability to resist outside pressures was not as great as formerly, and soon I grew tired of the bickering. After two years, I decided to step down once and for all. At that time, I named my successor.

—From *Lords I Have Seen*, by Siriwan McAllister-Kurita, Carp of Truth Press, 2628

Siriwan McAllister-Kurita became the only Coordinator in the Draconis Combine's history to ever hold the position on three separate occasions. After a few months, though, political pressure from court nobles began to build. Though still competent, she was beginning to show her age. Two years into her third "term," she grudgingly accepted retirement.

Instead of naming her grandson Raymond, as everyone had anticipated, Siriwan chose her granddaughter Sanethia. A quiet woman, Sanethia was seen as more easily maneuvered, giving her venerable grandmother the final laugh. Even when Sanethia was the nominal Coordinator, Siriwan McAllister-Kurita remained the force to reckon with in Kurita court politics. This state of affairs lasted until her death in 2632, at the remarkable age of 136.

THE GOOD YEARS

I don't care what other people say. Peace is an unhealthy and unnatural state. It clogs the mind with a pretty pink haze of flowers and waterfalls; it thickens our stomachs with fat; and makes us believe that we are all brothers under the skin. Peace? Why it's an absolutely deadly condition for a man, especially a warrior.

—From an address by Coordinator Takiro Kurita to the Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy, March 2695

PEACE AND PROGRESS

The lovely Sanethia Kurita became Lord Kurita (the title applied, regardless of sex) in 2607. A quiet, open-minded woman who was also a serious patron of the arts, Sanethia was an able ruler. Always willing to listen to new ideas, she maintained a firm but gentle grasp over state policy, and often suggested non-military options for resolving disputes. This attitude definitely reflected her grandmother Siriwan's influence, but Sanethia also initiated efforts to establish a peaceful, yet strong regime.

ARS GRATIA ARTIS

Attention: Artists!

Do you work in light, sound, taste, hearing, scent, or balance?

Are you skilled in the ancient arts of painting, dance, architecture, film, theatre, music, or sculpture?

Or have you tried the newest forms of cubing, holoart, light-painting, air-music, sine-sculpting, impressing, null-g ballet, or others even more exotic and original?

If so, you may be eligible for a subsistence grant from the Ministry of Artistic Development, an original program sponsored by Lord Sanethia Kurita of the Draconis Combine.

Contact the nearest Ministry office for more details.

—Public service announcement from New Samarkand News Radio, November 2612

With the death of Leonard Kurita, the relations between the Draconis Combine and the Star League slowly inched away from the precipice of all-out war. No longer did the besotted Coordinator send Kurita BattleMechs on "heavy reconnaissance forays" into Terran-Member States. Indeed, under Coordinator Sanethia, the Draconis Combine actually paid some reparations to the people whose lives and property the Kurita forces had damaged. Slowly, and with great caution, the Regular Army of the Star League stepped down from its year-long War Alert status.

Yet the relations between the two never really returned to the previous level of respectful, if not cordial, relations. In fact, the First Lord of the Star League was becoming aware that he could no longer really trust the leaders of the five other member-states of the League. He therefore ordered the Regular Army High Command to draw up plans for the best way to wage war against each of the five other Houses, should the need arise. The First Lord made it plain that the plans he wanted first were for a strategy against the Draconis Combine. Meanwhile, many Kuritans found the period of peace after the Reunification War entirely too quiet and lacking in the excitement that many, particularly the warriors, had grown to expect from life. Their boredom and nervous energy soon led many soldiers to relieve their frustrations through spontaneous brawls and riots, which were occurring with alarming frequency. Some equally bored and frustrated citizens also joined into these outbursts of mindless fighting and destruction. On Vanern, for example, three entire cities were lost in rioting. Coordinator Sanethia and her ever-present grandmother Siriwan decided that the people needed some large project to occupy their energies and to prevent further damage to the realm.

This "lull," as the people in the Draconis Combine were calling the peace, was accompanied by an almost League-wide boom in the economy.

Technology, now devoted to peaceful research and development, began to pay huge dividends for the six major Houses of the Inner Sphere. By 2630, hyperpulse generators had cut interstellar communications time lags by more than half. Improved, low-cost water purification systems made it possible to settle worlds ignored during the Exodus, and provided an economic boon to worlds that would no longer be reliant on the Ryan Cartel iceships. By 2700, more than 750 new worlds had been settled. There were also major advances in medical technology, biological engineering, and hydroelectrical engineering. Labor-saving devices provided more freedom and the leisure time to explore the pleasures of luxury goods and the arts. Trading ships travelled the length and breadth of the Inner Sphere, delivering goods and picking up new, exotic wares at each port of call. As the sense of growing prosperity filtered into the most distant reaches of the Star League, the overall quality of life continued to improve. This was to be mankind's apex, the peak of *homo sapiens*'s accomplishments.

ECONOMIC UNIFICATION

For some members of House Kurita, this period of peaceful coexistence may have been unwelcome. A generally unfriendly and even somewhat xenophobic society, the vast majority of its citizens rarely ventured beyond their own borders except when the Combine was involved in an attack on a neighbor. Until this time, trade with other Houses had been rare, too. When it did occur, the Kuritan merchants' objectives were absurdly simple: get as much as possible while offering little in return, then get out as fast as possible. The Draconis Combine had been created through military conquest, not peaceful negotiation, and some of its leaders would only comply with the new era of cooperation if forced. It was not only the growth of trade that was ending this time-honored stance. Some other House leaders were even calling for a single form of currency to facilitate trade.

When the issue of a universal currency system first emerged, the Combine's corporate sector (the percentage not under direct control of the Kurita family) opposed it just as vehemently as the incumbent First Lord of the Star League proposed it. According to the First Lord, a regulated currency would eliminate the current awkward system of barter and the fluctuating exchange rates between interstellar governments.

The Draconian industrialists, however, feared that the new currency would create too close ties and a dangerous interdependence between House Kurita and the other Houses, endangering their own economic power. They also feared the possibility of Star League-induced currency devaluation, which would render all money worthless. In their public statements, however, the corporate heads said only that they questioned the authority of the Star League to advocate such a massive change.

The First Lord continued to press for better political and socioeconomic relations between the League's member-states. He knew that once trade began to flourish among the six powers, there would be no going back. Adventurous freelance traders were the first to successfully deal in Draconian goods, when they managed to smuggle some across even House Kurita's well-

guarded borders. In their wake, these freelancers left samples of wares available from across the Inner Sphere. These ranged from paints, powders, trinkets, and toys for women and children to raw materials for industry and all varieties of vehicles (civilian, industrial, and military), and heavy equipment and supplies essential for planetary colonization.

As quickly as limited quantities of these high-quality goods were "acquired" and released to the open market, they sold out, with avid cries for more. The Kuritan manufacturers could not resist the lure of fat profits anymore than could their counterparts in the other Houses. The Kurita court still did not favor large-scale export trade with the other powers, but the influx of new wealth changed their minds, too. Within a few years, large cargo JumpShips boldly travelled where one-man merchant ships had slyly gone before. Greed replaced the isolationism among the economic and political upper levels of House Kurita. Finally, in 2623, member-states of the Star League voted on the question of a new currency system. Though there were lengthy debates, the system was eventually accepted unanimously.

Once the Kurita family had reversed its traditional position on trade and interstellar relations, few dared to disagree with the new policy. Because of concern that luxury goods from other powers might soften the spartan toughness of their people or that trade with outsiders might expose the House to economic sabotage, the Kuritans still restricted incoming trade somewhat and carefully monitored the effects of intercultural relations on the realm.

PULLING UP ROOTS

In June 2617, Lord Sanethia announced that she was moving the capital of the Draconis Combine from New Samarkand to the planet Luthien. The proclamation came as a shock to people within and without the borders of the Combine. Everyone had expected the Kurita family to remain always on New Samarkand, where they had their roots and where most of their ancestors were buried. Though many criticized the plan, others pointed out its merits. New Samarkand was so distant from the Combine's border with House Steiner that it would be almost impossible to effectively coordinate a campaign in the event of war. This was logical, but the choice of Luthien puzzled almost everyone. It was a large, but rather resource-poor world whose water and vegetation were always poised delicately on the verge of extinction. Why, asked the nobles and military alike, did the Coordinator choose a world whose population was just three million and whose greatest product was the Tushan Lobster, a small crustacean delicacy? Indeed there existed three other already-developed worlds more equipped to handle the responsibilities of housing the capital. What the critics did not realize was that the Coordinator had intentionally created this situation to test the mettle of her people, in case peace and prosperity were making them too soft.

THE KURITA STYLE OF BUSINESS

The Draconis Combine was never one to shrink from a task. Their efforts to enter into the League-wide economic market showed determination, if not finesse. The case of Waddesdon Traders is a good example of the Kurita style of business.

In 2617, a Sammuel Kestrich and Timth Miyasato bought two near-derelict freighters and boldly proclaimed themselves the Waddesdon Traders. Their first two years were spent carrying chemical fertilizers from their homeworld of Tannil, a Davion world just across the border.

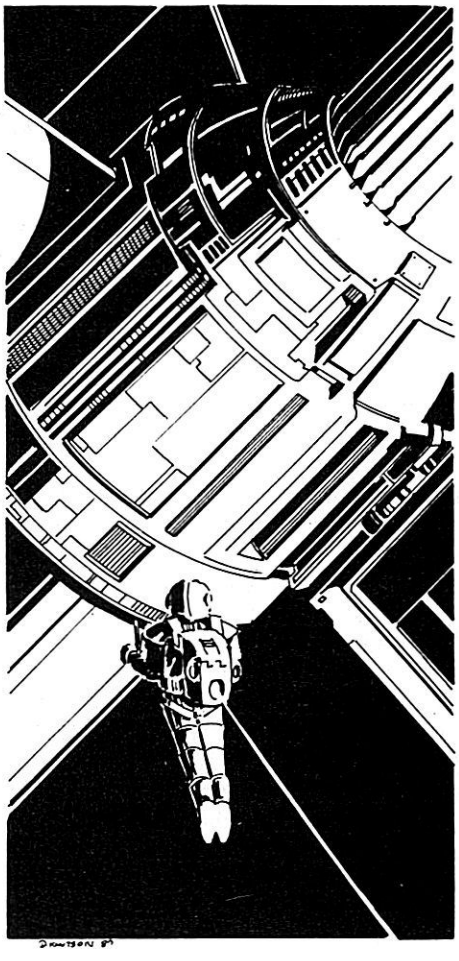
Though business was good, the two wanted to get into bigger-ticket items, but all their attempts were being thwarted by the Kosoan Trading Company, a Davion merchant association with five brand new freighters.

By 2621, the Waddesdon Traders were in deep trouble. Though they had managed to up their fleet to four freighters, the Kosoan Trading Company now had a virtual lock on almost all inter-house trade in that area of the border. Something had to be done, no matter what the cost, no matter what laws might be broken.

In March 2622, an unidentified freighter entered the Shinono system and quietly approached the *SS Franklin*, a Kosoan freighter. Few noticed the men hidden in the rigging of the unidentified freighter, much less that one of them used a rocket pack to scoot across to the *SS Franklin*, where he planted an object at the drive-sail junction. The mysterious freighter then moved off, and left the system a day later. An hour after its departure , an explosion rocked the *SS Franklin,* destroying both the drive core and the sail mechanism. Then came the reports that the *SS Franklin* was only one of four Kosoan ships to suffer a crippling explosion that very day. The cloud of suspicion quickly settled over the Waddesdon Traders.

The Federated Suns protested these incidents strenuously and demanded that the Waddesdon partners be turned over to them for trial. It was no use, however, for Waddedson Traders' audacity had impressed Lord Kurita and his Minister of Economic Exchange and Expansion. The scandal eventually fizzled out, resulting in Waddesdon Traders becoming the largest trading company in its region within two years. Their flagship was a huge, brand-new freighter secretly donated to them by Coordinator Sanethia "in recognition of their business skills."

—From *Trade Relations During the Star League Era*, by Precentor Sevir Devasu, Economics Division, ComStar



OLD WAYS AND NEW

Now I know how the slaves felt building the pyramids of Egypt.

—Comment by a mason during the construction of Imperial City in Luthien, as quoted in "A Castle in a Jungle: Report on Building the New Capital on Luthien," by Raul Jahns, in *Engineering Journal,* February 2619

Urizen Kurita the Second succeeded Sanethia when she resigned as Coordinator in 2620. With the determination typical of his line, the 30-year-old ruler oversaw much of Imperial City's construction on Luthien. At a height of over two meters and weighing 110 kilos, he was massive. This made Urizen a quickly identifiable figure in his frequent trips to inspect the progress of the construction. When it was complete, Imperial City would become the most ambitious, most expensive, most energy-consuming building project ever undertaken by the Draconis Combine. Patterned mostly on the architecture of Japan, it included the Imperial Palace and numerous administration buildings of the Combine government.

There were problems from the start. It took five years just to drain the huge, fetid swamp that would provide the land for the enormous new city. That accomplished, contractors began to arrive from as far away as the Lyran Commonwealth to begin the actual construction. These contractors commanded a virtual army of manual laborers, because the Kurita family frowned on the use of complex modern machinery.

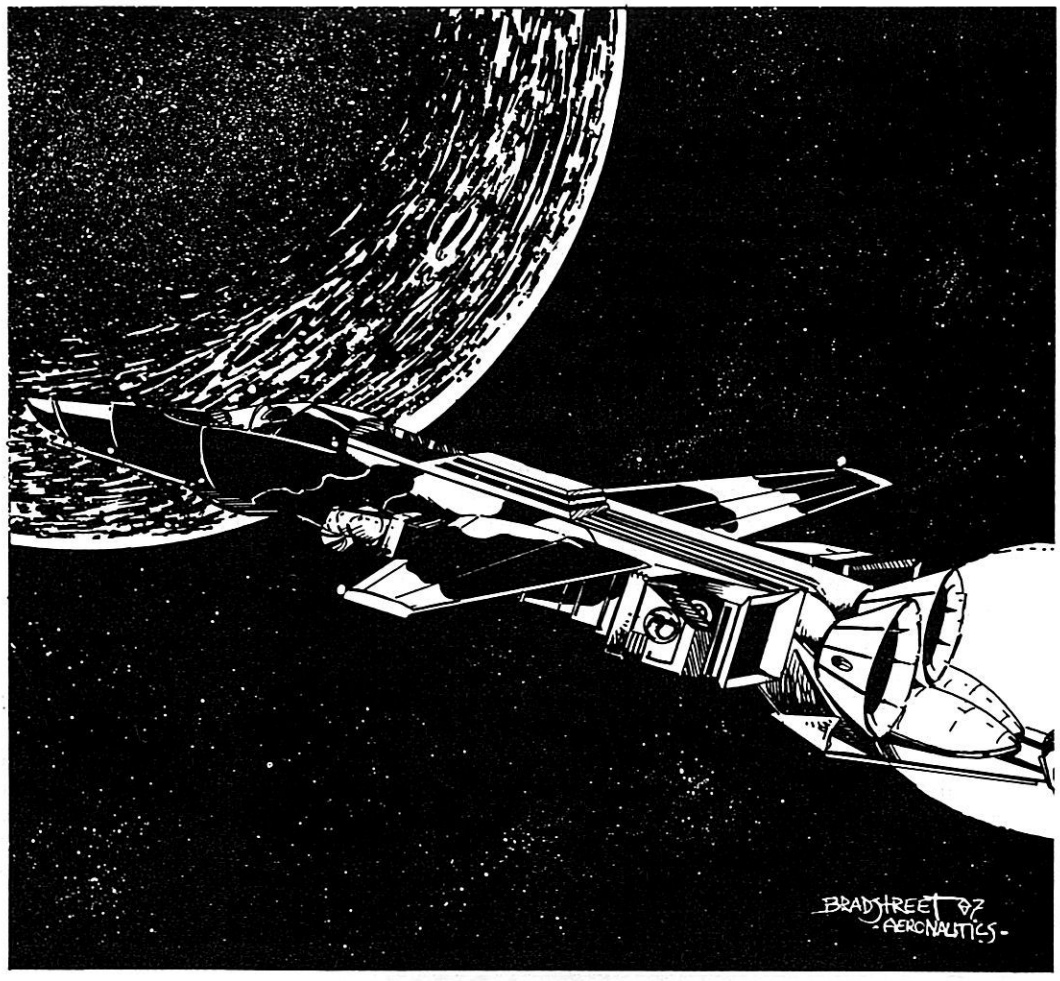
Most of these sweating workers were low-echelon members of the Kurita military or criminals assigned to the dangerous jobs such as putting huge blocks of teak or stone into position while the blocks dangled from slender cables. The primitive work methods caused many an accident, to the point that workers considered it a good day when less than 500 of their ranks were killed.

The construction of Imperial City created an economic boom across the realm. Archaic building materials such as teak, granite, marble, and mosaic tile were suddenly in great demand because of the Kurita family's desire to create a monument to their line in the ways of the ancients.

To cope with the flow of materials heading toward Luthien, a group of lesser cities soon sprang up about the construction site. Within ten years, the population of the planet had risen to 1 billion and showed no sign of stopping.

The erection of this tremendous homage to ancient Oriental architecture sparked a wave of interest in the old ways, at least among those fortunate enough not to be breaking their backs building the city. First, House Kurita instituted the *Kokugaku,* the "National Learning," which stressed Japan's ancient history in its curriculum. Then Buddhism and Confucianism gained renewed membership after years of decline, as did the martial arts, especially the Ways of the Sword and Bow. Needless to say, the idea of *Bushido,* the Way of the Warrior, was especially in vogue in the 2650s.

All this emphasis on the past did not mean that House Kurita was ignoring the ways of modern science and technology. In 2652, Coordinator Urizen set the government on an ambitious program of industrial development. In addition to the goal of importing such new technologies as the HPG communication device, the project aimed to give the Draconis Combine the ability to design and produce its own weapons systems. House Kurita did not want its military to have to rely on other Houses or Star League facilities for assistance or parts.



This plan bore fruit when Lexa Tech Industries produced the first *Stinger* LAM in 2688. A revolutionary piece of machinery, the Land-Air Mech could convert from a BattleMech to an AeroSpace Fighter. Even the First Lord began to commission the unique *Stinger* LAM for his own Regular Army, much to the Kurita family's satisfaction. This emphasis on military technology was to continue on into Takiro Kurita's administration, which saw development of the *Panther* and *Dragon* Mechs.

URIZEN II

The Nineteenth Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, the tall, gaunt Urizen was almost shy in his authority (in contrast to his namesake of three centuries before). Despite his quiet demeanor, however, he was an excellent civil administrator.

Though his detractors dubbed him "Urizen the Passive," he simply ignored them, successfully pursuing a policy of peaceful economic trade and colonial expansion throughout his reign. A Kurita to the core, Urizen also monitored the Household Guards closely, to assure the complete loyalty of his personal bodyguards. These precautions must have been adequate, for the Nineteenth Coordinator did not leave office until 2691, when he was 101 years of age. After his retirement, he took the unprecedented action of becoming a colonial governor on the outlying world of Echo, where he lived contentedly for another 19 years. Urizen Kurita II died in a ground vehicle accident in 2710, at the age of 120.

RETURN TO ISOLATIONISM

Of the six realms that made up the Star League, the Draconis Combine had been the least enthusiastic about joining. This was because of the belief ingrained into every citizen of the Combine that it was the destiny of House Kurita to eventually rule all humanity. Many, from the highest general to the lowliest Unproductive, had believed that to join the Star League was to admit failure, and implied that the Kuritas no longer honored their sacred destiny.

To win back public support, particularly among the military and the ISF, the Kurita leaders went about it in a typically egocentric way. Schoolbooks underplayed cooperation between the Combine military and the Star League Regulars during the Reunification War, for example. Historians and propagandists also began to claim that the Draconis Combine had not joined the Star League because it offered any special benefits, but out of a sense of pity. Meanwhile, the news media and propagandists were ordered to avoid reporting on events occurring outside the Draconis Combine. This created an image of the Star League as somewhat apart from the realm, and so the Kurita Lord could portray the League's policies and laws as outside interference whenever it suited his purposes.

—From *Political Relations Between the Member States and the Star League,* by Professor Jev Avigdor, University of Washington Press, 3021

BUSHIDO AND BATTLEMECH DUELING

The Four Oaths: Never be late in respect to the Way of the Warrior. Be useful to the Lord. Be respectful to your parents. Rise beyond love and grief to exist for the good of man.

—From *Ha Gakure (Hidden Leaves),* by Yamamoto Tsunenori, 17th century

Near the end of Urizen's term as Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, an interesting phenomenon occurred. The interest in the ways of the ancient Japanese had fostered a cult of *Bushido* among the warriors in the Combine. The *Book of Five Rings* by Miyamoto Musashi and historical accounts of medieval Japan also became popular. All this renewed the Combine's sense of destiny, and many believed the new emphasis on Japanese heritage would make the Kuritans better warriors.

As the pinnacle of the military, the Kuritan MechWarriors took every ancient word to heart. It soon became fashionable, then required, that all MechWarriors carry the *Wakizashi,* or short sword, and *Katana,* or longsword, of the ancient samurai on formal dress occasions. Dojos—schools devoted to the Way of ancient weapons—soon sprang up across the realm, reviving the nearly lost arts of *Kendo* and *Kyudo*, the ways of Sword and Bow, as well as other honorable weapons. The concept of sword dueling was revived during this time, and by the 2670s, the Coordinator had commissioned the writing of a set of rules to ensure that his MechWarriors did not kill one other off.

Those MechWarriors of non-Japanese ancestry were a little slower to become enthused about the samurai way. At first, these warriors felt very resentful at the recent turn of events. They believed that emphasizing knowledge of the ancient ways, which included learning the Japanese language (a terrible chore even for the Japanese), was becoming a means to discriminate against non-Japanese MechWarriors. It took several Proclamations by the Coordinator to convince them. He assured them that so long as a warrior was loyal, he would always be respected as vital to the destiny of the Kurita family.

This fascination with the ways of the samurai led to a growing popularity of BattleMech duels and to the concept of the Champion MechWarrior. In some ways, these revivals occurred because of Michael Cameron's Edict of 2650, which cut back seriously the Kurita military, putting many MechWarriors out of work. Now *Ronin*—masterless—they were forced to make their skills pay so that they could eat.

A duel often resulted when one MechWarrior somehow insulted another. The two would then decide where and when their contest would occur. The duel itself was usually fought with few rules and simply continued until one 'Mech was disabled. These one-on-one combats usually had the tacit approval of the participants' commanding officers. MechWarriors who had survived many duels soon became known as "Champions" among the people. They traveled about the realm, with aid from the Kurita family, to test their skill by taking on all comers. Champion MechWarriors like Miyamoto Musashi, Amanda Kazutoyo, and Rikkard Svenson became cult heros. The government rewarded those who managed to survive 70 or more contests; they became heads of their own Dojos, where they would train and teach others. The reputation of the Sun Zhang Academy increased appreciably during this time, as many of these skilled master duelists came there to teach.

The duels were not confined to competitions between Kurita warriors. Often, the more arrogant Champions would wander up to the entrance of a Star League Regular Army base and challenge its best MechWarrior to a duel. When the First Lord learned of this, he ordered that no one among his troops was to accept such a challenge. The First Lord also complained formally to the Coordinator, saying these duels were wasteful as well as politically dangerous. In reply, Coordinator Urizen Kurita put on a pained expression and explained that these men were technically *Ronin* (without master or supervision), and therefore beyond control. Through he paid their way about the realm, he was powerless to stop them from challenging whom they chose to duel.

It was not long, however, before the First Lord had to reluctantly rescind his order. He gave in after his warriors began to plead for the chance to show that their refusal to duel was not based on cowardice. There followed some 300 separate duels between the Champions of House Kurita and veterans of the League's Regular Army, starting in 2681 and ending in 2751 at the time of Simon Cameron's death. The record of wins and losses showed 157 victories for House Kurita and 152 for the veterans of the Regular Army.

At first, the Regulars MechWarriors lost with alarming ease to their Kurita challengers. To counter this, the Regular Army launched an aggressive training program to bring up the standards of the average MechWarrior. Meanwhile, veteran and elite MechWarriors from other realms came forward to keep the honor of the Star League from being tarnished by the Dragon.

THE RESURGENCE OF THE ISF

Common people who behave unbecomingly to members of the military class or who show want of respect to direct or indirect officials of my government will be cut down on the spot.

—From Coordinator Urizen's Kurita Mandate to the ISF, 2680

The almost fanatical immersion of Draconis society in the ways of ancient Japan had its effects on the Kurita family. Their normal arrogance became transformed into a righteous mania that reinforced the family's ancient belief in its destiny as rulers of the entire Inner Sphere. Coordinator Urizen Kurita was especially inspired by the resurgence of this tradition.

Not everyone in the Combine welcomed this new wave of Japanism, however. This was especially evident after the uprising of Arkah, where a predominantly Moslem population rebelled against the imposition of Japanese and Buddhist teachings in the curriculum of the schools. After putting down the rebellion, Urizen decided to strengthen the Internal Security Forces, or ISF. In 2680, he quadrupled their budget and gave the Director a mandate to cleanse the realm of those who might tarnish its honor with their contrary ways. The ISF was more than happy to oblige.

In keeping with the times, the ISF adopted the nickname *Metsuke*, which means "all-seeing eyes" and was used by the secret police during the time of the Shoguns. The *Metsuke* began to carry the *jitte,* a short, trident-like sword used by the ancient Japanese police.

Within ten years, the words "ISF" and "*Metsuke*" inspired terror throughout the realm. On countless occasions, the ISF carried out planetwide purges to weed out those who did not measure up to the ideals of the Draconis Combine. Many ComStar historians have said that the terrorist tactics of the ISF were the real reason that Kuritan society became stratified so quickly in the years just preceding the fall of the Star League.

URIZEN'S LEGACY

When Urizen Kurita stepped down as Coordinator of the Draconis Combine in 2691, he left a realm radically altered. Because of his many official and unofficial policies, his domain had taken on a nearly uniform culture and a quite disturbing fanaticism.

Gone were the trends toward a mellowing and melding of cultures to create something unique among the races and ages of man. Urizen's mandate to the Internal Security Force had effectively put a stop to that. In its place, he reinstated the culture of a Japan that had existed over a thousand years before, which the Japanese themselves had overthrown when it proved too restrictive. As might be expected, imposing a culture so alien to many citizens of the Combine had several serious consequences.

The first was to stifle a trend that might have encouraged more avenues for the expression of political criticism. The ISF purges quickly put an end to that.

Another effect was to further stratify the society, which was already divided between the nobles and the common people. The new division was between those who could adapt to the new culture, and those who could not, or would not, change to fit the times. Those who refused to adapt often lost all privileges, including the right to work. When such people were high enough in the social hierarchy, they might remain outwardly unscathed, but the ISF would haunt them to their graves.

The last and perhaps most damaging effect of this imposition of the medieval Japanese culture upon the many billions in the Combine was to give the ISF more power then ever. Indeed, they now had carte blanche to practice their dark ways.

During Urizen's reign, two other positive trends occurred. The first was the expansion of trade between the Combine and its neighbors. Though Kuritan traders had much to learn, they made up for it in hustle and hardball tactics. (In one example, a merchant from the Lyran Commonwealth, the acknowledged expert among traders, bilked a Combine firm out of over 3 billion League bills. In response, the swindled company sent hirelings to lay waste to a warehouse filled with valuable materials owned by the Commonwealth company.)

The other trend was toward technological self-sufficiency. Up until Urizen's reign, the Combine had relied on other states to provide them with parts for their equipment. When Urizen saw how aggressive the interstellar market was, he was understandably shocked. He immediately ordered a program to encourage the construction of more factories and to assist the expansion of Kuritan industries to supply the parts and supplies needed by the realm.

Imperial City on Luthien may be the most vivid example of the many forces acting on the Draconis Combine during this period. Completed in the final year of Urizen's reign, the city included stunning imitations of Oriental architecture jammed up against buildings that could only be called "Kurita Kitsch." Most of these buildings, built in the ancient ways from ancient materials such as teak, often house the most sophisticated technological tools and equipment. The greatest irony, however, may be that so many thousands died to build this city that no one but the Kurita family and its elite of courtiers, nobility, and high military men are allowed to enter.

—From *The Great Draconis Lizard,* by Samuel Puente, Lyran Commonwealth Historical Press, 2871

DEATH OF THE STAR LEAGUE

Death comes to all, and so one must not sit and brood about it. Seize the opportunity to wield your fate as though it were a sword and be glad that the world is suddenly different.

—Takiro Kurita, from a speech to a gathering of business leaders, given immediately after the death of Simon Cameron, 2751

OPEN SEASON

First Lord Simon Cameron was killed while inspecting a mining colony on New Silesia early in 2751. Like most major dignitaries of the era, Takiro Kurita, Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, attended the funeral. His sharp eyes peering so intently from his thin, scarred face gave him the air of a hawk eyeing the chickens.

In the end, all five of the remaining Council Lords were about to prove themselves hawks, with the recent years of quiet as their victim. The peace of the decades immediately following the Reunification War had already been shattered by the reappearance of space pirates preying on worlds along the Periphery and along the borders between realms. These attacks, termed "Bandit Raids" by the news media, soon escalated into a war's worth of quick raids and atrocities.

Obviously, there could not be so many bandits in the Inner Sphere. In reality, the various interstellar governments had decided to use the initial bandit raids as a smokescreen to hide the fact that they were springing raids of their own against their neighbors. Sometimes, it was done to right some previous wrong. Other times, it was to seize some prize. The sheer love of battle can certainly account for the rest.

Out in the Periphery, matters were coming to a head. Ever since the Reunification War, these distant republics had become known as the Territorial States. Though the Star League had launched a massive propaganda campaign to portray its rule as a benevolent force guiding the lives of distant friends, this image became more and more farcical with each news report of the growing tensions between the members of the Star League. The spark of rebellion once again ignited among the still independent-minded worlds of the Periphery.

Only a strong, wise leader could have calmed the growing torrent of angry words and deeds. Unfortunately, Simon Cameron's heir was a mere eight years old when his father died, and would not legally rule until he was 18. Even the most optimistic political analyst could see that the next ten years would be among the most crucial since the day man first took flight among the stars.

TAKIRO KURITA

An odd man, Takiro. Plenty of Kurita fire, yet underneath it all, it almost seems that he'd be happier in a Buddhist monastery somewhere.

—Simon Cameron, as quoted in *Simon Cameron: The Official Biography,* ComStar Source Library

Though Takiro was the eldest of Urizen's six children, there had been opposition to his appointment as Coordinator because of his previous deep commitment to a life of contemplation and reflection. Yet, he was a true example of what a samurai should be. Not only was he expert in the use of the *katana,* but he was a poet and painter as well. Because his religion taught that life is an illusion, he could not fully embrace the fanatical patriotism of the time.

While Takiro was still only heir to the throne, two district governors used the ISF to stage an assassination attempt against the young heir. The attempt failed, and Takiro had the captured ISF agents tortured into revealing who had put them up to it. With the blessing of his enraged father, Takiro hunted down the two men. Though Takiro executed only the two *shugo*s and their male children (which many Kurita historians have referred to as lenient punishment), it ended once and for all the talk that Takiro was too "soft."

As ruler of the Combine, Coordinator Takiro would continue many of his father's policies. Because of his particular interest in freeing the Combine's military industry from dependence on non-Combine resources, he was especially pleased when the *Panther* and *Dragon* BattleMechs started to roll off the assembly lines at the Alshain factories and into his 'Mech regiments.

Coordinator Takiro differed from his father in respect to imposing the medieval Japanese culture on his people, however. He eased the strict *Kokugaku*—the official curriculum—and made knowledge of Japanese a requirement only for those entering government and military service. He also made several conciliatory gestures to the non-Japanese groups within the Combine.

Takiro was not a man to shirk what he saw as his more disagreeable duties. After purging the ISF of his enemies, he increased the organization's funding and greatly expanded their duties to include scrutiny of the military. He was also responsible for the brutal suppression of the Fukuroi Riots that occurred in 2743 when nearby Benjamin decided to close down five of the planet's major factories.

ALEKSANDR KERENSKY

My private audience with General Aleksandr Kerensky did not turn out exactly as I had hoped. He refused to stop his military maneuvers near Luthien. This displeases me much, and so I have ordered as many ISF agents as can be spared to infiltrate the Regular Army. We must have an earlier warning the next time General Kerensky decides to try to bully the Draconis Combine. Not only will he fail to get his way, but his military exercises might have to be postponed in favor of defending his very life.

Why so many people are so pleased to hear that he has been appointed Regent and Protector is mystery. He is a soldier. An excellent one, true, but a soldier nevertheless. It is doubtful that he will stray too far from what Simon Cameron would have wished. If he were truly as good as everyone claims, he would take his power as Regent and rule as First Lord until the boy Richard comes of age.

Even now, it seems that the young Cameron lacks the inner authority to rule effectively—not ten years from now, not twenty, not thirty years from now. We will have no choice but to gut the Star League once and for all.

—From the personal diary of Takiro Kurita, entry dated June 2751

GUTTING OF THE STAR LEAGUE

Many accounts portray Lord Kurita as the villain who orchestrated the fateful events following the Council Lords' appointment of General Aleksandr Kerensky as Regent and Protector after Simon Cameron's death. The theory is that Takiro Kurita managed to persuade the other four Lords into passing the new rules and laws that pushed the teetering Star League over the edge. Each of the Council Lords was willful and strong, however, and so we must assume that they equally share the blame.

Their first major action was to pass an amendment to Michael Cameron's Edict of 2650, which had limited the size of Household Armies. This new amendment allowed the five Lords to legally *double* the size of their own personal militaries. In truth, this was a mere formality, for every one of the five House Leaders had begun a military build-up almost from the day after Simon Cameron's death. Believing that troubled times lay ahead, each believed he had the right to increase security for his own House.

The next year, the Council Lords passed another edict that raised the taxes levied on the Territorial States. It also gave each Lord a greatly enlarged chunk of the League's revenue. In the Draconis Combine, there were different reactions to the news. The few commoners who might have chanced to hear a rumor probably shrugged at the greed of the upper class. Of course, they would not voice such thoughts aloud. That might leave a person cold and dead, his head stuck to the point of a *jitte* and placed in a rice paddy as a warning to others. The upper classes and newly prosperous merchants eagerly anticipated the boost to their realm's economy and stature. The propagandists, of course, had a field day portraying this event as yet another proof of the Kurita dynasty's obvious superiority as leaders of men.

MISPLACED TRUST

Is it villainy to take advantage of a situation? Better to keep silent and prepare for the inevitable than to speak and grow weak.

—Minoru Kurita, in his speech broadcast by State Holo Channel 5, in 2771

Richard Cameron's accession to the title of First Lord was the event that sealed the fate of the Star League, that noble experiment among men. Though he had spent the last ten years playing the role of an appreciative youngster trying to learn from his wise elders, a very hurt and petty young man had been hiding behind that serene appearance. He must have brooded over every insult, real or imagined, that the five Council Lords may have committed during the decade before he was old enough to claim his title.

When he finally did so, Richard Cameron vented all his pent-up anger in Executive Order 156. This order demanded that all five Council Lords immediately disband their private armies. Coordinator Takiro Kurita was said to have burst into a fit of uncharacteristic laughter upon receiving the order. For once united, the other Lords responded in such fury that Richard Cameron was forced to revoke the order.

In April of 2765, New Vandenberg and 17 other Periphery worlds revolted against the Star League. Ever since the death of Simon Cameron and the levying of new taxes against the Territorial States, violent dissent had been running high in the outer worlds. Though Kerensky complained that it was like trying put a lid on a volcano, he had no choice but to pull troops from the Inner Sphere and send them to the Periphery. Indeed, the rebellion of New Vandenberg and the other outer worlds only made official a war that had already begun.

Within a year, three-quarters of all Regular Army troops were in the Periphery fighting to keep the rebellion from spreading further. To protect and guard the safety of the Terran Member-State and the First Lord, General Kerensky suggested that only troops from certain trustworthy Lords be used. First Lord Cameron politely refused, stating that Stefan Amaris, ruler of the Rim Worlds Republic, had been kind enough to offer his own troops to guard the Terran Member-State.

From his own dealings with Stefan Amaris, Takiro Kurita knew him as a man hungry, even greedy, for power. Though Kurita did not particularly disapprove of that, he knew it meant he must watch Amaris carefully. That is just what Takiro did, drawing his own conclusions. He guessed that Stefan Amaris had learned to play on the idealistic and impressionable young Richard Cameron's ego. He also intuited that some secret agreement between the two was behind the huge influx of 'Mech regiments from the Rim Worlds Republic into the worlds around the Terra.

What Takiro had not foreseen was how swiftly Stefan Amaris would act when his troops finally outnumbered units of the Regular Army. In lightning attacks, Stefan seized Terra and then proceeded to seize all of its worlds. The attacks were so well-planned and so totally surprising that only a few pleas for help managed to make it out of Terra.

STEFAN THE USURPER

When news of Stefan Amaris's seizure of Terra and the execution of the Camerons reached Takiro Kurita, the Coordinator's immediate reaction was one of quiet acceptance. Personally, he felt that Stefan had made a terrible mistake, however. Killing the Cameron family would only bring more violence and would undoubtedly draw the wrath of General Kerensky on Amaris's head. Takiro also believed it would have been shrewder for Amaris to have taken advantage of the young Lord's admiration and trust to get anything he wanted from the Star League

—From *Fall of an Empire*, by Grenville DuSimpson, Tharkad Press, 3021

Takiro's quiet acceptance changed to anger when news reached him that his grand-nephew Drago Kurita and his family were still on Terra under the "protective custody" of Stefan Amaris. As Ambassador to the Star League, it was Drago who had been keeping Takiro up-to-date on recent events. When it had become clear that violence would soon erupt, Takiro had ordered Drago to leave Terra. Before he could do so, the planet was taken over by Amaris, who captured Drago, his wife, and his four children.

Takiro suffered heart failure a few days later. He lingered for a day, discussing political questions with his son Minoru and quietly whispering to his gathered family that he would soon be visiting their honored ancestors. He was an astonishing 121 years old when he died. Even after leaving this life, his wishes for the Combine would have an important effect on the coming events.

Minoru Kurita now assumed control. Because he was a more aggressive man, most expected him to attempt to rescue his relations by force of arms. Documents recovered by the Lyran Intelligence Corps and subsequently obtained by ComStar show that Minoru could not act as he wished, however. Takiro had apparently made a death-bed request of his son to handle the situation through negotiation and not violence. Though no doubt upset that he must stay his hand, Minoru deeply respected his father and knew he must honor his last request. Anything less would be a great loss of face for himself and the whole Draconis Combine.

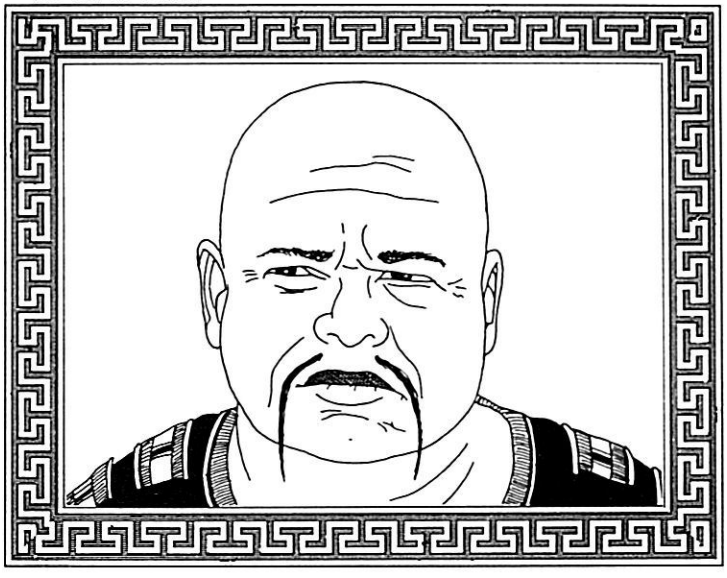
Some have speculated on how events might have turned out if Minoru had not been bound by his father's death-bed request. Had the aggressive Minoru felt free to throw his military against the still-winded forces of Amaris in an attempt to rescue his relatives, would the Kurita family have emerged as one of the heroes of this era instead of as the villain?

As it was, Minoru had to stand by quietly while Stefan Amaris sent him threats sugar-coated with jovial comments on the health and happiness of Kurita's grand-nephew and family. When Amaris asked for news of General Kerensky or for help in defending a border world, Minoru reluctantly gave Amaris whatever he needed.

No one will ever know exactly how much Minoru actively aided Amaris during the seven years of his war against the Star League. What we do know is that Minoru turned down a request from Colonel Bradley, commander of the 3rd Regimental Combat Team (the Eridani Light Horse), to use Kurita worlds as bases of operation for their attacks against Amaris forces. Some evidence also indicates that it was a member of the ISF who tipped off Amaris to the plans of the 3rd RCT's 19th Striker Regiment. Amaris used the information to ambush and destroy the 19th, one of the best units in the Regular Army.

It was more what the Combine did *not* do that angered the rest of the Inner Sphere. While the other states were allowing the Regular Army to pass through their realms and to use Star League bases, Minoru banned General Kerensky from entering the Draconis Combine. It reached the point that General Kerensky had to invade a portion of the Combine to get the use of several Star League facilities he needed to create a flanking front on Amaris. On Vega, Imbro, Styx, and Altair, Regular Army forces clashed with DCMS forces. To be fair, these confrontations were little more than token engagements in which the Combine forces retreated after only a few minutes of combat. The media of other Houses exaggerated these battles in their reports, creating even more bad feeling against Minoru.

Only after Kerensky and the Regular Army had reclaimed Terra did the public understand why the Coordinator had behaved so strangely. Despite Minoru's cooperation with Amaris, the Regular Army found Drago Kurita and his family dead in their rooms, apparently murdered by Amaris in the chaos just before the fall of Terra.



STEFAN AMARIS

INTO THE DARKNESS

Walk in a forest during the day and the sunshine makes the trees seem like a friendly presence. You feel happy. But walk in the forest at night and the trees remind you of prison bars. Why? Because the sunlight is no longer there to illuminate all that seems good in our experience. We are left to face only the dark side of our own nature.

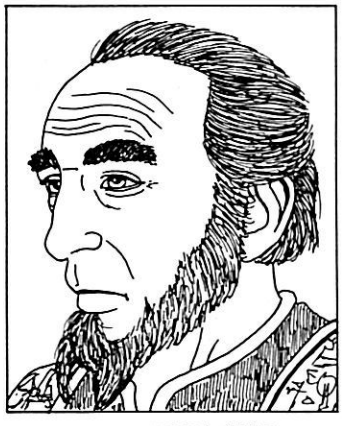
—From *Koans For a Modern Age*, by Jennifer Katsuyori, Gideon Press, 3000

When the five Council Lords gathered again on Terra in October 2780, they found very little on which to agree. They did manage to strip General Kerensky of his duties as Protector, much to Minoru's satisfaction, and sent him back to his army. The five also approved our sainted Jerome Blake as Minister of Communications. This proved to be the limit of their cooperation.

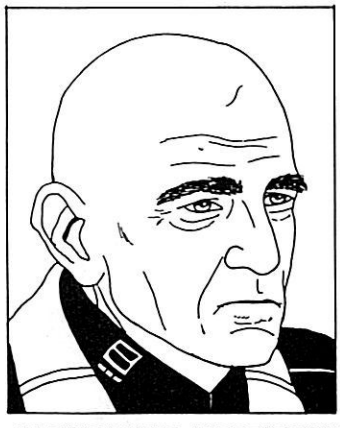
Their efforts to find a new First Lord quickly degenerated into chaos, with each of the five Council Lords trying to make deals with the others to get himself seated as the new First Lord. In August 2781, after months of mutual threats, pleas, and friendly and not so friendly efforts at persuasion, the Council Lords left Terra, never to meet together again.

Back on Luthien, Minoru Kurita began immediately to place his military on war alert. He also made expensive purchases of the few remaining loads of valuable natural resources available from the Terran Member-State and from some of the other realms before all the borders began to close.

Any non-Star League military units that had not been destroyed in the recent war suddenly became quite popular. Representatives from all five Houses began to court them with lucrative offers to join the cause of their respective Lords. There were even efforts to hire Regular Army troops as mercenaries.



JEROME BLAKE



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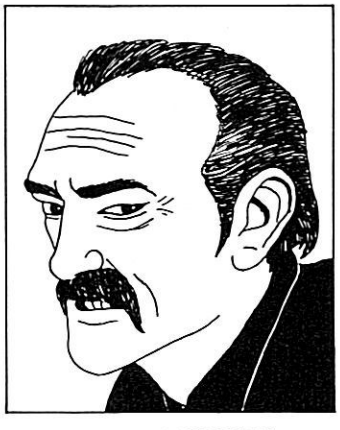


MINORU KURITA

THE 47 RONIN

Morning silhouettes.
Warriors stand ready—tense.
By noon, pained silence.
—Haiku by Coordinator Minoru Kurita

MASTERLESS WARRIORS

General Kerensky spent the four years following his dismissal as Protector trying to persuade the five Lords to reconvene the Council. He hoped, rather naively, that they would be able to resolve all their differences if they could only meet one last time.

Irritated by the aging war hero's persistent calls for peace, the Lords began to hint boldly that it was time for Kerensky to retire. At last, the General had no choice but to face the fact that the former Lords of the Star League's High Council had no real wish to ease the growing tensions among them.

In February 2784, General Kerensky summoned together his loyal officers on Terra, where he outlined his plan. Immediately after this meeting, the Regular Army quartermasters began to supervise a major effort to acquire over 200 transport JumpShips and an equal number of DropShips and liners.

Minoru Kurita heard about the surge of activity in the Regular Army. He read reports that League bases within the Draconis Combine were being stripped and the disassembled parts being packed up and moved out. He also became aware of the sudden heavy activity around New Samarkand, whose large Star League base and spaceport had suddenly becoming the center of tremendous traffic and commerce.

Though the reports made Minoru uneasy, he continued with his own plans for military buildup. Among his other secret initiatives during this time, the Coordinator sent a diplomatic mission to the Lyran Commonwealth with a proposal of importance to the Archon.

New Samarkand continued to be a hive of activity. By November, hundreds of freighters literally jammed the system's jump points. By late October, Regular Army fleets normally assigned to the Lyran Commonwealth, the Free Worlds League, and the Capellan Confederation were appearing in the New Samarkand system.

With growing alarm, the DCMS generals began to urge a complete war alert in the Draconis Combine, or at least in the Galedon Military District. There had already been two incidents of Kurita fighters being attacked when they came too close to the League orbital outpost above New Samarkand. Four eggs (Aero-Space pilots) had been lost, and the planet's population felt as though under a state of seige. Five days later, a 'Mech recon patrol from the Sun Zhang Academy was fired upon when it ventured too close to the League's base.

Minoru took no action in response to these incidents, and merely continued to stockpile equipment and supplies. His cryptic comment on the events in and around New Samarkand was that "masterless warriors tend to gather together before departing a burning castle."

Though this statement was inscrutable to most, hindsight reveals that the Coordinator at least suspected General Kerensky's intentions. In private, Coordinator Minoru must have been deeply concerned. His words about the Regular Army leaving could only have been based on a hunch that General Kerensky, like a true warrior, would rather exit the scene than face disgrace as a non-participant in future events. We can only wonder whether the legend of the 47 *ronin* haunted the Coordinator's dreams.

Evening stars prepare
to jump. Gray, sad warriors
leave for the unknown.

—Haiku written by Coordinator Minoru Kurita immediately after the exodus of the Regular Army, November 2784

The 47 *ronin* were faithful samurai retainers of a lord whose rival had tricked him into committing a serious breach of honor. To atone, the lord had to commit suicide. The 47 now-masterless *ronin* left the castle of their dead lord. Under the leadership of one Oishi Yoshio, however, they made plans to revenge their master's honor on the man who had tricked their lord into his death. One snowy night, all 47 *ronin* crept into the lord's manor, where they cut off his head and stuck it to the point of a spear. The 47 then paraded the gruesome prize back to the shogun.

The shogun now found himself in a dilemma. He greatly admired the 47 for their adherence to *bushido*, which required complete loyalty to one's master, even after his death. Indeed, the 47 quickly became a kind of ideal of what true samurai should be. The problem was that if the shogun allowed the 47 *ronin* to live, he would be rewarding a murderous vendetta that was clearly against the law (though everyone agreed their action had been morally correct).

In the end, the shogun decided that he must uphold the law, or else he would be creating a dangerous precedent by setting the 47 *ronin* free. They would have to commit hara-kiri, for which the 47 had been prepared from the start. Immediately afterward, they became martyrs in the tradition of *bushido,* earning a permanent niche in the arts and legends of the Japanese people.

Minoru Kurita knew that General Kerensky might consider it his duty to continue to serve his now dead master by attacking anyone who had been his enemy. If Kerensky were to seek vengeance, he would most certainly seek to wreak it against House Kurita first. Minoru did not doubt his own courage, but he did not think his forces could hold back the entire Regular Army.

In November, the Combine was abuzz with reports that General Kerensky and the bulk of his 'Mech regiments were mobilizing. Regular Army JumpShips were said to be heading toward New Samarkand. On that world, activity reached an even higher fever pitch as Regular Army troops began to load countless tons of supplies aboard the hundreds of freighters gathered there.

By now, Minoru's generals were convinced that Kerensky planned to use New Samarkand as the launching point for an offensive against the Draconis Combine. Once more Minoru restrained them. Despite his own private fears, he felt it would be ignoble to deny Kerensky's people their chance to leave gracefully and with honor—if that were, in fact, the General's true intention.

By late November, an estimated thousand or so freighters had gathered about New Samarkand. Indeed, the peasants of the planet would later tell their children and grandchildren how sunlight reflecting from the hulls and sails of Kerensky's fleet was as though "Lord Buddha had sprinkled the cosmos with a special gift of stars that burned and twinkled beautifully for a few months and then were gone."

THE FIRST SUCCESSION WAR

Many Draconions viewed General Kerensky's departure with great admiration. Though the Kurita propagandists had always portrayed the Regular Army as an undisciplined, uncouth, smelly horde, doing the will of a government drunk with power, that changed now. In the days immediately after Kerensky vanished with his followers, the Combine media began to describe them as true warriors who, after becoming masterless, gracefully and politely withdrew from the affairs of the remaining states.

Then the leaders of the Combine military learned the startling information that not all the Regular Army had left the Inner Sphere. One of the most notable exceptions was the famed Eridani Light Horse. Minoru immediately sent officers and diplomats to the 3 RCT's headquarters on Trondheim in the Rasalhague Military District.

The commanding officer of the Eridani Light Horse quickly dashed any hopes that the three elite 'Mech regiments would be eager to sign up with the Draconis military, however. Instead, Colonel Ezra Bradley stated that the Light Horse had no intention of entering into "the petty politics of five petty rulers." The three regiments would remain here to await the return of General Kerensky. Lord Kurita's representatives returned to Luthien with the news of Bradley's refusal, but it would be only the first of many meetings between the Draconis Combine and the famed Eridani Light horse. Most of the other Regular Army regiments that had chosen to stay behind were still in the region of the near-deserted Terran Member-State.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The Kuritans do not find much honor in hiring mercenaries, but they knew it was the only way to quickly build up their forces at this crucial moment. As the destined future rulers of all mankind, they would like to think that they do not need help. The second reason that the generals of the DCMS dislike hiring mercenaries is because they believe, and rightly so, that most mercenaries are not totally trustworthy. Only a few units such as the Eridani Light Horse or Wolf's Dragoons might be worthy of an employer's trust.]

Despite misgivings, the Draconis Combine did hire on several merc units during this time. The 52nd Heavy Assault Regiment, the 104th Striker Regiment, and the 28th Heavy Horse Regiment all signed contracts. Along with the 13th Republic Light Lancer regiment, a 'Mech unit from the forces of Amaris, the generals of the Draconis Combine now had more than enough unindoctrinated MechWarriors to worry about.

BUJITSU

If war is inevitable, then why wait for a formal declaration? Strike when you are ready. Pride heals far quicker for a victor.

—From *The Fall of Red Autumn Leaves,* by Minoru Kurita, 2794

Bujitsu is a specialty of the way of the warrior. It involves two opposing samurai kneeling before one other, their *wakizashi* sheathed but ready at their sides. A samurai skilled in *bujitsu* would be able to draw his sword and strike at his opponent with great speed and grace. Minoru Kurita saw the Draconis Combine and the Lyran Commonwealth as two such kneeling samurai. Now that the Commonwealth was a confirmed enemy, Minoru intended to apply his skills at *bujitsu* to strike the first blow.

In August of 2785, an Azami 'Mech battalion slipped across the border in unmarked medium 'Mechs to hit the undefended Commonwealth world of Bone-Norman that lay near the Periphery. Shocked at the possibility of an attack from the Periphery, the High Command of the Lyran Commonwealth Armed Forces shifted all its forces along the Kurita border toward the Periphery. This was exactly what Minoru Kurita had hoped would happen.

The DCMS struck at Trolloc Prime and Gram, worlds whose defenses had been significantly weakened. The lighter and more highly disciplined 'Mechs of the Kurita units had an easy time of it against the heavy, plodding tactics of the Commonwealth defenders. Within three months, the Draconis Combine claimed both planets for its own.

Though the Draconis military was prepared for a Lyran counterattack, it never came because of the Commonwealth's reluctance to be the first to openly declare war. Once they realized the attack would not come, the DCMS launched another invasion in June 2786.

BETWEEN TWO ENEMIES

Though *bushido* has been adopted to suit many different situations, the concept of courtesy toward one's enemy has always remained vital to a warrior's sense of honor.

Throughout history, there have been instances of a strong warrior facing an opponent who is ill-prepared to fight, let alone to die. In many such situations, the warrior would simply bypass his opponent, believing it a courtesy to ignore the other's weakness and to give him a chance to prepare for the next meeting.

On the other hand, the bypassed warrior would feel great shame because of his lack of composure and the fact that he was denied the chance to fight. He would do his best to improve himself for the next meeting. In this way, *bushido* encouraged weaker warriors to improve themselves so that victory in combat could occur between equally matched opponents and not because of an honorless conquest of the weak.

This courtesy also extends to large strategic actions, such as those of House Kurita during the early days of the First Succession War. The Combine military had exposed the Lyran Commonwealth for what it was: a realm made vulnerable by the incompetence of its military. Instead of pouncing, Lord Kurita decided to take on a much worthier opponent, the Federated Suns.

—From C*onsiderations Upon the Way of the Way of the Warrior,* by Professor Timothy Hudello, NAIS 3021

Disguised to resemble a freighter, a Kurita troopship slipped into the Skondia system. The Commonwealth system defenders never challenged the ship, even after all its DropShips had detached and begun a High-G burn toward the planet Skondia. The Kurita 'Mechs were allowed to make an unopposed drop on to the planet.

Instead of attacking the heavy industrial areas of the planet, which was what the Commonwealth defenders expected, the Kurita 'Mechs began to lay waste to the planet's cities. At this point, the commander of the planetary defenders ordered all his 'Mechs forward to challenge the attackers, but it was a bad decision. As soon as the defenders had moved away from the factories, a second wave of Kurita 'Mechs dropped from their still-unchallenged DropShips. This second wave totally destroyed many of the factories.

The Commonwealth defenders had failed to protect either the people of Skondia or its important factories. Indeed, it was the ease of this victory that led Minoru Kurita to decide that the Lyran Commonwealth was a weak opponent. So weak, in fact, that he could simply come back and take care of them later. Lord Kurita had other intentions at the moment, and they turned him in the opposite direction, toward House Davion and its Federated Suns.

THE SUNS MUST SET

The noonday suns burn
the dozing Dragon. He'll wake
when the suns must set.

—Battle haiku sent by Coordinator Minoru Kurita to all troops participating in the offensive against the Federated Suns

THE DRAGON STRIKES

Having proclaimed himself First Lord in late December of 2786, Coordinator Minoru Kurita felt it necessary to demonstrate the Combine's overwhelming strength. Because the Federated Suns was the only opponent that could be a real match for the Draconis Combine, Minoru gave his son permission to begin planning a major offensive against Davion.

To cleverly disguise his plans, Warlord Jinjiro Kurita used the high state of alert in the Galedon Military District still in effect since Kerensky's exodus. He guessed correctly that the Federated Suns had grown accustomed to all the heavy traffic in that region of space. To mask the arrival of Kurita regiments from the Steiner border onto the Davion border area, he ordered all troop transports to pass through Galedon first before dispersal to staging areas along the border.

The ISF, meanwhile, had managed to discover that the commanders of the Federated Suns were currently preparing an offensive against the Capellan Confederation. To stiffen the strength of the invasion, House Davion was pulling units from the Draconis March for reassignment elsewhere. That left the remaining units with an area far too large for them to effectively defend.

By the spring of 2787, Jinjiro had massed over 50 'Mech regiments and accompanying lesser units on the Davion border. Because his plan depended so much on the element of surprise, he gave his troops surprising orders when some premature clashes occurred on the planets Saffell and David. In both instances, he commanded his men to fight with an absolute minimum of units. Even if it meant losing these border clashes, it was imperative that Davion not learn that the Combine had massed more than a third of its military along their mutual border.

HEAVEN'S GATE

Second in importance and political power to Coordinator Minoru Kurita during this period was his son Jinjiro. Born to a concubine on Luthien, Jinjiro had spent much of his early life at the center of hot political wrangling.

Though his mother's given name has been lost, it was customary for a concubine to have an adornment-name, and hers was Heaven's Gate. A native of the Rasalhague District, she was apparently a beautiful woman whose non-Oriental features made her popular in the *ukiyos,* or pleasure districts, until Minoru bought her contract. After Jinjiro was born, Heaven's Gate used every persuasive art she knew to get Minoru to officially adopt the child, making him the legal heir. So great was her desire to see her son become the next Coordinator that perhaps there is truth to the rumors that she spiked the food and drink of Minoru's wife and other mistresses with an abortion powder. Minoru did eventually recognize Jinjiro as his son and heir. Jinjiro was already ten years old by that time and Minoru's wife, Yvonne Toshi, was six months pregnant.

Soon, many in the Court were whispering that the Coordinator had been bewitched by his concubine. Whether or not that was true, Yvonne Toshi did not like recent developments concerning the son of Heaven's Gate, and so she had her pushed off the parapets of Imperial City one dark night. When Jinjiro discovered the twisted form of his mother the next morning, she was still alive. It was almost as though she had hung on, hoping that somehow he would find her, for she died there in Jinjiro's arms. Legend says that the weeping of Heaven's Gate can still be heard at certain times among the chambers of the palace concubines.

Perhaps it was the trauma of having to watch his mother die so suddenly and so horribly that began to gnaw away at Jinjiro's sanity. The pain and shock may have been just enough to push a sensitive boy along the road to madness and atrocity.

Though he grew up to be an unstable, violent man, Jinjiro Kurita was also a skilled military strategist. He carried out some brilliant actions against the Steiner military in the late 2780s, which affirmed his own private belief that House Steiner was too weak to be a worthy target at the present time.

—From "Analysis of Childhood Factors on the Personality of Jinjiro Kurita," Internal Bulletin by David Morgenthau, Director of the ComStar Psychopolitical Archives, Terra

In May of that year, the Kurita Dragon rose up to strike hard at the forces of the Federated Suns. Though the Kuritans were attacking all along the border, the main focus of the invasion was the Tannil-Cussar region, where a total of 15 'Mech regiments were concentrated.

The surprise attack caught the forces of the Federated Suns completely off-guard. In the initial chaos, the defenders received conflicting orders to make an orderly retreat and to stand and fight. In the confusion, some regiments stayed and others pulled back, creating gaps in the front. One such instance occurred when the Syrtis Hussars stayed on Galtor III while the 23rd Heavy Assault Regiment (a mercenary group from the Regular Army) pulled back from Marduk.

The officers of the DCMS were not slow to take advantage of the situation. In a month's time, the elite 1st Sword of Light, commanded by Jinjiro Kurita himself, had arrived on the Davion world of Franklin. Minoru, at the head of the 3rd Sword of Light, was on Cartago. Their general strategy was to engage the enemy and to cut off their escape by destroying the Davion JumpShips and DropShips. Once the enemy was stranded, a large assault force would land to severely wound the Davion ground forces, but not to totally destroy them. That accomplished, the assault force would move on to another planet while a lighter force arrived to slowly take the defenders apart.

The strategy was working well, as Kurita spearheads gobbled up worlds with astonishing speed. By 2792, the forces of the Draconis Combine had penetrated as far as Imbrial III, Kestrel, and Saunemin. Though they had to contend with some stubborn resistance—at Galtor III, for example, deep to the rear of the advance—the Kuritans had little doubt that they would reach their objective, New Avalon, the capital of the Federated Suns.

One of the first effects of the successful Kurita campaign in progress was that the military of other Houses adopted their strategy of "planet-hopping." As on Cartago, this involved stranding a planet's defenders, leaving them to be mopped up at the attacker's leisure.

The other effects were less obvious, though just as important. One was the immediate shift in the attitude of the other Houses toward the Draconis Combine. There were even discussions among the highest councils of the Commonwealth, the Free Worlds League, and the Capellan Confederation about the possible wisdom of allying with the Dragon.

Though the Commonwealth certainly had no love for House Kurita, they were giving serious consideration to a mutual nonaggression treaty. The idea was ultimately too repellent, and so the Lyrans decided to redouble their efforts to shape up their own military while the Draconis Combine was busy harassing the Federated Suns.

The leaders of the Capellan Confederation, on the other hand, were eager to join with the Draconis Combine. They had long suffered beneath the weight of the Federated Suns and gladly welcomed the possibility that Kurita might bring Davion down. The fact that the dominant culture of the Draconis Combine was similar to the Confederation's quasi-Chinese traditions made the prospects of an alliance all the more appealing.

As for the Free Worlds League, they would probably never have given an alliance with the Combine much thought except that they wanted to see their traditional Steiner enemy vanquished. The leaders of House Marik believed that the Combine military would turn back toward the Lyran Commonwealth when they were done with the Federated Suns.

Of the three, only the Capellan Confederation actually put forward a proposal. With House Kurita riding so high on their military successes, the Coordinator flatly rebuffed the Liao diplomats, however. Instead, Minoru proposed that Liao join with him unconditionally in an immediate offensive against the flank of the Federated Suns. That effectively cut short any further discussion of an alliance between the Capellans and the Draconis Combine.

KENTARES IV

Mist-covered mountains
Move in and out of vision.
Real or just fog dreams?
—Haiku found upon the body of Minoru Kurita

By the beginning of 2796, the Kurita offensive had reached the Davion worlds of Odell, Saginaw, and Delavan. They were now just a few tantalizing light years away from New Avalon. Indeed, several raids had already been conducted against the capital of the Federated Suns. Victory seemed sure.

Minoru decided that it was time to halt the offensive long enough for his men to get some rest. He also wanted some of the heavier units to go back and clean up the pockets of heavy resistance they had bypassed. Warlord Jinjiro disagreed bitterly with his father, saying it was not good to give the enemy a chance to rest and regroup. An offensive is nothing if it does not constantly drive forward, he insisted.

Minoru, now 91, must have been weary enough of fighting and killing. With the end of life now so near, he no longer felt the same drive toward conquest, glory, or fame that fueled the battle lust of younger men. He ignored his son's advice.

Then, in March 2789, the offensive suffered a rather humiliating defeat. New Rhodes III, a world neighboring Terra and on the extreme edge of the offensive, had been taken by the DCMS early in the war. Though they had attempted to subjugate the civilian population, it was proving more difficult than expected. Indeed, the civilian populations of all occupied Davion worlds were showing remarkable stubbornness. Added to this was a still active guerrilla force of 'Mechs on New Rhodes III.

By the beginning of 2789, however, the commander of the Kurita forces believed that he had finally crushed all guerrilla resistance on Rhodes. The planet was now assigned to be a major depot for supplying Kurita troops in the immediate area. The Kurita commander immediately began to stockpile massive amounts of weapons and ammunition in every open space of the world's main spaceport.

To impress upon the unruly civilian population that the Dragon ruled, the Kurita commander had planned a parade. After gathering much of the sullen civilian population on the tarmac of the spaceport, he began marching his forces past them. As the shiny troops, tanks, and 'Mechs paraded past, however, a small force of Davion BattleMechs, led by Captain Conrad Warrent, rose from the river at the spaceport's edge. When Kurita forces that had not yet entered the parade attacked them, the Davion 'Mechs jumped their way into the piles of arms and ammunition.

In the ensuing battle, a thousand tons of supplies were lost, as well as many Kurita tanks and 'Mechs. A local news crew had managed to secretly record the whole scene. They managed to smuggle the tapes offworld, too, which resulted in the story of the Combine's humiliation spreading throughout the Federated Suns.

It was because of the debacle at New Rhodes that Coordinator Minoru and the 6th Sword of Light 'Mech regiment had to make its way to Kentares IV. The loss of supplies on New Rhodes had stalled the Kurita forces' efforts to beat down elements of the 7th Crucis Lancers on Kentares. The Combine was now in danger of losing the planet completely.

Landing there in early summer, Minoru's units were besieged almost immediately by the aggressive and creative tactics of the Davion regiment. Using sheer weight of numbers, Minoru forced his opponents onto a single continent. By late summer, he had nearly encircled them.

Outside New Snowfield, a small town nestled in the Carmelite Mountains, the Coordinator met his fate. Unable to pass up a chance to gaze upon the incredible scenery, Minoru left his *BattleMaster* and went on foot to the sunny alpine meadows, accompanied only by his lance members, a few guards, and a Buddhist priest. There the Coordinator and the priest sat among the trees, talking privately.

No one saw the camouflaged sharpshooter from an infantry unit attached to the 7th Crucis Lancers as he made his way down the mountain. The shot from the sniper's laser rifle caught the Coordinator in the back.

As he lay dying, the Minoru whispered something to the those gathered about him. Those words are lost to posterity, for Minoru's companions never betrayed their leader's trust. Meanwhile, the sniper managed to slip back up the mountain in the confusion, apparently not realizing whom he had killed.

THE MASSACRE

Smoke rises from ruins.
Our 'Mechs destroy and spit death
at innocents. Shame.

—Haiku found on the body of a Kurita officer who committed suicide during the Kentares Massacre

When some of Warlord Jinjiro's officers heard of the Coordinator's death, only the bravest, Talon Sergeant Richard Tobiason, dared to bring Jinjiro the news.

As he listened, Jinjiro remained calm, however. His only response was to call to him his aide, General Dazai Sorai. A few moments later, the new Coordinator left his office alone. On the way out of the command post, he ordered that Talon Sergeant Tobiason be promoted to Colonel and that some one clean up the mess in his office.

What the other officers found in Jinjiro's office was the disemboweled body of General Dazai Sorai, whose his head lay on the floor nearby. Jinjiro had apparently been enraged that General Sorai had lacked the courage to report the news of Minoru's death. He ordered Sorai to commit hara-kiri, and gave himself the honor of the beheading stroke. [EDITOR'S NOTE: hara-kiri means "happy dispatch" as well as "belly cutting."]

It was an eerily calm Jinjiro who boarded a JumpShip, accompanied by a regiment of the Sword of Light. This strange Jinjiro must have been even more frightening than the man of violent outbursts whom they had come to know so well. When Jinjiro Kurita arrived on Kentares, there was more bad news. A Davion force from across the front on Sonnia had rescued the remainder of the 7th Crucis Lancers.

A few days later, Jinjiro gathered together all his commanding officers on Kentares and gave them one curt order. "Kill them all," he said quietly, still calm. When one of the officers attempted to ask Jinjiro for further explanation of the order, Jinjiro ordered that the man be shot by his *Otomo*, members of the palace guards who serve as personal bodyguards for the Kuritas. Without another word, the remaining officers left the tent.

During the next five months, Kurita units on Kentares dispersed across the planet and began to systematically kill every citizen of the planet. The mass executions were accomplished by rounding up as many as possible in the cities, then using 'Mechs and vehicles to hunt down the rest. It was during the second month of this hellish activity that the Kuritans' military discipline began to waver. No matter how deeply indoctrinated with stoicism and obedience to the ruler, the duty of killing hundreds of people day after day was beginning to take its toll on the ordinary soldiers. Some were deliberately allowing groups of Kentares citizens to escape, and there were even reports of officers beginning to do the same. Soldiers had also begun to commit suicide because of the atrocities.

For Jinjiro, the thousands killed were no more than a number. To revive the sense of horror that his soul seemed to crave, he began to attend the executions. He even forbade the use of modern weapons at those he witnessed, preferring to see his victims beheaded by the sword.

When Jinjiro had satisfied his revenge enough to leave Kentares in February 2797, he left behind a silent world plunged in grief. His men had massacred more than 90 percent of the planet's civilian population, amounting to some 52 million men, women, and children.

Among the dead was the Buddhist priest who had been talking with Minoru Kurita just before his death. When the priest came to Jinjiro to try to stop the genocide, Jinjiro stabbed him and left his body to rot with the rest of the victims of his rage.

BLOOD FEVER

Military indoctrination courses are required of all raw recruits entering the military. These courses, usually consisting of speeches, films, and discussions, attempt to drill into each potential soldier why and for whom he is laying his life on the line. Though every Successor State uses this time-honored military technique, that of the Draconis Combine is by far the most exhaustive.

Though every Combine citizen knows the current line of propaganda chapter and verse, the recruit is treated as though totally ignorant of his realm's history and destiny. In addition to rigorous physical training, he must endure a political and mental training that is every bit as demanding and has its own share of accidents and casualties.

Those who crack under the mental strain are automatically mustered out of the military. Indeed, the ISF will now keep them under almost continuous surveillance because their failure in indoctrination marks them as permanent security risks. Many who are booted out of the military in this way commit suicide soon after.

The remaining recruits become so steeped in political dogma and the belief in the infallibility of their superiors that they are generally incapable of independent actions on the battlefield. The old saying that a Kurita soldier is about as independent as a pebble in a rockslide is exactly the state of mind the Kurita officers want in their men. It is true that a soldier who obeys orders to the letter may never take the initiative, but neither will he rebel.

This extreme tendency to bottle up emotions and urges at times causes virtual explosions of mental frenzy. Known as the "Berserker Syndrome" or "Blood Fever," the condition also breaks out among the militaries of other Successor Houses, but Kurita soldiers seem especially prone to it.

The Kentares Massacre is the most obvious example of this bloodlust. When ordered to murder the entire population of Kentares IV, most Kurita soldiers resisted the idea at first. Indeed, it took the execution of several Kurita troopers to guarantee that the order was carried out at all.

Once the killing started, however, the participating soldiers began to do the work with more and more speed. It no longer mattered to them *what* they were doing; all that mattered was to see the job done. Many soldiers, particularly those in the lower ranks, went on a virtual frenzy of killing. They nearly gave up resting, eating, and sleeping. All that slowed these men was the lack of ammunition and the time it took to hunt down their "targets."

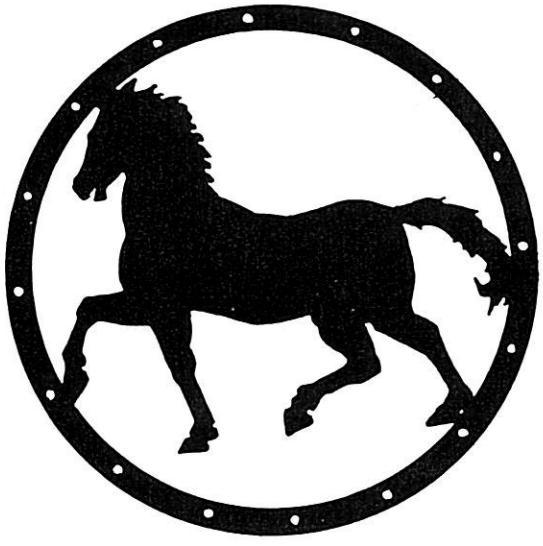
One soldier who succumbed to this form of group madness said it best. "The people of Kentares no longer seemed human to me. They became mere objects, and I felt kilometers distant as I watched them fall beneath my laser rifle. It was more like trying to mow down an endless sea of flesh-colored grass that moved, parted, and made funny noises when I pulled the trigger."

Of course, many of these soldiers eventually shook themselves free from this mania. Some managed to cope with what they had done because of their strong political beliefs and loyalty. Others were not so lucky, and many committed suicide during and immediately after the Kentares Massacre.

—From *Mob Psychology In Military Matters,* by Major-General Trevish Bradley (Ret.), ComStar Publications, 3002

The news of this atrocity spread when the ComStar representative on Kentares, in an understandable breach of our laws, broadcast the news of the massacre at the first possible opportunity. Soon the entire Inner Sphere knew what Jinjiro had done.

As a result of the massacre, the Eridani Light Horse decided to leave the Draconis Combine in June 2798, a move not easily accomplished. Hoping to force the unit to remain in the Combine, a planetary official on Sendai held the dependents of two battalions of the Light Horse hostage. When the Light Horse failed to surrender, all the hostages were killed. The battalions, the 8th Recon and the 50th Heavy Cavalry (later nicknamed the Bloody Half-Hundred) dropped on to Sendai and wreaked a horrible vengeance. When it was done, the entire Eridani Light Horse left the Draconis Combine and entered the Free Worlds League.



RISING SUNS

To hell with their blasted haiku. All I'm concerned with is seeing them maimed, mutilated, and destroyed. I don't care if they write poetry. They're butchers plain and simple, and I don't give a rat's ass that we might be related.

—Abe Naganori, Captain in the Federated Suns Regular Armed Forces

The sheer enormity of the Kentares massacre paralyzed House Davion with numbness for a time. As their minds slowly worked their way around the facts, anger began to well up in the souls of the people of the Federated Suns.

It was not long before Davion troops were launching spontaneous offensives against Combine forces. Though fueled by emotion rather than tactics and strategy, these attacks often succeeded. Affected in their own way by the news of the massacres, the Kuritans retreated in the face of the Davion assaults.

The commanding Davion generals at first tried to halt these independent actions by their troops. As reports of the successes of the attacks began to arrive, however, the Davion generals decided to take advantage of the situation. By the end of 2798, the Kurita presence had been pushed back from New Avalon. Streator was now the closest the Combine could come to the capital of the Federated Suns.

Jinjiro, for once totally unable to come up with a brilliant strategy, fell back on the Kuritans' traditional defensive strategy: wave attacks and fighting to the last man. This quickly proved inadequate.

Troop morale in the DCMS was at an all-time low. Though many Kurita soldiers accepted the Kentares massacre with a disciplined blandness, the news did instill many others with feelings of guilt. This, of course, affected the efficiency of the Kurita troops. Many soldiers and even a few MechWarriors simply surrendered in order to defect to the other side.

What the Federated Suns would learn from these defectors became the core of a new intelligence-gathering structure to ensure that the Federated Suns would never be caught off-guard again.

MILITARY REALITIES

It quickly became obvious even to the psychotic Coordinator that his actions on Kentares had given the soldiers of the Federated Suns the inspiration they needed to turn back the Combine's assault. Jinjiro no longer had the capture of New Avalon as his objective, but merely to hold onto what he had won. Even that now seemed doubtful.

Many in the DCMS, including Jinjiro, were beginning to rue their earlier decision to ignore the weak Lyran Commonwealth. In their efforts to appear strong by defeating the powerful House Davion, they had forgotten that House Steiner possessed some of the richest worlds in the Inner Sphere. Now, with most of their forces committed to trying to hold onto gains in the Federated Suns, the Combine could launch only sporadic invasions and raids against the Commonwealth.

No matter how sporadic their efforts, the Kurita forces did manage to seize such Steiner planets as The Edge and to cripple many Steiner industries with their raids. Indeed, this was to become the pattern of the later stages of the First Succession War. Especially for the Draconis Combine, which was trying desperately to hold onto their gains, seizing territory become secondary to trying to hurt the enemy by simply destroying him.

This fighting style suited the Draconis Combine quite well. Using battalion-sized 'Mech units, backed up by aerospace and warship support, the Combine launched deep raids against both its opponents. Though the raids were particularly effective against the Commonwealth, the Kuritans failed in their efforts to destroy the huge Lyran BattleMech facilities on Hesperus II.

Because of the predominance of heavier 'Mechs in the Lyran Forces, the Commonwealth forces were not as able to use this quick raid-and-destroy strategy. The Stealths and the Tamar Tigers, two Steiner units who did have the capability to move fast, carried out many successful raids against the Draconis Combine. Some of the important worlds they managed to hurt were Benjamin, Styx, and Dieron. Even after the Kuritans managed to ambush and destroy the Tamar Tigers on Benjamin in 2794, the Commonwealth found ways to continue some of its raiding.

COLLAPSE

Threats of fire spark courage.
Kurita warriors can't
retreat or be burned.
—Haiku orders from Coordinator Jinjiro, 2809

By 2808, the forces of the Federated Suns had pushed the DCMS back to the border between the Crucis and Draconis Marches. Though Jinjiro Kurita had attempted every possible means to motivate his men, including execution and torture, he was unable to ignite the spark that had inspired them in the early days of the offensive.

Now it was the turn of the Federated Suns to take back their worlds by launching swift attacks against Kurita JumpShips and DropShips, stranding the Kurita ground forces. Soon both sides were experiencing difficulty in finding enough JumpShip transportation to move their forces about. Taking a cue from the Lyran Commonwealth, each House seized commercial JumpShips and pressed them into military service.

House Davion launched a major counteroffensive in late 2808. Drawing reserves from the interior of the realm and from the border with the Capellan Confederation, the generals of the Federated Suns concentrated these new troops on either side of the front. Launched simultaneously, the two attacks were an attempt to squeeze off the "Kurita Bulge." One drive was launched from Caselton, with attacks aimed toward Kentares, Johnsondale, and Olancha. The other drive started from the Rowe area, with attacks aimed at Barlow's Folly, Udibi, and Cassias.

These attacks overwhelmed the Kurita defenders on most initial target worlds. Along with the efforts to win whole planets, House Davion was also launching small unit raids against supply centers deep behind enemy lines.

When word got out of the new Davion offensive and its intentions, panic struck their foe. It started among the lowly Kurita soldiers in the peasant troops manning the most forward worlds. Fearing that they would be sacrificed and eventually trapped when the Davion offensive thrusts met to their rear, many abandoned their posts and made their way to the nearest DropShip. Nothing the officers did could cajole, threaten, or whip the courage back into these ordinary soldiers. In many instances, whole infantry regiments crowded around DropShips, clamoring to get in.

Aware that they could no longer count on proper infantry support, the Kurita MechWarriors suddenly became very cautious. They attempted no major moves and made only token efforts to provide defense.

While all this was going on, it gave Davion the time and freed units to launch a third offensive in 2811. This thrust was aimed directly into the teeth of the DCMS and had as its initial targets Clovis, Doneval II, and Le Blanc.

Kurita defenses crumpled in the face of the Davion offensive. With almost extrasensory timing, the defenses on other Kurita planets weakened and collapsed during this period. Faced with a rout, Jinjiro began to strip troops from the Combine's interior. He stationed them on the original Kurita-Davion border to provide a line of defense while trusted officers from his personal staff continued to attempt to create some semblance of fighting units out of the rabble.

DEVOTION THROUGH HARDSHIP

The war was by now beginning to put a strain on the civilian sectors of the Draconis Combine. After the military seized most of the commercial JumpShips, the Kuritan economy ground almost to a halt. Factories devoted to the production of purely civilian goods either converted to manufacturing for the military or else they closed.

The lower classes of the society were hardest hit, as in every war. On most worlds, the common people were the first to feel the shortages of essentials such as food, clothing, and housing. For these people, the rationing of food and water began six years into the war and remained partially in force until after the Second Succession War. Because the textile industry had to channel almost all available materials into the manufacture of uniforms, clothing for the average citizen had to be made from the cheapest cloth. The situation was similar for housing, too, with the added fact that the war destroyed existing housing at the same time it siphoned away building materials for new housing.

Into this misery came the propaganda that to sacrifice one's comfort, security, and health for the greater good was a worthy, honorable deed. There were numerous government-sponsored contests to promote the art of selfless giving and to hold up for praise those who best exemplified it. Though some might have questioned the war measures that led to so much scarcity, the ISF was efficient enough to nip in the bud any potential protest long before it could spread. Anyone who complained publicly was executed publicly in a particularly gruesome manner.

Blood sports first made their appearance in the Draconis Combine during this time. Though the early forms were gladiator-like contests between criminals—a diversion not unknown to humanity—the propagandists put their stamp of approval on it. These brutal spectator sports helped to channel off the resentment that might otherwise have built up to dangerously explosive levels.

—From *The Draconis Combine And Moral Entanglement,* by Professor Uverman Brav, Tharkad University Press, 2910

House Kurita would need every bit of its reserves. Elated by victory, the forces of House Davion came roaring after the panicking Kurita troops.

By 2818, the forces of House Davion had reclaimed Clovis and Doneval II, and continued to push their way forward. The Draconis Combine had managed to create a semi-effective line of defense. They had even managed a major victory against the Lyran Commonwealth by destroying the 54th Lyran Guards on Otho. Much chaos still reigned among the DCMS, however. So many officers had committed ritual suicide because of failed missions that the military hierarchy was becoming full of holes. To plug up the gaps, Coordinator Jinjiro issued an edict forbidding any officer to commit hari-kiri until such time as he could be spared.

In the meantime, cadets from the various military academies were being pressed into service long before their training was complete. Though some of these had their moments of glory, most created more confusion because of their inexperienced decisions.

The forces of the Federated Suns slowed as they approached the region near their original border. The speed with which the Kurita offensive had crumpled left many of the Davion regiments breathless from pursuing the evening's retreating forces. As a result, logistic lines for the Federated Suns were in a snarl. Freighters kept arriving at planets to resupply certain units, only to find that those units had already moved forward another jump. This left many Davion units down to their last cannon shell and with most of their 'Mechs in need of repair.

The second reason the forces of the Federated Suns slowed their advance was the knowledge of what would happen if they entered the Draconis Combine. The instant a Davion unit landed on a Combine world, they would have to face a whole planet of rabid defenders. From the highest MechWarrior to the lowliest Unproductive, every Kuritan would be honor-bound to sacrifice his life to rid their world of the invaders. For the moment, the Davion High Command preferred to concentrate on retrieving the worlds they had lost.

BLOWN BACK TO THE STONE AGE

War gave the shy winds
the chance to sing within
the empty cities.

—Anonymous haiku scrawled on the wall of a government building on Tannil

By 2821, most of the fighting had died down and an unofficial cease-fire existed between the Draconis Combine, the Commonwealth, and the Federated Suns. Though raids still occurred, these usually involved forces no larger than a 'Mech battalion and were aimed at either destruction or seizure of resources rather than invasion.

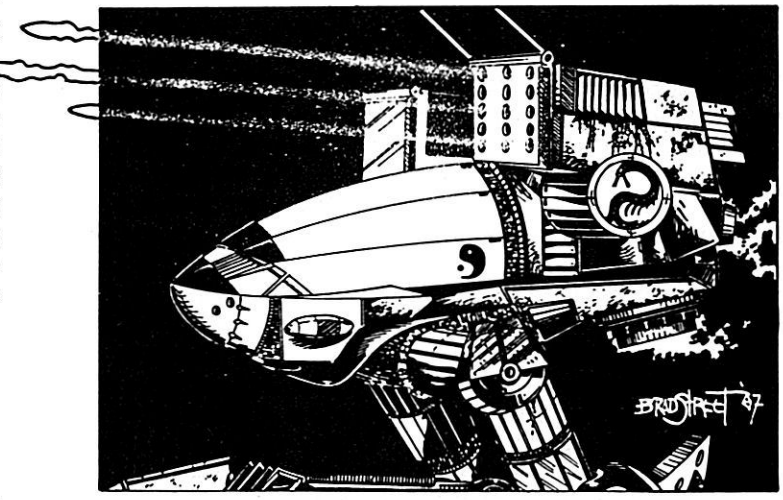
To take stock of the war's effect, Coordinator Jinjiro ordered a huge national census, whose purpose was twofold. First, it would measure the toll taken by three decades of fighting. Second, the census would identify the thousands of people who might have escaped the realm's usually meticulous record-keeping because of the war's chaos. The Coordinator was especially keen to see everyone accounted for and wrapped back into the legal straitjacket that is Kurita society.

Another consequence of the war was the loss to the Combine of all its major shipyards capable of manufacturing JumpShips. Only two shipyards survived the war because of their distant locations in the Pesht Military District. Some BattleMech manufacturing facilities were also destroyed, but the two major 'Mech factories on Luthien and Alshain had survived, as had several major subcontractors. The other Houses had suffered almost as much to their 'Mech production plants.

A particularly devastating result of the war was the loss of many water purification plants and the factories to build them. Once again, the availability of fresh water affected many important activities. Though the Combine wanted to rebuild industries, its leaders knew it would be futile in areas lacking enough fresh water for their needs. This forced the abandonment of some reconstruction efforts or the relocation of factories to planets deeper into the realm, which cost more in terms of money and time.

On the brighter side, the Draconis Combine had managed to acquire some territory. A total of 26 major planets had been won: 19 from the Lyran Commonwealth and 7 from the Federated Suns. Some of these worlds were prizes rich in natural resources. The government of the Draconis Combine used the acquisition of these worlds as proof that they had won the war. They wanted to blur from memory as quickly as possible the Kurita military's retreat from the forces of House Davion.

Of all the regions in the Draconis Combine, the Benjamin and Dieron Military Districts had been hit hardest. Both the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns had hit Dieron, destroying some 60 percent of the district's industrial capabilities.



PURGING

Lord Jinjiro Kurita was not well pleased with the overall performance of the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery, and was particularly ashamed of its virtual collapse in the Federated Suns. He also saw the need to review interservice cooperation, for its lack had resulted in the loss of several key battles.

Though Jinjiro was sorely tempted, he carried out only a relatively small number of executions. Instead, he demoted to the peasant soldiery those officers who had failed in their duty to the Draconis Combine. The few who had actually pleased the Coordinator were promoted, most going to the military academies to train the coming crop of officers.

Politically, the government of the Draconis Combine fared no better. Many district governors and civilian district leaders had shown poor foresight in preparing for the war and so had failed to provide enough protection to defend their resources from enemy attack. These dishonored politicians suffered fates similar to that of their military counterparts, and many ended up shoveling Thrax manure in the arctic wastelands of Kurita space.

SECOND SUCCESSION WAR

Caution in the quiet
summer twilight. War is peace
when enemies rest.
—Popular haiku propaganda

After the completion of his census, Jinjiro quickly organized reconstruction efforts. By nationalizing the few remaining private heavy industries and personally taking charge of the effort to rebuild several key weapons industries, he had control over his realm's industry and economy for the next decade. He considered the reconstruction to be a kind of war in itself, and demanded that everyone else view it the same way. When not overseeing construction or production, he could usually be found supervising the purification of the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery.

The formation of the People's Reconstruction Effort was one of Jinjiro's proudest achievements. The PRE became the ruling board and coordinating bureau of the government's various military, economic, scientific, and political reconstruction efforts. To head the PRE when he was not actively involved, Jinjiro appointed his half-brother Zabu Kurita.

Under Zabu's guidance, the PRE became a textbook example of what unity of purpose can accomplish. Zabu's official position as PRE Coordinator was second in importance only to Jinjiro himself. To assist him were five lesser coordinators, each more or less representing one of the pillars of the Draconis Combine.

Zabu's main focus of reconstruction centered on the preservation of knowledge. As a well-educated man, he had been horrified by the destruction of many universities, including his alma mater, Ashio University. As PRE Coordinator, he won from his half-brother the right to establish the PRE Academy on Dover, a planet in the Benjamin Military District.

The PRE Academy was to be staffed by professors and teachers who had lost their teaching posts to the destruction of war. The faculty would also include visiting industrialists, engineers, technicians, and mechanics from undamaged factories that could spare them to help others rebuild. The PRE Academy would attempt to preserve as much knowledge as possible by creating an enormous library and acting as a free consultation group for efforts to rebuild.

Though a noble and grand scheme, the Academy met opposition from both the military and the ISF even before it opened its doors. Those two agencies had grave reservations about how all this information was to be disseminated to anyone who asked. Zabu patiently explained that only corporations and groups whose loyalty was proven would be allowed to use the Academy's resources. It was not until Jinjiro backed his brother that the way cleared for the opening of the Academy.

SNAKES AND SNEAKS

Hey, as far as I'm concerned, those snakes could take a PPC cannon and ram it up their alimentary canals. They cheated us, starved us, then expected us to fight troops twice our size! They don't want mercenary units to fight for them. They want animated corpses who will follow their directions and walk into meat grinders.

—Captain Silvia Srec, commander of the mercenary Srec's Wrecks, commenting on their employment difficulties with the Draconis Combine, 2941

In 2825, the Paul Bunyon Regiment, a mercenary unit of MechWarriors from the Regular Army as well as from several Periphery realms, rebelled against the Draconis Combine. Stationed on the Kurita world of Zlatous, the unit had every reason to feel ill-treated by its employers. Though the Paul Bunyan Regiment had served as the rallying point for the retreating Kurita units of the Galedon District in the latter part of the war, the Office of Professional Soldiery Liaison (the department within the DCMS that handled relations with mercenary units) was not even bothering to pay the unit's salaries now that peace had come.

In 2822, the DCMS announced a new, totally optional system of procurement for mercenary units. On the surface, the system seemed quite fair. Instead of having to request supplies, the new system allowed an increase of the mercenary unit's pay so that they could buy supplies directly from the Procurement Division of the military. The Paul Bunyan Regiment, along with most of the other merc regiments in the Draconis Combine, agreed to the new system.

It did not take long for the regiment to realize that they had been conned. Their pay increase did not nearly cover the expense of buying supplies. As a result, the mercenary unit went deeper and deeper into debt to the Procurement Division. In an effort to work their way out of the situation, the regiment was forced to take on more and more missions. That, in turn, created a need for more supplies, which caused more debt, which created the need to carry out more missions, and so on.

In June 2825, the Paul Bunyan Regiment had had enough. Its units struck at warehouses on Zlatous, seizing what equipment it could for their weapons. Food warehouses were also a prime target, because most of the unit's members had been forced to cut back on their ration chits.

Though the ISF had taken note of the regiment's growing discontent, their violent actions did surprise the Kurita government. In reaction, Jinjiro ordered the destruction of as many of the mercenary unit's DropShips as possible, along with the capture and seizure of their JumpShip. He then ordered in the nearby 5th and 9th Galedon Regulars to punish the rebellious unit.

Deprived of a way off Zlatous, the Paul Bunyan Regiment dug in and prepared to face the coming Kurita force. It took the Kuritans two months to destroy the regiment, in the process laying waste to much of the planet. Some of the mercenary regiment did escape by seizing a Kurita DropShip and disappearing into the Periphery.

As a result of this incident, the Draconis Combine altered the way it handled mercenary units. It made the Company Store syndrome more subtle, so that it took a merc unit longer to sink into debt with the Combine. It also meant that it took longer before the unit realized what was happening. The DCMS perfected this system to the point where several mercenary units were eventually forced to sell themselves into the DCMS in order to pay off their debts.

Though the other Successor Houses do not necessarily treat mercenary units very well, none make such a concerted effort to subjugate their mercs. The Combine either ignores the needs of a unit to avoid having to squander its own precious supplies or money, or else it attempts to entangle the unit in a web of debt.

GEARING UP

Why break the peace? Because the First War solved nothing. Our fate, has yet to play itself out. Our destiny as rulers of the known universe is unfulfilled.

—From ComStar Interview #32 with Coordinator Jinjiro Kurita, April 2825

By late 2824, Jinjiro's mental health had deteriorated to the point that he was lucid and in control only part of the time. His maniacal episodes were increasing in frequency, duration, and intensity. Whenever the Coordinator showed signs that one of these fits was coming on, his aides immediately evacuated the Throne Room, locking and bolting it from without. Sometimes it was hours before the screams and ranting of the leader quieted enough that they dared to open the door again.

After several warlords and high-ranking members of the government had a doctor secretly examine the Coordinator during one of his dark periods, they learned that there was no cure for Jinjiro's madness and that he could be expected to go completely insane within the next decade or so. Jinjiro himself learned about the secret examination and the doctor's prognosis through the ISF, which was still loyal to him. Instead of immediately and characteristically ordering some bloody revenge, Jinjiro Kurita began to consider his options carefully and methodically.

He might have retired from rulership, or even committed suicide, but that would have left Zabu Kurita as his most likely successor. Because Zabu was more an intellectual than a military man, the generals of the DCMS did not think much of him. With so much depending on united efforts by the government and military, Jinjiro felt that it would be unwise for him to withdraw just then. Instead, he began to examine tapes of his psychotic spells. Even in his darkest moments, it seemed that he always managed to hang onto the single thread of directing the military.

The conclusion that Jinjiro Kurita drew from this self-scrutiny would rock and reshape the Inner Sphere yet again. His decision was to spend the next decade strengthening the Draconis Combine by using the one skill that seemed to transcend even his periods of madness. Jinjiro Kurita decided that he would start another war.

DIVINE WIND

Mission Elapsed Time—00:18:23.34

Glory to the Arm of the Dragon. Drop preceeding as planned. Heat shell cracked and pieces dispersed as expected, hopefully jamming the sensors of the Steiner military presence on Maetsu. The auto-Drop systems on the 'Mechs of my lance members seem to be working well. Only Unproductive Metsuko's *Stinger* is deviating off reentry path, but not seriously. Time to touchdown is two minutes, forty seconds. Expected to be within three kilometers of the Steiner water purification plant.

Mission Elapsed Time—00:25:02.23

Light flak bearing zero-niner-niner. Likely to be a couple of autocannons and a laser battery. They are not in path, and so have ordered lance to avoid and disregard. Unproductive Mitchell is having trouble remembering how to work the elbow joint of his *Phoenix Hawk* or else the actuator has failed. Tough to tell, because all the Unproductives' 'Mechs are such piles of guano...

Mission Elapsed Time—00:29:19.99

Just picked up blips of what can only be Steiner garrison 'Mechs. Computer estimates one assault, two medium, and one light in size. Trouble is they're right in our path. No going around. For the greater glory of the Dragon...

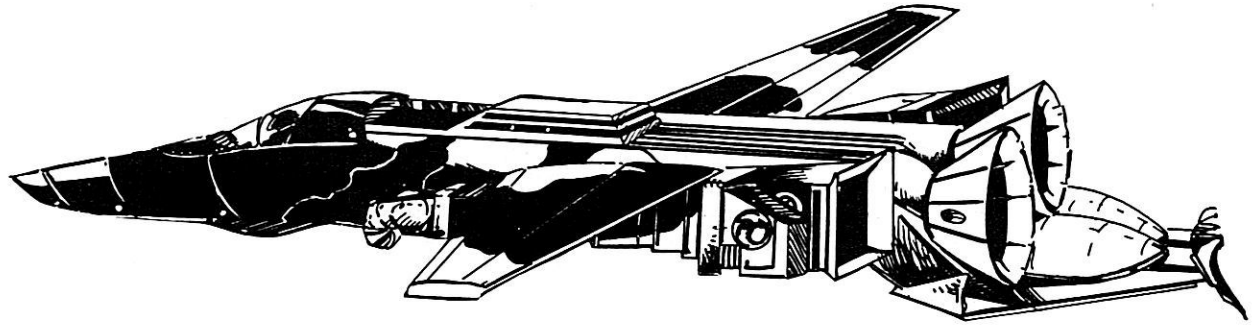
Mission Elapsed Time—00:31:23.32

Harrison? Pattern fire on my count. Group, on my count, execute the Dive-Drive Maneuver. Mitchell, Metsuko, and Harrison—you'll be the dives. Cover fire for one, and only one minute only. Rachter, you and I will be the drives. Remember, don't concentrate all your fire on just one opponent. Hit them all if you can to stun them into letting you drive past.

Hit your ChemCourage, group. What? Yeah, it's a hell of a way to win salvation. But just think, if you survive, you'll be heroes and citizens. Might even get to shake the Coordinator's hand. Ready? O.K., men, there they are. Dive, NOW! For the greater glory of the Dragon!

Mission Elapsed Time—00:33:36.01

—Transcript from Mission Log of Lieutenant Hevly Gomes, Lance Leader of Chain Gang 23 in the strike against the Lyran Commonwealth world of Maestu



CHAIN GANG MISSIONS

The fact that the Draconis Combine was willing to part with so many 'Mechs—however poor were the conditions of many of them—shows how important were the Combine's Chain Gang missions. Jinjiro intended that they would seriously retard and damage the reconstruction efforts of his neighboring realms.

For the most part, he got what he hoped from the three regiments of convicts, Unproductives, and misfit officers. These men and women received only rudimentary 'Mech training, with only a few lance formations and maneuvers for practice. Because so many were undisciplined, the pilots had to be strapped into their BattleMechs and given huge doses of ChemCourage, a favorite Kurita battle stimulant, before they would go on the missions.

Even with the incentives of freedom, citizenship, and money, many members of the Chain Gang Missions surrendered at the first sight of a Steiner or Davion 'Mech. On the other hand, many of these inadequately trained social misfits, in their inadequately prepared 'Mechs, actually completed their mission to lay waste to an industry.

On both the Davion and Steiner borders, the enemy had halted reconstruction efforts in favor of devising new security procedures to protect key targets. The Lyran Commonwealth lost four months and the Federated Suns lost two in the process. Kurita considered this a victory, despite the loss of so many BattleMech parts.

Though their superiors had promised the Chain Gang Mission members many rewards, the Kuritans never had the least intention of retrieving any survivors of a Chain Gang action. After the Kurita JumpShips and DropShips brought the teams in, they immediately left the system for good.

THE MINNESOTA TRIBE AND THE CHAHAR PROFIT

In late 2825, the Minnesota Tribe made its first appearance in the Draconis Combine with a raid on the world of Svelvik. This previously unknown 'Mech unit of nearly regimental strength showed considerable skill in besting the planet's meager garrison troops. Refusing any communications, they simply took what they needed, and then left Svelvik without further bloodshed.

What intrigued Jinjiro most in the reports of this unknown unit were that their impeccably maintained 'Mechs were freshly painted in Regular Army colors. It was Zabu who first noticed that the regimental patch was an outline of Minnesota, a geo-political domain in the North American region of Terra. What Jinjiro also learned from reports was that the regiment was apparently escorting a fleet of cargo, commercial, and liner JumpShips. This fleet, with their elite escorts, apparently had some definite destination and was using uninhabited star systems to reach it at a steady pace.

The mystery group, by now known as the Minnesota Tribe, next attacked Trondheim. Because it was a prefecture capital, the 20th Rasalhague Regulars were stationed there. The ensuing battle was striking for the way the mystery 'Mechs dealt with the Kurita 'Mechs in strict Regular Army formations and tactics. Once again, the mystery group refused all attempts at communication, to the point that pilots of destroyed Tribe 'Mechs killed themselves to avoid capture. The mystery fleet then jumped from the system, apparently headed for some uninhabited star system near Trondheim.

By now, the Kuritans believed that the Minnesota Tribe had to be a Regular Army unit, though they were not listed in any Regular Army order of battle. The possibility that the Minnesota Tribe might be an advance scout group raised the specter of the return of a very angry General Kerensky or his successor.

This made Jinjiro decidedly nervous. With much trepidation, he ordered the Rasalhague and Pesht districts to the highest state of alert. He also moved troops within these districts forward to the Periphery borders.

Meanwhile, the Minnesota Tribe struck Jarrett, again taking what they needed before moving on. This time the Tribe thwarted efforts to stop them when a large group of their AeroSpace Fighters intercepted and kept two battalions of Kurita 'Mechs out of the battle.

While House Kurita's attention was turned toward the Minnesota Tribe, the Lyran Commonwealth military took the Combine completely by surprise with a lightning raid on the Draconis Combine. What prompted the raid was the Combine's earlier capture of the Commonwealth freighter named the *Chahar Profit*. A grain ship destined for the starving population of the Steiner world of Chandler, the ship made a mis-jump that put it above Darius and under the guns of Kurita fighters.

To win back the freighter and to rescue its crew, Archon Marcus of the Lyran Commonwealth brought together the remaining members of the famed Stealth 'Mech regiment. With all of House Kurita's attention diverted toward the Periphery, the Stealth rescue mission worked like a charm, much to the embarrassment of the DCMS.

The Minnesota Tribe made one last attack against an inhabited Kurita world. About a week after Steiner forces succeeded in rescuing the *Chahar Profit*, the Minnesota Tribe regiment hit the Kurita world of Richmond with a vengeance. Though it was inconceivable that the Tribe could have known about the large prison and slave camps on the planet, their 'Mechs went straight for them. After easily overpowering the guards, they were soon freeing the many thousands of prisoners. Several DropShips then landed in the midst of the prison complexes to load up and transport all the freed prisoners offworld before the Kurita 'Mechs could arrive on the scene. Though no one realized it for quite awhile, the liberation of the prisoners and Unproductives on Richmond was the last time the Minnesota Tribe was seen in the Inner Sphere.

Both the Minnesota Tribe and the debacle of the *Chahar Profit* rescue took a heavy toll on the Kuritans' ability to control the thinking of their people. Though the government did its best to suppress accounts of the Minnesota Tribe, stories did spread, particularly through the lower classes. Like a vision of avenging angels, the Tribe had swept down to free political prisoners and members of the lowest class. The fact that everyone believed they were a Regular Army unit only added to their aura of offering divine assistance to the righteous and the poor.

These stories soon combined with accounts of the Commonwealth's rescue of the *Chahar Profit*. Like a slow virus, the dogma that the Draconis Combine was destined to rule the Inner Sphere began to show signs of erosion from within.

ROUND TWO BEGINS

My simple demand.
Submit and I'll spare your worlds
from the Dragon's claw.

—Haiku sent by Coordinator Jinjiro Kurita to the rulers of the other four Successor Houses, late 2829

The Minnesota Tribe incident and its corrupting effect on the lower classes forced Jinjiro to push up his timetable. In 2830, Kurita forces attacked the Commonwealth worlds of Chandler and Moore, while units on the Davion border went after Lucerne, Franklin, and Sahara V.

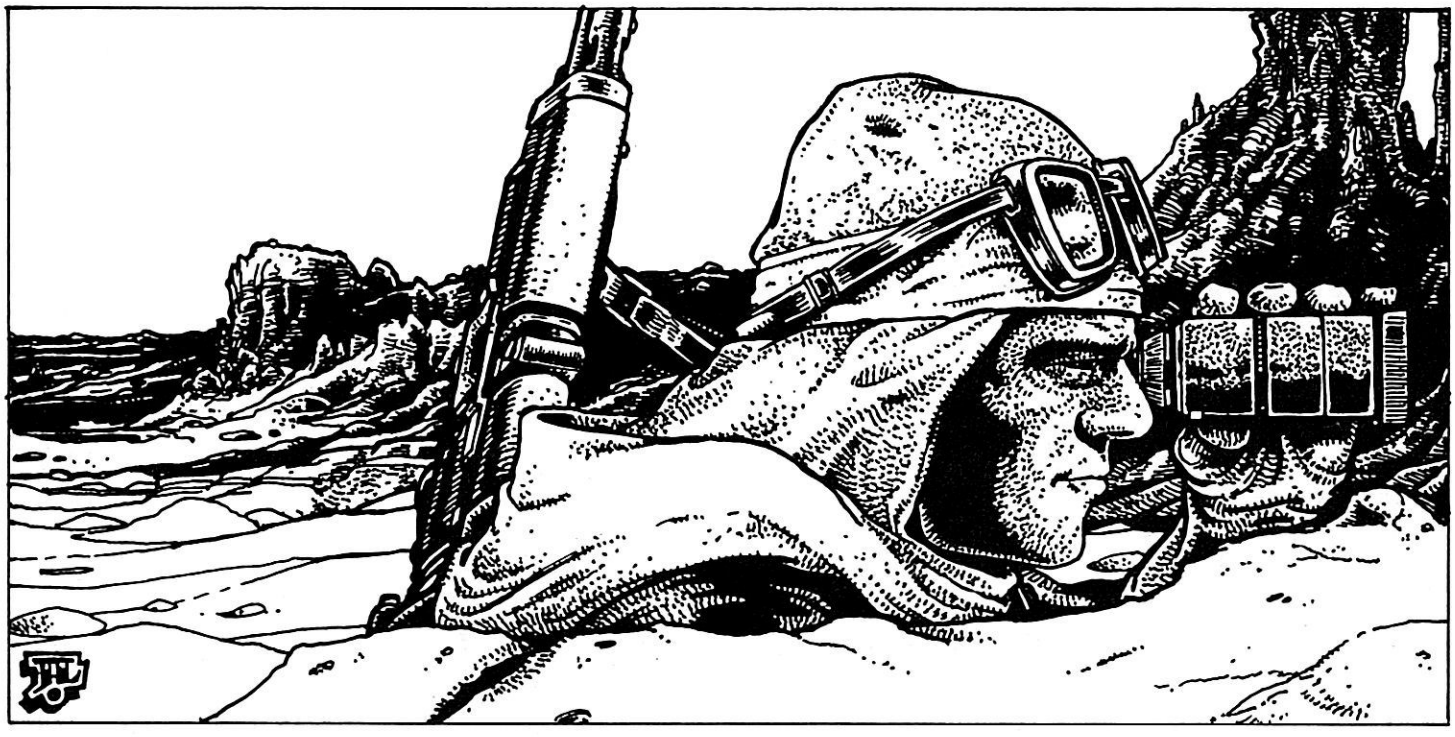
These invasion attempts were accompanied by smaller raids intended to keep the defenders of nearby worlds pinned down so that they would not be able to aid the target planets. Several deeper raids were also launched along both borders to assault major industrial centers.

THE DAHAR INCIDENT

Dahar IV was a world left relatively untouched by the huge Kurita offensive of the First Succession War. As a result, its level of industry and technology remained far above that of neighboring worlds, which had been well trampled by the boot of the Draconis Combine.

Dahar was General Chosokabe Motochika's choice for landing one 'Mech regiment and three lesser regiments. The Davion planetary garrison was headed up by a 'Mech regiment of Avalon Hussars. To the Davion commander's surprise, the Kuritans approached with a delegation carrying a white flag and General Motochika's message that he wished to surrender his troops and to defect to the Federated Suns.

Though the Davion commander was suspicious, the look of resignation in the General's eyes and the Kuritans' meekness at submitting to a physical search convinced him. Seeing that the surrender offer was genuine, the Davion commander ordered his men to disarm the Kurita soldiers and to seize control of their 'Mechs.



Agents of the Federated Suns had managed to ferret out at least part of Jinjiro's plans, however. When they attacked Lucerne and Franklin, the invading Kurita regiments found an equal number of Davion troops ready and waiting for them.

General Chosokabe Motochika, the Kurita commanding general of both invasions, saw that the chances of seizing these worlds were slim at the moment. He ordered a retreat off both planets, so that he could regroup his forces for another attack. Because of a lesser officer's error, the Coordinator never received the required request for permission to leave the planets. This breach of regulations was unforgivable, and the ranking Kurita officer was held responsible, no matter who actually was to blame.

Instead of returning to the border, where he would probably have been invited to commit hara-kiri, General Motochika suddenly announced that he was taking his three regiments of 'Mechs and a lesser regiment deeper into the Federated Suns.

As his troops moved out of their defensive positions, General Motochika's other two 'Mech regiments left their orbiting DropShips and dropped onto Dahar. That was the signal for the Kuritans already on the ground to pick up their weapons and begin fighting.

The stoic General Motochika calmly explained to the Davion officers that he had allowed himself to be the bait for this trap in order to atone for his sin of disobedience to the Coordinator. By sacrificing himself, he would restore the honor of his men, so that they might return to the Combine and perhaps keep their lives. The General then took a capsule from a seam in his uniform, swallowed it, and waited calmly for his own imminent death. His men, meanwhile, razed the planet Dahar to the ground. No longer was it a Davion world unscathed by war.

When Coordinator Jinjiro Kurita heard of General Motochika's action, he smiled and nodded. By his own order, General Motochika's troops were allowed to return to the Draconis Combine.

JINJIRO'S LAST YEARS

By the end of 2835, Jinjiro's mental health had so deteriorated that several of his palace guards now accompanied him everywhere to restrain him during his frequent psychotic episodes.

Yet, in his lucid moments, Jinjiro was still a great military strategist. His decision to maximize his strengths using search-and-destroy missions rather than invasions had proved to be sound. Particularly successful were his raids against Davion industries on Kestrel, Strawn, Sanilac, and Listowe. Against the Steiner foe, his raids on the Lyran worlds of Kessel and Kobe also showed the cleverness of his planning. Only Jinjiro's raid against the massive BattleMech facilities on Hesperus II had failed.

By now, Zabu Kurita was acting as the de facto leader of the Draconis Combine and was making most of the day-to-day decisions. Though Zabu showed Kurita shrewdness by building two new planetary supply centers into his budgets for the previous two years, there was increasing tension between him and the generals of the DCMS. The generals had always considered Zabu to be weak and soft, perhaps because Jinjiro's utter ruthlessness was such a dramatic contrast. As long as Jinjiro continued to have confidence in his half-brother's ability to rule, the generals had to remain silent.

No one knows who finally pushed Jinjiro permanently over the edge. What is known is that on February 14, 2837, a mysterious gift was delivered to the Coordinator's private rooms. A few minutes later, his loud screams and the thud of thrown furniture could be heard from behind his closed doors. Few took notice because such scenes had become so common of late. They could hardly take seriously his shouts that billions of corpses were coming to get him.

When the disturbance went on hour after hour, Jinjiro's family began to worry. His bouts of mania had never lasted so long or so intensely. Zabu finally ordered the palace guards, protected with riot shields and stun sticks, to enter the room.

Jinjiro attacked them immediately. Even though he was 90 years old, the Coordinator was a typically fit Kurita, trim and extremely strong. Jinjiro undercut one of the guards with a leg sweep, sending the guard to the ground with a broken knee. It took two hours to finally corner Jinjiro and control him.

Amid the rubble of the furniture, Zabu found a little doll dressed in the uniform of a Star League officer. This doll's cherubic features were so angelic, so unforgivably pure, that it is said even the well-adjusted Zabu felt uneasy. Who sent it or how it managed to slip past the many guards and examiners charged with protecting the Coordinator is still a matter of considerable speculation. Nevertheless, it was this little toy soldier that had apparently driven Jinjiro irrevocably mad.

Whoever sent it had done his homework well. From that day on, Jinjiro was permanently psychotic, plagued by the vision of that toy soldier. For four years, he spent his days either heavily sedated or in a featureless room screaming in terror. He finally died in July 2841, having fashioned a noose from his own clothes.

YOGUCHI KURITA

Of all the conspirators involved in the assassination of Zabu Kurita, only General Kozoma, the actual assassin, was executed. The others went unpunished. Though Kozoma's death was ordered by the Grand Inquisitor, some disputed the opinion. Technically, Zabu Kurita had committed hara-kiri.

The Draconis Combine was in a hurry to return to normal, however. With the confirmation of Zabu's eldest son, Yoguchi Kurita, most believed that a true Kurita was once again on the throne. Many were soothed by Yoguchi's first speech, which was filled with comforting words about how the Draconis Combine would one day rule the Inner Sphere and how that would require a supremely strong military.

To assert his ability to command the DCMS, Yoguchi planned and launched an immediate attack against the Commonwealth BattleMech facilities on Hesperus II. Though the two Kurita 'Mech regiments and five lesser regiments failed to destroy the factories, they did manage to come much closer to success than had any previous attack. This did wonders for Yoguchi's confidence and also for his standing among the Combine generals. Confident of his control over the government, Yoguchi allowed the action along both fronts to grow somewhat quiet while he began plans for a major new offensive.

It was also at this time that Yoguchi attached the ISF to the Draconis military, an action that pleased no one. The military, with as much reason to fear the ISF as anyone else, realized that it dare not attempt to exert its supposed authority over the Combine's secret police.

The ISF considered Yoguchi's move to be an insufferable insult. Ever since its formation, the ISF had considered itself to be the personal servant of the Coordinator. Its members had served loyally, always correcting their rare mistakes with brutal swiftness. To now be placed under the control of the military, which the *Metsuke* considered an inferior type of warrior, was interpreted as a sign that Yoguchi no longer considered their services of great importance. This rift between the ISF and the Coordinator was the beginning of a long, complicated, and fateful series of power struggles between the two.

THE NIGHT OF THE SWORD

I, General Frederick J. Kozoma, member of the DCMS High Strategic Council and the Procurement Evaluation Board, do hereby assert that what follows is a factual and account of what transpired on June 23, 2838.

My reasons for acting as I did are numerous and perfectly reasonable. After Jinjiro's illness forced that great leader to retire, Zabu assumed the throne.

Though I am sure he was an honorable man, Zabu lacked what has always made the Kurita family great—the desire to reduce his enemy to groveling at his feet. I doubt that Zabu even believed in the Kurita destiny. He certainly didn't show any such Kurita breeding when he issued the 2839 Budget.

My fellow generals and I couldn't believe it when we received copies of the budget. It called for a 4 percent cut in our military budget! I haven't the serenity of my more Japanese colleagues, and so I was unable to control my anger and displeasure.

Apparently I was not the only one who felt betrayed by Coordinator Zabu's actions. Three nights later, a group of my colleagues knocked at my door one evening. They had come to say that Zabu Kurita represented a clear and definite threat to the destiny of the Draconis Combine and that something had to be done about him before his pacifist policies spread further.

They appointed me to be the sword of their desire. The next night—last night—I concealed a special sword in my cloak. The sword was made of a special plastic that enabled me to walk through the metal and explosives detectors without incident.

I informed Zabu's secretary that I was there to deliver an urgent message of military importance. The fact that the secretary dared ask me if it could wait until morning confirmed the rightness of the deed I had come to do. Why, in Jinjiro's day, any man bearing important military news would have been ushered in immediately.

As it was, I had to wait some ten minutes in the corridor outside his door. When I finally entered, it was a shock to see one of his concubines lying among the rumpled sheets of his bed. Gods, Jinjiro would never have allowed a mere woman to stay a second longer than was necessary to service his needs—not that any of the concubines would have wanted to. This seemed one more proof of Zabu's weakness. He must have been one of those "perfume men". You know the type, the ones who actually lend a serious ear to what a woman might have to say.

All this so enraged me that I immediately drew my weapon. Seeing the sword did not effect Zabu as I had expected, however. He showed no fear, but only looked me in the eye and asked if I were acting alone or if I represented the other generals as well. When I told him that I was acting in accord with the views of most of the military High Command, he gave a slight nod.

He looked at my sword again, then got up and walked toward one of the room's walls. Half expecting him to call for guards, I was preparing to launch myself at him when he reached up and pushed a concealed button. A portion of the wall slid back, revealing an array of the most exquisite swords I had ever seen.

He reached up for one, smiling slightly. By now, I was certain that he was going to fight me personally. Feeling a bit outclassed by the sword he chose, an incredible blade that must have been an ancient Japanese antique, I prepared myself to die. Just then, Zabu turned and offered me the sword with a smile.

Shocked, I took the blade without saying a word. He then asked to be allowed to send his woman away. I agreed and watched with more puzzlement as he roused her, kissed her most lovingly, and sent her from the room.

I could not help but ask how he was able to accept his death so gracefully. It was far from what I had expected. Zabu replied that he was above all a Kurita and so viewed death in its proper light. He said, too, that it would have been ridiculous to try to avoid his death when his own military was dead set against him. No matter what he might do—purges, executions, and the like—he would always have to consider the DCMS as the enemy. Better to let the inevitable happen now, he said.

I gave him all the ritual courtesies. First, he wrote his death haiku, which was a fine one. I then allowed him to shower and to change into his best uniform. Finally, he took a silk mat and laid it in the center of his room. Kneeling on it, he took a short sword—another antique with beautiful designs along the blade—and wrapped it in a sheet of clear, white rice paper. He then took the sword and laid the point of it on the skin of his belly. I raised my sword.

I still do not understand his ability to meet death so honorably. Could he have been a better man than we imagined?

—Confession by General Frederick Kozoma, taped by ISF agents

PLANET-HOPPING AND SUNSTROKE

After spending a whole year in planning sessions with his general, Yoguchi devised a new version of the planet-hopping strategy that had proved so effective during the first war. Yoguchi's version did not call for a major push deep into enemy territory, but used a slower, more methodical capture of those enemy planets closest to the Combine. The only exception to this steady application of strength would be a series of deep raids conducted away from the main offensive to keep the enemy guessing. Yoguchi and his generals laughed to think that soon the Draconis Combine would be seizing worlds from its enemies as easily as plucking kernels from a cob.

The offensive began in 2840 against the Lyran worlds of Caledonia, Lambrecht, and Harvest, which were at the extreme end of the border. A month later, just as the LCAF was beginning to muster a response to the invasions, the Arm of the Dragon made a heavy raid on Thorin, a world near Terra, and at the opposite end of its border. The Thorin raid turned against the Kurita invaders when a heavy storm stripped the faster Kurita 'Mechs of their speed, leaving them at the mercy of the larger, more heavily armed Steiner 'Mechs. The raid did accomplish its purpose of making the generals in the Commonwealth hesitate and delay in sending aid to the Periphery side of the border.

On the Davion front, things were not going as well. The Combine's attempts to seize the Davion worlds of Tancredi, Anguilla, and Sturgis ran into a military defense that was more flexible and responsive than that of the Steiners. The Kurita heavy raid against Robinson, meant to freeze Davion reinforcements away from the three endangered planets, met with stiff resistance. The raiders were forced to withdraw much sooner than expected.

The situation on the Davion front went from bad to worse. Using the surge of reinforcements for the three planets as cover, House Davion moved its reserves up to the front lines. In late 2841, the Federated Suns forces launched its major offensive of the war.

Though the initial Davion strikes occurred along the border, two major areas of concentration suddenly swamped the Kurita generals. One was a major thrust apparently intended to take back worlds in the Kentares area. The other appeared to be an attempt to by-pass, then surround, the Kurita troops attempting to take Davion worlds on the Periphery edge of the border.

Though the Davion attackers were having their successes, the Kurita generals were relieved to see that their troops were retreating in a much more orderly fashion than during the first war. This allowed the DCMS to withdraw and to launch a well-planned counteroffensive.

ROWEENA KURITA

In the bright sunshine
one should fear small spiders. Death's
agents may not be big.

—Poem found among Roweena Kurita's personal effects

Roweena Kurita was Yoguchi's younger sister. Intelligent and astute, she saw clearly the effect of placing the ISF under the control of the DCMS. An ambitious young woman, Roweena took advantage of the *Metsukes'* hurt pride and began to curry favor with them.

When her brother appointed her as Coordinator of the People's Reconstruction Effort in 2841, she used the powers of her post to aid the ISF. In the beginning, she asked little in return. After 2842, however, she began to request the ISF's assistance. The ISF leaders agreed to help her because Roweena's schemes revolved more around accumulating wealth than seizing power. She loved luxury and seemed to have an obsession for collecting rare art objects.

In return, Roweena gave the ISF important access to the far-reaching network of the PRE, which had become a second-level bureaucratic communication system. As the people of the PRE came to realize that the ISF had intimate knowledge of their actions, the reconstruction of the Draconis Combine began to operate even more effectively than before.

DIVINE SACRIFICE

I know of no better way to end one's life than upon the upthrust bayonet of my enemy, for close behind would be my comrades, ready to avenge my death. And before me would stretch Paradise. There I will feast on heavenly manna and sit in the presence of Him, the Most Wise.

—Coordinator Yoguchi Kurita addressing a group of Azami warriors, 2843

The Davion offensive had managed to gain four Kurita worlds by the early months of 2849. Though they had met greater resistance than expected, the Davion High Command was confident that progress would continue apace.

For his part, Coordinator Yoguchi was beside himself with anger. To see his offensive thwarted by the audacious actions of the Federated Suns was more than an embarrassment. It was an insult to his family's destiny. If it had not been for the Combine's victories on the Commonwealth front, including the complete extermination of an elite Lyran BattleMech regiment by his son Hugai, Yoguchi would have given serious thought to suicide.

Instead, when the Coordinator read reports saying that House Davion had apparently chosen Tishomingo as its next target, Yoguchi decided that he would personally lead the planet's defense.

Tishomingo was one of those worlds that had escaped the ravages of the first war because it lacked any heavy industry. Agriculture was the planet's main worth. Its temperate atmosphere, abundant water supply, and good soil made the planet ideal for large-crop production. Because the first war had destroyed many water purification plants and the current war was busy trying to destroy the rest, Tishomingo and its abundant fresh water had suddenly become a prize target.

With the scarcity of usable farm machinery also created by the first war, the Tishomingo population had been increased to a relatively high level for an agricultural world. Several of the largest family groups had always been fanatical supporters of the Kuritas, and the presence of a large number of ISF agents helped keep the rest loyal. As a result, the civilian militia units, composed of a fair number of veterans from the DCMS, were well-organized, if not well-armed. Added to this were three regiments of armor and three more of infantry.

When Yoguchi Kurita landed on Tishomingo, he brought with him the 4th Sword of Light and three other lesser regiments. Though most of his generals did not consider the number of regiments now on the planet to be sufficient, Yoguchi was confident. What he did not realize was that Tishomingo had become a major objective of the Federated Suns' offensive because food and water had grown so scarce in the Davion region nearby. To achieve this major offensive target, House Davion was willing to put up a total of 20 regiments, four of which were 'Mech regiments.

The offensive was launched in typical fashion, with the incoming DropShips battling the planet's aerospace defenders. Then came the actual dropping of Davion 'Mechs onto the planet. Though the campaign was to last for three months, the outcome might have been predicted in the first few moments. Just after dropping onworld, a battalion of 'Mechs totally disrupted Coordinator Yoguchi's headquarters, forcing him to flee into the surrounding heavy forests.

Mopping up the planet was the Davion 'Mech units' main concern for the next month. Having taken care of the last Kurita 'Mech, three of the four Davion 'Mech regiments left Tishomingo. This mistake proved to be fatal.

If the Davion leaders had realized that they had almost killed the Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, they would never had left Tishomingo with only a single 'Mech regiment to hold it.

The Kurita military believed that their Coordinator was dead, for that was the report of his second-in-command. For some time, no one knew that their leader was alive, well, and very angry on Tishomingo. While awaiting rescue, Yoguchi Kurita had organized the civilian population to resist their conquerers.

For the next several months, the entire Davion garrison was almost forced to retreat inside its military bases for fear of being shot at, blown up, or poisoned. The local population's fanatical willingness to give up their lives shocked the Davion soldiers. That Yoguchi Kurita was orchestrating the guerrilla resistance seems to prove that Kurita command skills may indeed be hereditary. Through a system of runners, he communicated his orders to various fighting commanders.

By virtue of her position as head of the PRE, Roweena Kurita became de facto leader of the Combine, like Zabu before her. Seeing how systematically the people of Tishomingo were resisting the Davion invaders, she began to suspect that it was the result of her brother's clever handiwork. On a hunch, she decided to organize a military campaign to rescue whomever was directing the work of killing off Davion soldiers.

Back on Tishomingo, a surprise Davion patrol had discovered Yoguchi Kurita when it swept through his forest hideaway. Though he managed to escape, the Davion invaders had recognized him as the leader of the Draconis Combine. Yoguchi fled to Urado.

Having been warned of his arrival, the military underground in Urado sponsored a religious festival. Using this as cover, the population of the city suddenly swelled to twice normal as the farmers from the surrounding countryside entered the city. Unknown to the Davion garrison in the Urado, leaders of the underground were busy passing out weapons that had been stockpiled and hidden before the planet's invasion.

When the Coordinator entered Urado, the people rose up and killed the Davion garrison before it could mount a defense. Then they erected barricades to block vehicles coming into the city and turned strategic buildings into impromptu fortresses. Urado had became a Kurita stronghold in a matter of hours. The first attempts by the Davion troopers to take the city failed miserably. They knew, too, that attempts to starve the city out would be useless, as it contained several fortified underground food and water warehouses.

It took a week to assemble the battalion of Davion BattleMechs that would attack the besieged city. When the Davion forces struck, they were met by civilians carrying out many desperate guerrilla actions. Despite the Uradoans' courage and fierce determination to protect their ruler, it was soon obvious that they would not be able to prevent House Davion from capturing Yoguchi.

The rescue force sent by Roweena Kurita landed on Tishomingo just in time to save Yoguchi's life. Suddenly faced with a major Kurita presence on the planet, the Davion defenders pulled back to await reinforcements. In the end, more than three million Kurita citizens gave their lives fighting against House Davion's occupation of their planet. Fifty thousand of those died in the city of Urado. Coordinator Yoguchi Kurita accorded them the ultimate honor when he mentioned their courage in a speech.

THE STING OF SNOW FIRE

It had been a long and trying time for Yoguchi. He looked forward to returning to Luthien and Snow Fire.

Despite his outward toughness, Yoguchi Kurita had a weakness for women, perhaps inherited from his father Zabu. Though romantic love was not idealized or even much encouraged in the culture of the Draconis Combine, Yoguchi enjoyed falling in love every time a beautiful new woman caught his eye. He had collected many concubines already, but Snow Fire was, at the moment, his first choice.

He had first seen her in an *ukiyo* in the Rasalhague district, and knew he must own her so that no one else could take pleasure with Snow Fire. He had bought her contract and taken her to the Imperial Palace on Luthien. Now, with the fighting behind him for the moment, he looked forward to spending a long night with her as soon as he returned to the palace. Afterward, when Yoguchi had finally fallen asleep, Snow Fire took the knife she had hidden among her things and slit Lord Yoguchi Kurita's throat. Then she laid an embroidered patch on the Coordinator's body, where he lay in his bed. Finally, she swallowed poison, and lay down beside Kurita to await her own death.

DIVINE RETRIBUTION

My brother was killed by a slut of a Steiner spy. I refuse to rest until I have struck and taken something infinitely dear to the Steiner family.

—Coordinator Miyogi Kurita, in his eulogy of Yoguchi Kurita, 2850

Public reaction to Yoguchi's assassination varied. The Combine propagandists described it as a heroic death, concocting a story that Yoguchi had died at the hands of a large group of assassins. Those who knew the truth felt deep shame that a lowly Steiner female had been able to murder their Coordinator.

In response to this dishonor, the Combine High Command decided to hastily set in motion a plan that their strategists had been fashioning with great care. The mission would strike at the very heart of the Lyran Commonwealth—their BattleMech facilities on Hesperus II.

The plan had two parts. The first was to use the remaining warships in the Kurita navy, along with DropShips and fighters, to overcome the Steiner defenses and then to blockade both jump points in the Hesperus star system. The second phase would be to starve out the planet's defenders, followed by a massive ground attack.

The Lyran Commonwealth was at a weak point socially and politically at that moment in history. The Lyrans had just lived through the reign of a Jinjiro-like leader whose sadistic rule had left the realm in a state of shock. Now the Commonwealth was ruled by a rather shaky committee of three leaders who would make the major decisions until the rightful Steiner heir came of age.

The attack on Hesperus began smoothly, with a successful strike against both jump points, which Kurita naval vessels soon encircled. The Kurita forces just sat and waited as reinforcements and supplies flowed in. They knew that the three Steiner 'Mech regiments on Hesperus were eating into their own supplies.

KEYS TO THE MYSTERY

Snow Fire was a Steiner assassin, of that there could be no doubt. She had been planted in the Rasalhague district by the Lyran Intelligence Corps years earlier to gather information and to be ready should the ultimate assignment come. Her many skills had served her well.

Apparently, she had also had her own personal reasons for wanting to assassinate Lord Kurita. Her lover had been a member of the 4th Royal Guards, a unit that had been destroyed by the Kuritans. The regimental patch she had laid on the Coordinator's dead body was that of the 4th Royal Guards.

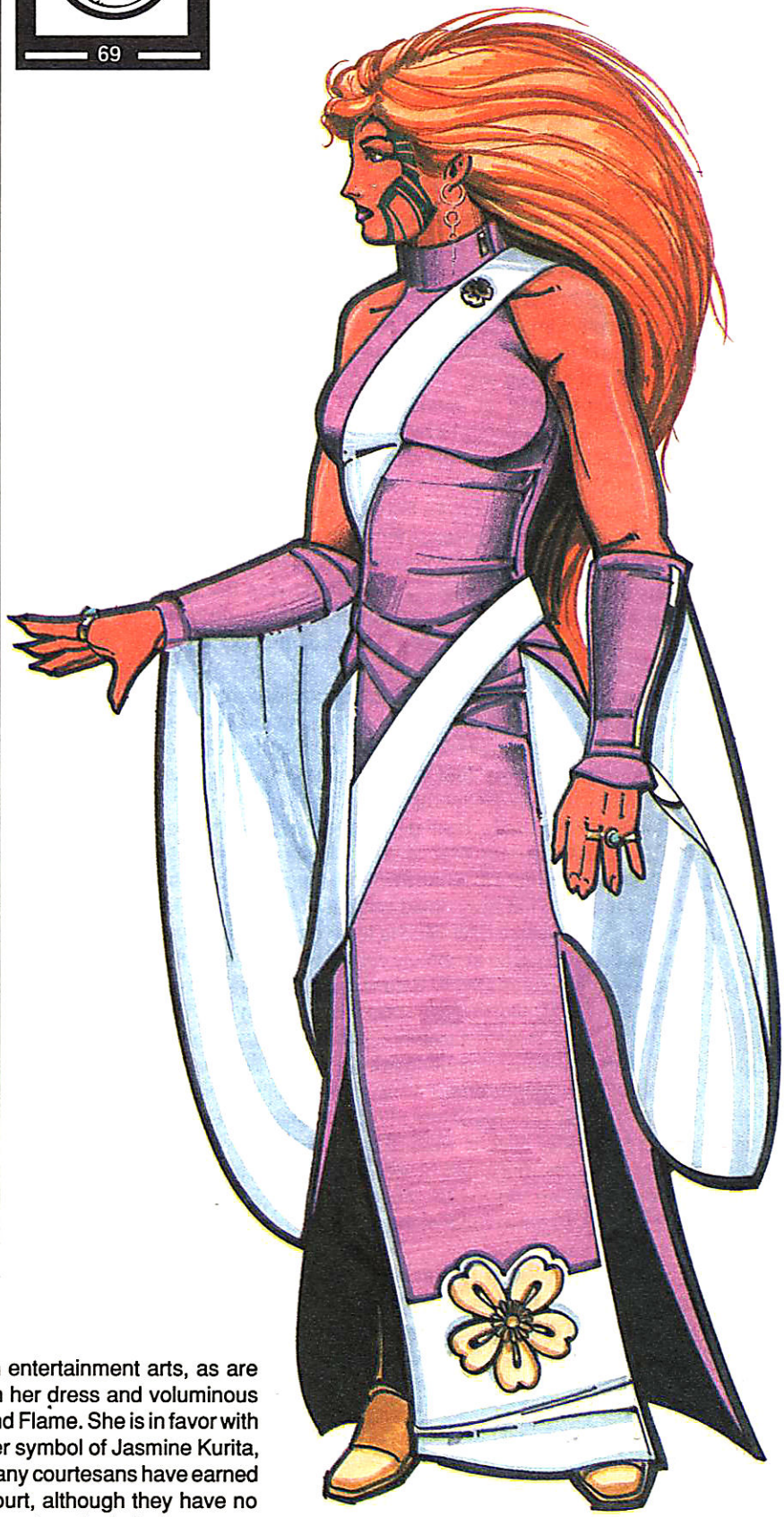
What has sparked considerable debate is how Snow Fire managed to get so close to Yoguchi without being discovered by the all-seeing ISF. The most plausible explanation is that someone high in the Combine government knew that Snow Fire was an assassin and simply turned a blind eye to the fact.

The Director of the ISF at that time was Malcolm Katsuyori, who had taken deep offense at the Coordinator's decision to place the ISF under control of the military. Though he could not order his own minions to kill the Coordinator, it is possible that he might have allowed Snow Fire to become the Coordinator's mistress, knowing full well that she was a spy and an assassin.

Roweena Kurita is another possible link to the mystery. As Coordinator of the PRE and confidante of Malcolm Katsuyori, she could also have been aware of Snow Fire's secret profession. Her motives for allowing the concubine to fulfill her mission would have been more complex, but not at all political. Roweena did not seek power; indeed, she refused to take over as ruler of the Combine when Yoguchi died.

From evidence gleaned from private letters and diaries, we know that Roweena was deeply in love with some unnamed person. From other evidence gathered, it is quite possible that the object of her affections was Snow Fire. (Such an affection would not have been out of place in Kurita society, where sexuality has its place in life, as long as it does not interfere with the Code of Honor.) Roweena's unnamed lover apparently spurned her advances. If that person was Snow Fire, the hurt and angry Roweena could easily have kept her own counsel about the concubine, knowing that the girl would soon be dead by her own hand.

—"Some Evidence Gathered on the Death of Yoguchi Kurita," ComStar Internal Bulletin, 2851



COURTESAN

Courtesans in Kurita are usually trained in entertainment arts, as are geisha. This courtesan, with the white wings on her dress and voluminous wig, is dressed to perform a Dance of the Moth and Flame. She is in favor with the Court as an entertainer, and wears the flower symbol of Jasmine Kurita, the Coordinator's wife and a patron of the arts. Many courtesans have earned themselves a measure of acceptance in the Court, although they have no official standing. In case of difficulty, many carry poison in their rings.

Six Kurita 'Mech regiments and another 15 lesser regiments dropped onto the lightly defended portions of Hesperus II and began a slow, methodical campaign to exhaust the three defending Steiner 'Mech regiments and five lesser regiments. The whole point of the strategy was to wear the defenders down rather than striking directly at the 'Mech factories.

After several months of this, the Kurita 'Mech regiments had succeeded in scattering the Commonwealth defenders from the mouth of the valley leading to Defiance Industries' BattleMech factories. With great expectations and visions of glory, the Kurita 'Mechs advanced almost to the door of the huge factories. Believing that victory was only moments away, the Kuritans were totally caught by surprise when the doors slid open to reveal a whole battalion of brand-new heavy Steiner 'Mechs. The confused Kurita MechWarriors fell back under the hail of laser fire, cannon shots, and laser bolts from the 'Mechs so new that they had not even been painted yet.

Pushed back beyond the mouth of the factory valley, the Kurita 'Mechs were immediately hit by the remnants of the Steiner 'Mech regiments. The Kurita offensive lost two weeks to this unexpected turn of events.

Matters had also taken a turn for the worse at the jump points. After several failed attempts to breach the jump points, the Lyrans had decided to make one massive attempt to fight their way past the ring of Kurita warships. Leading the charge was the *LCS Invincible*, a Star League-era battlecruiser that had been reduced to a mere museum curiosity orbiting Tharkad, the Commonwealth's capital world.

When the *LCS Invincible* materialized at the Hesperus jump point, it totally dwarfed all the Kurita warships, which scurried away in terror. Having secured the jump point, the Steiner commanders ordered in the rest of the Commonwealth relief force, and they headed for Hesperus II.

The Kurita ground forces, having managed to finally destroy most of the Commonwealth 'Mechs, were looking forward to punishing the MechWarriors that had thwarted them initially at the doors of the factory. What they could not know was that those MechWarriors in their shiny new 'Mechs were ordinary men and women, some very old, some extremely young, who worked in the factories. They had volunteered to defend the facilities and had been hastily trained to pilot 'Mechs, becoming known as "The Force of Last Resort." Their first victory against the Kurita BattleMechs had been the result of sheer beginner's luck, however.

When the Kurita 'Mechs opened fire on them at their second meeting, the novice unit retreated in panic. Victory seemed imminent as the Kurita 'Mechs were about to enter the factory complex. Just then, the guns and missiles of the *LCS Invincible* began to rain down on the Kurita 'Mechs. Within minutes, the *Invincible* had mowed down most of the Combine attackers near the BattleMech factories.

The commanding Kurita general considered the Hesperus strike to be a marginal victory, however, because they had managed to destroy one BattleMech assembly line. What satisfied Coordinator Miyogi even more was that the offensive—successful or not—had cost the Lyran Commonwealth dearly. While the DCMS lost about 50 percent of its ground troops, the Commonwealth lost at least as many troops, including two veteran 'Mech regiments. Both sides also lost most of their few remaining warships. The Commonwealth's awesome *LCS Invincible*, possibly the last capital warship in existence in the Inner Sphere, failed ever to return from Hesperus II because its drive failed in mid-jump.

THE MARATHON OFFENSIVE

I don't care how worn out the troops are. I tell you that both our enemies are on the verge of collapse. They can be ours if we apply ourselves and call upon that superiority that makes us unique.

—Coordinator Miyogi Kurita, in response to a request from the High Command to slow the Marathon Offensive

Coordinator Miyogi Kurita was a great believer in studying his opponents. To do so, he greatly expanded his agencies for gathering intelligence on the other Successor States. He also spent considerable time talking with ComStar representatives, hoping they would help him gain a clear picture of the nature and motivations of the other powers in the Inner Sphere.

After his semi-successful attack of Hesperus II, Miyogi's analysis of current Steiner and Davion politics made him believe that now was the time to launch yet another major offensive. Convinced that both realms were too concerned with political matters to effectively respond, Miyogi planned to launch attacks that concentrated in strong, decisive thrusts. Though he regarded his predecessor's "planet-hopping" strategy as effective, he believed it was too draining on resources. He was also hoping that his offensive would effectively put an end to House Davion's offensive in the Galedon area of the front.

The generals of the DCMS had some misgivings about the Coordinator's plan, however. Though it was true that planet-hopping offensives were a drain on resources, the Coordinator's plan could turn out to be even more costly. They also had serious questions about the logistics of keeping two deep penetrations effectively supplied.

Nevertheless, the Kurita military launched its offensive in late 2854. The main thrust of the Steiner half of the offensive centered on an axis created by the Lyran worlds of Dehgolan and Kelenfold. The offensive axis on the Federated Suns border was Rochester-Saunemin.

SWORD OF LIGHT

In Buddhist legend, the Myoos are wrathful dieties who drag unwilling souls to their salvation. Each Myoo carries a flaming sword that represents the radiance of Buddha's teachings. This odd sense of salvation through the actions of a wrathful diety appealed to the earliest members of the Kurita ruling family. It rationalized warring upon one's neighbors to save them from themselves. As the elite of the DCMS, the Sword of Light were always compared to the flaming sword of the Myoos.

To be accepted into a Sword of Light regiment, a candidate must have spent at least five years in a lesser 'Mech regiment and have scored in the upper 5 percent of a rigorous battery of political, religious, and military tests. Those who manage to make their way into a Sword of Light regiment are the crème de la crème. If he lives to retire—no easy feat—a Sword of Light warrior can look forward to a life of comfort and glory. There have been twelve different Sword of Light regiments throughout the history of the DCMS. There are currently five.

—From "Unique Regiments in the Armies of the Successor States," General Malvos Steinburg (LCAF ret.),

EARLY SUCCESSES

The first five years of Coordinator Miyogi's offensive met with considerable success. On the Commonwealth front, the efforts against Dehgolan, Tukayyid, and Grumium were all successful, though a special assault company was destroyed while attempting to crack a Steiner stronghold on Grumium.

Though successes on the Davion front were less exciting, the DCMS did manage to throw the Federated Suns back onto the defensive, so that Davion had to put aside the goal of winning Kurita worlds. On that front, House Kurita had managed to capture only one world, but it was an important one. Robinson was the capital of the Draconis March. Though all essential personnel and records had been evacuated long before the appearance of Kurita BattleMechs, its loss to Davion had a definite psychological effect on both sides.

It was for this reason that the Davion military fought so fiercely to hold onto Robinson, which was little more than a minor agricultural world. Three 'Mech regiments and ten armored and infantry regiments provided the planet's defense. The invaders were composed of four 'Mech regiments, all of them fanatical Sword of Light units, and ten lesser regiments. The Coordinator himself led the offensive.

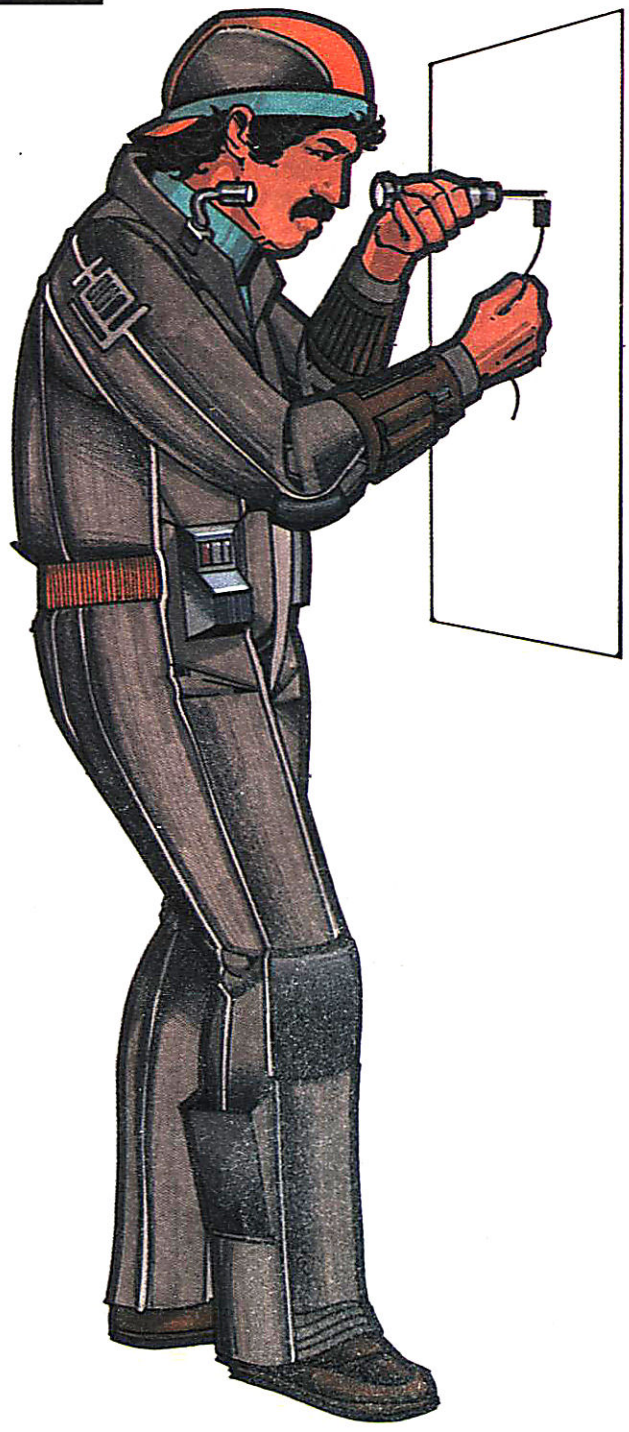
The Davion defense buckled and crumbled beneath the weight of the four elite Kurita 'Mech units. In the pivotal battle at Briarson's Crossroads, a Kurita assault battalion managed to crush a Davion stronghold protecting a crucial mountain pass. With the stronghold gone, the Kurita forces poured through the pass. The Davion commander had insufficient forces to protect himself, let alone the planet.

SLOW DOWN

By late 2862, the Arm of the Dragon was experiencing real difficulties. With aggressive campaigns on both borders, the supply lines had become too long and entangled. Already a light 'Mech battalion from a Rasalhague Regulars regiment had been badly mauled on Emporia because it lacked sufficient parts and supplies. Even more distressing was news that many parts were becoming impossible to find. This led to cannibalism of parts as an accepted practice. The shortages were also fostering disobedience among the 'Mech regiments, whose MechWarriors insisted on thoroughly searching all targets for usable parts and supplies before putting them to the torch.

The generals of the DCMS went to Coordinator Miyogi and humbly asked that he either stop the offensive or slow it down. To their surprise, Miyogi agreed.

With this, the Second Succession War came to an end. In reviewing their position, the Coordinator and his top military believed that they had come out on top again, with gains along both fronts. On the Commonwealth border, the Combine had managed to pick up seven planets, with the line of Orestes, Al Hillah, and Karbala forming the edge of a bulge into the Commonwealth. Along the Davion border, the Combine had succeeded in putting the Davion offensive to a halt and in reclaiming all their worlds. They had also managed to win three planets, Lucerne and Franklin being the limit of their conquests.



TECHNICIAN

Technicians wear a jumpsuit similar to that worn by Aero-Space personnel,and they are free to accessorize the uniform as needed. In this instance, the wristband holds small tools, and the apparatus on the waist is a small power unit for probes. On his right collar, the technician is wearing a cliplight. The cap is part of the uniform, and to wear it backward is common practice.

THE THIRD SUCCESSION WAR

After a long chase, some predators often ease up and pretend to be tired, hoping to convince their prey that it can escape. In that moment of exhaustion, the prey's concentration may lapse. Just at the moment, the predator puts on a sudden burst of speed and takes his victim totally by surprise.

—Coordinator Miyogi Kurita, in an address to the graduating class of the Sun Zhang Academy, 2866

By late 2863, relative quiet seemed to have settled over the Inner Sphere. Was it possible that after eight decades of fighting, the vicious wars were actually over?

A group of peace-makers came forward in early 2864. Composed mostly of businessmen from the Capellan Confederation and the Free Worlds League, the group proposed the signing of a peace treaty because they said war hurt everyone's business except the Lyrans' (who they accused of profiting from the conflict).

In the Draconis Combine, no one paid much attention to these "raving optimists." The lull in the fighting was a welcome chance for the people to rest a bit and for the government to begin laying down supplies for the next storm, which was sure to come. Though the invasions and raids had virtually ceased, the Combine's military strategists were busy analyzing how they might exploit any weaknesses they could identify in the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns.

Also during this time, a special ISF team conducted a secret investigation. Headed by Rajiv Sulevani, this small, elite squad was composed of ISF agents whose loyalty to the Coordinator was unquestioned. Their task was to determine just how strong Roweena Kurita had become and to investigate rumors about her "un-Combine activities."

SHADOW WAR

Roweena, who was now 69 years old, had been Coordinator of the People's Reconstruction Effort for almost three decades. She had become something of a mother figure for the average citizen of the Combine. Her grandmotherly face stared down from a variety of posters admonishing the people that recycling, for example, was the honorable thing to do. Her voice came over the radio asking for blood donations. Her image could be seen on the holo as she inspected the construction of new buildings.

In many ways, Roweena had become a more public figure than her brother Miyogi, which was why he had come to fear her. What he did not know was that Roweena had considerable influence with the ISF, the very agency that was supposed to be spying on her un-Combine activities.

Her influence over the ISF had come about when the previous Coordinator had placed the ISF under the command of the Kurita military, an insult to the ISF elite. The astute Roweena had stepped in to stroke their egos and to allow the ISF to use the People's Reconstruction Effort to gain access to all portions of the Kurita society. To say that this had led to Roweena Kurita becoming the unofficial head of the ISF would not have been too far off the mark.

Into all this stepped Rajiv Sulevani. A true believer in the Combine's destiny and the greatness of the Coordinator, Sulevani had not approved of the growing coolness between the ISF and the ruler of the Combine. He had already dueled and killed a fellow *metsuke* who dared say that the ISF no longer owed loyalty to the Coordinator because he had abandoned them to the lowly Arm of the Dragon.

To strengthen his position, Rajiv began a secret assassination campaign to rid the ISF of its most anti-Coordinator members. It was not until four turned up dead in only a month's time that the other *metsuke* realized that their enemy was within.

The conflict between the pro-Coordinator and the pro-Roweena factions became as deadly as it was confusing. A person might be shot, strangled, or stabbed on the scantiest of evidence and mountains of innuendo. Somehow news of the internal struggle leaked out to the public, which had begun to call it the Shadow War. For once in the long history of the Draconis Combine, the head found stuck upon the *jitte* was more likely to be the head of a *metsuke* than some poor citizen.

By 2865, more than a thousand *metsuke* had been killed in the Shadow War. Though Miyogi and Roweena kept up a semblance of cordiality during this time, both were struggling behind the scenes to get the upper hand. In a major escalation of the conflict, Roweena attempted to expand the powers of the PRE by absorbing a vital section of the DCMS Procurement Department. This would have forced the entire military to funnel their supply requests through the PRE.

The conflict between the two Kuritas was evolving into a clash between the Pillar of Gold, the established governmental structure, and the People's Reconstruction Effort. It was an eerie time for the average citizen of various Combine worlds, for it was sometimes a matter of life and death to gauge which faction had the most control over their world. Paying homage to the wrong side was a quick and easy way to lose one's head.

The DCMS, which had done its absolute best to remain neutral in this massive political struggle, was forced to react when they learned that news of the Combine's difficulties was spreading to their enemies. The generals found themselves divided over which Kurita, and therefore which faction to back. To avoid truly splitting the realm, the High Command voted to postpone their decision for a week.

A 36-year-old officer named Taragi Kurita sensed that here was a chance to increase his power and prestige. In separate audiences with Miyogi and Roweena, he attempted to peddle his influence over the generals of the High Command. Both Miyogi and Roweena knew that Taragi was only a general's aide who had not even the right to speak at High Command meetings. Roweena laughed in his face. Miyogi half-heartedly agreed to promote Taragi if he succeeded in swaying the High Command generals to back him.

When the High Command met to decide which Kurita to back in the Shadow Wars, Taragi rose and strode to the front of the room. He then removed from beneath his clothing the Dragon Medallion, the chain and seal that all legitimate Kuritas wear. He held the medallion up, as though it were a holy symbol, while the shocked murmuring of the generals became hushed. Taragi launched into a long and impassioned speech extolling the virtues of Miyogi and characterizing Roweena as kind of a witch.

Taragi's speech lasted for an hour. When it was over, he returned to his seat. The vote was unanimously in favor of Miyogi.

The mobilization of the DCMS was sudden and swift. Aided by *metsuke* loyal to the Coordinator, the Dragon Commandos stormed key offices of the PRE and the pro-Roweena ISF. By January, the Shadow War was officially over.

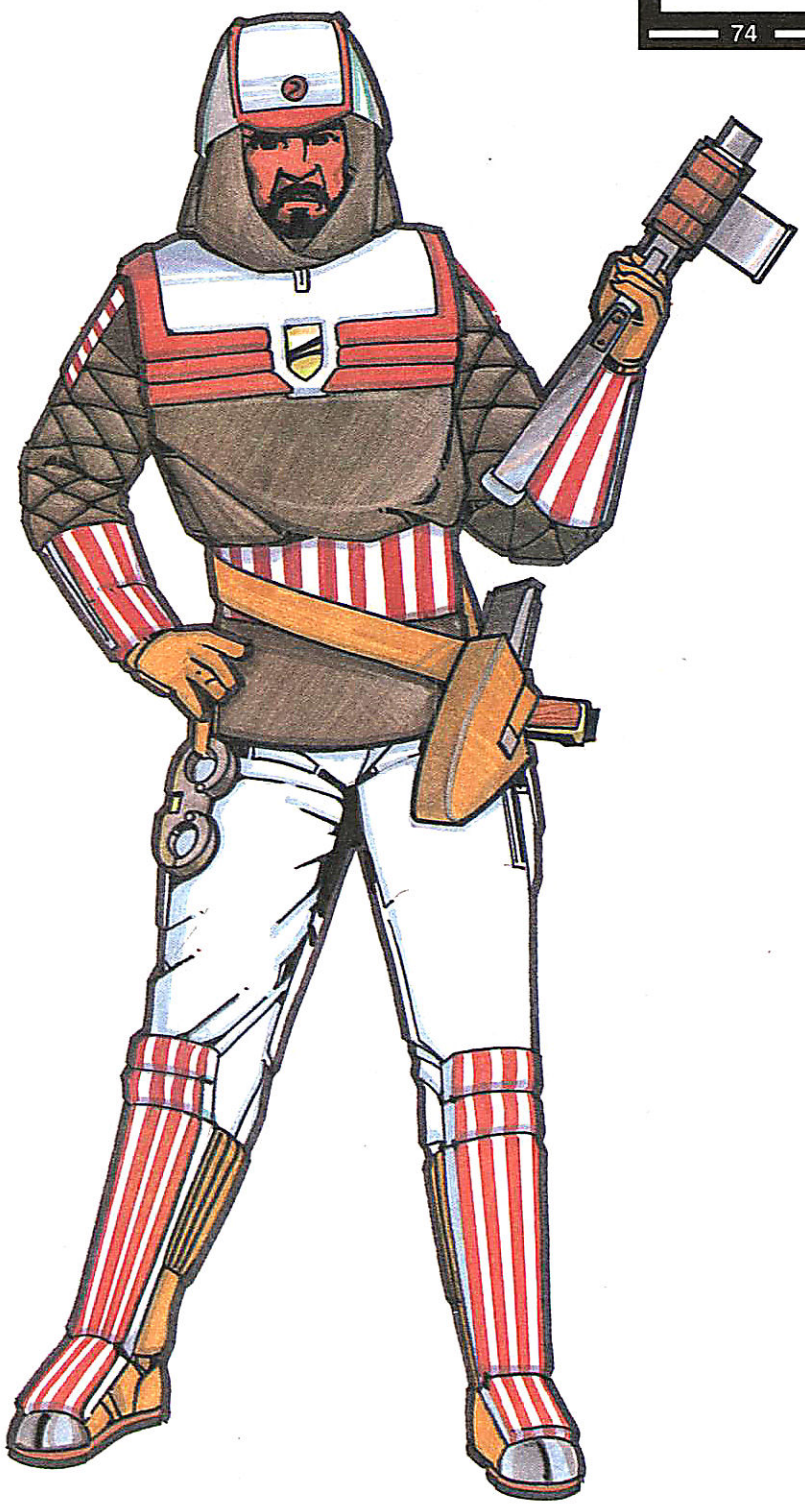
The PRE was officially dismantled by decree of Coordinator Miyogi. Roweena Kurita was sentenced to house arrest, as suggested by Taragi Kurita. He felt that executing her might have later repercussions, especially as there might be ISF agents still loyal to her in the hinterlands of the realm.

Taragi Kurita got his promotion. He also became the trusted advisor of the Coordinator.

A sad result of this political war was the destruction of the PRE University on Ashio. Though many blamed the pro-Roweena ISF for setting fire to the Grand Library, the surrounding villagers whispered among themselves that it was agents loyal to Miyogi who had started the blaze.

MINOR NOBLE

This is a minor noble, but one in trouble. The *Wakizashi* and *Katana* swords show that he attended a fine military school, but his plain clothes and desperate manner indicate that he has fallen on hard times. Young minor nobles may attempt to increase their status by performing nefarious deeds for higher-ranking nobles.



IS WAR THE NATURAL STATE OF MAN?

I say the answer is obvious. When is a man most keenly aware of life, most sensitive to its fragility and beauty than when he is most likely to lose it? What? Lovemaking, I hear you say? Well, that is true, but those moments are few, fleeting, and require far more emotion than most men are willing to invest. No, war is a far better lover of men; her arms are always open.

—General Taragi Kurita, in a speech to the graduating class of the Sun Zhang Academy, 2866

In typical Kurita fashion, the leaders of the Draconis Combine sought to punish all outsiders who had learned of their internal difficulties. Indeed, the full force of their wrath was directed at the Lyran Commonwealth. The main reason was that Commonwealth Archon Elizabeth Steiner seemed so well-informed of the sordid details of the Shadow War that her diplomatic and economic actions managed to create even more tension between the two warring political factions.

The second reason was that the Arm of the Dragon wanted to punish the audacity of Lyran traders attempting to expand their influence deep into the Rasalhague Military District. This was a clear nuisance, made all the more so because the Lyrans found willing markets for their many goods. Food was a much sought-after trade item on many Kurita worlds, and this deeply embarrassed the Coordinator.

The third reason was purely military. Most of the Commonwealth's industry was centered in the Federation of Skye, one of three major divisions within the Commonwealth. Because the Skye region was relatively small and lay close to Terra, the Combine High Command considered it to be a fairly easy target. It was also true that the Archon had relaxed the military vigilance of her realm, believing that a time of true peace was at hand.

In early spring of 2866, the DCMS launched attacks against distant Commonwealth worlds such as Chateau, Icar, and Steelton. Though these attacks gave every appearance of being full invasion attempts, they were a ruse and used second-line units with only a few 'Mech regiments. The real focus of the Kurita offensive was the Federation of Skye.

The offensive progressed far better than the Kurita generals had hoped. Caught unprepared, many Commonwealth units simply retreated off their worlds without firing a single shot. By the third week of the war, the Archon solved the dilemma of how best to use reserves by deciding to hold them back from worlds not under attack. This gave the Arm of the Dragon free reign over many important worlds, which soon fell like ripe apples into their grasp. Kessel, Ko, Dromini VI, Aubisson, and Port Moseby all fell to the Draconis Combine during the early months of the war.

CIVILIAN POLICE

The bright uniform of the Civilian Guidance Corps, or Friendly Persuaders (civilian police), is designed to make them as visible as possible, in hopes of intimidating troublemakers by the mere presence of police. This officer is carrying wrist restraints on his right hip, and a standard-issue police stunner on the left. He has a riot-control shotgun in his hand. It has become standard practice to carry the shotgun at all times, and to wear the stunner only for show.

MILITARY HOT SPOTS

The DCMS High Command had made one miscalculation in their strategy against the Lyran Commonwealth: they had failed to consider what the Federated Suns might do. The generals of House Davion had, with considerable foresight, made plans based upon the probability that the Combine would eventually go after the Lyran Commonwealth. The Davion generals intended to open their own maneuvers with a series of raids along the border to wear down the Kurita forces there.

In response, Coordinator Miyogi sent Taragi Kurita to the Davion front to act as chief advisor to the Warlords of the Galedon, Benjamin, and Dieron Military Districts, who were coordinating their actions against the recent upsurge of Davion activity.

The Draconis Combine received a boost to their efforts against House Steiner when emissaries from the Free Worlds League ventured to Luthien to discuss an alliance. Though he remained officially noncommittal, the Coordinator was encouraging enough that House Marik decided to go forward with their assassination plot against Archon Elizabeth Steiner.

The Marik assassins completely bungled the attempt, but the incident did signal the beginning of hostilities between the Lyran Commonwealth and the Free Worlds League. Now the already strained Commonwealth military had to worry about two fronts.

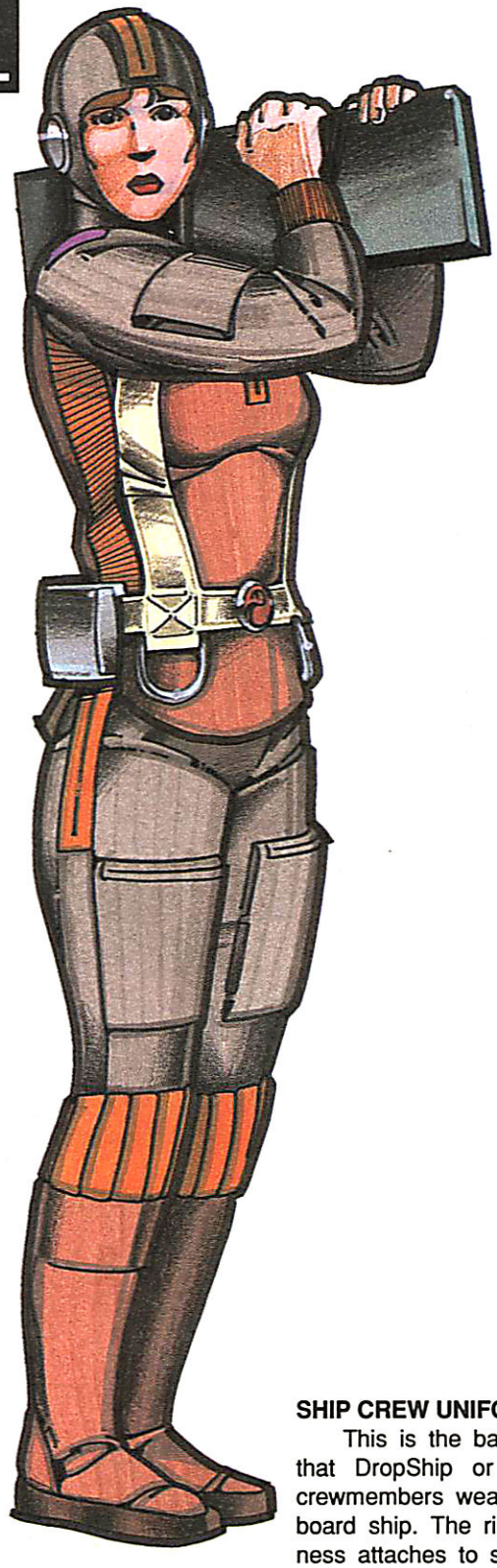
By the end of the decade, the Kurita offensive had made its way up to Marfik, and had easily overcome the Commonwealth's weak counteroffensive at the other end of their border. The only points of concern for the Draconis Combine during these years was that the elite Eridani Light Horse unit signed on with House Steiner in 2872 and that the Stealthy Tigers, a private unit of the Duke of Tamar, were formed. Indeed, the Tigers would prove themselves equal to nearly anything the Arm of the Dragon could field.

GOOD PLAN, UNEXPECTED END

Taragi Kurita was born with an inner ear problem that gave him chronic motion sickness and prevented him from becoming a MechWarrior, aerospace pilot, or even a crewman on a space ship. He had, therefore, spent the early years of his military career delving into the intricacies of the DCMS bureaucracy. While others were learning to do double scissors side-swipes in AeroSpace Fighters, Taragi had been learning how to secretly manipulate the bureaucracy. Now that he was a general, that talent came in handy for siphoning off money and goods anytime he wished.

It was more a game to him than anything else, because riches and power were not the prime motivators of Taragi's life. An intellectual of the first order, his real interest lay in solving problems. Being a Kurita meant that the problems he would like to solve were tied to the destiny of the Draconis Combine. He also had a mischievous streak.

Upon arriving on the Davion front, Taragi decided to see how far he could get by taking advantage of his position and using his great cunning. As the Coordinator's official representative, Taragi was treated with respect and even awe by the three Warlords. With malicious glee, he soon embroiled himself in the politics between the three Warlords, secretly pitting each against the others. At the same time, he was also examining the procurement system of the front like a puppet master examines a new puppet.



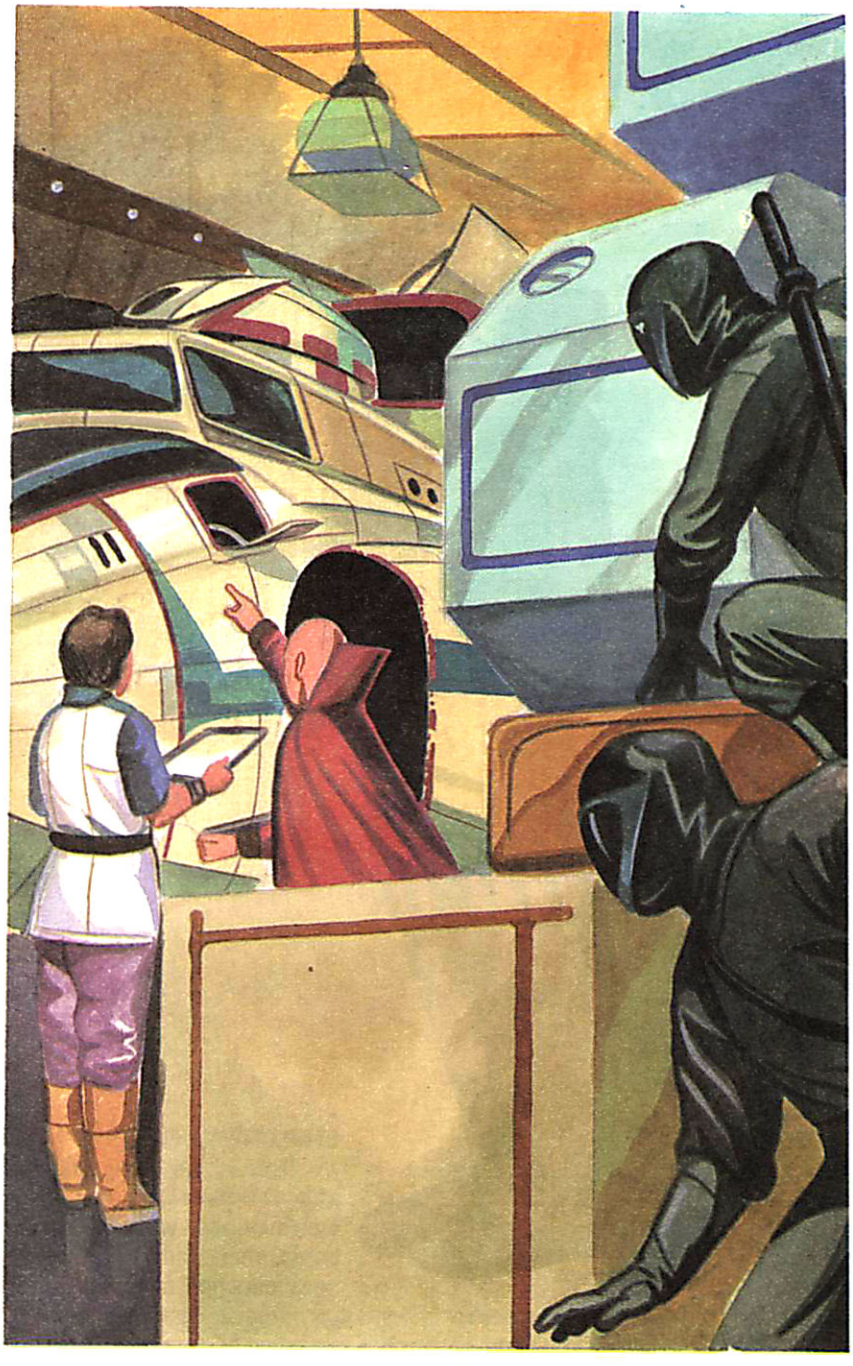
SHIP CREW UNIFORM

This is the basic uniform that DropShip or JumpShip crewmembers wear while onboard ship. The ring-and-harness attaches to safety wires when the crewmember is working on large equipment. The small box on the belt contains probes for testing equipment. There are pockets on the legs for carrying a quantity of small equipment, and the shoes are more comfortable than combat boots designed for outside wear. This crewmember is carrying a piece of armorplate for use in repair somewhere.

Within a year, the bureaucracy was a snarl all along the Davion front because of Taragi's deft manipulations. The three commanding generals were fighting among themselves, with each blaming the other for his poor supply situation. Militarily, the Federated Suns took advantage of the situation by attacking and seizing three worlds. The only Kurita commander who was able to pull any victories from the mess was Taragi.

In 2885, the Davion raids against the major supply points at Towne, Mara, New Ivaarsen, and Rowe were all successful, mainly because Taragi had made sure than these supply depots were ill-protected. After the Davion raids, he went to Luthien to report to the Coordinator on the total incompetence of the three commanding generals on the Davion front. Though he never blamed anyone specifically, Taragi's report made it clear that he believed the Davion front should be commanded by a single general, namely him.

After listening to the report, Miyogi thanked Taragi for his valuable service to the Draconis Combine. He went on to say that he agreed with Taragi's idea of single commander of the Davion front. Indeed, Miyogi had already selected someone for the job—his own son, Jon Kurita.



THE RISE OF TARAGI

General Taragi Kurita felt deeply humiliated when Jon Kurita became his superior on the Davion front. It was perhaps even harder to bear because he had been so sure that the appointment would go to him. Perhaps it was this insult that suddenly galvanized Taragi's vague ambitions into a sharp and clear lust to reach the pinnacle of the Draconis Combine.

He knew immediately where to turn. Roweena Kurita, now over a hundred years old, had been living out her house arrest in grand style. When Taragi came to visit her with a request for assistance and advice on how to win the Coordinatorship, Roweena saw her last chance to strike out at her brother.

What Roweena gave Taragi was a greater access to the ISF. Despite Miyogi's many purges to rid the *metsuke*s of pro-Roweena elements, a few of them had managed to escape detection. Though they were not many, they had kept in touch with Roweena and now gave Taragi access to secret information.

Roweena also gave Taragi good advice, saying that it would be best to discredit Jon Kurita first. If Taragi could do that, then Miyogi would have to replace Jon with Taragi. If he tried to retain him as commander, it would anger the DCMS, whose leaders cannot abide an incompetent ruler. Either way, Taragi would benefit.

General Taragi took Roweena's advice to heart. As second-in-command of the Davion front, he began to manipulate the bureaucracy secretly so that sufficient supplies did not reach the 3rd Sword of Light regiment on the vitally important world of Robinson. Added to the lack of supplies, particularly ammunition, was the substantial force of Davion guerrillas who generally made life difficult for the Kurita occupation forces on Robinson.

It was not long before the Federated Suns recognized that the elite Kurita regiment's supplies were low. In late 2891, a large invasion force of Davion 'Mechs, tanks, and infantry landed on Robinson. Now, when a consistent flow of supply was most needed, Taragi secretly manipulated the procurement routes so that the planet received nothing for a month. Seeing that they were in deep danger of running out of ammunition for their guns

and parts to repair their 'Mechs, the Sword of Light Mech regiment was forced to retreat off the planet. Robinson fell soon afterward.

The commanders of the Sword of Light have always had considerable unofficial influence because of the elite status of their troops. When the commanding officers of the 3rd Sword of Light came angrily to Jon and Taragi, wanting to know who had caused the supply snafu, Taragi sprang his trap. Using falsified information, as well as the testimony of a supposed procurement officer (actually an ISF officer serving Taragi), Taragi presented a mountain of damning evidence against Jon Kurita.

The commanders of the Sword of Light regiment urged the Coordinator most strenuously to remove John Kurita of his command and to put Taragi in charge of the Davion front.

The Coordinator's position was now as precarious as Taragi and Roweena had hoped it would become. Miyogi attempted to rally his own support by calling on certain key generals to come to the defense of his son. To the Coordinator's dismay, everyone had an excuse to stay neutral. This was due largely to a smear campaign being waged by Roweena's friends within the ISF. They were spreading the lie that Miyogi was sending an offer of alliance to Prince Davion of the Federated Suns.

THE UNOFFICIAL RULES OF WAR

Since the beginning of the third war, a set of rules governing combat has been slowly evolving. As the high commanders realized that their supply of parts and resources was dwindling fast, they began to adapt to the scarcity. Even before engaging in battle, one side might realize that his force had no chance to win and so would withdraw to cut his losses. Such a phenomenon would have been unthinkable during the first two wars, both of which were famous for battles in which the winner was the last one left standing.

Early in the Third Succession War, commanders began to plan battles in clear and open areas away from cities because they wanted their troops to have the best terrain in which to use their precious supplies. This tendency to fight away from cities was soon reinforced by the scavenger mentality that seized all the realms. With parts and equipment often irreplaceable, scavenging through the rubble for supplies and spare parts in the aftermath of battle became almost as important as the fighting.

This trend did not sit well with many of the more conservative DCMS generals. Raised in the old ways, they expected war to be terrifying, gruesome, and dramatic.

When Taragi learned that some of his generals questioned the new way, he issued a booklet entitled *The Katana Principle.* Consisting of a series of the Coordinator's observations, this small report outlined the religious and moral beliefs that supported the newer, more humane way of fighting. He wrote that the new style of fighting might not be as exciting as some of the older ways, but it was the only way to preserve the equipment and people vital to the Draconis Combine's eventual dominion over all humanity. The brief essay ended with the reminder to the generals that *bushido* demanded obedience to one's lord above all. The question never came up again.

—From "Taragi And The Katana Principle," Simone De Guthul, Precentor of Luthien

The final act was played out by Captain Hideyoshi Toyama, a young officer in the 3rd Sword of Light regiment. A zealot, even by Kurita standards, he intended to avenge his unit's humiliation on Robinson. After managing to enter the Imperial Palace with a large bomb strapped to his chest, he came into the Audience Hall where Coordinator Miyogi was seeing petitioners. Toyama immediately detonated the device, killing 30 people, including Miyogi Kurita.

When news of the assassination reached the Davion front, General Taragi had his ISF contacts arrest Jon Kurita. In a mock-trial, Jon Kurita, the only male offspring of Miyogi, was found guilty of negligence and treason. He was shot seven days after his own father's death.

THE BATTLE FOR SKYE

Barren world. Stark green
hills and unkind snow. Death here
is a cold silence.

—Death haiku found on the body of a Kurita officer on Skye, 2893

When the Steiner world of Zebebelgenubi fell in 2891, both the Commonwealth and the Draconis Combine turned their attention to the nearby world of Skye. The planet was much more than just the capital of the Federation of Skye, it was the emotional heartland of many millions descended from Scottish-English ancestors. For them, the bleak green hills and cold, misty mornings on Skye were the closest thing to heaven outside of Scotland on Terra.

It was obvious to both sides that if Skye fell, much of the Lyrans' will to resist the Kurita invasion would be lost. The LCAF was making every effort to prepare a defense of the planet, while the DCMS was making similar efforts to prepare a victorious invasion.

Three 'Mech regiments and twelve lesser units defended the planet. Against them, Lord Kurita sent five 'Mech regiments and 19 armor and infantry regiments. The Kurita soldiers encountered difficulties almost immediately after landing. Particularly disturbing was the population's fanatical devotion to their world. Though the Kuritans were familiar with such singlemindedness in their own people, they had not known it could also exist among the citizens of an enemy realm. Almost every day, the Skye guerrillas carried out some act of terrorism or sabotage against the occupying force.

Many of the Kurita soldiers, especially the officers, came to deeply admire the determination of the citizens of Skye, despite the fact that their partisan actions were slowing the offensive. Weather and terrain also began to affect the fighting, further blocking the will of the Dragon.

It was the unpredictable winter weather in the capital of New Glasgow that caused the most setbacks. What's more, much of the surrounding landscape was dominated by bogs and marshes, all just waiting to suck up 'Mechs and machinery. Fighting against opponents who knew and had lived in these conditions, the Kurita officers had to slow their advance even further.

The crucial battle occurred at the Bannockburn Bogs. A Kurita 'Mech battalion accompanied by a tank regiment was sent to take New Glasgow. After fighting off an attack from the 17th Skye Rangers, the Kurita forces were spread out over a large front as they began their march on the capital.

As night fell, the Kurita forces found their way blocked by a vast bog. They had no alternative but to stop for the night to encamp on a series of narrow concrete highways. When the sun rose the

next morning, the Kurita officers saw that during the night Commonwealth troops had moved into the bogs along paths only they knew. Surrounded and lined up like targets on the narrow roads, the Kuritans were badly hurt in the battle. After being forced to retreat, they never came so near to the capital of Skye again.

Though the struggle for the planet lasted another year, the Battle for Bannockburn Bogs was the last time the Kurita invaders had the offensive advantage. The cost of the campaign finally proved too much for the new Coordinator, and in early 2894, he reluctantly ordered his troops off the planet.

REGRETS

It's not the having, but the getting.
—Old saying

Now 60 years old, Taragi had become the Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, but the achievement brought him no contentment. The pursuit of the goal had been far more exciting, especially now that he was burdened with the heavy decisions and responsibilities of the realm. Taragi dearly missed the days when he could immerse himself in the curious pleasures of maneuvering through the vast intricacies of the government bureaucracy.

The High Command was now looking to him to design a plan that would put a halt to the enemy's recent gains on the Davion front. On the Steiner front, his men's inability to take the planet Skye had forced a complete change in the offensive's direction, snarling logistics and requiring difficult decisions. At home, bandit activity along the Periphery border was creating food and water shortages for the people of those farflung planets. The ISF, having finally discovered the last remaining *metsukes* loyal to the now dead Roweena, were awaiting the Coordinator's decision on their fate. In addition to all these problems, there was the nagging fear that Miyogi's three daughters might be plotting against him for killing their father and brother.

Faced with these problems, Taragi was tempted to retire on several occasions. Each time, the thought of his son Shinjiro prevented him for doing so. Though Shinjiro was almost 40 and seemed to be an excellent officer, Taragi felt that he was too politically naive to rule the Draconis Combine. Resigned to his lot, Taragi persevered, paying the price for the way he had schemed and plotted against others in his earlier years.

THE NEW CENTURY

As the 30th century dawned in Taragi's realm, the new century brought with it news of a major plague in the Albiero and Rjarred Prefectures. Though the plague could be treated with an existing vaccine, both the treatment and the vaccine depended upon advanced medical facilities—something lacking in both prefectures.

When confronted with news of the plague, Coordinator Taragi had to make a difficult decision about how treatment might be carried out. Some advisors counseled that he place both prefectures under strict quarantine. Should anyone from those prefectures attempt to leave, their JumpShip would be destroyed to prevent spread of the disease, now dubbed "Albiero Consumption."

A smaller, saner group of officials advised that to abandon so many people to certain death was an affront to the oath Taragi had taken on becoming Coordinator—that he would "do his best to protect the lives and well-being of those that aid me in my quest to fulfill the Kurita destiny."

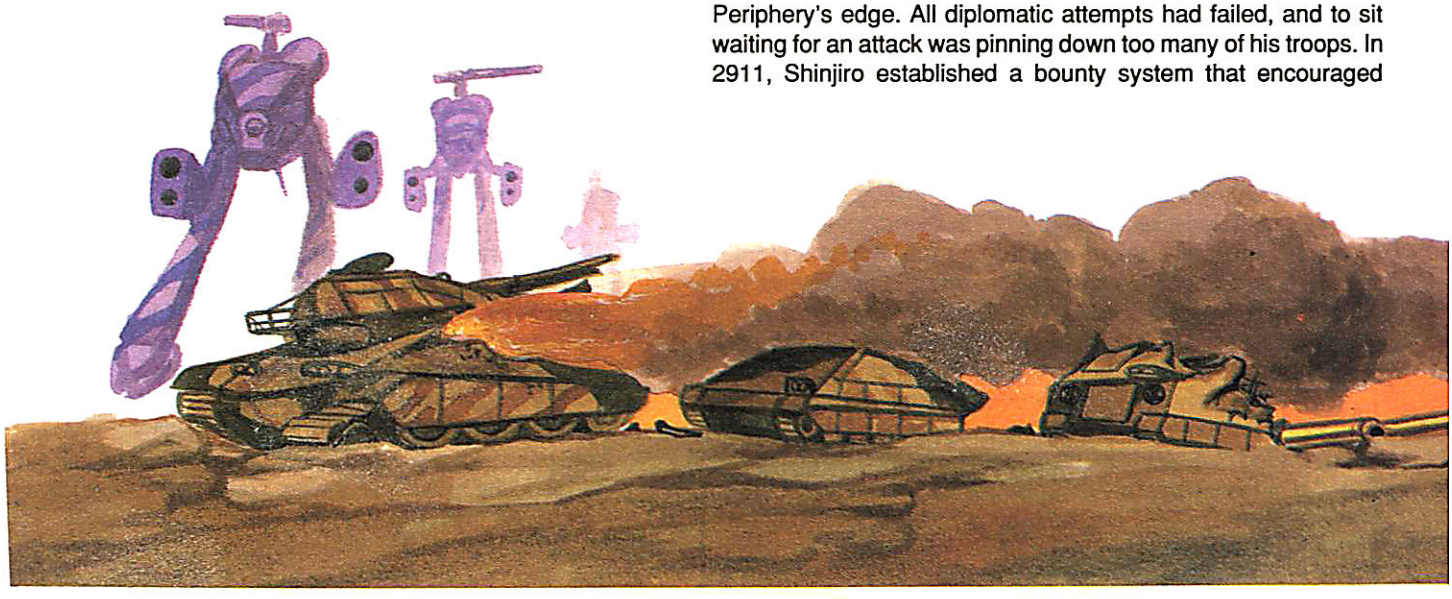
In the end, Taragi ordered that as much assistance as possible be given to the two stricken prefectures. In retrospect, his decision proved most fortunate. Three years later, in 2904, a new, cheap, and easily prepared vaccine was developed as a result of work in the Albiero Prefecture. Within another three years, the plague had been brought fully under control. Millions were spared by the Coordinator's decision to actively combat the plague.

Ironically, the medical profession that the Coordinator championed with his trust during the Albiero plague would ultimately fail him. In late 2907, a latent congenital defect in his heart suddenly struck Taragi down. The doctors in Imperial City tried to save him, but an error during surgery ruined his chances to recover. He died, as did the doctors who made the mistake.

OPERATION FREEDOM

Shinjiro Kurita proved to be far more politically skilled than his father had imagined. Upon taking the title of Coordinator in 2907, he immediately took up the reins of government and dismissed his father's counselors to show that he was in full control. He replaced them with a group of retired officers and diplomats who were among his teachers at the military academy. With this group of ex-professors and officers to assist him, Shinjiro began his reign.

His first concern was how to deal with the forces of the Bandit King that had been harassing the Kurita prefectures on the Periphery's edge. All diplomatic attempts had failed, and to sit waiting for an attack was pinning down too many of his troops. In 2911, Shinjiro established a bounty system that encouraged



hunting down the bandits. Open to all combat veterans of the DCMS, the program provided bounty hunters with surplus weapons systems, including a few battered 'Mechs, and transport on JumpShips. Nicknamed "The Gray Dragons," these bounty hunters did slow the rate of attacks against Kurita worlds along the Periphery.

In 2913, a more pressing military problem arose. The Lyran Commonwealth, having finally crawled out from under the Kurita offensive, was finally attempting an offensive of its own. It was named Operation Freedom after one of the worlds the offensive hoped to liberate in its first move.

Shinjiro lost almost two battalions of the 6th Sword of Light Mech regiments on Freedom. Pushed back by the elite Commonwealth 3rd Royal Guards, led by the Archon himself, the two Kurita battalions found themselves backed into a horseshoe valley with steep walls. The Steiner forces took further advantage of the situation by closing the mouth of the valley and then pouring a torrent of artillery fire onto the helpless Kurita 'Mechs. Soon, the two battalions of the Combine's best were no more. Even the death of the Steiner Archon in a freak 'Mech accident soon after did little to blunt the loss.

The Combine generals had been quite surprised by the fighting skill the Steiner troops showed on Freedom and other worlds in the area. Though some shrugged it off as mere luck, others could not help wondering if the Steiner military had finally found a way to correct its flaws.

TAMAR

When the arm of the Dragon lost its chance to seize Skye, the objectives of the offensive were changed to include worlds in the Tamar Pact. Though not as heavily industrialized as the Federation of Skye, this region had some relatively undamaged manufacturing centers that were still able to churn out their products. The region also had many agricultural worlds, which the Combine desperately needed.

Three 'Mech regiments would attack the planet: the 2nd Sword of Light, the 20th Dieron Regulars, and the 4th Proserpina Hussars. Twelve lesser regiments would back them up. In command of the whole operation was General Tugima Travison, a wily veteran who had spent the last three years on the Davion front. He had grown tired of the stalemate there and was now reveling in the fast action of the Commonwealth front.

His invasion was successful, and he landed his troops with only half the casualties expected. As hoped, the Commonwealth troops were stunned by the ferocity of the attack and were still reeling from it. General Travison delighted in toying with the Steiner units like a cat with mice. The only thing that prevented a complete collapse of the planet was the Commonwealth 'Mech units.

The Stealthy Tigers and two battalions from the elite Eridani Light Horse were especially inspired as they fought off the Kurita forces. As more of the defenders became motivated by their example, the Steiner soldiers began to fight with the same grit and determination as the defenders of Skye and Freedom.

With reinforcements from the LCAF pouring into Tamar faster than General Travison could keep up, his elation vanished as quickly as his initial advantage. By the beginning of 2916, General Travison had boarded a JumpShip back to the Draconis Combine. He was still wondering how the Commonwealth defenders had grown so tough.

THE ISF SINCE THE SHADOW WAR

It is time for even the bitterest of brothers to lay down their differences to face an enemy common to both.

—Coordinator Shinjiro Kurita in a message to the Internal Security Force, April 2919

When members of the ISF realized that they had become nothing but pawns murdering each other in the Shadow War between two Kuritas, it took some doing for the ISF Director to control his people's desire for revenge. In the end, the ISF reaffirmed its loyalty to the Draconis Combine, if not to the Kurita family.

After the Shadow War, the organization remained cloistered in its New Samarkand headquarters, avoiding direct contact with the government for the next ten years. This was also the location of the Black Dojo, a huge, featureless building that serves as the training center for the *metsuke*.

Not wishing to stir the wrath of the *metsuke*, the Coordinator did not try to pressure the ISF into returning to its more active former role. When contact between the ruler and ISF was necessary, the commander of the Sun Zhang Mech Warrior Academy acted as mediator. Though the ISF had withdrawn from Luthien, the organization continued to fulfill its obligations to the Draconis Combine during this time. Whenever the Sun Zhang commander passed on a request for their services, the ISF responded without hesitation. The main reason for remaining so obstinately separate from the government was to show the ISF's displeasure at having been used so callously.

Coordinator Shinjiro Kurita was a far-seeing ruler. Recognizing that dwindling resources in the Inner Sphere would eventually put limits on even the Arm of the Dragon, he saw that the concealed knife or the poisoned drink might become the most efficient way to eliminate some future enemies. Shinjiro felt it was essential to restore the closeness that had previously made the Coordinator and the ISF such a lethal combination.

Shinjiro Kurita visited New Samarkand in 2921. Though his official purpose was to address the graduating class of officers from the nearby Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy, his real purpose was to meet with the current ISF Director, Clarissa Indrahar, and her Council of Five.

PREFECT

The prefect's garb is one of understated wealth and power. The style is plain, but the material and workmanship are the best. The bands on the wrist, shoulders, boot-tops, and soles are platinum—a subtle but unmistakable statement of wealth. The braided belt is a sign of rank, symbolizing the strength found in unity and intertwining lives. It is also quite heavy, and can be used against a surly underling. The only other adornment allowed the prefect is the Dragon clasp, worn near the heart.

SHINJIRO AND THE ISF

The Dragon and Night Stalker meet in twilight. Worlds shall fear the results.

—Haiku by Clarissa Indrahar, in commemoration of the Davarapala Accords

The meetings between Shinjiro and Clarissa Indrahar stretched from the original plan of three weeks to become a six-month marathon. As a result, the two managed to hammer out a new accord between the ISF and the government.

The ISF's main grievance was at being placed under the control of the Combine military. As a compromise, Shinjiro offered to make the Director of the ISF a full member of the High Command. In that way, the Director would have a say and a vote on what her *metsuke* would be asked to do.

This concession satisfied Indrahar enough that other points of contention were resolved much more quickly. The Davarapala Accords were signed in 2921.

ON TWO FRONTS

Due to the unexpected stubbornness of the Lyran Commonwealth Armed Forces, House Kurita found that its offensive needed more time and many more units than originally intended. The cost of supplies tagged for the Steiner front were mounting far beyond the Kurita High Command's original estimates.

Because of the heavy activity on the Steiner front, the Kuritans had to pull some of their better units from duty along the Periphery; units of lesser quality went in to replace them. The various Bandit Kings took immediate notice of the changing of the guards and responded by attacking Kurita worlds with abandon. Though these attacks were often costly for the brigands, the handsome rewards more than made up for it. Of all the Gray Dragon bounty hunters, only retired General Ricardo Gillespie and his band (humorously nicknamed the "Geriatric Judge and Jury") was really successful. He and his tank company entered Luthien carrying the head of the notorious Grace Quiggley on the tip of the command tank's spike antenna.

Because so many men and so much material were being funnelled to the Steiner front, House Davion was making progress in its own battle against Kurita. Especially on worlds near Terra, the Davion commanders were able to take advantage of the Combine's need to keep the Steiner front so well-supplied that the Davion front was now under-manned and under-equipped.

Though House Kurita was winning more worlds along the Steiner front than they it was losing to the Federated Suns, the losses on the Davion front were especially disheartening and humiliating. Because the Combine commanders had always considered the Federated Suns to be their equal, every loss hit doubly hard.

THE FLY PAPER STRATEGY

The Arm of the Dragon's failure to capture Tamar proved more than just another humiliation for the Kurita generals. In one of the few truly clever strategic moves in the history of the Lyran Commonwealth, the LCAF High Command purposely left Tamar under-defended after forcing the last Kurita attacker offplanet.

Believing that the Commonwealth generals had just made a grievous mistake, the DCMS immediately attacked Tamar once again. As in the first invasion attempt, Lyran reinforcements arrived in time to drive away the Kurita attackers. Then, while the Kurita forces were retreating, the Lyrans pulled off most of their defenders in an open invitation to the Combine to attack again.

The purpose behind this erratic behavior was to tie up as many Kurita units as possible by tantalizing them with the hope of successfully invading Tamar. Every unit hanging about Tamar was one less to cause problems elsewhere for the Commonwealth High Command somewhere else. Though it did not take the Kurita officers long to understand this new "fly-paper strategy," the temptation of Tamar, the capital of one third of the Lyran Commonwealth, proved too great to resist. For the next six decades, Kurita units would make periodic attempts to invade Tamar, only to be pushed back each time.

—From *Blood and Tears: A Kurita Family History*, by Laura Smythe-Jones, Pesht National Press, 3000

The Marathon Offensive during the last years of the second war had convinced the Combine military that it was folly to attempt to sustain a major campaign on both fronts. In 2824, the Kurita High Command decided that as long as they continued to gain strategic advantage along the Commonwealth front, they would continue to devote to it the lion's share of supplies and equipment. This was, of course, a major disappointment for the Kurita officers on the Davion front.

HUGAI KURITA

In 2925, Shinjiro Kurita, the 27th Coordinator, died in his sleep. The circumstances of his death were somewhat suspicious, especially as a security computer had recorded the presence of a late-night visitor to the Coordinator's chambers on the evening of his death. The ISF and the Grand Inquisitor both investigated the matter, however, and pronounced that the leader's death was due to natural causes.

Into the Coordinatorship stepped Hugai Kurita. Still young at 35 years of age, Hugai had just taken command of a regiment when his father died, forcing his return to Luthien. Despite his age and inexperience, Hugai managed to impress the Draconis High Command with his calm bearing and quiet manner.

Hugai had grown up a stranger to his father. Shinjiro, a man fond of the spotlight, was not one to share his few emotions with less than millions. As a result, Hugai had spent most of his life away from Luthien and his father. Though this estrangement had never seemed to be a problem, there was a streak of violence that worried his mother and sisters.

Hugai was not the eldest offspring of Shinjiro Kurita, however. Though his sister Necess was older than him, the generals of the High Command had purposely passed over her for rulership of the Combine. For one thing, they were prejudiced against the fact that she was female. Though there had been women Coordinators in the past, the *bushido* mentality had reinforced the second-class status of women in the Combine—even at the highest levels. This did not prevent some upper-class women from holding important posts in the government or keep others from becoming MechWarrior and fighter pilots, but male chauvinism made it much harder for any but the most outstanding females to transcend their status.

Necess, however, had no interest in becoming Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. From her youth, she had been drawn to the arts of healing, which she believed were a more honorable pursuit than holding power over other humans. Her special interest was to rediscover lost medical techniques and technology, based on her training in medical sciences. Her work had already taken her to the other realms, much to her father's displeasure. Being a most stubborn and intelligent woman, Necess had decided that political boundaries would never prevent the possible rediscovery of some valuable tool or technique of the past.

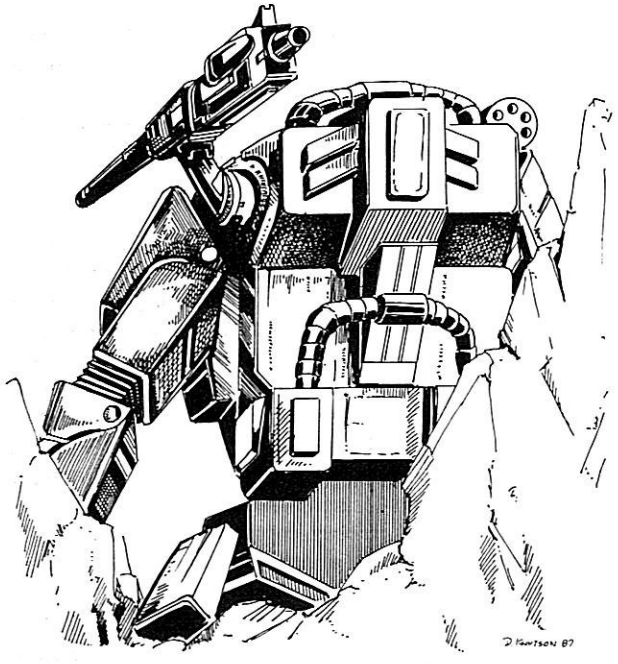
XHOSA VII

In the early days of Hugai's reign, the Federated Suns invaded Xhosa VII, an important Kurita world. Rich in deposits of metals and chemical energy sources, the planet also served the Arm of the Dragon as a major transportation center for distributing supplies and fresh troops to half of the Davion front.

For the past decade, the Federated Suns had been involved in a major offensive against the Capellan Confederation. With most of Davion's veteran 'Mech regiments busy grinding the House Liao military to dust, the generals of the Combine High Command assured Coordinator Hugai that there would be little activity on the Davion front for the next few years.

Though it was true that Davion had concentrated most of its forces on the Capellan front, its officers were not happy with the lull on the Kurita front. Indeed, the Davion strategists had long been considering the possibility of invading two Kurita worlds that seemed to be prime targets.

With supplies tight along the front, the Davion generals decided to invade only the planet Xhosa. Three 'Mech regiments and twelve lesser regiments would make the jump to Xhosa from the nearby Davion worlds of Olancha and Exeter.



Defending the planet were two regiments of Galedon Regulars and four lesser regiments, with Brigadier General Samson Sakamoto in command. As a warrior of the old style, Sakamoto's career had been long and illustrious.

Hugai had served under General Sakamoto and regarded him with great fondness almost as the father he never had. As a personal favor, Hugai had asked General Sakamoto to take over command of the 12th and 17th Galedon Regulars, both of which had just been reorganized, and so lacked any regimental spirit.

Xhosa was a world of barren plains, interrupted by mountain chains and thick forests. The planet's population had tended to cluster about the five major spaceports, leaving the rest of the planet only sparsely inhabited by loggers, hunters, and farmers. Because of Xhosa's location as a transportation center, the DCMS had used it as a training facility for its less experienced regiments. In late 2929, the two Galedon 'Mech regiments made the move to Xhosa.

The Davion attack came early the next year. Hidden among the heavy traffic of cargo ships, the Davion DropShips managed to make it almost halfway to the planet before being challenged and identified as enemy vessels. This gave General Sakamoto precious little time to prepare. He broke the 12th Galdeon Regulars into companies and charged them with protecting the spaceports and cities. He intended to meet the main enemy force while personally in command of the 17th Galedon Regulars.

The Davion attackers proved too strong, however. They seized two of the spaceports during the first day of the invasion, and used them to bring in the rest of their units, supplies, and support such as Long Tom artillery units. In defense, both Galedon Regular units fought with extraordinary skill and valor.

The biggest blow to the Kurita defenders was the death of General Sakamoto. While heading up the 17th Galedon Regulars, he challenged an advancing Davion 'Mech regiment on the Green Sands Plain, outside the capital city of New Xhosa. Though outnumbered and harassed by heavy artillery, General Sakamoto managed to outmaneuver the advancing enemy into exposing their command lance to him.

He then engaged General Mickertrick, the commander of the Davion invasion force, in 'Mech-to-'Mech combat. By the time reinforcements from both sides had arrived, both the two generals were dead and their 'Mechs transformed into hulks of smoldering metal.

ABDUCTION OF AN ACOLYTE

I've found that being a Kurita was a major hindrance to my growth as a person. I look forward to anonymity as a member of ComStar.

—Necess Kurita, in a public announcement on her intention to join ComStar, *Luthien Peoples' News Broadcast,* 2931

Hugai took the news of General Sakamoto's death hard. Though his warrior's training allowed him to control his grief, those near him knew how the loss affected him. It was in this state that the Coordinator learned the news that his elder sister had joined ComStar. Necess had grown increasingly frustrated by restrictions placed on her travel. She was also aware that ISF agents observed her every move during her visits to other realms. Disgusted by all this surveillance, Necess walked into the office of the ComStar Precentor on Luthien and announced that she wished to join our Blessed Order.

Matters between ComStar and House Kurita became quite tense during this time. No Kurita had ever asked to join our order, and so the news about Necess spread like wildfire across the Draconis Combine, despite the efforts of the ISF.

Meanwhile, the Precentor on Luthien was attempting to verify that Necess truly had a calling to the Order. He was aware of her abilities as a medical archaeologist, which would make her a welcome addition to our medical sciences division. After determining that Necess was sincere, his main concern was that she enter our Order quietly. That proved impossible, however.

The Coordinator responded foolishly. In November 2931, he sent a squad of ISF agents to the ComStar Hospice on Luthien, where Necess was serving her apprenticeship as a medic for the Unproductives who visit us for food and board. Though the two ROM agents protecting Necess managed to kill four of the ISF agents before dying themselves, the *metsuke* succeeded in capturing and returning her to Imperial City.

After Hugai locked Necess in a wing of the palace and forbade her to talk to any of our representatives, Precentor Stephanie Hendriks immediately protested the foul abduction of one of our Acolytes and the murder of two of our ROM agents. The Coordinator countered by claiming that Necess had been brainwashed into joining the ComStar.

When she requested orders from Terra, the Primus authorized her, under the Emergency Powers Act of the Holy Orders, to deal with the situation as she saw fit. Hendriks' first action was to contact ComStar Covert Operations to learn whether any mercenary unit was currently under contract with our organization. She was in luck. The Bandersnatches, a heavy 'Mech battalion of good ability, had just secretly signed on.

The Bandersnatches boarded a ComStar freighter headed for Luthien. During the journey, they removed, painted over, or replaced all identifying marks on their DropShips, 'Mechs, and uniforms, per our usual procedures. Once above Luthien, the DropShips of the Bandersnatches entered orbit and waited.

Precentor Hendriks had meanwhile entered into intense negotiations with Coordinator Hugai's advisors in Imperial City. She was attempting to arrange a meeting between only Hugai, Necess, and her in order to settle matters once and for all. Hugai's rash action had angered her, and she wanted to prove to him that he could not get away so easily with an attempt to cross ComStar.

Hendriks finally managed to obtain an audience with the Coordinator two weeks after the abduction. To get it, she had been forced to shut down the Luthien station for an entire day, which put the government into a panic. She met the Coordinator in the Grand Hall of Unity Palace, but Acolyte Necess was not present. When asked why, Hugai replied that he had no wish to see his sister manipulated by a "ComStar Witch."

Precentor Hendriks laid out her demands. Hugai must release Necess Kurita to make her own decision about whether to remain with her brother or to return to ComStar. Hugai responded haughtily until Precentor Hendriks explained that Luthien and the Draconis Combine would come under an Interdict from ComStar if he did not agree. Hugai smiled and said that the Combine could do without our services, if necessary.

What he did not expect was the holo-link Precentor Hendriks have made with Colonel Dietrikson, commander of the Bandersnatches. In clear military terms, Colonel Dietrikson informed the Coordinator that his unit's DropShips were just ten minutes from the Drop Window (the point from which 'Mechs exit their DropShips), and just 25 minutes from Touchdown in and about Unity Palace. Precentor Hendriks added that the Mercenaries had explicit orders to rescue Necess and her or to ruin Imperial City in the attempt.

Coordinator Hugai realized that even with the massive air and ground forces at his disposal, the fast-approaching Bandersnatches stood a good chance of making it onto the palace grounds. At that point, things would get very violent very fast. With a scowl, he announced that Necess was free to return to ComStar as a symbol of the Draconis Combine's undying appreciation of great service to the Inner Sphere. Precentor Hendriks bowed graciously and canceled the drop orders of the Bandersnatches.

Because Hugai had cooperated, ComStar did not attempt to further punish the Combine. Indeed, the Kurita leadership and ComStar have maintained cordial, if not friendly, relations since then.

THE STEINER QUAGMIRE

The truly odd thing about the Steiner front is that we win worlds, but each victory seems to slow us down and make us weaker. It is almost as though the Steiner worlds were an inert poison; the more we eat, the more they fester in our belly.

—Warlord Takeda Kenshin, Commander of the Rasalhague Military District forces

The loss of Xhosa on the Davion front made the generals of the Draconis High Command reexamine their military expectations on the Steiner front. In a year-long meeting held on Luthien in 2993, they discussed their operations there.

Though the Draconis Combine had seized almost 20 planets in their efforts against House Steiner, they had failed to capture two vital planets. The regional capitals of Skye and Tamar were both crucial to the Coordinator's plan to force House Steiner to sue for a treaty. Though invasion attempts against both planets had failed, the Kurita generals still held out hope of taking Tamar.

After the failed attempt against Skye, the Commonwealth forces managed to push the Kurita troops off nearby Zebebelgenubi, which had been the Combine's jumping off point for the attack on Skye. Now the Combine forces would have to use distant Alkalurops or Skondia as staging areas for future actions against Skye. The Draconis High Command agreed that would make everything much too costly.

The continual improvement in the quality of the LCAF was another topic of sober conversation among the Combine High Command. In the first and second wars and at the start of the third war, the Commonwealth forces had been rather incompetent, particularly among its officer corps, who seemed more interested in the cut of their uniforms than in strategy and tactics.

Though the vanity still existed, a sense of determination and self-confidence seemed to have infused the Commonwealth military. Now that the officer corps was actually willing to stand and fight—and with increasing skills, too—the lower ranks were also responding with rare acts of courage and heroism. This was bad news for the Arm of the Dragon, which had been used to seeing the Commonwealth troops cower or run at the mere flexing of its powerful muscles.

DECLINE AND FALL

All the good omens that had accompanied Hugai Kurita's accession had come to naught. Particularly after his sister left Luthien forever, he became completely withdrawn. Though many blamed Hugai's lack of interest in running the Draconis Combine on the loss of his mentor and his sister's departure from Luthien, it is hard to believe that this could explain the whole final decade of his rule.

During his increasingly long bouts of indifference, Hugai spent most of his time moodily wandering the Palace gardens, with orders that no one must disturb his reveries. Without the Coordinator's participation, the rest of the government could not create budgets. This, in turn, created severe problems for the DCMS and the DCA (Draconis Combine Admiralty).

As a result, from 2953 to Hugai's death in 2963, the DCMS and DCA had to survive on budgets that were simply repetitions of the 2952 budget, the last one in which the Coordinator had been personally involved. This meant that the military industries had been churning out the same quotas of parts and supplies for the last ten years. Though this kept the military afloat, a decade-old budget also resulted in frustrations such as Techs finding left knee actuators for a BattleMech in the warehouses but none for the right knee. Needless to say, barter became the name of the game between units.

The only military units that could get most of the supplies they needed were mercenaries, as they had access to a whole range of legal and illegal means. For a time, mercenary units such as the Plague Boys, the Shady Ladies, and McGee's Cutthroats were the best-equipped units in the Draconis Combine.

When McGee's Cutthroats landed on the Steiner world of Alexandria in 2953, they found themselves initiating the third war's biggest battle on the Steiner front. Seeing that the local units outgunned them, the Cutthroats called for help, which soon arrived. A simple raid soon escalated into a two-year campaign in which seven different 'Mech regiments played roles.

This large battle was not the only action along the Steiner front during Coordinator Hugai's depression. The LCAF finally made good their Operation Freedom when they took back Phalan from the Draconis Combine in 2952. So alarmed were the generals of the Kurita High Command that they began desperately to seek a way to bring the Commonwealth military down to their level. They decided upon another attack aimed at destroying the huge BattleMech facilities on Hesperus II.

In 2957, the ninth battle for Hesperus II occurred when two Kurita 'Mech regiments carried out an almost suicidal mission. The Kurita DropShips, having made it past the Commonwealth air defenders, dropped their 'Mechs as expected. In response, the Commonwealth 'Mech regiments arranged themselves in prepared positions on the plains outside the mountain range that housed the factories. The Kuritans did not drop onto the plain, as had every other attacker in the planet's long military history. Instead, the Combine 'Mechs dropped right into the mountain range.

More than half of the MechWarriors who participated in the attack died when their 'Mechs impacted on the mountainside. Glory of the Fallen Samurai banners were awarded to the families of those MechWarriors after the battle. Those who survived managed to severely damage the BattleMech factories before the Commonwealth defenders could arrive and drive them off. This heroic action crippled the factories, cutting Steiner 'Mech production by at least 50 percent.

HOHIRO KURITA

It is time for a renewal of that fire that made the Draconis Combine the unquestioned power in the Inner Sphere. Too long we have labored under false ideas spread to us from other realms. They are the concepts thought up by worms in human form, whose minds are corrupted by the weakness of emotion. We warriors know of only one emotion—devotion to the state. Those that feel otherwise are not true members of the Draconis Combine. They are the spawn of inferiors, and would be better off dead than alive in their haze of lies.

—Coordinator Hohiro Kurita, in an address to the graduating class of the Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy, 2965

Hugai was a weak ruler who fell prey to depression and loneliness, but his son Hohiro was the complete opposite. Believing that his father and other recent predecessors had failed to live up to their duty of fulfilling the destiny of House Kurita, he devoted himself body, mind, and soul to the cause.

Hohiro was a tall man, whose imposing face and body made even his smile seem like a threat. As a regiment commander, he ruled by fear. Whippings were so common in his unit that anyone not scarred by the lash was probably either a new unit member or Hohiro himself. As a commander, he was a Kurita to the core, carrying out attacks with abandon, and preferring to execute a good plan today rather than to wait for a better plan tomorrow.

When Hohiro assumed the Coordinatorship, he immediately injected life into the moribund DCMS and DCA by appropriating funds for them from the already meager budget of the People's Medical Services. Though this decision would eventually result in the outbreaks of a plague that would kill millions, the money did get a transfusion of needed parts to the Arm of the Dragon.

THE DRAGON RENEWED

Dragons are renewed
with blood of lessers. Why must
the small pay the big?

—Protest Haiku written on the walls of Imperial City, 2978

The fact that Hohiro took funds for the military from money originally tagged for health care of the lower classes indicated how he intended to treat anyone not intimately connected with the Kurita military. What he called "the coddling of the common citizenry" was another of the subversive ideas that the Coordinator wanted to stamp out.

Under the banner of "Dragon Renewals," the Coordinator took away the few services existing for the aid and relief of the lower classes. When he even attempted to close down the ComStar Hospices, officials turned him away with a reminder of what was within our power to do. Not surprisingly, those who wished to enter ComStar from the Draconis Combine rose astronomically during Hohiro's reign.

Language became another point of contention. Coordinator Hohiro wished to make Japanese the realm's only accepted language, with violations punishable by a public whipping. When news of this spread throughout the realm, it sparked off angry public demonstrations despite the tyranny of the times. The situation became so tense that Coordinator Hohiro was forced to sullenly withdraw the order making Japanese the only language in 2978.

Hohiro even managed to rile the ISF when he announced that his intention to review the Davarapala Accords because he had such grave doubts about almost all its provisions. Alarmed, the Director of the ISF managed to communicate his displeasure by having agents burn a large *jitte* on the lawn of the Coordinator's favorite garden. Amused by this audacity, Hohiro let the ISF continue on under the Accords.

Hohiro was not amused by the fact that many merchants, bankers, and industrialists resented his efforts to tighten his hold on the Combine. When some of these came to him to protest his harsh policies, Hohiro seized their holdings and had them beheaded. This led to an unprecedented revolt known as the Strike of 2989, in which major Combine industries shut down in protest against Hohiro's tyranny. Though the Coordinator tried everything from executions to attempting to run the factories with soldiers, he could not break the will of the wealthy bankers and industrialists. After four months of the strike threatened to put the Arm of the Dragon in jeopardy, Hohiro relented and began to ease up on the terms of his Dragon Renewal.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM

It's not enough to run here and there to strike at the enemy. Guile and cunning are required tools of a warrior, too.

—General Takashi Kurita, commander of the Imperial Palace Guards, 3002

As the year 3000 approached, Hohiro had been in power for 37 years, and the Draconis Combine showed the effects. Exhaustion, fear, and fatalism seemed to rob the Draconian people of their spirit. Among all the harsh Coordinators of the Combine, Hohiro had proved to be the most cruel.

To celebrate the passage of the old millennium and to usher in the new, Hohiro called for festivals and observances to take place across realm. When the incredulous people finally realized that the Coordinator was serious, they plunged into preparations like a starving men to a feast.

THE ARM OF THE DRAGON UNDER HOHIRO

While Hohiro's policies were causing one of the few public demonstrations of mass disobedience in the history of the Draconis Combine, the Combine military was suffering under its own set of new policies.

Coordinator Hohiro had stripped the warlords of much of their power to carry out at least some actions under their own initiative. Now all actions had to pass through the High Command, which resulted in a military very sluggish about responding to new situations. Also taking its toll was the ultra-harsh treatment of the soldiers, which Hohiro seemed to feel was beneficial to warriors. The constant terror under which the average soldier now lived was making him dull, completely lacking in the fire that had formerly characterized the Kurita troops.

Both the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns took advantage of Hohiro's egomania by making gains against the Arm of the Dragon. The Lyrans managed to take a few worlds back from the Federation of Skye section of the front, but it was the Federated Suns that gained most from the Combine's military sluggishness. During Hohiro's reign, House Davion succeeded in taking back seven of its worlds.

—From "Leadership Trends in the Draconis Combine During the Third War," Internal ComStar Bulletin, 3012

When the festivals commenced a full month before the new year, the reason for Hohiro's unexpected benevolence became clear. Three years before, he had called his son Takashi back from the Davion front to command the Otomo, the elite Household Guard. Now, Hohiro announced that he had important plans for his son, which he would announce on New Year's Day, 3000.

It was clear that the festivals and celebrations were as much for Hohiro's coming announcement as they were for the advent of the millennium. This cruel, harsh man had one soft spot in his heart, and it was for his son. He had lavished attention and gifts on the boy as a child, which had prompted the comment among the lower classes that Hohiro would spare one-tenth of 1 percent of the love for his son on the Combine, then the Unproductives would feast on caviar every day.

As a young officer in the 2nd Sword of Light 'Mech regiment, Takashi had displayed considerable talent. His skill at piloting a *BattleMaster* (a particular favorite of the Kuritas, along with *Dragons* and *Atlases*) was exceeded only by his innate leadership ability. Even the already elite 2nd Sword of Light improved under his command. Takashi eventually rose to command the regiment's heavy assault battalion. He apparently enjoyed the life of a battlefield commander, and there is some evidence to indicate that he was not pleased to be pulled from the regiment and brought home to Luthien.

It was, by all accounts, a truly spectacular New Year's Eve party, with more fireworks exploded that night on Luthien than ever before in human history. It was said that telescopes on nearby Chatham actually noted a slight increase in the amount of light coming from the Luthien system due to the massive display.

As scheduled, Hohiro made his much-heralded announcement on January 1, 3000. In a speech broadcast across the realm, he announced Takashi's promotion to Brigadier General and that he would serve as Hohiro's representative in the High Command of the Arm of the Dragon. He would also take command of the Otomo, the Palace Household Guard.

The sole purpose of the *Otomo*, is to protect the Coordinator and Unity Palace. It is slightly larger than a regiment in size and is made up of a mixture of 'Mechs, armor, and infantry companies from Sword of Light regiments and other units from each of the five military districts. It is a high honor to be chosen to serve in the *Otomo*. It is also easy duty because it has been decades since any enemy attack on Luthien. To be assigned to the Household Guard is known as "getting the dream ticket." Commanding the *Otomo* is an equally great honor and reserved as a heredity post for Kurita family members.

Despite the honor, Takashi Kurita was ambivalent about his new command. On the one hand, he liked being on Luthien because he was learning much about the politics of the Combine. There is no doubt that Takashi was looking forward to becoming Coordinator. But being confined to a post in the High Command and to the command of a regiment's worth of toy soldiers in shiny uniforms meant that Takashi would unlikely feel the heat of battle again. That made him sad. Some would later say it also made him mad.

ASSASSINATION OF HOHIRO

Like all men, I must face death one day. The circumstances surrounding my death won't matter to me, for I'll be on my way to heaven. It is only those who I leave behind who will discuss the matter.

—Coordinator Hohiro Kurita, 3002

If anyone expected Hohiro's new leniency to continue after the New Year's celebration, they were sadly disappointed. Immediately after the festivities were over, the Coordinator reimposed all the harsh edicts. He even strengthened some of them to help "strip away the laziness the celebrations caused." The festivities had reminded the people of a more joyful way of life, and many resented having it cut off again so quickly.

Late one night, *Otomo* Talon Sergeant Ingmar Sterenson slipped through a slight gap between two walls and entered the private gardens of the Coordinator. As one of Takashi Kurita's trusted aides, Sterenson knew the location of the motion detectors and the heat sensors and exactly how to avoid them. He silently slipped past all the security devices.

Ironically, it was the most ancient security device of all that nearly stopped him. The floors of the Coordinator's private quarters were of polished wood deliberately laid to squeak loudly whenever anyone walked. Sterenson had forgotten this, and when he stepped onto the raised floor of the Coordinator's Bedchamber Building, the squeak immediately alerted the *Otomo* guards. Sterenson ran toward the private bedrooms of Hohiro. Twice he was attacked by guards wielding swords (lasers were not allowed in the private quarters of the Coordinator), but Ingmar Sterenson, an expert with the sword, deftly cut them down.

Talon Sergeant Ingmar Sterenson burst into the Coordinator's bedchamber. Standing before the still-fearless leader of the Draconis Combine, Sterenson raised the sword above his head and screamed, "Independence for the people of Rasalhague!" He then cleaved the skull of Hohiro Kurita, 29th Coordinator of the Draconis Combine.

The repercussions of Hohiro's assassination were wide-reaching.

Talon Sergeant Ingmar Sterenson was apprehended and held by his fellow *Otomo* until they could locate Takashi Kurita. When Takashi arrived on the scene where his father lay dead, he had Sterenson taken out into the garden and shot. The *Otomo* then hung the assassin's body upside down from a tree until the bones dropped to the ground.

Though many among the populace might have been glad to see the tyrannical Hohiro dead, they could not help wondering if Takashi would be worse. So they watched and waited to see what his son had in store for his people.

TAKASHI'S "BENEVOLENCE"

I could never understand my father's harsh attitude toward the people. You would not give constant whippings to a horse you must ride every day. The beast would either throw you off or die. That's no way to treat a horse or a realm.

—Coordinator Takashi Kurita to Precentor Ambassador Isabel Sephran, 3005

A month after his father's funeral and the official state mourning given the fallen Coordinator, Takashi Kurita surprised everyone by announcing sweeping reforms to the laws governing the public of the Draconis Combine. Acting the part of benevolent leader, he outlined plans that would significantly loosen the chains that had shackled Draconian society under his father's administration.

While the public rejoiced over the proposed laws, which would repeal almost all of Takashi's restrictions, critics within the government began to mutter. They considered Takashi's proposal to be a ploy to prevent too close an investigation into how Sergeant Sterenson had managed to kill the Coordinator. Could the assassin have had help from Takashi?

When the ISF informed Coordinator Takashi of the rumors that he had played a part in his father's death, Takashi became enraged. Mustering the *Otomo*, he had them round up and bring into the courtyard of Unity Palace anyone who had been spreading such sedition, along with many former enemies. Takashi then accused them of traitorously weakening the Draconis Combine with their malicious lies. There was only punishment for such behavior, he shouted. With that, the *Otomo* began to cut down the politicians with their laser rifles.

It shocked many nobles to see Takashi begin to hunt down those who might have escaped the courtyard massacre. They then watched as he also executed the families of anyone who questioned him. Among the common people, this purge was a sign that Takashi's true nature was as violently repressive as his father's.

Takashi Kurita was not his father, however, Once he was sure that the people of influence as well as the general public understood his ruthlessness, he formally passed the new laws loosening the restrictions on Kurita society.

MILITARY REVIVAL

While control of the government was passing from Hohiro to Takashi, the DCMS and the DCA were suffering a series of setbacks at the hands of the Federated Suns. In 3002, for example, Davion troops routed a numerically superior Kurita force, including a Sword of Light regiment, in the Third Battle for Harrow's Sun. This gave the Federated Suns two major bulges into the Draconis Combine. One bulge was tipped by Harrow's Sun and the other was tipped by Cylene II.

For his part, Takashi decided to revamp the military. He made it plain to the officers of each regiment that nobody's job was safe. To strengthen the whole military, Takashi reshuffled the command structure of many regiments and showed that he would not hesitate to pull even the most illustrious commander from his post if necessary.

Every officer on and off the field now realized that he would be under close scrutiny, which created a sense of competition between unit commanders. The fear of imminent dismissal served to heighten the skills of each unit. It even promoted the use of innovative tactics, though this was not Takashi's public aim. In this same period, Takashi also removed the front commanders and returned to the policy of each military district's Warlord commanding the fight on his own portion of the front.

The Davion front concerned Takashi most. In 3007, he opened a modest offensive whose goal was to pinch off the two Davion bulges in the Kurita lines. He had attacks launched against Cylene, Mara, and Galatia III on one bulge while he attacked Harrow's Sun, Benet III, and Crossing. Perhaps because of the new sense of competition among the Kurita units, all the attacks succeeded. Very well pleased, Coordinator Takashi began to plan more ambitious schemes.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS HIS RIVALS

I'm a firm believer that history, and perhaps Buddha himself, judges people not by their friends, but by their enemies.

—Coordinator Takashi Kurita, from a speech to the graduating class of the Sun Zhang MechWarriors Academy, 3014

In 3013, the Third Battle of Mallory's World began when Coordinator Takashi ordered the Warlord of Dieron to seize that important agricultural planet. Using three 'Mech regiments, including the Coordinator's 2nd Sword of Light, and ten non-Mech lesser regiments, the invasion force hit the planet's major continent under cover of night.

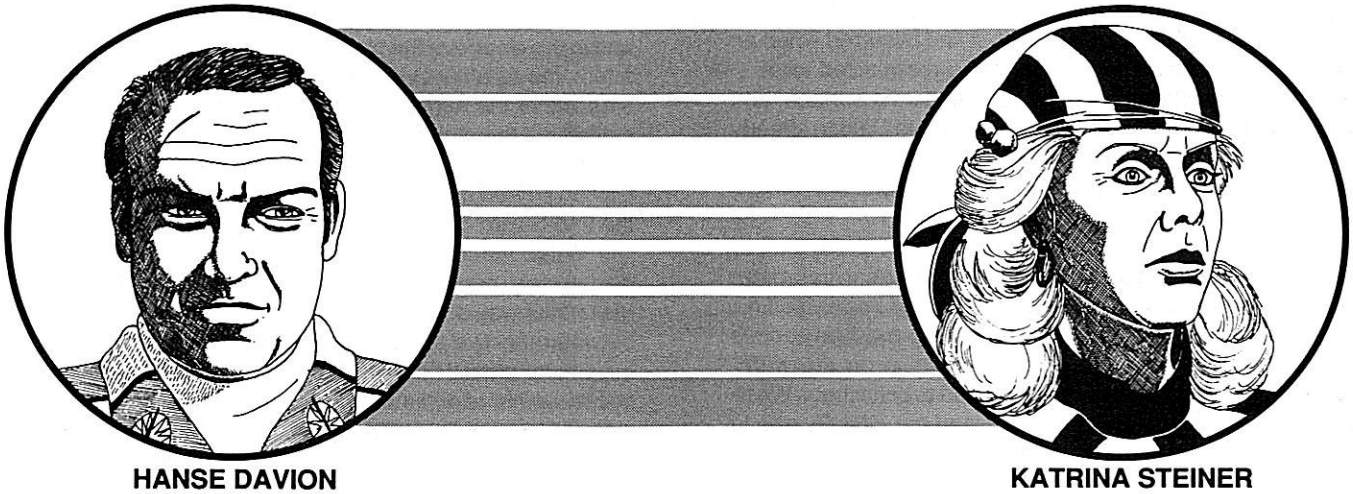
After three months of intensive combat, the continent was little more than a maze of burnt farm fields and destroyed cities. Though the Davion defenders finally managed to drive off the Kurita invaders, they paid a high price for success. While leading the defenders of Mallory's World, Ian Davion, Prince of the Federated Suns, was killed. This left control of the Federated Suns to Hanse Davion, Ian's younger brother.

Takashi was familiar with Hanse Davion, as he had read every intelligence report of the young man's early career in the military. The desire to know his future enemy grew into an odd friendship of sorts. When Hanse's father died, Takashi made an unprecedented, kind gesture of sending a note of condolence. Since then, each has taken a keen interest in the life and career of the other. Hanse Davion even sent a message expressing the wish that Takashi's wife Jasmine would recover from a serious illness that befell her in 3019.

There is, however, no doubt that each considers the other an honorable and respected opponent. This does not deny that they are sworn enemies. The fact that he respects Hanse Davion pleases Takashi immensely, because it gives their struggles the aura of epic struggle prized in *bushido*. Takashi realized that Hanse Davion is probably the only person he can trust to always do his best.

Takashi Kurita's opinion of the leader of the Lyran Commonwealth was not high at first. His opinion of her has risen in recent years. Though he was amused by her recent peace initiative, which he found a typically "womanly" gesture, he was impressed at how eloquently she stated her intention to defend her realm to the last warrior, if necessary.

Considering the similarity in political styles and outlook between Hanse Davion and Katrina Steiner, the only real reason Takashi holds Katrina Steiner in lesser esteem is due in large part to the Kurita attitude toward females.



HANSE DAVION **KATRINA STEINER**

THE HALSTEAD STATION AFFAIR

Of all my enemies, and there are many, I see the most honor in Prince Hanse Davion. His is a mind capable of seeing the advantages to be won from disaster.

—Coordinator Takashi Kurita in an overheard conversation with Subhash Indrahar, 3019

The Battle for Halstead Station was one of the first incidents in which Takashi Kurita faced Hanse Davion in a crisis. His exploits during the months of that battle went a long way to forming the Coordinator's high opinion of the new leader of the Federated Suns. The history of this battle dates back to 3012, however, one year before Prince Ian's death put Hanse Davion on the throne.

In that year, it came to the attention of the Davion military that House Kurita had converted huge sections of the quiet world of Halstead Station into an immense warehouse. Angered by the delays in getting spare parts from the Procurement Department to his frontline troops, Takashi had ordered construction of a depot closer to the Davion border to quickly supply his troops.

The Combine's military architects began immediately to excavate huge pits in the planet's surface, where the immense underground warehouses would be built. They would be constructed of concrete, steel, and armor to withstand the heaviest barrage from artillery and bombs. Defending these depots would be a circle of hardened positions bristling with guns to ward off any enemy attack from land or air.

Though the Combine military attempted to keep construction of the supply center top-secret, word of the project somehow leaked its way to Prince Ian Davion. Davion realized the danger to his forces should the Kurita military have quick access to replacement parts and supplies. The Prince considered it such a high-priority matter that he began personally to design the assault on the planet and the construction site.

By late 3013, Ian Davion's plans were almost complete, and he had marshaled almost all his forces for the attack. Just as he was about to brief his generals on his plans, he received the news that House Kurita had attacked Mallory's World. Without hesitation, Prince Ian left to direct the defense of that planet. When he later died on Mallory's World, the plans for the attack on Halstead Station almost died with him.

Though the Davion generals counseled the new Prince to postpone or even cancel the attack on Halstead, Hanse surprised them all by deciding to continue with the invasion as planned.

What the generals did not know was that Hanse Davion had just received important news from Halstead Station that Kurita construction crews had recently stumbled upon the ruins of a large complex of buildings while excavating on the planet. It did not take the Kuritans long to realize that they had dug up the remains of a large university. The biggest find occurred when an earth-scooper broke its bucket when it hit a room-sized vault.

It had taken weeks to bring the vault up to the surface, and would take weeks longer to safely open it. Hanse Davion already had an inkling of what might be in the vault, however. If he was right, the cache might prove far more important than Lord Kurita's new warehouses.

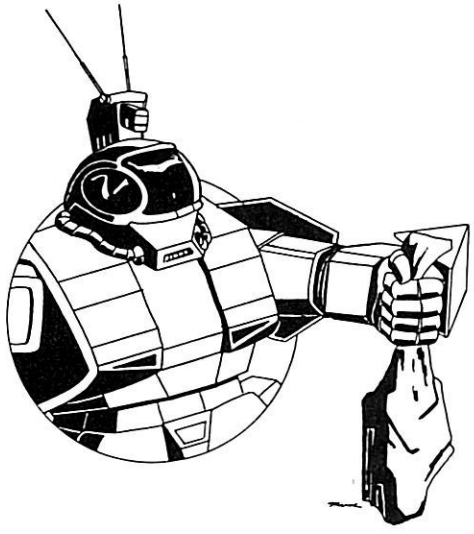
January 4, 3014 found Prince Hanse Davion at the lead of three 'Mech regiments. Based on a vague idea of what his brother had intended for the attack on the planet, he had improvised his own plan. His strategy hinged on a lightning drop and then a series of attacks aimed at destroying the construction on the warehouses, as well as the heavy machinery used to build them. While this was going on, Hanse Davion would lead the First Guards to find the mysterious vault. At prearranged points, the DropShips would land, pick up the entire raiding force, then leave again.

Takashi Kurita also realized what might be in the mysterious vault in the ruins of the university. When he heard that they could not remove the vault until it was opened and the contents preserved, the Coordinator sent reinforcements to the planet. On the day of the Davion raid, an additional 'Mech regiment and a large number of Kurita AeroSpace Fighters had arrived to bolster the 'Mech regiment and other lesser regiments already on the planet.

The drop and raid went as planned for the Davion attackers. Hanse Davion and his units, surprised by the increased numbers of Kurita 'Mechs, managed nevertheless to reach the vault. Opening the vault with a series of punches, the Davion 'Mechs reached inside.

The Prince's suspicions had been correct. What the huge hands of the 'Mechs found inside the vault were hundreds of priceless books.

There was no time to carefully pack up the books, and so the Davion 'Mechs picked up handfuls and stuffed them into large sacks. With sacks bulging, the 'Mechs then burned the remaining volumes, though this deeply pained Hanse. Now the 'Mechs of the Federated Suns made their way to the landing points for their DropShips.



Those ships were not there, however. In the space above Halstead Station, the Davion DropShips were in a running battle with Kurita fighters, most of which the Davion naval officers had not been expecting. Landing to pick up the Prince and his 'Mech regiment was impossible. Survival was now the name of the game for the Davion DropShips.

So started a cat-and-mouse game played both on the ground and in the air above the planet. Five times, the Davion DropShips attempted to rendezvous with the Prince and his 'Mechs. Each time, either the Kurita ground forces or their AeroSpace Fighters sniffed out the plan and thwarted it.

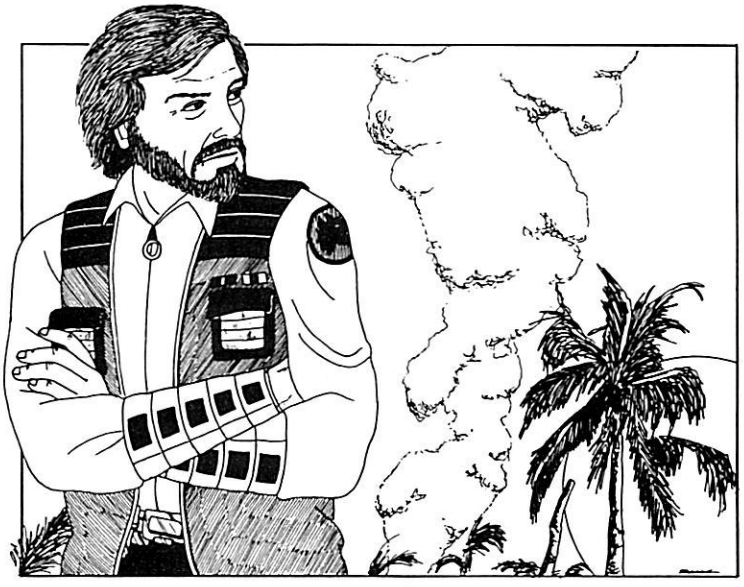
When Coordinator Takashi heard that his forces had Prince Davion pinned on Halstead station, he immediately went in with the 2nd Sword of Light to lead the hunt.

When reinforcements from the Federated Suns, including desperately needed AeroSpace Fighters, finally managed to make their way down to the planet's surface, much had occurred between the two sides. Prince Davion had, on three separate occasions, placed his own life in peril to protect his troops. On one occasion, his command battalion held a bridge on the enemy's side of a large river , exposing themselves to enemy fire, while the stragglers of a battered Davion company made their way across the river.

As the Davion DropShips, escorted by Davion Aero-Space Fighters, left Halstead Station, Coordinator Takashi Kurita could not prevent a grim smile of admiration from breaking over his grimy face.

The bags of books, which the 'Mechs of the Federated Suns had protected so diligently during the fighting, did prove far more important than Davion's success in destroying the Kurita storage base. The books were priceless antiques that the university had collected and protected in the vault. Though many were volumes on literature, economics, and psychology, most exciting to Hanse Davion were those dealing with technical matters such as water purification, myomer production, and computer design.

The Halstead Collection, as these books came to be known, are now housed in a special library whose atmosphere is carefully controlled to preserve the books. These volumes became the foundation for the curriculum at the New Avalon Institute of Science, where the books are housed today.



JAIME WOLF (WOLF'S DRAGOONS)

ATTITUDE TOWARDS MERCENARIES

Under the leadership of Takashi Kurita, the Draconis Combine has recently mellowed its attitude toward Mercenaries. No longer are units-for-hire treated as "mercenary scum," which was the infamous Jinjiro's term for them. Though this does not mean that the Kurita military gives merc units any special treatment, it does mean that House Kurita is no longer willing to risk a unit's ire by openly cheating them. Instead, Kurita prefers to use the more subtle "Company Store" scam to entangle mercenary units.

The recruiting and supervision of mercenaries is handled by the Professional Soldiery Liaison (PSL), which is under direct control of the DCMS High Command. Coordinator Takashi Kurita also takes an active interest in mercenary recruitment, and so often sets down the bargaining terms for the PSL negotiators. In the case of large or prestigious units such as Wolf's Dragoons, he sometimes involves himself in the contact with the unit's leader.

Takashi Kurita apparently views the mercenary life with some envy. On at least one occasion, he, along with an absolute minimum of *Otomo,* accompanied Jaime Wolf on a raid into Davion space. It was ostensibly to observe the Dragoon's tactics, but reports have it that Takashi's real reason was a simple desire to taste battlefield life as a MechWarrior once more.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Look, we may have pushed him back a bit in recent years, but don't you ever assume we've weakened him. He is the dragon on which his realm is based; scales for skin, flame for breath, leathery wings to fly, and all the more dangerous coiled like we have him now.

—Prince Davion to the Ambassador from the Lyran Commonwealth, 3025

With Hanse Davion's accession, a new chapter of the war began to unfold. As one of his personal goals, Hanse vowed to recover all the worlds lost to Minoru Kurita in the First Succession War. Though it is an ambitious program, the Prince seems to have the patience necessary to prepare thoroughly and to see it through.

His first offensive moves were actually against the Capellan Federation, with some forces left on the Kurita border to conduct raids that would keep Takashi's forces off-balance.

Takashi took the offensive by attacking the Davion world of Mara in 3015, using a combined Dieron and Benjamin task force. The Warlord of Dieron had control over the three 'Mech regiments composed of two Dieron Regulars and one Benjamin Regulars. They attacked in three different sites around the main continent of Mara.

The invasion was a textbook example of Takashi's attempt to improve the performance of his troops by encouraging competition between their commanding officers. The Dieron Warlord had many years of experience, and his district was the only one that faced both the Federated Suns and the Lyran Commonwealth. The Warlord of the Benjamin District, Ukita Yoriyoshi, was the new and rising star of the DCMS. He favored speed and innovation over the Dieron Warlord's more cautious style. Theirs was to prove an abrasive relationship.

Under the Dieron Warlord's leadership, much of the Kurita force managed to get itself pushed onto a narrowing peninsula. Hearing of this at another dropsite, Warlord Yoriyoshi took a battalion of his 3rd Benjamin Regulars, loaded them onto their DropShips during a battle, and took off. Landing behind the enemy forces, his 'Mechs dismounted fast enough to attack the Davion forces from behind. Before the Davion troops could get organized, Yoriyoshi had fought his way to the besieged Dieron Warlord, then began pushing the split Davion forces apart.

When The Kuritans had pushed the Davion forces off the planet, the Dieron Warlord attempted to have Yoriyoshi courtmartialed for disobeying a plan drawn up by the Coordinator himself. Takashi, who had been following the battle closely, stepped in and instead decorated Yoriyoshi for showing such initiative.

The Coordinator was far less pleased with events on the Steiner front, which had become almost completely stagnant. Only the fight for the heavily industrialized world of Sevren showed any real possibilities.

To try and shake things up, Takashi designed and executed a plan to seize the Commonwealth world of Laurent in 3016. Because of the planet's positions, the Draconis Combine could effectively cut off both Tamar and Sevren from the rest of the Commonwealth by getting control of Laurent.

Using three regiments of the Rasalhague Regulars, their first action was a ruse to give the appearance that the Kuritans were reinforcing their forces on Sevren by actually landing those 'Mech units on the planet. Though they did participate in the fighting on Sevren, the three regiments tended to stick close to the spaceport

and their DropShips. The instant the Commonwealth reacted to the presence of the three new Kurita regiments on the planet by sending in their own reinforcements, the Rasalhague units loaded onto their DropShips and moved out of the Sevren system to Laurent.

Those three Kurita 'Mech regiments came very close to taking Laurent. If it had not been for the strong defense put up by the planet's militia and the Beta Battalion of the 8th Donegal Guards, the planet would have fallen long before the arrival of reinforcements from Tamar and Sevren.

The attempt to take Laurent did not succeed, but it did create considerable action along the Steiner border. The reactions of the LCAF gave the Arm of the Dragon plenty of opportunities to make raids against Commonwealth planets.

WHEN ENEMIES UNITE

When Takashi Kurita flatly refused to even consider the Archon Katrina Steiner's cease-fire proposals in 3020, he did not dream that any of the other realms would take her seriously. Hanse Davion did, however, and quietly entered into a series of intense discussions aimed at creating an alliance between the Federated Suns, the largest and most powerful of realms, and the Lyran Commonwealth, the richest.

Whether it was male chauvinism that made Takashi reject the Archon's offer or the code of *bushido,* which tends to spurn negotiated settlements, Lord Kurita soon learned to regret his lack of civility. When he heard that the two realms had signed a peace and alliance treaty, he went nearly apoplectic with rage, one of the few times anyone had ever seen Takashi so out of control.

The Coordinator immediately sent emissaries to the Capellan Confederation and to the Free Worlds League. His hope was to forge his own alliance to face off with the Lyran-Suns. This goal has not yet come to pass because of the difficulty inherent in uniting three realms that are basically distrustful of one another. They have managed to coordinate some military efforts, however. Only time will tell if the three can overcome their wariness enough to jointly combat the ever-stronger bond between the Commonwealth and the Federated Suns.

INTERNAL SQUABBLES

Yes, there have been attempts on my life, but most leaders have to expect such things. For who can rule perfectly? With just a few words, I might instantly turn 20 million loyal subjects into enemies bent on seeing me dead. One rules as best he can, but learns to suspect every shadow, every blind corner.

—Archon Katrina Steiner in a Holo-interview, Tamar Broadcasting Company, 3024

There have been nine attempts on the life of Takashi Kurita during his reign as Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. The first came during his first year, when a distant relative of a man executed during the courtyard purge rushed up with a knife raised to strike. Takashi, whose padded jersey absorbed the knife thrust, also managed to break his assailant's neck. He ordered that the assassin's body be hung from the main gate of the Imperial Palace, along with that of every member of the *Otomo* group charged with guarding him that day.

The last three attempts have been sophisticated in their operation and suggest a single source. The first occurred in 3021 when a bomb detonated in Takashi's DropShip. The Coordinator managed to escape in an AeroSpace Fighter.

The next attempt came in 3023 when a courtesan pricked Takashi's finger with a poison-tipped needle hidden on her person. Though Takashi survived, he was deathly ill for two weeks and can no longer tolerate milk products because of reaction to the poison.

The third and latest attack came just five months ago. While Takashi was sparring in his *BattleMaster*, a microchip popped up from where it had been implanted in the 'Mech's coordination and guidance panel. It immediately began to send spurious signals into the Security Procedures panel. The controls of Takashi's 'Mech would no longer respond to his touch. Instead, the computer informed him that he was an intruder and had five minutes to vacate or else his 'Mech would self-destruct. The microchip had also latched the hatch to the *BattleMaster*, trapping Takashi. He barely managed to escape by desperately yanking every computer board in his display, which shorted out the rogue system.

The sophistication of these attempts points to an assassin who not only has knowledge of technology but of Takashi Kurita himself. Though the ISF suspects Marcus Kurita, cousin to Takashi, they have no real evidence. Marcus had been removed as Warlord of the Rasalhague Military District in 3019 when Takashi decided that his cousin was becoming too popular among both the people and the troops in the district. The Coordinator therefore "promoted" him to Chief of the Strategies within the DCMS High Command. Marcus was not particularly pleased with being removed so summarily from his original, important post.

THE CONTINUING ALLIANCE

The alliance between the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns has had a major impact on the fighting abilities of these two Houses. The Federated Suns launched a major offensive in 3022 that resulted in the capture of the important worlds of Tancredi II, Galatia, Rome, and several others. They also managed to seize Galtor III, a major source of Star League materials. These successes became even sweeter with the return of the elite Eridani Light Horse, which had been resting and recouping from losses of a decade earlier.

On the Steiner front, Tamar and Sevren, two planets that had been contested for decades, have now fallen to the Lyrans. The abilities of the LCAF have continued to improve, and the Steiners have further bolstered their military by employing mercenary units such as Hansen's Roughriders.

If House Kurita is known for anything, it is for their ability to respond fiercely and passionately when pressured or cornered militarily. If Takashi can hold onto his reign, his lenient policies plus the ability to skillfully manipulate his officers should combine with traditional Kurita fervor to sorely test anything the Steiner-Davion alliance can throw at him.

—From "An Unofficial Look at the Kurita-Steiner-Davion Fronts," Precentor Stils Weinstein, Internal Bulletin, ComStar Publications, 3025

PILLAR OF GOLD

SOCIOPOLITICAL STRUCTURE

the sun on earth, gold
can melt and form again
it is still strong

Gold has been considered the most precious of metals since the beginning of civilization. Aside from its glowing beauty, it is prized for its malleability and resistance to corrosion. Another property of gold, which can be beaten very thin and still remain strong, is that it does not readily combine with most chemical elements or compounds.

ETERNAL TRUTH

A jeweler had a gram of gold. His assistant wished to see how thin the gold could be beaten. He worked on it for hours, until he could no longer see it. When the master entered, the assistant was concerned that the gold was gone. He brushed the work surface over the pot, and the gold was all there. The jeweler laughed at the foolish youth, for the wise man knows that gold, no matter how beaten, will never disappear.

—From *Tales of the Old One*, by Shozo Sato, Carp of Truth Press, 2890

In the same way, the political workings of House Kurita are like a veneer of gold over the Draconis Combine. They must, however, be a glowing sheen rather than a heavy burden. These workings should also resemble the gold in electrical connections, precious because of the gold's utility as well as its invisibility. Thus do the Kurita leaders maintain order in the Draconis Combine by subtly manipulating the psychology of their people. To do this, they use a combination of restricted information, a rigid social order, and constant military presence, rather than obvious legal and police restraints. People oppressed by a tyrannical ruler will overthrow that ruler; people oppressed by themselves and their neighbors will have a more difficult time even discovering the roots of their discontent.

The mode of thought that maintains the Kuritan social order is a sense of communality. One man in space cannot survive, this teaching says, for we need one another to exist. One person is not important, but the society is. If a man should sacrifice himself so that the society can live on, he does not perish. He survives in the greater life of the society.

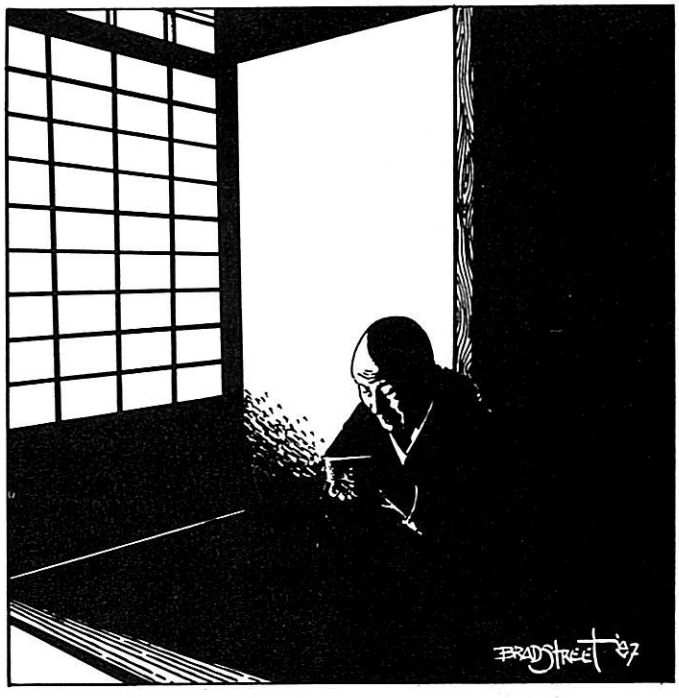
The center of this society is the Coordinator, who controls the government and the military. With the military as his strong arm ("the Arm of the Dragon"), the Coordinator is able to spread the glory of the Combine into the farthest reaches of space, and to protect it from enemies both foreign and domestic. The military serves the Combine and its people by establishing and protecting the social order, and the people serve the military by placing its needs first. Those in the military may have to give their lives for the state. No service is more honorable than that, and so the military commands the greatest respect from the civilian population.

THE RULER

The single and peculiar life is bound
with all the strengths and armor of the mind
to keep itself from injury, but much more
the spirit whose weal depends and rests
on the lives of many. The cease of majesty
dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
what's near it with it. Or it is a massy wheel,
fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
to whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
are mortised and ajoined, which when it falls
each small annexment, petty consequence
attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

—*Hamlet*, act III, scene iii

The ruler of the Draconis Combine is the Coordinator. He (and, in rare cases, she) is all-powerful. Though not literally considered divine, he might as well be for the privileges and respect he enjoys. The Coordinator *is* the Draconis Combine, encompassed in one person. The Coordinator's entire life is service to the Combine. He is burdened with the responsibility for the welfare of the entire system, and has no other interests. This combination of the physical embodiment of the spiritual ideal and the monastic devotion of the Coordinator to his service produce the reverence his people feel for him. The people of the Draconis Combine, constantly exhorted to serve the Dragon, are thus able to focus their energies on a single symbol. In time, the ideal came to be expressed as the maxim, "Serve the Coordinator, as he serves the Draconis Combine and its people."



Kü

Kü translates as nothingness, though it might be described as negative space that defines positive space. For example, a vase is a shape of clay with an opening in the middle: clay surrounding space. It is the empty space that defines the vase, which otherwise would be only a shape of clay. That space, that emptiness, is *kü*. Jump is almost meta-*kü*. Jump takes the emptiness and vast spans of time that define space, and transforms them into another nothingness, an absence of time and space. Without the void of space and time, jump would be just going through a doorway.

—From *The Philosopher And The Space Traveller*, by General Yuri Gamato, Celestial Spheres Publications, 2716

The strongest sword
need never to be drawn
but only worn
—From *Thoughts of Home*, by J.R. Zimmer

The Coordinator is the hub of the wheel of state, or even more accurately, the space at the hub of the wheel. To those with an understanding of *kü*, a wheel is useless without this space (where the axle goes), and therefore, this space *is* the wheel. With the Coordinator as the Combine's hub, everything comes back to him, everything comes from him. Yet it seems as though he is not even there, or at least is not perceived. The all-powerful Coordinator rarely commits any action directly, yet he sees all (through the ISF) and pulls all the strings.

In another respect, the hub is empty because it is the central authority of the Coordinator, not the man holding the office, that is crucial to his power. Each individual Coordinator leaves his mark on the office, but the position takes precedence over the man. A bad Coordinator attracts attention to his personal deeds, which draws honor away from his office. A good Coordinator guides the Combine toward a better future, and his deeds speak for him when he is gone.

Some Coordinators are strong and take a very active interest in all that is taking place, but these are often the least successful rulers. Those who do less and observe more, making their presence felt as an invisible hand guiding the actions of others, have been the better rulers. What is important is the respect of others for the rank, not the exercise of that rank's power.

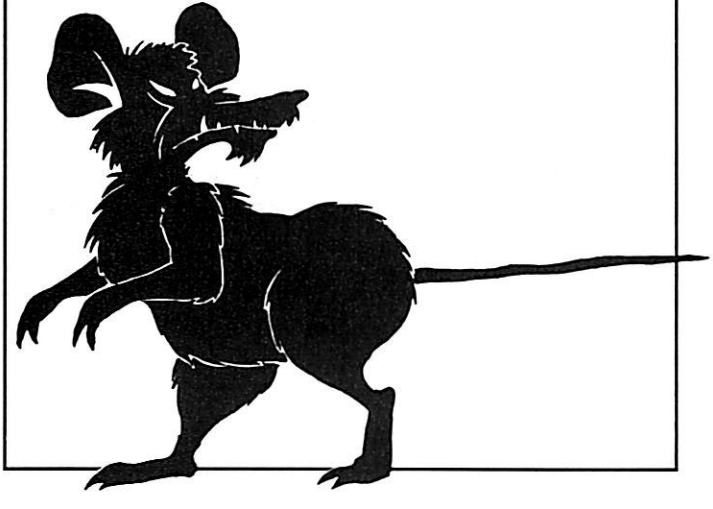
The Coordinator may make suggestions to others or he may speak in parables or haiku. He is skilled at making his will known indirectly. In this way, the blame for any problem will fall on the one who "incorrectly pursued" the Coordinator's wishes. Most Coordinators prefer small audiences. Formal Court, when the Coordinator receives his nobles, is an important ritual, full of beautiful spectacle, but of no meaning for affairs of state. It serves merely to satisfy the aesthetic demands of the nobility.

Jinjiro Kurita, although strong, was not an example of a good Coordinator, as he allowed himself to be too closely identified with a particular event, the Kentares Massacre. It would have been better to allow the massacre to take place in his name, rather than to lead it directly. To the people of the Combine, a good Coordinator is like a spider sitting in a web, feeling the vibrations. Ultimate decision and direction comes from him, but not action and not meddling in minor affairs—not overt intervention, at least. The Coordinator's declarations should be statements of general intent or carefully disguised statements on specific affairs, and should rarely be proclaimed. A popular saying in Court has it that "The Coordinator should speak once in each moon."

Coordinator Minoru once gathered together his advisors and told us this story:

"My grandfather knew the story of the King of the mice. The King of the mice was worried about cats. He asked the other mice to keep cats away, and to tell him if there were any cats about. When one day they did see a cat, they did not want to tell the King, because they would lose face for not keeping the cat away. The cat crept up on the King, as the mice argued among themselves about ways of removing the cat. One little mouse, whom no one had ever noticed before, finally ran up to the King to warn him of the cat's approach. The King hurried from the cat, now just a mouse-length away. He ordered the mice together and directed them in scaring away the cat. When it was over, he banished the mice who would not tell him his own business, and took as his closest friend the little nobody mouse who did the wise thing."

—From *Memoirs of Minister Roland Cranshaw*, University of Pesht Press, 2798



THE NOBILITY

all creatures raise heads
for the eagle, the beetle
is watched by the duck
—Traditional Kurita Haiku

The currents of fashion pass
over unmapped shoals
stay above or tear apart
—From *Thoughts of Home*, by J.R. Zimmer

The nobles are the real movers, the doers, in the Combine government. Their job is to implement the will of the Coordinator. The most powerful figures in running the Draconis Combine are the military commanders. Far behind them in real influence are the ministers, and behind them are the provincial leaders, and then the land- or corporation-holders. These last are noble in title, but rarely appear at court.

All figures in the court, down to the lowest latrine cleaner, have some kind of title. This is because the Coordinator cannot be directly served by, or risk coming into unplanned contact with, mere mortals. Higher positions in the court bring high titles, but the nobility who only work at court are seen as "*kuri*," or leeches. They provide useful contacts for those wishing to address a general or minister, or to attract the attention of the Coordinator himself. As they have no real function in the life of society, no matter how well they serve the Coordinator, they are leeches.

The Coordinator can overrule any decision or action by a noble. No one wishes to offend the Coordinator, and so most of the nobility are circumspect enough to wait until they are sure they have their ruler's approval. A corollary to this is that someone's extreme activity around court is a sign that he covets or usurps another's function, or is guilty of deliberate fawning.

The concept of "The Sufferings of the Lion," or the tormented lives of the nobles, has some truth to it. According to this teaching, the nobles serve the Coordinator and are responsible to those beneath them. This double burden entitles the nobility to physical pleasures to relieve their minds of their heavy burdens. It is certainly true that the nobles suffer different pressures than workers, but The Sufferings of the Lion seems to be a philosophy invented to justify the trappings of wealth.

SUFFERINGS OF THE LION

Some lowly worker in a factory or 'Mech maintenance center might say that this noble suffering is news to him. He is constantly watched by work supervisors and the Neighborly Patrol, unable to sneeze at the wrong time lest he harm the Combine and disgrace himself or his family. He might also hope to cadge a few extra food rations for his ailing mother, but it is true that the higher are watched more closely, by more people, with more reason.

—From *Voices of the Combine! Dissidents in Exile Speak*, John Pappas, ed., New Avalon Press, 2986

The nobles do have a difficult time maintaining their position. At the court on Luthien, intrigue and backstabbing are rife, and it is frequently difficult for a noble to tell who might be conspiring against him. Even if he senses something, the nobleman must keep his fears to himself to avoid being branded a paranoiac (for which he might be sent to a Contentment Home, or mental hospital).

A noble's task is to "present the face of House Kurita to the lesser worlds." This means that his every action is scrutinized, down to his grooming and how he chooses to furnish his house. The Dictum Honorium provides reasonable guidance for major questions of behavior, but there are many unspoken rules about domestic behavior, which must be understood and respected.

COURT RITUAL

Unity Palace, in Imperial City on Luthien, is the center of the Draconis Combine government. The major public areas (using the term public loosely) are the Courtyard and the Throne Room. The Courtyard is a central area, open to the heavens. It is ringed with balconies and paved with red bricks. Various ceremonies and military reviews take place there. The Throne Room is a large, elegant hall. The Coordinator's throne is on the north wall, and the only entrances are the massive door directly opposite the throne to the south and a hidden exit behind the throne. Except for the throne, there are no other seating arrangements. The room is hung with beautiful tapestries, and luxurious rugs cover most of the floor. On the ceiling is a map of settled space described in gold inlay.

Court functions are highly ritualized. Everything from serving the Coordinator's dinner to the annual *Shizoku-kotai*, the Pageant of Noble Loyalty, is performed according to a set order of behavior. There are so many rules of court behavior that a Bureau of Protocol is required to oversee planning for ceremonies.

RULE 7099.2

The Coordinator is to dine alone in the *dasiku* unless he specifies otherwise. [NOTE: Taskashi Kurita prefers company.] The red silk cushion is to be placed on the north side of the table, centered to the side, twenty cm from the edge of the table. If guests are to be present, pink silk cushions are placed on the other sides of the table in the following order: South, East, West, according to the position of the guests. Pink cushions are to be placed 35 cm from the table. One hour before mealtime, a small fir twig shall be burned in the *dasiku* to leave a pleasant aroma conducive to dining. Ten minutes before mealtime, a kettle shall be set to boil in the *dasiku*, and saki shall be warmed also. Three minutes before mealtime, a musician shall begin to play behind the *dasiku*, so that music shall be comfortably underway before the Coordinator arrives, yet the musician shall not tire or repeat before the end of the meal.

—From *Written Guide to the Court and the Servers*, Volume I, Private Printing, Unity Palace, Imperial City, Luthien

Among the great court rituals are Military Honors, The Cleansing of the Spirit, The Celebration of the Birth of the Coordinator, The Celebration of the Birth of the Coordinator's Heir, and the Pageant of Noble Loyalty.

Military Honors

The most loyal and brave men and women of the Draconis Combine are honored in ceremonies at court. Most of the Military Honors rituals are variations on one theme, although each medal and decoration calls for a slight difference in the ceremony. A disarmed honor guard lines the Throne Room and the path to the Coordinator, with a variety of nobles in court robes and officers in dress uniforms also in attendance. The fighter or fighters to be honored enter and bow deeply before the Coordinator and the company, chanting "my life for yours." The Coordinator then bestows the award.

Cleansing Of The Spirit

Once a year on Luthien (Luthien Year), the ceremony of the Cleansing of the Spirit takes place. This ritual reinforces the idea of the nobles as servants to both the Coordinator and the common people, and so it cleanses the nobles of false pride. At daybreak, the nobles assemble in the courtyard dressed in their finest. They solemnly proceed to the Throne Room, where they remove their outer robes to show themselves dressed in simple worker's clothing. (These are usually of a better cloth and workmanship than a worker would ever dream of, however.) Next, they clean the Throne Room, displaying their willingness to serve the Coordinator.

After this, the nobles compete in fencing and jousting matches to show their readiness to defend those they protect. They play a war game called the *hushiyo*, in which small mock villages are erected, peopled with actual workers, and defended by nobles against capture by a force of troops. This often has unfortunate consequences for the workers, but a good noble will theoretically defend the "village" with few casualties. The Coordinator observes approvingly from a convenient balcony. At sundown, the nobles again don their formal clothing to enjoy a sumptuous banquet, where they can congratulate each other on just how humble they can be.

Celebration Of The Coordinator's Birth

The Coordinator's birthday is usually the greatest feast of the year, and the ceremony lasts for three full days. The Throne Room is decorated in flowers suitable to the Coordinator's birth-season (chrysanthemums for an autumn birth, sunflowers for a summer birth, and so on). All nobility who can safely leave their assignments travel to Unity Palace, and any who cannot attend send greetings. (This is the busiest single time ComStar regularly faces in the Combine.)

On the first day, the nobles arrive, bearing gifts of tribute to the Coordinator. Each gift reflects the progress and production of the noble's military unit, district, land, or industry in the past year. Each noble greets the Coordinator, presenting his gift and reading a poem praising the Coordinator and the past year's glories. At this time, the Lord Chamberlain and the Court Poet read the greetings of absent Lords.

The second day, the actual birthday, is the Great Celebration. The Coordinator appears at Unity Palace to the assembled throng of commoners. All workers who can be spared are given some time off from their jobs. If possible, they get the whole day off, but a half-hour is more typical. During this time, the people assemble to hear the transmission of the Coordinator's greeting as it is received. Extra food rations are granted, and every home celebrates as best it can. Five orphans are adopted into the Royal Court staff and given jobs and titles. In the highlight of the evening's feast at Court, the Coordinator sings a song praising the Draconis Combine and vowing its eternal rule over all the stars.

The third day of the celebration is the Honor of the Past and Future. Statues of past Coordinators are lined up in the courtyard and decorated with flowers, and the Heir-designate leaves flowers and food at the Monument to Fallen Draconis Heroes. In the Throne Room, the Coordinator bids farewell to the nobles, who reaffirm loyalty and love for the Coordinator, and wish him a long life.

Celebration Of The Heir's Birthday

The Celebration of the Heir's Birthday is a smaller version of the Coordinator's birthday celebration. Nobles do not have to make extraordinary efforts to attend this one-day ceremony, but all nobility receive invitations that subtly indicate whether or not their attendance is expected. The nobles bestow gifts and a poem on the Heir-designate, and they attend a feast in the Throne Room. The only acknowledgement to the population is a general proclamation by the Coordinator, which praises the heir and vows his continuing education in the ways of serving the Draconis Combine and its people.

Pageant Of Noble Loyalty

The most stylized ceremony at Court, the Pageant of Noble Loyalty has lost some of its intrinsic meaning, being appreciated now more for its aesthetic appeal. The Nobles of the Court, the Ministers of the Five Branches, the heads of the Five Districts, and the head of each military branch are expected to participate. In reality, many of these are represented by a delegate, with no loss of prestige.

Dressed in special ceremonial garments representing their form of service, including elaborate headdresses, these representatives perform a traditional dance among five actual pillars symbolizing the Pillars of the Dragon. At the end of this dance, the nobles group together and form a dragon, performing another dance that snakes through the public sections of Unity Palace. The first dance is the Celebration of Nobility and Service. The second is the Dance of Loyalty, presumed to discover any activity taking place behind closed doors in the Palace. In 2981, at the end of this dance, Duke Paul Southern, Minister of the Treasury, fell from under the dragon costume with numerous stab wounds, proving how perfunctory the performance of the dance had become.

PRIVILEGES

Their wealth and position entitle nobles to material benefits and a few intellectual ones as well. Through the teaching of the Sufferings of the Lion, the nobles justify their luxurious lifestyle. Most nobles have substantial wealth, either in the form of landholdings and/or businesses. Those who serve as military leaders or administrators also receive a generous salary from the government. Just as most people with a position of authority have some noble title, so most nobles have some form of official title, which allows them to dip their fingers into the government pot.

Because of government control of commerce, anything a noble wants, he can get, one way or another. The only concerns are whether obtaining the desired object will create any scandal. Trusted nobles are, for example, allowed to own books and tapes from other States, but had better be able to come up with a good reason why they do. Some may even travel to other States for business or even pleasure (usually disguised as business), as long as they act intensely loyal back home.

Nobles often use their influence to help one another, whether it be to procure some rare item or to cut through bureaucracy in a government office. These favors may be performed in exchange for similar favors, or in exchange for a cash gratuity. A little economic corruption is not seen as an evil, as long as it is does not deprive the military. Even commoners can persuade a noble to cut through the bureaucracy for them, in exchange for a similar gratuity. This practice is known as *kitashu-ro-kuge*, or feeling like a noble. It is often said that this practice is the real reason the Draconis government is known as the Pillar of Gold.

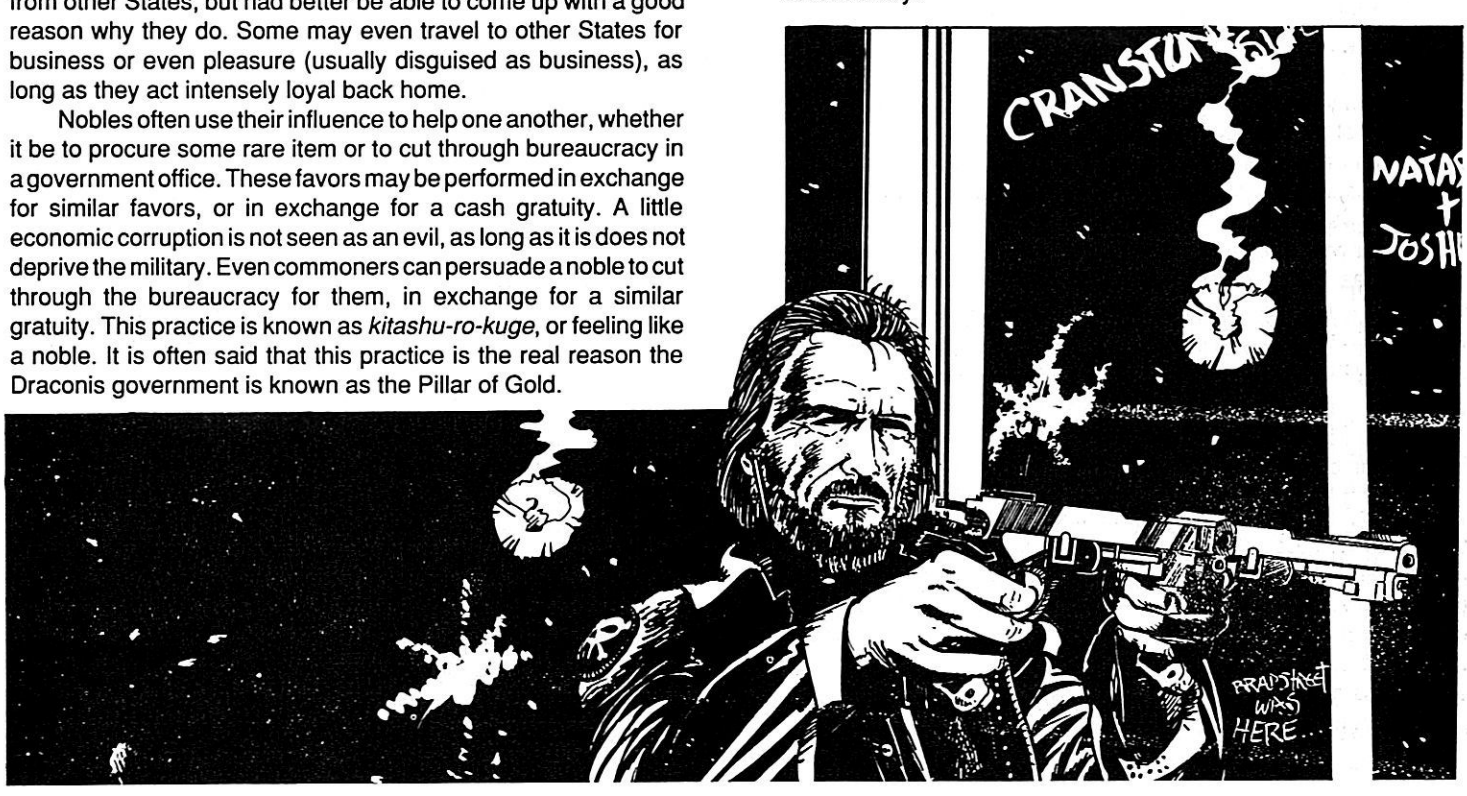
GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

The Draconis Combine government, such as it is, gives apparent autonomy to the individual worlds. In practice, the Coordinator makes all major governmental decisions. These are implemented by the military district commanders, working through the district governors and planetary chairmen. A planetary chairman who decides to rule solely as he sees fit will soon be overrun on his world by government troops, if he is allowed to live that long.

Individual planets frame and enforce their own laws, as long as these meet with the Coordinator's approval. This gives the rulers of individual worlds and the prefecture heads the ability to solve the problems unique to their worlds, and cuts down on cultural divisiveness by allowing the semblance of self-rule. This semi-autonomy increases the stature of the military as the one united force of the Draconis Combine, both in the public perception and in running the State.

There is very little central government structure. Each prefecture and district sends one representative to the Committee of Planetary Unity, which supposedly sets unified policy for the Combine. Any resemblance between the Committee of Planetary Unity and a Parliament is strictly on paper, however. The representatives are selected by the district governors, who are also Dukes of the districts, with the Coordinator's approval. The Committee may discuss minor difficulties between individual planets, but may not enact any laws. The function of the representatives is actually to report the Coordinator's wishes (and all court gossip) back to the prefects and district leaders, and to report any district news and gossip to the other representatives. Most committee meetings consist of a few representatives drinking tea while they plot against absent members or trade favors.

The District and Prefect heads are the real administrators of their areas. Each area has a military and a civilian noble leader. The civilian is the actual administrator; the military leader is the decision-maker. The prefect heads are the persons most likely to have to tangle with the extraordinary complexities of Draconian bureaucracy.



MINISTRIES

Getting something from the Kurita bureaucracy makes building a JumpShip in your backyard look easy.

—Ambassador Daphine Kresge, "Visiting the Dragon's Lair", *Interstellar Affairs Quarterly*, Fourth Quarter, 3018

There are five ministries overseeing the day-to-day affairs of the Draconis Combine: The Ministries of War, Interior, Treasury, Justice, and the Court. Each ministry has responsibilities to different aspects of the Combine, but it is never obvious which ministry covers a specific issue, much less what bureau and subcommittee of a ministry. Even lifelong members of the bureaucracy, or those who have spent their lives working with, or despite, the ministries have a hard time figuring it out. For example, having a tooth pulled might seem to fall under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Health and Happiness, a division of the Ministry of the Interior. First, though, the patient must go through the Treasury to acquire one voucher for the dentistry work and others for any materials that might be necessary to complete the work (one for each category of material). Then, if the individual must take time off from work, he must obtain an excuse form from either the Treasury or the ministry under which the worker's employer falls, or both. He may also need an excuse form from the local military authority, especially if the individual works in a military industry, as so many do. If any travel is involved, forms are needed from the War, Justice, Treasury, and Interior ministries.

The best local administrators are skilled at *Rensikuro-bu* (the Dance of Waiting and Smiling) and *Rurdu-Koba-tsö* (Finding the Cheese in the Maze). A large part of the problem is that the bureaucrats themselves do not know their responsibilities, and would rather err on the side of omission than commission. Working with the bureaucracies, like other Kurita businesses, is a matter of waiting patiently to see who will break and make the first move. Usually, the supplicant makes the move and the bureaucracy triumphs.

The head of each ministry is the Minister. The head of each bureau is also known as the Minister of that particular bureau, although they are sometimes known as Sub-Ministers. Below these are the Committeemen, the heads of sub-divisions of bureaus. All Ministers and Subministers are titled. Committeemen are generally also titled, but exceptions are frequent. The formal names of the Ministries and their component bureaus, while sometimes charming, often obscure the actual function of the department.

INTERIOR

The Minbushö, or Ministry of the Well-Being of the Land and the Peoples (Ministry of the Interior), is responsible for the living conditions of all Draconis Combine inhabitants, the environment, and settlements of the various planets. Anything that does not fit into the responsibilities of any other ministries usually finds its way into the Minbushö's convoluted structure.

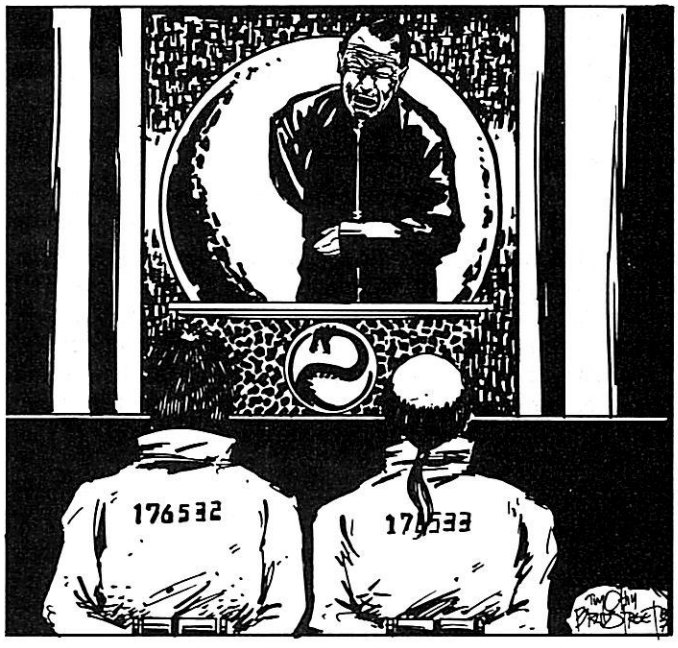
Among the major divisions of the Ministry of the Interior are the Bureau of General Indoctrination (education), Bureau of Shelter (housing), Bureau of Health and Happiness (medical care), Bureau of Human Growth (Worker Assignment), Bureau of Conservation and Salvage of Resources (Environmental and Recycling concerns), Bureau of Domesticated Plants and Animals (agriculture), Bureau of Natural Plants and Animals (forestry), and the all-powerful Bureau of Bureaucracy. The latter is intended to be a clearing house for the confused, but seems intent on creating more obscure names, offices, and paperwork.

WAR

The Hyöbushö, or Ministry of the Expansion of the Glories of the Draconis Combine (the Ministry of War), covers all aspects of the military. As the Arm of the Dragon so pervades Kurita life, it is perhaps more to the point to say that this ministry handles anything not covered elsewhere.

Among the divisions of the Ministry of War are the Department of Indoctrination, Bureau of Substitution, Assembly of the Grand Inquisitor, Procurement Department, Draconis Port Authority, Bureau of Administration, Combine Military Coordination Office, Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery, Draconis Combine Admiralty, Professional Soldiery Liaison, Physicians of the Dragon, Combine Support and Engineering , and the Draconis Combine High Command.

As the military is expected to run efficiently, the department names are more clearly self-explanatory than in other Ministries. For details on the Ministry of War, see the **Pillar Of Steel** chapter.



TREASURY

The Ökurashö, or Ministry of Wealth and the Disbursing of Assets (the Ministry of the Treasury), governs the economy, including trade and working conditions. The divisions of the Ministry of the Treasury are the most convoluted of all the bureaucracy. For example, the Bureau of Nourishment (food allocation) really seems to belong in the Ministry of the Interior, whereas the Bureau of Human Growth, part of the Interior Ministry, would seem to belong to the Treasury Ministry. The Bureau of Interstellar Trade covers customs and tariffs, and the Bureau of Economic Exchange and Expansion covers interstellar trade development and control.

Other departments of the Ministry of the Treasury include Bureau of Control of the Distribution of Symbolic Assets (money circulation), Bureau of Symbolic Assets (the mint), Bureau of Just Reward for Labor (worker pay scales), Bureau of Worker Protection (occupational safety), Bureau of Returns from Outsiders (foreign currency exchange), Bureau of Development of Treaty Brothers (trade liaison with Marik and Liao), and the Bureau of Development of Untapped Lands (Periphery trade liaison). The most important bureau of all, the Bursar, is part of the Treasury ministry. Often confused with the Bureau of Bureaucracy, the Bursar allocates funds for all the other ministries and bureaus.

JUSTICE

Kakun, The Ministry of Peaceful Order and Honor (Ministry of Justice), dictates law and order for civilians, and has charge of the court system as well. In Draconian courts, the accused is allowed a show of civil liberties (right to counsel, right to confront his accusers, right to cross-examine), but the excessively close relation between the police and the courts precludes any chance of a truly fair trial. Also, any case with military implications goes to Military Court, where civil liberties are unknown. A criminal case or civil suit involving a noble automatically goes to Noble Court, where more credence is given to the noble's side.

Despite the separate rule of each planet, the several police departments and courts all fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. Police are trained together, and are prepared to act in consort. The same is true of the courts. Information on suspect individuals and groups, as well as new techniques for control, are passed freely among the planetary forces. Prisoners are often passed around, too, to prevent former associates or family members from contacting them.

Included in the Ministry of Justice are: the Civilian Guidance Corps (The Friendly Persuaders, the civilian police), Neighborly Patrol (Civilian neighborhood watch and vigilantes), The Halls of Swift Justice (criminal court), The Machine of Peaceful Conflict Resolution (civil court), Guaranteed Honor for Kurita's Servants (noble court), Bureau of Confined Persuasion (prisons), and Bureau of Official Information (news and propaganda).

COURT

The Kazoku, the Ministry of the Servants of the Draconis Combine (Ministry of the Court), includes those bureaus directly concerned with the nobles and the court, and some others with a less obvious connection. Among the more obscure inclusions are the Bureau of Hospitality Toward New Lands (which assigns governors to planets recently conquered) and the Committee of Planetary Unity.

The Keeper of the House Honor is the most powerful section of the Ministry of the Court. Other sections include the Watchers of the Household (who run the Royal Palace), the Interior Staff of the Coordinator (the Coordinator's cooks and physicians), and the Committee of Special Events, who plan for court ceremonies.

ISF

The ISF is not included in any Ministry. Its doings are shrouded in such secrecy that it officially does not exist. No one branch of the government could claim control over the ISF, as its agents are everywhere, and they owe first allegiance to the Coordinator.

GOVERNMENT DISTRICTS

The five Government Districts are analogous to the military districts. The district and prefect names are the same, and the borders are generally the same. A few planets are in one military district and another government district, a situation that produces only problems for that planet. Between simple bureaucratic mishaps and deliberate sabotage by one prefect against another, everything is hard to accomplish on a split-district planet.

Each Government district is led by a Duke (District Governor), who works in conjunction with the military commander in charge of that district. The military commander always has final say, but usually prefers to leave administrative details to the Duke. Individual planets are run by Planetary Chairmen.

RASALHAGUE

Rasalhague is the Government District with the most distinct individual identity. Its separate history is taught in many of its schools, ostensibly to show the error of the old ways, but also to keep alive the feeling of separateness. The Coordinator makes sure that Rasalhague receives the closest scrutiny of all the districts, for he wants warning of signs of discontent. Any indication of unrest is dealt with swiftly, as Rasalhague separatism is viewed as an ember ready to ignite at the least kindling. This tendency, coupled with Rasalhague's long border with the Lyran Commonwealth, accounts for the fact that more troops are stationed in Rasalhague than in any other Draconis District.

Mies Kurita is the current leader of the Rasalhague District. Indeed, a Kurita has been in charge of the district for some time now, to keep it more closely connected to Luthien. Mies is adept at manipulating the nervousness about Rasalhague that runs rampant on Luthien, and has been able to secure economic improvements to keep the population happy.

The five prefects of Rasalhague reflect the separate, mostly Scandinavian origins of the district. Prefect Darrell Johannes of Thessalonika is the least worrisome to House Kurita. Happy in his rule over relatively peaceful planets of medium importance, he spends most of his time trying to keep major industries and military units out of his district, lest they attract the attention of foreign troops. Prefect Stefan Shor of Trondheim is in a similar position, keeping his prefecture free of great military influence, and concentrating on promoting Idlewild as a center for trade with the Periphery. The Kurita government is quite amenable to the idea, but most Periphery traders are still uncomfortable about entering Kurita space for extensive negotiations.

Kirchbach is probably the seat of the separatist movement. Prefect Mahar Lowell has recently begun strenuous crackdowns on signs of disloyalty to Kurita, mostly to save his own skin. Rumors abound of movements sympathetic to the neighboring Lyran Commonwealth, casting doubts on the support of border-world citizens for Kurita troops. Unlike those in most border worlds, troops from New Caledonia, Csesztreg, and Harvest are assigned clear across Kurita space.

Rubigen appears at times to desire separation from both Kurita and Rasalhague. Unlike the other Rasalhague prefectures, Rubigen has a large non-Scandinavian, non-Japanese population. As it is almost impossible to unite the descendants of Black Africans, Arabs, and Eastern Europeans to carry off a rebellion, Prefect Tony Armandu can stave off the strictest Kurita intervention in local affairs. Rubigen planetary leaders are much more concerned about the number of planets close to the Lyran border. Further complicating matters is a long-running feud among Rubigen, the Buckminster prefecture of Benjamin, and the Vega prefecture of Dieron over troop deployment and the theoretical alliance of Lyran planets not yet captured. Armandu complained to the Coordinator about the squabbling over Port Moseby and other Lyran worlds in the "contested pocket," and the other two prefects have sworn revenge against Armandu for drawing the Coordinator's notice to them.

Radstadt prefecture is the heart of the Rasalhague District and of Rasalhague separatism. New Bergen and Susquehanna have become the centers of the old Scandinavian culture, as Rasalhague and Radstadt are both too overrun with Kurita operatives. Two years ago, Kurita troops broke up a Leif Erikson Day celebration sponsored by the Sons of Knute and the Chrysanthemum Cross-Cultural Appreciation Society on Susquehanna. This action fanned the flames of discontent, but no coherent response has surfaced. Prefect Cory Andrews was not notified in advance of the raid, nor did he receive official notice from Luthien afterward. Andrews is justifiably nervous, and has made few public appearances or statements since.

PESHT

Pesht, site of Luthien and the most removed from hostile powers, is the most economically stable of the Districts, but is bearing the brunt of relocation and economic buildup. In light of Gandahar Prefecture's resources and sheltered position, it has become a target area for industrial expansion. The sparsely settled Bjarred and Ningxia Prefectures were not initially considered valuable, but are now being developed and populated swiftly as strategic reserves for defense of the capital. Though the old residents resent the newcomers, they know that the Coordinator will be very angry if he has to send troops to keep the peace on these worlds.

Albiero, containing several productive agricultural and industrial worlds, has been left alone for years, and its people like it that way. Prefect Hogo Manati is a favorite at court, a rare status for a Prefect.

Kagoshima Prefect is the home of the District capital of Pesht, as well as of the planet Luthien, center of the Draconis Combine both politically and astrographically. All planetary governments in Kagoshima feel a special pride in this association, and so are among the most loyal to the Coordinator. Prefect Tagushi Yotomo has very little work to do, as the District and Combine governments far overshadow his influence. Instead, he spends his time arguing with the Prefect of New Samarkand over Miyada, Sighisoara, and Worrell. Though these three worlds fall under the Galedon Military District, they were traditionally considered part of the Pesht prefecture.

GALEDON V

As birthplace of the Draconis Combine, the Galedon District had its days of glory, but now suffers from the severe destruction of the wars. This combination of special history and bloody suffering has instilled great pride in the Galedonians. No District is truer to the Draconis Combine, and none (except Rasalhague) also has so much pride in its own region.

District leader Mino Nakagona has had difficulty reconciling the district pride of Galedon and the necessity of evacuating so many of its planets. Tabayama, always a small prefecture, is scheduled to be reduced to only one fully populated planet, Pondicherry. The prefecture borders will probably be redrawn to ensure five functioning prefectures in the district. Prefect Mahi Sato of New Samarkand has been holding up the remapping until the question of split-jurisdiction worlds (see above) is settled. Also, many Galedon residents are visibly unhappy about having to relocate to what they call the "ends of space," the planets in Pesht District that are just as unhappy over receiving them. No real trouble has occurred, but even Galedonians not affected by the evacuations do not want to see their district depleted.

Residents of planets in the Kaznejov and Matsuida provinces along the Davion border are even more concerned about their own precarious position, with so many people being moved away from the border, instead of to it. The Planetary Chairmen of these border worlds have expressed their people's view that relocating citizens should move onto Davion planets as soon as they are captured. No one has dared to ask, "What captured Davion planets?"

BENJAMIN

Benjamin, despite its central location, often seems to be the stepchild of the Draconis Combine, getting all the work but none of the attention. The prefectures of Irurzun and Proserpina, with their borders on the Draconis Combine, are key military areas. Any social or political concerns that come up in those prefectures are pushed aside in favor of more immediate military problems. The paranoia about the government and the ISF that is rampant in Kurita society, coupled with the nervous fear of outside enemies that comes from living on a border world, makes people in all areas of Benjamin miserable. The feeling that "nobody cares about us," common throughout all Benjamin prefectures, does nothing to help this malaise. George Hakashi, Benjamin's District Governor, was once chastised for whining at court, but the people back home understood his feelings.

Buckminster Prefecture is known solely for its small, but crucial, border with the Lyran Commonwealth. This border is the "contested pocket," a finger of Steiner space sticking threateningly into Kurita territory. As with the Davion side of Benjamin, the only official notice taken of Buckminster is of the military threat, despite the fact that the majority of the planets in this prefecture are not even near the Lyran border.

Nicholas Dalton, prefect of Xinyang, frequently points out that the planets in his prefecture are closer to Luthien than most of the planets in the Kagoshima prefecture. All he has to show for his protest are some jokes about the statement, however. Otherwise, Xinyang and Kajikazawa prefecture simply go about their business, producing goods for the Combine and being left alone by practically everyone. Unlike the areas subject to military maneuvers, Xinyang and Kajikazawa are happy to be free of close official scrutiny.

DIERON

Dieron, closest to Terra, considers itself the most important district in the Combine. Residents of many of its worlds, especially in the Algedi prefecture, like to point out the remaining relics of the Star League, and even earlier eras, with a reverential awe. Because of the strategic importance of the planets in the area, and the consequent warfare, fewer and fewer of these historic relics remain.

There is constant military activity around Dieron, and most of its inhabitants say they are sick of it. There are fewer people of Japanese descent in Dieron than in any other District (even Rasalhague, which was force-settled by Orientals around the time of the Cultural Upheaval). This fact, combined with the age of the first settlements of the planet, gives Dieron as much loyalty to Terra as to the Draconis Combine. More than most Combine citizens, the residents of Dieron would like to see the Succession Wars ended and human space unified, as it was in the Star League. Unlike most Draconians, the people in Dieron do not much care who would rule this unified space, they would simply like the fighting to stop.

Though the war-weary attitude is common in the Dieron district, fear of invasion has also spread the opposite view that the enemies of the Draconis Combine should be stopped by any means necessary. Either way, life in Dieron is centered on war and the wish for peace.

INTERSTELLAR RELATIONS

Few Draconians travel, unless they are part of the military. Those who trade with other Successor States are watched carefully for signs of cultural weakness, and they are aware of the surveillance. "The eyes of the Dragon are like a mother watching a child in the street," is how the saying goes. Those who are tempted to stray too far from fealty to Kurita and the Dictum Honorium should be thankful for the reminder not to stray and for the chance to return to the Dragon's protection. Those who are not grateful flee to the other States, and are dead, in the Draconian view.

Travel under such tense circumstances (the slightest interest in another culture will be reported as treasonous) is not conducive to the understanding of other cultures, and is not meant to be. Military duty will, of course, rarely afford any true understanding of the worlds being invaded. Even mercenary units who have served other states are segregated from raw Kurita troops, to prevent the spread of any "confusing" ideas about other worlds. This lack of contact keeps most Draconians in the dark about other states, and receptive to whatever propaganda the government wishes to spread.

The official descriptions of other Successor States are caricatures emphasizing the worst possibilities of each culture. For example, they say that the Federated Suns are a collection of licentious perverts who wish to spread across settled space and corrupt all of mankind with their lazy, dissolute ways. Soon after, all of civilization will collapse from "the cult of the individual" and mindless self-indulgence. The Lyran Commonwealth is described as a group of greedy sensualists, concerned only with acquiring wealth and its trappings. They wish to conquer Kurita space to strip it of whatever wealth is available. The Commonwealth will enslave all the Draconians to do the work the Lyrans will not, because "all of mankind, even the worst louts, respects the hard-working, loyal ways of the Draconians".

The Capellan Confederation and the Free Worlds League are now considered to be misguided realms turning to the Draconis Combine for protection and guidance, a slightly confusing viewpoint necessary to explain the recent pact among the three.

LIAO

House Liao is sometimes regarded as a natural ally of the Draconis Combine, as some outsiders see both as Orient-influenced societies. Just as Terran Japan and China were not to be confused, so the Capellan Confederation and the Draconis Combine are quite different beyond surface resemblances. Indeed, it is a mistake to consider House Liao Oriental in the same way that House Kurita is modeled on the Japanese system.

The Kuritans view the Capellan Confederation as a weak and struggling state, ripe for infiltration. For the Combine, the three-way pact among Liao, Marik, and Kurita is the first step to crushing Davion between two wings of the Dragon. As for Liao, it needs assistance from House Marik and Kurita just to survive, even as the other two need Liao's position to hold back Davion. Liao realizes the danger of its alliance, but has little choice in the matter. The Liao leadership is hoping that once Davion is out of the way, they can use their skills at cunning to beat Kurita at its own backstabbing game.

MARIK

The Kurita leaders regard the Free Worlds League, that collection of squabbling states, as an example of the wrong way to do just about everything. The lack of strong central authority repels most Combine high officials as much as it tempts them to reach out and take it over. The Coordinator thinks that all the League needs is the strong-arm leadership that the Draconis Combine has. Unfortunately for him, most people in the Free Worlds League think that is the last thing they need. They do need the Kurita military position, however, especially because Davion and Steiner become increasingly friendly. Marik will be quickly vanquished if Kurita should fall to this combination. Even the threat of Kuritan infiltration of the League's government is better than that.

DAVION

Relations between House Kurita and House Davion are almost non-existent, but what does exist is not amicable. The Draconis Combine has always regarded the Federated Suns as a major nuisance standing in the way of Kurita rule over known space. Since the recent pact between Kurita, Liao, and Marik, which gives Davion's enemies the opportunity to work in concert, the Draconis Combine has been concentrating its efforts even more against Davion space.

STEINER

House Steiner has been, if possible, even more of a thorn in Kurita's side than Davion. As a realm frequently ruled by a woman and with dedication to making money, it would normally be assumed by the Kuritans that the Lyran Commonwealth would be a weak State, easily overpowered. The growing strength and tenacity of the Lyran Commonwealth has thus been an embarrassment to Kurita, and there would be a special sweetness to the conquest of this area. Katrina Steiner's recent ceasefire proposal has reinforced Lord Kurita's low opinion of House Steiner, yet the Draconis Combine is not engaged in active incursions into the Lyran Commonwealth at this time. Perhaps the prospect of defeat at the hands of this "soft" people is too hideous a fate to contemplate.

COMSTAR

The Draconis Combine has, at times, been ComStar's best customer. At present, its relations with the Sacred Order are shaky. House Kurita has been placed under several interdicts in the past, not only for non-payment, but for flagrant violations of neutrality. A devastating explosion in a corporate research facility has set back Kurita work on alternate communications systems, leading the Combine to treat ComStar with more respect of late. At the same time, a ComStar ship recently disappeared in Kurita space. Though there has been no definite evidence of foul play, ComStar agents are ordered to take the greatest precautions when working for House Kurita.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The strength of the Dragon is in its people. They are the Dragon, and the Dragon is for them.

—From *Thoughts of the Ruler*, by Hugai Kurita, Luthien Press, 2951

The major strength of the Draconis Combine is the loyalty and devotion of its people. Having always lived under a tightly disciplined system, most of its citizens do not imagine an alternative system as desirable. They are obedient and loyal, ready for service. The people of the Draconis Combine rejoice in victories for the Combine as for themselves. They feel a deep sense of belonging, a sense that an injury to one is an injury to all, and a triumph for one is a triumph for all. This selfless attitude is especially important in a state low on resources and with a deeply scarred industrial base, a state dependent on military conquest for development.

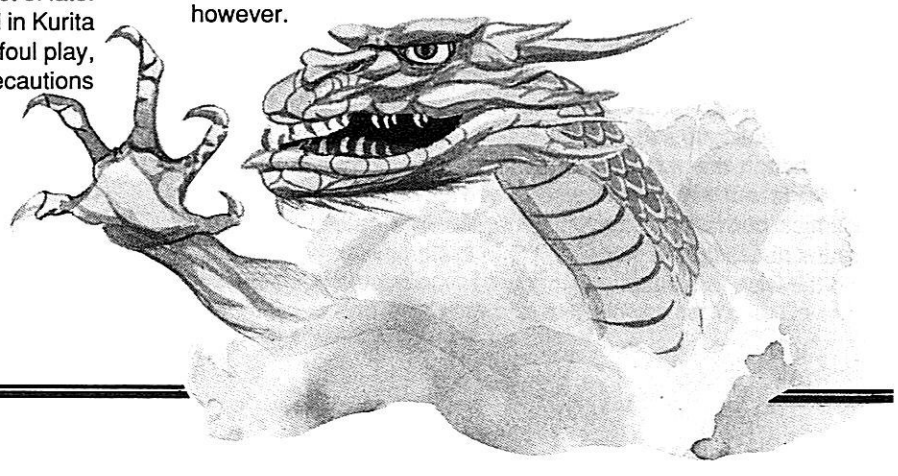
The major weakness of the Draconis Combine is, ironically, its militarism. A society structured around service to the military must maintain a precarious balance. If the military is woefully unsuccessful, the people will lose faith. If the military is wildly successful, and achieves total conquest, the society will have to be radically restructured to accommodate the change in status.

More important, the emphasis on the military is sapping the free will and thought of the people, and draining the economy. Once the creative spirit and resources are exhausted, there can be no growth in the community.

The other weakness of the Draconis Combine is the concentration of power in the hands of the Kurita family. Sooner or later, a dynasty ends, whether by lack of descendants or by assassination. Concentration of power in a tightly closed circle leaves no provision for running the Draconis Combine without Kurita.

The concentration of power is even more dangerous because of the government's dependence on one person's judgment. A bad leader does far more harm in a monarchy or dictatorship than in a system with a true parliamentary body. Also, if all power is in one person's hands, subordinates will spend their time jockeying for position near the leader, and neglect what duties they could be performing for the general good.

The people of the Draconis Combine expect strong leadership from the Coordinator, and look to him for guidance. If anything were to finally loosen the grasp of the Kurita family, the Combine would be ripe for takeover by another strong leader. If none emerged, the disciplined, group-minded people of the Draconis Combine would either plunge into the greatest anarchy ever seen, or they could unite in a true, communal combine. The latter ideal is hardly likely to occur within any foreseeable future, however.



PILLAR OF IVORY

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

The essence of religion is faith, a belief strictly independent of intellectual comprehension. Your religion, then, provides a complete ideological apparatus that is devoid of content. The content must come from elsewhere, from the reality of man's interaction with the material universe. And because the state is the means mankind uses to mediate this interaction, the content of religion in every era must reflect the ideological requirements of the state that rules in that era, and of the leading class that controls that state.

—Abbot Aloysius Maruyama, O.5.P., in *Analects and Commentaries of the Fifth Era*, Sacred writings of the Order of the Five Pillars, New Samarkand, 2817

As in all essential matters, the Draconis Combine took its lead in religion from its founder and First Lord, Shiro Kurita.

Shiro Kurita was born in 2270 in the minor city-state of Yamashiro on New Samarkand. The household of his father, Kamaro was based on the ascetic samurai culture of 17th century Japan. Though it has never been clear that the Kuritas could trace their lineage back to this early Japanese warrior class, it is true that Shiro always identified strongly with the thought and culture of pre-Exodus Asian Terra. Exactly which thoughts and what aspects of the culture he identified with most depended on his needs and goals at any given time. This is not to say that Shiro was consciously cynical about his beliefs. Rather, it was that the harsh focus of his will tended to channel all aspects of his life toward the achievement of his goals.

A hard worker and something of a stoic himself, Shiro strongly encouraged these qualities among his subjects. He also possessed a remarkable talent for concentrating on a single objective until it was attained, whether it be a stubbornly defended world or an important decision in a family matter. Some attribute his military prowess to this firmness of mind rather than to his skill as a strategist.

From an early age, Shiro and his brother Urizen trained intensely in the martial arts of hand-to-hand combat, as well as combat with knife, sword, staff, and other personal weapons. Before they reached their teens, they also came under the tutelage of masters in the rigorous study of *go*, chess, and variations on the strategy roleplaying games that had flourished in the late 20th century.

Because Shiro had been drawn to Taoism even as a youth, he had absorbed deeply and early the principle that all things change into their opposites. He could, for example, change a headlock by an opponent into his own hold by capturing the other man's elbow, or turn withdrawal from the enemy's advance into his own encirclement and attack. His appreciation of the Taoist dialectic, the principle of constant change, served him well as he made his way from a lesser household on New Samarkand toward the seat of power as founder of an interstellar dynasty.

As Shiro Kurita concentrated power on New Samarkand under himself, as he moved the process of consolidation offworld into the "Alliance of Galedon" and eventually into the Draconis Combine—as he moved from being the outsider to being the center of all things—his interest shifted from the Taoist principles of change toward the Confucian principles of stability.

Shiro Kurita established early in his reign the Draconis principles of a highly stratified society in which every citizen is assigned a rigorously defined position, with very clear expectations and prohibitions and with all loyalty and energy directed to the higher social classes and to the state. The collective was emphasized and individualism discouraged; the belief system of each class and caste was as rigidly prescribed as its position in society.

The harshness of Kurita control kept innovations in thought to a minimum over the centuries. Nevertheless, it was the very tightness of this grip that created exotic cults and practices around the edges of society, cults which tend to be as short-lived as they are fascinating. The Principality of Rasalhague, a major portion of House Kurita, and a primarily Christian region, did not become part of the Combine until after the McAllister Rebellion in 2510, 200 years after the death of Shiro Kurita.

Rasalhagian society originated in Terran Scandinavia. The original settlers tended to be free-thinking individuals who wished to avoid being dominated by the troubles of a larger neighbor. The Rasalhague ethic was self-containment and independence rather than conquest. Its religious underpinning was a gloomy northern Christianity that nurtured the individuality of its believers by fixating them on their personal relation to God. It was not until the reign of Siriwan McAllister-Kurita in the 26th century that the ideologies of the Draconis Combine and the Principality of Rasalhague were finally integrated. That was no small feat, requiring some compromise on both sides.

THE DOCTRINES OF KURITA

Less than ten years after Shiro Kurita became First Lord, he had taken the role of spiritual as well as governmental leader of the Draconis Combine. Once he had demonstrated that strength of character could achieve sweeping victories over formidable enemies, his people responded enthusiastically. They felt that Kurita's successes owed so much to sustained effort and a certain set of mental attitudes (something Kurita himself actively implied) that his followers could surely produce similar, if less spectacular, results. His ability to capture the people's imagination was no accident. Shiro had learned as a talented young *kendo* student that the strength of the sword came from the *ki* of the fencer extended through the length of the blade. It was his intention to weld together the people of Yamashiro Prefecture, then all the people of New Samarkand, and eventually all the people and resources of the galaxy into one mighty weapon. The will, or *ki*, controlling that mighty blade would be his own.

To control the people and to channel them, Shiro realized that he must control their ideology, their view of the world and of how they related to it. In order to get a two-handed fencer's grip on this, he laid down the fundamental values that would inform all of Draconis society: Purity and Harmony. These principles appeared, in one form or another, as part of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, the religions of feudal Japan. Though purity and harmony may seem benign and transcendent in the abstract, what they came to mean in Draconian practice was Harmony with the interests and intentions of the Kurita state, and Purity from any thoughts that contradicted those of the First Lord.

LIEUTENANT KAZUHASHI MAKES HIS REPORT

After the battles were over, the Kurita AeroSpace fighters returned to their base in small formations of threes and fours. Lieutenant Kazuhashi was one of the first to return. After alighting from his fighter, he stood and gazed into the sky through binoculars, counting his men as they returned. Though the Lieutenant looked rather pale, he was quite steady.

After the last fighter arrived, he made out a report and proceeded to headquarters, where he personally reported to the Commander. As soon as he had spoken the last word, he suddenly dropped to the floor. The officers present rushed to give assistance, but the man was dead.

On examination, it turned out that Lieutenant Kazuhashi had a slug wound in his chest that had proven fatal. The medic saw that the body was already cold, a condition that is impossible for someone who has just died. Nevertheless, the body of Lieutenant Kazuhashi was as cold as ice. His fellow officers decided that the Lieutenant must have been dead long before, and that it was his spirit that had made the report. Such a miraculous occurrence could only have been achieved by the sense of duty that the dead Lieutenant had possessed.

—From *Frontline Journal,* Military Propaganda Program presented by the Imperial Broadcasting Company, Luthien, February 15, 2788

PILLAR OF IVORY

Why, then, ivory, as the substance of the Pillar that signifies the thought and conduct of the Kuritan people? Of the Five Pillars, only Ivory and Teak represent living materials, and only Ivory comes from sentient beings like ourselves. Starting in earliest youth, the animal's tusks continue to grow during the whole of its existence; the tusk is built up in layers, the innermost layer being the last produced, while the outermost eventually becomes a hard and impervious protection. In like manner, the Pillar of the people's consciousness continues to grow with the expansion of House Kurita. As in the layered tusk, each stratum of society is assigned the mode of faith and conduct most suited to its position. As with the protective outer bark of the tusk, all is kept safe by the strength of character of the First Lord and the diligence of the Keeper of the House Honor.

—Constance Kurita, Keeper of the House Honor, in *Commentaries*, Office of Educational Materials, Order of the Five Pillars, Luthien, 3007

MYTHOLOGY OF IVORY

Five symbolic pillars are said to support the Draconian society of House Kurita: the Pillar of Gold, signifying the ruling Kurita dynasty and its governing apparatus; the Pillar of Steel, signifying the military; the Pillar of Jade, signifying economic productivity and the flow of wealth and commerce; the Pillar of Teak, for the culture and art of the Combine; and the Pillar of Ivory, signifying faith, philosophy, and codes of conduct.

Historians or social scientists of other Successor Houses might suggest that the dynastic line derives its existence from the larger society. In the Draconis Combine, however, no one ever questions the truism that everything originates with Kurita, and that without Kurita, there would be nothing. Long ago, in the 26th century, one of the wiser and more capable Draconian Coordinators, Lord Hehiro Kurita, was asked which of the institutions of society he would keep if the ruling House were to lose all but one. Without hesitation, he replied, "The Pillar of Ivory." As long as the people remain united in their ideology, the dynasty would eventually be able to regain all the rest; without the faith of its people, all would be lost.

THE SANCTUM ARCANUM

Deep within the recesses of Unity Palace on Luthien is a complex of small apartments called the Sanctum Arcanum. The innermost room is a low-ceilinged chamber dimly lit by indirect lights. Most of the chamber is taken up by a raised platform covered with an ancient, richly colored carpet woven with the design of an intricate Asiatic dragon. In the center of the rug is a black-lacquered sword-stand holding the well-worn *katana,* or longsword, of the dynastic founder, Lord Shiro Kurita. The figure of the dragon twines around five columns that rise from platform to ceiling. Each pillar, standing in a collar of filigreed gold at the base, is of a different kind of ivory.

To the right of the sword-stand is a smooth, cream-colored column of "soft" ivory, a huge elephant tusk from East African Terra. Its strength is self-evident, but its relative softness, which makes it the easiest for ivory-carvers to work, is symbolic of the adaptability of Kurita doctrine within its basic shape. To the left of the stand is a column that looks like clear glass, but that is actually a gigantic hippopotamus tusk from the tropical world of Thimphu. It is extremely dense, compact, "hard" ivory—so hard that it will give off fire when struck with steel. It symbolizes the strength and rigor of the unbending Kurita codes.

OMI KURITA

Slightly behind the sword-stand and to the right is a column of vivid turquoise blue. This is also the shaft of a single tusk, the tusk of an ancient mammoth recovered from deep within the earth on Terra. During the tens of thousands of years that it was buried, the tusk's pores were slowly penetrated with the metallic salts that gave it its color. This mammoth tusk is symbolic of the deep roots that Kurita ideology has in the ancient doctrines of Terran Asia.

Behind the sword-stand and to the left is a rough-looking column, streaked and unevenly colored, but nonetheless massive in its strength. Unfinished, with the bark still on, this is the partner of the soft ivory elephant tusk in the front. It symbolizes the Kuritan people, rough and unfinished themselves, needing the hand of the artisan, but at heart willing to be shaped.

Directly behind the sword is the last column, the serpentine body of an Asian dragon carved elaborately into a left-handed spiral of ivory. Another fossil tusk, it is the single, swordlike horn of the extinct giant narwhal, called the monodon, native to the ancient seas of the arctic wastes of Labrea. Until it was uncovered during a 27th century mining operation, this huge trunk of ivory had spent millennia buried in the permafrost, leaching radioactive isotopes. When the lights in the Sanctum Arcanum are turned off, this fifth pillar seems to hang in the air like a glowing dragon, filling the chamber with its own soft illumination.

The figure of the Dragon pervades and seems to sum up much of Kurita mythology. At times, it is taken to mean the First Lord, Shiro Kurita, and at other times, it stands for the entire Draconis Combine. The fifth pillar in the Arcanum symbolizes the sea and the land, the past and the present, the people and the society, all united in the body of the Dragon of House Kurita.

Built into the floor directly in front of the platform in the Sanctum Arcanum is a section of straw *tatami* mats covered with tightly stretched, brilliantly clean white canvas. Of the same length as the room (about five meters), and one meter wide, this area resembles a miniature *judo* or *aikido* practice mat. At each end of the mats sit two hooded figures on their heels, facing each other at attention. With hands on knees, they remain perfectly still but always alert. Each wears a wide-sleeved robe of rough brown cloth; their throats and shoulders are covered by what appear to be starched linen wings, but the material is actually a flexible ceramic that is impervious to weapons. Their heads are hooded, and all but the lower part of their faces are obscured by darkly tinted shields, also impervious to hard weapons and laser beams. Their robes are held shut by blue, metallic-looking sashes tied around their waists. These monkish guards are Adepts of the Order of the Five Pillars.

KEEPER OF THE HOUSE HONOR

The Order of the Five Pillars was originally formed in the mid-24th century to assist the Keeper of the House Honor. The first Keeper was Shiro Kurita's daughter Omi. After the death of her younger sister, Shada, Omi was charged with setting down in writing a detailed code of conduct called the Dictum Honorium. Since then, the Keeper of the House Honor, who is always a member of the Kurita family and almost always a woman, has been the powerful custodian of the Combine's religious, ideological, and social codes. The office was never officially established by the Coordinator, but it continued with a life of its own after Omi's initiative. In 2420, during the time of the weak Coordinator Parker Kurita, Sanyu Kurita moved to institutionalize her position as Keeper by promulgating the principle of The Five Pillars. In this way, she affirmed the other powers of the realm and placed her own power alongside them as an equal.

THE ORDER OF THE FIVE PILLARS

Sanyu also moved to create an apparatus for her power. Having proclaimed her own purview as the Pillar of Ivory, she persuaded the Coordinator to decree that the interstellar ivory trade would now be her exclusive monopoly. She intended to use this minor but lucrative industry as an independent source of funding for her office. Using her own personal fortune and the prestige of the Kurita name, she united the two minor ivory guilds against the largest. With the help of a cousin's infantry battalion in the Household Guards, she managed to seize the warehouses of the largest trading company. Conveniently, the company's three top executives were killed "while trying to abscond with assets."

The two smaller traders then found that under the terms of their "partnership" with Sanyu, their companies were to be liquidated and merged into what had become an unofficial government bureaucracy. With the sources of raw ivory firmly under her control, Sanyu next brought the ivory carvers and other artisans under her control. Those craftsmen actually welcomed the move, for it changed their status from mere underpaid workers to members of a semi-official guild with the prestige of House Kurita patronage.

By gaining control of the ivory trade, Sanyu had come into possession of a small fleet of merchant ships and a network of contacts that stretched throughout the Draconis Combine. As her operatives spread out along this network, locating caches of collected ivory, surveying new sources of raw ivory, and contacting the markets, they began very quickly to evolve from being mere business agents into acting like a corps of ideological inspector-generals.

As they carried on more and more of this inquisitorial activity, they took on the characteristics of a monastic order, which gave them the advantage of better coordination and the protection of a mystique and of anonymity. The Keeper then established a managerial hierarchy to control what had become a farflung bureaucracy. The ranks were divided into Neophytes at the bottom, followed by the Adepts, with the Illuminati as the superiors at the top; the chief superior was the Abbess or, at times, the Abbot. For its name, the organization chose "Order of the Five Pillars," as its self-assigned responsibility was to uphold the principles of House Kurita.

At the lower levels, the members of this Order carried on the labor of the ivory trade and developed the art of ivory-carving. In addition to the hunters, the merchants, the warehousemen, the JumpShip crews, and the artisans, a security force was developed to protect the valuable commodity. Over time, this evolved into a light but compact and highly disciplined paramilitary force that occasionally found itself involved in matters far removed from ivory.

Above the workers' level was a network of ideological surveyors, planetary circuit riders who constantly monitored the state of the people's consciousness and their compliance with the various Kurita codes. These Adepts gradually took on many of the functions of a teaching order, especially on more remote worlds.

Those of the "inquiring brothers and sisters," or inquisitors, who showed the most proficiency in tailoring orthodox thought to the needs of House Kurita and the demands of the current Keeper, moved up the hierarchy. They would now be responsible for gathering, through research and/or through meditation, the religious and philosophical resources of the ages, especially as they had roots in Terran Asia. It was at this level that monks generated those commentaries and interpretations of doctrine that made the Keeper of the House Honor a significant counterweight to the Coordinator within House Kurita.

Almost from the moment it came into existence, the Order began to operate as an intelligence apparatus. As its agents reported back on both the sources of ivory in a particular locality and on the ideological conditions of the natives there, they naturally included observations on political, military, and other developments. Every Keeper and Abbess has continued to urge them to do so. Particularly valuable were the contacts and information sources they developed independently of the ISF.

It did not take long for the ISF to run screaming to the Coordinator, but the O.5.P. (as the Order had come to be known) had the patronage of the highest levels of the Kurita family, and so was untouchable. The ISF then did the next best thing by penetrating the O.5.P. with agents of its own. The Director of Internal Security soon realized that the independent Order was a valuable window to raw information on the worlds of the Combine, and from time to time, a convenient cover for ISF operations.

THE DICTUM HONORIUM

The society of House Kurita is regimented, and in many ways stultified. To maintain the desired degree of order among the populace, the Combine leaders depend on one document: the *Dictum Honorium*.

The Dictum Honorium is a detailed set of conventions, first compiled and published by Omi Kurita (2309-2375) upon the death of her sister, Shada. The Dictum contains strict guidelines on procedures for offering and accepting surrender, ways of behaving honorably while in an enemy House, and other related protocols. It is the original reference source in the Draconis Combine for the increasingly complex web of obligations that circumscribes the lives of everyone, from top to bottom. Frequently, the Dictum spells out these interrelationships as tables or as interconnected line charts. It is maintained as a ready reference on every Combine world, and several senior House Kurita advisors are reputed to have memorized the entire document.

The Dictum, or Code, as it is sometimes called, has been heavily amended over the years, and now appears in its eleventh revision as a set of six volumes. It is significant to note that over the centuries, no deletions have ever been made to the document, only additions. Also, none of the punishments recommended for violations have ever been lessened or commuted in subsequent revisions. Selected portions of the most recent revision of the Dictum Honorium, and some of the official background history (included as part of the publication's introduction), are reproduced below. The text contains many anecdotes, historical examples, and lengthy monologues, most of which have not been included here for the sake of brevity. Finally, due to the lack of proper editing, the document is somewhat disjointed, making it fairly difficult to read. Nevertheless, it does provide clear substantiation of House Kurita's reputation for xenophobia.

ORIGIN OF THE DICTUM HONORIUM

DEATH OF SHADA KURITA

Before Shiro Kurita became Coordinator of the Draconis Combine in 2319, this greatest of all statesmen and military strategists took the time to raise a family, thus assuring himself a line of descendants.

Shiro sired two sons and two daughters. His daughter Shada, born in 2312, was his youngest, and in some ways his favorite. Even in her youth, she shared Shiro's strong jaw, love for life, and zest for adventure. Yet, she broke his heart and wounded his spirit when, in 2333, she announced her desire to attend the University of Pesht. Shiro knew the need for formal education, and he acknowledged the quality of that institution's curriculum. (In that era, women were not forbidden to pursue higher education.) Finally, reluctantly, he permitted her to leave the Draconian capital of New Samarkand for Pesht.

Four months later, Shada had met Charles Klein, a fellow student and social parasite from an undistinguished family. Klein's presence in Shada's company was only barely tolerable to her elders, and certainly not to be condoned. As is so typical of young, irresponsible adolescents, Shada and Klein fell in love. Though both continued their studies, it is clear in retrospect that they spent much of their free time together. Less than two months later, Shada verified that she had committed the most grievous of offenses: her indiscreet relationship would result in progeny.

It did not take long for Shiro to learn of this nearly unforgivable transgression. Alternately furious and frantic with despair, he ordered his daughter's immediate return to the capital. She came, under armed escort, but refused to accept any solution Shiro offered. The elder Kurita declared that she had disgraced her own honor and the honor of the Kurita family. By her affair with a person of no family and the resulting pregnancy, she had violated the principle of Purity. By her refusal to abide by the dictates of her father, she had violated the principle of Harmony. If she were to go ahead and complete the pregnancy, the resulting child would carry the impurity and the disharmony into the very heart of the Kurita realm.

Early the next morning, a messenger awakened Shada to say that she must come quickly to the palace's center grounds. She dressed and followed the messenger to where her father stood in full combat garb. Also awaiting her arrival was a firing squad armed with slug-throwers. Looking around, she noticed several other close relatives in attendance, including Omi, her older sister and confidante.

Shiro cleared his throat and asked one last time if Shada would cleanse her dishonor as he had asked. Indignant, she refused. Shiro Kurita, Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, Duke of New Samarkand, Unifier of the Worlds, followed the only course of action he could to rectify the shame his own daughter had caused. He unlimbered and raised his submachinegun, pointed it with practiced ease, and depressed the trigger. The grounds echoed loudly with the sound of small-arms fire for a few moments, and then all was quiet. Less than two hours later, Shiro Kurita announced the untimely death of his youngest, and then proceeded with the day's affairs of state.

THE FIRST KEEPER

Less than a week later, Omi began to compile notes on correct behavior. Shiro and Urizen Kurita served as her primary sources of counsel, but more than two dozen other leaders also provided advice or proclaimed mandates. Less than four months after Shada's death, the first version of the Dictum Honorium had been verified for accuracy and released for publication.

For the remainder of her life, Omi devoted her time to maintaining and amending these documents and to speaking publicly in support of the new moral regulations. Her role evolved gradually into an established, if unofficial, position that became known as "Keeper of the Family Honor," or "Keeper of the House Honor." Though no official authority accompanied the title, the holder of the position was entitled to a special degree of respect. Though the position of "Keeper" is not exactly hereditary, every Keeper since the time of Omi Kurita has been a member of some branch of the Kurita family.

When word of Omi's death reached New Samarkand in 2375, Omi's niece Shiragi Kurita accepted the position of Keeper, a duty she filled effectively and without controversy until her own death in 2410. Shiragi's term did include preparing the first full revision of the Dictum, after Robert Kurita assassinated Werner Von Rohrs in 2395. This new version, dated 2397, reemphasized the need for discretion in personal relationships, particularly when they dealt with "outsiders" (i.e., anyone not of the Kurita family).

THE THIRD KEEPER

Shiragi's successor, Sanyu Kurita, was a somewhat more volatile and controversial figure. In 2412, her brother Robert was assassinated. (Many people suspected that his death was the work of his sister Marika, in revenge for Robert's murder of her lover). Robert was succeeded as leader of House Kurita by his brother Parker, who immediately sent his own son and daughter, Grant and Yokara (Sanyu's niece and nephew), into exile. These traumatic happenings within the family spurred Sanyu to compile a second revision of the Dictum Honorium, which was released the following year, in 2413. This revision reflected some of House Kurita's activities in less than the best possible light, and Sanyu was briefly but strongly criticized for her injudicious action.

Five years later, Jason Kurita, great-grandson of Shiro's brother Urizen, was killed in a duel. Soon afterward, Sanyu's youngest brother, Saigo, died in combat. At that time, Sanyu was strongly "encouraged" by Coordinator Parker Kurita, her other younger brother, to release another revision of the Code. Parker wanted her to add certain details, and to take the opportunity to alter the document's somewhat aggressive tone. Sanyu declined diplomatically, stating that "the need was not yet great enough." After an unpleasant investigation, her word was accepted grudgingly, and the decision stood.

Sanyu did finally release the third revision in 2422, after Nihongi Von Rohrs took over as Coordinator, and sold Sanyu's younger sister, Lenore, into slavery. Sanyu also considered releasing another revision in 2426, after her nephew Philip was cruelly exiled. After being threatened with prison and slavery herself, Sanyu elected not to release any more documents. Though she maintained a relatively low profile for the rest of her term, Sanyu's strong convictions and independence of mind had established the autonomy of the role Keeper of the House Honor's role. Her successors have been careful to preserve that independence.

After Sanyu Kurita's death in 2459, Coordinator Kozo Von Rohrs decided that a separate position of Keeper was no longer needed. He had been the Coordinator for seven years, and felt that he could serve in a dual capacity. He remarked that the Von Rohrs were pure of morals and ethics, and thus did not need the kind of moral guidance that the corrupt Kurita line required. The position was effectively abolished for almost half a century.

In 2508, Marika Von Rohrs, sister of then Coordinator Yama Von Rohrs, took it upon herself to restore the position and function of Keeper of the Family Honor. She made this decision when Yama was deposed and imprisoned by another brother, Kruger. Marika quickly released a fourth revision of the Dictum in 2509. By her action, she demonstrated that the role of Keeper provided a necessary self-corrective counterweight within the dynasty. Marika was too late, however. She would hold her post for only a few months; the entire Von Rohrs line was executed in 2510 as a result of the McAllister Rebellion.

When Martin McAllister took over as Coordinator, Martha Kurita (descended from a Kurita noble) became the newest Keeper. Martha immediately began work on a fifth revision, which was released in 2511. Siriwan McAllister, who had been raised on Rasalhague, studied the Dictum Honorium with Martha. One day Siriwan would, as Coordinator, be among the Dictum Honorium's staunchest supporters.

THE UNDERGROUND DECADES

Sanyu Kurita's strength of character had established the post of Keeper of the House Honor as a focus of independent power in Kurita society in the 24th century. In order to institutionalize the position, Sanyu obtained from her brother Parker a monopoly on the ivory trade, which allowed her to create a minor bureaucracy, the Order of the Five Pillars. Kozo Von Rohrs's first act when he took over as Keeper was to summon the O.5.P. Abbess, Jamila Benhashemi, to an audience in his chambers. While waiting, he amused himself on a pile of cushions with half a dozen courtesans. When the Abbess was ushered in, she was allowed the briefest moments to register her surprise, and then was killed by knife-wielding assassins.

Many of the O.5.P. Illuminati suffered a similar fate. As word of the killings moved through the Order, the Adepts and Neophytes, taking advantage of their contacts in the ivory trade, dropped out of sight and blended in with the populations of the worlds most distant from the reach of the Von Rohrs military. The rituals of the Order survived underground for nearly 50 years. The scriptures were maintained in secret, new members were recruited and inducted, and the interplanetary networks were kept up through clandestine contacts and passwords.

This shadow apparatus was electrified when Marika Von Rohrs reestablished the office of Keeper in 2508, but the O.5.P. was far too distrustful of the Von Rohrses to come forward. The continued existence of the Order was not revealed to the ruling family until the Keepership of Martha Kurita, and the networks were not made fully available to the Keeper until the accession of Siriwan McAllister as Coordinator. The Pillarines, as members of the O.5.P. had come to be known, would not be fully confident of the restoration of the Order until the installation of a trustworthy Coordinator.

RESTORATION UNDER SIRIWAN AND MARTHA

In Siriwan McAllister, the Order of the Five Pillars had as its patron the single most powerful individual in the Draconis Combine. Siriwan had decided to develop the Order into a powerful instrument under the Keeper's control. During this time, the O.5.P. evolved into an intelligence-gathering agency that rivalled the ISF. Among the ranks of the Adepts, a corps of *budojin* was built up that concentrated on the practice and development of the very advanced and occult forms of the martial arts. Income to the Order from the ivory trade was greatly increased by a Draconian law requiring all levels of Kurita society to buy and maintain certain stocks of ivory artifacts. Finally, Siriwan McAllister had the complex of Pillarine buildings, including the Sanctum Arcanum, constructed in the capital.

CONTROLLING THE KI

All Neophytes of the O.5.P. are required to train in the martial arts of hand-to-hand combat and combat with personal weapons, regardless of whether they are librarians, ivory-carvers, JumpShip pilots, teachers, or travelling Inspectors of the Faith. A high level of proficiency is required before a Neophyte can move up to Adept. Those Adepts who show particular talent are taken into the ranks of the *budojin,* where they develop their strength of *ki,* or *chi,* to the occult level.

In the traditional Shinto faith of Terran Japan, *ki* was described as the universal energy of nature that flowed through every individual. Through discipline and concentration, one could gain control over this inner power. It was described as an energy that originated in the lower belly and that could be projected by a practitioner in the same way that a beam is projected from a lighthouse.

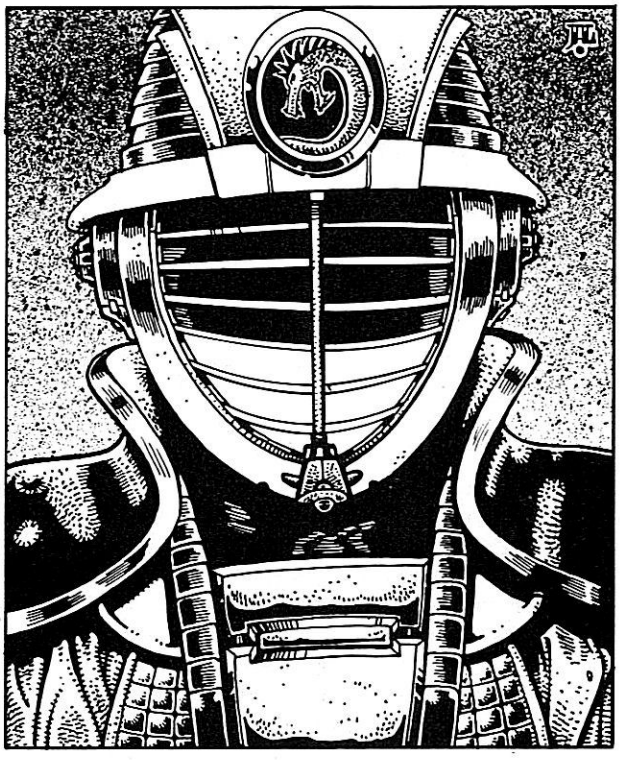
An Adept of *tai-jutsu* who could flow his *ki* into a throw or a punch could overcome any amount of mere physical strength in the opponent. An Adept of *kendo* who could flow his *ki* along the length of his blade could cut through any defense or any material. An Adept of *kyudo* who could project his *ki* to the target could send his arrow down the beam to an infallible hit just as if it were guided by a laser.

The *budojin* came to understand that *ki,* or *chi* , like electricity, could be either positive or negative, and that positive *chi* could be used instead of needles at acupuncture points to cure disease (an ancient Japanese art known as *kiatsu*). Likewise, negative *chi* could be used to create disease and death (an ancient Chinese art known as The Poison Hand technique). The *budojin* learned that *ki* is more than just an energy flow, but is actually like a glowing capsule that surrounds every living being, with long, fiber-like extensions from the lower belly. Pillarine Adepts on the *tai-jutsu* mat found that they could control and throw an opponent purely by use of his extended *ki,* without ever touching his body. Adepts in the *kendo* hall learned to concentrate on their shell of *ki* to the point where it became impervious to the blade, the spearpoints, and even the slugs of opponents.

THE O.5.P., THE MILITARY, AND THE ISF

During the time of Siriwan McAllister, all officers in the Kurita military were required to study martial arts under O.5.P. instructors. (The Order of the Five Pillars had been given a monopoly over these arts, just as it had obtained one over the ivory trade.) This gave the Keeper an X-ray view of the state of the Kuritan officer corps. It also gave the Keeper a great deal of influence, at times amounting to control, within the military. Those officers with the right state of mind and proper loyalties were initiated further into the arcane levels of the arts, at times actually becoming overt, or covert, members of the Order themselves.

Budojin Neophytes served as the security guards for the O.5.P. ivory ships and warehouses. Adepts and Neophytes from the ranks of the *budojin* served as elite paramilitary commando



Adepts with enough control could project their *ki* over great distances, with the extensions acting almost like optical fibers to send and receive information and to make observations. An advanced Adept could use the projected *ki* like a cable to travel across great chasms. With their *ki* shells fully developed, Adepts could also sense when a nearby enemy was intending to attack them.

It gradually became clear that at the entry levels, the male Neophytes had an advantage over the females because of their greater physical strength. The females managed to compensate by developing their endurance to the maximum. Regardless of sex or strength, practitioners with the greatest determination and courage were the ones who prevailed. As students passed from the Neophyte to the Adept level, where the occult uses of concentration and fluidity were most important, the women came into their own and generally surpassed the men. This was an important part of why the leader of the Order was almost always a woman.

and assassination teams whenever the Keeper of the House Honor needed them for such purposes.

When it became clear that the Internal Security Force could not eliminate the upstart Order of the Five Pillars, the ISF decided to penetrate the Order instead. The closed society of the *budojin* became a particular target for the ISF, which wanted to share the Order's penetration of the military. The ISF even subverted some of the Order's top martial Illuminati to set up a parallel and competing martial arts capability, hoping to compete for loyalty within the officer corps. What success they had was mostly among some junior officers who were still at the lower, more crudely physical level of development. The ISF training dojos could never develop any significant capacity in the occult arts, perhaps because of their lack of women adepts, or possibly because of O.5.P. counterpenetration.

EXCERPTS FROM THE DICTUM HONORIUM

The latest revision of the *Dictum Honorium,* the eleventh, consists of six large volumes of fine type, spelling out elaborate codes of conduct for every conceivable situation a Draconian citizen might meet in a lifetime, plus extensive commentaries and interpretations reflecting the ebb and flow of hidden struggles within the ruling circles over the centuries. To understand a particular passage, Members of ComStar who refer to these volumes will usually need a briefing from the Research Librarian on the specific political contentions that existed at the time the passage was written.

The following samples from the *Dictum* are provided to give an idea of the scope of the work, for it is impossible to adequately summarize this vast and intricate document. Many of the ideas have their roots in the ancient belief systems of Shintoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism, though under the stern sun of House Kurita, the concepts have been cleansed of any attachments they might have had to the past. The universal reference point throughout this system of thought is loyalty to the First Lord of Kurita. The universal value is the elevation of the Draconis Combine.

"ON THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE IDEAL CITIZEN" (DICT. HON. II, 17-23)

The highest ideals to which the subjects of Lord Kurita can aspire are Purity and Harmony.

By Purity is meant freedom from all that might come between the citizen and his duty to his Lord and government.

[*Commentary*: Purity does not mean avoidance of bodily functions such as sex. Rather, it refers to using those functions to increase one's contribution to the First Lord. To combine with one of the opposite sex to produce a child is therefore praiseworthy if the new life is dedicated to the service of House Kurita. Purity does not mean all avoidance of uncleanliness. If one must immerse oneself in uncleanliness in work or combat for the Lord Kurita, this is praiseworthy and no violation of Purity.]

By Harmony is meant synchronizing life, action, and thought to the higher purposes of one's society and one's Lord.

[*Commentary:* Birth is painful, sickness is painful, wounds in battle are painful, old age is painful, death is painful. This is the noble truth that leads to the cessation of all pain: the meaning of life will not be found through individual striving, but by becoming part of the web of society. One's life, one's happiness, one's strength are really the strength, the happiness, the life of the whole. Likewise, one's pain, one's wounds, and one's sickness are the sickness, the wounds, and the pain of the whole. If one craves life, happiness, and strength for oneself alone, then one's pain, sickness, and wounds must also attach to oneself alone, and one's death takes on the terror of the end of all things. In reality, one is not single. One is part of the whole, and when one dies, one knows that the whole never dies, but goes on always to serve and increase the glory of Lord Kurita.]

"THE VIRTUES OF HOUSE KURITA": THE GREATER AND LESSER QUINTADOCS (DICT. HON. II, 23-38)

The following are the virtues of the House Kurita. Those who possess these virtues prove by their actions that they are true people and friends, worthy of being treated as such. Those who do not possess these virtues forfeit the right to be called friends, and shall be treated as the enemies they are.

Virtues of the House Kurita are divided into two groups of five: the Greater Quintadocs and the Lesser Quintadocs.

The Greater Quintadocs

1. Honoring all leaders of House Kurita.
2. Accepting authority and responsibility, and the dictates of those with authority and responsibility.
3. Using all talents and abilities to the benefit of House Kurita.
4. Working toward the destruction of all enemies.
5. Promoting a single, unified Star League under the banner of the Dragon.

The Lesser Quintadocs

1. Following the right path in all things, and avoiding or working against those who do not.
2. Treating friends as such, and enemies as such.
3. Maintaining honesty in all relations with friends, and integrity in all relations with enemies.
4. Behaving with proper decorum in the face of adversity or temptation.
5. Maintaining pride and self-esteem in the face of death.

KURITA CODES OF RELATIONSHIPS AND CONDUCT (DICT. HON. II, 40 THROUGH 78)

The Kurita Codes aim to provide Draconian citizens with clearly prescribed codes of conduct for every possible social situation in which a citizen finds himself. As little as possible should be left to chance or to individual decision. In most cases, the average Draconian behaves in a highly standardized and predictable manner, because each one operates from the same set of rules. When Kurita citizens find themselves in situations *not* discussed in the codes, they may react in an unpredictable and even bizarre manner, because their reliance on authority has left them unprepared to think sensibly for themselves when the rules do not apply. The following are but a sample of the multitude of prescriptions in the Codes of Conduct.

"On Enemies"

The only friends a Draconian has are those who are born in, are totally committed to, and will die in, the service of the Draconis Combine. Members of any other political government, or of any other family or party not actively loyal to House Kurita, are *enemies.* They must be treated accordingly. All other Houses are deceptions, false pretenders to the throne that is rightfully Kurita's, and thus are enemies. All people can be classified either as *friends* (and fellow loyal Kuritans) or as *enemies.* There is no such thing as a neutral or disinterested party, the only *possible* exception being ComStar personnel.

However, not all enemies offend House Kurita equally. The lowliest MechWarrior or Astech does not displease the leaders of the Draconis Combine as much as would a Pretender to the Throne. Many underlings do not realize what wrongs they

commit. All else being equal, the lesser the rank, the lesser the offense of an enemy. Do not judge an enemy out of proportion to his failures. It is always possible that some enemies, not overly evil or afflicted, may be salvaged, especially if the enemy has skills that could be useful to House Kurita.

[EDITORS' NOTE: The term "salvaged" is used most often by senior Kurita officers to denote MechWarriors who once served with another House and who now serve with House Kurita. The warriors of Wolf's Dragoons are a contemporary example. Though they fought for other Houses in the past, the Dragoons are "salvaged" now that they are in the service of the Draconis Combine. Thus, this provision permits them to become friends of a sort. The relative scarcity of highly skilled MechWarriors is at least partially responsible for this elaborate rationalization.]

"On the Relations of Citizens with Enemies"

Citizens of the Draconis Combine are prohibited from having personal relations with enemies. To do so would deteriorate the moral fiber and strength of conviction that is so crucial to House Kurita.

"On Proper Behavior of the Warrior"

The proper business of the warrior is death. The warrior cannot enter a contest with any thoughts of his own survival. His only concern must be to destroy the enemy, or else to die fighting.

"On Proper Behavior Toward Enemies"

The opposing fighter must be presumed to have the same code of death or victory as the Kurita warrior. It would be disrespectful of the enemy to hold him to a lesser standard than we hold for ourselves. In the face of the enemy, our objective is to destroy him utterly, and there must be no hesitation or lack of resolve in this regard. It is true that fighters from other Houses hold to weaker standards than do the warriors of House Kurita. Nevertheless, we deal with them in battle as we expect to be dealt with ourselves, even though they may not actually deserve this honor.

"On Proper Behavior When Among Enemies"

Draconians from time to time find themselves in the presence of enemies without being in a state of war. This occurs when they serve as diplomats, for instance, or as delegates, traders, or as exchanged hostages. Such individuals must never allow enemies to learn of House Kurita's strengths, as these lessons must come as surprises on the field of battle. Enemies must not learn of House Kurita's secret plans for the future, for a premature revelation may bring an end to the plans.

It is too much to expect of enemies that they follow the proper path of virtue. Nevertheless, even animals have their own diluted forms of honor, inferior though they may be. Draconians must always be conscious of preserving and maintaining honor when possible. This means that enemies should also be treated as if they were people, unless there is evidence that they are not worthy of such treatment.

"On Accepting Surrender in Wartime"

Enemy fighters who offer to surrender on the field of battle either have no code of honor or else their code is completely unsuited to the situation. They should be killed immediately.

Enemy fighters who fall into our hands because of wounds, surprise, etc., become a decisive tactical burden on Kurita forces because of the need to care for, guard, feed, and transport them. They also represent the potential to transform again into combat units in our rear. They should be killed promptly.

To give death to enemy fighters in these situations is to give them the honor that is appropriate to warriors, even though they may neither understand this honor nor deserve it.

The Rule of Five applies: death is the one appropriate way of dealing with enemy surrender; there are four exceptions.

1. When enemy prisoners possess technical skills needed by the Draconis Combine, it should be determined if their state of mind is such that their loyalties can be reattached to House Kurita. If they can be salvaged, tactical circumstances permitting, they should be kept as prisoners.
2. Before enemy prisoners are killed, they should be surveyed to determine which ones might possess information valuable to the Kurita forces; these should be kept alive long enough for the information to be extracted.
3. Before enemy prisoners are killed, they should be surveyed to determine if any might be useful as hostages; tactical situation permitting, these should be preserved and returned as quickly as possible to rear areas.
4. A Kurita commander may find himself in a situation in which the surrender of an entire enemy force may be possible. In these cases, prisoners taken early can be preserved so as not to discourage the surrender of others. When the engagement is complete, the usual rules for accepting enemy surrender apply.

"On Surrender in Wartime"

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This section does not appear officially in the Dictum Honorium. It is found only in the Arcanum Copy of the Dictum. This copy is in the possession of the O.5.P. and is to be shown only to those persons specifically authorized by the Keeper of the House Honor. Only ComStar members with the highest clearance can inspect the facsimile of the Arcanum Copy in the First Circuit archives on Terra. Possession of an Arcanum Copy of the Dictum Honorium by ComStar is a First Circuit Secret of the Very Highest Priority.]

For a Kurita warrior to offer to surrender to an enemy in battle is a loss of Virtue of the highest order. It is a violation of his personal Purity, and a violation of his Harmony with the principles of House Kurita. This Purity and Harmony can be preserved at such a time only by the warrior's death.

The Rule of Five applies: when there is no other option but surrender, death is the one appropriate way to resolve the situation. There are four exceptions.

1. It is permissible for a Kurita warrior who is primed with explosives to surrender so as to place himself in a position where he can destroy enemy personnel or equipment along with himself.
2. It is permissible for a Kurita warrior who has been equipped with an occult transmitter to surrender so as to reveal the location of the enemy to Kurita forces for as long as he is in custody.
3. It is permissible for a Kurita warrior to surrender *if he has been designated in advance by a superior officer* as a penetration agent for Kurita military intelligence.
4. It is permissible for a Kurita warrior to place himself in the custody of the enemy in time of war *if he has been designated in advance by a superior officer* for hostage or hostage-exchange duty.

THE ART OF VENDETTA

Many of the so-called mental peculiarities of the Japanese have their origins in the love of purity and its complementary hatred of defilement. But, pray, how could it be otherwise, being trained, as we actually are, to look upon slights inflicted, either on our family honor or on the national pride, as so many defilements and wounds that would not be clean and heal up again, unless by a thorough washing through vindication? You may consider the cases of vendetta so often met with in the public and private life of Japan, merely as a kind of morning bath for a people in whom love of cleanliness has become a passion.

—From Yoshisaburo Okakura, *The Life and Thought of Japan,* London, Terra, 1913

In revenge, there is something that satisfies one's sense of justice. Our sense of revenge is as exact as our mathematical faculty, and until both terms of the equation are satisfied, we cannot get over the sense of something left undone.

—From Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido, The Soul of Japan,* London, Terra, 1900

Patience is a needed Art for vendetta. Haste makes the crop go sour. Vengeance, like fruits of the vine, requires time to sweeten.

—Kevin McAbayashi, in *Assassin's Handbook,* Office of Reference Materials, Order of the Five Pillars, Luthien, 2887

The concept of the vendetta (and the related concept of the revenge assassination) is old, and predates the Successor States and current times by at least four thousand years. During these millennia, many military strategists and philosophers, even religious leaders, have agreed that violence is often the only appropriate response to violence or other grievous affront. This does not imply that there are no guidelines for conduct. On the contrary, in vendetta societies throughout history, the account-books for blood debts have been kept as carefully as the financial records of the moneychangers, and the rules and conventions surrounding revenge have been more punctilious than even the strictest commercial code.

It should be pointed out that a vendetta killing differs from a political assassination in that the purpose of the vendetta is *to settle accounts,* to balance carefully that which is out of balance, and this, of course, requires great precision so that the old imbalance is corrected without a new imbalance being introduced. A political assassination, on the other hand, is much more straightforward, for it removes by the most efficient means available a person who has become inconvenient. Assassinations are not bound with all the rules and formalities of vendettas, though they do draw heavily on the expertise of the vendetta killers.

The dissolution of the Terran Alliance in the 24th century left many societies unhinged. The rules for many things, including revenge, fell into confusion. The highly structured and formalized Ares Conventions of 2412 went a long way toward establishing a workable set of proposals for limited but effective warfare. Though not specifically covered in the Ares Conventions, similar codes of conduct gradually evolved for administering vendettas as well.

House Kurita, a culture rooted in military tradition, has probably employed the art of vendetta more than any other House. As a result, the techniques, tactics, and regulations for vendetta are more fully developed here than elsewhere. Only one publication available within the Draconis Combine contains any information on vendettas. This single manual is the *Assassin's Handbook.* It is used primarily as a reference for poisons, weapons, and other tools of the trade, rather than as a sourcebook for tactics. Nevertheless, there are unwritten rules, presumably followed by all agents of House Kurita when they conduct vendettas.

From what ComStar agents have been able to learn, the Kurita rules of vendetta do vary, depending on whether the vendetta deals with another House or with other families within the Draconis Combine.

What follows is only a sample of Kurita rules of revenge. For ComStar operatives with a need to know, detailed tables from the *Assassin's Handbook* describing what weapons are appropriate in what circumstances are available in the First Circuit Reference Library (Restricted), on Terra. The proscriptions described here are specific to the Draconis Combine under the rule of House Kurita. Other Houses operate somewhat differently.

THE ASSASSINATION OF SOREN TORGERSON

Well then, it was myself after all who was asked to do it in the end. This great toff from Rasalhague on his visit to the city hadn't been able to keep his hands off the wrong man's daughter. The thing had already been settled with the girl when they spoke to me. They needed this 'Hagian dead, you see, and it was nothing they wanted to do for themselves. It was all right for the *mere Irish* to deal with the dirty work, but they couldn't have it done for a fee, could they, because it was a family matter. So I did it for the *honor,* and when they offered to give me the Gift of Obligation, I told them to give me the worth of it in House Bills and I'd buy my own present for myself.

This Torgerson was a very *suspicious* man, for all that, and he surrounded himself in his digs with such a crowd of bad men that it was impossible to get to him while everyone was home. So once I had ensconced myself in a hovel outside his walls, he got the invitation for another trip to Luthien, but it was the kind he wasn't likely to decline. Sure enough, I'm having my sip in the morning and the whole ugly lot of them goes past the window on their way to the spaceport.

Not being one to stand on formality, I proceed into the man's compound without waiting for a further invite, with the help of a little darkness and a little piece of wire. Things are a bit slack inside, what with His Honor being gone and all. The guards are having a screaming fight in the courtyard, the kitchen help is having a feast in the pantry, and the tutor and the nursemaid are having a roll in the Big Man's bed. A cough in the dark from me and the lovers are up and out in a hurry, leaving the door ajar.

It's right inside with me, and a survey of the bedroom. I find what I thought I would, that the ceiling is false, with the pretty wood panels covering a crawl space.

I gets up inside of it, directly above the master's bed, put some raw grain in my belly with a sip of the malt to help it swell, and commence to doze for the better part of a week, waiting for the party to return.

Return they do, with all their nastiness intact. The master's Physical Force boys set a very bad tone. They survey the premises thoroughly, except, of course, for the ceilings, and once again the place is impossible of entry to anyone who means harm to the inhabitants. Unless they're already in.

Torgerson spends the first night in the bed directly below me. Inasmuch as his niece accompanies him, prudence prompts that I pass directly to the events of the second night, which are more to the point, in any case. In comes himself, then, with a bad case of the staggers, and me waiting in the ceiling with the patience of a saint. A final jolt from his flask, no pun intended. He sets the bottle on the nightstand, sits on the edge of the bed, says goodnight with a great belch, and flops back on the bedclothes. Even if I'd had it in mind to go on with my week's nap, his rumbling and snoring wouldn't have allowed it.

Wasn't he lying there, then, with his bold mouth wide open, and me looking down onto his tonsils. No need to disturb my place. A bit of a needle on the end of a string, down from above and into his mouth; seven drops of clear liquid from the vial in my shirt make their way down the string and drip off the needle into his throat. And that's the end of him.

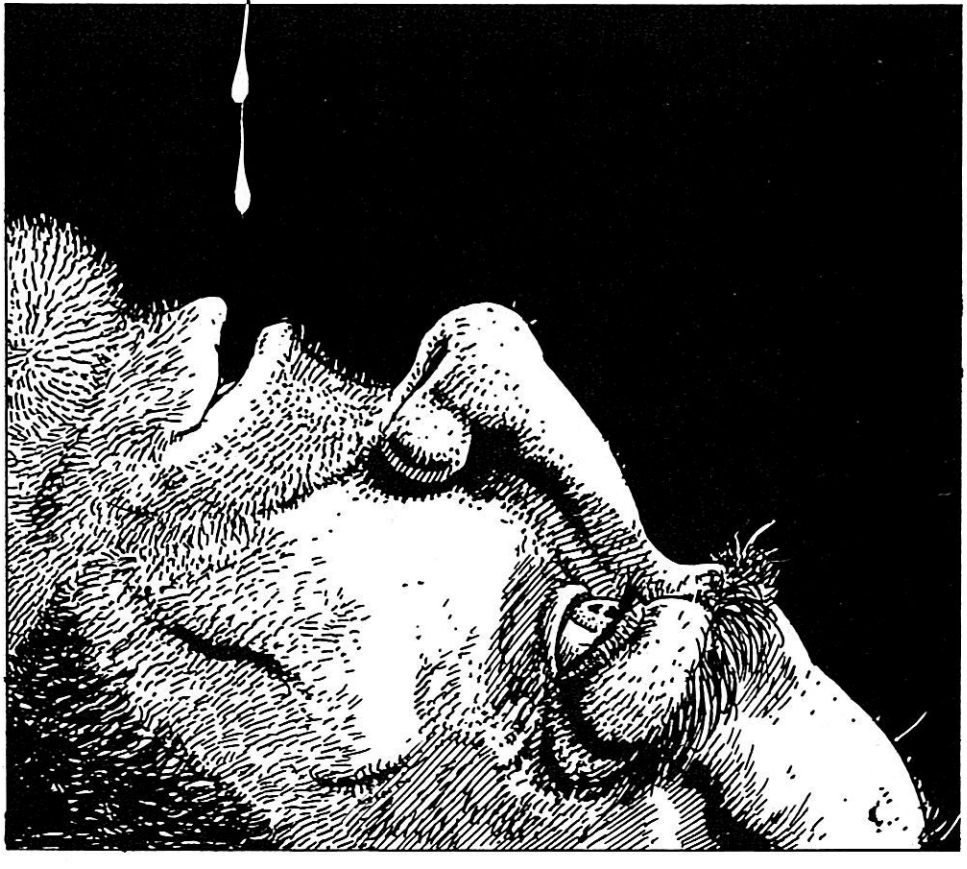
Next morning, there's the commotion. Oh, the premises are without a master. Ain't it terrible. A great wailing goes up, and I doze for a few more days while they make his stiff self up for the final exit. Then he's gone. The servants get back into the pantry, bottles are uncorked throughout the estate, and with nightfall, the tutor and his sweetheart are back in the great man's bed.

They leave the door ajar again, and it's down and out and over the wall with me.

The thing is done. Once again, the outraged father on Luthien can sleep easy, knowing his accounts are balanced.

And so can I.

—From *By the Pound or By the Hour: Memoirs of a Freelance Contractor,* by Jackie Quinn, as told to F. L. DePeltrie, Red Fire Press, 2932 (published in the Lyran Commonwealth)



VENDETTA LINES: WITHIN THE DRACONIS COMBINE

Vendettas Across Class Lines

In the Draconis Combine, there are no vendettas across class lines. If a person of lower class injures or affronts a family of higher class, this is a public offense against the Harmony of Lord Kurita, and will be dealt with by the Internal Security Force or other civil authority. Persons of higher class are authorized to chastise those of lower status at their own judgment, and no rights of vengeance attach to the chastised party.

Vendettas Within A Class

The right of vendetta operates only within the aristocracy (i.e., the Kurita families and other families of the ruling circles) and within the military. Within the merchant (middle) class and among the workers and the declassed, individuals do not possess such a high level of personal honor that it can either be offended or require the satisfaction of revenge.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Among the lower orders, individuals do retaliate, of course, for insults or injuries, but these actions are impulsive. The middle class, however, is obsessed with upward mobility, and so it parodies with deadly seriousness the customs of its betters. As financial and trading dynasties have gained more clout within the Combine, House Kurita has tolerated their plastic vendettas without granting them official recognition. Middle-class vendettas tend to fall into two categories: the socially pretentious aping of noble codes of honor, or the serious elimination of business competition.]

Nobles and warriors have an obligation to maintain their personal Purity unsmirched. They have a higher obligation, however, to preserve the Harmony of their relation to the will of their Lord Kurita. The obligation of Purity must never be allowed to interfere with the obligation of Harmony. When a family or an individual requires satisfaction to cleanse their honor, the vendetta must first be registered with House Kurita, and cannot proceed without permission. If the vendetta would contradict the interests of the First Lord, the impurity can be removed by royal decree.

If an offended one puts personal Purity ahead of the obligation of Harmony, he must not trouble the First Lord further once the impurity has been removed. Rather, he must take the initiative in restoring Harmony by removing himself from the First Lord's sight. The best guide for resolving these dilemmas continues to be the *Chushingura, the Tale of the 47 Ronin,* from medieval Terran Japan.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: In this tale, 47 samurai became masterless *ronin* when their lord committed suicide following a slight from a high advisor to the shogun. It was not acceptable to the shogun that his advisor be killed in revenge. Nevertheless, after elaborate deceptions, the 47 did kill the advisor, resolving the impurity of their master's death, but violating the Harmony of the Shogunate. They restored Harmony by gathering at their master's grave and committing mass suicide.]

The rules of vendetta do not apply to women. A woman has no right or obligation of revenge for a slight from another woman. If a woman of one family is offended by a man of another, the offense is not to her, but to her husband, father, or older brother. Though a man might be obliged to kill the woman in his own family, he cannot restore balance by killing a woman in the other family: vengeance must be directed against the offending male. If a younger brother of the offending male is killed, balance is not completely restored; if an older brother or the father of the offending male is killed, a new imbalance is created.

Inasmuch as the impurity attaches to the persons of family members, it is they alone who can cleanse it. Revenge cannot be accomplished by others, and especially not hired strangers.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This rule has given rise to the practice, in families unwilling or unable to exact the blood price personally, of "adopting" honorary members into the family and giving them a "gift of obligation" for carrying out the unpleasant duty. Thus, the lowest levels of society came to contain more and more "members" of the noblest Kurita families. Competition for these lucrative "Gifts of Obligation" was soon monopolized by three guilds of professional assassins, one predominantly Rasalhagian Nordics, one predominantly Russian, the other predominantly Irish. The noble Japanese would not stoop to such work. Members of these three other populations were so spread throughout the Combine that they could go anywhere without attracting notice.]

Within the military, no distinction is made in terms of balance between junior officers; balance can be restored by a duel to the death between the two principals. The same holds true among senior officers, with the proviso that vendettas must be registered with the First Lord, who can choose to restore balance by decree.

If a junior officer is offended by a senior officer, he must remove the impurity by killing someone appropriate of his own rank; i.e., he must commit suicide.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: As a junior officer in this position is formally obliged to commit suicide, more and more began to follow the model of *The 47 Ronin* by killing the senior officer first. When senior officers caught on to this trend, they instituted another practice, outside the formal rules, of allowing the offended junior officer to meet in combat with another junior officer from the senior's staff. This began the practice of senior officers keeping on their staffs one or more junior officers highly skilled in the martial arts, and this, in turn, greatly accelerated the penetration of the Kuritan military by agents of the O.5.P.]

VENDETTA LINES: OUTSIDE THE DRACONIS COMBINE

Citizens of other Houses can in no way compare with Draconians in terms of purity of character. Between a Draconian noble or officer and a person of comparable station from another House, the other person is always in some way inferior to the Draconian. Therefore, no offenses to Purity or obligations of vendetta can arise between Draconians and others of equal station. For a Draconian to take blood offense, the other person must be at least one rank or level higher. If the person is of the same or lower rank, the Draconian can simply chastise him with death, without any of the obligations of formal vendetta.

The primary obligation of formal vendetta remains Harmony with the Lord Kurita. All vendettas with persons or families of other Houses must be registered with House Kurita, and cannot proceed without permission.

Concerning agents or representatives of ComStar, the obligation of Harmony completely overrides the obligation of Purity. ComStar operatives cannot be killed, under any circumstances, unless this is decreed by the First Lord as a matter of state and not of honor.

WISDOM OF THE DRAGON

Over the centuries, the citizens of the Draconis Combine have developed an almost personal relationship toward the symbol of the Dragon. An image borrowed from the ancient mythology of Terran Asia, the Dragon figures prominently in cliches, epigrams, and other phrases of speech in Kuritan society. From the very beginning, Shiro Kurita fastened on the Dragon as a symbol of godlike powers because it would ensure his people's identification with the ruling House, rather than to some free-floating, undefined, and unpredictable god-figure. No other House identifies as completely with a single symbol, or accords it so much esteem, as does House Kurita with its Dragon.

A student of the subject, the court sage Tango, decided to compile a book of sayings. He entitled his book of parables *Wisdom of the Dragon*. The volume was first published in 3011, and is still widely available today. The examples below are only the merest sampling of the contents, but they are among the most common. All references come from the mythology of the Draconis Combine, and the meanings of many, if not all, phrases would be completely unknown in the territories of the other Houses.

ARM OF THE DRAGON

The combined military forces (particularly the 'Mech regiments) of the Draconis Combine.

THE YELLOW BIRD

The Dragon has only one dangerous enemy, a very small yellow bird possessed of a fierce demeanor and a sharp beak. Strangely unafraid, this bird searches for the sleeping Dragon throughout the land. If it were to find the Dragon, the bird would poke out its eyes (the Dragon's only vulnerable points). In common usage, this expression refers to the fact that any enemy can be dangerous, no matter how insignificant in appearance. (For example, the commander of a Kurita garrison on a hostile planet might tell his guards, "Keep your eyes open. I don't want any Yellow Birds on this watch"—meaning don't trust any of the local inhabitants, no matter how harmless in appearance).

CLAWS OF THE DRAGON

There are five claws on each of the Dragon's forelimbs. In common usage, each claw refers to one Military District in the Draconis Combine: First, Galedon; Second, Benjamin; Third, Pesht; Fourth, Dieron; Fifth, Rasalhague.

DRAGON DAYS

The period of time when, due to physical location and seasonal changes, a portion of a world experiences extended darkness.

DRAGON'S BLOOD

Another name for jewelblood, a rare and precious gem-like substance.

DRAGON'S BREATH

The Dragon is capable of killing many opponents merely by breathing on them. In common usage, this refers to the concept that death may come from less-than-obvious sources. It is also used as a collective reference to agents of the Internal Security Force (ISF).

DRAGON'S DOVE

The Dragon has only a single friend, a small, pale blue dove. This bird often serves as a lookout during the day in exchange for the Dragon's warmth and protection at night. In common usage, it is a reference to any valuable services rendered by a lesser subject, or to needed assistance from an unexpected source.

DRAGON'S JOY

This is the feeling of ecstasy that the Dragon experiences when a citizen fulfills his routine duties for the benefit of the Draconis Combine.

DRAGON'S LAIR

The place of seclusion where the Dragon sometimes sleeps to be safe from harm. In common usage, any place of guaranteed safety.

DRAGON'S SEEDS

Places that once were barren, but now permit the Virtues of the Dragon to grow and flourish. In common usage, any new worlds conquered by the Draconis Combine.

DRAGON'S TEARS

The Dragon cries a single tear for every wound it suffers. In common usage, any MechWarrior, AeroSpace Pilot, Tech, and so forth killed in combat is referred to as a "Dragon's tear."

DRAGON'S TEETH

This is an informal name for the Draconis Household Guard protecting the incumbent First Lord. (In 2510, Martin McAllister, commander of the Household Guard, led a palace coup in which the entire ruling Von Rohrs family was exterminated. This gave rise to a spate of quips among the lower ranks of the military, all of which related the Dragon's Teeth to certain parts of the First Lord's anatomy. Martin McAllister ordered severe punishment for anyone overheard referring to him so disrespectfully.)

DRAGON'S TIME

This is the period of time between sunset and sunrise: the Dragon is a nocturnal creature.

DUKE OF THE DRAGON

The Duke of Luthien (First Lord of the Draconis Combine) is often called Duke of the Dragon.

THE FIRST EGG

The first egg is the source of the Dragon (i.e., of the Draconis Combine). The First Egg was found and hatched by Shiro Kurita, from which grew the Dragon in all its splendor and glory.

EYES OF THE DRAGON

The sole vulnerable spot on the Dragon's body, and a potential target of the Yellow Bird.

FIST OF THE DRAGON

The Commanding General of the Draconis Combine army (currently General Vasily Cherenkoff) is commonly referred to as the Fist of the Dragon.

FRACKENCRACK

This is an exclamation or interjection, considered by most to be profane. It is said to be imitative of the sound of The First Egg hatching (sometimes alluded to in polite company by asking, "What is the sound of one egg hatching?")

HEART OF THE DRAGON

The sum of manpower, resources, and facilities possessed by the Draconis Combine.

PILLARS OF THE DRAGON

A set of five columns located in the Dragon's lair. Before sleeping, the Dragon positions his body so that each of the five pillars supports either a limb or the tail. This also refers to the Five Pillars of the Draconis Combine: Gold, Steel, Ivory, Jade, and Teak.

PRINCE OF THE DRAGON

The Prince of Luthien (currently Theodore Kurita) is commonly referred to as the Prince of the Dragon.

SHELL, OR SHELLS

This refers to a very young (i.e., unhatched) Dragon. There are many variations. When the word is used alone, it is an exclamation or interjection. "To eat shells" means to suffer at the hands of inferiors, particularly in combat. Someone with "a head like a shell" refers to an inexperienced or incompetent person.

SMILE OF THE DRAGON

A Dragon smiles only when it has defeated a worthy opponent, and is now feasting at the opponent's expense.

SONS OF THE DRAGON

In common usage, this refers to any loyal and faithful followers of the Draconis Combine. Within the ISF (only), it refers to Subhash Indrahar's elite assassins.

VIRTUES OF THE DRAGON

The Dragon possesses five Virtues: Bravery, Tenacity, Audacity, Integrity, and Wisdom. In common usage, this refers to the virtues that everyone in the Draconis Combine strives to attain.

THE MYSTICISM OF FIVE

There are myriad examples in Draconian culture of the special significance of the numeral "5". House Kurita court sages and others have deliberately encouraged the mysticism surrounding this numeral.

This attachment, though its origins are not clear, is certainly not unprecedented. Other cultures, especially primitive cultures on old Earth, often attributed special meanings or powers to various numerals. For example, the numeral "10" developed a certain importance due to the Arabic system of numerals and decimal mathematics. Special characteristics were ascribed to certain small prime numbers, squares, and multiples, with the pseudoscience of numerology supporting these beliefs.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: There is no evidence to support the rumor that the numeral "5" was selected because Shiro Kurita could not count any higher.]

The Draconis Combine itself is divided into five Military Districts, each of which is further subdivided into five prefectures. There happen to be five Successor States at this time. According to (convenient) Kuritan legends, five states will fight until only one remains—the Draconis Combine.

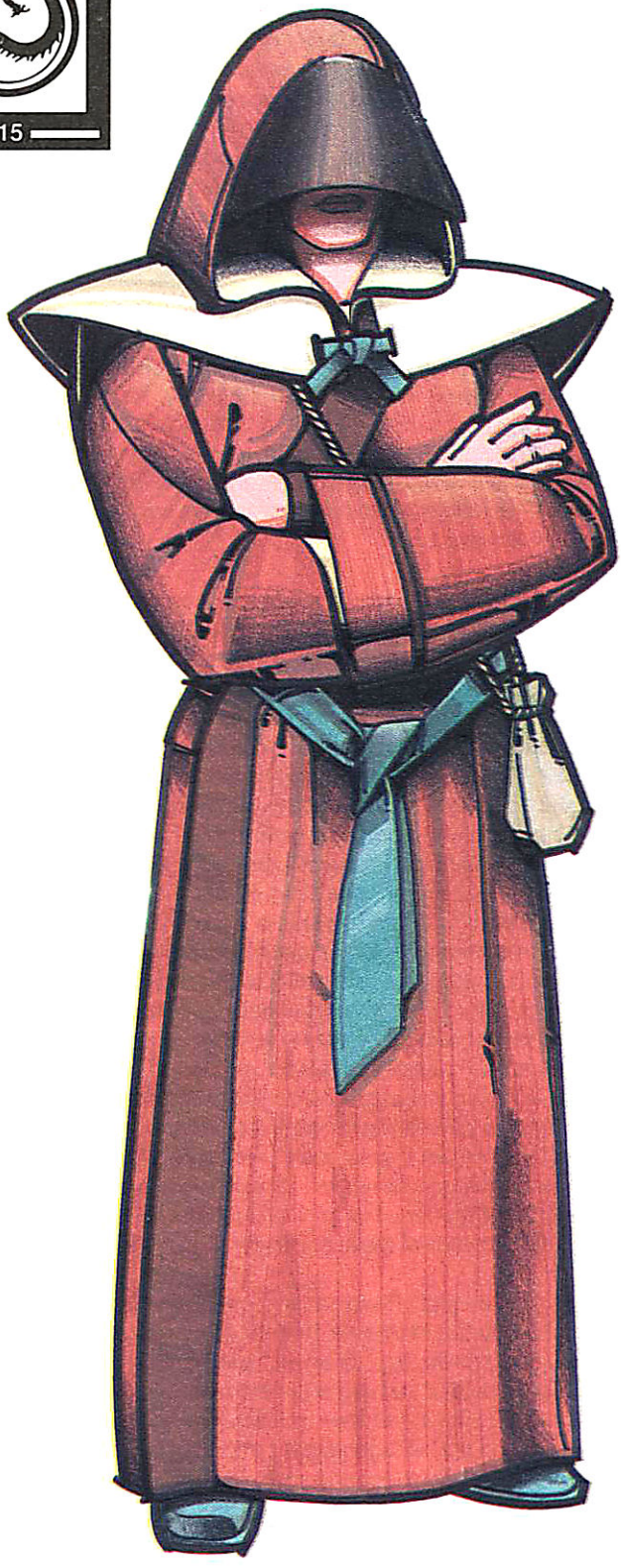
The numeral "5" also has importance with regard to the Dragon, and much of Draconian society revolves around the central concept of five pillars. The Dragon possesses five claws and respects five Virtues.

Some writings say that there is only one correct choice and four incorrect choices for each action. Though this statement is mathematically suspect, it does serve to remind Draconians to take care when performing a duty. It also indicates how straight and narrow a path Draconians are "encouraged" to maintain, and how delicate their balance must be along this path.

The importance given to the number "5" makes it prominent in the people's superstitions. The winning combinations in the various dice, cards, and pick-up sticks games that keep currency circulating among the lower orders are all multiples and combinations of five. Draconian citizens sometimes let important decisions depend on who is the fifth person to walk through a door or to call on the videophone.

It is considered good luck to be in a military unit with the number "5" in its designation, and Kuritan parents frequently use clout, cash, or both to get their children assigned to such units. This superstition occasionally works to the disadvantage of the Kuritan military. During one of the Kurita attack on Hesperus II, a Steiner commander correctly guessed that his Kuritan opponent planned to launch an attack at 5:00 A.M. on May 5. He used the cover of darkness to move out of his position. When the Draconians assaulted his empty perimeter in the early dawn, the Steiner force was already far to their rear, destroying fuel and ammo depots. The Kuritan offensive had to be called off.

Five-year birthdays are especially significant in Kuritan culture. Because of the high rate of infant mortality, babies are given only affectionate nicknames at birth. It is not until their fifth birthday that they receive their full names as permanent members of the family. The tenth birthday is considered the end of childhood. In the middle and upper classes, ten-year-olds usually begin intensified courses of training or education. In the lower classes, they begin full-time work, if they haven't already started. In the middle and upper classes, boys at their 15th birthdays leave home for extended military training. At 15, girls are considered on the verge of marriage. (This birthday for girls is sometimes referred to as the "Day of Nubility"; in some parts of the realm, the girls are still referred to by the old Mexican term "Quinceañeras".)



MONK

This is the traveling garment for a monk. The visor works as a one-way mirror; the hood and collar are lightly armored. The style of knotting the belt and collar tie indicate the rank of the monk; in this case, acolyte. An acolyte carries all his personal effects in the small pouch.

The 20th birthday for young men marks the beginning of their careers. At this point, young women should be approaching the fifth birthday "Naming Day" of their first child.

Twenty-five is a time of extra-lavish feasting for both men and women, mainly because of the supposed significance of five times five.

All birthdays at multiples of five years are times of special celebration, but the next major landmark is the 50th, given the significance of ten times five. This is also about the time in a man's career that he is at the prime of his power, and when a woman should be attaining the status of grandmother.

BELIEF SYSTEMS OF THE FIVE CLASSES

The original First Lord of the Combine, Shiro Kurita, decreed that work, social structure, and personal life would be rigidly decreed in advance for each of the five classes of Draconian society. Being so conscious of the need to control his people's ideology, Shiro was not about to leave a matter of such importance to chance. The religious beliefs of each class were also to be determined by the state.

Nobility

The very small class of *kuge*, or nobles, constitutes the leadership and the brains of the Draconis Combine. Thus, it needs the greatest possible breadth and flexibility of thought. It is also the most likely source of possible challenge to the ruling House, and so needs to be kept under close watch and tight control. Theoretically, every sort of (Asian) thought from ancient Terra is appropriate to this class, though the pull of contradiction is resolved mainly through the rigidities of Confucianism and the flexibility of Taoism. The Kuritan First Lords have always given great attention to keeping the minds of the nobility focused on the Confucian chain of obligations, of younger sons to older sons, of sisters to brothers, of wives to husbands, of children to parents, and of *everyone* to the First Lord of the Combine. At the same time, the give and take of warfare and politics require a fluid ability to take advantage of opportunity, a capacity to yield when softness is necessary, to crush when hardness is necessary, and to be alert enough to the flux of nature to know which course is appropriate.

Kuritan nobility is also charged with responsibility for maintaining an apparatus of Shinto priests, temples, and ceremonies, but the *kuge* themselves are discouraged from actually believing the superstitions of this antique religion. Shintoism is the designated belief system of the lower orders, and the purpose of the priesthood is to keep control of these beliefs firmly in the hands of the nobility.

At the time that Christian Rasalhague joined with the rest of the Combine following the McAllister Rebellion, a political compromise allowed the mostly Scandinavian Rasalhagians to preserve their religion, provided that use of the term "the Lord" means only the First Lord Kurita in all their public ceremonies. This reflected the suspicion and antagonism that the First Lords have shown since the time of Shiro toward any religion, in which the believer's attention is focused on some form of "god" instead of on the First Lord of the realm. The old beliefs were allowed to continue in private and more or less out of sight. There was much less tolerance for this kind of thought among the nobility than in the lower classes, however, precisely because doctrinal disloyalty among the nobles was more likely to lead to coup attempts.

Warriors

"One should never have to ask what is the Way of the Warrior," says the ancient Japanese samurai book *The Fallen Leaves* (*Ha Gakure*), for "the Way of the Warrior is death." Thus is the long debate on the meaning of *Bushido* crisply disposed of. Bushido, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism are the belief systems assigned to the warriors of the Draconis Combine. Confucianism rigidly attaches their loyalties to their Lord by way of their commanding officers; *Bushido* defines that that duty is Death, whether the enemy's or their own. Their meditations in the Zen manner are directed toward clearing their minds for the direct experience of reality. "The mind must be wiped clean of all dust of emotion, all thought of oneself. When an enemy attacks, he is answered by the counterblow just as he would be answered by the reflection if he had attacked a mirror." Kurita fighters strive to attain this state of "no-mind" (*mu shin*) during battle. One who attains it is a truly a remorseless killer. Once the act is done, he does not dwell on it, but leaves his mind free for the next decision or the next attack. Kurita officers with more ambition than ability tend to memorize the terminology as a substitute for the real thing.

The Middle Class

Draconis rulers are particularly attentive to the ideological state of the Middle Classes. Even if some faction within the nobility or the military were to seize control, the result would be a continuation of Kuritan society with new faces at the top. If the trading class, with its devotion to accumulating capital, were to gain control, a revolution in Draconian mores would take place.

An intensified Confucianism is the order of the day for the middle layer of society. The merchants, manufacturers, and moneylenders find this satisfying because it reinforces their positions as the heads of families and corporations. In this way, the focus of the chain of loyalty passes up through children, wives, and employees to themselves at the top.

Professionals and intelligentsia among the Middle Classes also tend to be drawn to the One-God religions or to off-brand cults that reinforce their individuality. As a rule, these types will give public lip-service to the required beliefs while rummaging privately through a shopping mall of ideologies until they find one that is "them." Then they will meet in secret, hiding away by themselves or with a few friends during their off hours.

By law, a man is supposed to spend a year in seclusion at the time of his father's death, which usually occurs sometime in the son's forties or early fifties. This obligation is customarily waived, usually for a bribe. If a Middle Class individual gives evidence of being drawn to some unauthorized ways of thinking, this year requirement will be strictly enforced. Indeed, he will spend the year at a governmental center so that he may rededicate himself to the principles of filial piety.

If an individualistic cult takes root in the Middle Classes, the leaders of House Kurita will spare no pains to eradicate it. These things are not tolerated in the Middle Classes the way they often are among the Unproductives. In the late 29th century, a scholar of ancient Terran roleplaying practices began writing clandestine science fiction books based on scenarios from early strategy games. He invented a fictional "Maximum Universal Personality," and claimed that a simple combination of microwave ovens and kitchen computers could determine and enhance each person's "MUP Quotient." When the authorities in Luthien realized that an interstellar cult had grown up around these notions, the scholar himself was microwaved, all offending kitchen equipment was confiscated, and hundreds of believers were either executed or sent to Filial Piety Centers.

Workers

The function of the working class is that it work. The brutal grind of 16-hour days leaves little time for religious study or discussion. A basic principle in every class is Confucian loyalty up the chain of obligation (with all chains leading to Lord Kurita). The special religious form assigned to the workers is Shintoistic superstition.

The Shinto hierarchy is firmly controlled by the nobles. Shinto priests drill workers and their families from the time of birth in the notion of a world filled with spirits and devils. The natural creativity of the workers has thus given rise to a rich lore of ghost stories. Every aspect of nature is endowed with a good or bad spirit that needs constant flattery. Workers are encouraged to keep small shrines in their homes and even in their workplaces, so that their minds may be continually occupied with giving these spirits the necessary attention without the need for any unproductive time away from the job.

Unproductives

The leaders of the Combine want the Unproductives, the "passively rotting mass" in the sump of society, to be drawn into Shintoistic superstition in the same way as the workers. The Unproductives are a mobile class, however. On some planets, they consist of masses of refugees from other places and other classes. On other worlds, they may be forced labor gangs rounded up across a whole arc of star centers. Everywhere this class catches the falling breakage of the rest of society, people from the full range of belief systems, but marginalized, usually permanently. In order to get an evening meal and a place to sleep in a Draconian E.T.A. Shelter ("Endeavoring To Assist"), they usually have to listen to a homily on Confucian loyalties and perhaps pray to a Shinto shrine. But like everything else in the lives of these beggars, criminals, rejects, refugees, and assassins, however, their religion is rootless and adrift.

It is these layers of society, characterized by hopelessness, that most often give rise to fanatical cults. While these may occasionally be harnessed to the needs of this or that noble family or politician, they are routinely exterminated, usually without much thought, by the military.

MINORITY RELIGIONS

Judaism

Non-Asian religions, especially One-God religions that the First Lord regards as competition, are generally not tolerated within the Draconis Combine. The exception, of course, is Christianity, which is only semi-tolerated because of the alliance with Scandinavian Rasalhague. No practice of Judaism is allowed.

A fair number of *minyans* (congregations of ten or more Jewish men) do meet clandestinely around the realm. These groups are in the mainsteam of Judaism, which has frequently been forced underground throughout its history.

Many of the Jews of Terra were greatly disoriented in the 21st century when a large sector of the rabbinate was incorporated into the Roman Catholic Church following the defeat of a particularly fascistic regime in the state of Israel. Since then, many people have continued to think of themselves as "Jewish," but not in a religious sense. These types can be found across the Draconis Combine, though usually as individuals or as small groups of friends, not as communities. Since severing their connections with the scholarly traditions of the religion, they do not, as did Jews of old, concentrate in the learned professions, but now exist in equal numbers among the workers and in the military, too.

One group not affected by the alienations of the 21st century was the sect of Hasidim. These ultra-orthodox and unrestrained followers believe that before the prophesied State of Israel can come into existence, a messiah must first come to the Jews. In their view, no such messiah has yet come, and so they believe that the rest of Judaism is a deviation, and that the old Terran Israel was a false state not fulfilling the prophecy. They were neither devastated nor surprised, when the Terran state of Israel went sour or when the rabbinate decided to enter the Catholic Church. These events only confirmed their teachings.

The sect is characterized by a certain exuberant boyishness, and a belief that the Jewish messiah (whom they call the "Moshiach") is yet to come. In fact, their relationship to their messiah is something like that of a precocious and unrestrained child toward a parent. Their slogan since their days on Terra has been "We Want Moshiach Now!"

Religious Jews who wanted to worship in Conservative or Reform ways generally gravitated toward the more liberal Lyran Commonwealth, but the Hasids set off in small groups across the reaches of Kurita space. Sometime in the 24th century, one of their venerable rabbis interpreted a text to the effect that when the Moshiach arrived, he would come from that direction. Not content to wait, the irrepressible Hasids began moving rimward across the Draconis Combine, hoping to meet their messiah halfway.

Islam

It was almost 350 years after the beginning of the Exodus from Terra that Moslems began moving to other worlds. Those who came into the Draconis Combine were mostly Touaregs, Hausas, and Fulani, Black desert tribesmen from the northwest African Sahara. Their immigration took them to a dozen or so worlds scattered along the borders with Houses Steiner, Davion, and Liao.

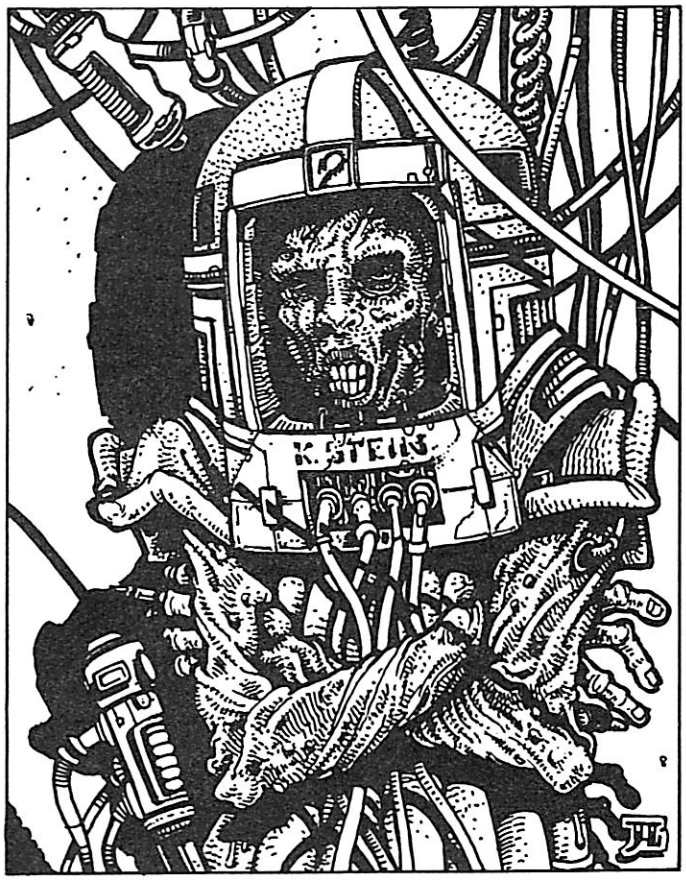
Before their departure from Terra, their faith had been altered by two great events affecting Islamic Africa in the late 20th and early 21st centuries: the terrible viral epidemics that swept the continent from south to north, and the wave of Shi'ite Moslem evangelism from Iran.

Divisions within Islam mostly stem from a struggle for succession among the immediate descendants of the Prophet Mohammed in the 7th century. The Shi'ites attached their allegiance to the loser of that struggle, the Khalif Ali. Like most losers throughout history, they made up a myth of future redemption, and taught that the twelfth Khalif of that branch of the family, the Imam as 'Zaman, would return as a messiah.

The North Africans adopted this messianic vision with a twist of their own. Being of Hamitic, or Black, stock, the Touaregs, Hausas, and Fulani were despised by other branches of the faith (even though racism was technically forbidden by the scriptures). They brought to their new, messianic Shi'ism a tenet from another minor sect of Islam, the Khawarij, which stated that the Khalifate could be held by any believer whom the faithful might consider fit, even though he be a Black slave.

In this way, these devastated survivors of famine and epidemic pinned their faith on the long wait for a messiah, the Imam as 'Zaman. As time went by, they became even more convinced he would be one of their own. As they lost their earlier identities as separate tribes and merged into one people, they took on the name "Azami." When the Islamic scriptures were finally reconciled with interstellar travel in the 25th century, they were among the first Moslems to leave Terra.

They settled on Kurita worlds near Terra, such as Tukayyid, Algedi, Al Na'ir, Dabih, and Markab. Within less than a hundred years, the Von Rohrs Coordinators sent out military expeditions to break the Azami and integrate them into Kurita society and ideology. Instead, Terran viruses that lay latent in the Azami bloodstreams eventually wiped out the Draconis invaders. Though this problem could have been overcome easily in subsequent campaigns, those campaigns never took place, because the Von Rohrs line was interrupted and exterminated by the McAllister Rebellion on Luthien.



THE DEAD HAND OF THE PAST

In the spring of 2497, three regiments of Kurita BattleMechs landed on the Azami planet of Algedi. Somewhere in the recesses of the Von Rohrs command complex, the decision had been made to break the independence of these exotic people and to integrate them into the Draconis Combine. When the first Azami approached the Kurita force, the brigade commander immediately made impossible demands on them, particularly that they give up their religion and adopt Kurita's Dictum Honorium. When the Azami indignantly refused, they were promptly beheaded.

The ensuing campaign began with the Kurita destruction of a string of Azami settlements, followed by nighttime counterraids by the inhabitants. Azami night-fighting tactics denied the Kurita forces a quick victory, but time was on the side of the invaders. The Azami could not inflict decisive damage on their heavier foe. In the sixth month of the campaign, however, matters suddenly came to an unexpected end.

An Azami tribal unit moving through the deep desert at night came upon a dug-in Kurita recon lance. The household elements—women, children, supplies—swung out in wide detour, and an hour before dawn Azami armored scouts opened up on the Kurita position.

To their puzzlement, there was no return fire from the alien 'Mechs.

As the Algedian sun broke the horizon, and night turned abruptly into morning, the Azami leader cautiously approached the closest Kurita 'Mech. The hatch in the 'Mech shin was open, and inside was a metal ladder, its red-lead paint worn bare, leading up into the leg. The Azami carefully reached in and took hold of a rung, then leaped back behind a rock, laser gun at the ready. The ladder began to shake. There was a commotion up inside the vehicle, and then a body fell into the open hatchway—a very distorted body of a dead Kurita MechWarrior.

The enemy soldier was shrunken up inside his cooling vest and the boot had fallen off one of his twisted feet. On his face was an expression of intense discomfort and horror. The blood inside his veins had congealed in less than half an hour to a thick, dry paste, and in some of the extremities, had dried to a powder. The Azami unit leader saw on the body lesions of a kind that had not been seen for nearly 400 years.

The Kurita invaders—all of them—had succumbed to a virus that had a Human bloodstream in which to flourish since the great viral epidemics that swept Terran Africa in the 20th and 21st centuries. The Azami, descendants of the few survivors, were themselves immune, but they carried the latent virus, which was released into the Kuritans from bodies on the battlefield and from Azami torture victims in Kurita camps.

Over the next week, the desert people found that Kurita units all over their world were similarly congealed to death. The invasion was over.

—From *Dateline Destiny: Strange Tales But True*, by Adam Rasalhague, Skandia Publishing House, 2513

The Azami had a realistic appreciation of their position. In 2516, an Azami delegation arrived on Luthien. In return for formal autonomy, they agreed to allow Kurita exploitation of their mineral resources. They also agreed to act as border units for the Draconis military, and to serve when required as cross-border raiders, with their Kurita-provided light and medium 'Mechs traveling in Kurita JumpShips and DropShips.

The question of religion and ideology proved more difficult to resolve. In the end, the Azami decided that the Dictum Honorium was not really so foreign to their own strict desert codes. Citing the Islamic principle of *taqiyya*, or caution, which allowed a Shi'ite to pass himself off as a mainline Sunni Moslem if it meant saving his life, the Azami agreed to adopt the Dictum as their ideology if the Kurita agreed not to inquire too closely into their faithfulness to it. After Hehiro Kurita assumed the Coordinatorship from his mother Siriwan, the male supremacist Azami found it convenient, if not to replace their Imam as 'Zaman messiah with the Kurita Coordinator, at least to blur the lines when dealing with Draconis emissaries.

OFF-BRAND SECTS

Any society with a rigid, state-controlled central religion is bound to generate a crop of exotic cults along its fringes. The Draconis Combine is no exception. House Kurita takes the people's ideology seriously, and polices any off-brand religions carefully. It is especially severe on any cult that puts up an individual as guru or prophet, considering this as a challenge to the First Lord. Between the Internal Security Force (ISF) and the Order of the Five Pillars (O.5.P.), there is a gray area as to which agency is responsible for controlling the people's thoughts, however. It is in this gray area that the cult-like movements flourish, especially in the Middle Class and among the Unproductives.

It would not be possible to describe all the exotic Draconis cults in one work. In the time it takes this ComStar report to be printed and distributed, a half-dozen Kurita cults will no doubt flicker out and a half-dozen new ones will surface. A few examples will suffice.

One cult that eliminated itself before even taking a name was a movement in the 30th century that convinced its followers to attempt interstellar travel by releasing their thoughts into space. In order to facilitate this process, the converts decided to engage in amateur trepanning, and the entire sect was wiped out in one weekend of infection before the ISF and the O.5.P. could agree who was to round them up.

Another cult, with roots far back in pre-Exodus Terra, is the Chanters. These folks believe that by endlessly repeating certain phrases, called mantras, they can improve their luck and bring themselves various rewards of their own choosing. The chanting cult is more or less tolerated by Kuritan authorities, mainly because it is so focused on the desires of each individual that there is little chance of it taking interest in any larger social issues. Chanting for luck is popular in the military, especially during combat. Kuritan commanders have had problems with Chanters using open mikes to jam tactical communications. Mantras using numbers have been outlawed in the military because they are too often confused with artillery fire coordinates.

A new cult has recently been identified somewhere within Brocchi's Cluster. It is believed that O.5.P. has penetrated this movement, but ComStar's information to date comes only from contacts within the ISF, whose knowledge of this latest development is still sketchy. The ISF refers to this group as the Tai Dai cult, though it is not known what name they have actually given themselves. Agents of the ISF are trying to piece together a picture based on fragmentary phrases and fourth-hand observations.

The group seems to have named its outpost "Terrapin Station," though whether this is a small world, a continent, or a city, is not yet clear. Some of the group's practices seem to have to do with a "box of rain," suggesting that their world may be water-poor. It is thought that a priesthood has developed, possibly called "Uncle John's Band." There are also rumors of an "estimated prophet," raising concern that their beliefs may contain elements of forbidden messianism. The group is very musical, has a penchant for colorful clothing, and seems to be accomplished in the healing arts. It was thought at one time that these people might have been long-lost survivors of the Trepanning cult, after one agent thought she heard them referred to as "dead heads," but there now seems to be no connection.

THE PILLAR OF STEEL

Might makes Kurita
Pillar of Dragon steel
Victory over all!
—Traditional Kurita haiku

MILITARY FORCES

The Draconis Combine—House Kurita—the sign of the Dragon—no other foe makes the young soldiers of the other Houses quake with such hatred and fear. All of Kurita space is one military camp, and Kurita soldiers inhuman bringers of death and destruction, according to accepted teaching. The awe in which other armies hold the Draconis Combine military is, itself, a source of strength for Kurita forces. If a psychological advantage is key in warfare, the Draconis forces sometimes have their victory even before going on the field. This edge, however, seems to be eroding, as more commanders in other Successor States learn the truth behind the monolith.

If all life in the Draconis Combine revolves around the military, and that military is a smooth fighting machine, it would seem that House Kurita should have long ago conquered all of Human space. However, the same could be said of each Successor State in the roughly even match-up of the Succession Wars. On the other hand, the Draconis Combine, with its lack of resources and technology, should have been overrun decades ago. It is a testament to the will of the Draconian people and the discipline and fighting tactics of its armed forces that the Combine has held on for so long.

As of July 3025, the Draconis Combine can draw upon approximately 80 BattleMech regiments. Although efforts have been made to gather the most up-to-date information possible on the forces, readers must remember that regiments are constantly being reformed, transferred, temporarily removed from active service, reactivated, or decommissioned for spares.

Like the other pillars of Draconis society, the Pillar of Steel has an important meaning. The Kuritas regard their military as a samurai regarded his sword. According to ancient legend, the Japanese created the finest swords in the world. The high density and extreme sharpness of these weapons made them ideal for decapitation. Famous swords were passed from father to son (as BattleMechs are). The samurai's blade was a sacred possession; parting with his weapon was a loss of honor. As a result, the Combine regards military defeat as a loss of honor—something Hanse Davion used to his advantage in the Galtor Campaign.

Indeed, House Kurita has its own samurai. Those students who show promise of becoming great warriors (or those with the right connections) attend one of the Great Schools, where students learn the discipline of *bushido*. Graduates of these schools become samurai, and in all things must adhere to the way of the warrior.

BUSHIDO

Known as the samurai's code of chivalry, *bushido* describes the principles of honor followed by the military class that ruled feudal Japan. It is a synthesis of borrowings from three sources. It borrowed stoic endurance and scorn for suffering and death from Zen, worship of country from Shinto, and the social ethic of the five relationships from Confucianism. *Bushido* emphasizes constant physical and mental training to maintain and improve fighting techniques, and discipline to develop the character, confidence, and inner self-control that the samurai needs to unflinchingly face an opponent in battle to the death.

The Kurita samurai owes his Coordinator uncompromising loyalty until death. Indeed, he is willing to sacrifice his life without a moment's hesitation.

—From *The Resurgence of Japanese Culture*, by Darby Pollack, Dragon Tooth Publishing, 2751

ORGANIZATION OF MILITARY UNITS

The Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery (also known as the DCMS or the Arm of the Dragon) depends on light 'Mech lances as its backbone in battle. The quickness and maneuverability of these lances was key to their early successes against the Lyran Commonwealth in the First Succession War. Many Kurita light 'Mech units contain *Jenner* BattleMechs (a favorite of Minoru Kurita's) and *Panther* BattleMechs (produced by the illustrious Gorton, Kingsley, and Thorpe Enterprises).

There are no standard BattleMechs for medium 'Mech units. These standby units are created from whatever 'Mechs the Combine can spare, with any dregs, wrecks, and scrap metal commandeered into the units.

Although the Draconis Combine has a wide variety of heavy 'Mechs, heavy units usually contain *Quickdraw* and *Dragon* BattleMechs (both from Luthien Armor Works). Luthien Armor also produces the *Charger* BattleMech, which is found abundantly in assault 'Mech units.

The Draconis Combine also fields several conventional units, which are more numerous than 'Mech units. Although most are useful only for garrison duty, some (including heavy armor and jump infantry) are on the front lines.

Light AeroSpace units contain *Sholagar* Class Fighters, medium lances contain *Shilone* Class fighters, and heavy lances contain *Slayer* Class Fighters. Captured Davion *Sparrow Hawk*s, *Corsair*s, and *Stuka*s sometimes constitute lances on the Combine's border with the Federated Suns, while captured *Seydlitz*es, *Lucifer*s, and *Chippewa*s often appear in units on the Lyran front to confuse the enemy. To further confuse matters, Marik and Liao fighters are sometimes used.

Like most units in the Successor States, Kurita military units are composed as follows: Four vehicles constitute a lance, three lances constitute a company, three companies constitute a battalion, and three battalions constitute a regiment. In infantry units, ten soldiers equal one squad, four squads equal one platoon, three platoons equal one company, and so on.

UNIFORMS

Uniforms are an important aspect of Kurita life. In this militaristic society, one wears clothes that match one's station in life, and so wearing a prestigious uniform shows that the individual is worthy of respect. Many soldiers on leave from their unit continue to wear their uniforms to impress the locals.

SENIOR OFFICERS

Senior officers are officers of the rank of Colonel (in the Admiralty, Captain) or above. Unlike some other Successor States, the Draconis Combine puts its senior officers into the field to conduct battles.

The basic color for the senior officer's uniform is black, and it follows the same design as the officer's service branch. For example, an Infantry General wears a black standard Kurita infantry uniform. Unlike uniforms of the other Successor States, Kurita uniforms have few trappings. Medals and decorations are worn only on the dress uniform.

The chief component of the senior officer's uniform is the high-collared black tunic. On each shoulder are the black-on-red dragon symbol of the Draconis Combine and gold *katakana* symbols describing House Kurita and the officer's Military District Warlord. These are the only touches of color on the uniform besides the rank insignia, which is worn on the uniform's left collar.

The officer's trousers are black with no ornamentation at all. Graduates of the Sun Zhang Academy, Wisdom of the Dragon, or the Sun Tzu School of Combat may wear their *Katana* and *Wakizashi* swords (which they receive upon graduation). In addition, few officers do not wear handguns on their belts, and most generally have another hidden somewhere in their uniform. The trouser legs are stuffed inside the officer's boots, which are black polyvinylate and must always be kept polished.

The officer's branch hat is also black. On the front of the hat is his regiment insignia, on the left side is the battalion insignia, and on the right side is his company's.

OFFICER CADET

As most field uniforms are similar, the only distinguishing mark of the officer cadet is the white striping. Officer cadets are considered a dangerous nuisance, full of answers to the wrong questions. The white stripe on the Officer Cadet's uniform is to warn others in the area of an inexperienced officer. This officer is using a wireless field communications system, and is probably being chewed out by a senior officer.

RANKS

The ranks used by the Draconis Combine are a reflection of those used by the United States Army and Marine Corps of the 20th and 21st centuries. Each rank insignia is a stylized *katakana* (or Japanese character) numeral. All military personnel wear their rank insignia on their left collar, where it is set against a rectangle of the soldier's branch color. Cherry red is for the MechWarriors; yellow is for the AeroSpace Pilots; dark green is for the DropShip and JumpShip crew; light green is for support personnel; dark brown is for infantry; light blue is for vehicle personnel; and purple is for artillery personnel.

The following are the rank descriptions and insignia of soldiers in the DCMS. Notes on equivalent ranks in the Admiralty and Support and Engineering are also included.

Ranks usually follow those of the United States Armed Forces of the 20th century. During formal occasions or when the speaker wishes to honor his listener, however, ancient Japanese rank names are used.

ARMY RANKS

Tai-sho	General
Sho-sho	Brigadier General
Tai-sa	Colonel
Chu-sa	Lieutenant Colonel
Sho-sa	Major
Tai-i	Captain
Chu-i	Lieutenant

NAVAL RANKS

Tai-sho	Admiral
Cho-sho	Commodore
Tai-sa	Captain
Sho-sa	Commander
Dai-i	Lieutenant Commander
Chu-i	Lieutenant
Sho-i	Ensign

The uniform is made from a synthetic fiber called trichloropolyester, which is flame-, tear-, and water-resistant (and prevents spills from marring the uniform's shine).

The sleeves of the tunic require cuff links, and the officer is free to wear any type he wishes. Some popular cufflinks show school crests, images of the Kurita dragon, swords, or BattleMechs. Cuff links are required to be less than two centimeters wide, however, as larger cuff links are too flashy for the proper officer.

Although it is true for most Kurita soldiers, senior officers take special care to keep their uniforms immaculate. This is not merely because the Kuritans are fussy about appearances (as are the Lyran Commonwealth's social generals), but because they wish their corpses to be presentable to the opposing general if they are killed in combat. In fact, many Kurita officers bathe and douse themselves with fragrance before battle for the same reason. Some even go so far as to put haiku in their uniform to please the opposing general. This all hearkens back to tradition in ancient Japan, when samurai did all these things.

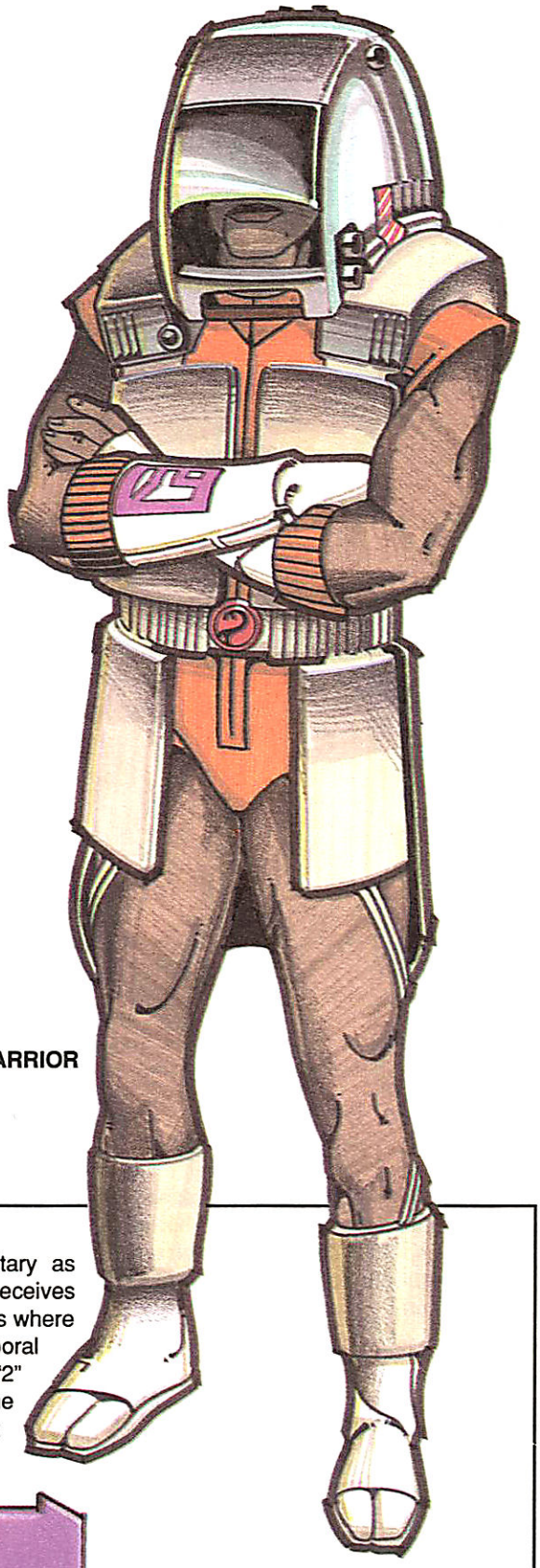
MECHWARRIORS

MechWarriors of the Draconis Combine have two sets of regular uniforms: one for wearing while inside a 'Mech and one for wearing when outside.

As the heat buildup inside a 'Mech is almost intolerable, MechWarriors wear as little as possible while piloting a 'Mech. The only clothing and equipment that a Kurita MechWarrior is required to wear inside his machine is a one-piece sleeveless and legless battle suit, boots, a neurohelmet, the biofeedback apparatus needed to operate the helmet, and a cooling vest. He wears no rank insignia while fighting.

When the warrior leaves his 'Mech, he must don his noncombat uniform. This consists of a dark grey jersey with a diagonal red stripe across the chest, and dark grey trousers with a red stripe running down each leg. He also wears calf-length black boots and a black visor cap with the symbols of his regiment, battalion, and company. A wide black belt with a silver buckle encircles the pilot's waist.

Like all Kurita soldiers, MechWarriors wear their rank insignia on the left collar and the symbols of House Kurita and their Warlord on each shoulder.



MECHWARRIOR

RECRUIT

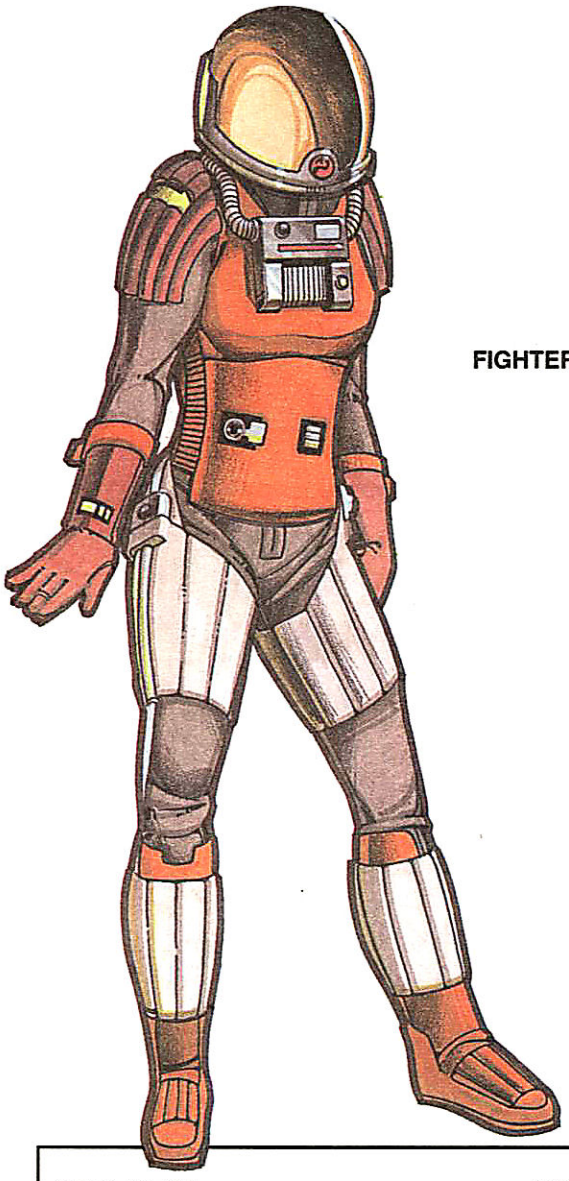
While in basic training, a soldier is called a Recruit. Recruits do not wear any rank insignia, but they do wear their branch rectangle. In the Admiralty, the equivalent rank is Spaceman.

PRIVATE

After completing basic training, most Recruits become Privates. A Private wears the stylized symbol for the numeral "1" set in lavender. Spaceman, Second Class is the equivalent rank in the Admiralty.

LANCE CORPORAL

Some Recruits join the military as Lance Corporals. This individual receives more pay than a Private, but that is where the difference stops. A Lance Corporal wears the symbol for the numeral "2" set in lavender. In the Admiralty, the equivalent rank is Spaceman, First Class.



FIGHTER PILOT

FIGHTER PILOTS

Kurita AeroSpace Fighter Pilots wear simple, brownish-purple jumpsuits. In addition, they wear a vest that contains a parachute; the ripcord is located on the front. Because AeroSpace Fighters experience great amounts of turbulence, a pilot needs to wear special pads over his thighs, lower legs, and shoulders. To allow the pilot to breathe normally while in space or in atmosphere, an Environmental Regulator Unit is hooked up to his control helmet. Inside the leg paddings are regulators that prevent the pilot's blood from pooling in his lower extremities during High-G maneuvers.

SUPPORT PERSONNEL

Technicians wear the same brownish-purple jumpsuit as do AeroSpace personnel. Although the suit has few adornments, there are many pockets for storing anything from a voltometer to a multipowered gyro diagnosticator. Actually, it is considered a uniform only because it is the only type of work clothing that the Procurement Department issues. Techs have no snap inspections and are usually left alone to perform their work. However, they must wear their proper caps, which resemble cloth baseball caps.

CORPORAL

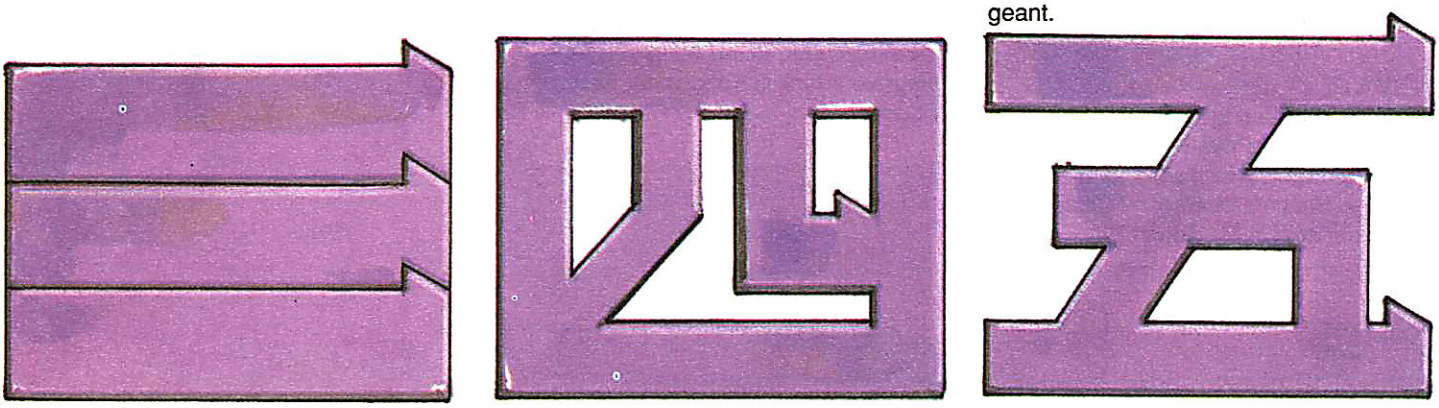
Usually an assistant squad leader or vehicle commander, the Corporal is the first rank where the individual experiences command over others. On his left collar is the lavender, stylized numeral "3". The equivalent rank in the Admiralty is also Corporal.

SERGEANT

The Sergeant is usually an infantry squad leader or a vehicle commander. He wears the lavender *katakana* symbol for the numberal "4". In the Admiralty, this rank is also called Sergeant.

MASTER SERGEANT

The next rank up for both the Mustered Soldiery and the Admiralty is Master Sergeant. This high-ranking noncommissioned officer wears the symbol for the numeral "5" set in lavender. A MechWarrior who does not own his own 'Mech also wears this insignia, although he is called simply "MechWarrior" instead of a Master Sergeant.

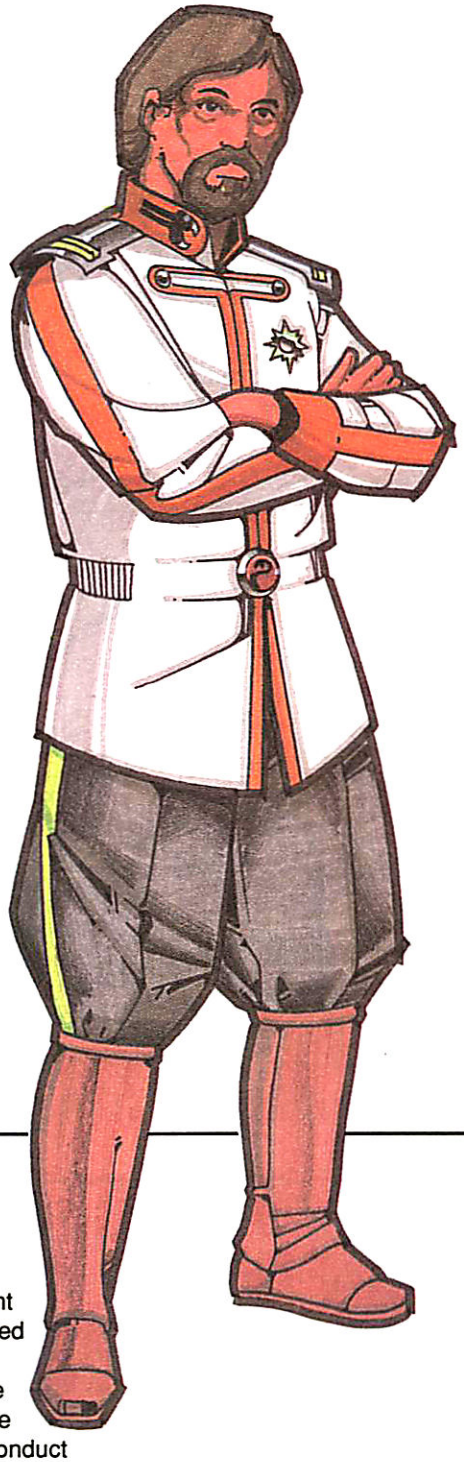


DRESS UNIFORMS

Although the specific kind of dress uniform depends on the individual's rank and branch, the basic design is the same for all. It consists of a white tunic, black pants, and red boots.

The white tunic has wide orange stripes running along the outside of the arms and down the middle. The cuffs are also orange. Sewn into the tunic is a belt, which is fastened with a clasp shaped like the Draconis Combine Dragon. The high collar is orange and sports the soldier's rank insignia. Along the shoulders are bars representing the soldier's branch.

The black pants are identical to those worn by senior officers except for the piping along the legs. Like the shoulder bars, the color of the piping represents the soldier's branch.



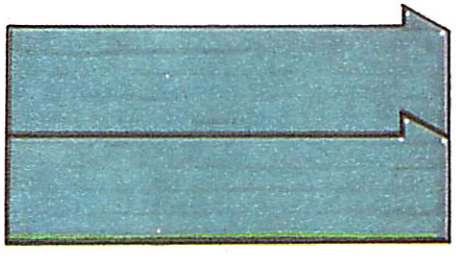
DRESS UNIFORM

TALON SERGEANT

The Talon Sergeant, the first of the so-called middle ranks, wears the numeral "1" like the Private, except that the symbol is royal blue. The Admiralty's Talon Sergeant and the first of the Tech officers, the Petty Officer of Support and Engineering, also wear this rank (lower-ranking members of S&E have the same ranks as the DCMS). In addition, a MechWarrior owning his own BattleMech, or one of noble lineage, wears this rank, but he too is called only "MechWarrior."

SERGEANT MAJOR

This is the highest rank that a noncommissioned officer in the Mustered Soldiery or the Admiralty can achieve. There are few Sergeant Majors in either branch, as an enlisted soldier must spend his career to reach this rank. There is usually one Sergeant Major per regiment, and he is responsible for the discipline and conduct of the enlisted personnel and noncommissioned officers in his regiment. The rank is represented by the *katakana* symbol "2" set against a royal blue rectangle. The next higher Tech officer, the Chief Petty Officer, also wears this rank against a light green rectangle. A MechWarrior who is the lance commander's second-in-command wears this insignia.



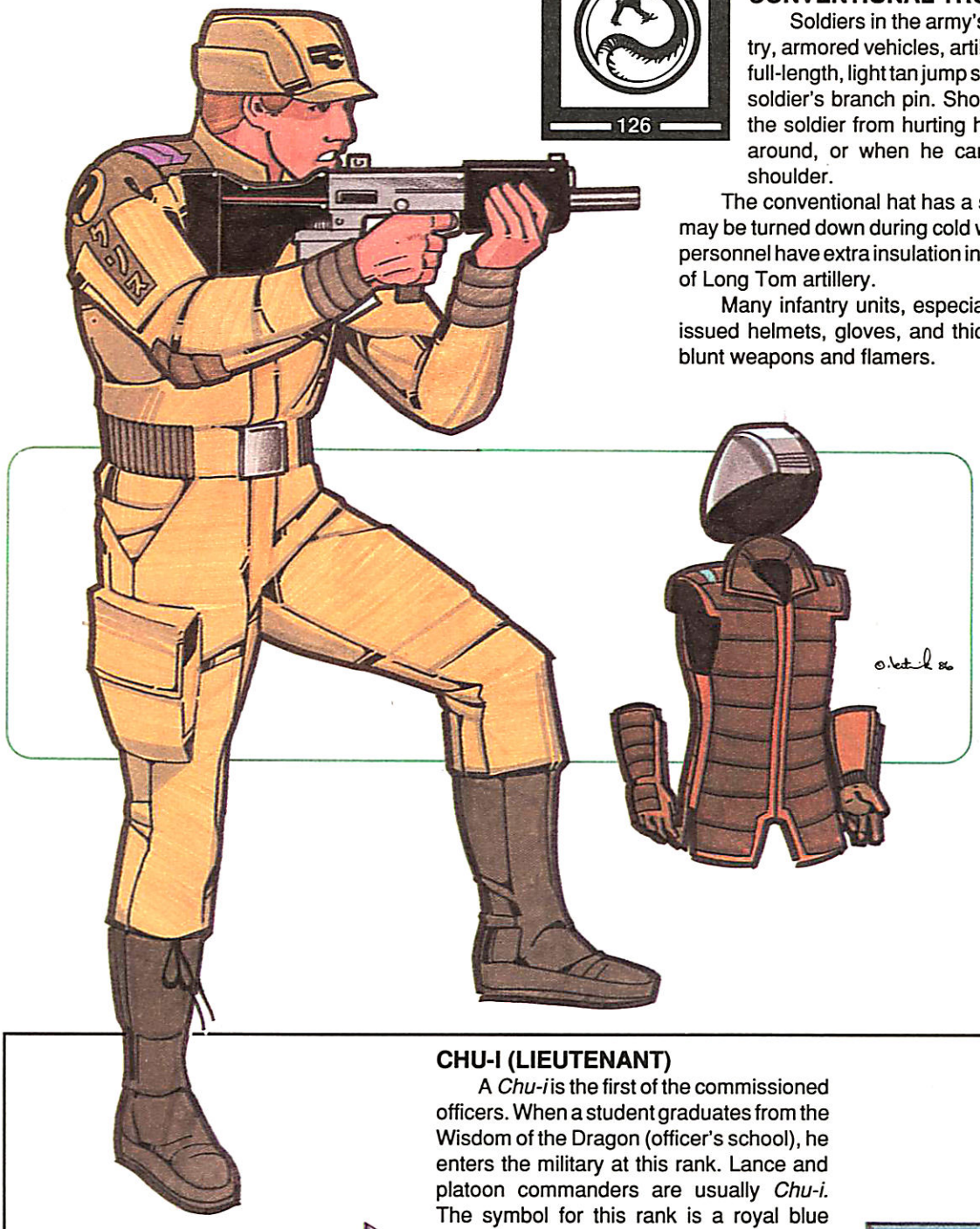
SERGEANT MAJOR

CONVENTIONAL TROOPS

Soldiers in the army's conventional branches (infantry, armored vehicles, artillery, and so on) wear a rugged, full-length, light tan jump suit. On the chest of the suit is the soldier's branch pin. Shoulder and elbow padding keep the soldier from hurting himself when he falls or crawls around, or when he carries a heavy weapon on his shoulder.

The conventional hat has a short visor and ear flaps, which may be turned down during cold weather or fierce winds. Artillery personnel have extra insulation in the ear flaps to muffle the sound of Long Tom artillery.

Many infantry units, especially those that use flamers, are issued helmets, gloves, and thick jerkins to protect them from blunt weapons and flamers.



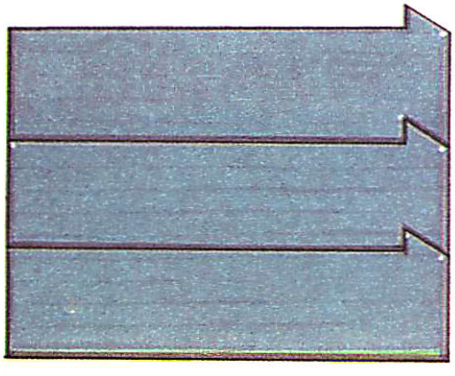
Vehicle personnel also receive jerkins, but theirs are designed to absorb shocks from bumping around inside a vehicle. In addition, their helmets are designed to prevent injury to the head. Both have cooling elements inside them that help keep the confined crew comfortable.

Because the color of the uniform is important in recognizing the soldier's branch, conventional soldiers are not issued camouflage uniforms. They must wear their tans while on arctic worlds and jungle worlds.

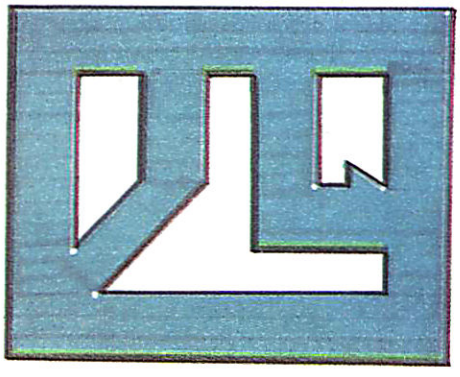
CHU-I (LIEUTENANT)

A *Chu-i* is the first of the commissioned officers. When a student graduates from the Wisdom of the Dragon (officer's school), he enters the military at this rank. Lance and platoon commanders are usually *Chu-i.* The symbol for this rank is a royal blue numeral "3" symbol. In the Admiralty, an individual just out of Wisdom of the Dragon is a *Sho-i* or Ensign, the lowest rank of an AeroSpace Pilot. Although the commander of an AeroSpace lance is technically a *Sho-i* and wears that rank insignia, he is called a Lancer. In Support and Engineering, the equivalent is the Master Chief Petty Officer.

The next *katakana* symbol in sequence, the royal blue numeral "4", is reserved only for Senior Master Chief Petty Officers, the highest Tech rank. Usually, there is only one such Tech per regiment, and he is commonly referred to as a Senior Tech.



CHU-I (LIEUTENANT)



SENIOR MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER

STRUCTURE

The Ministry of War is divided into many subdivisions, the most important being the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery. The Warlords of each of the five Military Districts have authority over all the military elements in their district.

DEPARTMENT OF INDOCTRINATION

This department is charged with educating youngsters to become MechWarriors, AeroSpace Pilots, infantrymen, Techs, and any other military profession. The most prestigious schools in the Combine are under its jurisdiction (see **Major Military Academies**).

As described in the **Education** chapter, some children go on to specialized schools such as military academics when they reach the age of ten. For six years, students at the military academies learn how to fight bare-handed and with weapons of all types. The Dictum Honorium is taught constantly, and the students at the better colleges are expected to live the impossible life of a samurai. In addition, all students drill constantly in their specialty, be it armored tanks or 'Mechs.

Not only do students in military academies learn the ways of the samurai and the specialized skills for their branch in the military, but they also undergo three weeks of propagandizing in a wilderness retreat each year. This training session is designed to both reinforce unquestioned fealty to House Kurita as well as to teach skills necessary for wilderness survival.

BUREAU OF SUBSTITUTION

The Bureau of Substitution is responsible for sending replacements to units that have suffered heavy casualties. Many units that have been decimated are simply disbanded, and the soldiers transferred to other units (which is why regimental numbers do not run in orderly progression).

In addition, this bureau handles all transfers of soldiers from one unit to another for any reason. Many soldiers fear this bureau's *Shuga-to-hama,* or "letter of joyous celebration," which means that the individual is being transferred to another unit without promotion, often with lower pay and decreased status. Some of these letters transfer the individual to another branch entirely. Soldiers who have displayed unsocial or mildly treasonous tendencies (such as grumbling about the food) are likely to receive such letters, but poor battlefield performance alone rarely earns one. Senior officers jealous of young soldiers have been known to arrange for their younger rivals to get such a letter. Note that when a soldier receives a transfer and a promotion, the notification comes from the Bureau of Administration.

ASSEMBLY OF THE GRAND INQUISITOR

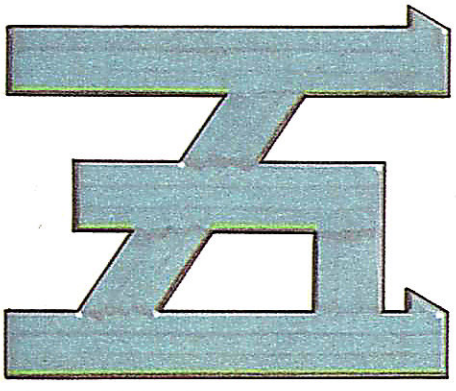
The Grand Inquisitor is the one who judges all infractions committed by soldiers against the Draconis Combine, House Kurita, or the Dictum Honorium. ComStar knows very little about the Assembly, as few of those called before the Grand Inquisitor survive, and none of those who have survived will talk about the experience. Nevertheless, ROM agents surmise that in this court, the accused is not allowed a lawyer. The atmosphere in the court is probably designed to intimidate the accused, and after the "trial," guilty parties simply disappear. It is believed that the Grand Inquisitor offers nobles and senior officers the opportunity to commit *seppuku* (ritual suicide) to maintain their own and their family honor. In fact, many commit *seppuku* rather than face the Grand Inquisitor.

The Assembly of the Grand Inquisitor has more power than the courts of the Ministry of Justice. For whatever reason, the Assembly may override the decision of those courts, or may send them notification that the Assembly is taking over adjudication of a dispute. The Assembly only judges cases against the Combine, however, and does not judge cases between individual disputants.

Because the Grand Inquisitor hears cases only rarely, most people consider him a distant threat. Their immediate fear is of agents of the Internal Security Force.

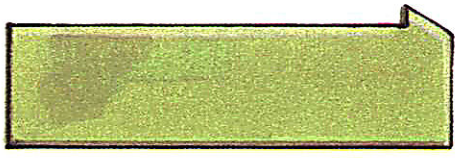
TAI-I (CAPTAIN)

A *Tai-i* in the DCMS is usually a company commander. His rank insignia is the symbol "5" set in royal blue. The equivalent rank in the Admiralty is the *Chu-i,* or Lieutenant, who commands a company of AeroSpace Fighters.



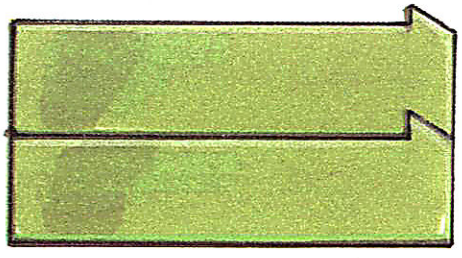
SHO-SA (MAJOR)

The *Sho-sa* is the first of the upper ranks, which are represented by numerical symbols in apple-green. *Sho-sa* are found mostly on battalion staffs, although senior company commanders may also be of this rank. Their rank insignia is the apple-green *katakana* for "1". *Dai-i* (Lieutenant Commander) is the equivalent rank in the Admiralty.



CHU-SA (LIEUTENANT COLONEL)

The next rank in the DCMS is the Chu-sa, who wears the apple-green symbol of the numeral "2". He is also usually a member of the battalion staff, and is commonly the Battalion Executive Officer. The equivalent rank in the Admiralty is the *Sho-sa,* or Commander.



PROCUREMENT DEPARTMENT

The Procurement Department is the quartermaster for the Kurita military, handling all the supply requisitions for all the armed forces. The warehouses of the Procurement Department are gigantic; on some worlds, the entire planet contains nothing but such warehouses. The locations of these planets are top secret, as a raid against one of them could wreak havoc on the logistics of the DCMS.

Just because a unit needs supplies does not necessarily mean that it will get them, however. The Procurement Department reviews the unit's loyalty and current battle record to determine if it is worthy to receive supplies. Needless to say, when a unit is on a losing streak, it will get fewer supplies, and the problem snowballs. Of course, well-placed bribes can circumnavigate the colossal red tape surrounding procurement. However, even the worst House unit gets supplies before a mercenary unit does.

There is little problem with shoddy merchandise in the Arm of the Dragon. The military gets only the best, leaving the rest of the citizens of the Draconis Combine with second-best. This department sets up defense contracts with various corporations to ensure that the firms are working in the best interests of the military.

DRACONIS COMBINE PORT AUTHORITY

The Port Authority handles the transport of supplies and reinforcements via freighter JumpShips and DropShips. It is not responsible for the transport of troops into combat, however. It handles the timetables for transport and coordinates space traffic around planets.

Recently, many members of the Port Authority went on strike for higher pay. Furious, Takashi Kurita had the Civilian Guidance Corps (the "Friendly Persuaders") slaughter the strikers to the last man. Since then, the Authority has been highly understaffed, and there have been many incidents of DropShip collisions in the atmosphere.

BUREAU OF ADMINISTRATION

Every requisition, letter from home, and communique goes through this office. The Bureau of Administration has warehouses that rival those of the Procurement Department.

This bureau is also in charge of censoring unfavorable battle reports, letters from home that contain "untruths", and any material that contains references disrespectful to the Draconis Combine, House Kurita, or the Dictum Honorium. This bureau has no influence over messages sent directly through ComStar.

COMBINE MILITARY COORDINATION OFFICE

This office carries out the war orders from the Draconis Combine High Command and sends units to planets. In its role as advisor to the High Command, the Military Coordination Office is staffed with members from all branches of the Combine Mustered Soldiery, Admiralty, Support and Engineering, Port Authority, and the Internal Security Force.

The Military Coordination Office also publishes a monthly manual on tactics called *Wisdom of the Samurai*. (Most say that the publication is just the office's way of making sure that its employees keep their jobs.)

DRACONIS COMBINE MUSTERED SOLDIERY

This main body of the Draconis Combine armed forces receives by far the greatest proportion of the Kurita budget. The DCMS contains the Dragon 'Mech Force (containing all the Draconis Combine's BattleMech units), the Dragon Armored Force (containing all the armored units), the Dragon Artillery Force, the Dragon Air Force, the Dragon Infantry Force, and Special Forces.

TAI-SA (COLONEL)

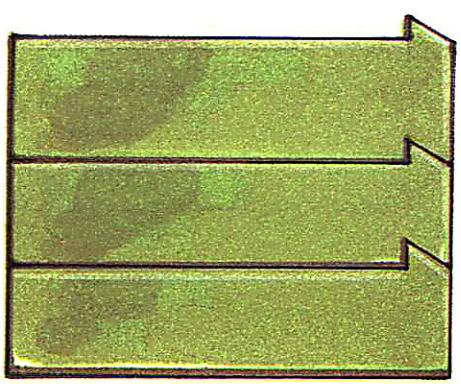
Bearing the apple-green numeral "3", the *Tai-sa* serves as a battalion commander. In the DCA, this rank is also known as *Tai-sa*, or Captain.

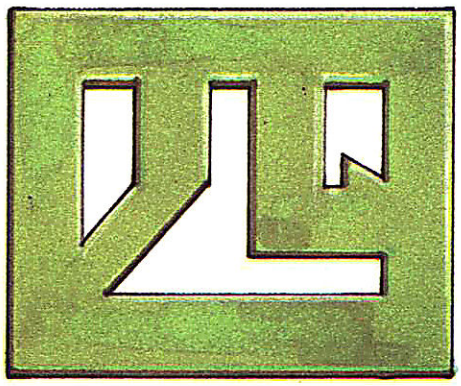
SHO-SHO (BRIGADIER GENERAL)

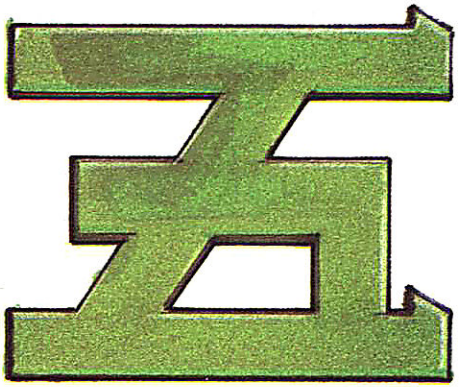
The *Sho-sho* is the General's aide, the regimental Executive Officer, and a member of the regimental staff. His insignia is the apple-green *katakana* "4", as is that of the Admiralty's *Cho-sho* (Commodore).

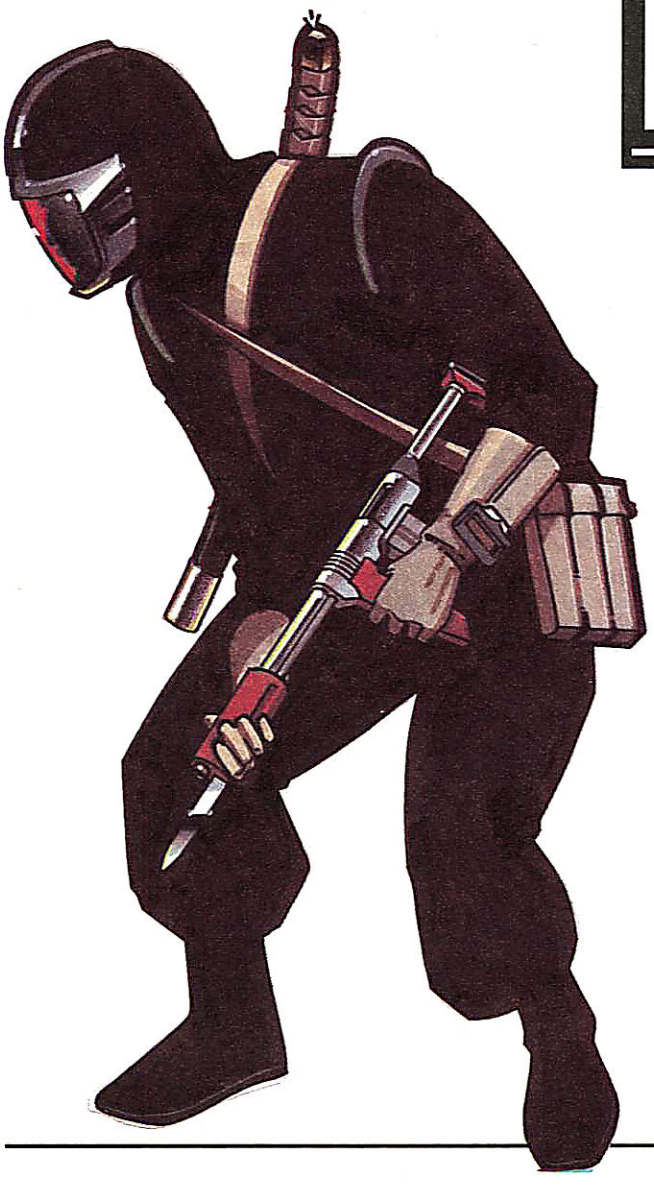
TAI-SHO (GENERAL)

Tai-sho is the highest rank in the DCMS. *Tai-sho* are the regimental commanders, the members of the High Command, the Prefecture commanders, and the Military District commanders. Their insignia is the numeral "5" set in apple-green. The equivalent rank in the Admiralty is the *Tai-sho*, or Admiral.









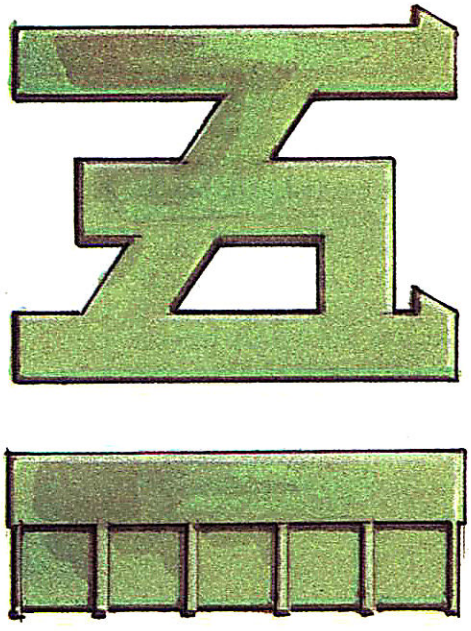
Special Forces is a catch-all for the various kinds of units used for special missions. One example is the Draconis Elite Strike Teams (DEST). This elite corps of commandos are trained in every branch of the military, from piloting a BattleMech to piloting a JumpShip. Its members are used mainly to infiltrate enemy installations. For example, an early DEST force stole the blueprints of the first BattleMech from the Lyran Commonwealth. Members of a DEST force follow the tenets of the ancient ninjas; that is, they practice combat and stealth maneuvers constantly. In addition, like the samurai, they will commit suicide rather than be dishonored.

ASSASSIN

The black outfit of the Special Forces is patterned on the costume of the Japanese ninja assassin. The helmet contains sensory-enhancing equipment, so that the soldier is aware of anyone approaching from any direction. This soldier is holding a particularly accurate automatic rifle, with a retracting bayonet. The pouch holds extra ammunition clips.

WARLORD/
GENERAL OF THE ARMY

More a position than a rank, Warlord is the actual title of a Military District commander. This individual is in charge of all elements of the military in his district; therefore, he may have come from the Mustered Soldiery or the Admiralty, but he belongs to both. He wears the stylized numeral "5" in green, and a bar with five squares below it. This bar indicates the district that that Warlord commands.



DRACONIS COMBINE ADMIRALTY

Like its sister branch, the DCMS, the Draconis Combine Admiralty (DCA) contains fighting forces of the Draconis Combine, but this department embraces the aerospace element of the military. All combat DropShips, JumpShips, AeroSpace Fighters, their pilots, and their support crews are part of the Admiralty. Many generals of House Kurita resent this, as they wish to direct aerospace forces to support ground actions. The separation of army from admiralty allows Kurita to ensure that AeroSpace units achieve their own strategic superiority before assisting the ground troops during an attack on a planet.

Rivalry between the Mustered Soldiery and the Admiralty is intense. Each branch believes that it is the most important element in the Bureau of the Military, and therefore, in the Draconis Combine. Lord Kurita fosters this rivalry, as it tends to improve morale and performance. It also can erupt into internecine violence, both off the field and on.

PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERY LIAISON

This corps of diplomats and bureaucrats is in charge of recruiting and supervising mercenaries. Takashi Kurita uses his best negotiators to work out contracts with mercs, as he is unwilling to allow mercenaries independent command. Often, he will make concessions on other points in order to integrate merc units under his generals. Although he realizes that he needs mercenaries, Takashi Kurita wants total control over their actions. These negotiators are also trained to extend large amounts of credit to fledgling mercenaries with the intent of putting the unit further and further into debt. Many small units have joined the Combine as regular troops because of this stratagem.

Mercenary liaisons (staff officers who work with both the mercenaries and Kurita command officers) also come from the Professional Soldiery Liaison. Usually, such officers are also members of the ISF, and mercenaries should ensure that such officers never suspect the unit of treachery. The ISF has been known to judge and exterminate the leaders of suspected units.

KURITA TRAINING

Training does not end after graduation, and a green soldier enters a new kind of education while in the field. For example, it is not unusual for troops to march four days without sleep, except for what can be snatched during ten-minute halts. Sometimes, troops sleep while marching. Indeed, more than a few soldiers have been known to wander off a road while sleeping on their feet (such laziness is punished with 20 lashes). Even after the troops strike camp, no one gets a chance to sleep. They are all assigned to outpost or patrol duty.

I asked the Talon Sergeant why he did not let his men sleep. He replied, "That is not necessary. Kurita troops already know how to sleep. They need training in how to stay awake."

—From *My Life as a War Correspondent*, Mercer Thomlinson, Dragon Tooth Publishing, 3022

PHYSICIANS OF THE DRAGON

Many years ago, medical personnel were looked down on because their profession was considered unmanly, worthy only for the weak or women (a justifiable belief in such a militaristic society). To prevent this discrimination, doctors created the brotherhood known as the Physicians of the Dragon. Although this group has mystical trappings, members are by no means witch doctors. Their schools are as good as any in the Inner Sphere, and their equipment is up-to-date. The populace regards the Physicians with awe, which has helped to swell the numbers of Kurita doctors and persuaded the Coordinator to allocate more funds to the Brotherhood.

Before, during, and after surgery, the Physicians use many rituals, including blessing stethoscopes, speaking to wounds and incisions, and purifying the patient with singing and dancing. Although most in the upper classes of society realize that it is all an act, average citizens in the Draconis Combine heartily believe that these rituals are necessary for successful operations—a phenomenon familiar to ComStar.

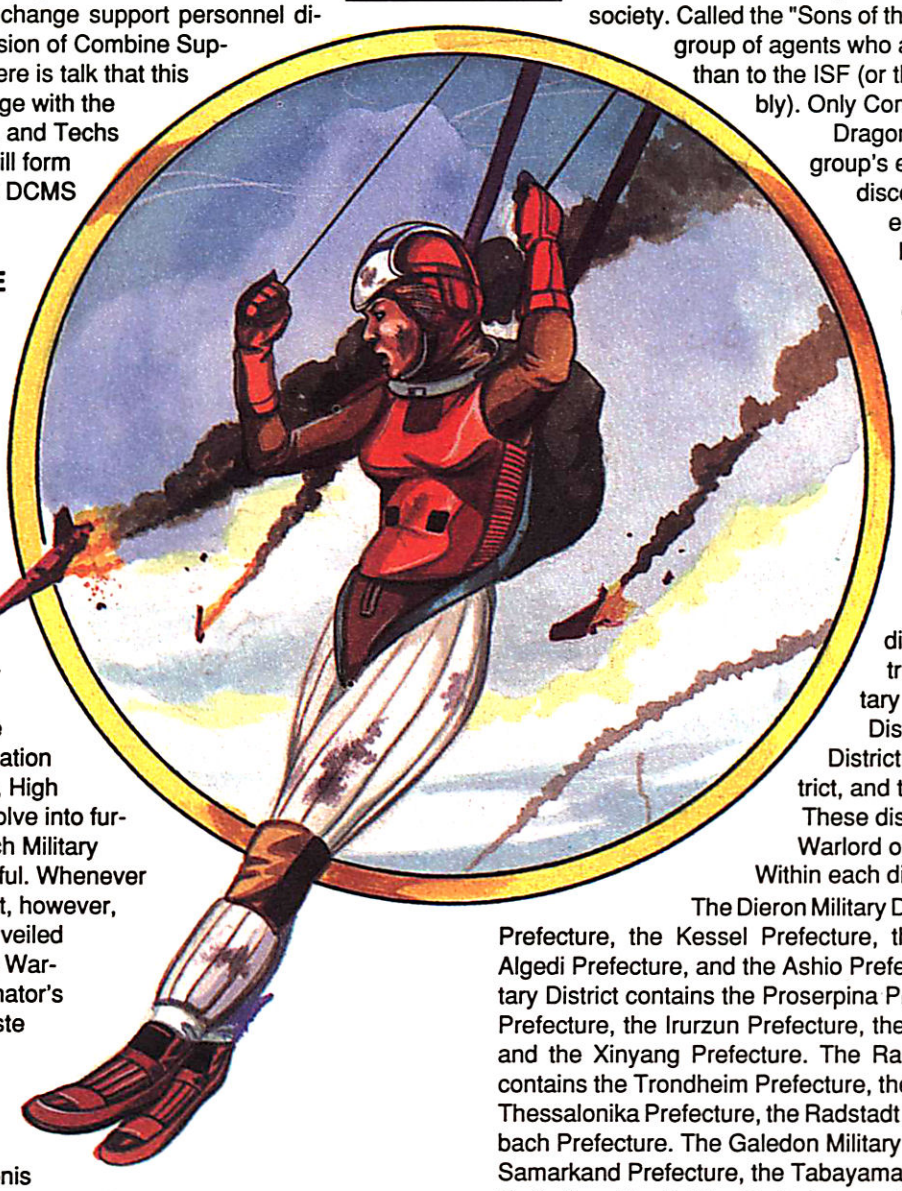
On the battlefield, Kurita soldiers respect MASH units highly. Combat doctors are assigned living accommodations on a par with senior officers. Even Warlords treat Physicians of the Dragon well, as these doctors have absolute power in the operating room. (Rumor has it that more than one senior officer with a poor regard for the Brotherhood has lost a leg due to an ingrown toenail.)

COMBINE SUPPORT AND ENGINEERING

This department encompasses all the combat engineers and technical personnel in the Arm of the Dragon. It is increasingly becoming solely an administrative bureau. It "lends" its manpower to the other branches of the military, which absorb the engineers into their structure. Frequently, regiments exchange support personnel directly, without the permission of Combine Support and Engineering. There is talk that this department will soon merge with the Bureau of Administration, and Techs and Combat Engineers will form their own branches in the DCMS and the DCA.

DRACONIS COMBINE HIGH COMMAND

This group of staff officers is headquartered in the Royal Palace and works with the Coordinator to determine military strategy. Warlords from the five Military Districts and other high-ranking generals constitute the High Command. They study battle reports, planetary terrain, and enemy strengths gathered by the Combine Military Coordination Office and the ISF. Often, High Command meetings dissolve into furious arguments over which Military District is the most powerful. Whenever the Coordinator is present, however, such displays are kept to veiled threats and insults, and a Warlord may gain the Coordinator's favor through a witty riposte directed toward another.



INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE

Citizens of the Draconis Combine rarely mention the Internal Security Force (ISF), but they all think about it constantly. Responsible for many abductions, killings, and interrogations, the secret police fosters fear, paranoia, and devotion to the state. Those who follow the way of the samurai have little to fear from the ISF, however, unless their honor conflicts with the honor of the Draconis Combine.

The director of the ISF is Subhash Indrahar, "the Smiling One." Indrahar is feared perhaps even more than the Coordinator himself. ComStar projects that if the ISF continues to build its power base, it may become the power behind the throne. Indrahar has befriended Theodore Kurita, Heir-Designate to the Draconis Combine, and he may try to exert his will upon the young prince. Any attempt by Indrahar to become Coordinator will doubtless be covert, as ISF agents may ally with the Coordinator in any open revolt.

There are few visible members of the ISF. Most agents belong to other groups or governmental departments, and few know about these operatives' affiliation with the secret police. The ISF has infiltrated every organization in Kurita space and many others in the other Successor States. Its reach is even longer, as citizens may collect a reward for reporting treasonous activity or talk by others.

Inside the secret police is an even more secret society. Called the "Sons of the Dragon," the society is a group of agents who are more loyal to Indrahar than to the ISF (or the Coordinator, presumably). Only ComStar and the Sons of the Dragon themselves know of this group's existence; any others who discover the group have been exterminated. Although we know little about the Sons of the Dragon, ComStar does know that Theodore Kurita has been inducted into the society.

DEPLOYMENT OF COMBINE MILITARY FORCES

Combine space is divided into five military districts: The Rasalhague Military District, the Pesht Military District, the Benjamin Military District, the Galedon Military District, and the Dieron Military District. These districts are ruled by either a Warlord or a General of the Armies. Within each district are five prefectures.

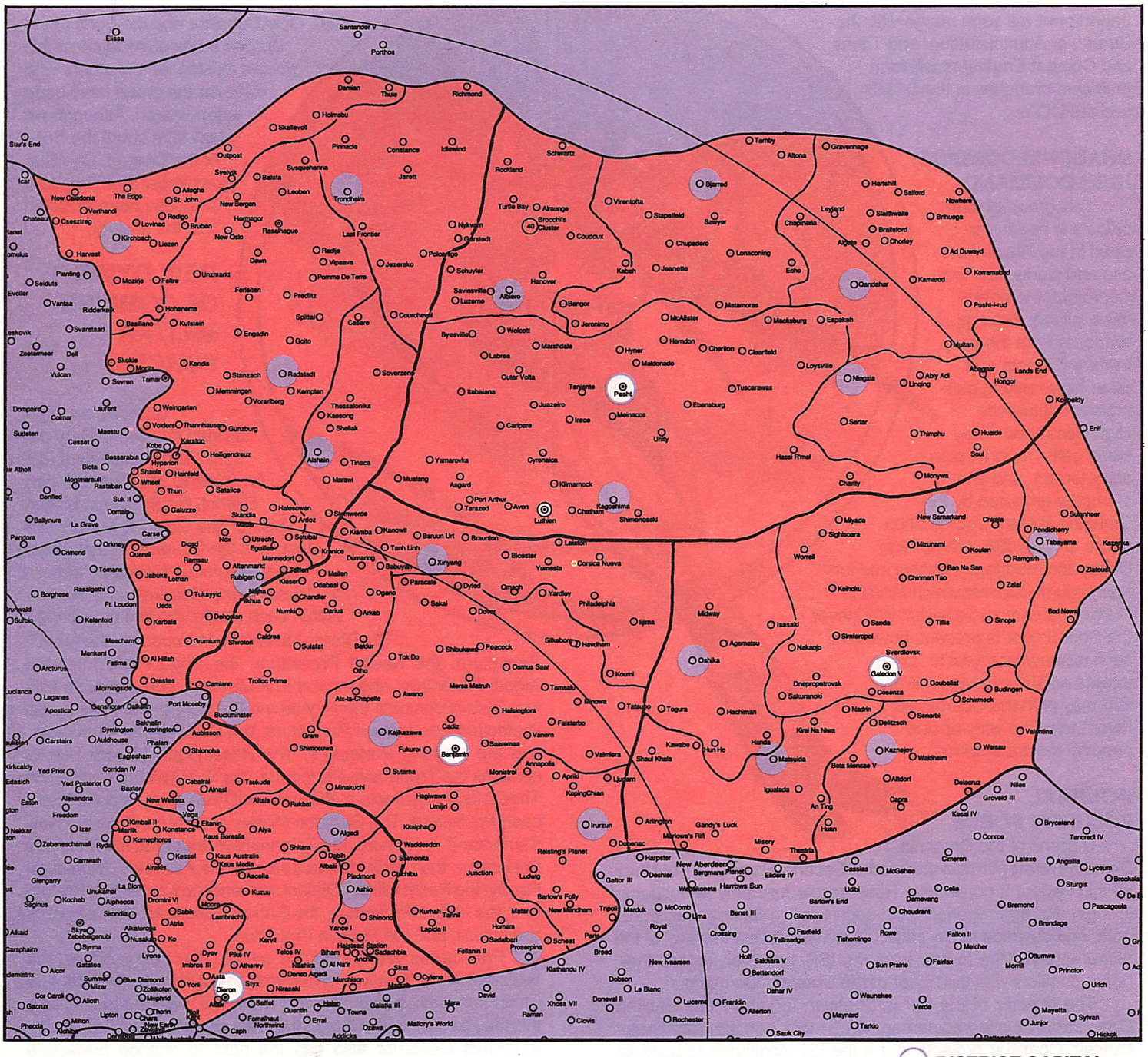
The Dieron Military District contains the Al Na'ir Prefecture, the Kessel Prefecture, the Vega Prefecture, the Algedi Prefecture, and the Ashio Prefecture. The Benjamin Military District contains the Proserpina Prefecture, the Kajikazawa Prefecture, the Irurzun Prefecture, the Buckminster Prefecture, and the Xinyang Prefecture. The Rasalhague Military District contains the Trondheim Prefecture, the Rubigen Prefecture, the Thessalonika Prefecture, the Radstadt Prefecture, and the Kirchbach Prefecture. The Galedon Military District contains the New Samarkand Prefecture, the Tabayama Prefecture, the Matsuida Prefecture, the Oshika Prefecture, and the Kaznejov Prefecture. Finally, the Pesht Military District contains the Kagoshima Prefecture, the Albireo Prefecture, the Bjarred Prefecture, the Qandahar Prefecture, and the Ningxia Prefecture.

Prefectures are not all the same size. For example, the Radstadt Prefecture is much larger than the Kirchbach Prefecture within the same military district. There are several reasons why this may be so. First, military takeovers can enlarge a Prefecture. A District Governor also has the right to change prefecture boundaries. Note that the prefectures containing the administrative headquarters/capitals are much larger than the other prefectures in the district.

- It is more prestigious to be assigned to a prefecture bordering the enemy than it is to work in the inner areas. The border prefectures offer more opportunities for combat. The one exception to this is the Kagoshima Prefecture, which contains Luthien, the capital of the Draconis Combine. To be assigned there is a prestigious honor and a sign of impending promotion.

(EDITORS NOTE: Because of the restriction Kurita society places on women, few rise to high stations in either the military or civilian life. A few females have attained the rank of General, but would certainly never become a Warlord.)

DISTRICT AND PREFECTURE BOUNDARIES OF KURITA SPACE


Santander V
Porthos
Elissa
Damian
Thule
Richmond
Holmsbu
Skallevoll
Pinnacle
Constance
Idlewind
Schwartz
Rockland
Jarett
Susquehanna
Outpost
Svelvik
Balsta
Leoben
Trondheim
Turtle Bay
Almunge
Brocchi's Cluster
40
Virentofta
Bjarred
Tamby
Altona
Gravenhage
Hartshill
Salford
Nowhere
Stapelfeld
Saltyar
Leyland
Stalthwaite
Brithuega
Chapineria
Braitsford
Chorley
Aldebe
Ad Duwayd
Chupadero
Lonaconing
Echo
Jeanette
Kabah
Nykvarn
Gurstedt
Coudoux
Last Frontier
Rasalhague
New Oslo
Bruben
Lovinac
Rodigo
Verthandi
New Caledonia
The Edge
Allegha
St. John
New Bergen
Hermagor
Kirchbach
Liezen
Harvest
Planting
Seiduts
Mozirje
Feltre
Unzmarkt
Dawn
Radlje
Vipavva
Pomma De Terre
Jezersko
Polcanigo
Schuyler
Savinsville
Albiero
Luzerne
Hanover
Bangor
Jeronimo
Wolcott
Byesville
Courchevel
Cellere
Spittal
Engadin
Goito
Farfalten
Preditz
Ridderkerk
Basiliano
Kufstein
Hohenems
Vantaa
Svarstaad
Zoetermeer
Dell
Vulcan
Skokie
Kandis
Stanzach
Radstadt
Memmingen
Kempten
Vorarlberg
Severn
Tamar
Weingarten
Voldens
Thannhausen
Gunzburg
Maestu
Cusset
Kobe
Kastion
Hyperion
Shaula
Hainfeld
Wheel
Thun
Satalice
Galuzzo
Skandia
Halesowen
Ardoz
Shimmerde
Kamba
Kanowit
Baruun Urt
Braunton
Tanh Linh
Leision
Xinyang
Bicester
Yumesta
Corsica Nueva
Dumaring
Babuyan
Mannedorf
Altanmarkt
Jeffen
Mellen
Rubigen
Kieser
Odabasi
Paracale
Dylad
Omagh
Yardley
Philadelphia
Ogano
Sakai
Dolwe
Chandler
Darius
Arkab
Numki
Meha
Pahua
Ueda
Tukayyid
Dehgolan
Karbala
Kelenfold
Grumium
Shirotori
Caldrea
Sulafat
Baldur
Tok Do
Shibukawa
Peacock
Osmus Saar
Otho
Troiloc Prime
Camlann
Orestes
Al Hillah
Fatima
Menkent
Meacham
Arcturus
Morningside
Port Mossby
Buckminster
Aix-la-Chapelle
Awano
Mersa Matruh
Tamsaki
Helsingfors
Falstarbo
Vanern
Saaremaa
Valmiera
Ijima
Koumi
Oshika
Midway
Agematsu
Isesaki
Nakaojo
Simferopol
Sverdlovsk
Galedon V
Dnepropetrovsk
Sakuranoki
Cosenza
Goubellat
Budingen
Schirmeck
Senortsi
Nadrin
Delitzsch
Kirei Na Nwa
Kaznejov
Waldheim
Weisau
Valentina
Beta Mensae V
Altdorf
Delacruz
Groveld III
Niles
Kessil IV
Bryceland
Tancredi IV
Conroe
Cimeron
Latexo
Anguilla
Lyceum
Brookeland
Sturgis
Pascagoula
Bremond
Brundage
Fallon II
Melcher
Ottumwa
Princton
Ulrich
Mayetta
Sylvan
Junior
Hickok
Sauk City
Tarkio
Maynard
Waunakee
Verde
Allerton
Franklin
Rochester
Lucerne
Le Blanc
Dobson
Donegal II
Xhosa VII
Clovis
Raman
David
Mara
Galatia III
Towne
Quentin
Erral
Ozawa
Addicks
Mallory's World
Caph
Northwind
Fomalhaut
Seffel
Helen
Alnitak
Dieron
Styx
Nirasaki
Denab Algedi
Murcheson
Sadachbia
Skat
Cyllene
Marsic
Al Na'ir
Bham
Hellespont Station
Yance I
Tarnil
Lapida II
Mistar
Horham
Sadalbari
Proserpina
Scheat
Perry
Bread
Klathandu IV
Feltanin II
New Ivarsen
Royal
Crossing
Tallmadge
Tishomingo
Rowe
Fairfield
Hoff
Sakhara V
Bettendorf
Dahar IV
Sun Prairie
Fairfax
Morrill
Banet III
Glenmora
Choudrant
Damevang
Barlow's End
Udki
McGehee
Cassias
Eldora IV
Harrows Sun
Waskoneta
Bergmans Planet
New Aberdeen
Harpster
Deshler
Gator III
Ludwig
Junction
Reisling's Planet
Donenac
Arlington
Gandy's Luck
Marlowe's Rift
Misery
Thesria
Huan
An Ting
Caora
Igusada
Matsuida
Handa
Hun Ho
Kawabe
Shaul Khala
Valmiera
Monistrol
Annapolis
Apriki
KopingChian
Ljusarn
Hachiman
Togura
Tatsuno
Ikinowa
Hayden
Silkaborg
Kaijkazawa
Cadiz
Benjamin
Fukuroi
Gram
Shimozuwa
Shionoha
Subaisson
Accrington
Symington
Sakhalin
Audchouse
Carstairs
Eaglesham
Phalan
Port Mossby
Apostica
Laganes
Morningside
Gerard Corom
Oaklash
Corridan IV
Yed Prior
Yed Posterior
Baxter
Cebalrai
Alnasl
Tsukuda
Minakuchi
Sutama
Hagiwara
Umijiri
Kitalpha
Waddesdon
Simonita
Chichibu
Piedmont
Ashio
Dabih
Albali
Algedi
Shitara
Kaus Media
Kaus Australis
Kaus Borealis
Alya
Eltanin
Vega
New Wessex
Altais
Rukbat
Kimball II
Marlik
Konstance
Kornephoros
Kessel
Alraiis
Camwath
Glengarry
Kochab
Alphecca
Skiron
Skiron
Skiron

'MECH UNIT DEPLOYMENT TABLE
(as of 3025)

DIERON MILITARY DISTRICT
CO: General Vasily Cherenkov, Warlord of Dieron

Kessel Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
3rd Dieron Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Kessel
(CO: Brigadier General Sen Ti Ch'uan)			
12th Sun Zhang Academy Cadre	Green	Fanatical	Kessel
(CO: Colonel Petrovich DiLenardo)			
11th Legion of Vega	Regular	Reliable	Marlik
(CO: Colonel Theodore Kurita)			
Kingston Caballeros	Regular	Questionable	Sabik
(CO: Lieutenant Colonel Tobias Villagua)			
22nd Dieron Regulars	Veteran	Questionable	Ko
(CO: Brigadier General Tatyana Sobiroff)			

5 regiments
CO: General Radj Grokti
Aide: Brigadier General Allison Martenez

Vega Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
2nd Legion of Vega	Regular	Questionable	Vega
(CO: General Michael Heise)			
14th Legion of Vega	Regular	Questionable	Vega
(CO: Brigadier General Christine Nordica)			
2nd Dieron Regulars	Veteran	Questionable	Shionoha
(CO: General Friedrich Von Galberston)			

3 regiments
CO: General Sandra Thonnel
Aide: Brigadier General Vladimir Destrovich

Al Na'ir Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
5th Sword of Light	Elite	Fanatical	Dieron
(CO: General Palmer Conti)			
9th Sun Zhang Academy Cadre	Green	Reliable	Dieron
(CO: Colonel Gitaki Hurunko)			
18th Dieron Regulars	Elite	Reliable	Altair
(CO: General Dexter Kingsley)			
15th Dieron Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Al Na'ir
(CO: General Joseph Izuzu)			
8th Dieron Regulars	Veteran	Reliable	Al Na'ir
(CO: General Harriet deLetereau)			
36th Dieron Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Nirasaki
(CO: General Hadji Rajpuman)			

6 regiments
CO: General Dexter Kingsley
Aide: Brigadier General No Ti Kan

Ashio Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
27th Dieron Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Ashio
(CO: General Fassen Koutri)			
12th Dieron Regulars	Green	Reliable	Ashio
(CO: Brigadier General Yawatono Kurita)			
Brion's Legion	Regular	Questionable	Murchison
(CO: Colonel Pythonius Brion)			
(2 battalions)			
9th Dieron Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Cylene
(CO: General Lisa Montgomery)			

3 regiments, 2 battalions
CO: General Jasid Porterfield
Aide: Colonel Lawrence Jacobi

Algedi Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
24th Dieron Regulars	Green	Reliable	Ashio
(CO: General Simlin Toshirov)			
1 Regiment			
CO: General Simlin Toshirov			
Aide: Brigadier General Wilhelm Derf			

GALEDON MILITARY DISTRICT
CO: General Grieg Samsonov, Warlord of Galedon

New Samarkand Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
5th Galedon Regulars	Veteran	Reliable	New Samarkand
(CO: General Grieg Samsonov)			
3rd Proserpina Hussars	Elite	Fanatical	Galedon
(CO: General Bruce Lee Bernstein)			
McGee's Cutthroats	Veteran	Questionable	Galedon
(CO: Colonel Andrew McGee)			

3 regiments
CO: General Grieg Samsonov
Aide: Brigadier General Li Dok To

Kaznejov Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
17th Galedon Regulars	Green	Reliable	Kaznejov
(CO: General Brigham Rutledge)			
Alpha Regiment, Wolf's Dragoons	Elite	Reliable	Capra
(CO: Colonel Jaime Wolf)			
Delta Regiment, Wolf's Dragoons	Elite	Reliable	Capra
(CO: Colonel Kathleen Dumont)			
8th Sword of Light	Regular	Fanatical	Delacruz
(CO: General Jagawen Torisobo)			
4th An Ting Legion	Regular	Reliable	Valentina
(CO: Brigadier General Jophet Pati)			

5 regiments
CO: General Brigham Rutledge
Aide: Colonel Wendall Hansen

Matsuida Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
12th Galedon Regulars	Green	Reliable	Matsuida
(CO: General Tarsus Bodoli)			
Beta Regiment, Wolf's Dragoons	Elite	Reliable	Misery
(CO: Colonel Andrei Shostokovitch)			
Gamma Regiment, Wolf's Dragoons	Elite	Reliable	Misery
(CO: Colonel Wilhelmina Korsht)			
Epsilon Regiment, Wolf's Dragoons	Elite	Reliable	Thestria
(CO: Colonel Baxter Arbuthnot)			
2nd Galedon Regulars	Green	Reliable	Arlington
(CO: General Lavrenti Kornilov)			
8th Galedon Regulars	Veteran	Reliable	Marlowe's Rift
(CO: Brigadier General Victor Nicholas)			
21st Galedon Regulars	Regular	Questionable	Marlowe's Rift
(CO: Brigadier General Jarvek Dolmassay)			

7 regiments
CO: General Tarsus Bodoli
Aide: Colonel U Poi

'MECH UNIT DEPLOYMENT TABLE
(as of 3025) Continued

Oshika Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
16th Galedon Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Oshika
(CO: General Francisco Bevier)			

1 regiment
CO: General Francisco Bevier
Aide: Brigadier General Karren Toynby

Tabayama Pefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
19th Galedon Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Bad News
(CO: General Janet Parkinson)			

1 regiment
CO: General Janet Parkinson
Aide: Brigadier General Henri Trebor

PESHT MILITARY DISTRICT
CO: General Kester Hsiun Chi, Warlord of Pesht

Kagoshima Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
3rd Pesht Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Pesht
(CO: General Kester Hsiun Chi)			
1st Sword of Light	Veteran	Fanatical	Luthien
(CO: General Ano Rentoshi)			
7th Sword of Light	Veteran	Fanatical	Luthien
(CO: General Moshiu Yodetobo)			

3 regiments
CO: General Kester Hsiun Chi
Aide: Brigadier General Harred Kurita

Albiero Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
9th Pesht Regulars	Green	Reliable	Schwartz
(CO: General Fyodor Markt)			

1 regiment
CO: General Fyodor Markt
Aide: Brigadier General Alessandro Fanconia

Ningxia Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
7th Pesht Regulars	Green	Reliable	Land's End
(CO: General Lorelei Girardin)			

1 regiment
CO: General Lorelei Girardin
Aide: Brigadier General Thales Jedko

Qandahar Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
10th Pesht Regulars	Green	Reliable	Gravenhage
(CO: General Filbert Robinson)			
6th Pesht Regulars	Green	Reliable	Nowhere
(CO: Brigadier General Ajid ben Aryen)			

2 regiments
CO: General Filbert Robinson
Aide: Brigadier General Roshu Aotoki

Bjarred Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
4th Pesht Regulars	Green	Reliable	Tarnby
(CO: General Vladimir Kreckt)			
Johiro's Regiment, Night Stalkers	Veteran	Questionable	Matamoras
(CO: Colonel Tadaki Johiro)			

2 regiments
CO: General Vladimir Kreckt
Aide: Colonel Arthur Millington

RASALHAGUE MILITARY DISTRICT
CO: General Ivan Sorenson, Warlord of Rasalhague

Radstadt Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
8th Rasalhague Regulars	Green	Fanatical	Rasalhague
(CO: General Ivan Sorenson)			
St. Cyr Heavy Assault Group	Veteran	Questionable	Kandis
(CO: Colonel Galahad deChevereau)			
Lone Star Regiment	Veteran	Questionable	Volders
(CO: Colonel Samuel Granger)			
1st Sun Zhang Academy Cadre	Green	Reliable	Weingarten
(CO: Brigadier General Isoroku Kurita)			
5th Sun Zhang Academy Cadre	Green	Reliable	Moritz
(CO: Colonel Ishtar von Nielsburg)			
22nd Rasalhague Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Heiligendreuz
(CO: General Tassen Sorenson)			

6 regiments
CO: General Ivan Sorenson
Aide: Brigadier General Sven Johannsen

Kirchbach Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
17th Rasalhague Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Kirchbach
(CO: General Kelly Benzinger)			
Altenmarkt Militia	Veteran	Reliable	Outpost
(CO: General Aldus Bergen)			
25th Rasalhague Regulars	Green	Questionable	Damian
(CO: General Uchi Tikidomo)			
2nd An Ting Legion	Regular	Reliable	New Caledonia
(CO: Brigadier General Victoria Kuhlmeier)			
5th Amphigean Light Assault Group	Regular	Reliable	Harvest
(CO: General Kent Gerber)			
Helmut's Hermits	Regular	Questionable	Harvest
(CO: Colonel Helmut Aufkopfen)			
McGavin's Regiment, Night Stalkers	Veteran	Questionable	Basiliano
(CO: Colonel Lloyd McGavin)			

7 regiments
CO: General Voren Ricol, Duke of Kirchbach
Aide: Brigadier Devon Boldermar

'MECH UNIT DEPLOYMENT TABLE
(as of 3025) Continued

Rubigen Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
9th Rasalhague Regulars	Veteran	Reliable	Hyperion
(CO: General Jonathan Pershing)			
1st Proserpina Hussars	Veteran	Reliable	Orestes
(CO: Brigadier General Elizabeth Langley)			
4th Proserpina Hussars	Veteran	Reliable	Orestes
(CO: Brigadier General Pho Ngeb)			
Tooth of Ymir	Regular	Questionable	Wheel
(CO: Colonel Davis Heller)			
5th Rasalhague Regulars	Green	Reliable	Jabuka
(CO: General Hichi Kanuchiwan)			
Vandelay's Valkyries	Regular	Questionable	Karbala
(CO: General Hope Vandelay)			

6 regiments
CO: General Jonathan Pershing
Aide: Brigadier General Meredith Westenburg

Thessalonika Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Rating	Loyalty	Homeworld
13th Rasalhague Regulars	Green	Reliable	Thessalonika
(CO: Brigadier General Jan Fjolek)			

1 regiment
CO: Brigadier General Jan Fjolek
Aide: Colonel Erich Barstow

Trondheim Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
20th Rasalhague Regulars	Green	Reliable	Trondheim
(CO: Brigadier General Dierdre Messernacht)			

1 regiment
CO: Brigadier General Dierdre Messernacht
Aide: Colonel Kenneth diStrovia

BENJAMIN MILITARY DISTRICT
CO: General Hirushi Shotugama, Warlord of Benjamin

Buckminster Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
2nd Sword of Light	Elite	Fanatical	Buckminster
(CO: General Goshi Tengwan)			
4th Arkab Legion	Regular	Reliable	Camlann
(CO: Brigadier General Li Cheng)			
6th Arkab Legion	Regular	Reliable	Arkab
(CO: Brigadier General Stanislaus Rozurski)			

3 regiments
CO: General Kyesan Kurita
Aide: Brigadier General Fenton Worridge

Kajikazawa Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
2nd Benjamin Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Kajikazawa
(CO: General Samson Tartikoff)			
17th Benjamin Regulars	Veteran	Reliable	Benjamin
(CO: General Hirushi Shotugama)			

2 regiments
CO: General Hirushi Shotugama
Aide: Brigadier General Bosley Krinninger

Proserpina Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
9th Benjamin Regulars	Veteran	Reliable	Proserpina
(CO: General Denice Eastmoreland)			
2nd Arkab Legion	Veteran	Reliable	Tannil
(CO: Brigadier General Li Cho Sok)			

2 regiments
CO: General Sotei Ganacheho
Aide: Colonel Fritz Hillinger

Xinyang Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
15th Benjamin Regulars	Green	Reliable	Xinyang
(CO: General Boris Petroff)			

1 regiment
CO: General Boris Petroff
Aide: Brigadier General Todo Sechiwan

Irurzun Prefecture

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
3rd Benjamin Regulars	Regular	Questionable	Irurzun
(CO: Brigadier General Jakodo Naguchido)			
6th Benjamin Regulars	Green	Reliable	Irurzun
(CO: Brigadier General Saad Shazli)			
11th Benjamin Regulars	Regular	Reliable	Tripoli
(CO: General Innocent IV)			
1st Amphigean Light Assault Group	Veteran	Reliable	Reisling's Planet
(CO: General Olivet Satterthwaite)			
2nd Amphigean Light Assault Group	Veteran	Reliable	Reisling's Planet
(CO: Brigadier General Karl Gramenov)			

5 regiments
CO: General Ilya Djemkin
Aide: General Trentus Kole

WEAPONS INDUSTRIES

Like every other Successor State, the Draconis Combine has lost many weapons manufacturers to the wars. Gone are the Diplan Mechyards, home of the JR7-D *Jenner,* the sprawling manufacturing metropolis of DeHuego and Freshet DropShip Design, and the miles-long automated assembly lines of Amalgamated Sword and Steel. The surviving plants are deep within the interior of the Draconis Combine.

Name: LexaTech Industries
Plant Location: Irece
CEO: Joseph Hu Chan
Weaponry Manufactured: *Stinger* LAM
Notes: Though not the only manufacturer of the *Stinger* LAM, LexaTech introduced this design during the days of the Star League. The company is doing very well, which may be due to the fact that these 'Mechs are frequently disabled on the field. LexaTech churns out *Stinger*s to replace those lost in combat. As one of the few BattleMechs that is still being produced in Kurita space, the *Stinger* LAM sees a lot of action.

Name: Buda Imperial Vehicles
Plant Location: Buda
CEO: Marquis Anthony Frederick Germane
Weaponry Manufactured: 135-K Lifesaver Coolant Truck, TKG-150 *Tokugawa* Medium Tank, 67-K Daimyo Headquarters Unit
Notes: Although a small company, Buda Imperial has a long and illustrious history in the manufacture of military vehicles. This company was the first to install flamers on its coolant trucks, and several other corporations in the Inner Sphere have emulated the practice. The *Tokugawa* medium tank is a new design that has yet to be tested in combat, although its designers swear that it is the best medium tank in the Inner Sphere.

Name: Gorton, Kingsley, and Thorpe Enterprises
Plant Locations: Jarett, New Oslo
CEO: Guy Kinsley VII
Weaponry Manufactured On Jarett: PNT-9R *Panther*
Weaponry Manufactured On New Oslo: Rifles and Submachineguns, Jump Jets
Notes: GK&T Enterprises acquired Alshain Weapons, manufacturers of the *Panther*, about a half-century ago in a bitter corporate struggle that almost bankrupted both firms. Since then, production of the *Panther* 'Mech has increased yearly. In fact, GK&T plans to create three more *Panther* factories in the next five years. The destruction of the facilities that produced the Cat's Eye 5 Targeting and Tracking System and the Sipher CommCon CSU-4 Communications System may limit production, however.

Name: Luthien Armor Works
Plant Location: Luthien
CEO: Samuel Botterfield
Weaponry Manufactured: DR6-1N *Dragon*, CGR-1A1 *Charger,* and the QKD-4G *Quickdraw*
Notes: A manufacturer of the *Charger* and *Quickdraw* 'Mechs, Luthien Armor Works is also the sole producer of the *Dragon* BattleMech. Recently, its best engineers have designed a *Dragon* variant, the *Grand Dragon.* Although it has yet to see action, the *Grand Dragon* promises to be a fearsome opponent.

Name: Mangon Aeronautics
Plant Location: Torbildown, Schyler
CEO: Andromeda Fuyerton
Weaponry Manufactured: SL-21 *Sholagar*
Notes: As manufacturer of the SL-21 *Sholagar* light fighter, this corporation is in dire economic straits. The release of the Yotashuma Report, which claimed that the craft can become uncontrollable in some atmospheric conditions, damaged the company's reputation. Its stock prices have been falling ever since. The Bureau of the Military is currently accepting bids to produce another light AeroSpace Fighter for the Combine Admiralty. Many corporations are scrambling to land this contract, virtually a guaranteed monopoly. In the meantime, Mangon is not likely to raise sufficient funds to correct the *Sholagar*'s problem.

Name: Wakazashi Enterprises
Plant Locations: Dover, Chatham
CEO: Marquess Cynthia Evans
Weaponry Manufactured At Dover: Conventional Reconnaissance aircraft, SL-15 *Slayer* Heavy Fighter
Weaponry Manufactured At Chatham: SL-17 *Shilone* Medium Fighter
Notes: Wakazashi Enterprises was one of the premier aircraft manufacturers in the Star League. After the start of the First Succession War, Wakazashi planned to move its plants to the Periphery so that they could avoid being damaged in the ensuing carnage. Minoru Kurita wooed back the corporation's loyalty by offering them a contract to build a medium AeroSpace Fighter. The result was the *Shilone*, an excellent medium class fighter with more than average firepower and armor.

MAJOR MILITARY ACADEMIES

Kurita space has thousands of military schools (ranging from small MechWarrior institutes to enormous infantry training camps) that all teach a specific discipline. A particularly apt pupil may attend more than one academy at different times, and all senior officers have attended at least two institutions of advanced learning. An individual wishing to join Kurita's Special Forces must attend three academies and graduate in the top 5 percent of each one. Students have no choice as to which academy they will attend; the decision belongs to the students' primary school proctor. Well-heeled families have been known to influence the proctor's decision, however.

SUN ZHANG MECHWARRIOR ACADEMY

The largest 'Mech academy in the Inner Sphere, Sun Zhang graduates at least 400 MechWarriors each year. Named after an ancient Japanese military strategist and general, Sun Zhang is located on New Samarkand and teaches only BattleMech and AeroSpace Fighter studies. Graduating soldiers immediately enter military service in the Sun Zhang Academy Cadre, commanded by General Isoroku Kurita, himself a graduate of the Academy. Completing an education at Sun Zhang guarantees a student a 'Mech or a Fighter. Most senior officers attend this school, which is noted for its harsh discipline and rigorous training in *bushido.*

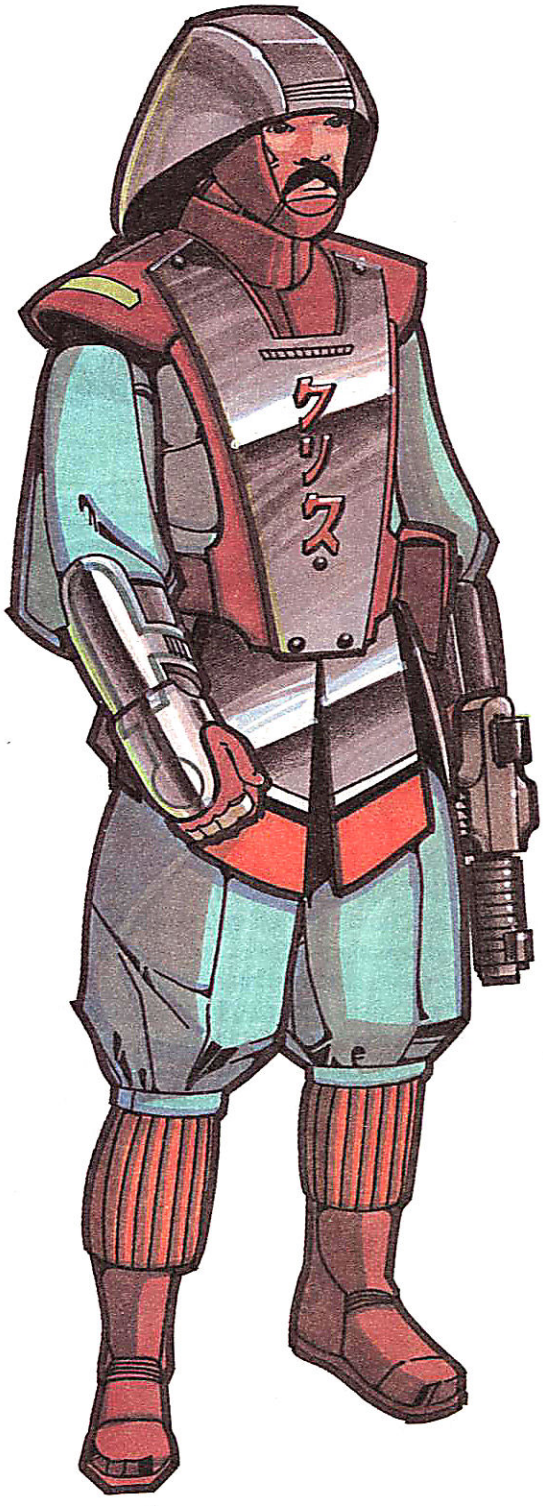
Sun Zhang is one of the few schools in the Draconis Combine that honors its graduates with both a *Wakizashi* and a *Katana* sword. These may be worn with the soldier's dress uniform. If for any reason the soldier dishonors himself in any way, however, he must commit *seppuku* or face the loss of his 'Mech or fighter, land holdings, titles, rank, and both his own and his family's honor.

UNIVERSITY OF PROSERPINA

UNIVERSITY OF PROSERPINA

The University of Proserpina teaches combat skills to aspiring infantrymen, MechWarriors, AeroSpace Pilots, and artillery personnel. Many students specializing in conventional arms attend this university. As the school has only three dilapidated *Jenners*, a headless *Trebuchet*, two *Shadow Hawks*, and a *Locust*, only a few students train to be MechWarriors. AeroSpace Pilots can get an adequate education here.

Located on Proserpina, close to the Federated Suns, this school has suffered several attacks. During the last attack, the students participated in the defense of Proserpina, which is how the *Shadow Hawks* joined the school's collection of BattleMechs.



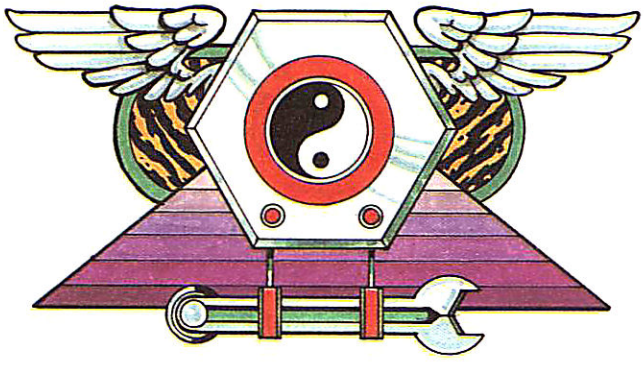
CEREMONIAL GUARD

Ceremonial guards are outfitted for protection, not assault. Their helmets and torso pieces are a strong armor. The gauntlet emits a weak electrical field that is helpful in close crowd control, and particularly uncomfortable for anyone the guard backhands. The gun is a blunderbuss version of the sonic stunner for crowd control. Ceremonial guards are usually on duty in the presence of many important persons, and so rarely wield powerful firearms, to protect their charges from errant shots.

HACHIMAN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

Coordinator Hugai Kurita himself came up with the idea of creating a school dedicated solely to Battlefield Technology skills. Students get hands-on training in the repair of BattleMechs, AeroSpace Fighters, DropShips, and conventional machines. In addition, this school has a special class devoted to scrounging parts from a city and using almost any kind of scrap to fix a 'Mech.

The headmaster of HTI is retired Chief Master Petty Officer Grant Harper, the scourge of Marlik. During the battle for Marlik, Harper marshalled his Techs into an infantry unit to fight off a light 'Mech scouting lance that surprised an undefended Kurita headquarters unit. Although the mobile headquarters vehicle was destroyed, Harper and his men prevented the Steiner 'Mechs from capturing the regiment's supply of spare parts, supplies, and ammunition.



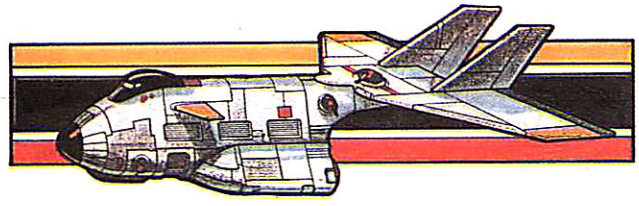
MINORU KURITA UNIVERSITY

As soon as Coordinator Minoru Kurita perceived that war would break out among the Successor States, he created this school to mass-produce trained infantrymen. Although ostensibly a university, it is actually a training facility designed to churn out the greatest number of soldiers in the least amount of time. Training lasts only six months, after which the graduates form their own unit. A startling number of these green troops never see more than one battle, and the survivors are usually transferred to other units. Most soldiers consider MKU graduates' first battle as a final exam; with such a high rate of attrition, this university is known for having few alumni.

INTERNAL SECURITY COLLEGE

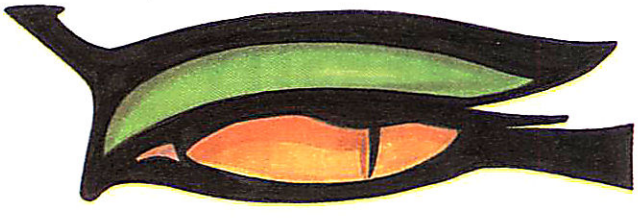
Those with the necessary inherent nastiness are recommended for the Internal Security College, the training ground for ISF agents. Curricula include such relevant classes as Phys Ed 204 (Using Martial Arts to Inspire Terror, Death, and Loyalty) and Psych 103 (An Introduction to Brainwashing, Interrogation, and Paranoia). The list of students is classified, as knowing the identity of future agents is a crime against the state.

Located on New Samarkand, the Internal Security College is isolated and well-protected. Surrounding the grounds are 60 kilometers of diacetylsilicate, a sand that eats away metal, rubber, and flesh. Any aircraft within 200 kilometers is shot down without warning. The ISC works hard to ensure that they have no visitors or deserters.



AEROSPACE AND INTERSTELLAR INSTITUTE

The AeroSpace and Interstellar Institute teaches its students to serve on either an AeroSpace Fighter, a DropShip, or a JumpShip. Most students prefer not to enter the DropShip or JumpShip curriculum, as there are few openings for such personnel. JumpShip openings are extremely rare, and replacement personnel are needed only when a serviceman retires or dies in combat (a rare occurrence). Usually, when DropShip crews die, their craft is usually destroyed. As DropShip production is slow, new openings are rarely available. As a result, most DropShip and JumpShip curriculum graduates must either join the ranks of the Unproductives or find unskilled work elsewhere.



WISDOM OF THE DRAGON

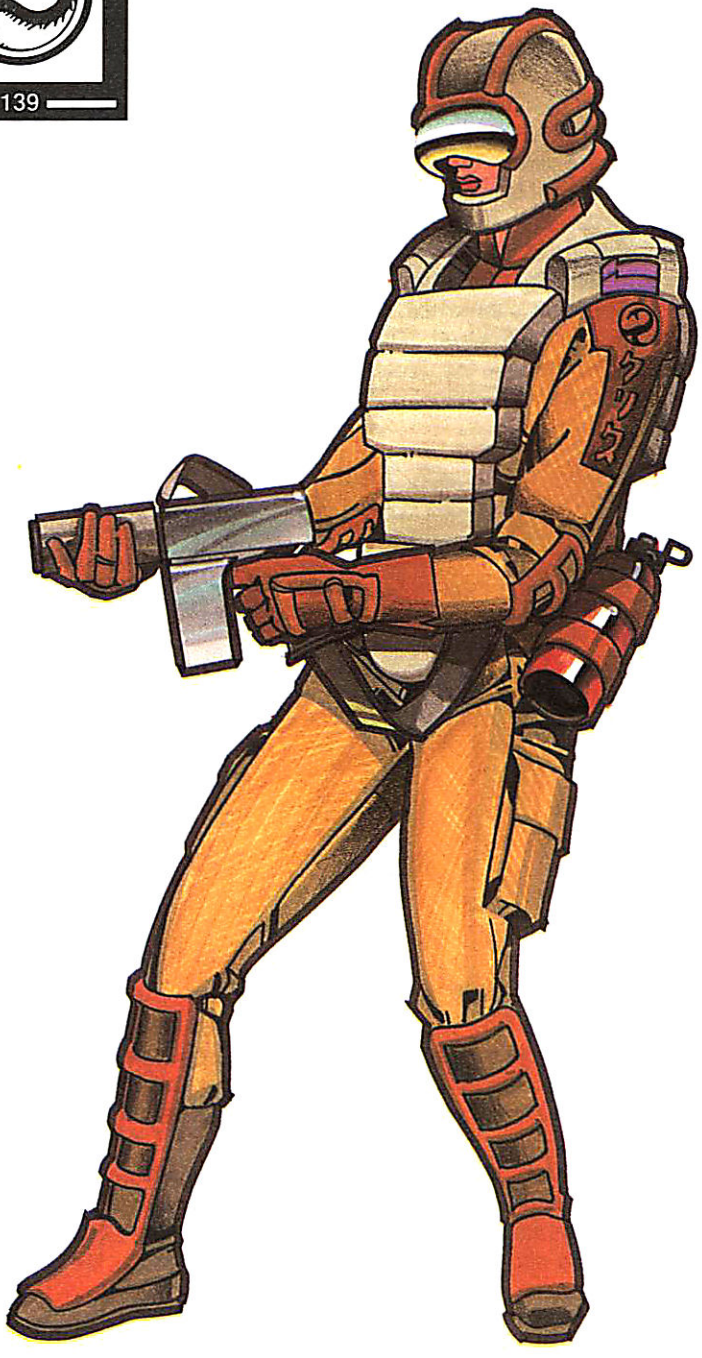
This university is an officer's school. Like every other Kurita institution, it is supposed to be "open to all", but only officer-candidates may actually attend. This school specializes in strategy and command, and hones the future officer's loyalty and honor. This is usually the second school an officer-candidate attends; no student ever goes here right after leaving primary school. Its grueling course of study emphasizes traditional combat, and penalizes students for improper (or innovative) tactics in order to preserve the status quo. Graduates are given both a *Wakizashi* and a *Katana* blade, even if the officer has already received them elsewhere.

DIERON DISTRICT GYMNASIUM

Most MechWarriors train at schools like the Dieron District Gymnasium. This school has a dozen training 'Mechs and graduates approximately 15 MechWarriors each year. Although not a disreputable school, the DDG is far less prestigious than Sun Zhang or the Sun Tzu School of Combat. This school emphasizes battle readiness over loyalty to House Kurita, however, and so graduates are more prepared for combat than many who graduate from the high-brow schools.

SUN TZU SCHOOL OF COMBAT

This small school offers studies in all branches of combat. The intent is to teach each branch to work with the others, making the strength of one type of unit compensate for the weakness of another. Students are in class as often as they are on the field. All study battles from ancient Earth days up to the present. As in the Sun Zhang Academy, graduates receive both a *Wakizashi* and a *Katana* blade. This is the only school where conventional soldiers can receive these samurai swords.



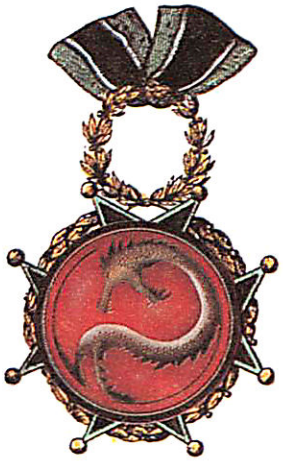
TANK CREW UNIFORM

This tank crew uniform is not as extensively padded as similar uniforms of other Houses. It does afford some protection from the intense bouncing that a crew suffers while riding in a tank, while allowing more maneuverability for the crewman who survives the ride. The fire extinguisher suggests the unreliability of Kurita equipment. Even if the crew is endangered, the Kurita rule is to "save the equipment." This crewmember carries a sawed-off repeating shotgun.

MEDALS AND DECORATIONS

Following the example of his predecessors, Takashi Kurita awards few new noble titles. However, he makes up for this by awarding orders of knighthood to career military officers. Soldiers may wear medals, ribbons, and pins on their dress uniforms only.

Soldiers are decorated in lavish and formal ceremonies. If the Coordinator himself is to bestow the honor, the recipient (who is the only member of the assembly allowed to wear his weapons) lays his weapons before him and prostrates himself before the throne, repeating the words "my life for yours" until he becomes hoarse. (The record is three hours, 37 minutes, and 19 seconds). After the recipient is finished, he rises to his knees. The court chamberlain now brings the decoration to the Coordinator on a steel shield, and the Coordinator makes the presentation.



ORDER OF THE DRAGON

The Order of the Dragon is the highest honor an officer can achieve. The Coordinator himself bestows the medal, which is for those who have aided the Draconis Combine in making significant territorial gains. Recipients of this medal become knights in the Order of the Dragon.

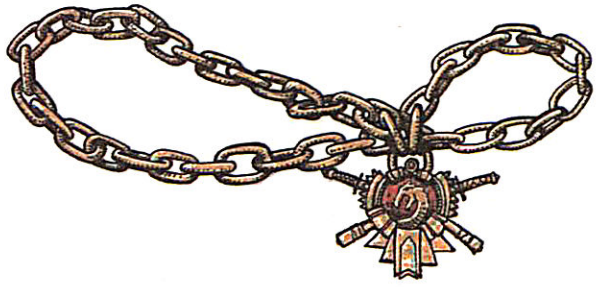
The medal hangs about 15 centimeters from the recipient's neck on a blue-and-black ribbon. In the center of the medal is the black-on-red Kurita dragon, and surrounding the crest are eight blue points tipped with gold. In addition, a gold wreath circles the crest.

BUSHIDO BLADE

The Bushido Blade is given to those officers who demonstrate great courage or leadership on the field of battle. This pin is a five-centimeter red circle with a black *katana* sword. An officer wears this pin on the left breast pocket of his dress uniform.

KATANA CLUSTER

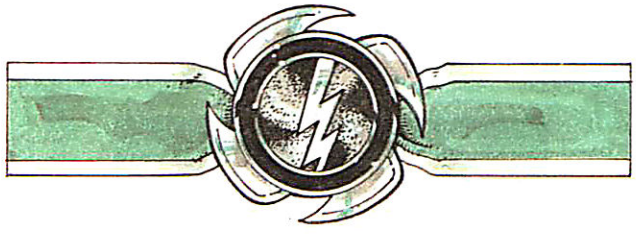
Hanging from a green-and-black ribbon, this medal has a silver dragon with five bands in the middle. Each year, the Katana Cluster is bestowed on the MechWarrior who has tallied up the most 'Mech kills.



HONOR OF WAKIZASHI

An officer receives the Honor of Wakizashi when he demonstrates his personal or familial honor at the expense of loyalty to House Kurita. Although betraying House Kurita is punishable by execution, if the betrayer has a high rank, he may instead receive the Honor of Wakizashi. Upon receiving this medal, the officer drives his *Wakizashi* sword into his abdomen, and his second decapitates him an instant later. Committing *seppuku* allows him to retain his honor. The last recipient of this honor was Brigadier General Djoran Belarguz, aide to the treasonous General Yoriyoshi, Warlord of Benjamin.

The medal itself hangs from a heavy gold chain; the entire medal is heavy to remind the recipient that the price of honor is heavy.



WHITE STARBURST OF RASALHAGUE

Attached to a blue-and-white striped ribbon, the white starburst resembles a galaxy, with its four arms spiraling from the center. A silver lightning bolt is depicted in the center. The Warlord of Rasalhague gives this medal to a soldier whose action saves the lives of civilians or fellow soldiers.

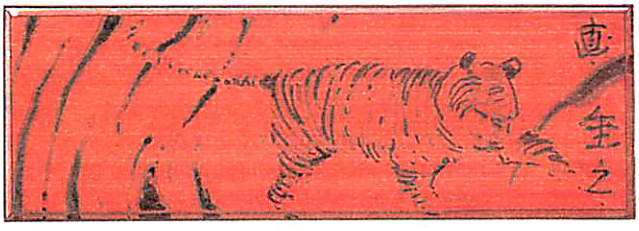
The Black Starburst of Rasalhague is identical to the White Starburst except that the starburst is black. Awarded posthumously to the soldier, this medal is draped over the soldier's coffin or buried beneath the soldier's memorial marker.

PROSERPINA BAR

A member of the Proserpina Hussars who demonstrates great skill or bravery against the enemy receives the Proserpina Bar. Many other Kurita units have their own similar kind of award. The Bar is bronze and obsidian with a dragon's claw.

KNIGHT OF NEW SAMARKAND RIBBON

Another order of knighthood awarded by the Coordinator, this red and black ribbon hangs on the left side of the officer's uniform and depicts a oriental tiger. An officer whose strategy and tactics win him a battle against imposing odds may become a Knight of New Samarkand.

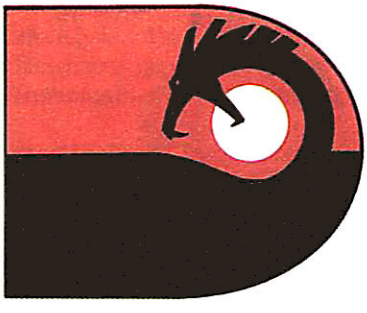


WATCHER OF THE DRAGON'S EYE

This certificate is awarded to a civilian who actively protects the Draconis Combine. It has been given for deeds ranging from discovering a spy in the administration to blowing up an ammunition dump behind enemy lines. The certificate says, "His Imperial Lordship, Duke Takashi Kurita, Unifier of Worlds, does hereby bestow upon [fill in the blank] the title of Watcher of the Dragon's Eye because of his/her undaunted bravery in the face of the enemy. May the Dragon watch over you."

GLORY OF THE FALLEN SAMURAI

Any great leader who falls in battle joins the ranks of the Fallen Samurai. His name is etched on the Great Wall of Luthien alongside the names of those before him. In addition, the deceased's direct superior awards a black-and-red dragon banner to the deceased's next of kin.



SELECTED REGIMENTS

SWORD OF LIGHT BATTLEMECH REGIMENTS

The five Sword of Light BattleMech regiments are the elite of the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery. Every element that makes up the unit, including choice of personnel, training, and equipment, is calculated to raise its abilities one step higher, one step better than more typical 'Mech regiments.

The symbol of the Sword of Light is an ancient one with roots in the Buddhist, Hindu, and even Christian religions of ancient times. The Sword of Light originally represented enlightenment, which cuts through ignorance. Under the flag of the Draconis Combine, the flaming sword has come to symbolize the ruthless assertion of Lord Kurita's will.

The main requirement for a MechWarrior's admission to a Sword of Light regiment is fanatical devotion to the Kurita family, demonstrated by at least five years' flawless service in another 'Mech regiment. The applicant must then undergo a rigorous examination of his mental, physical, spiritual, and political abilities. Techs and other support personnel must also pass a similar test.

Sword of Light regiments receive the best that the Procurement Department can offer, with the unit's MechWarriors and fighter pilots getting new or nearly new BattleMechs or AeroSpace Fighters. Sword of Light regiments get first priority in the field, too, from first use of replacement parts to first place in the chow line. The regiments even have their own *private* JumpShips and DropShips of near-new condition.

These regiments do not have a specific RR (Region of Responsibility) to cover, but travel throughout the realm, lending assistance where needed. To aid the regiments on unfamiliar worlds, the High Command provides the latest maps and reports about the unit's target.

Sword of Light regiments also have the far less glorious role of suppressing rebellions. In recent years, they have not had to perform this duty. In the past, however, the mere appearance of a Sword of Light 'Mech on a troubled world would send rebellious elements scurrying.

All five regiments have four complete battalions. The unusual fourth battalion gives the regiment commander tactical flexibility that only three could never provide. Some of the advantages are that a fourth battalion can provide protection for the regimental commander; bolster a defensive stand through a simple increase in numbers or by protecting the rear and flanks; or deliver a devastating punch to an enemy weakened by the first three battalions.

The Sword of Light regiments usually adopt a flat red paint scheme for their 'Mechs. All 'Mechs of the regiments carry the Kurita crest on the left shoulder and the regimental crest on their backs and the front of the right leg. Each regiment represents one of the five Pillars of Kurita society.

1st Sword of Light: The Ivory Dragon

This unit is composed of two medium battalions, one heavy battalion, and one assault battalion that specializes in night actions. The unit represents the Pillar of Ivory, or religion, and the regimental patch is an ivory Kurita dragon.

2nd Sword of Light: The Steel Dragon

This regiment is composed of one light battalion, two heavy battalions, and one assault battalion, and has twice the usual number of AeroSpace Fighters. The Steel Dragon prefers open set actions. This unit represents the Pillar of Steel, or the military, and their regimental patch is a gray Kurita dragon.

5th Sword of Light: The Gold Dragon

The 5th is composed of one light battalion, one medium battalion, and two heavy battalions, all suited to its specialty of city fighting. This unit represents the Pillar of Gold, or government, with a regimental patch of a gold Kurita dragon.

7th Sword of Light: The Teak Dragon

This unit is composed of two light, one medium, and one assault battalion. Like the 5th, the 7th is a specialist in city fighting. This unit represents the Pillar of Teak, or culture, and the regimental patch is a brown Kurita dragon.

8th Sword of Light: The Jade Dragon

This unit is composed of two medium and two assault battalions. The regiment reorganized in 3011 and does not yet have a speciality. This unit represents the Pillar of Jade, or the economy, with a regimental patch of a green Kurita Dragon.

DISTRICT FORCES

The Dieron Regulars

The Dieron Military District is the region of the Draconis Combine nearest Terra, and includes those worlds seized by the Draconis Combine when the Star League fell. Dieron is the only district whose forces must face the military might of both the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns. As a result, the district's BattleMech Forces have more 'Mech regiments than any other military district.

The eleven regiments of the Dieron Regulars are responsible for all the worlds within the Dieron district, and the enemy worlds across the border as well. Every unit must be intimately acquainted with the terrain, cities, and strategic points of each world in the district, perhaps the toughest requirement facing any District 'Mech forces. The Warlord of Dieron always keeps with him a set of detailed maps and files, which are kept constantly updated.

District Forces seldom venture from their region to fight. There have been a few exceptions to this policy, which began in the time of Hugai Kurita. The reason for keeping district troops localized is to foster a loyal attachment to their part of the realm, on the theory that it will inspire them to fight for their own worlds with more passion. These local troops are also likely to quell rebellions in their realm quickly, because of their shame at seeing such a dishonor occur in their region.

The Dieron Regulars are usually well-supplied, requiring only a minimal hassle with Procurement to get what they need. Of the five District Forces, the Dieron District Force has the best reputation among Kurita MechWarriors. There is almost always some action in the district, and political adherence to party line is not as important as it is in the Sword of Light regiments.

The Dieron Regulars do not adhere to a standard paint scheme. They adapt their 'Mechs according to the situation, except for the white with gold striping that they always choose for ceremonial occasions.

The symbol of the Dieron Regulars is a red starburst against a setting sun.

2nd Dieron Regulars: The Pride of Shionha
This light 'Mech unit specializes in mountain combat.

3rd Dieron Regulars: The Ever-Vigilant of Kessel
This medium 'Mech unit specializes in city combat.

8th Dieron Regulars: Wrath of the Spurned
This medium 'Mech unit specializes in night combat.

9th Dieron Regulars: Will of the Dieron
This is a heavy 'Mech unit with no speciality.

12th Dieron Regulars: Arm of Unswervable Power
This is a medium 'Mech unit with no specialty.

15th Dieron Regulars: Devotion Through Combat
This is an assault 'Mech regiment with no specialty.

18th Dieron Regulars: Pride of Dieron
This heavy 'Mech unit specializes in city combat.

22nd Dieron Regulars: Vengeance of Dieron
This light 'Mech unit specializes in reconnaissance.

24th Dieron Regulars: Collector of Heads
This is a heavy 'Mech unit with no specialty.

27th Dieron Regulars: The Claws of the Tigers
This medium 'Mech unit has no specialty.

36th Dieron Regulars: The Hungry Ghosts
This is a light 'Mech unit specializing in open field battles.

Rasalhague Regulars

The Rasalhague Regulars form the core of forces in the Rasalhague Military District. Their eight regiments face off with the Lyran Commonwealth, too, and must also protect a large border along the Periphery.

Special conditions color the Rasalhague Regulars' actions. Rasalhague has always been a hotbed of political discontent. Its large European population has long chafed under the Oriental system of the Kuritas. As a result, political upheaval is a common occurrence in this section of the Draconis Combine.

The loyalty of the Rasalhague Regulars is of vital concern to the Kurita family, and subject to constant scrutiny. As much as the Coordinator would like to man these units with dependably loyal, hand-picked troops (namely, Orientals) that would be dangerous, if not disastrous. Nothing would galvanize the anti-Kurita sentiment of the Rasalhague public more quickly than to make every MechWarrior in the Rasalhague Regulars an Oriental. It would not take long for the Rasalhagians to believe that the units were there to watch them instead of to protect them from Lyran aggression.

Most MechWarriors of the Rasalhague Regulars are of European descent, with Orientals forming a small minority. To be eligible, these Warriors must pass an examination of their political leanings as tough as that given to men entering the Sword of Light regiments.

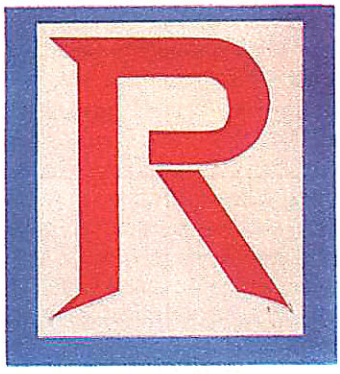
This constant scrutiny of the Rasalhague Regulars has several effects. One is that the units are almost uniformly paranoid. Almost all their actions off the battlefield are planned to keep agents of the ISF from criticizing their propriety.

Another effect of this surveillance is to create delays in the flow of supplies from Procurement to the Rasalhague Regulars. ISF agents carefully scan every request the unit makes for parts and equipment to prevent the unit from attempting to stockpile equipment. As a result, the Techs of the Rasalhague Regulars have become magnificent scroungers, capable of amazing feats of rigged repairs.

The Rasalhague units have the highest MechWarrior turnover rate among the five districts, mostly because of the strain caused by the constant surveillance. This attrition makes it difficult for the Rasalhague Regulars to act as true units and not just a collection of MechWarriors. Though their unit skills tend to be poor, they are acceptable to Lord Kurita, who apparently fears rebellion more than he does the Lyran Commonwealth.

The units also suit the appearance of their 'Mechs to local terrain or weather conditions. On formal occasions, the Rasalhague Regulars choose white with jade-green striping.

The patch of the Rasalhague Regulars shows a red "R" against targeting cross-hairs.



5th Rasalhague Regulars: Crushers of Insurrections
This is a medium 'Mech unit that specializes in crowd control.

8th Rasalhague Regulars: The Executioners
This is a light unit with no specialty.

9th Rasalhague Regulars: Pride of Rasalhague
This heavy 'Mech unit specializes in city fighting.

13th Rasalhague Regulars: Bane of the Commonwealth
This is a heavy 'Mech unit with no specialty.

17th Rasalhague Regulars: The Veterans of Tamar
This is a light 'Mech unit specializing in reconnaissance.

20th Rasalhague Regulars: The Torturers
This medium 'Mech unit has no specialty.

22nd Rasalhague Regulars: The Krushers of Kobe
This heavy 'Mech unit specializes in open warfare.

Galedon Regulars

This collection of eight BattleMech units must protect the longest section of the Draconis Combine's border with the Federated Suns as well as a large section of its border with the Periphery. The unit also protects New Samarkand, the birthplace of the Kurita dynasty. For these reasons, the Galedon Regulars inspire as much respect as the Dieron Regulars.

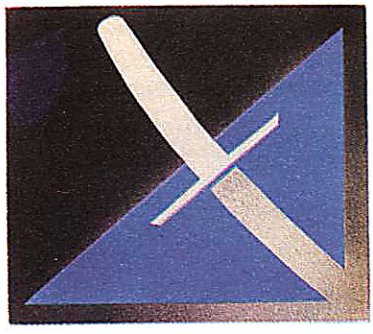
Because the Galedon Regulars must defend worlds of great historical and emotional importance, the ISF must approve all MechWarriors entering its ranks. Though each warrior must survive intense scrutiny, it is not as severe as that faced by the Rasalhague Regulars. Moreover, relations between the Galedon Regulars and the Procurement Department are cordial and do not require endless security checks on their requisitions.

Though the unit does not have the clout of the Sword of Light regiments, it does enjoy some influence with the Draconis Combine Port Authority, which has major transportation points at Galedon and New Samarkand. The Galedon Regulars need the favors of the DCPA because defense of their military district demands that they be able to move quickly when needed. Only the Rasalhague District has more star systems to protect.

Discipline is strong in the Galedon Regulars, which traditionally recruits a large percentage of the Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy graduates. This makes morale in the units high, and tends to imbue the unit with a fanaticism like that seen in the Sword of Light units. Though this may be good, it also give the units a reputation for ruthlessness not usually expected from "common" district forces. Members of the Galedon Regulars who are on New Samarkand for leave often serve as assistant teachers at the Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy.

The Galedon Regulars tend to favor light colors, such as white, tan, or light gray, for their BattleMechs. On parade, they always appear with their 'Mechs painted gray with white striping.

The banner of the Galedon Regulars is a white *Katana* sword over a black triangle and a blue triangle.



2nd Galedon Regulars: The Wrath of History
This is a light unit specializing in open field battles.

5th Galedon Regulars: Pride of Galedon
This is a medium unit specializing in mountain fighting.

8th Galedon Regulars: The Fate of Enemies
This heavy unit has no specialty.

12th Galedon Regulars: The Avengers of Crimes
This light unit specializes in reconnaissance.

16th Galedon Regulars: The Keepers of Treasures
This is a medium unit with city fighting skills.

17th Galedon Regulars: Protectors of Karma
This heavy unit specializes in city fighting.

19th Galedon Regulars: Pride of New Samarkand
This is a heavy unit specializing in defense.

21st Galedon Regulars: The Dragon's Tail
This medium unit specializes in open-field combat.

The Benjamin Regulars

Of the five military districts, the Benjamin District has the smallest borders. Despite being a relatively small area to defend, the Benjamin District has a surprisingly high number of regiments.

There are seven regiments in the Benjamin Regulars. While they are expected to defend the borders with the Commonwealth and the Federated Suns, they also have other functions. Their first role is that of a reserve upon which the Draconis Combine High Command can draw to fill out offensive strategies. The Benjamin Regulars are also a vital second line of defense, should either neighboring enemy manage to penetrate another district and fight its way into the Draconis Combine interior.

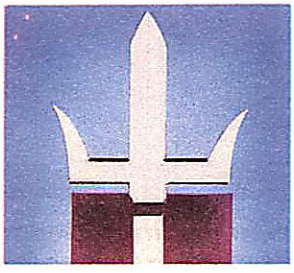
Of the five District Forces, the 'Mech units of the Benjamin District are the easiest to join. There are few requirements, and political correctness is not considered of vital importance in this district. What is important is a willingness to adapt, as the unit must often fight outside its district. This sounds simple, but these MechWarriors are expected to be familiar with all the worlds in the Benjamin District and with all pertinent information regarding missions outside the district. The ability to learn quickly is the major requirement for a MechWarrior in the Benjamin Regulars.

The relation between the Benjamin Regulars and the Procurement Department is adequate. The common belief among the lower ranks of the military is that the Benjamin Regulars do less than the other District Forces. The Procurement Department tends to feel that whatever the Benjamin Regulars might need can wait awhile. This attitude can cause supply shipments to be months overdue. Often, the units must call upon the High Command itself to grease the wheels of the Procurement Department.

The 'Mechs and fighters of the Benjamin Regulars suffer because of the sluggish supply system. Although few 'Mechs are pulled from duty because they lack parts, most are missing at least one part or system, and the Techs are constantly surly because of the lack of parts.

The Benjamin Regulars do not have a preferred 'Mech color. During parades, however, the 'Mechs are painted white with brown striping.

The symbol of the Benjamin Regulars is a white dagger in a red sheath.



2nd Benjamin Regulars: Defenders of the Combine
This is a light 'Mech unit with city-fighting skills.

3rd Benjamin Regulars: Pride of Benjamin
This is a heavy 'Mech unit with open-country fighting skills.

6th Benjamin Regulars: Lord Kurita's Hopes
This is a light unit with no particular specialty.

9th Benjamin Regulars: Wrath of the Common People
This medium 'Mech unit has city-fighting expertise.

11th Benjamin Regulars: Comfort of the Poor
This is a light 'Mech unit with city-fighting abilities.

15th Benjamin Regulars: The Tribute of the Unproductives
This is a medium 'Mech unit with no specialty.

17th Benjamin Regulars: The Power of Proper Religion
This heavy 'Mech unit has open-country fighting expertise.

The Pesht Regulars

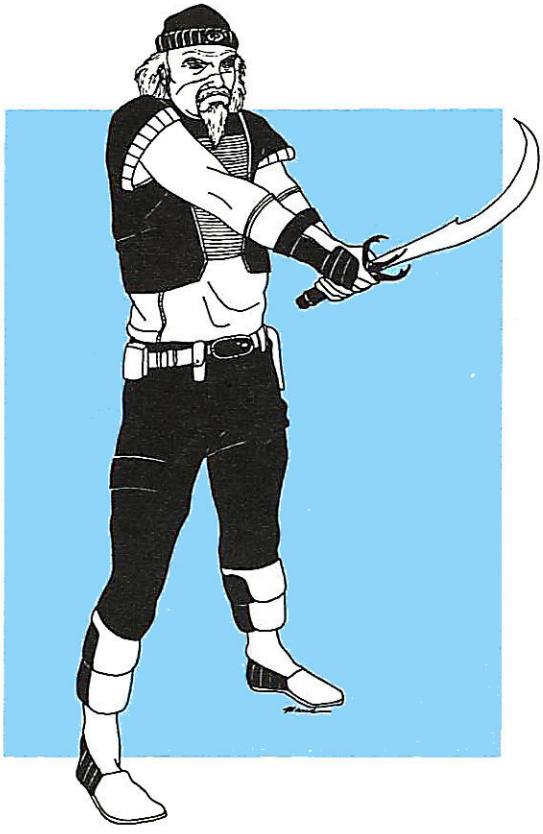
Of the five military districts, the Pesht District is the largest. Yet, of the five districts, this one has the fewest Mech regiments. Without any borders along the Commonwealth or the Davion fronts, the Pesht Military District sees far less action than the other districts. Only the long stretch of border with the Periphery is active, in the form of an occasional bandit raid.

The Pesht District forces have evolved into more than just a fighting force. Because Luthien, the Draconis Combine capital, is located in the Pesht District, the Pesht Regulars find themselves taking part in more and more ceremonial events. This ceremonial role has turned the Pesht Regulars into a show unit. It is now traditional to keep the 'Mechs of the Pesht Regulars looking their best. Close-order drills for parades is their specialty .

The personnel of the Pesht Regulars has also changed. When the District forces were formed before the First Succession War, the Pesht Regulars were normal regiments, manned by MechWarriors with no special qualification except strong loyalty. As time wore on, and more and more MechWarriors died in the wars, those who survived to near-retirement age became important because of their experience.

It was decided that these veterans would be transferred to the Pesht Regulars once they reached a certain age. This way, they could serve out the rest of their careers with a relatively low chance of dying. The DCMS began sending many recent graduates of the various MechWarrior academies to the Pesht Regulars to serve under, and to learn from, the veterans.

Today, most Pesht Regulars commanders are officers who have served at least 15 years in front-line units, with green warriors serving under them. Although this mixture seldom creates good 'Mech units, it does make good MechWarriors of the rookies. Studies have shown that a young MechWarrior stands a 25 percent better chance of surviving his first year on the front lines if he has first served in the Pesht Regulars.



The fact that the Pesht Regulars do not see much action gives them low priority with the Procurement Department. It is sometimes a struggle for them to get even the simplest supplies. Their requisitions are continually bumped, to be filled only after the other District Forces are supplied. The problem often reaches such proportions that the Pesht Regulars will parade past the Coordinator without workable weapons and with other systems just barely running. Jury-rigging a 'Mech is a Tech's daily routine in the Pesht Regulars.

In addition, many higher officers find being assigned to the Pesht Regulars a grave insult. Indeed, the Kurita family has been known to use the Pesht Regulars as a form of purgatory for officers who have offended them.

Pesht Regulars are always in their parade-best colors, as camouflage is usually not necessary when fighting against bandits. They use a white paint with gray striping scheme. Many say the gray is appropriate, considering the age of some of the warriors.

The symbol of the Pesht Regulars is a green dragon encircling a planet.

3rd Pesht Regulars: The Gray Panthers
This light 'Mech unit specializes in reconnaissance.

4th Pesht Regulars: The Evening Warriors
This is a medium 'Mech unit with no specialty.

6th Pesht Regulars: The New Hopes
This is a heavy 'Mech unit with no specialty.

7th Pesht Regulars: The Future Guards
This is a light 'Mech unit with no specialty.

9th Pesht Regulars: The Pride of the Pesht
This heavy 'Mech unit has no specialty.

10th Pesht Regulars: The Red Dawn
This is an assault 'Mech unit with no specialty.

The Arkab Legions

When the believers in Islam finally left Terra in the mid-25th century, their search for the Messiah gradually fused many distinct groups of Moslems into Azami. Azami groups settled worlds with hot suns and desert sands, which reminded them of their Terran home. Their preference for these harsh worlds kept them separate from most other populations. However, the worlds the Azami had chosen lay within the confines of the Draconis Combine.

When House Kurita attempted to assert its control over the Azami worlds in 2497, they were shocked to discover a people who fought with the passion and abandon that only fanatical belief can supply. House Kurita was deeply impressed, even while they were attempting to exterminate this determined people.

When a virus carried by the Azami, but to which they were immune, began killing Kurita soldiers, the government of the Draconis Combine decided to negotiate a peaceful agreement with the Azami. The Azami were granted limited autonomy, on the provision that they swear loyalty to the Draconis Combine and the Kurita family.

To capitalize on the fighting spirit of the Azami, the Kurita family arranged to train them as MechWarriors. The Azami were natural MechWarriors, and soon the Kurita family decided to outfit them into three regiments of light and medium 'Mechs. These units are trained in a lightning-quick style of fighting that is uniquely Azami.

These regiments came to be known as the Arkab Legions ("Arkab" being an Oriental corruption of Arab). While they are usually stationed on their homeworlds in the Benjamin and Dieron Military Districts, the units are expected to go wherever needed. They are specialists in 'Mech reconnaissance and raiding tactics.

The Procurement Department supplies the Arkab Legions with some slight hesitation, for not everyone is convinced that precious supplies should be wasted on those not intimately bound by loyalty to the Draconis Combine. However, the Arkab Legion's many raids against the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns show that, if treated right, the Azami and their Arkab Legions will be loyal followers of the Draconis Combine for a long time.

The paint scheme for the Arkab Legions is either desert tan or dark-green. As they are semi-autonomous, the three Arkab Legions are not required to show the crest of the Draconis Combine. Their crest is a six-pointed star against a yellow and black background.

2nd Arkab Legion: Defenders of the Faithful
This medium 'Mech unit specializes in fast attacks.

4th Arkab Legion: Allah's Blessings
This light 'Mech unit specializes in reconnaissance.

6th Arkab Legion: Desert Nomads
This is a light 'Mech unit specializing in fast attacks.

FREE-FLOATING REGIMENTS

The Draconis Combine military uses the term "free-floating regiment" to describe units without a set region of responsibility. These free-floaters are expected to be ready to move—and to move fast—to wherever they are needed. To this end, free-floaters usually have their own DropShips and JumpShips.

There is a prejudice in the Draconis military against the free-floaters. While many admire the skills of the better units, most feel that free-floaters are little better than mercenaries. Detractors say that because the units move about so much, they cannot develop a sense of loyalty to the realm the way District Forces can.

The free-floaters feel this prejudice most when trying to get supplies.

The Proserpina Hussars

The Proserpina Hussars are the elite among the free-floating regiments in the Draconis Combine. Their ability to launch hit-and-run attacks is legendary. The origin of the Hussars has been long lost. The first mention of them is as a tank division in the Kurita family's early military. Since that time, their excellent abilities have always earned preferential treatment.

The Proserpina Hussars are linked to the University of Proserpina. In the old days, the elite graduates from that university would automatically enter the Hussars. The university (as well as the whole planet) has suffered much from recent fighting, however, and its relations with the unit have dwindled.

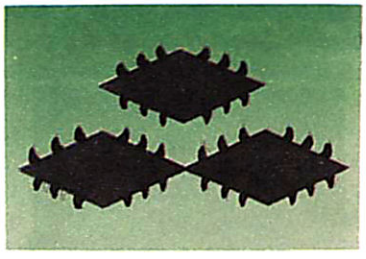
The commander of the Proserpina Hussars reserves the right to test the abilities of any MechWarrior sent to his unit. This test concentrates on the warrior's ability to fight and react in a highly mobile combat situation. If the applicant does not measure up to the commander's standards, he is sent to a lesser regiment.

There is no other requirement but the ability to fight fast and well. As a group, the Proserpina Hussars tend to scoff at the importance laid upon politics and questions of right or wrong. To them, existence boils down to living, fighting, and dying. They consider it ridiculous to worry about leaving any legacy. They are careful not to voice this belief when around government officials, however.

The Proserpina Hussars get along quite well with the Procurement Department. Their reputation and achievements easily overshadow any prejudice against their free-floating status. Like all free-floaters, the Hussars do suffer from having their supplies sent almost anyplace except where the unit happens to be.

The Proserpina Hussars have a single paint scheme for their 'Mechs. Blue, green, and silver are their colors.

Three blood limpets make up the crest for the Proserpina Hussars. Native to Proserpina, blood limpets are blood-sucking quasi-reptiles with hard green shells and weighing about a kilogram. When they sense body heat, these creatures rise above the muck of their swamp and run with amazing speed on their six legs toward the prey. Needless to say, they gave the early colonists on Proserpina endless nightmares.



1st Proserpina Hussars: Blood Suckers

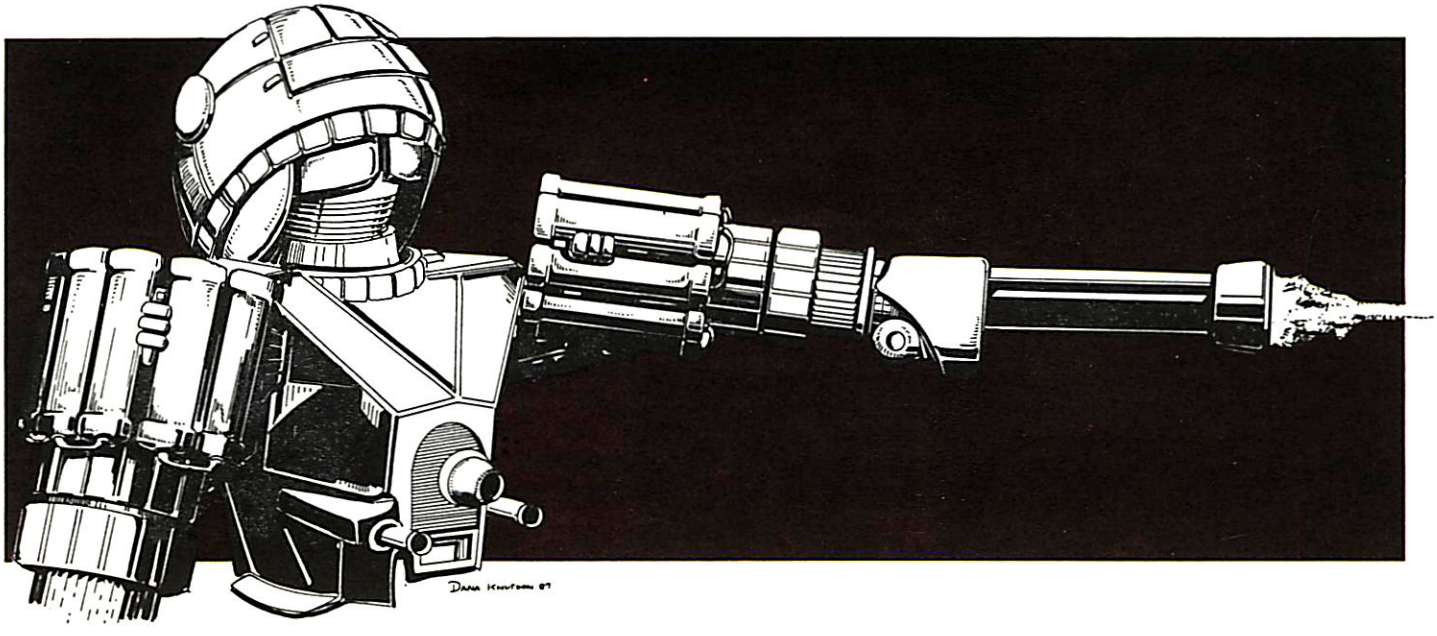
This is a medium 'Mech unit with four battalions, specializing in hit-and-run tactics.

2nd Proserpina Hussars: Kurita's Vampires

This is a medium 'Mech unit with additional fighter support, specializing in hit-and-run tactics.

4th Proserpina Hussars: The Luthien Leeches

This medium 'Mech unit specializes in hit-and-run.



Legion Of Vega

At the other end of the spectrum from the Proserpina Hussars is the Legion of Vega. A recent creation of Coordinator Takashi Kurita, the Legion is said to "represent the armpit of the Arm of the Dragon." If it is a sign of Kurita disfavor to be assigned to the Pesht Regulars, then it is a sign of Kurita loathing to be assigned to the Legion of Vega, a hell from which none are expected to return.

Created in 3011, the unit is made up of three regiments. Each is a collection of misfits from the Kurita military, the fragments of shattered mercenary units, deserters from other realms, and MechWarriors captured from the Periphery and sold as slaves to the Legion.

Considering the odd assortment of MechWarriors, it is not surprising that discipline is almost non-existent. Motivating this group of misfits is difficult, and usually comes down to offering them bonuses or threatening executions to get them moving.

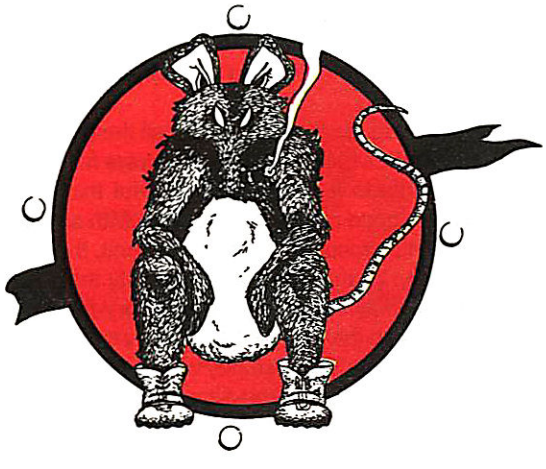
The Legion of Vega is run along the lines of a mercenary unit. The government encourages this mentality by paying the MechWarriors not salaries, but a fee for each mission.

It is next to impossible for the units to procure parts. On their list of units, the Procurement Department has the Legion of Vega at the very bottom, even lower than the mercenary units. The Procurement Department will often go out of its way to delay the few supplies approved for the Legion of Vega.

Although the ISF has difficulty handling the activities of the Legion of Vega, the nature of these MechWarriors makes it essential that the group be constantly monitored. The saying among the Legion MechWarriors is that you can't open a door without hitting an ISF agent on the head. The scrutiny of ISF is another reason supplies for the Legion of Vega are always delayed.

The unit does not have the funds to paint its 'Mechs, and so 'Mechs have an assortment of paint schemes.

The unit's crest is a rat smoking a cigarette upon a design of a planet. In honor of the man responsible for making their existence a living hell, the members of the Legion of Vega (including its commander, Theodore Kurita) have named the rat on their crest Takashi.



2nd Legion of Vega: The Pillagers

This is a medium 'Mech unit.

11th Legion of Vega: The Looters

This is a heavy 'Mech unit.

14th Legion of Vega: The Boozers

This is a light 'Mech unit.

The Night Stalkers

Formed by a forcibly retired MechWarrior, the two regiments in this unit have gained quite a reputation. When Colonel Lloyd McGavin retired because of his age and wounds, he felt he had plenty of years of fighting still in him. He got permission from an incredulous DCMS to form his own regiments, then went to various rich members of the Draconis Combine business world to fund his efforts.

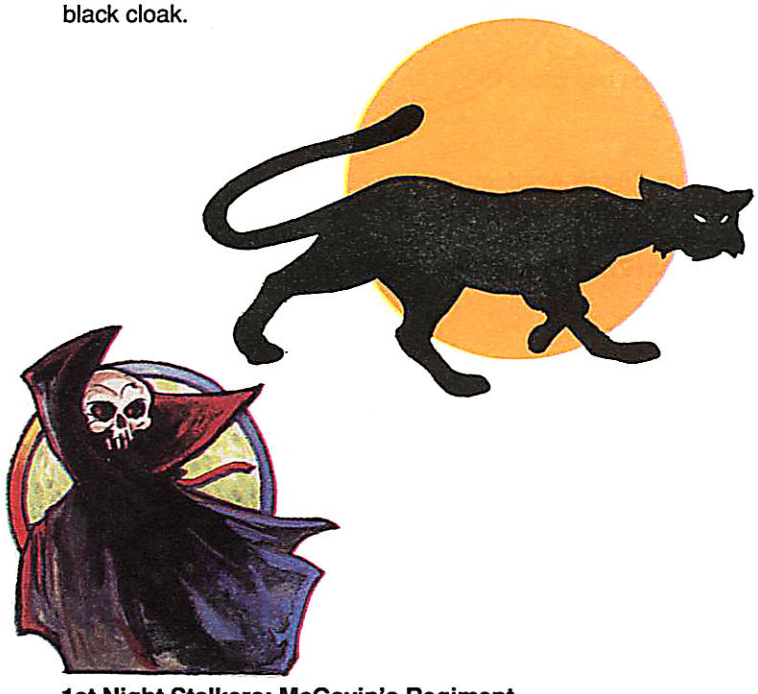
By 3020, he had two complete regiments of new and used light 'Mechs. To form the officer corps, he gathered a group of other veterans, similarly forced to retire. Colonel McGavin then won permission to recruit young MechWarriors who had failed to gain admittance to the better 'Mech units.

The unit soon proved itself a remarkable force. They specialized in raids against enemy-held worlds, with most of their success at the expense of the Lyran Commonwealth Armed Forces. Their defensive capabilities have also been praised, especially after the regiments played a vital part defending the BattleMech works at Al Na'ir.

Unfortunately, Colonel McGavin is a man who cares for his MechWarriors too much. Feeling invulnerable to punishments from the government, he has twice disobeyed the orders of officers during campaigns, saying he would not risk the life of his soldiers in a plan that would clearly not work. This has ruffled quite a few feathers among the Kurita officers.

The Coordinator is not pleased with McGavin's actions. Takashi Kurita has ordered the two regiments split up and stationed as far away from each other as possible. The Procurement Department has also been ordered to "lose" some of the supplies intended for the Night Stalkers.

The Night Stalkers favor dark colors. The symbol of McGavin's Regiment is a large black cat against a big white moon, and the insignia for Johiro's Regiment is a skeleton wearing a black cloak.



1st Night Stalkers: McGavin's Regiment

This is a light 'Mech unit with four battalions that specialize in hit-and-run raids.

2nd Night Stalkers: Johiro's Regiment

This is a light 'Mech unit specializing in raids against enemy worlds.

The Sun Zhang Academy Cadre

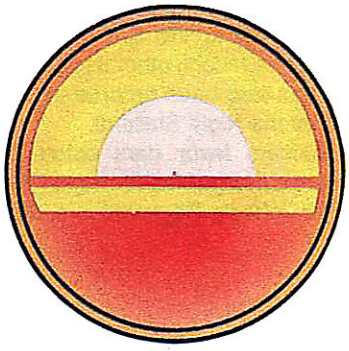
The Sun Zhang Academy Cadre represents the ultimate test for would-be MechWarriors who have spent the previous four years at the academy. In the Cadre, they are treated to real combat and are expected to react like warriors in the long and glorious tradition of the Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy.

The cadets serve in a Cadre for nine months. At the end of the term, they are either allowed to graduate or must serve another term in the Cadre. Most do not graduate after their first term in the Cadre.

Life in the four Cadres is extremely rough. The Instructing Officers have been chosen to be as tough and brutal as possible, so that when the cadets do finally graduate, a normal 'Mech unit seems tame in comparison. Cadets are expected to lead patrols in enemy territory, walk unafraid through minefields, and generally perform tasks that would make even the most hardened MechWarrior hesitate. It is not surprising that deaths among the cadets, including suicide, are extremely high. Those who survive will be treated with great respect for the rest of their lives.

Procurement is not a problem for the Sun Zhang Academy Cadres.

'Mechs in the Cadre are white with blue stripes, and the unit's crest is a setting sun. All cadre Regiments are classified as light.



1st Sun Zhang Academy Cadre: Vigilance
5th Sun Zhang Academy Cadre: Perseverance
9th Sun Zhang Academy Cadre: Determination
12th Sun Zhang Academy Cadre: Humility

The An Ting Legion

In the Second Succession War, the An Ting Legions served much the same purpose as the Proserpina Hussars, earning the same respect and glory. As the war wore on and the An Ting suffered several major defeats, the five regiments of the group dwindled to just two. Those two have survived to the present day.

Years ago, An Ting had a MechWarrior school whose prestige rivalled that of the Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy. Graduates from this school went into the An Ting Legion. Unfortunately, several attacks from the Federated Suns and one from Sun Zhang Academy alumni closed down the academy.

Today, the An Ting Legions are free-floaters. The Procurement Department treats the regiments with little respect, and so the units are in decline.

Dark blue is the color chosen for An Ting regiments. Their unit crest is a black dragonet against a red background.

2nd An Ting Legion: The Light of Enlightenment

This is a medium 'Mech unit specializing in night-fighting.

4th An Ting Legion: The Buddha's Light

This is a medium 'Mech unit specializing in city-fighting.

The Altenmarkt Militia

The Altenmarkt Militia is an experiment created by Takashi Kurita to defuse political tensions in the Rasalhague District.

The population of the planet Altenmarkt was one of the most chronically rebellious in the district. The Coordinator ordered that Altenmarkt Militia be formed totally from young men and women native to that planet. The militia unit was shipped off to sit on the Periphery's edge.

Takashi then had his propagandists tell the people of Altenmarkt about the glories their fellow citizens were facing out there. The propaganda made it seem so wonderful that many more Altenmarkt youth signed up for military duty. With so much of the population's attention focused on the militia unit, there has been a significant decline in anti-government activity there.

The Altenmarkt Militia is not having a glory-filled time, however. The unit is low on the Procurement Department's list, and so the 'Mechs of the unit must constantly be jury-rigged before they can face battle. In the six years the Altenmarkt Militia has been in existence, however, it has managed to become an effective unit. Various members of the unit are now being transferred to bolster other units, while other wide-eyed citizens of Altenmarkt replace them.

The militia does not have a unit color nor does it have a unit crest.

1st Altenmarkt Militia: The Altenmarkt Wolves

This is a medium 'Mech unit with open-field combat skills.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

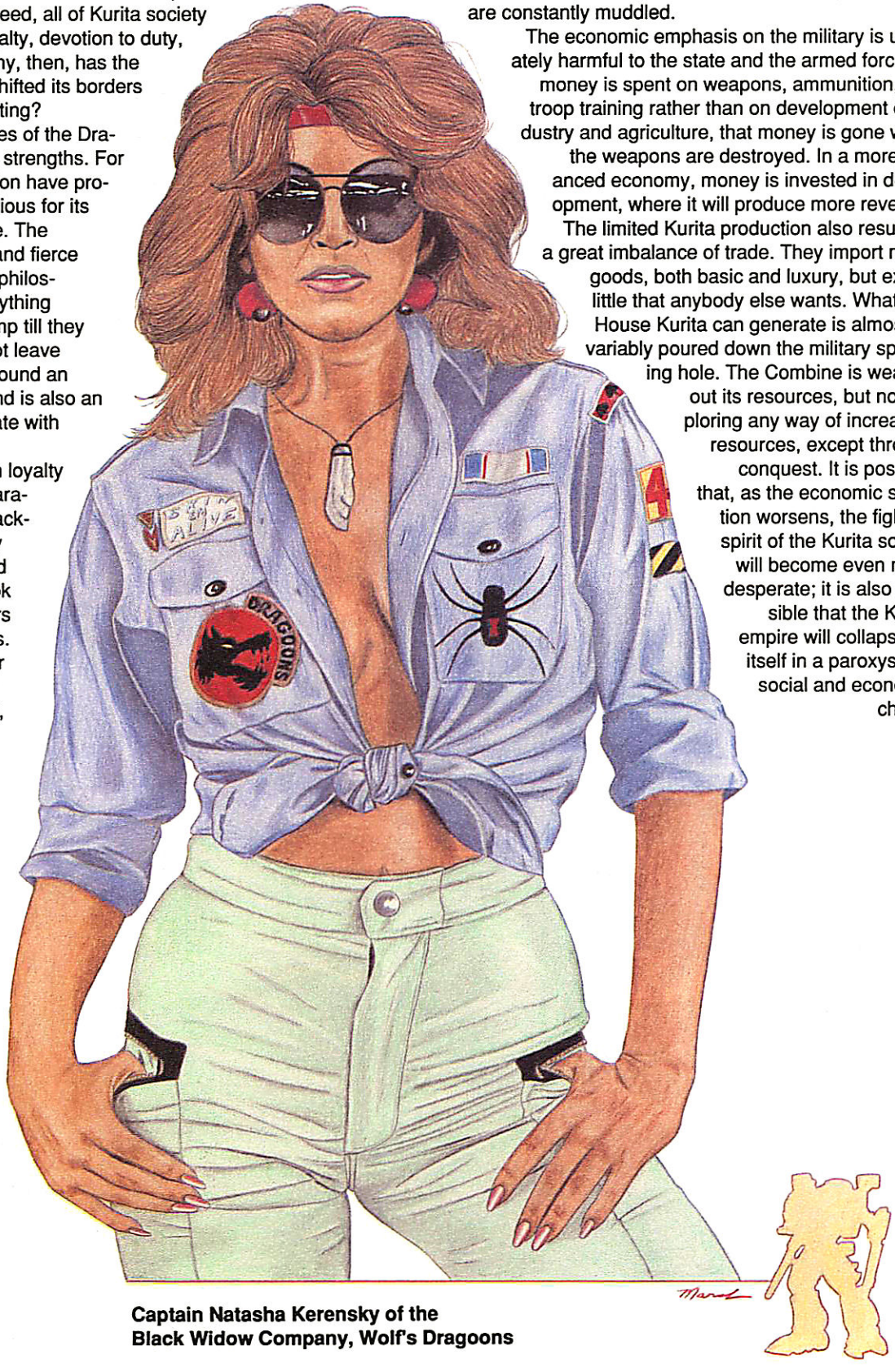
The Draconis Combine has the second largest armed forces of all the Successor States, after the Federated Suns. The Combine also allots a greater percentage of its economic resources to the military than any other Successor State. Kurita troops are known for their discipline and devotion to their leader; indeed, all of Kurita society is based on unswerving loyalty, devotion to duty, and service to the state. Why, then, has the Draconis Combine hardly shifted its borders in hundreds of years of fighting?

Many of the weaknesses of the Draconis Combine lie within its strengths. For example, loyalty and devotion have produced a fighting force notorious for its lack of innovative technique. The Kurita fighting style is wild and fierce because the Kurita tactical philosophy is often to "throw everything we've got at them, and stomp till they stop moving." This does not leave much room to maneuver around an enemy's surprise tactics, and is also an impractical method for a state with limited resources.

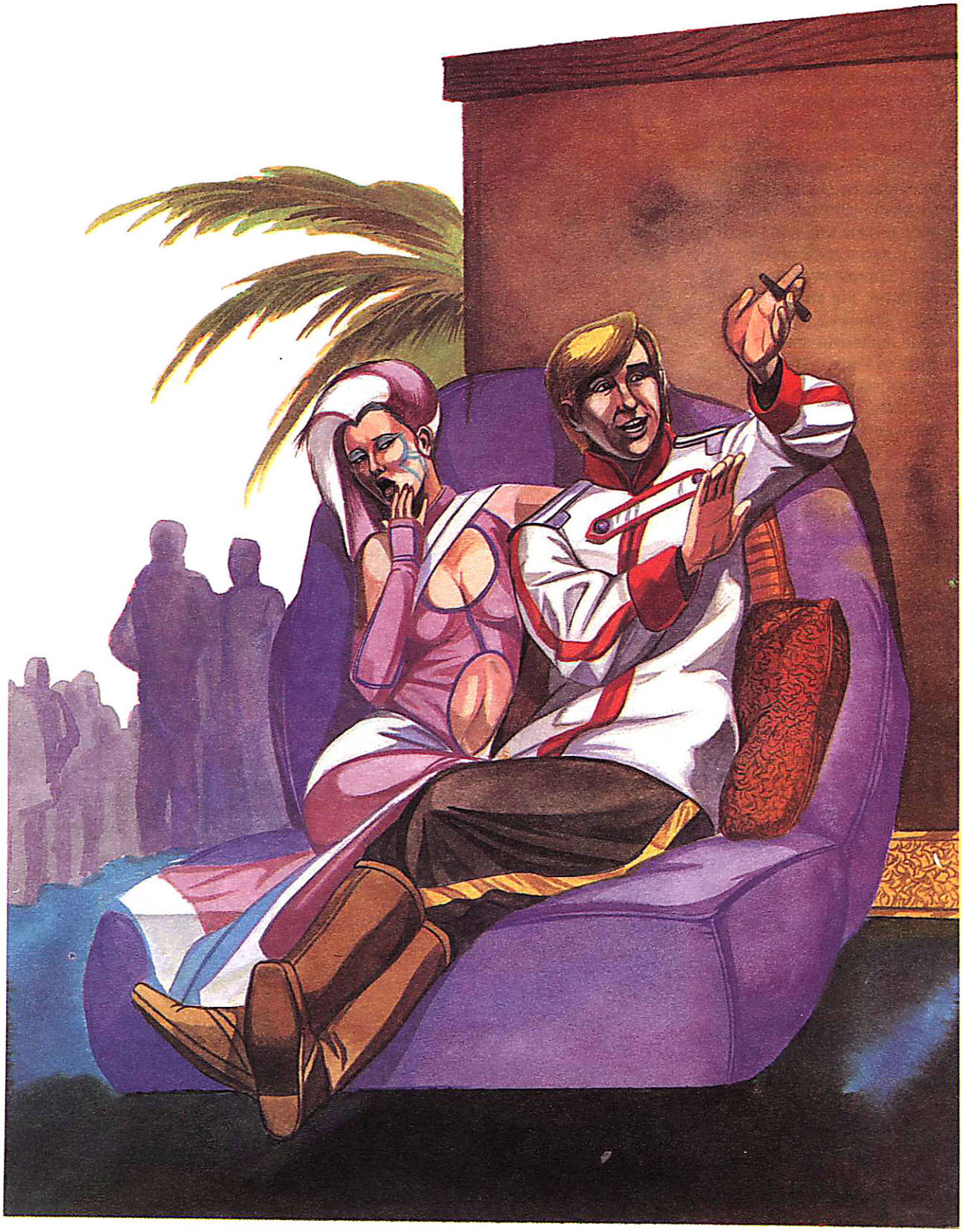
Extensive emphasis on loyalty also can lead to rampant paranoia, back-stabbing, and track-covering. Too often, military leaders are more concerned with making themselves look good and their fellow officers look bad than with their jobs. In a realm charged with fear of disloyalty, few are willing to stand out from the crowd, even to display skill and talent. Devotion to leaders means no initiative in the lower ranks. For example, if a Draconian commander is killed, no man will step forward to lead the troops.

Rivalry between the service branches and among the military districts also handicaps the fighting forces. Communications, the chain of command, and responsibilities are constantly muddled.

The economic emphasis on the military is ultimately harmful to the state and the armed forces. If money is spent on weapons, ammunition, and troop training rather than on development of industry and agriculture, that money is gone when the weapons are destroyed. In a more balanced economy, money is invested in development, where it will produce more revenue. The limited Kurita production also results in a great imbalance of trade. They import many goods, both basic and luxury, but export little that anybody else wants. Whatever House Kurita can generate is almost invariably poured down the military spending hole. The Combine is wearing out its resources, but not exploring any way of increasing resources, except through conquest. It is possible that, as the economic situation worsens, the fighting spirit of the Kurita soldier will become even more desperate; it is also possible that the Kurita empire will collapse on itself in a paroxysm of social and economic chaos.



Captain Natasha Kerensky of the Black Widow Company, Wolf's Dragoons



PILLAR OF TEAK

DAILY LIFE AND CULTURE

For a house that will endure
one thousand years
carve its beams from honor.
—Haiku by Siriwan McAllister Kurita, 2579

Among the five pillars of the Draconis Combine, the Pillar of Teak represents the daily life and culture of its people. Though this precious wood flourished in the hot, moist climates of India, Burma, and other southeast Asian countries on Terra, it was successfully transplanted to only one world in the Draconis Combine. This was the planet Jabuka in the province of Rasalhague.

The structure of Draconian society is symbolized by this valuable timber because it was one of the strongest and longest-lived building woods ever used by man. Unity Palace, home of the Coordinator of the Draconis Combine on Luthien, is constructed from and decorated primarily with this beautiful, durable wood.

Just as the royal palace is built from teak, which is practically imperishable if not exposed, so the structure of Kurita society must be durable, dependable, and strong. These qualities correspond with the ideals of duty, honor, and obedience that rule every member of Kurita society, from the Coordinator at the apex to the lowest of the Unproductives (an underclass like the *eta* of 17th century Japan).

In the Draconis Combine, it is difficult to rise beyond one's station at birth, except through military, technical, or professional brilliance. Each man and woman sees how his place and function fit into the whole, and so this stratification does not generally create dissatisfaction among the masses.

THE DRACONIAN PEOPLE

Always preserve the dragon and its magic will keep you strong.
—*Sayings of Shiro Kurita*, Imperial Press, 2339

Ever since Shiro Kurita first forged the Draconis Combine, its people have believed that they are destined to rule the known universe by dint of their greater bravery, virtue, and intelligence. Reverence for the ruling family, especially the godlike Shiro, who first envisioned the goal of extending Combine sway over the Inner Sphere, has made the Kuritans believe it is their moral imperative. This doctrine underlies every aspect of life in this realm.

The people of the Draconis Combine may be among the most contented of all the Successor States, not because their daily life is particularly pleasant, but because theirs is a collective identity based on a shared vision of society. This vision gives purpose and meaning to their lives. The Draconian people believe that their Coordinator rules by divine right and that their own place in the scheme of things is part of the same divine plan. Each person has his duty within the divine order and that gives a transcendent quality to each existence, no matter how spartan. This collectivity also prevents the ordinary people from missing the luxury, leisure, or sensual pleasures that are generally lacking from their lives.

CODES OF CONDUCT

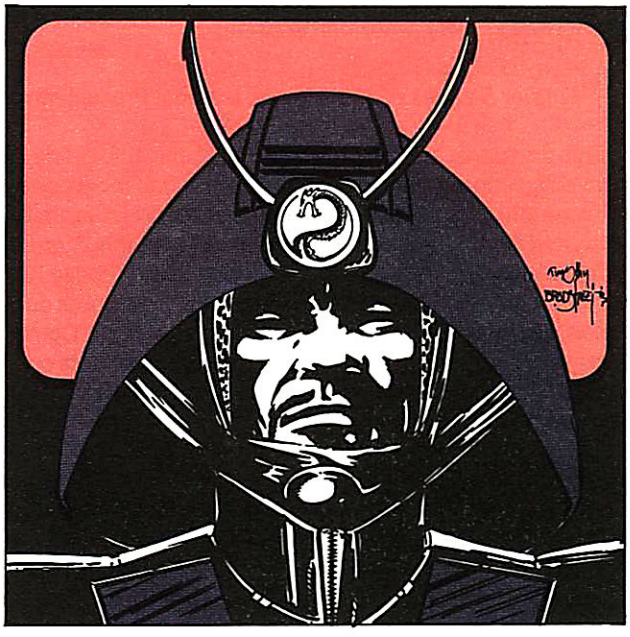
To maintain order and discipline among the vast populace of the realm, the rulers of the Combine enforce the venerable Dictum Honorium, which now numbers six volumes (see **Pillar of Ivory**). These Codes of Conduct emphasize that there is one correct way of conduct and four incorrect ways. The false paths are known as oblivion of spirit, sorrow from weakness, ignorance of order, and pain of failure.

The citizens of House Kurita are thoroughly indoctrinated with the Code from the time they enter First School at the tender age of four years. Indeed, the Dictum Honorium pervades every institution of Kurita society, and has done so for 700 years. Its essence has become second nature to Kuritans. They see the universe and their place in it through the ideals of the Code, and they interpret all events according to its precepts.

STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY

At the head of Draconian society is the Coordinator, who is revered as the dynastic father of his people. Under him come the nobility, or *kuge*, and the military class, the *buke*. In the center is the middle class of professionals and corporate managers. Next down the line are the commoners, or *heinin*, who perform most of the actual work of the society. Lowest of the low are the Unproductives, an underclass composed of criminals, disgraced members of other classes, beggars, and other undesirables. They are often assigned to suicide missions, clean-up crews in atmospheres that have been poisoned, unsafe mining operations, as test subjects for scientific research and experiment, and so on.

The basic unit of society is the nuclear family, consisting of father, mother, and their offspring. In daily life, this group overlaps with the extended family, a two- or three-generation collection that includes grandparents, their married children, and their numerous grandchildren. Because of tradition and the crowded conditions of ordinary Combine housing projects, these extended families often share a residence, living an almost communal existence.

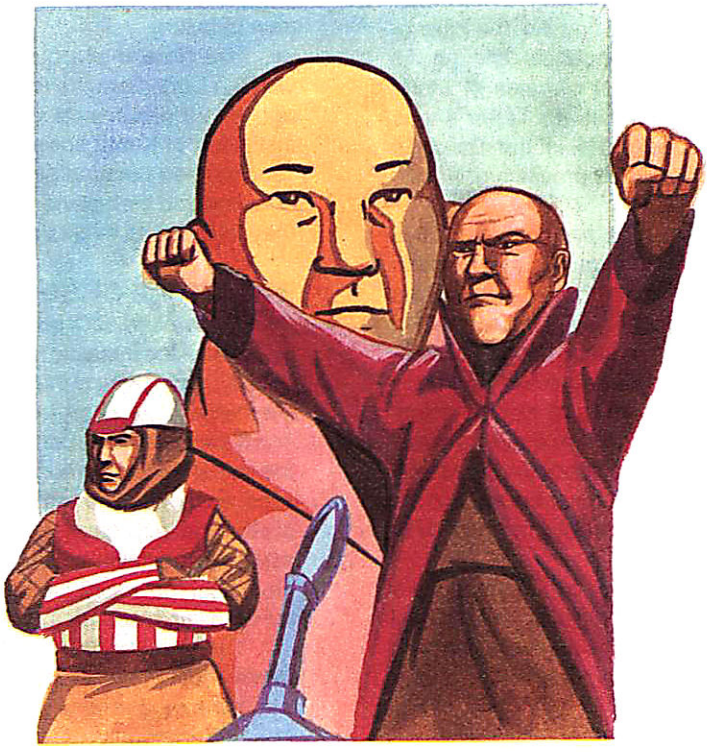


Although the few women who enter the military service achieve a measure of equality, the rest still exist in time-honored roles. The male is the undisputed head of his household, while the women are responsible for taking care of the home, feeding and clothing their families, raising the children, and overseeing their daughters-in-law. Because Kuritans are universally indulgent of very young children, one might see a three-year old cry and rail in tantrum with his mother, but that child would never display such behavior in the presence of his father or other important male figures.

At the higher levels of society, among corporate management, for example, wives rarely see their husbands. The men are expected to spend after-hours with their colleagues. Much business is transacted during these seemingly casual get-togethers, which is one reason the wives are excluded.

To this day, marriages are often arranged, particularly among the upper classes. Parents send holos or videotapes of their daughters, plus life histories, to the families of marriageable sons. There are many reasons why a girl might be rejected by the boy's family. She might have unsuitable friendships, for example, or be too bold in expressing herself in company. If a marriage is arranged, the courtship period lasts at least two years, and the betrothed couple would rarely spend time together unless in the presence of a chaperone.

Perhaps because of this antiquated tradition, the institution of the geisha is still strong wherever there are large populations of nobility, military, or professional men who can afford the services of these elegant companions.



MILITARISM

Destiny is duty.

—Further Sayings of Shiro Kurita, Imperial Press, Luthien

The traditional ruthlessness of the Kurita ruling line has filtered down into the society at large. Even in the most peaceful times, one out of four Kurita citizens is conscripted for military training and indoctrination. In times of all-out war, this figure is at least double. Because of their training and culture, House Kurita soldiers are fearless and cold-blooded, preferring combat duty to garrison, protection, or other special duties. Indeed, Combine officers will spare no cost in lives, either of their opponents or their own men, in order to meet an objective. Life is cheap, honor is dear—or so the saying goes.

Draconian culture is rooted in a military tradition that dates from the days of Shiro Kurita, influenced by the samurai ways of his Japanese ancestors. Because of his success in forging the Draconis Combine through military strategy and sheer determination, Shiro became revered as god-like. The warrior qualities that he embodied represented the ideals of honor, duty, and devotion.

Furthermore, his dedication to creating an empire under a single ruler expanded to become a manifest destiny. Believing that the Draconis Combine is destined to rule all of Human space, its leaders will seek to achieve this by any means necessary. Despite this militant obsession, the Combine has made no significant changes in its borders for the past 150 years. This is due mainly to the ruler's tendency to reward mediocrity among his officers and to punish innovation or ambition. The propaganda machine continues to feed the Kuritan people images of military glory and dominion, while also assuring them that all things come to he who has patience. The Dragon may not yet be truly roused, but when that day comes, he will be invincible.

XENOPHOBIA

Another means of ensuring discipline and unquestioning obedience from the populace is the xenophobia of the Draconis Combine. To maintain the political "purity" of their House, the rulers of the Combine have always sought to limit contact between their people and those of other realms. Most Kuritans will never venture beyond their own borders unless involved in a military action. It is also an act of treason to marry anyone who is not a citizen of the Draconis Combine. The Dictum Honorium states that the Combine was born in struggle and this state of affairs will continue until the Dragon rules all of known space.

In the early days of the Combine, its leaders even resisted the idea of trade with other realms, because they feared that their spartan society would be undermined by the availability of luxury items. They also feared exposing themselves to possible economic sabotage from their opponents.

At the time of the Star League's formation, the Combine opened its doors wide to trade. Today, the Combine must trade to obtain both necessities and revenue. Nevertheless, the Minister of Indoctrination continues to strictly regulate what is suitable for import, to whom it will be made available, and how much intercultural contact is healthy. In the current era, some resource-poor Kurita worlds are almost totally dependent on simple foods imported from their rich Steiner neighbor. Among the upper classes, however, there is always money to buy the gourmet specialities, antique weapons, or frivolous adult toys currently in demand from Steiner and Davion traders.

The fact that House Kurita lacks the resources of its two well-endowed neighbors has paradoxically strengthened its xenophobia. The Kuritan people have had to learn to conserve what they have and to do without what they do not. This perpetual tightening of the belt has created a strong mystique among the people. Sharing hardships has imbued in them a feeling of spiritual strength that reinforces the belief in their superiority over the other, "softer" peoples of the Human Sphere.

EDUCATION

The purpose of education is to develop in children's minds morality and patriotism, to inspire unshakable love toward their homeland; to inspire vigilance, strength, will power, character, and courage; to develop self-discipline and to encourage physical and aesthetic culture for the greater glory of all.

—From a speech by the Minister of General Indoctrination at the graduation ceremony of Pesht University, 3021

In any society, education is the most powerful tool of propaganda, with control of the media a close second. The Kurita regime uses these two agencies of information to continually reinforce in its people unquestioning loyalty, courage in battle, and devotion to order.

Kurita education is based on the principle that knowledge, like any other aspect of society, must serve. The Ministry of General Indoctrination rejects the philosophy that children should be encouraged to reason out matters for themselves in order to draw their own conclusions. Instead, the Kurita system is based heavily upon rote learning and the principle that all students be thoroughly indoctrinated with the obedience and loyalty prescribed by the Code of Honor. Though the Kuritan system stresses science and technology, the rote training tends to discourage any real advances in these areas because it stifles creativity and original thought, even among the intellectual elite.

Loyalty and obedience begin at home, of course. There the child learns to revere his parents and his ancestors as well as the supreme authority of the Coordinator, who embodies the soul of the Kuritan people.

The Kuritan educational system has numerous methods for drilling these attitudes and beliefs at all levels of education. For example, courses in history and even geography interpret facts and events according to state ideology. Also, every student is drilled in *sushin* (ethics), which teaches patriotism and reverence for the Coordinator. The school system has also become the central propagandist for Draconian militarism, and Regular Army officers attached to each secondary school teach special courses of military instruction.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Although House Kurita has borrowed widely from other systems, its education system includes several distinctive features.

The first of these is that primary education is compulsory for all children, while secondary and higher education are reserved for a select few. That means that the majority of children of First School age do get a rudimentary education, and so literacy is almost universal. First School begins at age four and lasts until age ten. During the last year, each child must face a battery of tough achievement and aptitude tests.

Only about 60 percent will pass these exams, and that is intentional. Those that do succeed are channelled by the Bureau of Skill Development of the Ministry of Indoctrination to the appropriate trade or technical Middle School. The remainder will probably leave school forever at this point.

The Middle School curriculum generally lasts five years, and offers a solid course of study in mathematics, sciences, geography, history, language, and literature. The students wear uniforms and are subject to a semimilitary discipline, while continuing to be exposed to serious indoctrination in the Draconian ideology.

The students work hard, and the school year is ten standard months long. Though the youngsters find little time for leisure activity, they are encouraged to study the martial arts, particularly *kendo*, the ancient art of fencing, or *kudo*, archery, as relaxation.

In the Draconis Combine, the vast majority of the people are content to end their formal education after First School. Because the masses will never engage in anything but rote duties or manual labor, they share the official belief that higher education might well spoil a good craftsman by making him discontented with his fate.

At age 15, Middle School students submit to another round of examinations that will determine who is suited for higher education, or *dai gakko*. At the university level, it is assumed that the student has mastered the preparatory general subjects and will devote most of his time to his own special field. Having completed his higher education, the student receives his *gakushi* ("learned gentleman") degree. Those selected for postgraduate study and who produce an acceptable thesis will receive the coveted title of *Hakase*, or doctor.

Some of those students who do not survive the weeding-out process that leads to the *koto gakko* and then the *dai gakko*, do have one other option. Those whose tests show the necessary aptitude may attend one of the many *semmon gakko*, a word that might translate to college but that literally means specialty school. Some schools teach higher-level commercial or technical courses, while others specialize in subjects such as mining or agriculture. Though higher education is reserved for males, some women may attend *semmon gakko*. The course of study usually lasts three years, with a diploma rather than a formal degree awarded to graduates.

It is obvious from this description that the Kuritan students receive special or vocational training rather than a broad general education, even at the highest levels. As always, the principle is a pragmatic one: study of the liberal arts would not make a student more useful to the society. Also, the theory is that such broad general training would encourage radical and dangerous tendencies of thought.

Although the Kuritan educational system borrows more knowledge than it develops, the state is determined to combine high technology with traditional values and ideals. During the expansionist Star League era, the founder of Luthien University was a broad-minded scholar who appreciated what Kuritans could learn from the discoveries of scientists and scholars from other realms. In his inaugural speech, Dr. Paul Edwards spoke for many when he stated that "knowledge shall be sought throughout the galaxy in order to promote the welfare of the Draconis Combine."

At the same time, the leaders insist that even the most advanced knowledge must not interfere with maintaining the Dictum Honorium. A corollary of this is that the whole system is operated by and for the state. The principle permeating every phase of Kurita education is that education is to teach and investigate those sciences and studies that are of practical service to the Combine. Private First Schools are non-existent, though there are a few religious-based Middle Schools. Before the devastation of the Succession Wars, some private universities did exist. A few of these were outstanding, but most could not compete with government institutions of higher learning. Indeed, both government and private industry gave preference to graduates of state schools. In the current era, no private university still stands.

As might be expected from such a single-minded system, Kurita education is highly centralized. The Ministry of General Indoctrination dictates all aspects of schooling and rigidly supervises schools. Indeed, the offices of the Ministry compile most of the compulsory textbooks in use. It is said that the Minister, sitting in his office in Luthien, can rest assured on any given day that all students of a given grade throughout the realm are studying a given page of a given textbook.

According to Yorito Hale, House Kurita's most influential Minister of General Indoctrination, the task of Kurita education is to "transform the school into a weapon of Draconian society."

UNIVERSITIES AND OTHER HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

Because of the severe damage that the Kurita sphere suffered during the three Succession Wars, most of its universities were destroyed. This included New Samarkand University, the first ever established in the Draconis Combine. Many First Schools and Middle Schools were also destroyed, but with the recent lessening of hostilities, the Ministry of Indoctrination has begun returning these to pre-war levels.

Just as with its industrial efforts, however, House Kurita's native education would be seriously lacking if their spy system did not supply much of the up-to-date science and technology. These technical subjects, along with military science, are prestigious courses of study.

The Imperial Institute Of Technology

This is as high-level as Kurita technology studies get, but even this prestigious university cannot compare with anything House Davion or Steiner have to offer. Only the best and brightest, with high science and math aptitudes, will be tracked through the Draconian school system to arrive ultimately at I.I.T.

Luthien University

Located on the capital world, this university offers a more traditional spectrum of education, suited to those headed for civil or diplomatic services. Studies range from history and astrography to languages and the history of art. These graduates are not being primed for the high-paying jobs that graduates of I.I.T. or Kurita's Noius Archipelagus Institute of Science will land. They will be the bureaucrats or lower-level members of diplomatic missions. These students have been chosen more for their ability to engage in cultivated discourse with outsiders or the less-educated than for possible contributions to the ever-present goal of Kurita military dominion.

Noius Archipelagus Institute of Science

Military science and technology are the focus of education at this school, which was founded to compete with the New Avalon Institute of Science, Hanse Davion's pet project. Indeed, the only reason for locating on Noius Archipelagus was the coincidence of the two schools' initials. Noius Archipelagus has so far failed to distinguish itself. The word in the Federated Suns is that Noius Archipelagus is awaiting a breakthrough in theft of research from New Avalon.

NON-JAPANESE CULTURE IN THE DRACONIS COMBINE

Although the general Kurita culture is closely based on that of Terran Japan, the majority of Combine citizens are not of Japanese ancestry. Especially on planets where one non-Japanese people predominates, there are definite strands of other cultures discernible.

The official Kurita tolerance for "foreign" cultures varies. At this time, under Jasmine Kurita's advocacy of the arts, multi-cultural study and display is actually encouraged. The new School of Cultural Investigation on Al Na'ir is dedicated to exploration of the different cultures "from which we took the best elements, to forge together the superior way of living known as Kurita culture," according to Hamin Gemal, Dean of that school. Students of Cultural Investigation apply history, geography, anthropology, sociology, art history, and other disciplines to discover the hidden heritage of the non-Japanese Draconis Combine.

In the arts, especially, these other cultures show their influence. While most cultural aspects—education, class structure, titles, and modes of address, for example—display the mainline Japanese-influenced culture of Kurita, arts and crafts on different planets still reflect the individual spirit and local cultural influences. For example, the architecture of the School of Cultural Investigation itself shows distinct references to the building style of the Terran Middle East.

Artists studying at Cultural Investigation, or influenced by its philosophy, follow their interests in one of two ways: either by reproducing the artistic forms of past times, or by adapting them to present forms. Examples of the first include Philip Valenzuela's translations of ancient Spanish authors such as Marquez, Neruda, and Borges, and Marion Tsevernasky's popular renditions of Russian, Ukrainian, and Latvian folk music.

Examples of the adaptive school are among the most exciting artistic work being done in the Combine today. The light-painting of Nevil Pastor is directly influenced by central African textile and decorative arts; the holoplays of Marcella Dreyfuss reflect the early film work of Fellini and Moffat; and the null-g ballet company directed by Paul Kosmo draws from the 23rd-century levitation dances of Martine Shelley.

The only major gap in the current wave of interest in other cultures is that of Rasalhague and its Scandanavian cultural influences. Rasalhague District inhabitants have always been under suspicion of harboring separatist tendencies. Few Rasalhagians wish to be closely identified with a movement studying "foreign" cultures; and the promoters of this study are happy to be free of the taint of association with Rasalhague.

In the xenophobic atmosphere of House Kurita, the only way to sell the studies of other cultures is by stressing the superior way of the Combine and the benefits of incorporating the best of other cultures. It is likely that if Kurita suffers a major setback either on the battlefronts or internally, these foreign elements will be banned. Those now studying these cultures know they are taking a great risk, and more than most, truly suffer for their art.

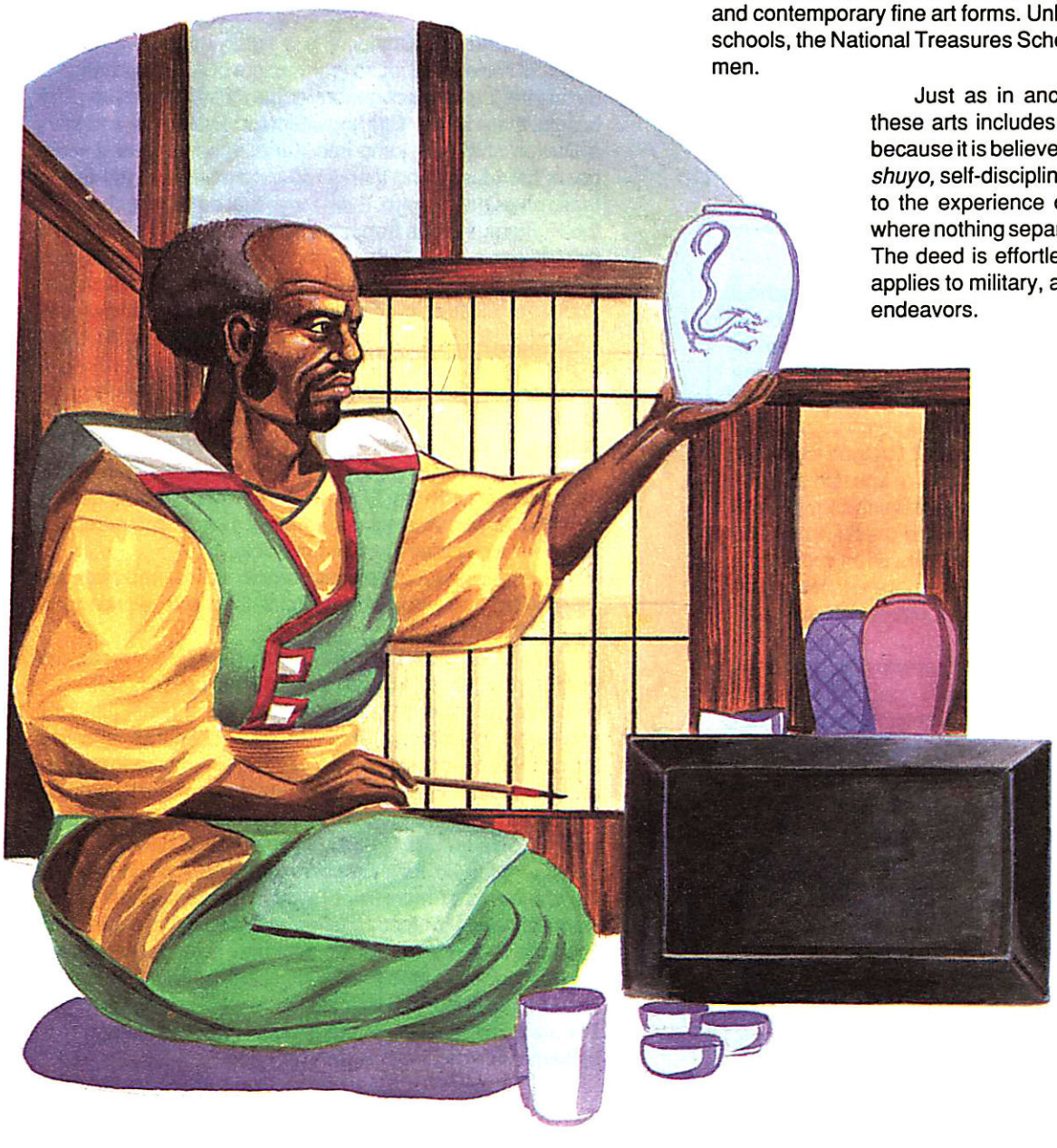
—From *The Human Sphere: Arts and Culture*, by Elison Wallach, New Avalon Press, 3022

ARTS

Though Kuritan society is serious, hard-working, and dutiful, its people retain a keen sensitivity to beauty, maintaining an artistic tradition that is heavily indebted to the traditional arts of ancient Japan.

Commoners are not encouraged to practice the arts, however, nor have they the time, even if there were the inclination. Their tastes run more to the "soaps" on state-controlled holovision or to the televised sporting events in which men and machines fight to the death.

Where the arts truly flourish is among the nobility and the warrior class. This is particularly true in the present era because both Jasmine Kurita, Consort of Takashi Kurita, and Indrahar Subhash are passionate connoisseurs of many different art forms. Jasmine, in particular, has become an active patron by sponsoring many cultural events at Unity Palace on Luthien, where she has built a special theatre for performances. The whole intricate maze of buildings and chambers that make up the Royal Residence are filled with the finest of ancient and modern paintings, sculpture, pottery, tapestries, rugs, and other examples of Kuritan arts and crafts.



Though military training takes up much of a warrior's time, many of them are serious students and practitioners of haiku, the classic poem of 17 syllables. Often, they compose special battle haiku before going into battle and place these in their neurohelmets, in case they are killed or taken prisoner.

Jasmine Kurita has persuaded her husband to give special subsistence grants to the artists that she favors or finds especially promising. Though this is not an official program, it does reverse the government trend of neglecting the arts.

The one activity the government does sponsor is the Nohkabu performing troupes. Nohkabu is a blend of ancient and modern theatrical techniques to create a theatre that appeals to and instructs the ordinary people. The themes of these traveling troupes are mostly historical, and portray events in the life of the dynastic line or in the history of the House. Only those who have been trained in the National Treasures School may be assigned as a performer or creator of these events.

NATIONAL TREASURES SCHOOL

National Treasures School, located in Imperial City on Luthien is staffed by the most accomplished masters of the traditional and contemporary fine art forms. Unlike ordinary advanced-level schools, the National Treasures School admits women as well as men.

Just as in ancient Japan, the training in these arts includes serious meditation training, because it is believed that only mental training (or *shuyo,* self-discipline) can lead a man or woman to the experience of *muga. Muga* is the state where nothing separates the doer from the doing. The deed is effortless and masterful. This goal applies to military, artistic, religious, and secular endeavors.

THE GEISHA TRADITION

Geisha are members of an honorable tradition of entertainment dating to ancient Japan. *Geisha* translates loosely as "person of pleasing accomplishments." These artisans, mostly women, are trained to entertain patrons in a number of pleasant, artistic ways. A Geisha learns several different entertainment arts such as singing, dancing, and poetry writing and recitation and hostess arts (such as massage, food serving, and flower arranging). The position of Geisha is one of the most honorable available to a Kurita woman. Contrary to popular opinion, Geisha are not prostitutes, but are closer to bards or court jesters in their entertainment niche. Some women are trained in the erotic arts, as courtesans, but this is not the function of the Geisha.

The Geisha is revered as an artist-server. Most work in special houses, to which patrons go in small groups or alone. One or more Geisha will entertain a patron or group, depending on how much the patron paid. Businessmen frequently bring their associates to a local house. The Geisha serve food, tea, and wine in an especially artistic way, and entertain with their performing art speciality. Sometimes, a patron will take over one Geisha, setting her up in a separate house for his benefit.

—From *A Business Guide to the Draconis Combine*, by Seth McDonald, Commonwealth Press, 3009.

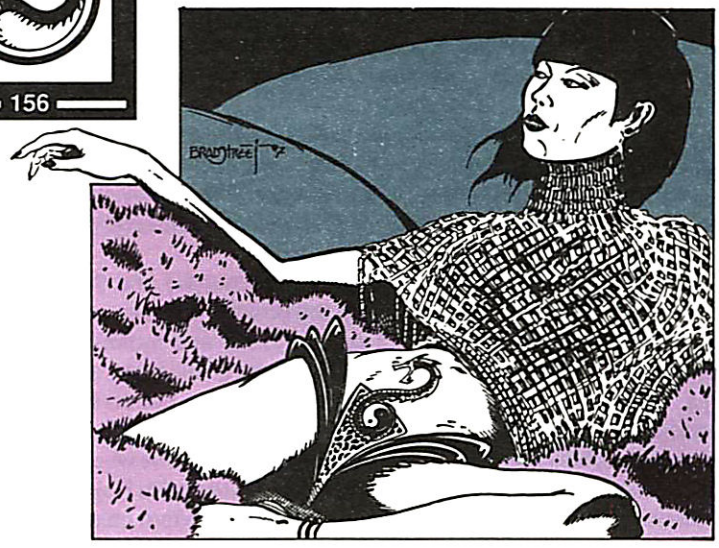
A LARK'S LIFE

My father sold me to apprenticeship in the Geisha school when I was seven. For this, I praise his wisdom and his generosity. In the school, I learned to become a person of pleasing accomplishments, a geisha. Honor smiled on me again because at this school was the most skilled singer of my profession, known to so many as The Songbird. Yes, my native gift was a lilting soprano voice that I trained to cover a wide range of emotions and styles. The deepest instruction given to me by the Songbird was the training of my sentiments that I might not only sing, but sing poetic words and beautiful melodies of my own invention. Even more, she taught me to create these songs at a moment's notice so that my singing was truly that of a bird: effortless, natural, spontaneous.

I learned, too, the arts of dance, flute-playing, massage, artful dressing, delicate manners, serving food and drink, and witty conversation, so that a man might find with me entertainment and sympathetic company. I entertained many visitors to our house in my first year there. Then one day, one of the highest officials of our realm contracted for my exclusive services as his mistress. He took such great comfort in my company that he renewed my contract until the time when he joyously gave his life in combat. My fame had spread, for this man had often brought the great ones of the Court to be entertained by me.

He had named me The Lark, which name I bear proudly to this day, as the chief Mistress of Song in my own former school.

—From *The Geisha Life,* by Li-Ann Sung, Imperial Publishing House, 2970



SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Draconis Combine is a tightly controlled, almost fanatical society. Because their system of education tends to dictate the fate of the common people as well as shaping their beliefs, there is very little social unrest. Every now and then, a Davion ship may jump into Kurita space, make a wide-beam broadcast, and then jump out again, but very few of these ships get through. Even those that do cannot persuade the Kuritans that the trappings and luxuries of their wealthy neighbors compare to the spiritual treasures and devotion to the cause of empire that they hold so dear. There is a black market in electronic entertainment equipment and videos from other Houses, but only the richest nobles can afford any of these.

Takashi Kurita depends on his policy of promoting the loyal and eliminating the ambitious to keep his iron grip on his realm and to keep anyone from getting enough power or support to stir up things at home. The ISF, which penetrates every corner of Kurita life, has so far been able to quickly ferret out any troublemakers, whether a street corner rabble-rouser or a rebellious general or noble.

Summary executions are commonplace, and trials are more often kangaroo court affairs than true workings of justice.

Life for the ordinary man or woman is quite similar across the 100 planets that House Kurita claims for itself. This state of affairs best serves Lord Kurita's political aims, just as it served his forefathers. There is little street crime, because the concept of honor promotes cooperation between people, and most seek to behave in an ideal manner. It would be dishonorable to steal, because this would imply that a man was not able to fulfill his obligations to his family.

Everyday life in the Draconis Combine, although drab by the standards of many other worlds, is satisfactory. Basic physical needs for food, shelter, and clothing are met in as comfortable a manner as the economy permits. As there is virtually no social mobility, most people content themselves with their lot in life, and look to their family and friends for joy. People adjust to their circumstances, and the average Draconian would say that his life was good.

PILLAR OF JADE

ECONOMICS

cool jade in the hand
is of value to the soul
also worth some cash
—From *The Haiku of Chairman Robert Forbes Otaku*, Kurita Business Press, 3001

The green-colored gemstone known as jade has been highly prized for millennia, with special mystic properties often associated with it. Among some peoples, the possession and contemplation of jade objects was thought to bring a serenity to the soul and to drive away evil thoughts.

Fine pieces of jade have always been worth large amounts of money, but most cultures prefer gold, silver, or even diamonds as symbols for commerce. In the Draconis Combine, however, it is the Pillar of Jade that stands for commerce and industry. Indeed, pieces of jade are placed in all offices and factories as a reminder to focus on the expected task and not to become feverish with hopes of wealth. Even the savviest trader or executive will often stop to meditate on his jade when feeling that the pressure to succeed may interfere with his judgement.

Among the most popular forms for jade carvings are the simple pierced disk, the pillar, and the tree. The pierced disk, a jade form dating to primitive man on Terra, suggests breaking though the materialist view of life to see the vastness of the heavens. It also suggests a coin, open to the same view, which has been drilled to become worthless.

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

To say that the Draconian government controls the economic system is almost redundant. As the Coordinator controls the nobles, military, and every other aspect of life, he *is* the government.

House Kurita is not as wealthy a state as its size and importance might suggest. Many of its worlds are actually resource-poor, having been settled for the purpose of exploiting only one or two minerals or crops. Other worlds have been hit hard by the Succession Wars, many of them victims of the philosophy of destroying the planet in order to "save" it. The disruption of interstellar transit has seriously affected many Combine worlds unable to grow their own food, and they now find themselves cut off from needed supplies. The Kurita government has been evacuating these planets as quickly as possible. With so many large ships being requisitioned for the military, however, the operations of the Economic Relocation Program are haphazard, at best.

The Kurita government frequently keeps worlds capable of producing bountiful crops and worlds with intact industrial bases at artificially high population levels. It uses the Economic Relocation Program to move people to these planets, where large families are encouraged through a system of monetary and social rewards and the unavailability of contraceptives. The official reason for this overpopulation is "to be ready to re-seed barren worlds when the war is over." The unofficial, but generally accepted, reason is to encourage young people to want to escape crowded conditions on their homeworlds by joining the military.

As a result of overpopulation, food rationing exists on even agricultural planets. What is available varies in quality with different worlds, though agricultural planets can generally provide simple but fresh foods for their people. Less-endowed worlds have to make do with a bewildering variety of processed items. Corporations or the government provide housing by way of a cumbersome bureaucracy (which can make things crowded sometimes), though public housing is clean, well-maintained, and adequate.

Medical care is also free, but can be frighteningly primitive. On many worlds, all but the most ill persons are better off going to a village folk-medicine clinic for some herbal tea and hot compresses than to a government Health and Happiness Center where the doctors might be experimenting with unknown, new techniques. Medicine reveals better than anything else the depths of ignorance to which humanity has fallen, and how the Kuritans always apply any recovered knowledge to benefit the military first. Not surprisingly, the most civilized development in Kurita medicine are the well-run Welcoming Homes, or hospices for the dying. These provide a quiet, pleasant atmosphere, sparely furnished but sunny rooms and large gardens for meditating, pain relievers, and a benignly neglectful medical staff.

There is always more than ample and elegant housing for deserving people with the proper connections, however, and luxury foodstuffs appear on fine porcelain dishes of even the most sharply rationed planet. The nobility have the cash and connections to acquire any household item they desire, with noble families able to retain house physicians among their many other attendants. If one were to point this out to an ordinary Draconian citizen, he would simply shrug and say that the upper classes serve the Emperor more closely and have responsibility to the lower classes as well. They will have more sensual pleasures, as they have more pain in their souls. This way of regarding the sufferings of the upper classes has become a basic tenet of Kurita society.

DELIGHT TO THE EYE

Presentation of food as a delight to the eye is difficult, but of utmost importance, when serving prepared food rations. Always remove food from the container in which it was purchased and transfer it to plates. If the food is plentiful, arrange on an individual plate for each diner. If the food must be stretched thin, arrange on one central platter for all to view the wholeness of it before dividing. Separate foods by color and texture. If all food is one texture and no other food can be procured, arrange in fanciful shapes, such as animals and birds (see illustration of kelp sea-eagle). Add other objects to the serving dish for visual variety. Possibilities include leaves or flowers, beads or smooth stones, and candles. Watch to be sure that no one tries to eat the decorations.

—From *Cooking for the Family*, by Mimosa Kaji, Kurita People's Press, 3025

MILITARY ENDS

The Kurita economy is geared to the improvement of Kurita life and to the grandeur of the Draconis Combine. At present, that means concentrating on military and war production. Forty years ago, under Treasury Minister Tadaki Nagai, all businesses were designated as either Direct Service (Military) or Indirect Service (Civilian).

The Military designation affords a business government protection from both physical threats and economic difficulties. A Military firm, however, is almost entirely controlled by the armed forces, with a military hierarchy paralleling and able to overrule the regular Board of Directors. Each military board may oversee several companies. Civilian businesses maintain more separate control over their own affairs. Most civilian businesses still deal with the military in some way, and all civilian firms operate under the direct supervision of at least one military officer. The amount of supervision will depend on what percentage of the business directly affects the military.

In a Military firm, production schedules and even entire product lines may change suddenly and abruptly to reflect the needs of the war effort. Should a civilian company be in disagreement with the military about production plans, the firm may simply find itself unable to obtain raw materials to manufacture the goods the military does not want produced.

CONSERVATION AND WASTE

With natural resources generally in short supply, conservation has become an important part of Combine life. The conservation ethic combines with respect for the work needed to produce anything of value. To waste any substance is an affront to nature and an act of disloyalty toward the Draconis Combine.

Conservation of Resources Bureau auditors come around as often as possible, about every six months, to check that corporations are not wasting resources. The COR Bureau matches industries that use wastes as their raw materials, so that one industry will receive another's usable waste products, while sending theirs to a third. Private citizens will occasionally find a COR agent or a Neighborly Patrol member going through the trash to make sure it has been properly sorted into organic, cloth, plastic, glass, paper, metal, and so on.

THE CORPORATE STRUCTURE

The Kurita economy is based on a policy of Controlled Scarcity, with the government's Committee of Resource Management in control of the distribution of all resources, goods, and services. Noble families usually own the Combine's industries, but essential services, such as electric power generation, are run as governmental monopolies.

Memorandum

To: Count Hiro Swenson, Chairman of the Board, Golden Eagle Tire and Rubber
From: Colonel Oliver Noruki, Military Oversight Committee 34

The Decision of the Military Oversight Committee has been reviewed by the Military Procurement Authority. Within 30 days, the operations of Golden Eagle Tire and Rubber will merge with Dover Vehicular Fittings, at the site of Dover's current settlement. Workers moving with the Golden Eagle should be prepared for relocation in 15 days. Workers being transplanted will be notified of their new assignments in 30 days, and should be ready five days after that.

Officers of the corporation have already been notified of their status in the new workplace. Those who have not received such notice should consider a career change. General Yorito Hoitsu will be available to counsel those uncertain of their future course.

I note the reactions of Barons Ikoma and Clay and of Count Marshall. Ikoma and Marshall were deemed correct in their shame at demotion, and provision has been made for their families. The weakling Baron Clay reacted hysterically, and so the state's charity is all that is left for his family.

I hope you enjoy retirement on your farm. May the closeness of nature bring joy to your silver years.

Although the Kurita economy is government-run, it is by no means a communist economy. It can be best described as controlled-market capitalism. New businesses can start up only with the permission of the government, and must be run under close government supervision. The corporations are not owned by the government, however, and have their own directors and may issue stock if they wish. There is a tolerance of small operations on most worlds, such as the independent farmer's markets. If they become too successful, they are usually closed down or absorbed by a large firm.

Ownership of a corporation is equivalent to landholding in terms of noble prestige and power. Indeed, Kurita corporations operate in much the same way as did feudal fiefdoms. Workers become "attached" to the company that employs their parents, and the only way to leave the employ is to join the military, or be exchanged to another corporation ("given a new opportunity to grow in transplant soil"). If fired, a worker will probably never find employment with another corporation, and either becomes an "Unproductive" or joins the military to spend the rest of his short life among the lowest infantry grunts. The government often sends Unproductives to work in the worst, most grueling positions of state-run industries. The only other option is starvation. In some instances, depending on the circumstances of firing, starvation is the honorable choice, and the disgraced worker is allowed a proper funeral for "having seen his life to its natural conclusion." In other instances, starvation is simply a way to avoid the fate of becoming an Unproductive, which disgraces the worker's family and former employer (implying he did not train the worker in proper execution of duty). The entire family may never work again (certainly not for that firm).

Loyal workers live their entire lives around the corporation. They are born in corporate hospitals, attend corporate schools, live in corporate houses, buy from corporate stores, and are frequently cremated and entombed in company mausoleums. Most workers wear uniforms indicating the company for which they work and the position they hold. Workers purchase these uniforms, along with nearly everything else they need, from the company store, an emporium that graciously allows credit against the next paycheck for its high-priced goods. At age 30, many workers find themselves still paying for their first pair of shoes.

Agricultural Planets

Agricultural planets have more primitive conditions than do industrial areas. They often compensate by offering more room and, sometimes better food, to their residents. Noble families own the majority of arable land, which is tilled by serfs in the feudal scheme prevalent in the Successor States. This is usually a plantation-style arrangement in which peasants receive a salary for their work, but must buy their food at whatever prices the landholder wishes to charge.

Middle-class farmers hold a small percentage of the land, growing enough to feed their families and still sell a surplus at the markets. Peasants going to the markets spend their ration coupons on whatever fresh produce, or even meat or fish, they can afford. The marketing farmers cash in the coupons at a government office, for whatever percentage of the face value the officials decide to pay. Middle-class farmers and small landholders exist on many industrial worlds, providing fresh food and a semblance of self-sufficiency.

IMPORTANT CORPORATIONS

Name: Matabushi Incorporated
Home Office Location: Corant City, Albiero
President/CEO: Duke Ishi Tahiro
Principal Divisions
Division Name: Matabushi National Service
Division Head: Marquis Tonomahi Tahiro
Chief Products: Defense computers and tracking equipment
Division Name: Matabushi Computing Equipment
Division Head: Marquis Norimoto Tahiro
Chief Products: Computers and advanced electronics
Division Name: Matabushi Artificial Workforce
Division Head: Marquis Yasu Hanagata
Chief Products: Robotics
Division Name: Matabushi Finance
Division Head: Marquis Nagate Tahiro
Chief Products: Banking and investment
Division Name: Matabushi Trade
Division Head: Marquis Tanji Koetsu
Chief Products: Shipping and trading

Business Summary:

Matabushi's position proves the adage that "the giant grows unchecked." It has survived wars and economic crises in its position as the most prosperous and technologically advanced company in Kurita space. It now has the government seal of approval, allowing it first bid on any contracts and also giving it first civilian access to any new technology captured.

The Matabushi National Service division is the closest to being a defense contractor that any civilian Combine corporation can get. In addition to producing guidance and tracking sensor systems, it manufactures other computerized equipment that might have applications in civilian transportation in most ad-

vanced societies. In the Draconis Combine, however, any equipment is subject to military requisition. Only a token minimum goes for civilian use.

The same is true for Matabushi's computer and robotic divisions. In these firms, more equipment is available for civilian use, as most of the products are for the benefit of other corporations serving the Combine.

Matabushi Finance is the only sizable private finance firm in the Kurita sphere. Most banks are government-run. One of Matabushi's major functions is to change House Bills liberated from other Successor States into useful currency, usually C-Bills.

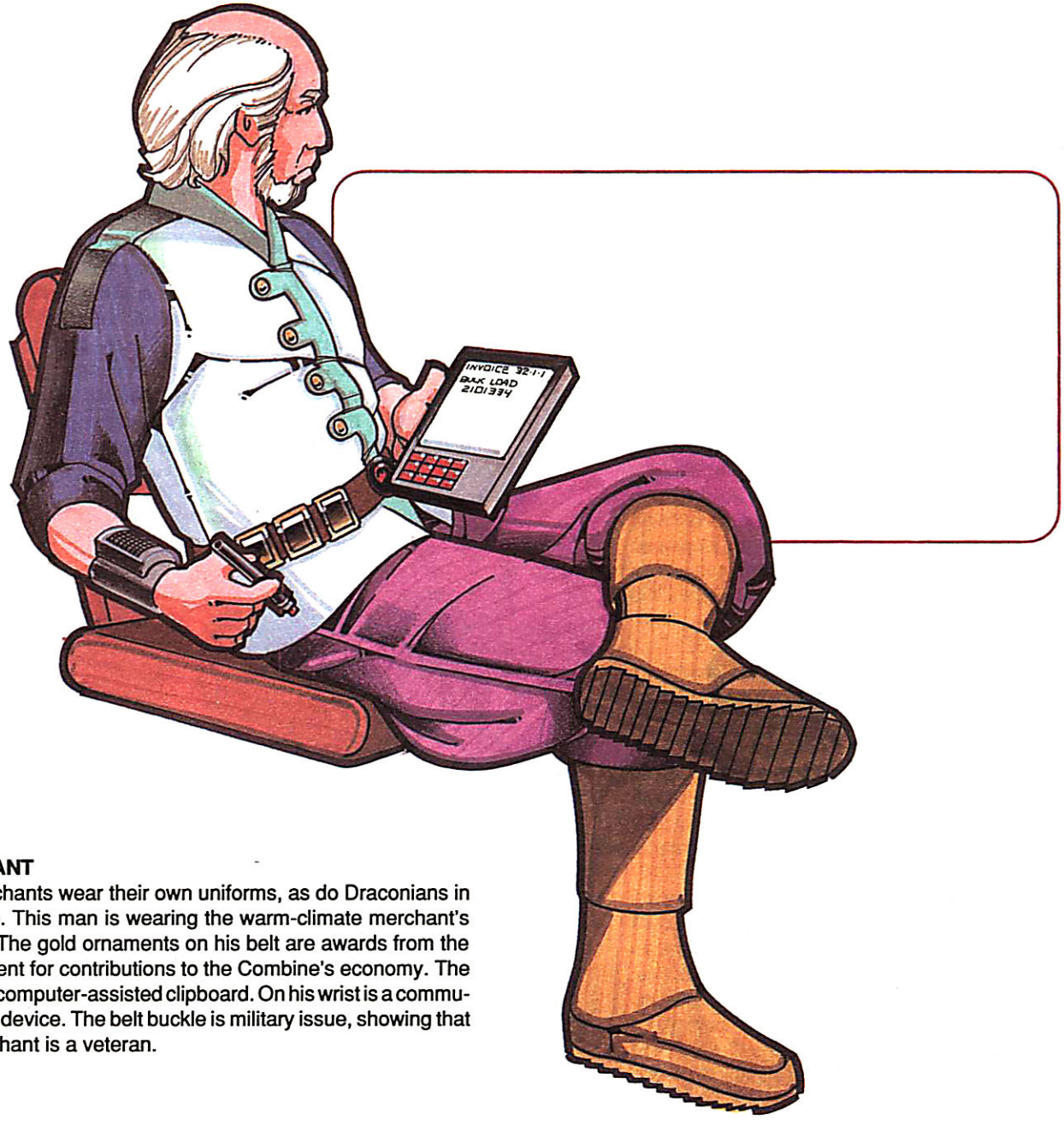
Matabushi Trade grew as a sideline to Matabushi Finance, as a way to launder money throughout settled space. Most of its dealings are with the Bandit Kings in the shadowy world of the Periphery, but the division has also operated in every Successor State.

Name: Metals of the Earth
Home Office Location: Jassen, Nox
President/CEO: Marquis Unno Kitabake

Business Summary:

Metals of the Earth dates back to the Star League era, when it was a medium-sized mining firm. It now also manufactures mining equipment, chemicals and synthetics, including myomers.

Metals of the Earth has always been closely tied to the Kurita family. One of the original founding partners was a Kurita, and there has always been at least one Kurita on the Board of Directors. It is no surprise that Metals of the Earth gets the majority of valuable government contracts.



MERCHANT

Merchants wear their own uniforms, as do Draconians in every job. This man is wearing the warm-climate merchant's uniform. The gold ornaments on his belt are awards from the government for contributions to the Combine's economy. The slate is a computer-assisted clipboard. On his wrist is a communications device. The belt buckle is military issue, showing that this merchant is a veteran.

Name: Tanadi Computers
Home Office Location: Masamori, Hachiman
President/CEO: Marquis Gonsai Somo

Business Summary:

Tanadi produces computers for office, government, and home use. It also designs and installs communications systems. As Tanadi installs equipment for sensitive government operations, security clearances and the loyalty of its employees is even more important than usual. Ask Geoff Lubin, who lost his job for being curious about what went on in a forbidden section of the plant.

Name: Peoples' Protection
Home Office Location: East Wexler, Hanover
President/CEO: Count Kano Mauser

Business Summary:

Given the fearful atmosphere that permeates even the highest strata of Kurita society, a company producing security systems and personal weapons should be prosperous. There are scores of such firms, the most successful being People's Protection. People's manufactures alarm systems, secure storage safes and rooms, surveillance equipment, surveillance equipment detectors, and a host of other security products for civilian use. People's also produces small personal weapons, mostly bladed weapons, slug-throwing guns, and laser pistols.

People's sells only to the civilian population, but their research and development department freely shares ideas with the military.

Name: Amau Electronics
Home Office Location: Silvaton, Trondheim
President/CEO: Marquis Yasumoto Amau

Business Summary:

Amau makes electronics for consumer use, with products ranging from microwave ovens and music chip players to home automatic hair stylers and holo displays. Kurita consumer products have long been known for their low quality because most first-class materials are routed to the military rather than for frivolous consumer vanities. Nevertheless, there is currently a vogue on Kurita planets to acquire electronic "toys," a vogue probably fed by recent exposure to Davion and Steiner goods on occupied worlds. At the moment, this buying frenzy is beneficial to the economy. If that trend should reverse for any reason, the government is expected to denounce decadent, foreign-influenced luxuries.

Name: Interstellar Harvesters
Home Office Location: Xano, Cusset
President/CEO: Marquis Emi Kira

Business Summary:

Though Interstellar Harvesters began as an agricultural equipment company, it now also produces heavy equipment for other industries such as mining, metalworking, and construction. Over-diversification and some mismanagement ran the company into financial trouble in recent years, but a bloodless coup in the executive offices eliminated much of the problem. Anyone calling and asking for Yosi Hikosura, the former company president, is told to try the Naga Monastery, to which Hikosura abruptly retreated.

Name: Yoshimatsu Chemicals
Home Office Location: Siang, Biham
President/CEO: Marquis David Yoshimatsu

Business Summary:

The largest chemical concern in Kurita space, Yoshimatsu has long been known for the rigorous safety procedures it follows when working with chemicals and as a generous employer. In a freak accident of two years back, a worker fell into a vat of polymers. Since then, there have been endless rumors that his ghost now stalks the corridors of the plant. The rumor has now grown even more elaborate, with the ghost sightings reported in a half-dozen different plants on as many worlds. Although workers cannot leave their jobs over such a baseless fear, employee morale is low in most plants and trouble may be brewing.

Name: New Samarkand Metals
Home Office Location: Garden, New Samarkand
President/CEO: Marquis Charles Sadafuji

Business Summary:

"If it's metal, its Samarkand" is the motto of this fast-growing concern. When planetary losses and transportation difficulties threatened the supply of ores for steel-making, Samarkand moved ahead with research on alternate metals. Though their Tempered Samarkite alloy is a little more difficult to work with than steel, it has proven to be equally strong. The actual formula for Samarkite is guarded as closely as the Coordinator.

Name: Long Life Company
Home Office Location: Bonanza, Altair
President/CEO: Viscount Sanzo "Uncle San" Oguri

Business Summary:

The Long Life Company began 200 years ago, at which time its founders sold herbal medicines and patent nostrums. It now produces sophisticated chemical medications and hospital equipment, but still derives a good profit from its *Tree of Life*, *Hands of a Loving Mother*, and *Secret of a Bull's Virility* tonics.

Name: Surinami Processing
Home Office Location: Surinami, Ko
President/CEO: Marquis Senzo Goito
Principal Divisions
Division Name: Surinami Foods
Division Head: Maxwell Plunkett
Chief Products: Consumer packaged foods
Division Name: Happy Life Meals
Division Head: Werner Nakogawa
Chief Products: Institutional catering

Business Summary:
Surinami Foods produces processed foods ranging from freeze-compressed Survival Rations to the Tinned Splendors specialty gourmet line. The bulk of their business is the Home Helper line of canned and boxed food, especially prepared to feed a lot of people from the small cooking space of an average Kurita home. Interestingly, the Stomach's Joy product is not rationed on most planets. Its recipe is a closely guarded secret, but those who survive the wretched taste and texture report that eating a lot of Stomach's Joy does, indeed, produce a feeling of well-being, an almost floating sensation.

Happy Life Meals provides food for institutions Corporate cafeterias, schools, hospitals, and Feeding Stations are among its customers, with the quality of the food provided declining respectively.

Name: Styx Mining
Home Office Location: Memphis, Styx
President/CEO: Viscount Robert Monahan

Business Summary:
Styx Mining exists these days to serve as a foil for the powerful Metals of the Earth Company. Whenever Metals of the Earth has drawn an unseemly number of government contracts, a few go to Styx. The firm also picks up the slack when Metals of the Earth is so overextended that it has no additional equipment available. Needless to say, there is a heavy air of fatalism in the Styx boardrooms, and the company is not known for innovation, except in paper JumpShip design.

Name: Galileo Instruments
Home Office Location: Camden, New Oslo
President/CEO: Count Mark Diashai

Business Summary:
Galileo Instruments began as a manufacturer of control equipment for spacecraft, but diversified into sophisticated electronic systems for a variety of applications. Former CEO Phillip Diashai had a minor falling-out with the military procurement board about the time the government was splitting into military and civilian divisions. Diashai chose to give up the guidance systems section of the firm in order to remain civilian. The company has overcome the financial setback of losing 60 percent of its line, and now excels at producing electronic equipment and an innovative line of agricultural electronics, most notably the Automatic Self-Harvesting Hydroponic Farm.

Name: Sparkling Spirits, Incorporated
Home Office Location: Kooya, Huan
President/CEO: Count Kahei Tsuki

Business Summary:
Sparkling Spirits dates back over 200 years to the lucrative water purifying business. If it had not been for the Tsuki family's influence at Court, this all-important corporation would have been nationalized long ago. There are currently new rumors that the Interior Minister wishes to dissolve Sparkling Spirits, but it may be just another of the periodic efforts at making the Tsuki family grovel even more before the Coordinator.

Name: Pomme De Terre Foods
Home Office Location: Billings City, Pomme de Terre
President/CEO: Marquis Buji Takika

Business Summary:
Pomme De Terre's food products are simpler and sometimes tastier than Surinami's, possibly the result of the corporation's location on the most productive Kurita agricultural planet. Among Pomme De Terre's products are canned fruits and vegetables in almost recognizable forms. Their food is not as widely distributed as Surinami's and is more expensive, but is very popular where ever available. Pomme de Terre has recently begun a chain of fast food stands that has taken off like a firecracker.

Name: Spreading The Glories Incorporated
Home Office Location: Cho, Minakuchi
President/CEO: Count Harutomo De Sorrentelli

Business Summary:
Spreading The Glories is an arts and entertainment production and distribution firm. It mostly churns out war movies and morally instructive romances for consumption by the masses. Taking its cue from holos and films imported from other States, Spreading The Glories has lately begun producing horror films and musicals. Its greatest hit this year is *The Attack of the Polymer-Coated Man*, a horror holo. The musicals combine pageants and sentimental paeans to loyalty, honor, family love, and collectivism. Spreading The Glories has exported some works, leading to the Marik joke that you can't tell the firm's musicals from their horror films.

Name: Pesht Motors
Home Office Location: Vrydolyak, Pesht
President/CEO: Marquis Fuyoshi Nose

Business Summary:
Pesht Motors produces trains, tractors, buses, and autocars. It also runs the mass transit system on most worlds, even building and providing streetcars to be drawn by beasts on planets that cannot afford any other vehicles.

Name: Isesaki Shipping
Home Office Location: Ukonsoi, Isesaki
President/CEO: Viscount Harold Machida

Business Summary:
Isesaki Shipping dates back over 500 years. Though the firm has undergone changes and restructuring many times, Isesaki has always held a royal patent to trade anywhere in the Successor States. The history of the Successor States has sometimes made it almost impossible for the company to carry out that shipping, but Isesaki agents have a way of always finding someone who will deal, even in the midst of war.

Name: Ivory Trade of the Order of the Five Pillars
Home Office Location: Luthien
President/CEO: Constance Kurita
Business Summary:
This is not a corporation per se, but a quasi-governmental monopoly. When Sanyu Kurita was Keeper of the House Honor, she took over the ivory trade to finance her work as Keeper. The Order of the Five Pillars was originally formed as a security force for this trade. Although the Order has expanded beyond its role of protecting the ivory trade, this trade remains vital to the workings of the Keeper's office.

TRADE

the dog and rat bring gold
from the house of your enemies
if you fill their dish
—From *Haiku of the People,* compiled by Josh Wells, Dragon Speaks Pamphlets Press, Hachiman, 2909

INTRACOMBINE TRADE

In the Draconis Combine, production and distribution of materials and goods is still highly specialized on specific worlds. Too few worlds are totally self-sufficient, which means much effort must go into transporting materials around the Combine. There have been some improvements. The majority of industries reliant on one raw material are on planets producing that material, for example. Production is still slow in most places, however.

Any Draconian citizen who can afford to buy consumer goods usually prefers imports over the fairly shoddy Combine versions. Working-class people are encouraged to keep possessions to a minimum, not only because of high prices and small living spaces, but through a cultural ethic that disapproves of accumulating luxury items. (Luxury items would be defined as anything not necessary to maintaining life in one's proper station.) Workers who attempt to acquire excess goods are considered in unseemly imitation of nobles. Nobles, on the other hand, are encouraged to accumulate and display fine objects as a reflection of their status and the glory of the Combine.

Middle-class people and military families are right now in the midst of a craze for acquiring semi-practical objects such as electronic gadgets and products for personal adornment. This began as a taste for imported toys and luxuries, but now "buying Kurita" is stressed. This buying mania is officially tolerated for now, because it stimulates the economy. If the stimulated economy eventually goes into a dizzy inflationary spiral, the bottom will fall out of the consumer goods market. All those surplus processors will no doubt then be melted down to make ammunition.

INTERSTELLAR TRADE

Kurita consumer goods are not of a high enough caliber to market around the galaxy, but the government-connected merchants of the Draconis Combine have no qualms about trading in materials and goods sorely needed, even by the military, if they need ready cash. For example, if the Capellan Confederation has some plastisteel available for purchase, Combine traders will sell, say, 'Mech armor to the Free Worlds League in order to get the C-Bills for the plastisteel, without considering the long-term need for 'Mech armor. Part of the reason for such careless planning is that a percentage of such a sale will go to the broker.

Kurita's recent treaty with Houses Liao and Marik has opened trade among these three houses, giving such trade official sanction and bestowing "Most Favored Nation" status on one another. The pity of it is how little each world has to offer the others.

The Draconis Combine trades with the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns on an unofficial basis. This trade is always conducted by civilian firms, with no appearance of government involvement. Traders from these worlds who want to maintain their lucrative accounts with the Draconis Combine soon learn the elaborate etiquette surrounding business in the Kurita empire. One of the prime directives of this etiquette is not to reveal one's close ties to one's government, and not to indicate knowledge of the other parties.

DOING BUSINESS

Kurita businessmen will never begin to discuss business right away. Instead, they will converse about the seasons, the stars, the wonders of botany, all the while waiting for the other man to break down and mention business first. To do so is a sign of weakness and sign of impatience to a Draconian.

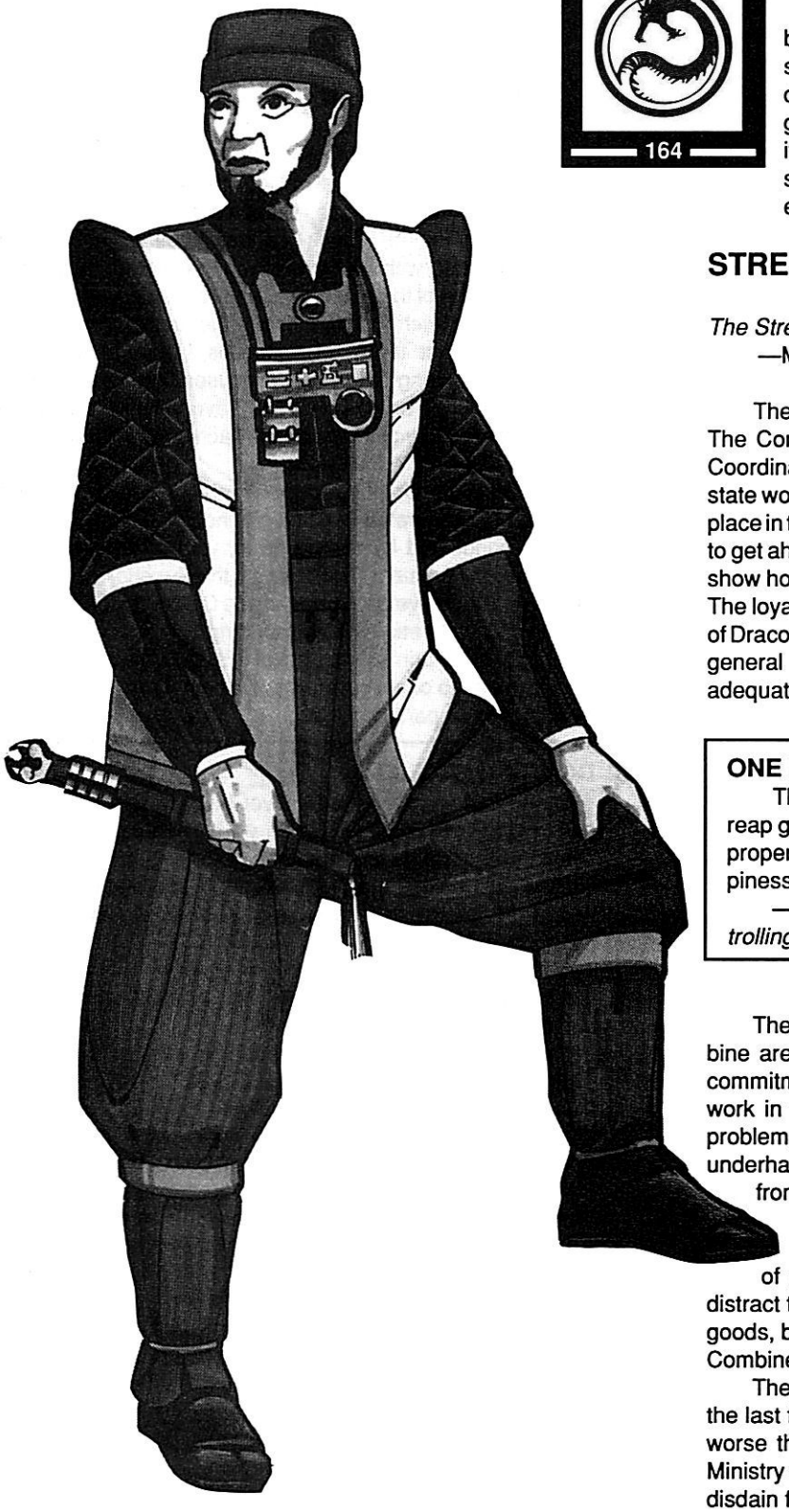
Draconian businessmen do not conduct business over the telephone or by mail. They wish to always look their business associates in the eye.

—From *Business with the Dragon: Hints for the Lyran Trader,* by Seth McDonald, Commonwealth Press, 3011

The Draconis Combine imports both useful and frivolous items from Steiner and Davion. Food is the most common import, both to feed the populations of crowded planets and to satisfy the cravings of the pampered nobles. Among the other useful items brought in are building materials such as plastisteel and moldable concrete and high-tech industrial items. The amount of plastisteel imported indicates how severely limited are production facilities for that material in the Combine. The high-tech items are probably studied by Kurita engineers hoping to keep pace with technological developments elsewhere. Most industrial items are used as intended, as Kurita production cannot keep up with demand.

Frivolous items imported include goods such as toys, small appliances, and electronic entertainment items. Antique weapons, collected by parties in every state, are an especially popular import in the Draconis Combine.

Houses Davion and Steiner do not import much from their Kurita neighbor. Most Kurita goods are not of high enough quality to interest buyers from these states, and their governments frown on letting too much of their money go into the Combine's coffers. These states do, however, wish to maintain a semblance of two-way trade in order to keep the Kuritans interested in buying their goods. Kurita liquors and wines are the most popular export, with some market also existing in both the Steiner and Davion realms for illicit and semi-legal narcotics.



MINOR OFFICIAL

The uniform of the official tells everything about his office, almost down to the desk at which he sits. The uniform color indicates his ministry; the baton, his bureau; the chest plate, his department, and the badges hanging from the plate reveal the exact assignment of the bureaucrat. This official works for the Ministry of the Treasury, Bureau of Worker Protection (occupational safety), Department of Claims and Compensation, Office of Ongoing Care for the Pesht District.

The Combine and the Periphery states trade freely, because the outworlds are a perfect market for Kurita to sell untested, unacceptable, or outmoded products. Indeed, House Kurita provides the Periphery worlds with goods that no one else will sell them. The number one item is weapons, even if outmoded. Kurita merchants also sell items such as chemicals, computers, and even the ever-popular small appliances within the Periphery.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The Strength of the Dragon is its people.
—Malcom Ford

The greatest strength of the Draconis Combine is its people. The Combine's citizens are devoted to their society and their Coordinator in a deep, unquestioning way that any other head of state would envy. All Combine citizens also have a sense of their place in the grand scheme of life. Rather than spending time trying to get ahead by raising their social status, Kurita workers strive to show honor by finding the best way to do any job they are given. The loyalty and production levels of Draconis workers, like those of Draconis soldiers, are amazing to residents of other States. The general population also accepts a standard of living that is adequate, though rarely more than that.

ONE MIND, ONE PURPOSE

Through working together, we shall sow and we shall reap great benefits for the Draconis Combine. We must use proper behavior with all persons, at all times, to achieve happiness for all.

—From *How to be Successful at Business While Controlling Effort*, by Robert Morse, Dragon Printers, 2999

The ultimate economic weaknesses of the Draconis Combine are its lack of resources and the policy of wholehearted commitment to the military, to the detriment of new production and work in the private sector. The nobility are also sometimes a problem, with their cautiousness holding up progress and their underhanded backstabbing and court intrigues distracting them from necessary work. The middle class, military, and nobles, all of whom are exposed to influences from outside the Combine, may also be susceptible to a dangerous form of materialism. Trade in luxuries sometimes threatens to distract traders from their clever negotiations for necessary raw goods, because they can so easily move the luxury items in the Combine.

There has been an upturn in the Combine's inflation rate in the last few years, and the balance of trade with other states is worse than usual. Reforms such as a sweeping purge of the Ministry of the Treasury, new austerity measures, and a renewed disdain for the trappings of wealth are imminent.

Great leaders tell the tale best
Study carefully
For their strengths point to the rest
—Choda, *Wisdom For The Moment*

Name: Takashi Kurita
Title: Duke of Luthien, Unifier of Worlds
Position: Coordinator of the Draconis Combine
Birthplace: Eto, Kagoshima
Age: 55
Sex: Male

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Takashi Kurita is a handsome, well-built, and wiry man. His close-cropped hair is still black across the top, but otherwise it has gone completely white. The white patch that defines his widow's peak gives him a particularly striking appearance. Though his features are strongly Oriental, his eyes are steel blue. The only signs of age on his strong-jawed face are the slight crows' feet around the eyes and the scars across his left cheek, chin, and jaw.

Brief History:

Since his father Hohiro's death at the hand of a Kurita household guard 21 years ago, Takashi Kurita has ruled the Combine. Takashi was born on August 18, 2970 at the home of his paternal aunt Florimel on the planet Kagoshima. As his mother had been quite ill throughout her pregnancy, she had gone to the home of her sister-in-law for complete bedrest and medical care. Despite this, the birth was slightly premature and his mother nearly died. The infant was hardy, however, and soon began to gain weight and improve in health. (This strong constitution has served Takashi well, for as the heir to his father's realm and a military man himself, he constantly draws on his native strength and endurance.) Two years later, his brother Miyamoto was born.

Although Kurita society, particularly at the highest levels, is severe in its standards of conduct and duty, children are given almost free reign in their formative years. This is particularly true for male children. Takashi and Miyamoto enjoyed the carefree lives of privileged male children until age four, when they entered school. The two brothers were more like twins, with the younger Miyamoto idolizing his elder sibling.

After primary school, Takashi entered Sun Zhang Military Academy on New Samarkand. It is the largest 'Mech academy in the Inner Sphere, and provides the Kurita line with its palace guards and elite MechWarriors. Here the young cadet went through six years of standard MechWarrior training, a mentally and physically grueling indoctrination into the samurai tradition. Takashi was an apt student, but received neither special treatment nor dispensation because of his status as heir to the Kurita throne. To the contrary, his instructors were even more severe with him, at his father's request.

It was at primary school on New Samarkand that Takashi met the young Subhash Indrahar, future head of the Kurita secret police. The two became friends in boyhood, especially enjoying *kendo* fencing matches in their spare time.

At age 16, Takashi graduated with honors, to his father's great satisfaction. Because of his outstanding performance, the Proctor of the school chose Takashi to be among the select few who would attend the Wisdom of the Dragon school. These elite cadets would one day be top officers in the well-trained Kurita military. It is as a graduate of the Wisdom of the Dragon school that Takashi today wears his *Katana* and *Wakizashi* swords on all formal or ceremonial occasions.

After completing Wisdom of the Dragon School at age 20, the young Lieutenant Takashi was given command of a lance and sent to the border world of Marlow's Rift, where he saw his first action against Davion forces. In the next seven years, Takashi distinguished himself in numerous actions on important border worlds such as Marduk, Harrow's Sun, and Mallory's World. As a result, he was promoted to Captain in 2995, and to Major in command of a battalion in 2997, a result of his brilliant leadership in the invasion of Deshler. Though he was young for a battalion commander, the fact that Takashi was heir to the throne as well as a promising young officer led to his quick rise through the ranks.

Soon after, his father recalled Takashi from the front. As Heir-Designate, it was time for him to take over his hereditary position as Commander of the Household Guard at the palace on Luthien. The shrewd Hohiro also wanted his son to begin to learn the political maneuvering he would one day need to navigate the complicated intrigue of both court life and interstellar politics, and to begin to make his own network of allies and friends among the powerful. Here at court, Takashi and Subhash Indrahar renewed their boyhood friendship. At that time, Subhash was an aide to the Director of the ISF, in charge of coordinating the ISF's efforts with the Household Guard. The two resumed their childhood pastime of *kendo* swordsmanship, at which they were both highly skilled and evenly matched. It was also in this year that Takashi's only son was born.

Takashi had wed his third cousin Jasmine shortly after graduation from the Wisdom of the Dragon School, but she had been unable to bring a pregnancy to completion until the doctors ordered her to a complete bedrest in peaceful surroundings. This ironic repetition of Takashi's own history resulted in the birth of his only child, a son whom they named Theodore. Jasmine was never able to conceive again.

In 3002, his younger brother Miyamoto died in battle, a most honorable death for a son of the Kurita dynasty. Though of course his grief remains private, Takashi has never recovered from the loss of his beloved brother, the one person with whom he could always be himself. Two years later, his father Hohiro was assassinated. Because Takashi commanded Hohiro Kurita's Household Guard at the time of the assassination, he was at first suspected of complicity. Fortunately, the actual murderer was killed by his own comrades shortly after committing the deed. If that were not enough to prove his innocence, Takashi ordered a brutal purge during the first 18 months of his rule to silence any last accusing voices.

Takashi Kurita has been an effective and forceful leader. Through judicious use of the ISF, and as a direct result of his complete and utter distrust of everyone, the Kurita warlord has suppressed or thwarted nine attempts on his life and two abortive coups by members of his family. Not only has he suppressed opposition to his rule, Takashi Kurita has hunted down and thoroughly crushed it.

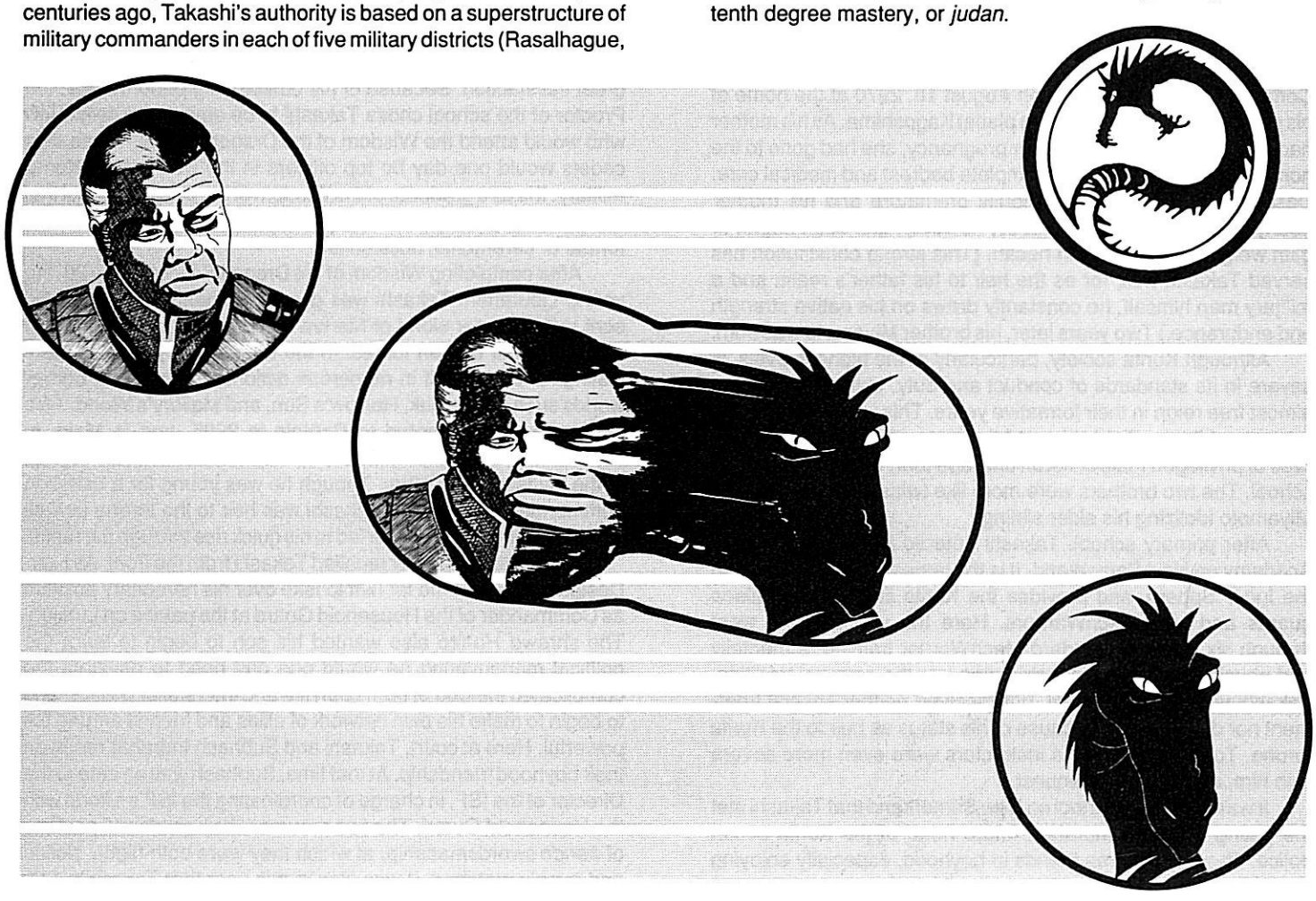
Following the tradition established by Jinjiro Kurita nearly two centuries ago, Takashi's authority is based on a superstructure of military commanders in each of five military districts (Rasalhague, Pesht, Galedon, Dieron, and Benjamin), rather than on a system of planetary nobility. The governments of individual planets have no real power outside their worlds, and have gradually yielded considerable authority to the military rear echelon, often in exchange for their lives. Lord Kurita is extremely effective in playing his commanders against one another. Further, should any commander begin to win too great respect or popularity, Kurita will often summarily replace the individual. Though this tactic may have curtailed Kurita gains, especially against an ever more potent and clever Davion opponent, it has also kept Kurita commanders from stepping out of line or combining against their master.

Manner:

As would be expected from his superb military training and his position, Takashi Kurita is a man of few words but swift action. He will suffer fools neither in his personal nor his political retinue, and maintains his attitude of severity even with his wife and other family members. He is also known for intransigence and self-confidence to the point of arrogance. Though not a tall man, his presence is so imposing, the aura of power around him so intimidating, that even the mightiest noble trembles when he must come before Takashi.

Special Skills/Powers:

Takashi Kurita possesses both the military skill and ruthless cunning needed to rule his vast realm with an iron will and a firm hand. He is a master at *kendo*, the art of fencing, having achieved tenth degree mastery, or *judan*.



Name: Jasmine Kurita
Title: Flower of the Realm
Position: Consort of the Coordinator
Birthplace: New Samarkand
Age: 50
Sex: Female

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

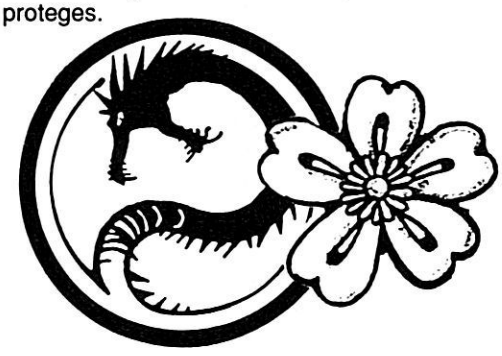
Jasmine Kurita, wife of the Coordinator, is one of the loveliest women at Court. Her features are pure Oriental, though her skin is darker than the classic Kurita ideal of feminine beauty allows. She is small-boned and delicate, and she often wears long, flowing silk gowns hand-painted with the flowers of her name.

Brief History:

The daughter of the head noble family on the important planet of New Samarkand, Jasmine Kurita met her future husband Takashi when she was 13. Takashi, the Heir-Designate and a student at Wisdom of the Dragon, had come to her native world as part of an inspection tour of the planetary garrison. That evening, Jasmine's father, Duke Marco Isu, provided the traditional banquet and ceremonial entertainments in honor of his prince. It was a high honor for his young daughter to perform with her five sisters in a traditional Japanese dance for the Coordinator-to-be. They were all studying with one of the masters of the form at that time, but Jasmine was clearly the most gifted and inspired in her performance. Takashi knew that he must have a wife, for it was his duty to sire a male child, and this young girl seemed to him the perfect embodiment of traditional womanhood because of her high birth, beauty, and almost pure Japanese features. He spoke to Duke Marco the very next day, and the marriage took place years later, though the betrothed couple never met again until the day of the wedding.

Though it was difficult for her to conceive a child, Jasmine was overjoyed when she finally was able to bring a son to term. She would never be able to carry a child again, and so she devoted herself to the precocious little boy, lavishing attention and affection on him until the day he was taken from her to attend the Sun Zhang Academy on New Samarkand. Jasmine had imbued the boy with her own love of the classical arts, and he developed a special taste for literature.

Jasmine Kurita and her husband have virtually no personal relationship, but he treats her with the respect due to the mother of his heir and the official consort of his realm. She is the leader of the social life of the Palace, and shares her husband's and son's friendship with Indrahar, who often talks with her about their mutual interest in the arts. With her son far from the Court these days, she has become an unofficial patron of the arts on Luthien. Though it is a dreary world for the most part, she has created a beautiful theater within the walls of Unity Palace, and sponsors many performances by masters of the National Treasures school and their proteges.



Jasmine accepts her life and her role, having been brought up with the expectation that she would marry for her father's political or economic benefit. Indeed, she knows she has brought great honor to her family by being the wife of the Coordinator, and she does not question or bemoan her lonely fate.

Manner:

Jasmine walks with the delicate grace of one trained in the arts of Japanese womanhood as well as its classic dance forms. Her aristocratic upbringing gave her the regal bearing and training to dominate the females in any gathering because of her rank, yet not to stand out in an unseemly fashion when men are present. She has a natural calm and kindness that strengthened her son and tempered the more brutal traits of his Kurita blood.

Special Skills/Powers:

Jasmine Kurita was skilled in the art of *budo*, classic Japanese dance, though she no longer performs, of course. She is sensitive to all the arts, and has a good eye for budding artists who may one day show genius. She patronizes their work, filling Unity Palace with treasures and special command performances.

Name: Theodore Kurita
Title: Prince of Luthien
Position: Heir-Designate
Birthplace: Imperial City, Luthien
Age: 28
Sex: Male

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

With his slender good looks, Theodore Kurita resembles his mother more than his father. Where Takashi is muscular and stocky, Theodore is tall and lanky. His deep-set eyes peer from a rather narrow face, and he wears his coarse black hair in a longer, freer style.

Brief History:

Brave, arrogant, proud, and crafty, Theodore Kurita is the archtypical Kurita clanmember. Unlike his father Takashi, he has had no opportunity to command the Household Guard. In fact, he has stayed (or been kept) away from Court, ostensibly to be "groomed" by military life. In reality, the devious Takashi wishes to prevent his talented and ambitious son from becoming part of the intrigues of the Court. Theodore has many friends and allies on New Samarkand, Rasalhague, and other major worlds in the Combine, which keeps him even more under his father's close scrutiny.

The only son of the ruler of the Draconis Combine, Theodore Kurita was born on July 1, 2997, in the same year his father was recalled to Unity Palace on Luthien to command the Household Guard. His mother was slow in recuperating from the complications of his birth, but she had so yearned for a child that her only son became Jasmine's deepest joy and reason for living. Though it was not traditional for a royal woman to keep her baby's pallet near hers during the first year of the child's life, Jasmine did so, just as the wife of any miller or professor might do. She indulged him constantly and to the extreme, knowing that soon enough he would assume the burdens of discipline, duty, and the many obligations of *on*, or honor. The stern Takashi never showed special warmth to the child, though of course he was proud to have finally sired a son and heir.

At age 6, Theodore began his schooling with private palace tutors, physical trainers, and religious masters. His father wanted a MechWarrior for a son and spared no expense preparing the boy to shine when it came time for him to enter the Sun Zhang Academy. As it turned out, the young Heir-Designate was one of the most outstanding warriors in both his Sun Zhang and Wisdom of the Dragon graduating classes.

It was while he was stationed on New Samarkand that Theodore was inducted into the Sons of the Dragon and established a special friendship with Subhash Indrahar. Whenever Subhash visited New Samarkand, he and young Theodore went to the dojo for *kendo* matches. Seeing the young man's bravery, intelligence, and ambition. Subhash privately began to instruct him in the powers of *ki.*

Theodore Kurita has served in a number of regular units since leaving Wisdom of the Dragon School, both in the field and as a staff officer (most recently to General Cherenkoff in the Dieron Military District). At present, he commands the motley Legion of Vega. The Legion is the brainchild of Takashi Kurita himself. It is an amalgamation of loosely organized, poorly led, and poorly equipped 'Mech lances drawn from Bandit Kingdoms, other Houses, and mercenary regiment fragments from across the Inner Sphere. As it is the scrapheap of House Kurita military, attempts to use it in a real offensive generally end in disaster.

Theodore resents this assignment deeply, and feels it prevents him from fulfilling his duty-to-one's-name, or *giri.* No less paranoid than his forebears, the younger Kurita has shown a remarkable talent for military science, the like of which has not been seen since Minoru or even Shiro Kurita. Nevertheless, his father's mistrust has kept Theodore from having any major influence, though some have attributed the successes along the Lyran front to advice he provided while serving on the District Commander's staff.

Manner:

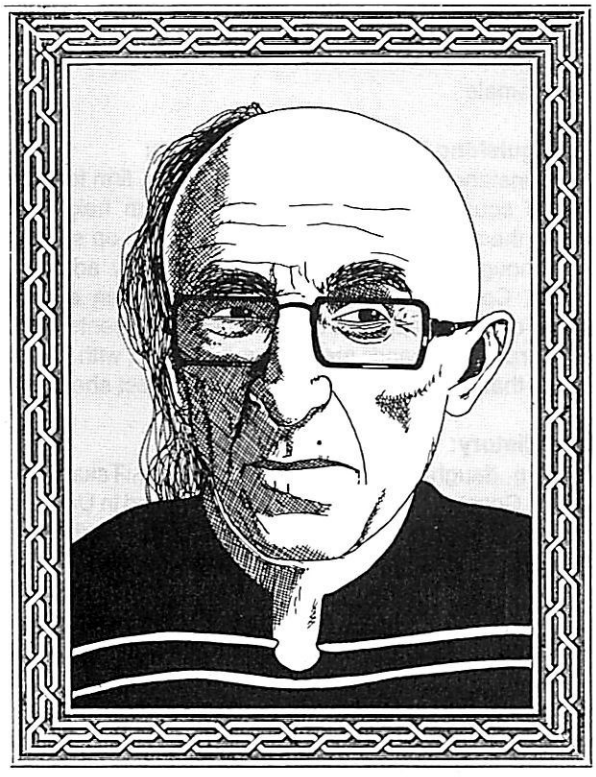
Theodore Kurita is as proud, even arrogant, as any of his forebears, but his demeanor gives the impression of seriousness, rather than ferocity. Though he is a man of few words, when he does speak, it is with eloquence learned from his familiarity with the great literary classics. He conceals his craftiness beneath a veneer of flawless manners and extreme courtesy at all times, even among his comrades in the military.

Special Skills/Powers:

Throughout his MechWarrior and officer training and while stationed in the Dieron Military District, Theodore Kurita has shown his tactical brilliance on the maneuvering board, but has had few occasions to show his talent under fire.

As a boy, he was betrothed to the younger daughter of a noble family, but when her father was discovered in a plot to assassinate Takashi, the whole family was executed. Takashi's father was leery of another such contract and Jasmine was more than happy to keep her only son closest to herself. Since then, Theodore has not sought a wife, but physical elegance and exquisite courtesy have made him a favorite among the females of all ages at his father's court on Luthien. He has a beautiful speaking voice and an eloquent way of turning a phrase, which many attribute to his love for the ancient classics of Japanese literature.

Name: Subhash Indrahar
Title: Director of the Draconis Combine Internal Security Forces
Birthplace: Fujima, Kagoshima
Age: 57
Sex: Male



Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Middle-aged, barrel-chested, and broad-shouldered, Indrahar affects archaic spectacles through which he typically squints. He is half-bald, but with the heavy black brows and prominent cheekbones of his Indian ancestry.

Brief History:

Subhash was born to a lawyer's family on the planet Kagoshima. As the youngest of five children, he became the apple of his mother's eye. His father, too, doted on the precociously intelligent boy. Realizing that his son might aspire to a brilliant future, the older Indrahar tutored Subhash constantly as the time of the crucial First School examinations approached. As with all the other children of the Combine, the results of these exams would determine Subhash's fate.

It was in First School that Subhash Indrahar and Takashi Kurita, heir to the throne, first met. They enjoyed each other's cleverness and stimulated one another competitively even at this young age. When the examinations were through, Subhash had scored brilliantly in academics but seemed to show little aptitude for military skills. This was as his father hoped. Despite the honor of fighting for the realm, Indrahar the elder understood that his son's brilliance could lead to even greater power than would piloting a 'Mech, and thus give him the opportunity for greater service.

The ISF has its own scouts in the Ministry of Indoctrination to identify potential candidates for training in the secret police. Subhash was immediately identified as one of these, and so was sent to New Samarkand for his training at the Internal Security College. In addition to their academic subjects, these students receive special instruction in mental control. At 16, he was selected for additional training at the ISF's secret institute for advanced students on New Samarkand. Here he learned classified methods of espionage and mental and physical persuasion.

Subhash distinguished himself as an agent, particularly in the Proserpina affair and during the infiltration of the Rasalhague Self-Determination Party in order to discredit Martin Sorenson, one of the most determined of Rasalhague's dissident leaders. What finally brought him to his post as an aide to the Director of the ISF in Luthien was his work in uncovering a plot against the life of Coordinator Hohiro Kurita.

It was Takashi Kurita who eventually appointed Subhash to his current post as Director. After the ninth unsuccessful attempt on his life, Takashi decided it was time for the ISF Directorship to change hands. Since then, the Coordinator has been well satisfied with his choice.

The pressures of their work have kept Takashi and Subhash from spending time together socially, except at formal functions. This, coupled with the tensions and suspicions between powerful people, has caused relations between Takashi and Subhash to become cooler than previously, although they are still cordial.

The power he wields as Director of the secret police makes Indrahar one of the most feared men in the Combine. At the Kurita court, however, he projects the image of a connoisseur of fine art and music, an epicure of dance and opera, and a student of great literature. Indrahar's smooth facade keeps others from scrutinizing him too closely. In reality, he is more treacherous (and perhaps more dangerous) than Takashi Kurita himself. Those who cross him usually discover this too late.

Indrahar is also something of a mystic. In recent years, he has created an inner circle of fanatical agents and spies personally loyal to him and known as "Sons of the Dragon." The existence of this extremely secret society is unknown even to Indrahar's longtime friend, Takashi Kurita.

Manner:

Subhash Indrahar's outward manner is affable and pleasant, and he takes a friendly interest in talking with anyone he happens to encounter in his life or work. This pleasant demeanor hides the ruthlessness and cunning that have brought him to his present position and that continue to be essential for his work. It is to his great credit that the Director of the Secret Police has been nicknamed "the Smiling One" for his gregariousness.

Special Skills/Powers:

In addition to his high intelligence and extensive knowledge on a wide range of subjects, including the arts, Indrahar is as skilled at *kendo* as his friend Takashi. He, too, has reached the tenth level. What no one knows is that he has actually also developed his *ki* power even beyond the tenth degree. His mastery is so great that he can manipulate others to his will by influencing their *ki* energy with his own.

Name: Constance Kurita
Title: Keeper of the Family Honor
Birthplace: Imperial City, Luthien
Age: 35
Sex: Female

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Constance Kurita has the same strong, firm features of her second cousin, Takashi Kurita. Of medium height, she also shares the stocky, muscular build that shows up so often in her line. Though she lacks the feminine delicacy admired by her culture, Constance does have beautiful green eyes that are almost catlike in appearance, and her movements also show a feline grace. Her hands are also beautiful, too, with long, tapering fingers that lend an air of beauty to any object she handles.

Brief History:

The daughter of Marcus Kurita, and Takashi's second cousin, Constance Kurita was born and raised in Unity Palace on Luthien. Though not eligible for university studies (being female), she performed so well on her secondary school exams that her father was able to persuade the finest lawyer in Luthien to train the girl to think like a lawyer. After several years, she became Chief Aide to her great-aunt Florimel, then Keeper of the Family Honor.

When Florimel stepped down last year at age 82, she recommended Constance as her successor. The Coordinator was pleased to appoint her, believing that he could mold her to his own will if necessary. Florimel had been entrenched in the position so long that Takashi had felt his hands were tied whenever he had wanted to revise the Codes to suit his own ends.

Marcus had served his daughter well, however, by seeing that she gained familiarity with legal ways. Florimel was an even better mentor, for she knew that the Keeper's duty to the realm was a sacred one. It is no easy task administering the sizeable bureaucracy that has grown up around the Dictum Honorium since its inception in 2333.

Constance inherited a difficult situation, but so far she has handled herself with courage and finesse. Though the Keeper of the Family Honor is a position of authority and respect, the Keeper has to juggle the demands of the current Coordinator and the Order of the Five Pillars, the society of monks assigned to serve the Code.

Like Takashi Kurita, the Abbot of the Five Pillars believed that he would be able to seize even more power for his Order when the venerable and shrewd Florimel stepped down. Constance, however, has her own plans. Knowing that she must neither alienate nor submit to the Abbot, she has so far won his support by negotiating some concessions that give the Order greater power and prestige on certain key planets, but that do not surrender any power essential to the Keeper. Indeed, these concessions are in her own interest, for the monks make circuits throughout the realm to oversee the administration of the Code. Almost like the Jesuits of ancient Terra, they serve as an alternate spy network because their reach is so deep and wide.

Constance is secretly in conflict with the Coordinator over his treatment of Theodore, which she considers dishonorable behavior between father and son. Florimel always had a special feeling for Theodore because he was born in her summer home and because she never had a son of her own. Constance has always idolized the courageous young heir, too. She would like to revise the Code to place greater emphasis on a father's duty to his offspring so that Theodore could take his rightful place at Court. If Takashi learns of this, he will have to find subtle ways to persuade her to his own point of view. He cannot summarily replace the Keeper or confront her openly. Over the centuries, the Keepers have managed to create reverence for their task of preserving the "soul of Kurita"—its honor.

Manner:

Constance has the cool, uninflected speech of the abstract thinker as well as the perfect composure that a trained legal mind often bestows. She is wary as a cat, but never jumpy. Rather, she always waits with infinite patience and calm for those around her to move first. Like a shrewd samurai, she gains the advantage of knowing their intentions without anyone guessing hers.

Special Skills/Powers:

Constance has committed the whole six-volume set of the Dictum Honorium to memory. Though she was not privileged to become a lawyer, she has a lawyer's ability to take an official document and make it serve her own purposes. She is also a skilled negotiator, probably because of the unruffled composure she has learned through periodic meditation retreats into the high mountain temples of Luthien.

Name: Vasily Cherenkoff
Title: Warlord, Knight of the Dragon
Position: Commander of the Dieron Military District
Birthplace: Aldinga, Dieron
Age: 45
Sex: Male

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Vasily Cherenkoff has the strong, fair-haired good looks of his Slavic ancestors, with a hale and hearty air. Taller and much heavier than most of the people around him, he is a physically imposing specimen. His weight is due to his enormous capacity for food and drink. Despite his bulk, he maintains physical fitness through practice of the martial art of *judo*.

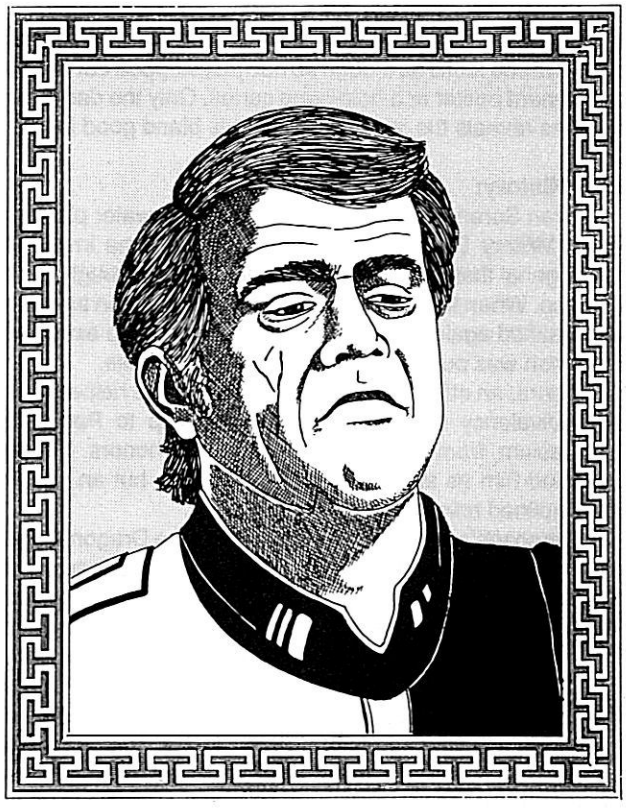
Brief History:

Though his rise to power has been meteoric, Vasily Cherenkoff is a competent but not particularly innovative military man. He accepts Takashi's leadership as a matter of duty, which is the main reason he was selected for his current job. Like most of the military hierarchy in the Draconis Combine, Cherenkoff learned early that trying to make a name for himself could be hazardous to his health, and so has tended to limit his initiatives to rote maneuvers and strict adherence to regulations. For Kurita's part, he has found it easy to manipulate and control the vain, rotund General. Because Cherenkoff has virtually no friends, the Coordinator also believes he can dispose of the man easily when he has outlived his usefulness.

Cherenkoff comes from a family that has produced a long line of outstanding generals. This, along with his being a distant relation of the Kurita clan, explains how a competent but not particularly brilliant officer could rise to such heights. From the Sun Zhang Military Academy, he was first assigned to a rear unit on a backwater planet far from the current hotspots. When Vasily became dissatisfied with the post, his family used its influence to get him promoted as a Lieutenant attached to a combat unit in the Rasalhague District along the Steiner border.

It would have been difficult for him to rise much higher in that post because the Sorensons of Rasalhague were prejudiced against Vasily's Kurita connections, however distant they were. Once again, his family pulled some strings. His proctor at the Sun Zhang Academy had not considered Vasily worthy of assignment to officer training at the Wisdom of the Dragon school. Now, however, his family got him an appointment there. After graduation, he was sent to the Dieron Military District, where he became Captain of a company in the 12th Dieron Regulars. At this time, Vasily began to take frequent leaves to attend social functions in Luthien, which is how he finally met Takashi Kurita.

The shrewd Kurita realized that this young officer could be invaluable one day because of his dutiful, malleable attitude. Takashi bided his time even after his father's death, pulling a few strings of his own to get Vasily promoted to Major, then Colonel, and finally to General. With the patience of a samurai, he waited for Cherenkoff finally to achieve a military victory significant enough to merit his appointment as Warlord. Takashi had to wait a long time. Five years ago, Cherenkoff finally came through at Marlik.



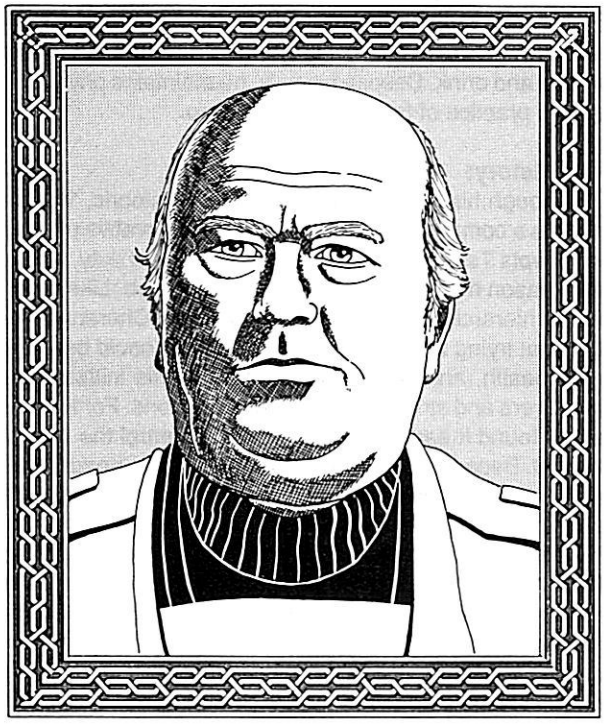
Manner:

Vasily Cherenkoff is a vain, arrogant man whose abrasive personality wins him few friends. His only pleasure seems to be food and drink, but he rarely breaks bread or shares a cup with companions unless forced to it by duty or obligation.

Special Skills/Powers:

Aside from his seventh-degree level (*schichidan*) in *judo*, Vasily's only other special talent is his prodigious ability to consume vast amounts of alcohol without visibly showing intoxication.

Name: Ivan Sorenson
Title: Warlord, Recipient of the Order of the Dragon
Position: Commander of the Rasalhague Military District
Birthplace: Pepperville, Echo
Age: 52
Sex: Male



Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Warlord Ivan Sorenson is so tall that he has difficulty squeezing into the cockpit of his *Atlas* BattleMech. With his blond hair and blue eyes, he looks as though he had just stepped out of a Steiner recruitment poster or a holo-soap series. Only the dark glower in his eyes reveals the menace behind his bland good looks.

Brief History:

Ivan Sorenson grew up on a small backwater planet in the Pesht Military District. When young, he became involved in a crime gang that terrorized his home region through theft and violence. When the authorities moved in, Sorenson turned traitor and testified against his friends. His cohorts were executed and Sorenson was put to hard labor on a DCMS base.

There, an officer befriended Sorenson and helped him pass an equivalency test and win a scholarship to Pesht District Gymnasium, from which he graduated with honors. ISF reports classified him as an excellent MechWarrior, but an unruly and undisciplined officer.

Sorenson's early career in the Arm of the Dragon taught him that irritating his commanding officers was dangerous to his health. They would respond by assigning Sorenson to lead BattleMech charges. He thus learned to control his anger and to follow orders after being wounded in one of those charges.

Sorenson was given officer's training when an ISF MechWarrior discovered his tactical skills. Most of his career as an officer has been spent commanding units on the Periphery border, where he has displayed a good ability to marshal his units over a wide area. During that time, he met the soon-to-be Coordinator Takashi Kurita, who was impressed with Sorenson's willingness to fulfill orders to the utmost of his abilities.

Later, Coordinator Takashi relieved his cousin Marcus Kurita as Warlord of Rasalhague because Marcus had become too popular. Takashi put Sorenson in his cousin's place. Sorenson's European good looks would endear him to the district's population, yet his loyalty to Takashi was unquestioned. He would not hesitate to follow Takashi's orders to stamp out any hint of rebellion in the district. While Sorenson has quelled rebellion in the area, his military skills have not been up to the recent challenges from the Commonwealth.

Warlord Sorenson is not much good at planning, for his skills tend toward defense. This inability has resulted in recent Commonwealth gains in the district.

Manner:

Warlord Sorenson is an abrupt man with little interest in other people's opinions. When in the company of Japanese-descended officers, Sorenson does tone down his bluster, but still manages to rile the other officers. Only Takashi earns Sorenson's respect.

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Grieg Samsonov
Title: Warlord, Recipient of the Order of the Dragon
Position: Commander of the Galedon Military District
Birthplace: New Bergen, Tinaca
Age: 55
Sex: Male

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Warlord Grieg Samsonov is a tall, gray-haired man who manages to look dashing despite his wrinkles and sagging jowls.

Brief History:

Samsonov has always been an astute judge of what other people might be able to do for him. As a youngster on Tinaca, he managed to discover the ISF agent in his local school. He then used the *metsuke,* without the agent's knowledge, to get promoted himself as a potential MechWarrior. By using the ISF agent, he managed to enter schools far beyond the class of his poor parents.

Graduation from the Wisdom of the Dragon gave Samsonov the chance to enter the wide world of Kurita military politics. His ability to lead troops is fair, at best, but his administrative skills are phenomenal. This ability to deal with the military bureaucracy has kept his units almost always fully supplied, which has earned him many enemies among his colleagues. Fellow-officers tend to view Samsonov as a oily boot-licker.

Grieg Samsonov's abilities have brought him many victories. When he was a commander of the 19th Galedon Regulars, his unit fought House Davion up and down the border in places like Elidere, McGehee, Errai, and Kesai IV. Though his unit did not always win, it usually did better than any other DCMS regiment in the area.

In 3018, Takashi Kurita asked Samsonov to command the Galedon Military District, and Samsonov felt he had accomplished all that he ever wanted. He now has political clout, wealth, and prestige.

His present self-satisfaction is also Warlord Samsonov's problem. He has turned his penchant for intrigue to petty schemes such as blackmailing companies within his district. Samsonov's actions on Galtor III, which caused Warlord Yoriyoshi to disgrace himself, have come under scrutiny by the DCMS. Warlord Samsonov allowed lowly mercenaries to load up ahead of Yoriyoshi's troops, a major breach of common sense, let alone military etiquette. Rumors have it that the Coordinator himself has been contemplating a suitable punishment. Judging by the Lord Kurita's past actions, it is likely that Warlord Samsonov will be at the head of some desperate invasion attempt in the near future.

Manner:

Warlord Samsonov's manner is very slick, a product of his long year's experience at political games in the Luthien arena. On the battlefield, he is more abrupt, but even in the heat of battle, his snake-like demeanor shows up at times.

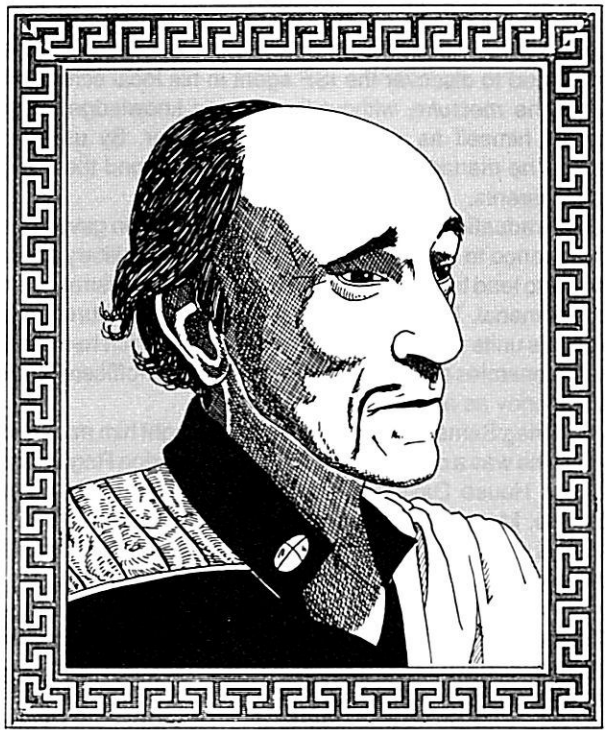
Special Skills/Powers

Warlord Samsonov has what warriors call the "sixth sense," an unnatural ability to anticipate approaching danger. This is one reason he has been able to get away with so much without being caught. He also has a natural aptitude for interrogation, which he uses on most everyone.

Name: Hirushi Shotugama
Title: Warlord, Recipient of the Bushido Blade
Position: Commander of the Benjamin Military District
Birthplace: Valley of Third Perceptions, Vanern
Age: 44
Sex: Male

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Warlord Hirushi Shotugama is a short man, whose slim build and quiet manner sometimes make it difficult for people to take him seriously. The nasty scar that runs down his left cheek (a result of ejecting from a burning *Panther* BattleMech) belies his quiet appearance. A slight limp betrays his replaced lower leg, another "souvenir" of that incident. Shotugama was raised in the practice of the martial arts, and favors the styles of combat practiced by the monks of ancient China.



Brief History:

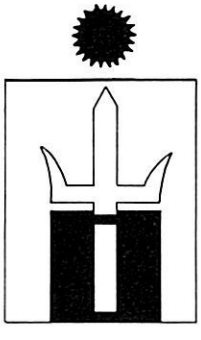
Hirushi Shotugama is the youngest and most inexperienced of the five Warlords, having held the post for only two months. He acquired the position when Warlord Yoriyoshi disgraced himself during the Galtor III debacle. As a result of this disgrace, Hirushi Shotugama must win back some measure of respect for his District's military forces.

Hirushi was born and raised in a Buddhist nunnery. His mother was a noble woman who became pregnant by a man not of her class, which is a major disgrace. Following the rules of the nunnery, the mother renounced her claim on the child and became one of the nuns, treating the infant with no more interest or care than did the other nuns. As a result, Hirushi was raised by 30 nuns. Though he later learned that one was his mother, he never knew which.

Hirushi's early interest in *go* and other strategy games foreshadowed his vocation. The sympathetic commander of a local garrison unit gave the boy a proper education. Hirushi went on to graduate with honors from the University of Proserpina and was immediately enrolled in the Wisdom of the Dragon.

After leaving college, Hirushi was assigned to units along the Periphery before being transferred to the Benjamin Military District. He quickly rose in rank by displaying an almost uncanny ability to guess an opponent's next move. Before becoming Warlord, he was commander of the 9th Benjamin Regulars and participated in the recapture of Cylene II. He was awarded the Bushido Blade for his accomplishment there. On Cylene, he met Warlord Cherenkoff, and the two took an immediate dislike to each other.

As Warlord of the Benjamin Military District, Hirushi Shotugama realizes that he is the unknown quantity on the Davion front. The Coordinator, his fellow Warlords, and the Federated Suns are all watching to see how he handles himself during his first major military action.



Manner:

Warlord Shotugama's upbringing in a nunnery has given him a silent demeanor. Though unfailingly polite and straightforward when offering an opinion, he always gives the impression of holding something back, as though passing judgment.

Special Skills/Powers:

Shotugama is an excellent player of strategic games such as chess, *go*, *shogi*, and Dragon Armies. He is also adept at the use of the *jitte*, the three-pronged knife that is the symbol of the ISF. While he seldom carries his sword, he does constantly carry two *jitte*. On two separate occasions, Shotugama captured assassin's blades in the prongs of his *jitte*, breaking their blades with a quick twist of the wrist.

Title: Mies Kurita
Position: Rasalhague District Governor
Birthplace: Rasalhague
Age: 50
Sex: Male

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Mies Kurita's appearance displays his Nordic/Japanese heritage. He is tall and thin, with aristocratic features, blue eyes, and straight black hair tinged with grey. Mies has a direct, almost staring gaze that he uses to disconcerting effect.

Brief Personal History:

A distant branch of the Kurita family has been in charge of the Rasalhague District for a century in order to maintain a close tie between the Coordinator and this troublesome area. This Kurita family has intermarried with the local Scandinavian population to further cement its ties with the people.

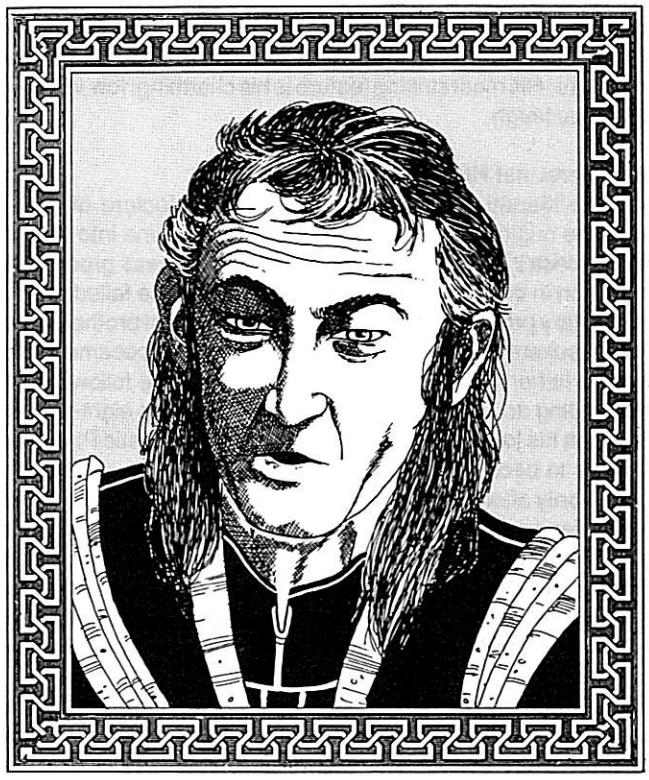
Mies is a product of this mixed heritage. Though he had been studious as a youth and never good at military games, he had to attend the Rasalhague Military Academy as training for his future position. His fighting abilities did not shine, but he had a friendly way with his fellow students, getting along well with just about everyone. There was no honor in defeating the weak young fighter, and so his classmates worked with him instead to improve his skills to passable levels. Mies was also adept at flattering his teachers and becoming their pet project.

While serving his term as a junior officer, Mies distinguished himself only by his rare, valuable talent at getting anything he wanted from Procurement. He explained this talent as simply a matter of knowing how to talk to them, which earned him the nickname "the man with the soul of an accountant." Mies did not consider this an insult.

When his father, Malcom Kurita, died, Mies returned from his assignment on a distant military outpost, and assumed the duties of the political leader of Rasalhague. These duties consist mostly of convincing the Coordinator that everything in the Rasalhague district is under control and that there is no sign of rebellion. Otherwise, the job is described by Mies as "wearing grey and keeping one's mouth shut."

It is also the duty of the Rasalhague District Governor to see that there truly is no sign of rebellion, but that job is usually passed on to the District Military Commander. Mies has nothing in common with Ivan Sorenson, who holds that post and who is disliked by many. Mies has developed his own working relationship with the man, however, simply by treating him well. Mies can override any order of Ivan's that contradicts his own wished by applying a little tactful diplomacy. Indeed, it has become part of Mies's job to smooth over problems Ivan creates.

Mies is skilled at getting what he wants for the district by playing off Takashi's fear of rebellion in the area. His best tactic is to warn that "the people are going to be *really* unhappy with (or without) this project." Takashi would rather not have to deal with rebellious Rasalhagians if he can simply buy some peace.



Personality:
Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Mies has no greater ambition than to serve the Coordinator well and to die a natural death at an advanced age. He would also like to see Rasalhague shine as the preeminent district in Kurita space. Mies is proud of his district, and vaguely sympathetic toward its political separatists, but he thinks Rasalhague is better off surviving under Kurita than starting a bloody battle for independence. Mies's reading of history has taught him that no order lasts, and sooner or later the Kurita empire will crumble. He has no stake in such an occurrence, however, wanting only to live out his life as peacefully and uneventfully as possible.

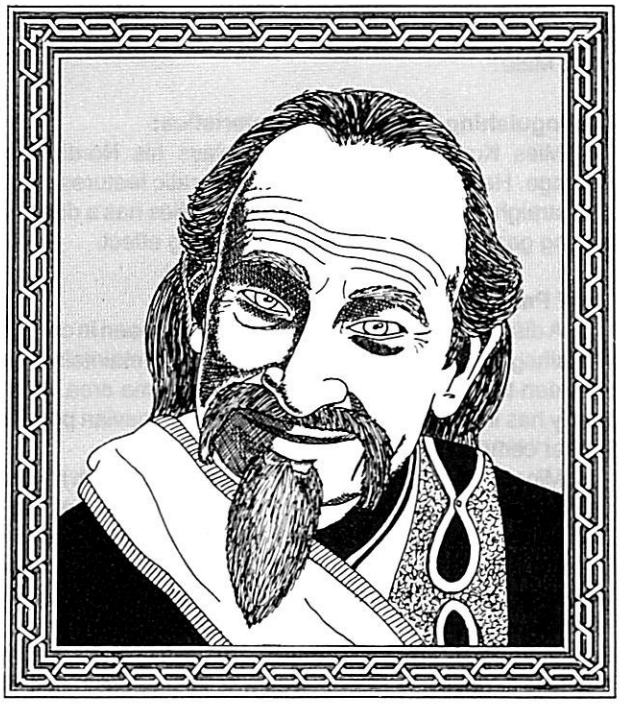
Manner:

When dealing with people in an official capacity, Mies is soft-spoken but direct. He is good at assuming a friendly interest in someone whose power he needs, or will need. In private, Mies is reserved but warm. He is a devoted family man, though still somewhat reserved. Mies's eldest son, Knute, is the scrappy fighter his father is not. Mies would like to retire, but wants Knute to learn some quieter arts of persuasion first.

Special Skills/Powers:

Mies's most visible talent is the ability to communicate with people whom others consider to be impossible—and to get what he wants from them.

Name: Hogo Manati
Title: Duke of Albiero
Position: Prefect of Albiero, Pesht
Birthplace: Buena Villa, Albiero
Age: 45
Sex: Male



Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Hogo Manati is a small, dark man who is always neatly dressed and precisely groomed. His soft-spoken sincerity and open, disingenuous manner would be a rarity in any government anywhere. His most striking feature is his charming, low voice and infectious laugh.

Brief Personal History:

The Manati family have headed the prefecture of Albiero since the original division of the Draconis Combine into Districts and Prefects. The third son of his family, Hogo was groomed for a position in the government bureaucracy after he failed to show any military promise. Unfortunately, Hogo's oldest brother, Bakin, died of leukemia at age 20. The next brother, Ted, became Prefect on their father's death in 3007. Ted was killed the following year in a boating accident, leaving no children. Twenty-eight-year-old Hogo left his job as auditor in the Bureau of Domestic Plants and Animals to become Prefect of Albiero.

Shortly after assuming office, Hogo went to the Royal Palace on Luthien for the Coordinator's birthday celebration. Though he lacked proper instruction in court protocol, his self-effacing manner and willingness to seek advice won over most of the staid nobles, who would ordinarily have shunned Manati for his minor gaffes. Even the Coordinator noticed the pleasant young man, and granted him a rare private audience.

Manati has divided his time between Luthien and Albiero since then, enjoying a privileged position in Court that is unknown for a mere prefect. Albiero, a smaller interior district of mostly agricultural worlds, needs little direct administration, and is better served by the prefect's presence in court. Manati has managed to swing several projects and grants to his area, including the highly sought-after breeding program for Pitney Pigs, a new hybrid farm animal.

Meanwhile, Manati has acquired status as friend and confidante to many high members of the court. Few nobles are accustomed to talking with someone who seems to have no ulterior motives and a genuine interest in them as people. When directly questioned about conversations he has had, Manati answers, "I really don't remember." No one has ever learned that Manati has betrayed a confidence.

The only political concern in Albiero is Brocchi's Cluster. This group of 40 tightly grouped stars has never been fully explored and documented. Nobody knows what habitable planets are in the Cluster or if they are totally uninhabited. Countless persons have disappeared into the cluster, including many who were fleeing various governments, armies, creditors, families, and so on. Manati has been playing down the need to explore Brocchi's Cluster because, he says, he does not want the bureaucratic nightmare if more planets are found. With manpower and equipment so limited, the Kurita government has not pushed the research project, but many court observers are puzzled by Manati's desire to halt the project.

Manati has a wife and children on Albiero, but the whole family seem to cope well with the extended separations. Hogo hopes to keep his sons away from court as much as possible, so that they will be unspoiled when the time comes to succeed their father.

Manner:

Hogo Manati is charming and witty, but self-effacing. He sometimes affects the manner of "just a country farmer," a pose not so far from the truth. He is smart, but not cunning. Manati is just being himself when his is open and friendly, but he is not the gregarious fool that some assume. He realizes his position is as precarious as anyone's at court—maybe more so, considering his relative unimportance. He is not close to Theodore Kurita, and so will probably disappear from court when Takashi dies.

Special Skills/Powers:

The ability to function in the court, to win the economic development projects for a district that no one really values, and to remain friendly with many different people who detest each other is remarkable and uncommon. In Hogo Manati's case, they spring from his temperament, birth, and circumstances, so that his greatest power is in simply being himself.

Name: Marquis Unno Kitabake
Position: President, Metals of the Earth
Birthplace: Windward, Kilmarnock
Age: 57
Sex: Male

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Unno Kitabake has an open, friendly face that appears much younger than his 57 years. More scientist than businessman, he sometimes has the distracted look of a professor who has tousled his thick shock of hair while in deep thought. He is a tall man who looks ill at ease in the cape and billowing trousers of his nobleman's garb. Though he makes every effort to live up to the immaculate appearance that his position and his culture hold dear, Unno generally looks rumpled, as though just awakened from a quick nap.

Brief History:

Unno Kitabake is a president of the second-largest corporation in the Draconis Combine. Several years ago, he received his title and appointment when his successor was discovered to be involved in a treasonous scandal.

Unno was the eldest son of a mineworker's family on the unexceptional farming world of Kilmarnock. Though Kuritan society is stratified and rigid, some individuals are able to rise in position because the Combine will not waste their superior talents. Powerful family influence definitely helps the children of the military or the nobility, but the Combine's system of education also recognizes and rewards excellence. Through his aptitude for the sciences, Kitabake managed to achieve the coveted title of *Hakasi,* or Doctor, in the metallurgical sciences.

Throughout his school years, Unno had been an incorrigible inventor. When he eventually began his professional career in the mining industry, he contributed to the development of new uses for some common metals, more efficient operating practices, and the invention of an ingenious ventilation device that encouraged greater productivity from the miners.

Unno was the senior Vice President of New Samarkand Metals, where he had played a key role in the development of Tempered Samarkite alloy, when the scandal broke at Metals of the Earth. Very few people ever learned the whole story, of course, but the ISF had detected then President Duke Rollo Rourke in a grandiose scheme to amass a fortune large enough to get him out of the Combine and into the Periphery, where he hoped to found his own dynasty.

Because Metals of the Earth has operations on a number of planets, its 'Mech security force is quite large. Duke Rourke had been skimming profits as well as using his military to intimidate the populations of the worlds where his mines operated. His plan was devious yet simple. By using his might to tyrannize the citizens of those planets, he intended to foment a series of uprisings that would divert attention from his theft of resources and material while he made a quick exit via hyperspace. Before he could complete the final stages of his plan, Subhash Indrahar presented Takashi Kurita with irrefutable documentation of Rourke's treachery. The man was immediately executed and Kitabake put in his place.

Kitabake is often touted by the government as a fine example of the heights to which even a worker's or farmer's son might aspire. His autobiography, *The Upward Way*, was made into a mass-broadcast holovision mini-series.

Manner:

Because of his working-class background, Kitabake will probably never be able to play properly the role of proud nobleman, proving the popular Court adage that aristocrats are born not made. Though essentially a friendly, likeable man, he is often so lost in deep thought or study that he may not even see persons who pass him in the halls or on the street. Some have interpreted this tendency to inner absorption as the snobbery of an upstart.

Special Skills/Powers:

The inventiveness of Unno's mind has been responsible for his rise in status. His ability to put his technical knowledge to innovative, even unexpected uses has resulted in several important developments in the field of mining operations.

Name: Kester Hsiun Chi
Title: Warlord
Position: Commander of the Pesht Military District
Birthplace: Gilhooly's Bar, Midway
Age: 57
Sex: Male

Distinguishing Physical Characteristics:

Warlord Hsiun Chi has Chinese features and a stocky build. His left arm is artificial, the result of a PPC hit on his 'Mech during the Third Battle of Glenmora.

Brief History:

Warlord Kester Hsiun Chi was born to a minor noble family on the water-rich world of Midway. As a young man, he dreamed of becoming a captain of one of his father's many fishing trawlers. A chance meeting with an ISF agent who became interested in the young man eventually led to Hsiun Chi to receiving training at the Sun Tzu School of Combat and then at the Wisdom of the Dragon.

When he completed his education, Hsiun Chi entered the elite 5th Sword of Light. Near the end of Coordinator Hohiro's reign, Hsiun Chi had a serious confrontation with his superiors. When told to walk into an obvious ambush, then Major Chi flatly refused. Though he could have been executed for insubordination, he was only publicly whipped, left in the sun for a week, and demoted back to MechWarrior.

When Takashi came to power, he remembered reading reports about Chi's demotion. Takashi re-labled the action "a prudent preservation of the Dragon's resources." He offered Hsiun Chi, who had worked himself back up to the rank of Major, a promotion and the position of aide to Warlord Cherenkoff of the Dieron District. Presumably, Takashi thought Chi would be eternally grateful, and would prove a deeply loyal subject.

After a few years' service, Chi became Cherenkoff's most trusted advisor, and helped shape his strategy. Many later said that what little creative flair existed in Cherenkoff's plans was probably Hsiun Chi's work.

In 3014, Warlord Simpson Mitsumasa, commander of the Pesht Military District, died of cancer. Coordinator Takashi immediately offered the post to Hsiun Chi, who had no alternative but to accept. The new Warlord was secretly upset by his appointment. Hsiun Chi had been hoping that Cherenkoff would get the Pesht district command, leaving Chi control of the Dieron Military District. Chi felt he could bring new fire and strength to the district, and he was certain he could succeed where Warlord Cherenkoff was failing.

As commander of the Pesht, Warlord Hsiun Chi has little to do except plan the occasional military action along the Periphery. The boredom is killing him, and he is seriously contemplating retiring early to go back to his homeworld to fish.

Recently, *Otomo* Commander, General Marcus Kurita, has contacted Hsiun Chi, seeking to "merge forces to agitate for assignment to posts better suited to our abilities." Warlord Hsiun Chi can smell the rebellion in the message, but has not yet replied.

Manner:

For a man of strict Chinese upbringing, Hsiun Chi is quite talkative and gregarious. He seldom stands on ceremony and is fond of treating his soldiers like people. His fellow officers look upon this trait with disapproval.

Special Skills/Powers:

Warlord Hsiun Chi is a tinkerer. He has spent much of his spare time taking apart his *Grand Dragon* 'Mech, trying to coax some more speed or agility from it. He also is skilled in working with wheeled vehicles.

A BRIEF ATLAS

Second in size to the Federated Suns, the Draconis Combine is more than 145 by 140 parsecs wide. Inside this vast realm are trillions of people, each with his own racial and cultural heritage. Approximately 350 inhabited planets are within the Draconis Combine. This chapter presents only a small glimpse of some of the diverse planets within the Combine, but provides an historical, political, and economic description of these.

[NOTE: If there is a working recharge apparatus at one or both of a system's jump points, then the planetary description will list *Zenith* and/or *Nadir* to indicate where the jump station is located. *Percentage and Level of Native Life* is a rough estimate of how much of the world's plant and animal life is indigenous, as well as stating the highest level of development reached by its fauna.]

PESHT MILITARY DISTRICT

World Name: Luthien
Star Type: G0III
Position in System: 4
Time to Jump Point: 8 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Takashi Kurita, Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, Unifier of Worlds, and Duke of Luthien
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Most Exalted Ambassador Tayless Gromminger, Precentor of Luthien Station
Population: 5,203,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 10%, Amphibian

Before 2619, Luthien was a low-population farming world settled by colonists in 2276. JumpShips arrived insystem about every month, but that was the extent of its relations with other worlds. All the farmers wanted was to be left alone.

Sanethia Kurita's proclamation establishing the new capital of the Draconis Combine on Luthien brought heated protests from the farmers, but the Coordinator's word was law. DropShips of technicians, engineers, architects, and construction workers began arriving in the Luthien system daily, and the Combine confiscated the land chosen for the Imperial City. The Coordinator did, however, arrange the evacuation of the farmers to the unsettled though habitable world of Yumesta. Luthien was to be an industrialized world and had no need for farmlands.

Luthien was industrialized quickly. Drawn by the profits to be made, companies began buying up the land from the Combine. Soon, most of the surface was turned into factories. Although the planet contained no raw materials, the world became an important source of manufactured goods. Even today, Luthien is a major manufacturing world.

Imperial City on Luthien is one of the most breathtaking cities in the Inner Sphere. Buildings made of teak and marble rise majestically, the Daimyo canal flows gently through the city, and parks with grand sequoias and birch trees surround the Imperial Palace. The palace itself is a grand feat of engineering, composed solely of teak. The city is a rare example of serenity and beauty in the ruins of the Successor States.

However, the rest of Luthien is a harsh contrast. The many factories that make Luthien such a wealthy planet are filthy and rundown. Waste chemicals choke the planet's rivers, and slums of brick and wood surround the manufacturing cities.

Most of the populace of the planet work in the vast factories. Only a lucky few serve the Kuritas and the other families living in Imperial City.

World Name: Pesht
Star Type: F7V
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 10 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
District Governor: General Kester Hsiun Chi, Warlord of Pesht and Duke of Pesht
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Davin Qerrogaf
Population: 4,890,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 45%, Mammal

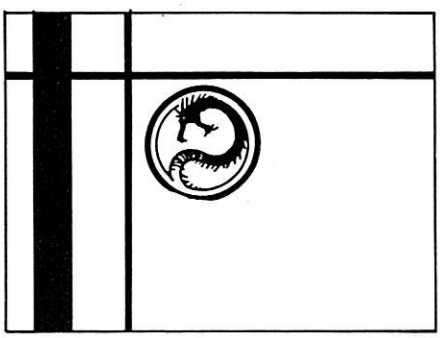
Discovered in 2212 by a group of Ozawan merchants, Pesht was not settled for a hundred years. The apelike predators that lurked in the vast forests wiped out every colonization attempt by the Ozawa family, who laid sole claim to the planet. Soon, the mercantile dynasty gave up trying.

Later, the Ozawa clan relinquished all rights to the planet to the Draconis Combine, although the former did not tell the latter of the ape creatures. The Kurita settling party was wiped out to the last man.

Perhaps they were more determined or ruthless than the Ozawas. Regardless, in less than ten years, the Combine had driven the creatures to the brink of extinction. Only then did the Combine reveal its main interest in the world—to create a military base. Fortifications reminiscent of feudal Japan sprang up, and soldiers from every branch of the military soon arrived. Pesht became the launching point for Combine forays into the Draconis Rift.

During the restructuring of the government under Coordinator Martin McAllister, Pesht became the capital of a Military District. Then, when the capital of the Draconis Combine moved to Luthien, most of the units stationed on Pesht were transferred to Luthien.

Rulers of Pesht have always resented the fact that Luthien—and not Pesht—was chosen as the new capital. Pesht is now treated as a common garrison planet, and District leaders spend most of their time on Luthien, although they exert no more influence over the planet than any other district leaders.



World Name: Bjarred
Star Type: F4V
Position in System: 5
Time to Jump Point: 12 days
Recharging Station: Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Yoshimas Drebbly, Earl of Bjarred
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Nelson Dewers
Population: 890,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Amphibian

Bjarred is a rather small world beneath a large hot sun. Though it has little open water on its surface, huge underground rivers run through catacombs below the surface. Lush grasses, bushes, and trees cluster above these subterranean waterways. As a result, vast lines of vegetation crisscross the planet. Bjarred's barren mountains are rich in minerals and metals, which attracted the first colonists, an Ozawa scout group, in the early 23rd century.

Today, the Deep Ores Company is the sole industry on the planet. In contract with the Metals of the Earth, the Deep Ores Company has kept other companies away by frequently paying bribes to the planet's Chairman. Because the Chairman has recently been demanding higher bribes, the CEO of Deep Ores, Melissa Ozawa (a distant relation of the famous Ozawas) has decided to stop paying. She believes that her company is now strong enough to stand competition from any rival that appears on Bjarred.

Mountain bandits often raid Deep Ores' mines and camps. Defending the planet and the mining concern is a battalion of the 4th Pesht Regulars commanded by Colonel Brethby Stiverson. Their headquarters are in the capital of Bjarred, Oasis V.

World Name: Albiero
Star Type: M2IV
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 3 days
Recharging Station: Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Hogo Manati, Earl of Albiero
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Rhys Davis
Population: 856,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 18%, Reptile

Although Albiero has a low population and almost no industry, it is the most prosperous planet in its prefecture (the others are even more desolate). Considered a wasteland of dead planets, the Albiero Prefecture contains mostly worlds that once were rich in minerals and metals, but have long since been mined out and deserted. In addition, Brocchi's star cluster, a group of several stars and planets, is a favorite hiding place for pirates and renegades, and they have wreaked havoc on the population remaining here.

Albiero itself once contained a vast wealth of iron and copper, which prompted the Holden Mining corporation to dispatch settlers to this planet in 2735. In fact, the planet's wealth led the corporation to move its headquarters to this planet. Tunnel drivers made huge networks of tunnels under the planet's surface. From Albiero, other mining concerns struck out for nearby worlds to mine their wealth.

After the fall of the Star League, the mining equipment on Albiero fell into disrepair, and there was no one who knew how to fix it. The mining companies soon went bankrupt, and Albiero and the other planets in this prefecture became little more than ghost planets. Because the area soon lost prestige due to the lost income, the prefecture gradually became smaller. In 2957, the Pesht Military District absorbed a large chunk of the prefecture (including the former prefecture capital of Wolcott), and the Coordinator named Albiero as the new capital.

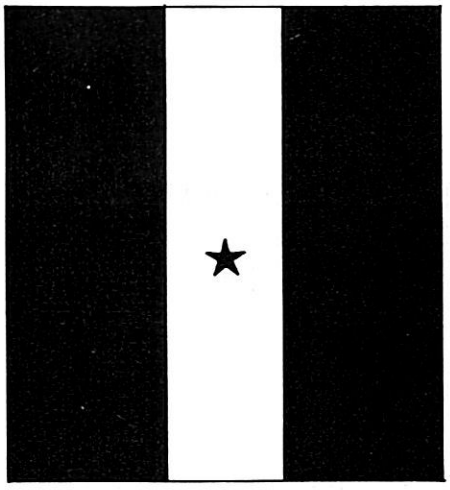
Since then, Albiero has become an ideal training ground for soldiers. There are few civilians left on the planet, and the soldiers can train in the planet's vast network of tunnels. Unfortunately, the Pesht Prefecture still overshadows this prefecture, and few soldiers ever get to see these training facilities.

World Name: Qandahar
Star Type: G0IV
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 8 days
Recharging Station: Zenith
Planetary Chairman: Bradley Dammann, Earl of Qandahar
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Alexander Fisken
Population: 2,304,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Mammal

Qandahar is a dark world with almost perpetual cloud cover. Though the planet has large bodies of water, the industries of the planet's early colonizers dumped toxic waste into every water source. Now, the planet's sizeable population must import its fresh water. Industry still flourishes on this planet, selling and manufacturing sub-assemblies for small fusion power planets used to power cities.

Qandahar's sizeable Arab population has a history of rebellion against the rule of the Planetary Chairman. Currently, the dissident underground, calling itself the Holy Struggle, is attempting to shut down the Dow-Nexus Turbine Factory because it has consistently disregarded workers' safety. Although the ISF has several agents in the Holy Struggle, Subhash Indrahar is hesitant to break up the group because he is not overly fond of Dow-Nexus.

Outside the planetary capital, Fair Weather, and the other domed cities, the planet's ecosystem is on its last legs. Over 50 percent of the indigenous life-forms have become extinct. Only the Toxic Life-Forms (TLF), created on Terra during the 22nd century to digest toxic wastes, are thriving.



World Name: Ningxia
Star Type: K0V
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 4 days
Recharging Station: Zenith
Planetary Chairman: Frederic Rassarus, Earl of Ningxia
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Martha Sullivan
Population: 23,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Reptile

A small agricultural planet, Ningxia has only one large city—New Zephyus, the Prefecture capital. Located on a large, rocky, forest-covered island in the planet's only ocean, New Zephyus is well-known throughout the Combine for the beauty of its *ukiyo*. The saying is that on Ningxia, one can satisfy one's hunger, and in New Zephyus, one can satisfy all one's aesthetic and sensual desires.

The planet has benefited from this reputation. Even though Ningxia has large diamond deposits worth millions, many highly placed politicos, including the present Coordinator, want the planet to retain its pristine, pastoral beauty. Many rich politicians and business leaders have houses along the shore of the ocean.

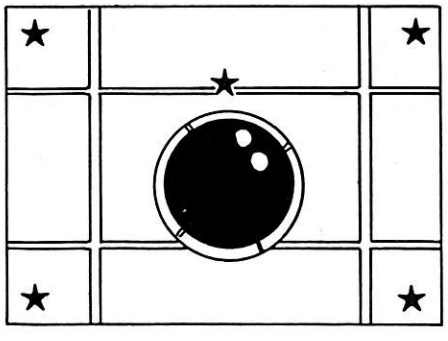
Ningxia supports a large spaceport on an island near New Zephyus. Because this ancient facility's machinery chronically breaks down, there have been several major disasters in recent years. The machinery needed to repair the facility is better used elsewhere, and so the planet is having trouble shipping its foodstuffs out to needy worlds. Ningxia Foods, a major food-producing company on the planet, has resorted to having its freighters land directly on its farms to load up cargo. This has angered many people, who worry that other companies will copy the practice, eventually marring the world with scorched earth, noxious fumes, and toxic wastes.

GALEDON MILITARY DISTRICT

World Name: Galedon V
Star Type: K5III
Position in System: 5
Time to Jump Point: 3 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
District Governor: Mino Nakagona, Duke of Galedon
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Jhi To Phud
Population: 1,595,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 25%, Mammal

This lightly settled planet has little industry but abundant high-grade industrial diamonds. Settled in 2282, Galedon V's vast resources and large quantities of uncontaminated water brought colonists in by the droves. It was the common hatred against the Ozawa Mercantile Association that led the inhabitants of Galedon V to ally with Shiro Kurita to form the Alliance of Galedon, an amalgamation of worlds under the authority of Shiro. It seems that Shiro fooled the entire Galedon Colonial Board into believing that Galedon was an equal partner in the Alliance. Shiro captured more and more worlds, however, and soon dropped the pretense of the alliance. With firm control of the leaders of the Colonial Board, Shiro turned his attention to other planets.

Nevertheless, the citizens of Galedon V reacted bitterly to Shiro's "usurpation." In 2332, waves of revolt swept the planet, but even though the armies of Shiro Kurita were occupied with the Principality of Rasalhague, enough forces arrived to slaughter the rebellion and its leaders. They left behind ruined cities and starving civilians. Shiro's Colonial Board then helped rebuild the planet, all the while praising Shiro for his benevolence and charity. The starving civilians soon became grateful to Shiro for providing them with food and shelter, and the planet Galedon V has been a staunch supporter of the Kuritas ever since.



World Name: New Samarkand
Star Type: F0IV
Position in System: 6
Time to Jump Point: 12 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Mahi Sato, Duke of New Samarkand
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Trani Caruba
Population: 950,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Mammal

Settled in the early days of the Exodus, New Samarkand was once the administrative and mercantile capital of the Draconis Combine. However, when Sanethia moved the capital to Luthien, the planet decayed. Now, havens of pirates and thieves inhabit its crumbling mansions and cities. In spite of this (or because of it), New Samarkand is the home of the Internal Security Force and its Internal Security College. A few manufacturing concerns still operate here, including New Samarkand Metals and IndoTronics Incorporated. These concerns operate in enclosed fortifications, where their employees also live. Armed guards patrol the borders to ensure that no undesirables attempt to invade the area for supplies.

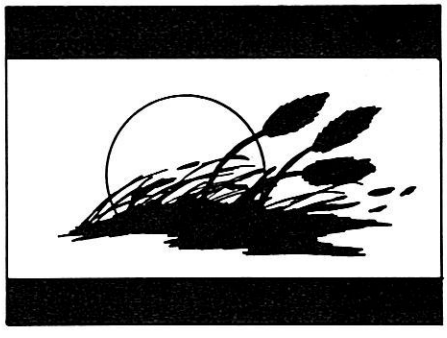
New Samarkand is perhaps best known as home to the Sun Zhang MechWarrior Academy. The abandoned cities provide an excellent training ground for MechWarrior and AeroSpace Fighter Pilots to practice the intricacies of city fighting.

World Name: Hachiman
Star Type: G8IV
Position in System: 4
Time to Jump Point: 6 days
Recharging Station: Zenith
Planetary Chairman: Rex Fillington, Earl of Hachiman
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Firis Konotaki
Population: 3,634,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 45%, Mammal

Hachiman is one of the few planets in the Draconis Combine that has both plentiful natural resources and livable planetary conditions. In addition, the planet is the center of the realm's computer and advanced electronics industry. Hachiman's main continent is dotted with several major industrial parks that manufacture electronic parts.

The largest city on the planet, Masamori, is home to Tanadi Computers, one of the largest computer firms in the Draconis Combine. Masamori also has a large and raucous *ukiyo*, whose weekend festivals often disintegrate into riots. The planetary government puts up with this foolishness because it tends to keep the workers away from more dangerous pursuits.

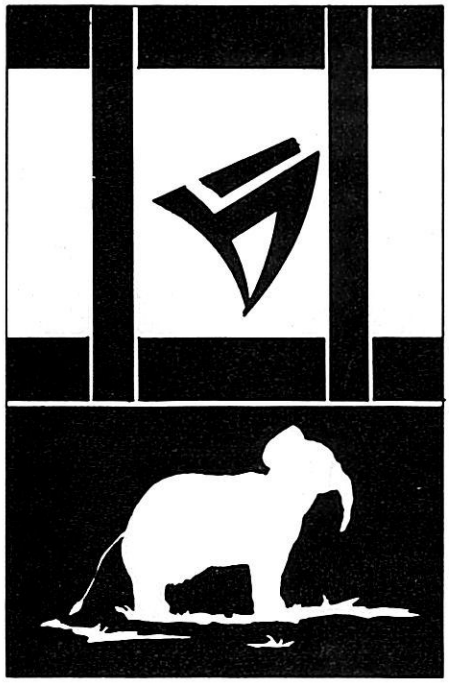
Considering the importance of the planet, it is not surprising that the ISF has a large presence on the planet. However, their agents are infiltrating the planetary government and not the industries. There have been many scandals in the government, some of which point to Warlord Samsonov.



World Name: Oshika
Star Type: G5V
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 7 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Larrith Corx, Duke of Oshika
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Adrian Dulouhy
Population: 4,207,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Mammal

Because Oshika is the capital of a prefecture, it has many cities devoted to the politics of running the prefecture. The capital of the planet, Takadanobaba, is situated in the world's only major mountain range, the Tribly Range. The planet is also the regimental headquarters fo the 16th Galedon Regulars, which means that General Francisco Bevier is the real source of political power on the planet.

Poor in resources, Oshika can grow enough crops to sustain its population only with the aid of imported chemical fertilizers. The indigenous Oshika Ox, which looks like a cross between an elephant and a cow, is becoming a profitable food item for the planet, and many farms are converting to ranches to raise the animals. It is uncertain, however, whether the profits brought in by the animals will offset the cost of importing food.



World Name: Matsuida
Star Type: G5V
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 7 days
Recharging Station: Zenith
Planetary Chairman: Otto Irragang, Duke of Matsuida
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Paul Sibert
Population: 1,027,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Reptile

Despite good sun, good position, and good planet size, Matsuida somehow manages to be hideous. Rough terrain broken only by seas of gelatinous pea-green water helped earn this planet its nickname of "Nausea."

Matsuida is a prefecture capital as well as the headquarters of the 12th Galedon Regulars. Because of many generations of patient, nausea-proof sailors, a thriving fishing industry has developed that literally scoops up chunks of the ocean to get at the Matsuida Carp, considered a delicacy on distant Luthien.

World Name: Kaznejov
Star Type: F4V
Position in System: 5
Time to Jump Point: 12 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Peter Joncas, Earl of Kaznejov
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Ernesto Lassich
Population: 1,009,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 10%, Reptile

Kaznejov is another sun-baked world. Only its modest ore deposits prompted colonization in the early 24th century. Since then, the populace has imported life-forms to make this world more habitable. During Star League days, settlers altered the weather with satellites, mellowing the climate to a peaceful, idyllic hum. These efforts to change the environment succeeded so well that the planetary government attracted many tourists with the slogan "The best planet mankind can build."

After the fall of the Star League, however, all efforts to maintain the delicate manmade environment of Kaznejov were forgotten in the fighting. Now, two of the three manmade oceans have dried up completely, leaving behind a desert of crystallized salts. Having fallen into disrepair long ago, the weather satellites work only sporadically, sometimes causing great storms that whip the growing deserts with wind and lightning.

The iron ore deposits, Kaznejov's only natural resource, were exhausted long ago. As there is nothing else of worth left here, the planet is losing its population.

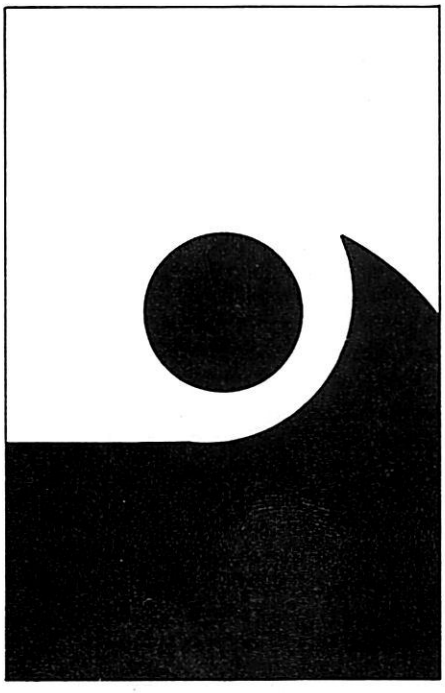
There has been talk of moving the prefecture capital from Gondovia on Kaznejov to Celeste City on nearby Waldheim. As the regimental headquarters of the 17th Galedon Regulars, Kaznejov frequently hosts skirmishes with Kurita units on the large barren deserts outside the military base.

World Name: Tabayama
Star Type: F0IV
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 10 days
Recharging Station: Zenith
Planetary Chairman: Arthur Ezposa, Earl of Tabayama
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Restbert Garinger
Population: 2,000,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 25%, Fish

Tabayama is the capital of Galedon's Periphery prefecture. The government employs most of the planet's population to run the prefecture bureaucracy, but a sizable number hunt in the planet's many forests for whitetail deer, the menace of Tabayama.

Imported several hundred years ago by a wealthy industrialist who loved the seemingly harmless creatures, the deer were soon breeding far too fast for him to control. Through the decades, countless efforts to control the deer have failed. Currently, the planet employs over two million hunters to shoot the deer, and this number is barely enough to keep the animals from overrunning the planet's croplands. However, Tabayama has a successful industry that exports venison to other worlds.

The planet's hunters have banded together to form The Hunters' International in an effort to win higher wages. Recent ISF reports indicate that they have no anti-government leanings, however.



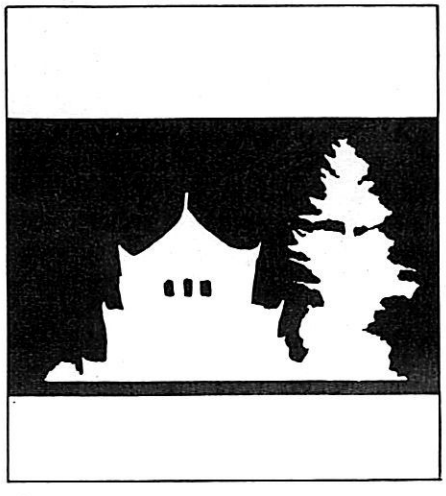
BENJAMIN MILITARY DISTRICT

World Name: Benjamin
Star Type: M1V
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 3 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
District Governor: George Hakashi, Duke of Benjamin
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Kenta Delmorrow
Population: 4,655,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Mammal

Benjamin is a large world orbiting a very dim sun. To help boost the amount of sunlight the planet receives, it has sent 20 huge "semi-suns" into orbit around itself. Much like the collecting sails of JumpShips, these semi-suns are circular reflectors made of paper-thin, mirror-like fabric. The semi-suns reflect light down onto the planet in such a way that Benjamin's day is effectively lengthened and the amount of sunlight received is boosted by 20 percent.

Benjamin has a fair climate that can support hardier crops and meat animals, and has a few good deposits of petroleum and coal. The use of these fuel sources has polluted large stretches of the planet, but most of the industries must now use the proper anti-pollution devices. The major heavy industry of Benjamin is parts manufacture for wheeled vehicles.

Benjamin's main importance arises from the fact that it is the capital of a military and political district. The capital of Benjamin is Deber City, site of the huge Political Park of administrative buildings where the fate of billions is determined. Just outside the city is the headquarters of Warlord Hirushi Shotugama, the most powerful man in the district as well as the personal commander of the 17th Benjamin Regulars.



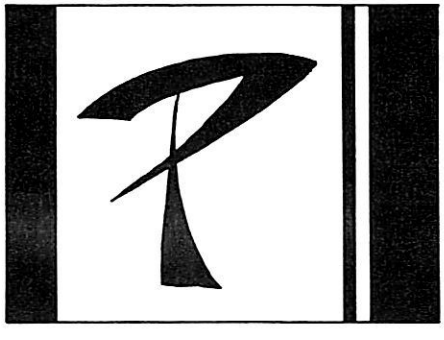
World Name: Proserpina
Star Type: K2V
Position in System: 4
Time to Jump Point: 4 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Reginald Rosanqet, Duke of Proserpina
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Todd Marx
Population: 1,872,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 10%, Reptile

Proserpina is a death trap of enormous proportions. Seven times the planet has been the object of ferocious contests between the Draconis Combine and the Federated Suns. After each battle, the planet and its people have suffered grievously.

Of Proserpina's five continents, two are complete wastelands. The northern Amerigo continent is unapproachable except in an environmental suit because of the many long-lasting contact poisons in the soil and water.

During the last battle between Davion and Kurita, the Combine forces wrested the planet away from the Federated Suns by releasing huge plumes of nerve gas that killed approximately 60 percent of the planet's civilian and military populations. Needless to say, the Kurita troops had little problem taking Proserpina after that.

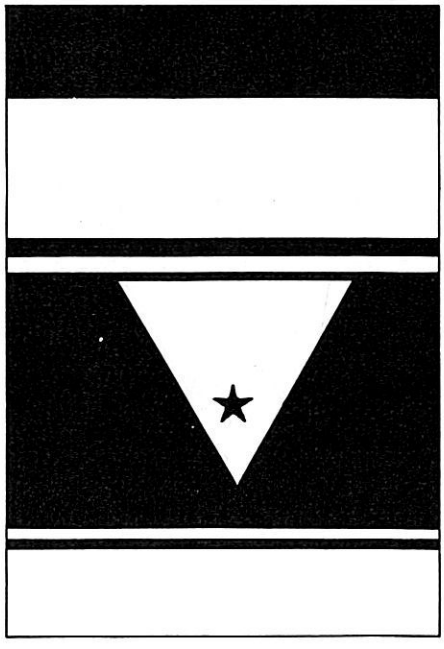
Despite all this, Proserpina now has a large population and a variety of minor industries. Because the planetary capital of Conqueror's Pride is also a prefecture capital, it supports many bureaucrats. Proserpina is also the homeworld of the 9th Benjamin Regulars, under the command of Denice Eastmoreland.



World Name: Buckminster
Star Type: A9III
Position in System: 6
Time to Jump Point: 21 days
Recharging Station: Zenith
Planetary Chairman: Carlton Van Mitre, Duke of Buckminster
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Hari Jukazi
Population: 2,641,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Insect

Buckminster has undergone rapid changes in the last 20 years. Once known for its agricultural products and light industrial items such as tractors or threshers, Buckminster used to have close ties with the nearby Steiner world of Port Moseby, an eager customer of its products. It was a peaceful world, whose inhabitants considered themselves fortunate.

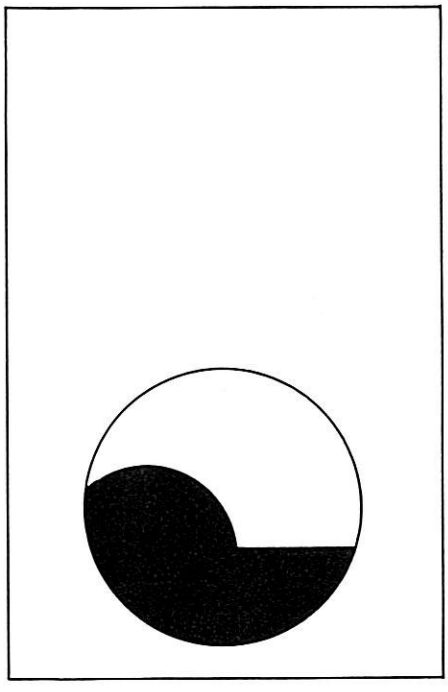
That all changed when the prefecture capital moved from Sulafat to Buckminster. Now that Buckminster is both a prefecture and a frontline world on the Steiner border, the DCMS considers it doubly necessary to protect the planet. The elite 2nd Sword of Light is now stationed here. With so many Kurita BattleMechs present and training for war, the abundant crops of Buckminster are being crushed under the tread of heavy metal feet. This has angered the people of Buckminster. In the past 20 years, many overt and covert anti-government groups have formed, giving the numerous ISF agents on the planet plenty to do.



World Name: Kajikazawa
Star Type: G5IV
Position in System: 4
Time to Jump Point: 7 days
Recharging Station: Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Ukita Hideie, Earl of Kajikazawa
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Christine Delmon
Population: 927,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Reptile

Kajikazawa is a prefecture captial in the Benjamin district. With the planet Benjamin close by, quite a few of the duties that would normally fall to Kajikazawa go instead to Benjamin. This has left Kajikazawa less populated and less hectic than usual for a prefecture capital, which suits the population fine. Only the presence of the 2nd Benjamin Regulars reminds them that they are, indeed, an important part of the Draconis Combine.

The planet's major continent has large areas of mild climate and pleasant landscapes. The government capitalizes on this with a major tourist industry and by renting out vacation mansions to the harried politicians of nearby Benjamin. The planet also has several large *ukiyos* that cater to the upper classes.



World Name: Irurzun
Star Type: G4V
Position in System: 5
Time to Jump Point: 7 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Edward Lyons, Duke of Irurzun
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Kevil Moranic
Population: 5,090,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 25%, Mammal

Irurzun is an important world for the Draconis Combine. Recent discoveries of radioactive elements, gemstones, and metal ores have increased the necessity of keeping the Federated Suns away from the planet. To this end, two complete 'Mech regiments, the 3rd and 6th Benjamin Regulars, plus three infantry regiments, are headquartered on the planet.

Though many of the units are spread out to worlds closer to the border, the number of soldiers on Irurzun makes it a crowded world for its size. Most of the activity centers on New Gotham City on the continent of South Umbrian, as this is the capital of the planet and of the prefecture.

Away from the cities, Irurzun shows a more pastoral side. There are many small farms raising marshy plant crops in the hot and humid atmosphere. With the discovery of so many hidden resources in recent years, it is unlikely that Irurzun's picturesque areas will remain intact much longer. Already a crew from New Samarkand Metals has arrived to begin a huge strip mining operation.

Agents of the ISF have also been interested in Irurzun in recent months. Rumor has it that operatives from the Federated Suns may also be present on the planet. If this is true, the *metsukes* must hunt them down. The DCMS High Command suspects that if Davion agents are on the planet, it may mean that Irurzun will be the focus of some military effort in the near future.

World Name: Xinyang
Star Type: F0V
Position in System: 2
Time to Jump Point: 10 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Nicholas Dalton, Earl of Xinyang
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Madelyn Gleena
Population: 1,010,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Amphibian

Xinyang Prefecture lies close to Luthien and far from the devastation of the wars. Like the other worlds in this prefecture, the planet has not been despoiled by warfare. Xinyang is a large world with plenty of water but few natural resources. As a result, it is little more than a place for the bureaucracy to work and the site of a major rest and recuperation base for the Arm of the Dragon.

The regiment stationed on the planet is the 15th Benjamin Regulars, but the planet often plays host to battalions from other units as they rotate off the front lines for rest and resupply.

A whole slew of industries have sprung up around the comings and goings of the soldiers. Xinyang has a large supply depot and one of the largest and best-equipped military hospitals in the Draconis Combine. It also has a major ISF facility, which debriefs any soldier coming off the front lines, in search of new information about the enemy. It goes without saying that the *ukiyos* in Xinyang are large and well-staffed with men and women of pleasure for the soldiers' enjoyment.

As the planet cannot support the food needs of its large population, the spaceports are busy with incoming shipments of food from surrounding worlds.

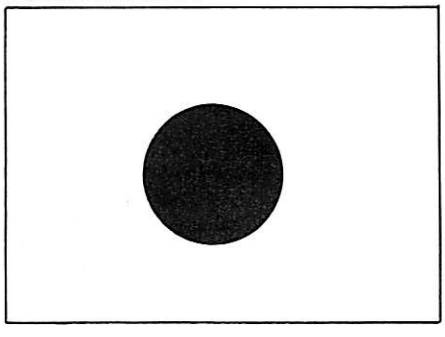
DIERON MILITARY DISTRICT

World Name: Dieron
Star Type: G3V
Position in System: 4
Time to Jump Point: 3 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
District Governor: Seville Newbury, Duke of Dieron
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Myndo Waterly
Population: 5,284,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 35%, Amphibian

During the years of the Star League, Dieron was a large and thriving planet in the Terran Hegemony. It was a major administrative center as well as a large electronics center for the Regular Army. When the Star League fell and the last of Kerensky's ships left the Inner Sphere, the Draconis Combine became quite interested in acquiring Dieron. When they seized the planet, however, the Combine forces discovered that much of the planet had suffered severely during the war to oust Stefan Amaris. The Regular Army stripped the few intact buildings of everything useful.

Dieron is a cramped world because of its many large mountain ranges. What space is available exists in countless small valleys, and earthquakes are a frequent problem. With so little to recommend the planet, it is amazing that over five billion people live here. Arrogance made Minoru Kurita turn Dieron into a military district capital; he liked the idea that an important Star League base was now a premier world in his domain.

The cramped cities stuck between towering mountains make the planet ripe for political rebellion, however. To squash budding rebellions, the ISF plays on the Dieron people's obsession with the Star League. An ISF agent will spread rumors of a Star League cache, causing thousands to flood into the mountains prospecting for artifacts, thus defusing any tensions that had existed before.



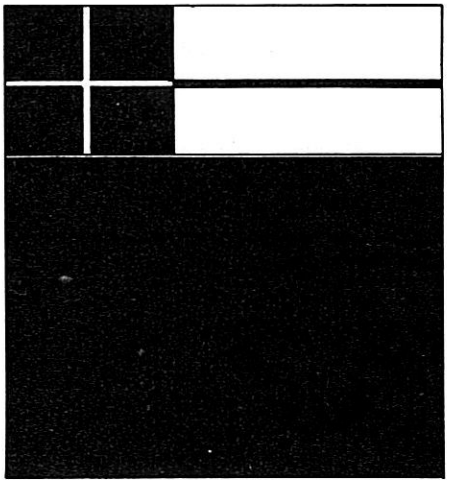
World Name: Altair
Star Type: F7III
Position in System: 5
Time to Jump Point: 10 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Muirvald Cooke, Duke of Altair
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Elba Fuentes
Population: 3,639,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Reptile

Altair is a large, dry planet beneath a very unstable sun. The cause of the sun's frequent solar storms and violent flares is unknown, but such activity shuts down communications, sometimes for two months or more.

The planet's underground rivers are the reason that a few areas do support vegetation. Around these green patches cluster the three billion inhabitants of the planet. Mining is a major industry, with five iron ore deposits and one titanium ore deposit presently being mined.

The curious water in certain portions of the planet has given rise to the planet's second biggest firm, the Long Life Company. Headquartered in the city of Bonanza, this company grows certain herbs in "Altairian Medicinal Water" (as they call it) so that the herbs may be used in teas. The company is also a large manufacturer of more conventional medicines.

Currently, the 18th Dieron Regulars are stationed on Altair.

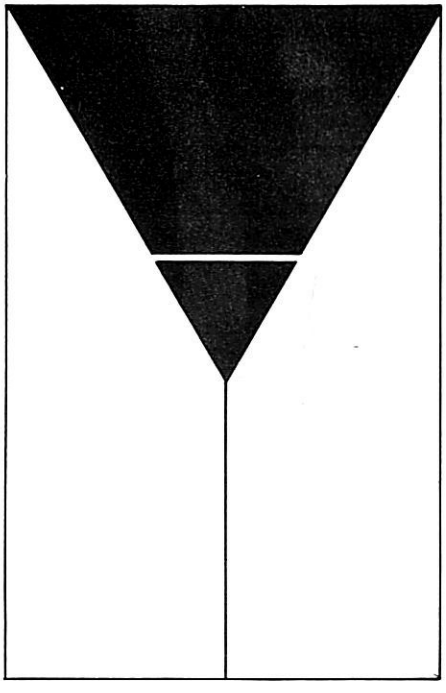


World Name: Al Na'ir
Star Type: A9III
Position in System: 5
Time to Jump Point: 21 days
Recharging Station: Zenith
Planetary Chairman: Raymond Tormark, Duke of Al Na'ir
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Elizabeth Heaton
Population: 641,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: None

The inhospitable planets in the Al Na'ir system would have been ignored if the asteroids had not been rich in rare metals. Since Star League days, many space-mining companies have populated the asteroids.

A small BattleMech factory was built in one of the asteroids, taking advantage of the zero gravity. After the large portions of 'Mechs are constructed there, they are sent to the planet Al Na'ir to be assembled and tested. The BattleMech facility was a joint venture by Luthien Armor Works and Alshain Weapons. Damaged in 3010, the plant is only recently back to production.

Al Na'ir itself is barren and has thin atmosphere. Currently, two BattleMech regiments are on the planet, the 8th and 15th Dieron Regulars, both excellent fighters in Zero-G atmosphere.



World Name: Ashio
Star Type: G6IV
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 7 days
Recharging Station: Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Elnar Kloven, Duke of Ashio
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Karl Jahn
Population: 1,274,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 25%, Mammal

Ashio is an unremarkable planet with only one major distinction—it has the largest volcano in the Inner Sphere. Mount Vesuvius Major is over ten kilometers tall. Though the mountain has long been dormant, scientists estimate that if Vesuvius Major erupts, it could block all sunlight from the planet, sending it into an ice age.

Currently, Ashio is the headquarters of the 27th Dieron Regulars.

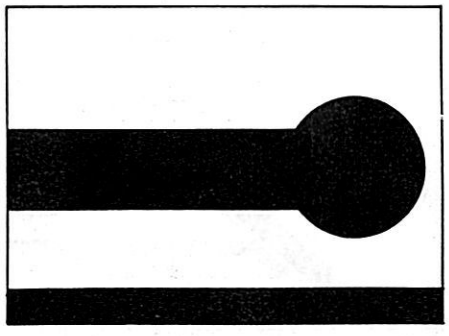
World Name: Algedi
Star Type: A7IV
Position in System: 5
Time to Jump Point: 22 days
Recharging Station: Zenith
Planetary Chairman: Valter Norum, Duke of Algedi
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Fritz Delano
Population: 1,900,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: None

Algedi is a barren world beneath a sun so large that it takes up a full third of the sky during the day. Because the sun allows no true night, people not accustomed to the planet seem to suffer from broken biological clocks. Efficiency on this world is very poor; only the Algedian Azami, long-settled on this arid world, seem to have adjusted. When they leave Algedi, however, they are terrified of the dark.

Though there has been much talk about moving the prefecture capital to a planet where the bureaucracy can function effectively, nothing comes of it. Despite the most modern equipment, paperwork in this prefecture is in a perpetual snarl.

Imported life-forms adapted to desert life are flourishing on the planet. Asketen Sand Walkers and Terran Burros are commonly seen grazing on tough grasses and cacti. Some minor deposits of gold have been discovered on the planet, but not enough to warrant exploitation.

The Azami of Algedi are very independent, which has often led to clashes between their ways and those of the Combine. They own half of the planet, and non-Azami are not allowed to enter their "Desert Pardise." The ISF presence here is fairly high but inconspicuous.

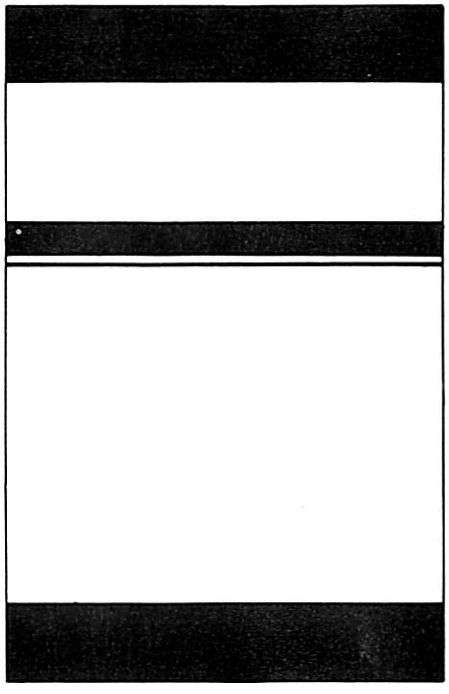


World Name: Kessel
Star Type: G0V
Position in System: 2
Time to Jump Point: 7 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Gregory Lanskey, Earl of Kessel
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Sandra Sakes
Population: 2,310,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 5%, Mammal

Although captured from the Lyran Commonwealth hundreds of years ago, Kessel still supports a strong underground movement agitating for freedom from the Draconis Combine. The main underground force are the Kessel Freedom Fighters, who conduct hit-and-run attacks against military targets and the bureaucracy.

The Draconis Combine decided to make Kessel a prefecture capital at the beginning of the Third Succession War to assert its domination over the planet. Since then, the toll of freedom fighters, soldiers, and petty bureaucrats killed here has climbed into the hundreds of thousands. Hard-pressed to explain why they cannot get rid of the terrorist organizations, the ISF tends to blame it on aid from the Lyran Commonwealth and on Loki, Steiner's crack terrorist squad.

Kessel is heavily industrialized. In recent years, the pollution created by the industries has poisoned the clouds, contaminated the water, and tainted the land.

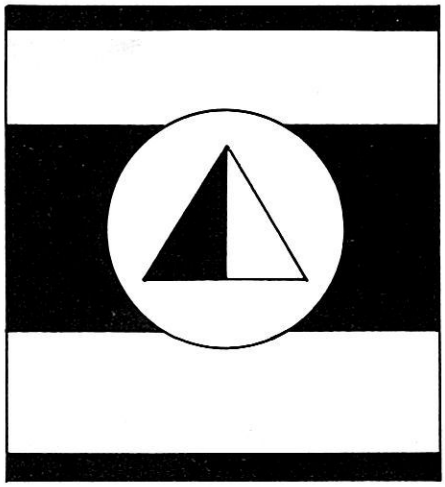


World Name: Vega
Star Type: A0V
Position in System: 7
Time to Jump Point: 27 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Marianne Vron, Duke of Vega
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Noren Glover
Population: 2,284,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: None

Another hot and dry world, Vega has many bombed-out factories on its rocky surface. Few firms remain operational. One company, the Cosby Myomer Research Firm, manufactures myomer cable bundles for 'Mechs and lacks good business morals. It is rumored that the CEO of the company is wanted in the Commonwealth for the murder of a Lyran trader. ISF agents working in the company turn a blind eye to much of the skullduggery because most of it is aimed at Commonwealth traders who trade in the system.

All the life-forms on Vega have been imported. Neucason, the capital city on Vega, has many government buildings as befits a prefecture capital. A monorail connects the city with Nasew, a large city on the planet's only ocean. The people travel in electric cars or ride horses.

One of the oddities of Vega is the Pyramids of New Egypt. Built during the Star League era, the five pyramids were the whim of an eccentric megabillionaire, Akem Sanders, who believed in the pantheistic religions of the ancient Egyptians. He had the pyramids built as a sign of his devotion. Since then, there have been many attempts to burrow into or under the pyramids in search of treasure, but nothing has ever been found.



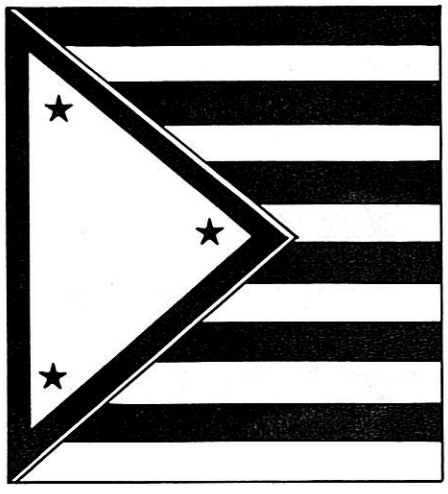
RASALHAGUE MILITARY DISTRICT

World Name: Rasalhague
Star Type: K4V
Position in System: 6
Time to Jump Point: 4 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
District Governor: Mies Kurita, Duke of Rasalhague
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Zilya Armanovitch
Population: 4,957,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 35%, Mammal

Rasalhague has an ancient history going back into pre-Hegemony days, when a large group of Swedish and Northern Europeans left a war-torn Terra. They found a large world orbiting far from its huge sun and possessing abundant water and natural resources. Rasalhague was so similar to their former countries that the colonists ignored its few bad qualities, such as a deadly local virus.

Since that time, large industries have sprung up to take advantage of the plentiful natural resources, including the various exotic fruits and animals from the jungles of the planet's torrid tropical zone.

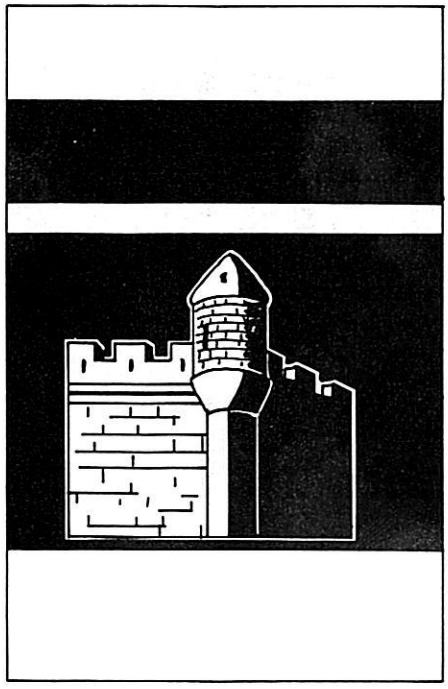
The wishes of the people to stay free and independent were dashed when the Principality of Rasalhague fell to the Draconis Combine. Although sometimes brutal, the Draconis Combine has respected the independence of Rasalhague and has not destroyed the large and solemn Palace Hall, the government building located in Reykjavik, the capital city of Rasalhague.



World Name: Radstadt
Star Type: G5III
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 6 days
Recharging Station: Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Cory Andrews, Earl of Radstadt
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Byron Sdoble
Population: 841,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 25%, Reptile

Radstadt has the dubious distinction of hosting one of the largest prison complexes in the Draconis Combine. The Lotus Flower Correctional Institution is a sprawling facility the size of a small city and is located just outside Munich, the planetary capital. The most dangerous criminals, those insane enough to openly rebel against the Kurita government, are held in the Black Tower, a huge windowless, concrete building. Surrounding the building is a ring of fences and minefields to deter anyone leaving.

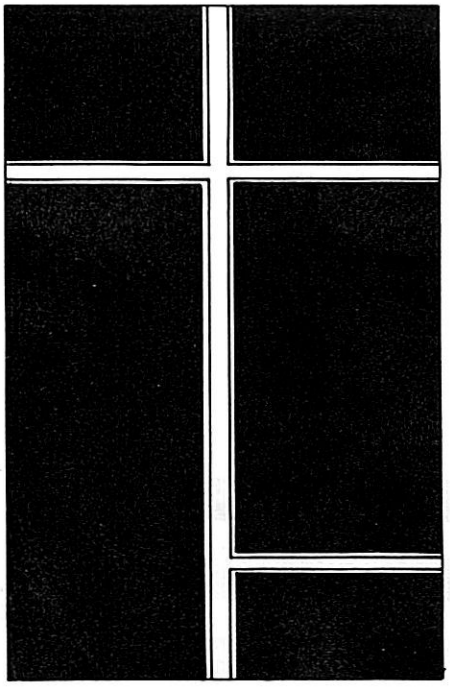
The rest of the planet is nondescript. There is a thriving fishing industry, and the timber industry specializes in Radstadt Pine, a tree whose wood (if treated) literally shimmers as if it were flecked with gold.



World Name: Rubigen
Star Type: G6II
Position in System: 4
Time to Jump Point: 8 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Tony Armandu, Duke of Rubigen
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Sanduskey Rivers
Population: 2,932,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Mammal

Rubigen has a dark, cold atmosphere, with over half its surface covered in ice. Its two small seas are perpetually filled with icebergs. Navigating on Rubigen's seas requires great skill and precision, which may explain why 15 percent of the officers in the Draconis Combine Admiralty are from Rubigen. Furs from this world, particularly that of the Rubigen red wolverine, are highly prized.

City Rubigen is the capital of the planet as well as the seat of the prefecture. It is near the Bassers Glacier, which has been creeping toward the city at the alarming rate of one and one-half meters a year. It is expected that the glacier will overrun the city's spaceport within the next decade.



World Name: Alshain
Star Type: F8IV
Position in System: 5
Time to Jump Point: 9 days
Recharging Station: Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Mikhail Friedrich, Earl of Alshain
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Dio LaVohne
Population: 2,759,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 25%, Reptile

Alshain is a fair-sized planet with enough natural resources to support a BattleMech factory and various lesser industries. Beyond that, the world is not large enough to support anything larger than light industry. The general climate of the world is temperate, and it possesses large pine forests, which were started by the original settlers.

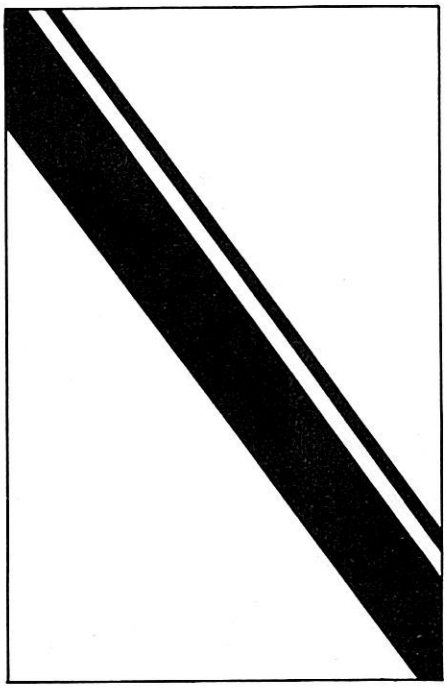
Silverdale is the capital of Alshain. A large city, it clusters around the planet's spaceport. In addition, the city has a large, European-influenced *ukiyo*, complete with beer halls and red lights. There is also a growing underground movement that worries the ISF.

The head of the Alshain People's Movement is a shadowy figure called the Silver Fox. As a result of their latest terrorist action, 20 workers were killed at the BattleMech factory. The *metsukes* have brutally executed suspected members of the groups to quell the growing movement, but to no avail.

World Name: Thessalonika
Star Type: G0V
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 7 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Darrell Johannes, Earl of Thessalonika
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Gregory Rowden
Population: 1,410,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 25%, Mammal

Thessalonika is a resource-poor world; only petroleum deposits and a few gemstone veins give this planet any industry. The real worth of the planet lies in its abundant life-forms. Although possessing only one small ocean, the planet somehow manages to maintain a number of types of life. The larger animals, such as oxen and Pesht butcher beasts, do quite well on the large, open, grassy plains on Thessalonika.

Tyrsis is the capital city. Located there is a major museum, the Tyrsis McNeil Museum, which is devoted to the preservation of military technology.

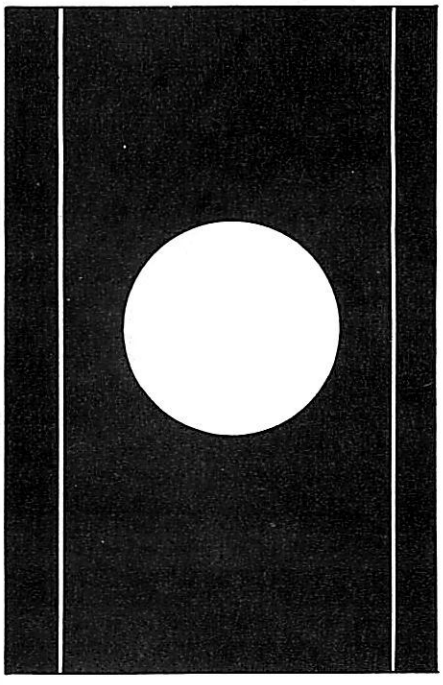


World Name: Kirchbach
Star Type: F0V
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 10 days
Recharging Station: Zenith
Planetary Chairman: Mahar Lowell, Earl of Kirchbach
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Clarissa Hedstron
Population: 784,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Mammal

Kirchbach is a front-line world as well as the capital of a prefecture. The prefecture bureaucracy has to contend with threats from the Periphery as well as from the Lyran Commonwealth, which is just a jump away.

The LCAF and bandit groups from the Periphery sometimes raid the planet and the capital city of New Samos. Two years ago, the Commonwealth launched an attack against the government computer centers in New Samos. Since then, the planet has been in complete chaos, which Luthien seems unable to unravel. The computer breakdowns have even paralyzed the military presence on the planet.

The planet has few resources, but its temperate climate allows its people to grow enough crops to sustain themselves.



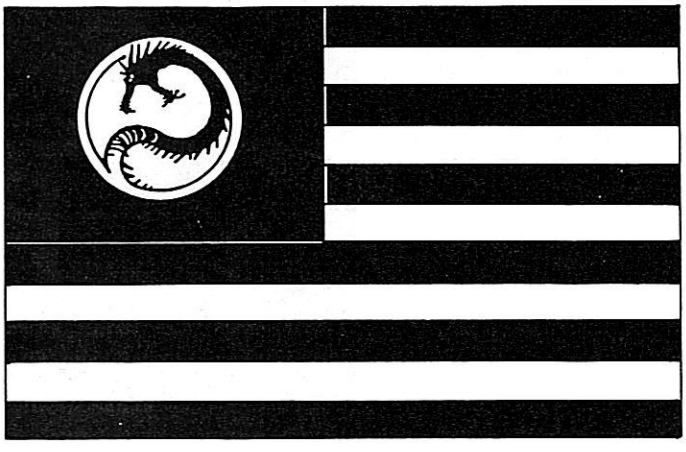
World Name: Trondheim
Star Type: G5III
Position in System: 3
Time to Jump Point: 8 days
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Planetary Chairman: Stefan Shor, Earl of Trondheim
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Roberta Debong
Population: 1,997,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Mammal

Trondhiem is a big world scarred by several active volcanos. There are three currently erupting, and two of them having been erupting for the past three years. The ash thrown into the atmosphere has disrupted the planet's climate, ushering in very hot summers broken by extremely cold winters. Until the volcanoes cease erupting, the population will have to contend with the quirky weather.

The volatile nature of the planet does allow easy access to rare metals and minerals. Several major companies have been mining the planet for centuries. In addition, Amau Electronics, one of the largest electronics firms in the Draconis Combine, has its factories here.

The people of Trondhiem seem to be as volatile as the world they inhabit. Over the centuries, there have been many protests, rebellions, and attempted revolutions. Most disturbances require the Arm of the Dragon to be put down. Currently, the people of the planet are quiet, but the ISF has not reduced its sizeable force of agents.

The capital of Trondhiem is Misby Flats.



INDEX

Aerospace and Interstellar Institute, 138
AeroSpace Fighter, military developments, 45; defend Halstead Station, 88; used by Minnesota Tribe, 62
Age of War, 29,35, 37
Al Na'ir (world), 147, 180, 186
Albiero (world), 180; prefecture, 78, 176
Algedi (world): 118, 187; prefecture 99
Alliance of Galedon: formed in 2302, 21; continues, 22; ruling body, 24; under complete control of Shiro, 23; political alliance, 101
Alshain (world): 49, 189; site of BattleMech manufacture, 59
Altair (world), 24, 50, 186
Altenmarkt Militia, 148
Amaris, Stefan ("Stefan the Usurper"), 50, 186
An Ting Legion, 148
Andrews, Prefect Cory, Prefect of Radstadt,98
Ares Convention, 30, 110
Arkab (world), 47
Arkab Legions, 145
Armandu, Prefect Tony, Prefect of Rubigen, 98
Ashio University: Zabu's alma mater, 60; destroyed with PRE, 73
Assassin's Handbook, 110
Azami, 118,119,145,187

Bandersnatches, 83
Bannockburn Bogs, 78
BattleMechs: attack Federated Suns, 54; attack Federation of Skye, 74; attack Hesperus II, 70; attack Robinson, 76; attack Skye; 77; commanded by Hanse Davion, 88; Davion use against Kurita, 55; dueling in, 46; expendable, 62; Federated Suns, 121; introduced during Age of War, 30; invade Maetsu, 61; Kuritan forces, 121; Liao, House, 121; manufacture by Terran Hegemony, 35; manufactured at Al Na'ir, 147, 186; manufactured on Hesperus II, 65, 68, 84; manufactured on Luthien and Alshain, 59; Marik, House, 121; military developments, 45; on Algedi, 118; on Buckminster, 184; on Davion border, 53; stationed on New Rhodes III, 55; successful against House Liao, 82; threaten Unity Palace, 83; use by House Davion, 68; use against Terran states, 43; use near Terra, 42; used against Davion, 71; used against Lyran Commonwealth, 57; used against Periphery bandits, 79; used against Tamar Pact, 79; used in Thorin raid, 66; Warren Kurita's interest in, 38; defeated by Hugai Kurita, 67; in Battle of Mara, 89
Belarguz, Brig. Gen. Djoran, 140
Benhashemi, Jamila, 106
Benjamin (world): 23, 24, 49, 57, 184
Benjamin Military District, 99, 131, 145, 174, 184; opposition to Davion incursions, 75; site of PRE academy, 60; war losses of, 59
Benjamin Regulars: 144, 184, 185
Bevier, Francisco,182
Bjarred (world): 180; Prefecture, 78; 98
Black Dojo, 80
Blake, Jerome, 56
Bradley, Colonel Ezra, 52
Brocchi's Cluster (star group), 176
Buckminster (world), 184; Prefecture, 99
Buddhism, 45, 48, 70, 102, 108, 141, 174
budojin (O.5.P. Adepts), 106, 107
Bujitsu,53
buke, 151
Bureau of Protocol, 93
bushido: "Way of the Warrior" 45, 53; and vendetta, 110; bars Necess from Coordinatorship,81; BattleMech dueling, 46; leads Takashi to reject cease-fire, 90; meaning of, 116; samurai code, 121

Cameron, Ian: leader of Terran Hegemony, 40; suspends Ares Convention, 41
Cameron, Michael: issues Edict of 2650, 49; succeeds McKenna, 25
Cameron, Richard, 49
Cameron, Simon: death of, 47, 48; First Lord of Star League, 48
Capellan Confederation: alliance with, 99; businessmen from, 72; Davion border, 58; House Liao, 30, 54, 55, 99; invaded by Federated Suns, 82, 89; peace treaty with Free Worlds League, 40; trade with, 163; war with Free Worlds League, 31; withdrawal of military forces, 51
Carmelite Mountains, 55
Celebration of the Coordinator's Birth, 94
Celebration of the Heir's Birthday, 94
Chahar Profit, 62
Chain Gang Missions, 62
ChemCourage (artificial stimulant), 61, 62
Cherenkoff, General Vasily, 114, 171, 174, 178
Christianity, 101, 116, 117, 141
Cleansing of the Spirit, 94
Clovis (world), 58, 59
Colonization Law of 2128, 12
"Company Store Scam," 89
ComStar: interstellar organization, 110, 127, 128, 130, 131; Hospices threatened by Hohiro, 84; agents immune to vendetta, 112; compiler of history, 5; dealings with House Kurita, 100; interest in Kurita religion, 108; investigates Yoguchi's death, 69; political science class, excerpt, 29; protests Necess' abduction, 83; relays greetings, 94; representatives meet with Miyogi, 70; reveals massacre, 57, technological/historical events, 8
ComStar Covert Operations, 83
Confucianism, 45, 101, 102, 108, 116, 117, 121
Conservation of Resources Bureau , 158
Council of One, 24
Council of Five, 80
Crucis Pact, 20
Cult of the Dragon, 5
Cylene II (world), 87, 174

Dalton, Nicholas, prefect of Xinyang, 99
Davarapala Accords, 81, 85
Davion, Hanse: assumes control of Federated Suns, 87; excited by find on Halstead Station, 89; Galtor Campaign, 121; invades Capellan Confederation, 89; plans invasion of Halstead Station, 88; Takashi's admiration for, 88
Davion, House: Federated Suns, 5, 25, 26, 31, 53, 55, 59, 66, 99, 100; battlefront, 82; BattleMechs of, 62; border, 144; border with Kurita, 76; counteroffensive, 58; defensive posture, 71; education, 154; Islamic settlement, 117; merchants, 152; military, 87; plan for war, 75; politics of, 70; propaganda, 156; response to Kentares massacre, 57; rivals House Kurita, 166; success against, 67; use of BattleMechs, 68
Davion, Ian, Prince of Federated Suns, 87; death of, 87
Davion, Lucien, 20
Dictum Honorium (code of conduct): 93, 99, 104, 105, 106, 108, 118, 119, 127, 128, 151, 152, 153, 170
Dieron (world), 23, 24, 57, 186
Dieron District Gymnasium, 139
Dieron Military District: 99, 131, 145, 168, 171, 186; opposition to Davion incursions, 75; war losses of, 59
Dieron Regulars, 142, 143, 186, 187
Dojos, 46
Doneval II (world), 58, 59
Dover (world): 60; site of PRE academy, 60
Draconis Combine: attacks Principality of Rasalhague, 26-27; growth of, 25; ruled by bastard, 33; violates Tamar Pact, 31
Draconis Combine Admiralty (DCA), 130
Draconis Elite Strike Team (DEST), 129
Draconis Rift: blocks Terran Hegemony, 25; direction of Kurita empire, 24
Dragon Renewal (political initiative), 84, 85
"Dragon's Breath," 113
"Dragon's Teeth," 114
Dreyfuss, Marcella, 154
DropShips: acquired by Kerensky, 51; attacked by Federated Suns, 58; in Battle of Mara, 89; invade Halstead Station, 88; invade Xhosa VII, 82; leave Halstead Station, 89; supply lines, 128; used in Chain Gang Missions, 62; used on Tishomingo, 67; on Laurent, 90

Economic Relocation Program, 157
Edict of 2650, 49
Edwards, Dr. Paul, 153
Emergency Powers Act, 83
epidemic, in Albiero and Bjarred, 78
Exodus: 10, 11, 182; difficulty of, 18; end of, 21; Kearney-Fuchida drive, 10-11; Ryan Cartel, 43;
Terran colonists, 20; Terran Parliament, 10

Federated Suns: 5, 25, 26, 31, 53, 55, 59, 66, 99, 100; alliance with Lyran Commonwealth, 90; attack An Ting Legion, 148; attacked by Draconis Combine, 54; BattleMechs, 121; battles with, 184; border, 143, 144; border with Kurita peaceful, 37; counterattack, 66; discovers Jinjiro's plans, 63; interest in Star League, 40; invade Xhosa VII, 82; Kuritan attitude towards, 99; losses to, 81; military front, 87; Minoru's perception of, 53; Motochika pretends to defect to, 63; neglect of, 75; new target, 53; presses military advantage, 76; raids against, 145; re-take worlds conquered by Kurita, 59; resistance, 58; size, 149,179; success of, 67; trade with, 163; weaknesses sought by Draconis Combine, 72
Federation of Skye, 26, 28 35
First Succession War, 53, 63, 121, 144 "Fly Paper Strategy," 81
47 Ronin, 51, 52
Franklin (world), 54, 63
Free Worlds League: 30, 54, 57, 99, 100; alliance with, 99; businessmen from, 72; Kuritan attitude toward, 100; peace treaty with Capellan Confederation, 40; propose alliance with House Kurita, 75; trade with,163; war with Capellan Confederation, 31; withdrawal of military forces, 51
Freedom (world), 16, 79
Fuchida, Takayoshi, 9-10
Fukuroi Riots, 49

Galatia III (world), 87, 90
Galedon V (world): 70, 181; Alliance headquarters, 22; major colony, 21; Ozawa Clan, 20
Galedon Alliance, 7
Galedon Colonial Board, Shiro's presence, 21
Galedon Military District: 98, 131, 181; opposition to Davion incursions, 75; preparation for war, 51
Galedon Regulars, 143, 173, 182, 183
Galtor Campaign, 121
Galtor III (world), 54, 90, 173, 174
geisha, 156
Gemal, Hamin, 154
Geneva, 16
Gillespie, General Ricardo, 81
Grand Inquisitor: investigates Shinjiro's death, 81; military judge, 127

Hachiman Technical Institute, 138
Hakashi, George, 99
Halstead Collection, 89
Halstead Station (world), 88
hara-kiri (see also seppuku): death of General Sorai, 56; forbidden by Jinjiro, 59; Motochika avoids, 63
Harrow's Sun (world), 87, 165
Harvest (world), 66, 97
Heaven's Gate, 54
Hendriks, Stephanie, Precentor, 83
Hesperus II (world), 30, 57, 65, 68, 70, 84
Hinduism, 141
Household Guard: "Dragon's Teeth," 114; loyalty of, 46; Otomo, 85; set to repel attackers, 37; Unity Palace, 85, 165, 166, 168; used by Sanyu, 104
Hsiun Chi, Kestor, 178

Imperial City (capital of Luthien), 45, 48, 78, 82, 83, 84, 93, 179
Imperial Institute of Technology, 154
Imperial Palace: Japanese architecture, 45; site of assassination attempts, 94; site of Yoguchi's assassination, 68
Indrahar, Clarissa, Director of ISF, 80, 81
Indrahar, Subhash, Director of ISF, 19, 88, 114, 131, 155, 165, 168, 169, 177, 181
Inner Sphere: 168, 179; at peace, 72; bandits in, 48; hears of massacre, 57; Kerensky's army departs, 52; Kurita destiny, 47; Kuritan ambition, 62; limited resources of, 80; mercantile association, 20; militarization of, 29; military action, 49; political alignment of, 70; technological development, 43; unites, 40
Internal Security College, 138, 169
Internal Security Force (ISF), branch of government, 97, 131; presence on Dieron, 186; "Dragon's Breath," 113; after Shadow War, 80; agent serving Taragi, 77; agents on Qandahar, 181; aided by Roweena, 66; and mercenaries, 130; and Rasalhague Regulars, 142, l43; and the Household Guard, 165; assassination attempt against Takiro, 49; assassins, 114; attached to Draconis military, 65; commanded by Subhash Indrahar, 169; Davarapala Accords, 85; difficulty with Legion of Vega, 147; Director, 47; fear of, 127; infiltrate O.5.P., 107; informs Takashi of rumors, 86; investigates Shinjiro's death, 81; investigates Yoguchi's death, 69; kidnap Necess, 82; objects to O.5.P., 104; on Tinaca, 173; opposes PRE academy, 60; presence in Benjamin, 99; presence on Algedi, 187; presence on Hachiman, 182; presence on Irurzun, 185; presence on Tishomingo, 67; presence on Xinyang, 185; prevents conspiracy with Periphery, 177; punishing vendetta, 112; purged of Roweena's influence, 78; purges, 48; quells protests, 58; reconciled with Coordinator, 81; remains loyal to Jinjiro, 61; reports on Tabayama, 183; rivalled by O.5.P., 106; Roweena gives Taragi access to, 76; secretly investigates Roweena, 72; sees for Coordinator, 92; strengthened, 47; suspects Marcus Kurita, 90; takes confession of General Kozoma, 64; thought control, 119; training, 138; treachery within, 50; ubiquity in Kuritan life, 156; use of, 66
Irurzun (world), 185; prefecture, 99
Islam, 117, 118, 119, 145
Isu, Duke Marco, 167

Jabuka (world), 151
Japanese language, 46, 84
Japanese architecture: Imperial Palace, 45
jitte (samurai weapon): 49, 174; burned on lawn, 85
Johannes, Prefect Darrell, 97
Johnsondale (world), 58
Judaism, 117
Julliard, Admiral Leondard, 16
JumpShips: acquired by Kerensky, 51; attacked by Federated Suns, 58; destroyed to prevent contagion, 78; supply lines, 128; used against Periphery bandits, 79; used in Chain Gang Missions, 62; used in ivory trade, 104
Junction (world), 23

Kagoshima : planet, 165, 169; prefecture, 99
Kajikazawa (world), 185; prefecture, 99
katana (longsword), 46, 103, 122, 137, 138, 139
Katana Principle, The (booklet by Taragi Kurita), 77
Katsuyori, Malcolm, 69
Kaznejov: (world): 183; prefecture, 98
Kazuhashi, Lieutenant (Kuritan legend), 102
Kearney, Thomas, 9
Kearney-Fuchida drive: development, 9; Exodus, 10-11; first use, 11
Keeper of the House Honor: establishes O.5.P., 104; head of O.5.P., 107; religious leader, 103, 105
Kelswa, General Kevin, 35
kendo, 46, 102, 106, 153, 165, 168
Kentares IV: 55, 58, 66; site of massacre, 55, 57
Kentares Massacre: as direct intervention, 92
Kerensky, General Aleksandr: military leader, 49, 50, 53; departs New Samarkand, 52; dismissed as Protector, 51; suspected of connection with Minnesota Tribe, 62
Kessel (world), 74, 187
ki (religious principle), 102, 106, 107, 168, 169
kiatsu (Japanese healing art), 107
Kitabake, Marquis Unno, 177
kitashu-ro-kuge (government procedure), 95
Klein, Charles, 105
Kokugaku ("National Learning"), 45, 49
Kosmo, Paul, 154
Kosoan Trading Company, 44
Kozoma, General Frederick: execution of, 65; forces Zabu into seppuku, 64
Kresge, Ambassador Daphine, 96
ku (philosophical principle), 92
kuge (nobility), 116, 151
"Kurita Bulge," 58
"Kurita Kitsch," (architectural style), 48
Kurita, Adam, 27, 28
Kurita, Blaine, 42
Kurita, Constance: CEO, Ivory Trade of the O.5.P., 163; Keeper of the House Honor, 102, 170
Kurita, Drago, 50
Kurita, Elaine, 42
Kurita, Grant, 38, 105
Kurita, Hanako, 33
Kurita, Hehiro: Coordinator, 40; and the Pillar of Ivory, 102; as peacemaker, 41; death of, 42, 86; heir-apparent, 39; signs Treaty of Vega, 40; son of Warren and Siriwan, 38
Kurita, Hohiro: becomes Coordinator, 84; Coordinator, 178; legacy, 87, 165, 166; offends ISF, 85; plot against, 169; proclaims celebrations, 85; son of Hugai, 84
Kurita, Hugai: accuses ComStar of brainwashing, 83; appoints General Sakamoto, 82; author, 100; becomes Coordinator, 81; budgetary problems, 84; creates Hachiman Technical Institute, 138; death of, 84; mind deteriorates, 84; son of Shinjiro, 81
Kurita, Hugai: son of Yoguchi, 67
Kurita, Isaac, 26, 27
Kurita, Jasmine, 87, 155, 166, 167, 168
Kurita, Jason: "Tyrant of Rasalhague," 28, 33; death of, 31, 34, 105; removed from office, 34
Kurita, Jinjiro: Coordinator, 57; death of, 65; history, 166; illness causes resignation, 64; institutes Chain Gang Missions, 62; intrigued by Minnesota Tribe, 62; madness, 54, 61, 65; orders attacks on Steiner and Davion, 63; orders census, 59; orders Massacre of Kentares IV, 56; poorly regarded as Coordinator, 92; purges Kuritan leadership, 59; reconstruction efforts, 60; unable to inspire war effort, 58; Warlord, 53, 54
Kurita, Jon, 76, 77
Kurita, Kamaro, 20, 101
Kurita, Knute, 175
Kurita, Lenore, 33
Kurita, Leonard, 42, 43
Kurita, Malcolm, 175
Kurita, Marcus, 90, 170, 172, 178
Kurita, Marika, 29, 31, 105
Kurita, Martha, Keeper of the House Honor, 106
Kurita, Mies, governor of Rasalhague, 97, 175
Kurita, Minoru: addresses advisors, 92; Coordinator, 50, 54, 186; death of, 55; favorite BattleMechs, 121; history, 168; legacy, 89; opposes Kerensky, 52; prepares for war, 51, 53; speech to Draconis Combine, 49
Kurita, Miyamoto, 165, 166
Kurita, Miyogi: addresses Sun Zhang Academy, 72; becomes Coordinator, 68; brother of Yoguchi, 68; death of, 77; offensive successful, 71; pleased with offensive against Steiner, 70; promotes his son to front Commander, 73, 76; sends Taragi to Davion front, 75; sentences Roweena to house arrest, 73; three daughters, 78
Kurita, Necess, 81, 82, 83
Kurita, Nihongi, 28, 29
Kurita, Oma, 28, 29, 33
Kurita, Omi: compiles Dictum Honorium, 104, 105; death of, 28, 105; first Keeper of the House Honor, 103
Kurita, Parker: Coordinator, 31, 35, 105; institution of The Five Pillars, 103;.object of Nihongi Von Rohrs' revenge, 32
Kurita, Philip, 33
Kurita, Robert: Coordinator, 29, 35; contrast with Nihongi Von Rohrs, 34; death of, 31; decides to invade Lyran Commonwealth, 31; kills Werner von Rohrs, 29, 105; object of Nihongi Von Rohrs' revenge, 32; signs Ares Convention, 31
Kurita, Roweena: Coordinator of PRE, 66, 69, 72; approached by Taragi, 76; becomes de facto Coordinator, 68; denounced by Taragi, 73; plots against Miyogi, 77; sentenced to house arrest, 73
Kurita, Saigo, 105
Kurita, Sanethia: Coordinator, 43, 182; moves capital to Luthien, 44, 179; resigns as Coordinator, 45
Kurita, Sanyu: death of, 106; institutes The Five Pillars, 103; Keeper of the House Honor, 105, 163
Kurita, Shada, 103, 104, 105
Kurita, Shinjiro: becomes Coordinator, 78; coordinates military actions, 79; death of, 81; meets with ISF Director, 80, 81
Kurita, Shiragi, Keeper of the House Honor, 105
Kurita, Shiro: "First Citizen" of New Samarkand, 21; "Way of the Warrior," 7; born in 2270, 20; creates Draconis Combine, 25; dies in 2348, 25; direct ancestor of Martin McAllister, 37; first Coordinator, 105, 116, 181; founder, 7; hatches "The First Egg," 114; history, 168; katana of, 103; letter from Urizen, 27; letter to his brother, 23; letter to his son, 24; memory of, 41; plans for expansion, 26; political tactics, 22; proclaims himself Lord of Yamashiro, 20; quoted, 151, 152; religious beliefs, 101, 102; rules of dynasty, 34; source of Dictum Honorium, 105; tradition, 23
Kurita, Takashi: accompanies mercenaries, 89; admiration for Hanse Davion, 88; appointed head of Household Guards, 85; assassination attempts, 90; attitude towards mercenaries, 89, 130; Coordinator, 86, 165-171, 173, 175-178; creates Altenmarkt Militia, 148; creates Legion of Vega, 147; decorating civilians, 141; decorating soldiers, 140; hunts down enemies, 87; invades Laurent, 89; military leader, 85; orders slaughter of strikers, 128; policies, 156; prefers company when dining, 93; rejects cease-fire, 90; son of Hohiro, 85

Kurita, Takeo (videodrama), 8
Kurita, Takiro: addresses military academy 43; contemplative nature, 48; Coordinator, 48; death of, 50; laughs at Richard Cameron's authority, 49; meets with Kerensky, 49; military developments, 45; opposes Stefan Amaris, 50
Kurita, Taragi: chief advior to Warlords, 75; Coordinator 77; death of, 78; humiliation, 76; manipulates bureaucracy, 76; presents evidence against Jon, 77; promoted by Miyogi, 73
Kurita, Tenno: Coordinator, 27, 28; Shiro's son, 24, 27
Kurita, Theodore: commander of Legion of Vega, 147; Heir-Designate, 131, 166, 168, 170, 176; Prince of Luthien, 19, 114
Kurita, Toshiro, 33
Kurita, Urizen, 20-27, 105
Kurita, Urizen, II: "Urizen the Passive," 46; administrative abilities, 46; Coordinator, 45, 46, 47 death of, 46; explanation for dueling, 47; legacy of, 48; Mandate to the ISF, 47
Kurita, Victor, 26, 27
Kurita, Vladimir, 27, 28
Kurita, Warren: becomes Coordinator, 38; death of, 38, 39; husband of Siriwan, 38
Kurita, Yoguchi: addresses Azami warriors, 67; becomes Coordinator, 65; death investigated, 69; death of, 68; devises new strategy, 66; flees Tishomingo, 68; organizes resistance to Davion, 68
Kurita, Yokara, 105
Kurita, Zabu: becomes Coordinator, 64; de facto leader of Draconis Combine, 65; death of, 64; Director of PRE, 60; Jinjiro's half-brother, 60; not backed by military, 61; notices insignia of Minnesota Tribe, 62; precedent for de facto Coordinator, 68
kyodo, 46, 106, 153

Land-Air 'Mechs, military developments, 45
LCS Invincible, 70
Legion of Vega, 147, 168
Lexa Tech Industries (developer of Sting LAM), 45
Liao, House: BattleMechs, 121; Capellan Confederation, 30, 54, 55, 99; Islamic settlement, 117
Liao, Terrance, 40
Lowell, Prefect Mahar, 97
Luchesi, General Armando, 16, 17
Luthien: capital of Draconis Combine, 44, 93, 94, 97, 98, 99, 103, 144, 154, 155, 167, 169, 173, 176; construction of Imperial City, 45; planet, 23, 44, 48, 49, 51, 52, 54, 68, 75, 76, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 102, 114, 118, 119, 151, 165, 168, 170, 171, 179, 180, 182, 183, 185; site of BattleMech manufacture, 59
Luthien University, 153, 154
Lyran Commonwealth: accused of war profiteering, 72; attacked by Draconis Combine, 57; border, 97, 99, 142, 144, 190; border with Kurita expanding, 37; cedes planet of St. John, 35; counteroffensive, 79; defeat of BattleMechs, 67; First Succession War, 121; formed in 2408, 35; generals, 123; House Steiner, 5, 26, 31,35, 54, 57, 58, 61, 62, 66, 75, 100, 129; interest in Star League, 40; invaded by Yoguchi, 66; Jewish settlement, 117; Kurita advances against, 34; Kurita victory against, 59; loses Kessel, 187; military front, 90, 143; Minoru's perception of, 53; object of revenge, 74; raided by Night Stalkers, 147; raids against, 145; recent gains, 172; strategy, 81; strategy against, 75; Takashi's attitude toward, 87; target of revenge, 68, 71; trade with, 163; trade with Vega, 188; weaknesses sought by Draconis Combine, 72; withdrawal of military forces, 51

Mallory's World (world), 87, 165; invaded by Draconis Combine, 88
Manati, Hogo, 98, 176
Mara (world), 76, 87, 89
Marathon Offensive, 81
Marik, Albert, 40
Marik, House: attempts to assassinate Steiner Archon, 75; BattleMechs, 121; Free Worlds League, 30, 54, 57, 99, 100
Massacre of Kentares IV: ordered by Jinjiro, 56
Matsuida (world): 183; prefecture, 98
Matterhorn (transceivor station): 16
McAbayashi, Kevin (author of Assassin's Handbook), 110
McAllister Rebellion: 101, 106, 116, 118; begins in 2494, 36; leads to death of Kruger Von Rohrs, 34
McAllister, Martin: Coordinator, 38, 106, 180; commander of Household Guard, 37,114; death of, 38; diplomatic envoy, 36; executes Von Rohrs line, 37; marries Illiyana Sorenson, 36; quote attributed to, 32
McAllister-Kurita, Siriwan: as kingmaker, 41; becomes "brevet" Coordinator, 38; becomes 13th Coordinator, 39; becomes 17th Coordinator, 42; childhood on Rasalhague, 37; .Coordinator, 101, 106, 107; daughter of Martin McAllister, 36; death of, 42; grandmother of Sanethia, 43; quoted, 151; remembers Warren's death, 42
McDonald, Seth, 156, 163
McKenna, Fleet Admiral James: establishes Terran Hegemony, 19, 25
MechWarriors: honor of, 59; carrying swords, 46; Champions, 46; honored posthumously, 84; uniforms, 123
metsuke: "all-seeing eyes," 47; approached by Roweena, 66; influence in ISF, 78; kidnap Necess, 82; killed in Shadow War, 72; loyal to Roweena, 76; members of ISF, 81; offended by ISF reassignment 65; on Tinaca, 173; storm offices of PRE and ISF, 73; terrorism on Alshain, 189; training center, 80
Military Districts (government districts), 166
Military Honors (court ritual), 94
Ministry of Interior, 96
Ministry of Justice, 96, 97, 127
Ministry of the Court, 96, 97
Ministry of Treasury, 96, 164
Ministry of War (branch of government), 96; subdivisions, 127
Minnesota Tribe, 62
Minoru Kurita University, 138
Mohammed, 118
Motochika, General Chosokabe: destroys Dahar IV, 63
Myoos (Buddhist legend), 70

Nagai, Takadi, 158
Nakagona, Mino, 98
New Avalon (world): capital of Federated Suns, 54, 55, 57
New Avalon Institute of Science, 89
New Bergen (world): 98; subjugated, 27
New Earth (world): first interstellar colony, 12, 15, 30
New Glasgow (world): capital of Skye, 77
New Samarkand (world): 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 51, 52, 80, 101, 102, 143, 165, 167, 168, 169, 182; birthplace of Shiro Kurita, 20; capital of Draconis Combine, 105; ceases to be capital, 44; independence from Ozawas, 21; led by Shiro Kurita, 7; McAllister returns to, 36; Ozawa Clan, 20; prefecture, 98
New Samarkand University, 154
New Snowfield (town): site of Minoru Kurita's death, 55
Night Stalkers, 147
Ningxia (world): 181; prefecture, 98
Nolus Archipelagus Institute, 154
Normandy (resort on New Samarkand), 39
Nox (world), 35

Operation Freedom (Lyran counteroffensive), 79, 84
Order of the Five Pillars (O.5.P.): infiltrates Kuritan military, 112; instruct Kurita military officers, 107; led by Constance, 170; religious/economic institution, 104, 106; thought control, 119
Otomo: accompany Takashi into battle, 89; commanded by Marcus Kurita, 178; fail to protect Takashi, 90; Household Guards, 56, 85; massacres politicians in courtyard, 86; member assassinates Hohiro, 86
Outer Reaches Rebellion: 2235-2237, 15; ends in 2238, 20; results of, 18; success of, 17; "criminals of the past," 19
Outworlds Alliance: war against, 41
Ozawa Clan, 20
Ozawa Mercantile Alliance: opposed by Shiro Kurita, 7, 21; Kuritan business, 181; policies, 20; resistence to Shiro, 22
Ozawa, Melissa, 180

Pageant of Noble Loyalty (court ritual), 93, 95
Panther BattleMechs: development of, 45; manufacture of, 49
Pastor, Nevil, 154
People's Reconstruction Effort (PRE): dismantled by Miyogi, 73; aftermath of war, 60; conflict with Coordinator, 73; led by Roweena, 68
Periphery: banditry along Kurita border, 78; bandits in, 79, 81; border, 53, 62, 66, 142, 143, 144, 147, 148, 183, 190; Lenore takes refuge, 33; mercenaries flee to, 60; military action, 49, 50; 178; No-Man's land, 5; rejection of Star League, 40; Rim Worlds Republic, 50; Territorial States, 48; trade with, 97, 177
Pesht (world): 23, 37, 105, 180; Military District, 42
Pesht District Gymnasium, 172
Pesht Military District (government district): 98, 131, 164, 172, 179; ordered on military alert, 62; site of shipyards, 59
Pesht Regulars, 144, 145
Pesht University, 105, 153
Physicians of the Dragon, 130
Pillar of Gold, 73, 91-100, 102
Pillar of Ivory, 101-119, 151
Pillar of Jade, 102, 157-164
Pillar of Steel, 102, 121-149
Pillar of Teak, 102, 151-156
Port Moseby (world), 74, 98, 184
Professional Soldiery Liaison, 60, 89, 130
Proserpina (world): 184; prefecture, 99
Proserpina Hussars, 146, 147, 148
Protectorate of Donegal, 26, 35

Quintadocs, Greater, 108
Quintadocs, Lesser, 108

Rasalhague (world): 168, 181, 188; homeworld of Daniel Sorenson, 33; Military District, 42; Siriwan's birthplace, 38; terrorist raid, 28
Rasalhague Military Academy, 175
Rasalhague Military District: birthplace of Heaven's Gate, 54; birthplace of Snow Fire, 68; economic expansion of Lyran Commonwealth, 74; government district, 97, 105, 106, 116, 117, 131, 148, 154, 171, 172, 188; military headquarters, 52; ordered on military alert, 62
Rasalhague Regulars, 142, 143
Rasalhague, Principality of: absorbed by Draconis Combine, 101; border on Draconis Combine, 7; Draconis Combine attacks, 25, 26, 27; government archives, 36
Reunification War, 40-43, 46, 48
Rim Worlds Republic, 41, 50
Robinson (world), 66, 76
Rome (world), 90
Ronin, 46, 47
Rourke, Duke Rollo, 177
Rowe (world), 58, 76
Rubigen (world), 189; separatist movement, 98
Ryan Cartel, 17, 43
Ryan, Rudolph, 13, 14

Sakamoto, Brig. Gen. Samson, 82
Samsonov, Grieg, 173, 182
Sanctum Arcanum, 103, 106
Sato, Mahi, 98
Second Succession War, 58, 60, 71
seppuku (see also hara-kiri): 28, 56, 127, 140; performed by Elaine Kurita, 42
Sevren (world), 16, 89, 90
Shadow War: aftermath, 80; begins, 72; details known by Elizabeth Steiner, 74; ends, 73
Shintoism, 102, 106, 108, 116, 117, 121
Shizoku-kotai (Pageant of Noble Loyalty): 93
Shor, Stefan, 97
Shotugama, Hirushi, 174
Skondia (world), 35, 53
Skye (world), 31, 74, 77, 79, 83
Snow Fire (concubine name of Yoguchi's assassin), 68, 69
"Sons of the Dragon," 131
Sorai, General Dazai, 56
Sorenson, Blaine, 36, 37
Sorenson, Daniel, 28, 33, 34
Sorenson, Illiyana, 36
Sorenson, Ivan, 172, 175
Sorenson, Jan, 28
Southern, Duke Paul, 95
SS Franklin, 44
Star League: 180, 183, 186; dueling MechWarriors, 47; established in 2571, 40; High Council, 51; history, 153; Kuritan isolation from, 46; Kuritan xenophobia, 152; new currency system, 44; prepares for war against members, 43; uniform on doll, 65; Unproductives, 46; war against outsiders, 41; weakened, 48, 49
Star League Articles, violation of, 42
Steiner, Elizabeth: Archon of Lyran Commonwealth, 74; survives assassination attempt, 75
Steiner, House: accidental death of Archon, 79; BattleMechs of, 62; border, 184; border too far to attack Luthien, 44; defense of Hesperus II, 70; education, 154; implicated in Yoguchi's death, 68, 69; imports from, 152; Islamic settlement, 117; loses planets to Draconis Combine, 83; Lyran Commonwealth, 5, 26, 31, 35, 54, 57, 58, 61, 62, 66, 75, 100, 129; military front, 77, 78, 81, 84; politics of, 70; stronghold on Grumium, 71
Steiner, Katrina: Archon of Lyran Commonwealth, 87, 100; proposes cease-fire, 90
Steiner-Davion Alliance, 5
Sterenson, Talon Sergeant Ingmar, 86
Styx (world), 50, 57
Succession Wars, 5
Successor States: House Kurita most isolated of, 41
"Sufferings of the Lion," 93
Sulevani, Rajiv, 72
Sun Tzu School of Combat, 139
Sun Zhang Academy: addressed by Hohiro, 84; addressed by Takashi, 87; addressed by Taragi, 74; addressed by Miyogi, 72; Cherenkoff's alma mater, 171; diplomacy of commander, 80; military academy, 43, 122, 137, 139, 143, 148, 167, 182; reputation of, 46; students fired upon, 51; Takashi's alma mater, 165; Theodore's alma mater, 168
Sun Zhang Academy Cadre, 148
sushin (ethics), 153
Sverdlovsk (world), 21, 22
Sword of Light BattleMech Regiments, 35, 70, 141, 143, 184

Tai-jutsu, 106, 107
Tamar (world), 31, 79, 81, 83, 89, 90
Tamar Pact, 26, 28, 35, 79
Tancredi IV (world), 66, 90
Tango (compiler of Wisdom of the Dragon), 113
Tannil (world), 44, 54
Taoism, 101, 108, 116
taqiyya ("caution"), 119
TAS Pathfinder, 11, 12
Taurian Concordat, 41
Terra (world): 50, 55, 66, 77, 81, 99, 101, 104, 113, 116, 117, 118, 119, 145, 151, 154, 157, 170, 181, 188; ComStar Headquarters, 83, 110; meeting place of Council Lords, 51
Terran Alliance: 10, 11; collapses in 2314, 25; Colonization Law, 12; control of space colonies, 13; Declaration of Independence from, 16; fall of, 15; response to secession, 17
Terran Hegemony: begins in 2315, 19; continued power of, 30; joins Star League, 40; manufacture of BattleMechs, 35; newly formed, 25; technological superiority, 29; Tenno seeks closer ties with, 28; history, 186
Terran Parliament: Colonization Law, 12; Exodus, 10; hears of secession in 2235, 16; increases power of colonial governors, 15; response to secession, 17
Territorial States: 48; taxes levied on, 49
Tharkad (world), capital of Lyran Commonwealth, 70
Third Succession War, 72, 77, 187
Tintavel (star system), 30
Tishomingo (world), 67, 68
Tobiason, Talon Sergeant Richard: brings Jinjiro news of Minoru's death, 56
Toshi, Yvonne, 54
Toyama, Hideyoshi, 77
Travison, General Tugima, 79
Treaty of Vega: 40; Hehiro signs, 41
Trondheim (world), 28, 52, 62, 190
Tsevernasky, Marion, 154
Tushan Lobster, 44

Ukiyo, 54, 68, 182, 185, 189
Unity Palace: building material, 151; cultural events, 155; Household Guard, 85, 165, 166, 168; massacre in courtyard, 86; meeting in, 83; Sanctum Arcanum, 103, 106; seat of Draconis Combine government, 93, 167
University of Proserpina, 137, 146, 174
Unproductives: "passively rotting masses," 117; and religious sects, 119; beliefs of, 116; in Draconis Combine, 59; liberated on Richmond, 62; Star League, 46; stay in ComStar Hospices, 82; take part in Maetsu invasion, 61; underclass, 151, 159

Valenzuela, Philip, 154
Vega (world), 40, 50, 188
vendetta, 110-112
Von Rohrs, Kozo, 34, 35, 106
Von Rohrs, Kruger, 34, 36
Von Rohrs, Marika, Keeper of the House Honor, 106
Von Rohrs, Nihongi: Coordinator, 32, 105; begins purges, 33; deposes Parker Kurita, 32; removes Jason Kurita from office, 34
Von Rohrs, Werner, 29, 105
Von Rohrs, Yama, 34, 36, 37, 106

Waddesdon Traders, 44
wakizashi, 46, 53, 122, 137, 138, 139, 140
Water shortage, on space colonies, 12, 13
Wisdom of the Dragon: book of Kuritan sayings, 113; school, 138, 165, 166, 168, 171, 173, 174
Worrell (world), 23, 98

Xenophobia: 152; in the arts, 154
Xhosa VII (world): 83; invasion of, 82

Yamashiro: birthplace of Shiro, 20; prefecture, 102
Yamashiro Guard: under Shiro and Urizen's command, 20
Yellow Bird (Kuritan folk saying): 113
Yoriyoshi, Ukita, 89, 140, 173, 174
Yotomo, Tagushi, Prefect of Kagoshima, 98

Zen, 116, 121

HOUSE KURITA

The Draconis Combine

Map of the Draconis Combine

8 PARSECS

40 PARSECS OR 130.4 LIGHT YEARS

MAXIMUM JUMP --- APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS.
FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES USE 9 PARSECS = 29.34 LY

Map Compiled by COMSTAR.
From information provided by the COMSTAR EXPLORER SERVICE
and the STAR LEAGUE ARCHIVES on Terra.

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- District Capital
- Prefecture Capital
- District Borders
- Prefecture Borders

The Rock
Elissa
Santander V
Porthos
Sigurd
Oberon VI
Butte Hold
Damian
Thule
Richmond
Holmsbu
Skallevoll
Toland
Star's End
Steelton
Outpost
Pinnacle
Constance
Idlewind
Schwartz
Tarnby
Altona
Gravenhage
Susquehanna
Svelvik
Balsta
Jarett
Rockland
Persistence
Icar
Winfield
New Caledonia
The Edge
Alleghe
St. John
Leoben
Trondheim
Turtle Bay
Almunge
Virentofta
Bjarred
Hartshill
Salford
Nowhere
New Bergen
Chateau
Csesztreg
Verthandi
Rodigo
Lovinac
Bruben
Hermagor
Rasalhague
Brocchi's Cluster
Coudoux
Stapelfeld
Sawyer
Chapineria
Leyland
Slaithwaite
Brihuega
Maxie's Planet
Trell I
Kirchbach
Liezen
New Oslo
Last Frontier
Nykvarn
Garstedt
Brailsford
Algete
Chorley
Romulus
Harvest
Radije
Dawn
Vipaava
Jezersko
Polcenigo
Chupadero
Lonaconing
Ad Duwayd
Twycross
Seiduts
Planting
Mozirje
Feltre
Unzmarkt
Pomme De Terre
Schuyler
Hanover
Kabah
Jeanette
Echo
Oandahar
Kamarod
Korramabad
Evciler
Vantaa
Riddarkek
Ferleiten
Predlitz
Savinsville
Luzerne
Albiero
Bangor
Denizli
Hohenems
Spittal
Casere
Courchevel
Jeronimo
Matamoras
Pusht-i-rud
Devin
Leskovik
Svarstaad
Basiliano
Kufstein
Engadin
Goito
Byesville
Wolcott
McAlister
Macksburg
Espakeh
Zoetermeer
Dell
Marshdale
Hyner
Herndon
Cheriton
Clearfield
Multan
Baker 3
Vulcan
Skokie
Moritz
Kandis
Labrea
Maldonado
Loysville
Sevren
Tamar
Stanzach
Radstadt
Soverzene
Outer Volta
Ningxia
Aby Adi
Linqing
Land's End
Hongor
Dompaire
Colmar
Laurent
Memmingen
Kempten
Vorarlberg
Thessalonika
Itabaiana
Terrante
Pesht
Tuscarawas
Juazeiro
Ebensburg
Graus
Sudeten
Voldens
Thannhausen
Gunzburg
Kaesong
Sheliak
Irece
Meinacos
Unity
Sertar
Thimphu
Huaide
Soul
Cusset
Maesh
Kobe
Karston
Bessarabia
Hyperion
Heiligendreuz
Caripare
Hassi R'mel
Blair Atholl
Biota
Shaula
Hainfeld
Alshain
Tinaca
Yamarovka
Cyrenaica
Dustball
Montmarault
Rastaban
Wheel
Marawi
Mualang
Asgard
Kilmarnock
Charity
Monywa
Koniz
Benfled
Suk II
Thun
Satalice
Galuzzo
Port Arthur
Tarazed
Avon
Luthien
Chatham
Kagoshima
Shimonoseki
Graceland
Ballynure
La Grave
Domain
Skandia
Halesowen
Ardoz
Stemwerde
Myada
New Samarkand
Chinda
Sumnheer
Pandora
Carse
Nox
Utrecht
Setubal
Kiamba
Kanowit
Baruun Urt
Braunton
Leiston
Sighisoara
Pondicherry
Orkney
Diosd
Eguilles
Kranice
Tanh Linh
Bicester
Corsica Nueva
Mizunami
Tabayama
Crimond
Quarell
Ramsau
Mannedorf
Altenmarkt
Toffen
Dumaring
Babuyan
Xinyang
Yumesta
Worrell
Koulen
Kazanka
Tomans
Jabuka
Lothan
Rubigen
Kiesen
Meilen
Paracale
Dyfed
Omagh
Ban Na San
Ramgarh
Ziatoust
Rasalgethi
Tukayyid
Odabasi
Ogano
Yardley
Chinmen Tao
Keihoku
Zalaf
Borghese
Ft. Loudon
Ueda
Nagna
Pilkhua
Chandler
Philadelphia
Grunwald
Surcoin
Kelenfold
Karbala
Dengolan
Numiki
Darius
Arkab
Sakai
Dover
Midway
Isesaki
Sanda
Tiflis
Sinope
Bad News
Meacham
Grumium
Shirotori
Caldrea
Sulafat
Baldur
Silkeborg
Havdhem
Simferopol
Cerberus
Blue Diamond
Al Hillah
Tok Do
Shibukawa
Peacock
Agematsu
Nakaojo
Oshika
Sverdlovsk
Fatima
Orestes
Otho
Osmus Saar
Koumi
Galedon V
Garrison
Arcturus
Camlann
Trolloc Prime
Mersa Matruh
Tamsalu
Dnepropetrovsk
Goubellat
Budingen
Ginestra
Luciana
Leganes
Morningside
Aix-la-Chapelle
Awano
Minowa
Tatsuno
Togura
Sakuranoki
Cosenza
Schirmeck
Gansloren Dalkath
Port Moseby
Buckminster
Helsingfors
Hachiman
Nadrin
Senorbi
Kockengen
Sakhalin
Symington
Accrington
Aubisson
Cadiz
Falsterbo
Kirei Na Niwa
Delitzsch
Alpheratz
Porrima
Breuksten
Carstairs
Auldhouse
Phalan
Eaglesham
Gram
Kajikazawa
Vanern
Handa
Valentina
Shimosuwa
Fukuroi
Benjamin
Saaremaa
Kawabe
Hun Ho
Shaul Khala
Matsuida
Beta Mensae V
Kaznejov
Waldheim
Weisau
Sevon
Veckholm
Kirkcaldy
Yed Prior
Corndan IV
Edasich
Yed Posterior
Baxter
Cebaikai
Tsukude
Alnasl
Monistrol
Annapolis
Apriki
Ljugarn
Altdorf
Delacruz
Ferris
Whittington
Eaton
Alexandria
Freedom
New Wessex
Altais
Rukbat
Minakuchi
Hagiwawa
Umjin
KopingChian
Igualada
An Ting
Capra
Niles
Groveld III
Kesai IV
Nekkar
Izar
Kimball II
Vega
Eltanin
Alya
Algedi
Kitalpha
Irurzun
Arlington
Gandy's Luck
Marlowe's Rift
Misery
Thestria
Huan
Bryceland
Tancredi IV
Kennard
Telman IV
Laurieston
Zebeneschamali
Ryde
Martik
Konstance
Kornephoros
Kaus Borealis
Kaus Australis
Kaus Media
Ascella
Shitara
Dabih
Albaili
Waddesdon
Shimonita
Donenac
Reisling's Planet
Harpster
Conroe
Cimeron
Latexo
Anguilla
Haynesville
Pitkin
Chaffee
Carnwath
Alrakis
Kessel
Piedmont
Chichibu
Junction
Ludwig
Galtor III
Deshler
New Aberdeen
Bergman's Planet
'Eldere IV
Harrow's Sun
Cassias
McGehee
Lyceum
Brookeland
Palarito
Diboll
Inner End
Gladius
Glengarry
Unukalhai
La Bion
Ashio
Waykoneta
Udibi
Sturgis
De Berry
Hazelhurst
Bastrop
Seginus
Kochab
Alphecca
Dromini VI
Moore
Kuzuuu
Barlow's Folly
New Menoham
Tripoli
Marduk
McComb
Damevang
Cola
Bremond
Pascagoula
Broaddus
Pattison
Delos IV
Laiaka
Alkaid
Skyes
Zebebelgenubi
Skondia
Sabk
Atria
Lambrecht
Kurhah
Tarnil
Matar
Lima
Benet III
Choudrant
Glenmora
Sterlington
Kirbyville
Kilbourne
Carsphairn
Syrma
Nusakan
Ko
Lyons
Yance I
Halstead Station
Sadachbia
Ancha
Crossing
Fairfield
Tishomingo
Rowe
Fallon II
Brundage
Greeley
Milligan
Stratford
Beaumont
Arnaudville
Algorab
Cor Caroli
Alioth
Muphrid
Zollikofen
Menkent
Mizar
Summer
Vindemiatrix
Alcor
Galatea
Dyev
Pike IV
Athenry
Imbros III
Asta
Yori
Telos IV
Bihan
Al Na'ir
Nishira
Deneb Algedi
Sadalbari
Proserpina
Scheat
Fellanin II
Klathandu IV
Breed
Dobson
Le Blanc
New Ivarsen
Hoff
Sakhara V
Bettendorf
Dahar IV
Sun Prairie
Fairfax
Morrill
Ottumwa
Princton
Adrian
Chanute
Farnsworth
Millray
Woodbine
Winfield
Kountze
Boondock
Zaniah
Gacrux
Milton
Lipton
Thorin
Chara
Dieron
Attin
Saffel
Quentin
Helen
Towne
Galatia III
Mara
Xhosa VII
Doneval II
Franklin
Lucerne
Allerton
Waunakee
Verde
Urich
Mirage
Alta Vista
Cohay
Pheeda
Kentares
New Earth
Zavijava
Northwind
Fomalhaut
Errai
Clovis
Maynard
Junior
Sylvan
Protection
Nagel
Bassfield
Delcambre
Inman
Shiloh
Wyatt
Zosma
Denebola
Oliver
Graham IV
Alula Australis
Sirius
Terra
Caph
Addicks
Ozawa
Rone
Rochester
Robinson
Sauk City
Tarkio
Hickok
Linneus
Altoona
Thibodaux
Hevannee
Alhena
Cheriah
Marcus
Castor
Pollux
Devils Rock
Kaid
Small World
Ankea
Elbar
Empona
Necedah
Pattonsbrug
Benedict
Savonburg
Rochelle
Kalidasa
Dieudonne
Bordon
Talitha
Outreach
Carver V
Epsilon Indi
Ingress
Deneb Kaitos
Ruchbah
Basal
Kentares IV
Colchester
Potwin
Macomb
Ulysses
Vibrunum
Neosho
Tangipahoa
Rosspine
Kentwood
Alkes
New Hope
Epsilon Eridani
Sheratan
Bryant
Fletcher
Kaewich
Tybalt
Tygress
Achernar
Norma
Schedar
New Rhodes III
Carnago
Olancha
Exeter
Johnsondale
Layover
DeWitt
Larned
Lexington
Peabody
Mokane
Palmyra
Davisville
Humansville
Terra Firma
Acamar
Woodstock
Mirach
Caselton
Edwards
Logandale
Avawatz
Cholame
Blandinsville
Rosamond
Bogard
Evansville
Ramona
Quincy
Keytesville
Sullivan
St. Robert
Newton
Rio

The Draconis Combine's Line of Succession and Partial Kurita Family Tree

Dates and years in italics indicate time spent in power as Coordinator or equivalent

Shiro Kurita
2270 - 2348 (78)
2319 - 2348 (29)

Tenno Kurita
2305 - 2376(71)
2348- 2376 (28) II

Kinkaku Kurita
2333 - 2408 (75)

Nihongi Kurita
2336 - 2396 (60)
2376- 2396(20) III

Hugai Kurita
2308 - 2385 (77)

Nara Kurita
2346 - 2398 (52)

Shiragi Kurita
2347 - 2410 (63)

Omi Kurita
2309 - 2375 (66)
(Slain on Rasalhague)
(Compiled Dictum Honorium in 2334)

Cheong Kurita
2350 - 2446 (96)

Shada Kurita
2312 - 2334 (22)
(Killed by father for indiscrete behavior)
(Became pregnant at college)

Robert Kurita
2371- 2412 (41)
2396- 2412 (16) IV

Jason Kurita
2401 - 2418 (18)
(Killed in duel)*

Philip Kurita
2406 - 2502 (96)
(Exiled in 2425)

Elizabeth Kurita
2431 - 2512 (81)

Anthony Kurita
2439 - 2526 (87)

Ruth Kurita
2441 - 2485 (44)
(Died in air crash)

Marika Kurita
2375 - 2440 (65)

Nihongi Von Rohrs
2394 - 2452(58)
2421 - 2452(31) VI

Kozo Von Rohrs
2426 - 2470 (44)
2452 - 2470(18) Vii

Yama Von Rohrs
2445 - 2510 (65)
2470- 2508 (38) VIII
(Imprisoned by Kruger in 2508)

Kruger Von Rohrs
2460 - 2510 (50)
2508 - 2510 (2) IX

Marika Von Rohrs
2469 - 2510 (41)

Nengo Von Rohrs
2470 - 2510 (40)

(All members of Von Rohrs family executed after McAllister Rebellion)

Sanyu Kurita
2377 - 2459 (82)
(Instituted Five Pillars in 2420)

Parker Kurita
2380 - 2421 (41)
2412- 2421 (9) V

Grant Kurita
2403 - 2493 (90)

Yokara Kurita
2410 - 2498 (88)

Saigo Kurita
2382 - 2419 (37)
(Killed in battle)

Lenore Kurita
2386 - 2436 (50)
(Sold into slavery 2421.
Killed for sport by owner)

Martin McAllister
2474 - 2515 (41)
2510- 2515 (5) X

M

Warren Kurita
2474 - 2517 (43)
2515 - 2517 (2) XII

M

Siriwan McAllister Kurita
2496 - 2632(136)
2515 (1) XI
2517- 2556 (39) XIII
2605- 2607 (2) XVII

Hehiro Kurita
2516 - 2591 (75)
2556 - 2591 (35) XIV

Martin Kurita
2536 - 2558 (22)
(Killed in combat)

Leonard Kurita
2550 - 2605 (55)
2591 - 2605 (14) XV

Sanethia Kurita
2556 - 2651 (95)
2607 - 2620 (13) XVIII

Elaine Kurita
2566 - 2604 (38)
(Suicide)

Raymond Kurita
2568 - 2670 (102)

Blaine Kurita
2585 - 2605 (20)
2605 - 2605 (7 mo) XVI
(Terminal Illness)

Urizen Kurita
2590 - 2710 (120)
2620 - 2691 (71) XIX
(Retired as Coordinator)

Takiro Kurita
2650 - 2771 (121)
.2691- 2771(80) XX

Minoru Kurita
2705 - 2796 (91)
2771 - 2796 (25) XXI

Jinjiro Kurita
2747 - 2841 (94)
2796- 2837 (41) XXII
(Completely psychotic for last 4 years of life)

Zabu Kurita
2757 - 2838 (81)
2837- 2838 (1) XXIII
(Killed by his own generals)

Yoguchi Kurita
2790 - 2850 (60)
2838 - 2850 (12) XXIV
(Killed by mistress in employ of House Steiner)

Yoguchi Kurita
2817 - 2833 (16)
(Blew self up in stolen Panther)

Hugai Kurita
2821 - 2860 (39)
(Killed in combat)

Taragi Kurita
2830 - 2907 (77)
2890 - 2907 (17) XXVI

Shinjiro Kurita
2858 - 2925 (67)
2907 - 2925 (18) XXVII

Necess Kurita
2884 - 2962 (78)

Hugai Kurita
2890 - 2963 (73)
2925 - 2963 (38) XVIII

Shon-Lee Kurita
2897 - 3000 (103)

Hohiro Kurita
2932 - 3004 (72)
2963 - 3004 (41) XXIX

Takashi Kurita
2970 -
3004 - Present XXX

Theodore Kurita
2997 -
(Heir-Designate)

Miyamoto Kurita
2972 - 3002 (30)
(Killed in combat)

Isoroku Kurita
2996 -

Florimel Kurita
2942 -

Undell Kurita
2943 -

Marcus Kurita
2965 -

Constance Kurita
2990 -

Alexander Kurita
2994 -

Donal Kurita
2998 -

Akiro Kurita
2973 - 3002 (29)
(Killed in Sholagar Crash)

Elija Kurita
2984 -

Mitchell Kurita
3002 -

Vincent Kurita
2699 - 2788 (89)
(Killed in combat)

Quentin Kurita
2703 - 2800 (97)
(Killed in DropShip explosion)

Chada Kurita
2706 - 2810 (104)

Drago Kurita
2727 - 2780 (53)

Hiragi Kurita
2728 - 2750 (22)
(Jumpjet failure)

Thomas Kurit
2725 - 2796 (71
(Suicide following fai
on New Rhodes)

Joseph Kurita
2753 - 2780 (27)

Johnna Kurita
2755 - 2780 (25)

Tu Kurita
2760 - 2780 (20)

Loga Kurita
2768 - 2780 (12)

(Family slain by Stefan the Usurper on Terra)

Miyogi Kurita
2796 - 2890 (84)
2850 - 2890 (40) XXV
(Killed by Taragi supporters)

Dira Kurita
2830 - 2910 (80)

Rho Kurita
2836 - 2901 (65)

Miran Kurita
2843 - 2920 (77)

Jon Kurita
2844 - 2890 (46)
(Shot for treason by Taragi)

Urizen Kurita
2273 - 2336 (63)
(Warlord of Draconis)
(Brother of Shiro)

Victor Kurita
2301 - 2334 (33)
(Victor and Isaac killed during military overture into the Principality of Rasalhague)

Isaac Kurita
2309 - 2334 (25)

Adam Kurita
2311 - 2391 (80)
(Warlord of Rasalhague 2432-2385
Led rescue mision of 2377 to rescue Oma Kurita)

Vladimir Kurita
2328 - 2375 (47)
(Governor of District of Rasalhague.
He and majority of family killed in raid)

Gabrielle Kurita
2330 - 2403 (73)

Toshiro Kurita
2340 - 2432 (92)
(twins)

Hanako Kurita
2340 - 2429(89)
(twins)

Jason Kurita
2351 - 2422 (71)
(Subjugated Principality of Rasalhague)
(Governor of Rasalhague 2375-2422) (47)
(Killed by Daniel Sorenson)

Edward Kurita
2356 - 2375 (19)

Oma Kurita
2357 - 2397 (40)
(Drank herself to death)

Miyamoto Kurita
2351 - 2375 (14)

Iteki Kurita
2375 - 2375 (6 mo.)

Daniel Sorenson
2377 - 2487 (110)
(Lord of Rasalhague 2422-2487)

Erik Sorenson
2408 - 2449 (41)
(Killed in Combat)

Rachel Sorenson
2414 - 2501 (87)

Ariana Sorenson
2427 - 2491 (64)

Blaine Sorenson
2436 - 2521 (85)
(Lord of Rasalhague 2487-2510)
(Duke of Rasalhague 2510-2521)

Illiyana Sorenson
2479 - 2499 (20)

Katherine Sorenson
2484 - 2593 (109)

Jarod Sorenson
2485 - 2510 (25)
(Killed in action against Von Rohrs)

Ajax Sorenson
2509 - ?
(Whereabouts unknown)

Ariel Sorenson
2496 - 2620 (124)

Romulus Sorenson
2497 - 2572 (75)
(Duke of Rasalhague 2521-2572) (51)

Wolfgang Sorenson
2535 - 2580 (45)

Audra Sorenson
2542 - 2628 (86)

Timothy Sorenson
2544 - 2576? (32)
(Lost on exploration ship)

Oma Sorenson
2500 - 2510 (10)
(Fell off swing set)

Vladimir Sorenson
2937 -
(Warlord of Rasalhague)

Richard Sorenson
2959 - 3007 (48)
(Killed in combat

Daniel Sorenson
2990 -

Ilyana Sorenson
2999 -

Heath Sorenson
2966 -

Bradley Carson
2994 -

M

Joseph Carson
3024 -

Ellen Sorenson
2992 -

Jan Sorenson
2995 -

Iaim Sorenson
2999 -

Richard Rogers
2965 -

M

Steve Rogers
2990 -

Anna Sorenson
2970 -

Planet Guide

The coordinates of Terra are 0.0

World Name	X Coordinate	Y Coordinate	Affiliation
Abagnar	383.64	317.65	K
Abiy Adi	352.60	317.39	K
Accrington	-10.17	146.31	S
Achernar	77.98	-32.60	L
Ad Duwayd	365.12	377.90	K
Addicks	72.24	-0.26	D
Adrian	453.27	28.43	D
Agematsu	256.11	187.25	K
Aix-la-Chapelle	76.68	164.04	K
Al Hillah	-23.47	180.21	K
Al Na'ir	60.77	31.56	K
Albalii	71.72	79.28	K
Albiero	151.79	359.90	K
Alchiba	-68.33	1.83	S
Alcor	-75.37	29.21	S
Alexandria	-58.16	117.10	S
Algate	326.52	381.55	K
Algedi	66.76	96.24	K
Algorab	-115.01	15.13	S
Alhena	-83.20	-14.60	M
Alioth	-59.46	14.08	S
Alkaid	-94.93	47.47	S
Alkes	-115.80	-31.04	M
Alkalurops	-36.25	45.64	S
Alleghe	-9.91	409.72	K
Allerton	4.96	7.30	D
Almunge	165.09	400.59	K
Alnasi	2.87	117.10	K
Alphecca	-47.20	62.59	S
Alpheratz	507.52	154.39	P
Alrakis	-20.08	82.67	K
Alshain	58.68	281.14	K
Alta Vista	511.17	13.04	D
Altair	9.39	14.08	K
Altais	37.56	110.84	K
Altdorf	336.17	120.49	K
Altenmarkt	13.82	225.85	K
Altona	286.10	425.36	K
Altoona	555.50	-4.17	D
Alula Australis	-24.52	-4.69	M
Alya	26.60	97.54	K
An Ting	304.35	110.84	K
Ancha	76.15	36.51	K
Anguilla	415.72	80.33	D
Ankaa	75.37	-9.39	D
Annapolis	166.13	131.96	K
Apostica	-60.24	156.74	S
Apriki	174.74	122.58	K
Arcturus	-78.76	176.04	S
Ardoz	46.68	248.02	K
Arkab	77.98	202.64	K
Arlington	214.64	100.67	K
Arnaudville	588.89	37.03	D
Ascella	21.12	75.11	K
Asgard	127.79	268.62	K
Ashio	74.07	68.07	K
Asta	4.17	25.82	K
Athenry	17.73	31.30	K
Atria	-16.17	52.16	K
Aubisson	4.43	147.87	K
Auldhouse	-38.86	140.83	S
Avawatz	166.39	-29.73	D
Avon	151.26	254.28	K
Awano	96.76	162.48	K
Babuyan	88.67	225.33	K
Bad News	425.89	197.16	K
Baker 3	-105.36	327.04	S
Baldur	80.59	189.86	K
Ballynure	-82.93	248.54	S
Balsta	29.21	416.50	K
Ban Na San	363.03	222.72	K
Bangor	178.13	352.86	K
Barlow's End	307.22	63.64	D
Barlow's Folly	174.74	67.55	K
Baruun Urt	106.93	240.20	K
Basalt	66.76	-29.21	D
Basiliano	-37.29	344.52	K
Bassfield	594.10	4.96	D
Bastrop	568.28	61.03	D
Baxter	-31.56	113.71	S
Beaumont	589.15	40.16	D
Benedict	477.52	-11.48	D
Benet III	265.23	58.68	D
Benfled	-73.55	263.15	S
Benjamin	125.18	135.88	K
Bergman's Planet	268.36	75.63	D
Bessarabia	-25.82	279.32	S
Beta Mensae V	320.00	130.40	K
Bettendorf	267.32	26.08	D
Bicester	149.96	230.03	K
Biham	72.50	37.03	K
Biota	-45.12	274.10	S
Bjarred	245.15	411.80	K
Blair Atholl	-99.63	273.58	S
Blandinsville	230.03	-33.12	D
Blue Diamond	-41.99	183.08	S
Bogard	271.75	-32.60	D
Boondock	596.19	21.65	D
Bordon	-63.64	-33.64	M
Borghese	-80.33	212.55	S
Brailsford	330.43	388.59	K
Braunton	130.40	239.41	K
Breed	197.16	40.16	D
Bremond	391.72	59.20	D
Breukelen	-88.93	142.66	S
Brihuega	358.08	394.59	K
Broaddus	469.18	56.33	D
Brocchi's Cluster	162.22	391.20	K
Brookeland	444.14	71.20	D
Bruben	-5.74	391.98	K
Brundage	407.11	49.81	D
Bryant	13.30	-13.30	L
Bryceland	410.24	98.84	D
Buckminster	17.73	156.22	K
Budingen	385.72	163.52	K
Butte Hold	-101.71	466.57	P
Byesville	133.79	338.78	K
Cadiz	123.10	150.48	K
Caldrea	34.16	195.08	K
Callison	-63.11	-15.13	M
Camlann	0.52	167.17	K
Caph	13.04	-0.52	D
Capra	343.47	106.67	K
Caripare	148.13	293.92	K
Carnwath	-63.64	83.20	S
Carse	-15.91	241.24	S
Carsphairn	-97.02	39.38	S
Carstairs	-77.72	140.57	S
Cartago	141.09	-10.17	D
Carver V	-5.48	-20.86	L
Caselton	117.36	-35.99	D
Casere	78.50	346.86	K
Cassias	320.52	80.59	D
Castor	-41.47	-17.47	M
Cebalrai	-8.35	120.49	K
Cerberus	480.13	192.21	P
Chaffee	-96.24	83.20	S
Chandler	47.47	209.16	K
Chanute	467.88	23.73	D
Chapineria	294.70	395.63	K
Chara	-29.47	6.52	S
Charity	318.44	268.36	K
Chateau	-76.41	399.02	S
Chatham	182.56	252.45	K
Cheriton	246.98	331.48	K
Chertan	-75.37	15.65	M
Chichibu	91.28	75.63	K
Chinmen Tao	344.26	217.51	K
Chirala	389.11	243.07	K
Cholame	204.21	-31.56	D
Chorley	335.91	383.12	K
Choudrant	339.04	56.59	D
Chupadero	230.03	382.85	K
Cimeron	365.90	84.76	D
Clearfield	266.02	330.43	K
Clovis	181.78	3.13	D
Cohay	615.49	11.48	D
Colchester	308.00	-13.56	D
Colia	360.69	67.55	D
Colmar	-66.76	302.01	S
Conroe	380.51	92.32	D
Constance	100.93	432.93	K
Cor Caroli	-62.85	15.65	S
Corridan IV	-38.34	122.58	S
Corsica Nueva	195.86	229.24	K
Cosenza	328.87	163.00	K
Coudoux	182.30	386.24	K
Courchevel	95.97	347.91	K
Crimond	-69.63	232.63	S
Crossing	255.58	47.73	D
Csesztreg	-69.89	394.85	K
Cusset	-49.81	286.36	S
Cylene	106.93	25.30	K
Cyrenaica	168.74	280.36	K
Dabih	60.51	84.76	K
Dahar IV	281.92	20.34	D
Dalkeith	-26.34	156.74	S
Damevang	348.69	64.94	D
Damian	73.55	463.44	K
Darius	65.72	206.55	K
David	140.57	19.30	D
Davisville	485.61	-27.64	D
Dawn	29.47	378.68	K
De Berry	450.66	63.11	D
Dehgolan	5.48	200.82	K
Delacruz	375.81	114.23	K
Delcambre	544.55	4.96	D
Delitzsch	329.39	148.13	K
Dell	-61.81	333.82	S
Delos IV	618.88	60.51	D
Deneb Algedi	41.47	26.34	K
Deneb Kaitos	65.20	-13.04	D
Denebola	-13.04	-1.83	M/S
Denizli	-113.97	350.52	S
Deshler	216.99	75.11	D
Devil's Rock	-36.51	-15.39	M
Devin	-111.62	336.95	S
DeWitt	260.02	-21.91	D
Diboll	479.61	67.81	D
Dieron	13.04	15.39	K
Dieudonne	-75.89	-26.08	M
Diosd	-2.35	232.63	K
Dnepropetrovsk	302.01	170.30	K
Dobson	206.03	26.60	D
Donenac	202.12	89.72	K
Domain	-33.12	250.37	S
Dompaire	-75.37	302.79	S
Doneval II	200.56	8.87	D
Dover	133.79	203.16	K
Dromini VI	-21.12	66.76	K
Dubhe	-71.20	-16.17	M
Dumaring	80.33	225.33	K
Dustball	-105.36	268.62	S
Dyev	5.74	41.21	K
Dyfed	127.27	215.68	K
Eaglesham	-33.64	135.88	S
Eaton	-81.63	113.71	S
Ebensburg	239.41	304.09	K
Echo	290.01	372.94	K
Edasich	-97.28	121.79	S
Edwards	133.27	-32.60	D
Eguilles	37.56	235.24	K
Elbar	127.79	-8.08	D
Elidere IV	282.45	76.68	D
Elissa	-39.38	487.44	P
Eltanin	-1.83	100.67	K
Emporia	258.97	-6.52	D
Engadin	20.08	339.56	K
Enif	432.93	291.31	P
Epsilon Eridani	18.52	-21.39	L
Epsilon Indi	29.47	-15.65	L
Errai	52.68	4.43	D
Espakeh	304.61	344.78	K
Evansville	296.27	-36.51	D
Evciler	-95.97	359.90	S
Exeter	190.12	-8.08	D
Fairfax	356.51	31.56	D
Fairfield	289.49	46.16	D
Fallon II	371.12	49.03	D
Falsterbo	172.39	148.92	K
Farnsworth	566.46	31.82	D
Fatima	-31.56	177.34	S
Fellanin II	133.27	33.12	K
Feltre	-20.34	365.38	K
Ferleiten	25.56	357.04	K
Ferris	588.89	128.05	P
Fletcher	47.20	-23.73	L
Fomalhaut	21.12	5.48	D
Fort Loudon	-32.60	210.99	S
Franklin	252.98	10.95	D
Freedom	-64.94	108.75	S
Fukuroi	111.62	135.36	K
Gacrux	-86.59	11.21	S
Galatea	-54.25	34.43	S
Galatia III	91.54	14.87	D
Galedon V	336.17	175.26	K
Galtor III	195.86	73.81	D
Galuzzo	-15.65	253.24	K
Gandy's Luck	252.45	93.89	K
Ganshoren	-43.81	159.61	S
Garrison	-104.06	182.04	S
Garstedt	127.27	385.46	K
Ginestra	-111.62	164.83	S
Gladius	-96.76	72.50	S
Glengarry	-77.46	77.72	S
Glenmora	287.92	53.46	D
Goito	45.12	335.91	K
Goubellat	354.43	166.65	K
Graceland	-101.45	248.28	S
Graham IV	-23.73	-10.43	M
Gram	54.77	145.79	K
Graus	-101.45	299.92	S
Gravenhage	307.48	429.80	K
Greeley	453.27	40.68	D
Groveld III	390.42	114.49	D
Grumium	-4.96	188.56	K
Grunwald	-98.32	204.99	S
Gunzburg	12.52	292.88	K
Hachiman	255.06	153.61	K
Hagiwawa	124.66	113.19	K
Hainfeld	-13.56	270.97	K
Halesowen	36.77	254.02	K
Halstead Station	78.76	44.34	K
Handa	277.23	141.88	K
Hanover	168.74	367.47	K
Harpster	215.16	83.20	D
Harrow's Sun	264.19	71.72	D
Hartshill	326.52	411.28	K
Harvest	-62.59	378.68	K
Hassi R'mel	291.31	281.40	K
Havdhem	184.91	187.25	K
Haynesville	459.27	80.33	D
Hazelhurst	554.98	65.98	D
Hean	75.37	-14.60	D
Heiligendreuz	3.39	280.36	K
Helen	83.98	10.17	D
Helsingfors	145.00	154.13	K
Hermagor	23.99	392.50	K
Herndon	227.42	335.39	K
Hickok	436.06	-4.96	D
Hivrannee	631.66	-6.00	D
Hoff	266.54	37.03	D
Hohenems	-18.52	351.56	K
Holmsbu	58.16	443.62	K
Homarn	147.61	52.42	K
Hongor	393.55	317.13	K
Huaide	380.25	289.23	K
Huan	307.48	99.10	K
Humansville	557.85	-32.60	D
Hun Ho	252.45	137.96	K
Hyner	206.03	330.96	K
Hyperion	-19.56	279.58	K
Icar	-84.24	417.54	S
Idlewind	124.66	432.93	K
Igualada	292.88	115.27	K
Iijima	213.07	197.95	K
Imbros III	-2.09	34.43	K
Ingress	50.07	-18.78	L
Inman	560.98	7.30	D
Inner End	592.54	75.89	D
Irece	207.86	296.79	K
Irurzun	188.56	98.58	K
Isesaki	279.58	195.60	K
Itabiana	128.31	310.35	K
Izar	-60.51	98.32	S
Jabuka	-28.69	221.42	K
Jarett	102.76	471.79	K
Jeanette	224.03	370.60	K
Jeronimo	184.65	343.73	K
Jezersko	88.93	373.20	K
Johnsondale	162.22	-23.21	D
Juazeiro	164.04	304.35	K
Junction	136.14	79.54	K
Junior	403.20	1.04	D
Kabah	208.90	372.94	K
Kaesong	60.24	299.40	K
Kagoshima	202.90	257.15	K
Kajikazawa	89.19	143.96	K
Kalidasa	-106.67	-23.21	M
Kamarod	349.47	363.56	K
Kandis	-6.52	324.96	K
Kanowit	88.15	242.54	K
Karbala	-23.99	198.47	K
Karston	-10.43	279.58	K
Kaus Australis	5.74	84.24	K
Kaus Borealis	11.48	97.28	K
Kaus Media	7.82	80.85	K
Kawabe	242.80	136.92	K
Kawich	54.25	-29.73	D
Kazanka	448.58	231.85	K
Kaznejoy	332.52	133.79	K
Keid	3.13	-10.17	L
Keihoku	309.83	213.86	K
Kelenfold	-57.90	200.03	S
Kempten	45.64	310.87	K
Kennard	472.83	89.19	D
Kentares IV	150.74	-13.30	D
Kentwood	632.96	-20.34	D
Kervil	34.43	46.42	K
Kesai IV	373.47	106.67	D
Kessel	-13.30	84.24	K
Keytesville	378.42	-31.04	D
Kiamba	71.72	242.02	K
Kiesen	51.38	218.29	K
Kilbourne	576.89	44.08	D
Kilmarnock	174.21	265.49	K
Kimball II	-35.99	100.67	K
Kirbyville	511.69	51.64	D
Kirchbach	-39.38	386.24	K
Kirei Na Niwa	300.44	148.66	K
Kirkcaldy	-97.28	128.31	S
Kitalpha	113.97	97.80	K
Klathandu IV	176.82	31.82	D
Ko	-18.26	44.34	K
Kobe	-15.13	284.01	S
Kochab	-68.85	63.11	S
Kockengen	-112.67	151.79	S
Kokpekty	416.50	305.14	K
Komephoros	-34.43	92.84	K
Koniz	-93.37	262.10	S
Konstance	-20.34	97.28	K
Koping Chian	182.82	117.36	K
Korramabad	376.07	367.73	K
Koulen	375.03	231.33	K
Koumi	201.08	172.39	K
Kountze	529.16	27.38	D
Krenice	57.38	232.37	K
Kufstein	-11.21	344.52	K
Kurhah	105.10	57.38	K
Kuzuu	23.21	67.29	K
La Blon	-32.08	73.55	S
La Grave	-51.64	249.32	S
Labrea	140.05	328.35	K
Laiaka	-101.45	54.77	S
Lambrecht	13.56	58.16	K
Land's End	411.54	322.87	K
Lapida II	113.97	51.64	K
Larned	297.05	-23.21	D
Last Frontier	80.85	391.46	K
Latexo	396.42	81.11	D
Laurent	-44.60	305.66	S
Laurieston	-107.45	94.41	S
Layover	206.03	-20.08	D
Le Blanc	208.90	18.52	D
Leganes	-78.50	161.70	S
Leiston	176.04	236.81	K
Leoben	41.73	408.93	K
Leskovik	-91.28	336.17	S
Lexington	318.44	-22.95	D
Leyland	311.40	396.42	K
Liezen	-21.12	383.64	K
Lima	237.85	54.51	D
Linneus	454.31	-8.08	D
Linqing	344.78	313.22	K
Lipton	-34.16	6.52	S
Ljugarn	199.77	121.53	K
Logandale	144.48	-36.25	D
Lonaconing	260.28	377.90	K
Lothan	-9.91	222.72	K
Lovinac	-29.47	393.81	K
Loysville	294.44	322.87	K
Lucerne	233.94	12.52	D
Lucianca	-97.80	164.83	S
Ludwig	163.52	77.72	K
Luthien	169.26	252.72	K
Luzerne	125.44	354.95	K
Lyceum	432.41	76.68	D
Lyons	-23.21	39.12	S
Macksburg	278.80	344.78	K
Macomb	344.52	-20.34	D
Maestu	-35.73	289.23	S
Maldonado	214.12	323.91	K
Mallory's World	112.40	6.00	D
Mannedorf	49.55	228.98	K
Mara	122.84	8.87	D
Marawi	62.85	267.32	K
Marcus	-59.46	-15.65	M
Marduk	210.20	60.51	D
Marfik	-40.95	98.58	K/S
Markab	98.58	23.47	K
Marlowe's Rift	236.81	88.67	K
Marshdale	164.83	333.04	K
Matamoras	254.80	352.34	K
Matar	163.52	56.85	K
Matsuida	280.88	130.14	K
Maule	32.08	247.50	K
Maxie's Planet	-97.28	393.03	S
Mayetta	408.93	7.04	D
Maynard	307.22	2.35	D
McAlister	215.16	346.34	K
McComb	224.29	58.16	D
McGehee	333.30	75.63	D
Meacham	-28.95	189.08	S
Meilen	60.51	221.68	K
Meinacos	202.90	297.83	K
Melcher	370.60	38.86	D
Memmingen	6.52	311.40	K
Menkent	-38.86	20.86	S
Mersa Matruh	132.49	170.56	K
Midway	249.85	204.99	K
Milligan	479.35	39.12	D
Millray	616.01	32.08	D
Milton	-64.94	2.87	S
Minakuchi	64.42	117.62	K
Minowa	185.17	158.83	K
Mirach	109.80	-27.12	D
Mirage	479.35	15.65	D
Misery	276.71	85.80	K
Miyada	312.96	247.24	K
Mizar	-55.03	20.86	S
Mizunami	348.69	234.20	K
Mokane	430.84	-23.21	D
Monistrol	160.91	124.66	K
Montmarault	-59.72	265.49	S
Monywa	352.08	268.10	K
Moore	5.74	64.68	K
Moritz	-32.60	322.35	K
Morningside	-35.99	169.52	S
Morrill	399.55	32.08	D
Mozirje	-39.12	365.38	K
Mualang	97.28	268.10	K
Multan	366.95	332.00	K
Murchison	75.37	20.08	K
Muphrid	-27.64	15.39	S
Nadrin	316.09	154.13	K
Nagel	475.18	6.52	D
Najha	35.99	213.07	K
Nakaojo	289.75	184.91	K
Nashira	48.77	35.99	K
Necedah	357.04	-8.08	D
Nekkar	-94.41	97.28	S
Neosho	554.72	-25.82	D
New Aberdeen	259.24	79.02	D
New Bergen	19.56	406.59	K
New Caledonia	-59.72	409.20	K
New Earth	-12.52	3.13	S
New Home	7.30	-12.78	L
New Hope	-114.23	-33.12	M
New Ivaarsen	228.98	34.95	D
New Mendham	180.73	59.98	K
New Oslo	15.39	389.64	K
New Procyon	-4.96	-10.43	L
New Rhodes III	103.28	-15.91	D
New Samarkand	362.77	250.89	K
New Wessex	-12.52	114.49	K
Newton	320.26	-30.77	D
Niles	402.15	121.01	D
Ningxia	317.65	316.09	K
Nirasaki	34.69	19.56	K
Nopah	57.64	-7.82	D
Northwind	34.43	-2.87	D
Nowhere	372.42	406.85	K
Nox	13.30	242.02	K
Numki	49.55	202.90	K
Nusakan	-9.39	44.34	S
Nykvarn	124.40	392.24	K
Oberon VI	-112.40	477.52	P
Odabasi	71.72	215.68	K
Ogano	83.72	213.07	K
Olancha	168.74	-6.52	D
Oliver	-32.08	-7.04	M
Omagh	154.13	213.33	K
Orestes	-26.34	169.52	K
Orkney	-49.03	237.07	S
Oshika	241.24	178.39	K
Osmus Saar	150.74	175.52	K
Otho	78.50	177.60	K
Ottumwa	402.15	33.64	D
Outer Volta	156.74	320.78	K
Outpost	15.39	430.32	K
Outreach	-3.13	-34.95	L
Ozawa	85.54	2.87	D
Pajarito	484.04	77.98	D
Palmyra	454.84	-26.08	D
Pandora	-85.54	236.81	S
Paracale	100.67	217.51	K
Paris	193.51	47.99	K
Pascagoula	433.45	57.90	D
Pattison	593.84	56.33	D
Pattonsbrug	380.51	-6.00	D
Peabody	333.56	-23.73	D
Peacock	137.70	185.69	K
Persistence	-107.19	409.98	S
Pesht	207.86	312.70	K
Phalan	-20.08	135.62	S
Phecda	-75.11	-15.65	S
Philadelphia	193.25	210.73	K
Piedmont	79.02	78.50	K
Pike IV	20.34	39.64	K
Pilkhua	33.90	208.12	K
Pinnacle	72.50	434.75	K
Pitkin	497.08	77.72	D
Planting	-54.25	367.99	S
Polcenigo	110.06	378.16	K
Pollux	-31.82	-15.65	M
Pomme De Terre	56.85	366.16	K
Pondicherry	405.28	241.24	K
Porrima	-115.01	140.57	S
Port Arthur	132.75	257.67	K
Port Moseby	3.39	161.70	S
Porthos	91.02	480.13	P
Potwin	310.35	-20.08	D
Predlitz	44.08	357.82	K
Princton	417.02	26.60	D
Proserpina	161.17	34.16	K
Protection	455.88	5.48	D
Pusht-i-rud	376.07	351.82	K
Qandahar	320.78	361.47	K
Quarell	-30.77	234.72	K
Quentin	46.42	12.52	D
Quincy	350.52	-34.16	D
Radlje	58.16	380.25	K
Radstadt	41.73	319.48	K
Raman	163.00	9.39	D
Ramgarh	395.37	226.90	K
Ramona	332.00	-38.60	D
Ramsau	-0.26	224.55	K
Rasalgethi	-42.25	214.12	S
Rasalhague	39.64	393.29	K
Rastaban	-33.90	265.23	S
Reisling's Planet	177.34	81.37	K
Richmond	131.96	459.53	K
Ridderkerk	-46.68	354.43	S
Rigil Kentarus	-2.87	2.61	S
Rio	96.24	-28.95	D
Robinson	234.72	-6.52	D
Rochelle	-114.75	-15.91	M
Rochester	228.98	3.13	D
Rockland	151.26	423.02	K
Rodigo	-17.47	396.94	K
Romulus	-90.50	382.85	S
Ronel	96.50	-2.61	L
Rosamond	180.21	-33.90	D
Rosepine	589.41	-22.95	D
Rowe	336.17	48.51	D
Royal	224.55	44.86	D
Rubigen	30.77	219.85	K
Ruchbah	57.90	-22.95	D
Rukbat	42.51	109.80	K
Ryde	-45.64	93.63	S
Saaremaa	140.05	138.22	K
Sabik	-12.78	57.64	K
Sadachbia	83.72	37.56	K
Sadalbari	139.01	43.29	K
Saffel	25.82	12.00	D
Sakai	110.32	207.86	K
Sakhalin	-24.25	153.09	S
Sakhara V	279.06	34.43	D
Sakuranoki	284.79	161.44	K
Salford	342.43	406.85	K
Sanda	326.00	196.38	K
Santander V	78.50	485.35	P
Satalice	6.00	263.15	K
Sauk City	279.06	-3.13	D
Savinsville	143.18	359.38	K
Savonburg	502.56	-15.65	D
Sawyer	252.72	396.16	K
Scheat	170.04	42.25	K
Schedar	118.92	-21.39	D
Schirmeck	370.34	158.04	K
Schuyler	123.36	370.34	K
Schwartz	177.87	430.58	K
Seginus	-82.93	64.16	S
Seiduts	-82.67	364.86	S
Senorbi	348.69	151.26	K
Sertar	315.57	294.96	K
Setubal	44.60	239.68	K
Sevon	469.70	134.05	P
Sevren	-44.86	316.09	S
Shaul Khala	221.42	134.57	K
Shaula	-31.04	271.75	K/S
Sheliak	64.94	292.62	K
Sheratan	41.21	-21.65	L
Shibukawa	117.62	184.91	K
Shiloh	-88.93	-4.96	M
Shimonita	94.67	83.20	K
Shimonoseki	214.38	250.63	K
Shimosuwa	46.42	136.66	K
Shinonoi	80.59	54.51	K
Shionoha	-5.74	135.62	K
Shitara	41.99	88.41	K
Shirotori	18.26	191.43	K
Sighisoara	305.14	240.46	K
Sigurd	-104.84	484.04	P
Silkeborg	183.08	187.52	K
Simferopol	308.53	190.38	K
Sinope	385.98	197.16	K
Sirius	-2.35	-7.56	L
Skallevoll	67.29	440.23	K
Skandia	22.95	253.76	K
Skat	94.15	27.12	K
Skokie	-41.99	325.48	K
Skondia	-32.08	56.07	S
Skye	-57.90	52.16	S
Slaithwaite	328.87	396.68	K
Small World	52.16	-7.04	L
Soul	380.77	281.66	K
Soverzene	87.89	320.00	K
Spittal	59.72	347.65	K
St. John	-13.56	404.50	K
St. Robert	437.36	-31.56	D
Stanzach	14.60	318.70	K
Stapelfold	220.12	396.68	K
Star's End	-83.98	436.06	P
Steelton	-106.67	426.15	S
Sterlington	528.90	54.25	D
Sternwerde	64.42	250.89	K
Stratford	530.99	39.38	D
Sturgis	420.67	69.37	D
Styx	26.08	25.82	K
Sudeten	-84.24	294.70	S
Suianheer	423.28	248.80	K
Suk II	-29.47	258.45	S
Sulafat	48.77	185.95	K
Sullivan	416.76	-31.30	D
Summer	-44.86	26.34	S
Sun Prairie	328.09	29.21	D
Surcin	-92.06	196.64	S
Susquehanna	52.68	424.32	K
Sutama	91.54	124.92	K
Svarstaad	-62.59	341.65	S
Svelvik	17.47	415.19	K
Sverdlovsk	344.26	185.95	K
Sylvan	426.93	3.13	D
Symington	-38.86	149.18	S
Syrma	-59.20	40.16	S
Tabayama	411.28	235.24	K
Talitha	-34.43	-34.95	M
Tallmadge	278.53	42.25	D
Tamar	-15.65	317.92	S
Tamsalu	169.26	165.87	K
Tancredi IV	433.45	94.41	D
Tangipahoa	594.62	-21.65	D
Tanh Linh	91.02	234.46	K
Tannil	123.10	57.90	K
Tarazed	127.27	253.76	K
Tarkio	320.26	0.00	D
Tarnby	269.15	432.93	K
Tatsuno	206.29	156.48	K
Tellman IV	541.94	99.10	P
Telos IV	44.34	40.68	K
Teniente	187.78	310.09	K
Terra	0.00	0.00	C
Terra Firma	22.69	-33.90	L
Thannhausen	-8.61	294.70	K
The Edge	-33.90	410.76	K
The Rock	-82.93	504.91	P
Thessalonika	74.85	307.48	K
Thestria	282.45	76.68	K
Thibodaux	581.32	-7.56	D
Thimphu	349.73	288.97	K
Thorin	-23.73	8.08	S
Thule	93.89	459.27	K
Thun	-18.00	262.10	K
Tiflis	357.30	197.43	K
Tigress	75.37	-29.73	L
Tinaca	71.20	276.19	K
Tishomingo	318.44	46.68	D
Toffen	41.99	223.77	K
Togura	226.37	154.92	K
Tok Do	94.41	169.26	K
Toland	-116.84	435.28	S
Tomans	-51.38	224.29	S
Towne	69.89	8.08	D
Trell I	-115.01	390.42	S
Tripoli	201.34	53.46	K
Trolloc Prime	33.90	172.65	K
Trondheim	73.28	408.93	K
Tsukude	20.34	120.49	K
Tukayyid	-4.69	212.55	K
Turtle Bay	154.13	404.50	K
Tuscarawas	260.80	311.40

On September 9 2796, Coordinator Jinjiro Kurita, consumed with bloodlust, ordered his troops to slaughter the citizens of Kentares IV to the last man...

And Kurita became the most feared name in the Inner Sphere.

To control his people, the Coordinator of the Draconis Combine must control their ideology. Thus, Draconis society's values are Harmony and Purity—Harmony with the interests and intentions of the Kurita state, and Purity from any thoughts that contradict those of the Coordinator.

Only the powerful, mystical society ComStar could compile this sourcebook on House Kurita and the Draconis Combine. Dozens of full-color illustrations depict famous personalities, scenes, and military ranks, decorations, and insignia. Also included is Kurita history, from Shiro Kurita's bloody conquests while forging the Draconis Combine to Takashi Kurita's ruthless "justice." Every Combine 'Mech regiment from Rasalhague to Luthien is listed, along with the totalitarian government's structure, a description of the ISF (the Combine's secret police), and excerpts from the *Dictum Honorium*, which spells out the codes of conduct for Kurita citizens.

Threatening to devour both the Federated Suns and the Lyran Commonwealth, the Dragon grows stronger and more fearsome. Every year brings the Draconis Combine closer to fulfilling its destiny of conquering the Inner Sphere.

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