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INTRODUCTION



"Nothing human is alien to me."

—Terence

When the Clans first came to the Inner Sphere in 3049, they were the enemy. They possessed weapons more fearsome than any we had ever known, and they fought like demons. Our imaginations made monsters of them, alien mockeries of humankind come to harvest us like so much ripe wheat. Against such a foe, our only weapon was the slim hope of gaining their confidence in order to influence them away from conquest. This was my mission as emissary to them in those first dark years of the Clan War—to earn their trust and learn whatever I could that might help us either turn them away or destroy them.

I learned a far more profound truth about the Clans than I had expected. They were not alien monsters, but human—the descendants of the long-departed SLDF, whom many of us had been raised to revere as the last remnant of humankind's finest hour. They shared our humanity, despite the unimaginably different ways, mores and view of the universe they had developed in nearly three hundred years of exile. My time with the Clans taught me to see them not as merely "the enemy," but as our kin—made strangers by time and unfortunately bent on conquering us, but no less our brethren.

Had I possessed the power then to make them see us as kindred, the Clan invasion might have ended in genuine peace far sooner than it did. Now, in the wake of the Great Refusal, some might say there is little need for the Clans to understand the Inner Sphere. The Clan War is over; the Inner Sphere won. The Successor States and Periphery nations can get back to their own business, and the defeated Clans can war among themselves. In the meantime, both sides can ignore each other and enjoy the peace.

Peace, however, is a fragile thing—as both Clan and Inner Sphere history prove. Though several Clans have accepted the Great Refusal's outcome, the Wolves and the Jade Falcons

have not. Both of these once-mighty Clans are fast rebuilding their fighting forces, savaged in the recent vicious Refusal War between them. Other threats may raise their heads as well. Clan Steel Viper, beaten out of the Inner Sphere by the Jade Falcons, might avenge that defeat by launching the Clan War all over again—this time with allies among the so-called Home Clans, many of whom would like nothing better than to succeed where the first invaders failed. As for those Clans that now live among us, we cannot take their goodwill for granted. We must show ourselves worthy of their respect, lest they become our foes again. The Ghost Bears, Nova Cats, Diamond Sharks and Wolves in Exile are powerful friends and dangerous enemies. If they are to remain good neighbors, they must see us for who we are—not mere barbarians corrupted by our own worst impulses, but members of the human family with strengths that outweigh our weaknesses.

This volume is an effort to accomplish exactly that. A *Guide to the Inner Sphere* is intended to make the peoples of the Successor States and Periphery nations at least a little comprehensible to our Clan cousins. Our differences with the Clans are great, but no difference can obliterate the human identity we all share. Against that common heritage, differences of culture, society and viewpoint merely enhance the human experience. They make it richer, as different flowers make a garden more beautiful. In that spirit, I offer this document to Clan and Inner Sphere readers, in the hope of enlightening both to the betterment of us all. The Inner Sphere's diversity is more than an excuse for division. It can be a source of strength, forcing us to enlarge our universe and our imaginations. That larger view brought humanity the Star League, five centuries ago and again today. If we hold to it and let it flourish, it will bring us even greater good in the future.

—Anastasius Focht

Tukayyid, 18 July 3063

INNER SPHERE IDENTITY

In a region called home by as many different peoples and cultures as the Inner Sphere, it may seem strange to speak of an overall identity, or of any similarities at all. Yet every Inner Sphere nation shares three characteristics that set them apart from the Clans: a workable balance between vastly diverse elements, families in which parents or close blood relatives care for children of varying ages, and recognition of other human endeavors as equal or superior to waging war.

CLAN AND INNER SPHERE DIFFERENCES

Like many groups in the Inner Sphere, individual Clans see themselves as significantly different from their fellows. Though minor from an Inner Sphere perspective, cultural differences among the Clans frequently threaten to explode into major rifts. Throughout Clan history, they have prompted everything from long-standing feuds to mini-civil wars to outright obliteration.

The realms of the Inner Sphere are far more different from each other than are any two Clans. Some are virtually bubbling over with different cultural groups and political factions. Others hew sharply to a single cultural pattern and centralized power structure. Yet even the most freewheeling society possesses some sense of unified identity, and even the least tolerant realm peacefully incorporates nonconformist elements.

Falcon vs. Wolf

On the surface, Clans Wolf and Jade Falcon appear remarkably similar. Both are renowned for military strength and expertise even by Clan standards; neither contains any strikingly unusual cultural feature, such as the theocratic Cloisters of the Cloud Cobras or the Goliath Scorpions' devotion to collecting relics of humanity's past. Yet these two Clans have spent much of their mutual history at each other's throats. Each is convinced that it embodies the true vision of Clan founder Nicholas Kerensky, and that its counterpart is a distorted reflection. The long-running feud between Falcon and Wolf stems not from any vast social or cultural chasm, but primarily from a decision made in the Clans' earliest days. Nicholas Kerensky chose to join the Wolf Clan instead of the Falcons, and the Falcons never got over it. Mutual hostility over Kerensky's choice led these two Clans to clash again and again, each confrontation only hardening convictions that the opposing Clan was deeply unworthy.

When the Warden and Crusader political movements began to arise in the 2980s, it was almost inevitable that the Wolf and Falcon clans should end up on opposite sides. That political dispute centered on two interpretations of the Hidden Hope doctrine, General Aleksandr Kerensky's promise that the Clans would one day return to the Inner Sphere. The Wolves

espoused the Warden position, which saw the promise of return as an ideal to inspire greatness rather than a literal command. In the Warden view, the Kerenskys meant the Clans to develop free of Inner Sphere ways while remaining ready to defend their lost home against any outside threat. The Crusaders took Hidden Hope as a direct order to raise a new Star League from the ashes of Inner Sphere civilization.

The writings from which the divide arose are ambiguous, particularly in the context of the turbulent times surrounding them. When weighed against the Clans' immense similarities, the Warden-Crusader split seems startlingly insubstantial. With so many of their most important social underpinnings in common, it is hard to understand why the Clans could not simply agree to disagree on this apparently minor point. Yet for the Falcons and the Wolves, choosing sides in this dispute merely confirmed each Clan's long-held belief that the other was an apostate Clan, deliberately rejecting the Kerenskys' vision.

The feud came to a head in the Refusal War, a bitter conflict that nearly destroyed both Clans. IIKhan Ulric Kerensky, a prominent Warden, had agreed in 3052 to a bold gamble that might win all for the Clans in a single, decisive stroke. Clan forces would battle the Com Guards, ComStar's crack military troops, on the backwater world of Tukayyid. If the Clans won, ComStar would give them the prize they most sought—Terra,



birthplace of humanity and the Star League. If the Com Guards won, the Clans would observe a fifteen-year truce. At great cost, the Com Guards carried the day, and Ulric Kerensky signed the Truce of Tukayyid. To the Jade Falcons, the truce was a high crime. Balking from achieving conquest, they bided their time and sought allies among the Wolf Clan's own frustrated younger warriors. In 3057, they accused Ulric of committing genocide against the Clans. By agreeing to a fifteen-year lull in the fighting, they argued, he and his fellow Wolf Wardens had deprived younger warriors of any chance at serious combat, thereby vastly increasing the odds of their deaths in battle.

Ulric refused to accept the guilty verdict handed down by the Clan Grand Council, and the Jade Falcons avidly claimed the honor of forcibly defending the Council's judgment. Wolf and Falcon units fought bitterly across world after world in their two Inner Sphere occupation zones. The Falcons eventually won a near-Pyrrhic victory, reduced to a fraction of their former strength. The Wolves fared even worse, split into Warden and Crusader groups. The Warden Wolves found sanctuary in the Inner Sphere; the Crusader Wolves were briefly Absorbed by the Falcons, until their current Khan Vlad Ward won his remnant Clan's freedom by killing the Falcon Khan who had engineered the Wolves' destruction.

In the four years since, the Wolves and the Jade Falcons have attempted an uneasy *détente*. Both are Crusader Clans now, removing one bone of contention, and neither wishes to fight another Refusal War any time soon. Yet their legacy of mutual hatred remains. They are allies of convenience for the moment, but may not prove able to overcome what many of them see as a giant rift spawned by a seemingly small incident at the dawn of Clan history.

Clan Blood Spirit

Clan Blood Spirit provides another striking example of an apparently minor difference leading to major repercussions. Like other Clans, the Blood Spirits valued *esprit de corps*, particularly among warriors. However, the Blood Spirits were the only Clan to extend this sense of brotherhood beyond their own members. They reached out to their fellow Clans, attempting to forge ties based on mutual respect and a willingness to aid any Clan in need.

Initially, other Clans welcomed the Blood Spirits' overtures. Struggling to create a viable society on the ruins of the worlds they had settled, the Clans could not afford to let their own rivalries distract them. As they matured, however, they began to drift apart. A sense of common ground gradually gave way to jingoistic pride in one's own Clan, often coupled with disdain for all others. In this atmosphere, the Blood Spirits found their attempts at diplomacy derided, their past aid discounted and their liberality suspect.

Rising distrust reached its apex with the Annihilation of the Not-Named Clan, obliterated for the crime of declaring themselves independent of Clan law and traditions. In the wake of

this bloodletting, any unusual behavior appeared to threaten the Way of the Clans. The Spirits' emphasis on Clan-wide unity, along with guardedly expressed sympathy for the Not-Named, made them the biggest potential target. Though the Spirits avoided Annihilation, the Clan Grand Council took action almost as damaging against them. The assembled Clan leaders chastised the Blood Spirits for their "unClanlike" ways and warned them to change or face the consequences.

Other Clans took this censure as an invitation to raid Blood Spirit holdings. Attack after attack swiftly took a toll. Their territory halved and their military in tatters, the once openhearted Blood Spirits severed most contact with other Clans. Their bitter isolationism persists to this day; apart from holdings on the world of York, a few vital trade ties and their enclave on the Clan homeworld of Strana Mechty, the Blood Spirits have withdrawn completely from those they once called brothers-in-arms.

The Azami: Diversity Within Unity

The Azami people of the Draconis Combine provide an example of diversity within the most culturally unified Inner Sphere nation. Descended from the desert-dwellers of North Africa on Terra, the Azami have kept their Arab and African traditions, languages and Islamic religion throughout their history, despite living in a realm where virtually everything reinforces the prevailing Japanese culture. Only once have the Combine's rulers attempted to remake the Azami in a Japanese mold. In the late 25th century, the bloodthirsty Von Rohrs dynasty sent troops to the Azami homeworlds, but swiftly lost its assault force to diseases dormant in the Azami population.

The Azami sent a delegation to the Combine capital of Luthien just six years after the violent overthrow of the last Von Rohrs Coordinator. Siriwan McAllister-Kurita granted the Azami worlds formal autonomy and their people unprecedented freedom of conduct and worship, in exchange for rights to Azami mineral resources and the use of their fighting men in the Combine's border defense. Every Coordinator since then has left the Azami to live as they see fit. The Azami have returned the favor by fulfilling their obligations and coexisting peacefully with their Japanese neighbors.

REMAKING THE STAR LEAGUE

Much of the Inner Sphere's history is a shameful record of petty squabbles and vicious border wars fought for greed or hatred. The first Star League succumbed to such base passions, and only a fool would fail to acknowledge the threat they pose to the second. Despite all the backstabbing, infighting and mutual hostility, the nations of the Inner Sphere nonetheless came together to create the first Star League and its successor. People were no different in the first Star League era—no less greedy and venal, no more tolerant unless well taught to be so. And yet the quarrelling, corrupt realms of the Inner Sphere gave humanity its finest hour and noblest achievements. Given time, the second Star League may reach those heights again.

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

The Inner Sphere, no less than the Clans, tends to look back on the first Star League era as a golden age of idealism. We like to think people were nobler then—more honorable, more worthy of trust, more compassionate. Yet the Star League's first act was an exercise of raw power: the Reunification War against the Periphery states, for the crime of having politely said, "No, thank you," to First Lord Ian Cameron's invitation to join the League. Simply to form the Star League required more than a decade's worth of horse-trading and arm-twisting. Though the leaders who signed the Star League Accords in the mid-26th century were undoubtedly visionaries, neither their motives nor their realms were entirely free of greed, power-lust or calculation. The Capellan Confederation, for example, signed its treaty in exchange for badly needed financial and technological assistance, as well as a long-coveted prize: the worlds of Andurien, ceded to it by the rival Free Worlds League. The Federated Suns, recovering from a brutal civil war, joined in the wake of an economic crisis exacerbated by agents of Ian Cameron and Albert Marik, then Captain-General of the Free Worlds League. Both the Federated Suns and the Draconis Combine also received a promise of preemptive military strikes by Star League forces on enemy planets in the event of a Davion-Kurita war.

Nor were the member-states free of suspicion toward each other. These buried feelings of mistrust gave rise to the so-called Hidden Wars that plagued much of the Star League's existence. The first Hidden War, between the Draconis Combine military and the SLDF, arose from a Star League Council edict in 2650 that limited the size of each member-state's army. The decree forced House Kurita, among others, to dismantle numerous BattleMech regiments. Convinced that the First Lord had enacted the decree specifically to curb the Combine's military strength, the Kuritas retaliated by encouraging Combine MechWarriors to fight duels with their SLDF counterparts. By winning enough duels, Coordinator Urizen Kurita II hoped to humiliate the Star League in the eyes of Combine citizens.

The dueling added fire to the second Hidden War, which erupted in 2725 from longstanding enmity between the Draconis Combine and the Federated Suns. An attempt by the Coordinator's half-Davion nephew to claim the Federated Suns throne sparked the four-year War of Davion Succession. By the time the SLDF finally intervened to end the fighting, House Davion's ruling prince was dead and several worlds had suffered the ravages of battle. Around this same time, a relaxation of Star League government regulations paved the way for the Periphery's wholesale economic exploitation by the Great Houses and the Terran Hegemony. By 2738, when Simon Cameron became First Lord, support for the Star League among Periphery citizens had withered almost to nothing. This situation laid the groundwork for the Amaris coup, which would end the Star League in less than thirty years.

Given these and other tensions that raged almost constantly beneath the surface, the first Star League's thriving existence for a century and a half testifies eloquently to

humanity's ability to rise above its disputes. The successors of this same collection of quarrelsome realms have reforged the Star League after nearly three centuries of vicious infighting, and have so far remained united in the face of considerable stresses. These include recent Capellan military adventurism, particularly that realm's successful absorption of the St. Ives Compact; unrest in the Federated Suns' Draconis March and in Combine regions on the other side of that border at the very rapprochement between Davion and Kurita rulers that made the new Star League possible; and the bitter mutual suspicion between the peoples of the old Lyran Commonwealth and Federated Suns, which the short life of the Federated Commonwealth apparently did little to calm. This last flash point recently degenerated into civil conflict, a sad end to an era that began with such great promise. Yet even here, hope for the future remains. The victor in the FedCom civil war will have a unique opportunity to heal its wounds, with the unity of the Star League as a living example. That unity was not forged by the Clans, despite their impressive military might and single-minded dedication to remaking humanity's lost Golden Age in their own image. The rebirth of the Star League belongs instead to the Successor States—often corrupt and riven with distrust, but nonetheless capable of rising above their own worst weaknesses when the survival of their way of life demands it.

FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Clan and Inner Sphere ways of structuring families and raising children offer the sharpest contrast between their respective cultures. These intimate bonds shape the larger society by determining the worldview of the individuals who comprise it. Growing up in a Clan sibko is profoundly different from being raised in a typical Inner Sphere family; each of these experiences lies at the core of our different ways of life.

Though most Clansmen live outside the elite warrior caste and are frequently raised in nuclear families, the warrior caste's prestige makes its ways and customs the Clan-wide ideal. Therefore, the warriors' method of childraising has a far-reaching impact on Clan society. Warrior-caste offspring are raised in sibkos (sibling companies), groups of children born at the same time from the same genetic line or lines. The gene-parents of these sibling groups play no role in their upbringing; in many cases, such as the famous Jade Falcon warrior Aidan Pryde, a geneparent may have died in battle before any of his or her "children" are conceived. Instead, sibko children are raised by individuals who may feel no emotional connection to their charges. A nanny sees to the infants' physical well being and develops their early motor skills; sibparents, usually retired warriors, hone the older children's physical abilities and teach them what it means to be a Clan warrior.

Raised as one of a group with little individual attention, the typical sibko child forms his closest emotional ties with his sibmates. He defines himself as part of that collective and mea-

sure his own worth by what he adds to it. The natural egotism of the human psyche is channeled into sibling competition—sibko members constantly test themselves against each other, knowing that superior performance will also reflect well on the sibko as a whole. In this way, the warrior caste ensures a properly Clanlike balance between the desire for individual accomplishment and the need to serve the larger Clan.

By contrast, children in the Inner Sphere are raised by parents who are expected to love and nurture them physically, emotionally and psychologically. Even in collective-minded states like the Draconis Combine and the Capellan Confederation, young children receive considerable personal attention from mothers, fathers and occasionally members of a larger extended family. An Inner Sphere child may have siblings, but rarely several that are the same age. Each child has his or her own place in the family structure: the firstborn, the middle child, the baby, the only. This unique place, combined with one-on-one parental attention for at least the child's first decade, reinforces natural human egotism and gives most Inner Sphere children a strong sense of individual worth.

Both Clan sibkin and Inner Sphere children eventually encounter the larger world. How they come to terms with it offers insight into a major difference between the Clans and the Inner Sphere. Most human societies are at best indifferent or even actively hostile to the individual ego. For the child of a Clan sibko, society's failure to notice him barely impinges. His collective upbringing has already taught him that his truest value lies in serving group interests. The more ego-driven Inner Sphere child, by contrast, experiences the world's indifference as a profound shock. In order to function as part of his society, he must find a way to retain his self-worth while accepting the reality of the culture in which he lives. The ability of Inner Sphere citizens to do this on a personal scale enables the societies they inhabit to accomplish the same psychological balancing act, albeit imperfectly—believing in their own worth while accepting the equal worth of cultures other than their own.

ATTITUDES TOWARD WAR

For the Clans, warfare represents the apex of human achievement. A Clan warrior by definition is considered worthy of more respect than a Clansman of any other caste, because his life's work—waging war—brings his Clan the greatest honor. No scientific breakthrough, no degree of technical or business expertise, no artistic achievement and no amount of wealth can match the value of what a Clan warrior does. Even freeborn warriors, scorned as near worthless in some Clans, have higher status than members of lesser castes do. Though the Clans acknowledge value in the work of other castes, they see that value in military terms. Scientific research created the eugenics program that breeds trueborn warriors, and also produces such useful items as improved armor alloys and devastating weapons; technicians maintain the sophisticated machinery that makes warfare possible; merchants find the resources and

create the wealth to finance Clan fighting forces; and the laborers' menial work oils the machinery of everyday Clan life so that higher castes may devote themselves to more worthy tasks.

In the Inner Sphere, war is merely one of many human endeavors, and not always the one valued most highly. Inner Sphere citizens generally respect the soldiers who protect them, but some realms rank military service higher than others—and even the most martial states tend not to honor warfare as an end in itself. In the highly militaristic Federated Suns and Draconis Combine, for example, war is a glorious enterprise matched by little else. Yet neither of these realms sees war as the greatest achievement of humankind. Its glory instead rests primarily on the need to protect the nation from real or perceived enemies bent on its destruction. Warfare has no intrinsic worth, but takes its value from the civilian way of life it safeguards.

The Lyran Commonwealth and its successor, the Lyran Alliance, provide an even more extreme example. The average Lyran citizen values prosperity above all, and so accords the highest worth to moneymaking and clever business dealing. Fighting is sometimes necessary to ensure the nation's security, and war can be lucrative to a certain extent. Inevitably, however, its losses outweigh profits. A military machine is expensive to maintain, and warfare generally disrupts the trade that is the Lyrans' lifeblood. Like avalanches, tornadoes, and other acts of God, war for most Lyrans is to be avoided when possible, fought or endured only when necessary.

Because the peoples of the Inner Sphere regard other human activities as equal or even superior to warfare, their cultures have a richness and depth that the Clans largely lack. Much of the energy that the Clans direct toward war, denizens of the Inner Sphere may turn in other directions: composing symphonies, writing novels, inventing ingenious gadgets, exploring deep philosophical questions and the like. As illustrated above, the Lyran realm is an excellent case in point. Its greatest strength has always been economic rather than military, and the nation's general prosperity has allowed its various peoples and their cultural traditions to flourish through the centuries.

In other parts of the Inner Sphere, even a warrior may turn his mind toward other things. The Draconis Combine's famous Bushido code blends the art of war with other arts far different—a Combine MechWarrior is likely to be a gifted poet or painter as well. The Xin Sheng movement currently revitalizing the Capellan Confederation is partly based on military conquest, but also encompasses political reforms, urban renewal and a dawning renaissance in Chinese art. And these are only a few examples; countless others abound in the far-flung reaches of Inner Sphere space.

This introduction has touched on a few threads in the vast, colorful tapestry that is the Inner Sphere. A dazzling variety of societies bound by recognition of our common humanity, the Inner Sphere exemplifies humanity's best and worst, so intimately intertwined that neither can exist without the other.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INNER SPHERE

The history of human life among the stars and the creation of the great star empires begins with humanity's long-ago first steps into space. Among the ancient nations of Terra, the dissolution of traditional alliances and enmities in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries created an era of unprecedented peace and cooperation that freed all human societies to turn their energies toward the advancement of the human race. By 2020, the groundbreaking research of two scientists—Thomas Kearny and Takayoshi Fuchida—led to the development of a fusion reactor capable of powering a starship. In 2027 the Alliance starship *Columbia*, powered by the first Kearny-Fuchida fusion engine, made its historic journey to Mars. With that brief voyage, humankind's migration from Terra began.

In 2102, physicists building on Kearny and Fuchida's work developed the first faster-than-light ship in an intensive research effort known as the Deimos Project. Deimos produced the first Kearny-Fuchida drive, which created a space warp around a starship through which the craft could "jump" distances of up to thirty light years from its starting point. On December 5, 2108, Terra launched the first so-called JumpShip, the TAS *Pathfinder*, on its famous round trip between Terra and the Tau Ceti system.

The ability to travel between star systems in the blink of an eye led to an unparalleled expansion of human colonization. The first colony of New Earth, established on Tau Ceti IV in 2116, paved the way for hundreds of others. Under the banner of the Terran Alliance, humans spread throughout the galaxy as their ancestors had once swarmed over Terra. By the year 2235, an Alliance survey had counted more than six hundred human colonies scattered across a sphere roughly eighty light years in diameter. In a parallel to earlier human history, however, this colonial expansion carried within it the seeds of its own destruction. Self-sufficient colonies far from their founding worlds began agitating for home rule, and in 2236 a group of worlds at the edge of human-explored space declared independence from Terra. The Colonial Marines, dispatched from Earth to quell the rebellion, failed miserably. Within six years, the Alliance government had granted independence to all colonies that lay more than thirty light years from Terra.

RISE OF THE HEGEMONY

Over the next several decades, a combination of political infighting and the severe economic strain of supporting Terran colonies tore at the fabric of the Terran Alliance. Tales of colonists starving to death sparked riots among sympathetic Terrans, while the ranks of the poor, dispossessed and angry grew. In 2314, civilian riots and political polarization spawned an Alliance-wide civil war. The Alliance Global Militia, which had remained uneasily neutral throughout the long years of unrest, stepped in to stop the violence at the behest of James

McKenna, an admiral in the Alliance Global Navy. Using his newfound authority as the Alliance's military savior, McKenna tore down the corrupt Alliance government and established the Terran Hegemony in its place. In 2316, a grateful public elected him the Hegemony's first Director-General.

During McKenna's twenty-three-year term of office, he launched three military campaigns to bring independent colony worlds back under Hegemony control. The first two campaigns, though hard-fought, were largely successful; the third, launched in 2335, was not. The aging McKenna left control of the final campaign to his son Konrad, whose persistent refusal to follow standard procedure eventually ended in disaster for the Hegemony Navy. In 2338 Konrad led his naval convoys blindly into the heavily mined Syrma system, losing all but two of his twenty-nine troopships. This failure also gave heart to the worlds opposing the Hegemony, which had begun to ally with each other to protect themselves from expanding Hegemony influence. Konrad's disgrace left the Hegemony without an heir to fill McKenna's place; on James McKenna's death in 2339, the Hegemony's High Council passed the leadership to James McKenna's third cousin, Michael Cameron. The new Director-General recognized the folly of attempting to impose unity by force and instead began efforts to cement good relations with allied colony worlds that had formed independent nations.

In 2351, Michael Cameron took an action with cultural repercussions that would echo for centuries. He created the Peer List, establishing the equivalent of a feudal nobility whose members owed their exalted rank to their achievements. Among the first to receive a title was Dr. Gregory Atlas, lauded for his work on refining myomer bundles. These incredibly powerful synthetic muscles were an integral part of early WorkMechs; when powered by a fusion reactor, myomer bundles give a BattleMech its strength and mobility. Though Dr. Atlas would not live to see the first BattleMech—used in action on February 5, 2439—his work ultimately changed the face of war.

Inevitably, Cameron's Peer List led to the creation of feudal ruling families in the various independent states surrounding the Hegemony. In the latter half of the twenty-fourth and the early twenty-fifth centuries, tensions between these fiefdoms escalated into open war. Humanity's interstellar nations fought battle after battle against each other, each more savage than the last, culminating in the unspeakable massacre of civilians on the world of Tintavel in the Capellan Confederation. That tragedy shocked the various combatants back to sanity, at least for a time. The Confederation's leader, Chancellor Aleisha Liao, responded to the massacre by devising the Ares Conventions—a set of rules for warfare intended to keep such atrocities from ever happening again. On June 13, 2412, the Hegemony and all the other nations signed the Ares Conventions, agreeing to limit the use of nuclear weapons and cease assaulting civilian targets.

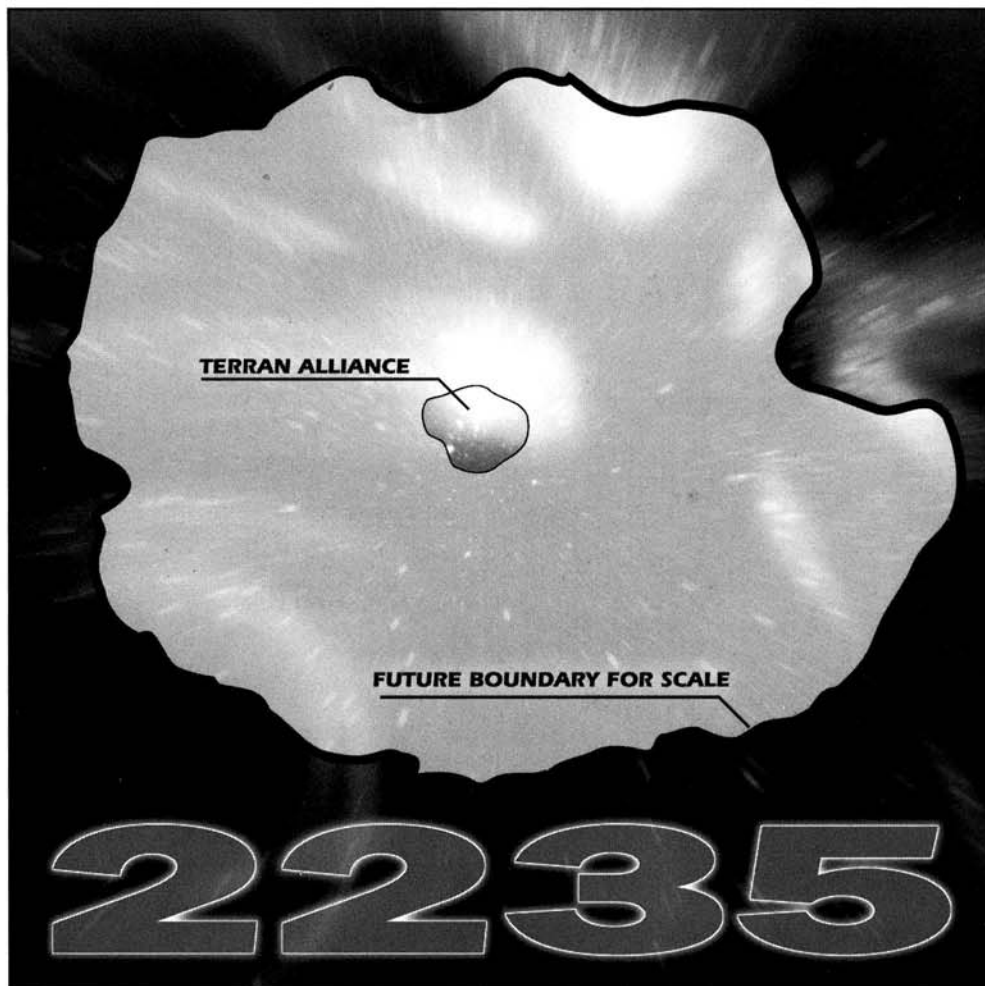
Though intended as an act of peace, the Ares Conventions made war both legal and palatable by removing the most vicious means of fighting it. Many of the signatory states wasted little time in abusing their newborn right to wage warfare.

THE STAR LEAGUE ERA

The Hegemony engaged in its share of battles over the next century or so but also served as a neutral mediator between warring parties. Despite the Hegemony's history of military expansion, its possession of Terra gave the Hegemony a certain credibility as a peacemaker in the eyes of other nations. Ian Cameron, who became Director-General in 2549, expanded the Hegemony's peacemaking role and negotiated an end to several conflicts. In 2556, Ian persuaded the leaders of the Free Worlds League and the Capellan Confederation to sign the Treaty of Geneva; this famous document laid the groundwork for the formation of the Star League, the interstellar alliance that briefly ended wars and advanced all humanity's welfare. The Lyran Commonwealth signed its treaty in 2558, the Federated Suns in 2567. With the inclusion of the Draconis Combine in 2569, Ian Cameron achieved his dream of uniting virtually all humankind under one ruler.

Led by the Cameron dynasty, the Star League gave its citizens peace and prosperity for two hundred years. Though it could not completely wipe out the human impulse toward conflict, it kept disputes between its member-states under firm control. After Lord Simon Cameron's tragic death in 2751, the rulers of all the member-states served as regents for Simon's young son, Richard Cameron, but unfortunately abused their positions to jockey for personal power. The lonely Richard turned to Stefan Amaris, ruler of the Rim Worlds Republic in the far-off Periphery, for friendship and advice. Amaris hated the Camerons, and used his false friendship with Richard to destroy the Star League from within. On December 27, 2766, Stefan Amaris murdered Richard and took control of the Star League.

Within weeks of his coup d'état, Amaris tried and failed to gain the support of General Aleksandr Kerensky, commander of the Star League Defense Forces. The honorable Kerensky despised the usurper Amaris and launched a bitter, thirteen-



year war to liberate the Terran Hegemony from his grasp. On September 29, 2779, Kerensky led the assault against Amaris's final stronghold on Terra. In the face of overwhelming force, Amaris surrendered. By order of General Kerensky, Amaris, his family and his closest aides were summarily executed by SLDF troops for their crimes against humanity. This act of vengeance closed the book on the first Star League.

In late 2780, the Council Lords stripped Kerensky of his title as Protector of the Realm and ordered him to disperse all SLDF units to their peacetime locations. Bereft of central leadership, the member-states of the Star League vied with each other for power. The only issue they could come to agreement on was the appointment of Jerome Blake to rebuild the HPG networks throughout the Inner Sphere. This decision would result in the founding of ComStar, an event which would have ramifications far beyond what any of the member states could have foretold. Following that decision, the lords officially dissolved the High Council in August of 2781. Each lord then left Terra for home and began to build his own power base. When the various lords angled for SLDF units to back their power bids, General Kerensky took drastic action. On February 14, 2784, Kerensky

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proposed to his troops that the SLDF should leave the Inner Sphere and found a new society beyond known space, based on the ideals of the Star League. In late November of 2784, Kerensky's Operation Exodus became a reality; more than eighty percent of the SLDF departed with Kerensky. The bewildered people of the Inner Sphere, mourning the loss of their hero, comforted themselves with the belief that Kerensky and his people would return when humanity needed them.

CENTURIES OF WAR

In the resulting power vacuum, the rulers of the realms now called the Successor States fought endless, brutal wars, each seeking to re-establish the Star League under his own leadership. In three hundred years of conflict, however, the Successor Lords accomplished little save to blast humankind virtually back to the Stone Age. By the time the third Succession War ended, humanity had lost almost every Star League-era technological advance; only stringent restrictions on destroying JumpShips, DropShips, BattleMechs and other irreplaceable technologies of war allowed interstellar combat to continue. As the Successor States battered each other senseless, the fighting ground down to endless border

skirmishes in which no combatant gained significant advantage.

As the Inner Sphere warred, so did the descendants of the SLDF. Within two decades of planetfall, the men and women who had followed Kerensky to preserve the ideals of the Star League had betrayed those ideals and degenerated into vicious, fratricidal conflict. Determined to salvage something from the wreckage of his father's dream, Kerensky's son Nicholas led eight hundred followers to a safe haven, where together they forged the society later known to history as the Clans. Though the Clans would not arrive in force in the Inner Sphere until 3049, they sent one unit as a vanguard in 3005—Wolf's Dragoons. This famed mercenary unit fought for each of the Successor States in turn, testing the strength of their militaries and learning something of their societies. Prolonged contact with the Inner Sphere nations gave the Dragoons a deeper understanding of those their own society dismissed as corrupt and vicious barbarians. Ultimately, the Clan-born Dragoons would become loyal and invaluable allies of the Inner Sphere.

STEPS TOWARD PEACE

By the turn of the thirty-first century, common wisdom among Successor State militaries held that conquest of the Inner Sphere through conventional warfare was impossible. Those who wished to found a second Star League had to find another way. In 3020, Archon Katrina Steiner of the Lyran Commonwealth sent a peace proposal to her fellow Successor Lords and caught the interest of Hanse Davion, Prince of the Federated Suns. In 3022, the Archon and the Prince concluded a secret alliance that would bind their realms together through Hanse Davion's marriage to Katrina's daughter and heir, Melissa Steiner. This union joined two families and two nations into a single strong realm that combined the economic power of the Lyran Commonwealth with the military might of the Federated Suns. The union of these states put the Draconis Combine in an uncomfortable position between two of its greatest enemies and led the smaller Capellan Confederation and Free Worlds League to fear conquest by the emerging Federated Commonwealth.

After months of secret negotiations between the Capellan Confederation, Draconis Combine and Free Worlds League, all

three of those nations signed the Concord of Kapetyn in 3024. Intended as a counter to the Lyrans Commonwealth/Federated Suns alignment, this triple alliance provided for mutual support and defense. It also guaranteed that any renewed war would engulf the entire Inner Sphere.

FOURTH SUCCESSION WAR

On August 20, 3028, Hanse Davion and Melissa Steiner held their wedding on Terra in the presence of their fellow Successor Lords. At the reception following the wedding, Hanse Davion offered a gift to his bride. As he fed Melissa a piece of wedding cake, Prince Hanse announced, "Wife, in honor of our marriage, in addition to this morsel I give you a vast prize. My love, I give you the Capellan Confederation!" With those words, Hanse Davion launched the Fourth Succession War.

In a series of military exercises held between 3026 and 3028, Hanse Davion had discovered that he could move vast numbers of troops swiftly to distant battlefields. He had also reorganized his army into regimental combat teams (RCTs) consisting of two or more regiments of BattleMechs plus armor and artillery support. This organization gave Davion troops overwhelming advantages in numbers. The RCTs poured into the Capellan Confederation in five successive waves, cutting it in half.

Such large-scale mobilization by the Federated Commonwealth did not come without cost. The vast demand for JumpShips and DropShips to ferry troops across space reduced commerce between worlds to essential items, inflicting economic hardship on many planets. ComStar, whose members had preserved the technology of interstellar communications since the fall of the Star League, opposed Hanse Davion's war. The organization placed the Federated Commonwealth under Interdiction; ComStar's hyperpulse generators would relay no messages to, from or between any Federated Commonwealth worlds. Hampered by the Interdiction and satisfied with his conquests, Hanse Davion sued for peace in 3029. The battered Capellan Confederation agreed to the Commonwealth's terms, desperate to free its scant military resources for use against other enemies, such as the Free Worlds League. The League had exploited the Confederation's weakness, taking several worlds, and the Confederation's



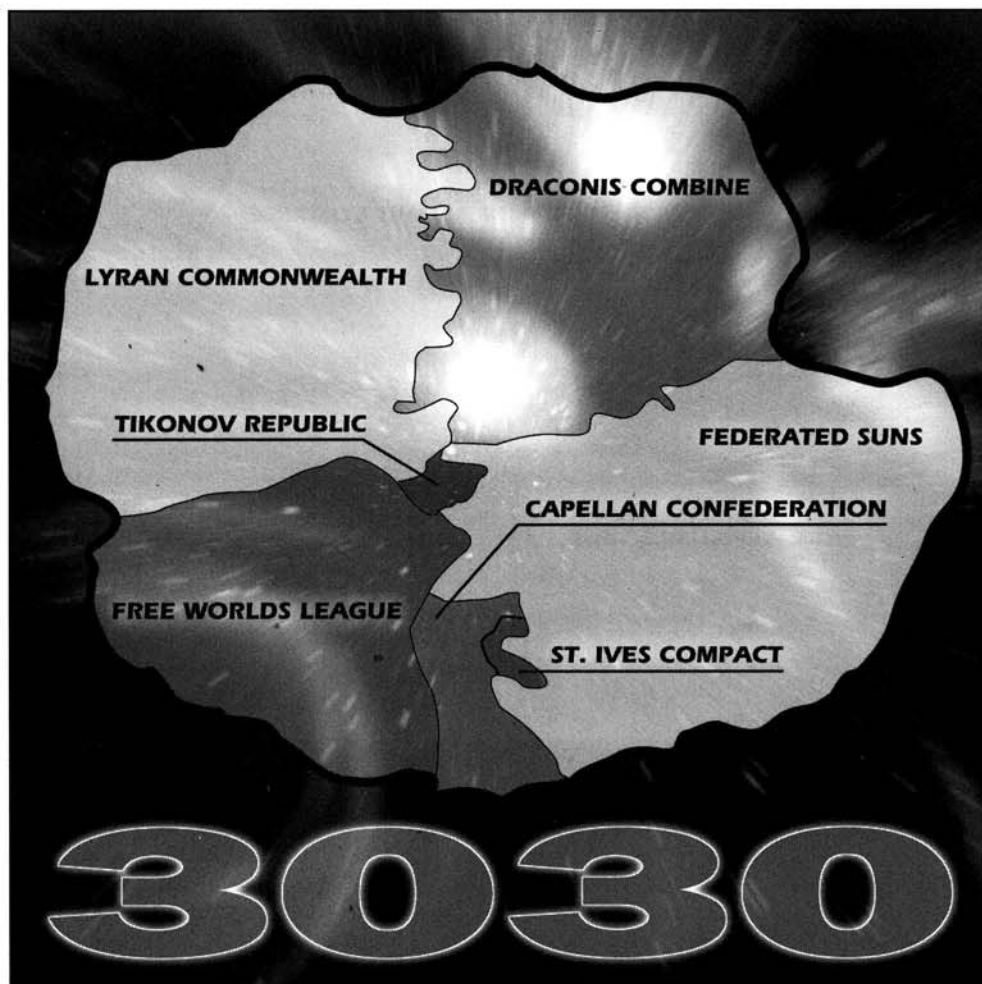
Chancellor could no longer afford war with House Davion if she hoped to preserve her nation.

SKIRMISHES AND PLOTS

Between 3029 and 3039, the Successor States jockeyed for power through covert dealings and small skirmishes in lieu of outright war. The Federated Commonwealth continued the integration of its militaries (which would finish in 3042), governments, economies and conquered worlds, forming the largest and most powerful realm in the Inner Sphere. This giant state set a precedent for the revival of the Star League. Despite the Federated Commonwealth's painful dissolution just thirty-five years after the signing of the Alliance Treaty, the mere fact that two Successor States could merge with each other proved that wars of conquest were not the only path to human unity.

Meanwhile, the Draconis Combine took one lesson from the Fourth Succession War to heart and overhauled its military in response to Hanse Davion's "lightning war." As the Combine's *Gunji-no-Kanrei*, or Warlord, Theodore Kurita took several steps to ensure his nation's safety. He revamped the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery, upgrading its training and loosening

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ing the command structure to reward personal initiative. In his most controversial act, Theodore signed a compact with ComStar, granting independence to several Combine worlds in exchange for ComStar's Star League-era BattleMech designs.

Theodore's reforms were put to their first test on March 13, 3034, when the Free Rasalhague Republic announced its independence from the Draconis Combine. The declaration of independence touched off a minor rebellion within the Combine, as reactionary commanders refused to pull their military units from the new republic. Theodore declared the reactionaries *ronin*, lordless, and sent his own units to drive them from Free Rasalhague. Theodore's troops and various mercenary groups joined the Republic's Kungsärmé in battle against the *ronin*, but poor contracts negotiated in haste with the mercenaries paid most too much money for too little fighting. Ultimately Free Rasalhague won its freedom, but its citizens learned to loathe the mercenary MechWarrior.

In April of 3039, the Successor States saw the last gasp of military adventurism in the name of restoring the Star League. Hanse Davion set in motion the second great wave of his war to unite the Inner Sphere, selecting the Draconis Combine as his

target. The first assault wave of his two-front attack on the Dieron district succeeded brilliantly, and Davion's military advisors believed they had taken the Combine by surprise. But before the Federated Commonwealth forces could launch their second wave, the Combine counterattacked and threw the Commonwealth on the defensive. Aided by the Star League 'Mechs he had received from ComStar, Theodore Kurita gambled with the fate of his nation and won. By attacking in the teeth of the Davion onslaught, Theodore made Hanse Davion believe the DCMS stronger than it actually was. By October of 3039, Davion chose to cut his losses and make peace.

The War of 3039 accomplished little for those who fought it, save to remind the Successor States of the severe cost of war—and the foolishness of relying on it as a means to achieve lasting peace. A few worlds changed hands, but the balance of power remained the same. Aside from an assault in 3041, in which the Tenth Lyrans Guards took the world of Skondia from the Combine, the states of the Inner Sphere seemed content to

rebuild their realms in peace. Military readiness and overcharged rhetoric still ruled the day, but the Successor States had—at least temporarily—grown tired of war. The Inner Sphere rebuilt during ten years of peace, which ended abruptly on August 13, 3049.

ENEMIES FROM BEYOND

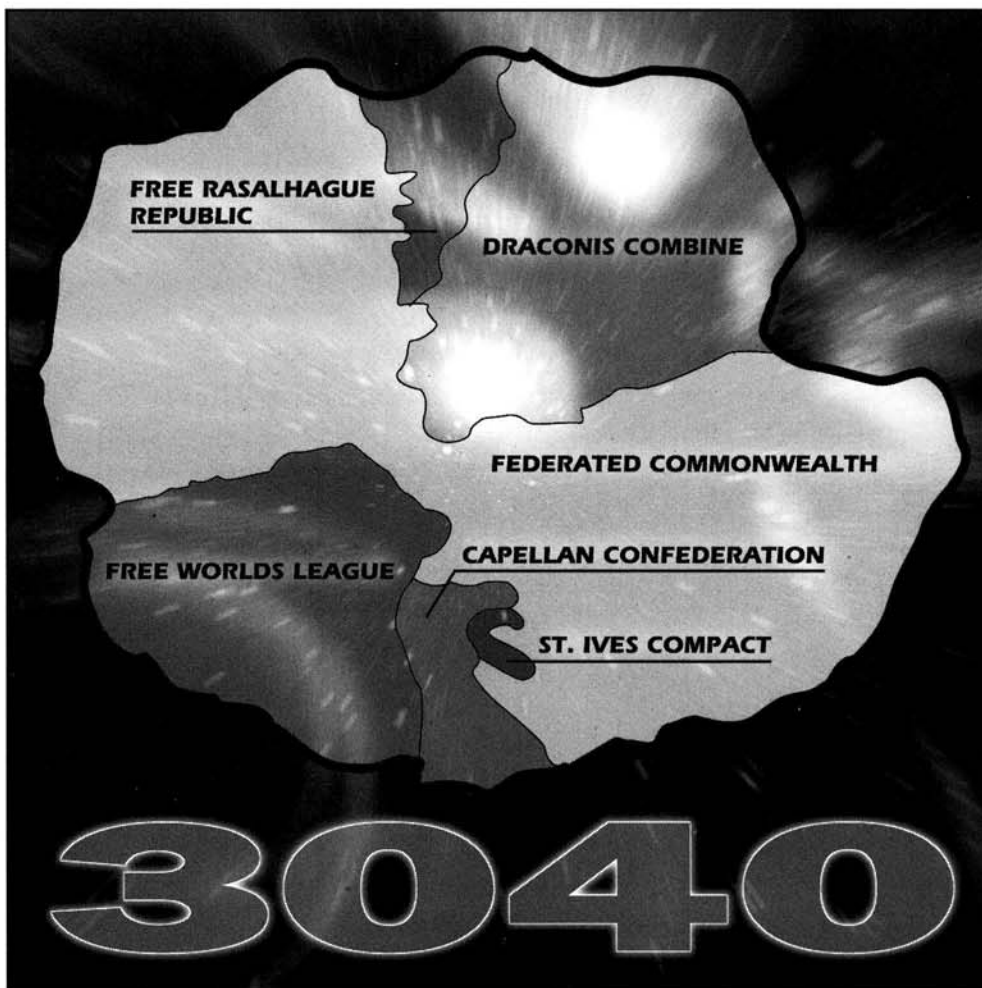
In that year, while hunting pirates in the Periphery near the Free Rasalhague Republic, a detachment of the famed Kell Hounds mercenary unit succumbed to a mysterious fighting force on a godforsaken planet known as The Rock. Casualties included Phelan Kell, only son of the Hounds' founder Morgan Kell and cousin to Victor Davion, Hanse and Melissa's eldest son. Phelan was listed as missing, presumed killed, but the Inner Sphere did not learn his true fate until several months later. The Kell Hounds' defeat marked the first of many lost battles against the Clans, a race of warriors descended from the long-vanished Star League Army. The Clans invaded the Inner Sphere to conquer it and restore their version of the ancient Star League.

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In March of 3050, the Clans struck in force, hammering the Draconis Combine, the Free Rasalhague Republic and the Lyran side of the Federated Commonwealth. Wave after wave of Clan attacks followed, executed with blinding speed and ruthless efficiency. Using their technologically superior OmniMechs and tenacious armored infantry known as Elementals, Clan warriors cut down their Inner Sphere opponents like wheat before a scythe. Four Clans rolled across the Inner Sphere in the first wave: Smoke Jaguar, Ghost Bear, Jade Falcon and Wolf. Inner Sphere forces launched a few successful counterattacks, but those strikes came too little and too late. The Clan juggernaut thundered on, halted only when catastrophe struck.

On October 31, 3050, a Rasalhagian pilot named Tyra Miraborg crashed her *Shilone* fighter into the Clan flagship *Dire Wolf*, killing the Clans' war leader. The death of the ilKhan accomplished what six months of desperate fighting had not; the Clans ended their assaults, garrisoned the worlds they had conquered and withdrew many of their military units from the Inner Sphere. For several months, later dubbed the Year of Peace, the leaders of each Clan debated who should be the new ilKhan. In late 3051, they chose Khan Ulric Kerensky of Clan Wolf to lead a renewed assault against the Inner Sphere.

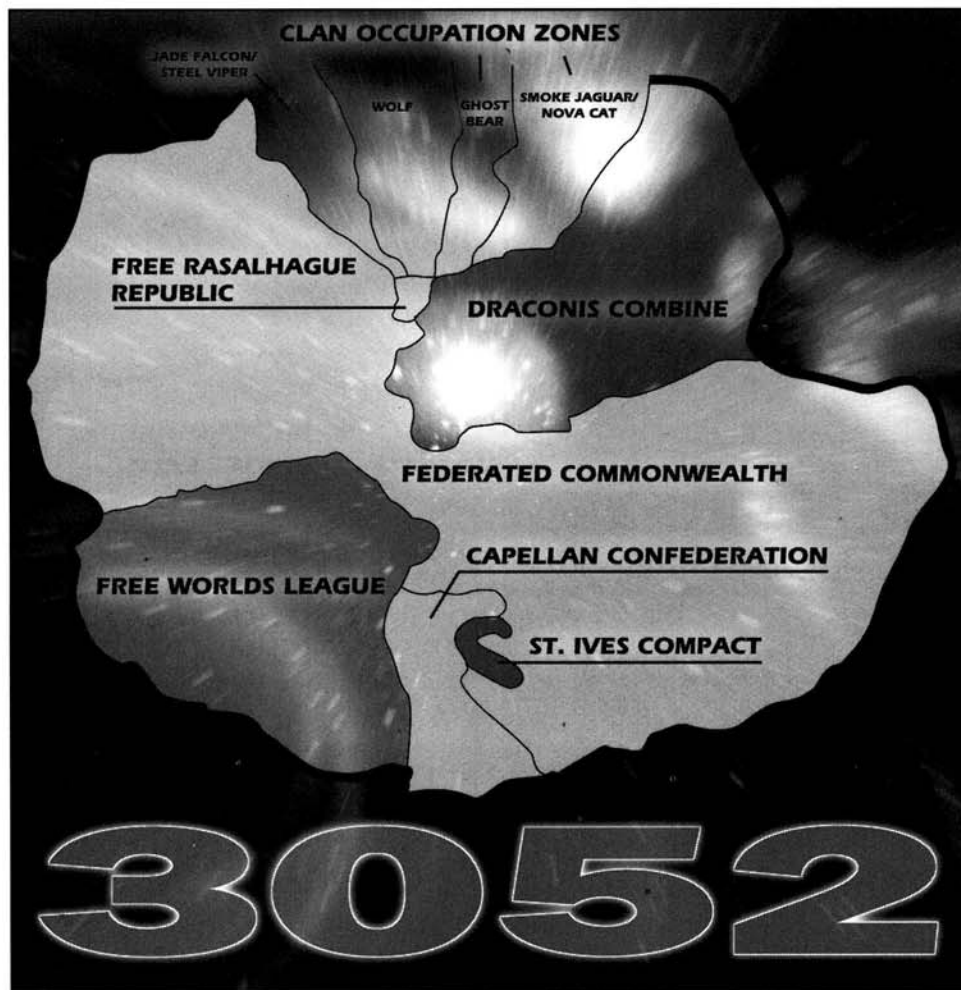
During this lull, Colonel Jaime Wolf of Wolf's Dragoons summoned the leaders of the Successor States to the world of Outreach. There, Wolf revealed that he and his fellow Dragoons were actually Clan warriors—and that they were prepared to aid the Inner Sphere against their own people. The Inner Sphere leaders spent the better part of that year overcoming their mutual hostilities and formulating a combined response to the overwhelming Clan threat. Setting aside centuries' worth of mistrust between their two nations, Hanse Davion and Theodore Kurita sealed a non-aggression pact—a visionary action that brought the Inner Sphere one step closer to resurrecting the Star League. Davion also bargained for material aid from the Free Worlds League by promising its leader, Thomas Marik, that the famous New Avalon Institute of Science would devote massive resources to curing Thomas' son Joshua of leukemia.



In November of 3051, the Clans renewed their invasion. In January 3052, Clans Smoke Jaguar and Nova Cat attacked the Combine capital of Luthien. In an act of political courage that sealed the nascent alliance between the Federated Commonwealth and the Draconis Combine, Hanse Davion sent the Kell Hounds and Wolf's Dragoons to help defend his age-old enemy's homeworld. The trust engendered between the two nations by Davion's action enabled both to devote all their efforts to fighting the Clans.

Meanwhile, an internal threat from an unexpected source was taking shape. ComStar had negotiated with the Clans soon after the initial invasion; upon the Clans' return to the Inner Sphere, ComStar offered to administrate their conquered worlds. ComStar's leader, Primus Myndo Waterly, intended to use the Clan conquest to bring about the collapse of civilization; ComStar would then step in as humanity's savior, thereby gaining power over all of human-occupied space. When Waterly discovered that the Clans intended to conquer Terra, ComStar's homeworld and the cradle of humanity, she abruptly changed her tactics. Though I did not know it at the time, my own plan to end the Clan onslaught dovetailed with Waterly's pernicious

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scheme. At my urging, Waterly sent the Com Guards to fight the Clans on the backwater world of Tukayyid. If the Clans won, ComStar would give them Terra. If they lost, the Clans would halt their advance toward Terra for fifteen years. At the same time, Waterly set secret plans in motion to strike at the Clans and the Successor States simultaneously.

The Com Guards defeated the Clans on Tukayyid in May of 3052, in a bloodbath that cost ComStar's forces dearly. While the Com Guards fought and died on Tukayyid to save the Inner Sphere, Primus Waterly gave the word to her agents. They launched a series of covert attacks on worlds in the Clan occupation zones and also struck at communications sites across the Inner Sphere. By this bold gambit, Waterly hoped to cripple the Inner Sphere and the Clans in the same blow, enabling her loyalists to seize power. Fortunately, the strikes failed. On my return to Terra, I deposed Primus Waterly and began a massive reform of ComStar.

VICTORY AND CHANGE

The end of the Clan invasion brought other changes in its wake. Hanse Davion died of a massive heart attack at the end of

the war, and Chancellor Romano Liao of the Capellan Confederation died at the hands of an assassin, leaving her son Sun-Tzu on the Celestial Throne. Sun-Tzu immediately began to build a power base, allying himself to House Marik through an engagement to Thomas Marik's illegitimate daughter, Isis. Within a few years, Theodore Kurita succeeded his father Takashi as Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. Ryan Steiner, perennial thorn in the side of the Federated Commonwealth's rulers, began agitating for an independent Isle of Skye. ComStar, meanwhile, split into two factions. The reactionary group christened itself Word of Blake and emigrated to the Free Worlds League planet of Gibson with Thomas Marik's blessing.

On June 19, 3055, a bomb blast at a charity event on Tharkad killed the Federated Commonwealth's beloved Archon, Melissa Steiner-Davion. Authorities failed to apprehend a suspect. Ryan Steiner, riding the crest of anti-Davion sentiment he had spent years creating, accused Archon Prince Victor Steiner-Davion of engineering Melissa's death so that he might claim her throne for himself. Ryan's native Isle of Skye, already seething with secessionist fever, erupted in

open rebellion. Victor's sister Katherine tried to mediate between her brother and the rebel faction, with little success.

In April of 3056, Victor's aide and Katherine's lover, Galen Cox, fell victim to a bombing attack in a Solaris hotel that narrowly missed Katherine. Four days later, an unknown assassin shot Ryan Steiner dead. Suspicion centered on Sven Newmark, an expatriate Rasalhagian who served as Ryan's aide. Many people, however, suspected that Victor ordered Ryan killed to silence his allegations about the death of Archon Melissa. In an effort to defuse the turmoil in the Lyran half of the Federated Commonwealth, Victor declared the Lyran world of Tharkad and the Davion world of New Avalon co-capitals. He then shifted his government to New Avalon and left Tharkad in Katherine's hands, naming his sister as his official regent. This move, coupled with Ryan's death, temporarily quelled the rebellion.

Victor arrived on New Avalon to disturbing news: Joshua Marik was dying of leukemia despite the best efforts of the NAIS to save him. The rest of the Inner Sphere still desperately needed war materiel that only the Free Worlds League could provide, and Victor could not afford to lose the only hold he had over Captain-General Thomas Marik. After consulting with his senior

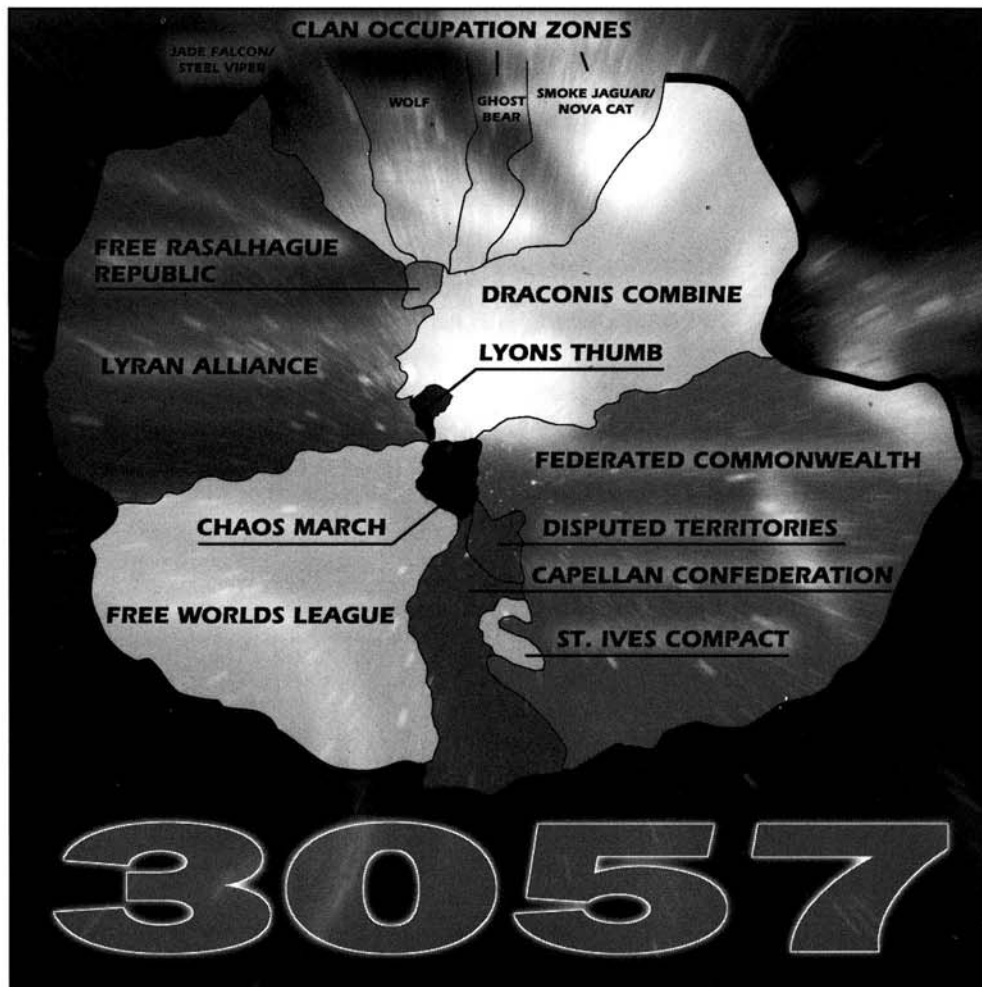
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advisors, Victor replaced the dying child with a substitute. Marik, however, had his suspicions, and took steps to confirm them. In September of 3057, assailants dressed as Capellan commandos attempted to kill Joshua's double. Two days later, Thomas Marik claimed he could prove that the Joshua Marik on New Avalon was not his son, but a duplicate. To retaliate for his son's death, Marik sent troops into the Commonwealth's Sarna March.

A horrified Katherine publicly denounced Victor for his deception, recalled all Lyran troops to her half of the Federated Commonwealth, severed relations with her brother's realm and announced the formation of the Lyran Alliance. She then declared her nation neutral, securing the Free Worlds League border and leaving that nation free to fight against the Federated Commonwealth. In conjunction with Marik's invasion, Sun-Tzu Liao sent Capellan troops into the Sarna March to reconquer worlds his grandfather had lost during the Fourth Succession War. Aided by Katherine's neutrality and united by their hatred for House Davion, Marik and Liao prosecuted their war against the Federated Commonwealth with surprising speed and success.

As the threat of a wider Inner Sphere war loomed, political infighting between the Clans also intensified. Many of them, especially Clan Jade Falcon, chafed beneath the Truce of Tukayyid and willingly seized any excuse to break it. Opposition to the truce soon erupted into civil war between Clans Jade Falcon and Wolf. Led by Phelan Kell, who had risen among his Clan captors to become Khan Phelan Ward of Clan Wolf, a significant portion of Clan Wolf's warriors fled to sanctuary on the Kell Hounds' homeworld, Arc-Royal. The rest of Clan Wolf fought a losing battle against the Jade Falcons.

Both conflicts abruptly ended in a surprising series of twists. Content with having taken back the worlds that had once belonged to the Free Worlds League, Thomas Marik concluded a peace treaty with the Federated Commonwealth. Sun-Tzu Liao, unwilling to continue his own campaign without Marik's backing, also ended hostilities. The Kell Hounds, having refused Katherine Steiner-Davion's demand for aid in defending the Lyran Alliance against Capellan aggression, established an anti-Clan defensive zone centered on Arc-Royal. By these acts,



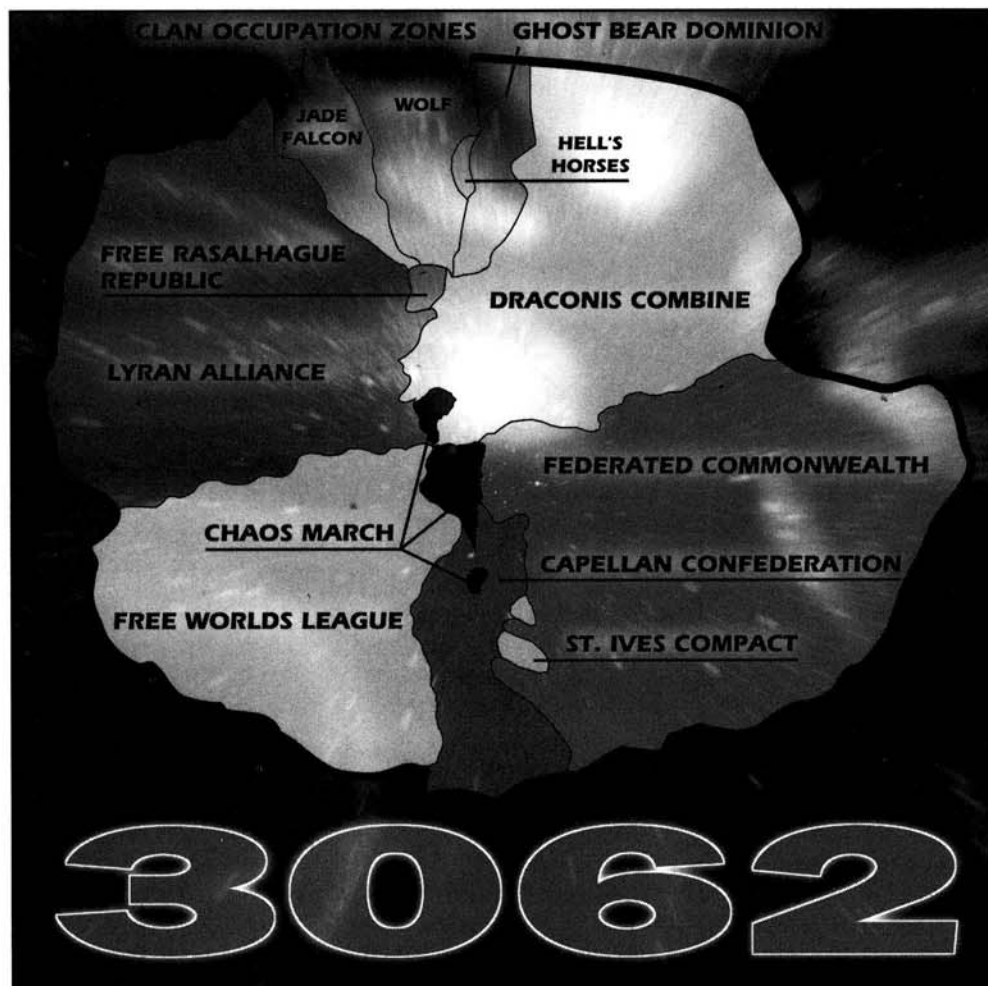
the mercenary unit carved its own fiefdom out of Katherine's realm. In the oddest turn of events, the Wolves who had battled the Jade Falcons merged with that Clan and then won freedom from their Jade Falcon conquerors. This new Clan, led by Khan Vladimir Ward, briefly called itself Clan Jade Wolf, until the death of Falcon Khan Elias Crichell at Khan Vlad Ward's hands gave Vlad the clout to revive his Clan as the "new" Clan Wolf.

THE UNIVERSE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

The first five years after Tukayyid, tumultuous though they were, seemed positively tranquil compared to the explosive events of 3058–3061. Those years saw many of the certainties by which Clan and Inner Sphere alike had lived violently overturned, giving way to a new order fraught with possibility and peril.

In the wake of the Sarna March invasion, the Word of Blake seized its chance to deal what it hoped would be a death-blow to ComStar by capturing Terra, cradle of humanity and ComStar's stronghold. Troop movements from the Free Worlds League into the so-called Chaos March provided cover for the Word of Blake Militia to move several divisions within

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striking distance of humanity's homeworld, and the high demand for mercenary troops in that same region of space did the rest. Brion's Legion, a mercenary unit that had constituted nearly half the strength of ComStar's Terran Defense Force since the Fourth Succession War, abruptly ended its ComStar contract in favor of a higher-paying Chaos March assignment. With so much of its troop strength gone virtually overnight, Terra was vulnerable. Unwilling to relocate Com Guard forces from the Clan border, I made a decision that unwittingly paved the way for Terra's loss. I chose to replace Brion's Legion with the 21st Centauri Lancers, a unit with a sterling reputation. The Lancers, however, never arrived on Terra. In an elaborate charade, the Word of Blake sent its own troops to Terra. Masquerading as the Lancers, the units maintained their deception long enough for the Word of Blake to move the rest of its forces into position.

In late February of 3058, the Word of Blake struck. The Com Guards on Terra, taken by surprise and unable to use the planet's formidable defenses because of Blakist sabotage, fought a bloody but ultimately losing battle across every

Terran continent. By early March of 3058, the Word of Blake held Terra in an iron grip from which it has yet to be dislodged.

During those same months, Clan Jade Falcon drove deep into the Lyran Alliance and captured several planets before Inner Sphere forces stopped the Falcon advance on the world of Coventry. Conceived as a show of Falcon strength in the aftermath of the Refusal War, the Coventry campaign was to have far more ominous consequences for the Clans than the Falcon commanders could have anticipated. On Coventry, the Falcons came close to victory against Lyran Alliance forces but were deprived of it by two events: preliminary moves by Clan Wolf to strike at worlds in the Jade Falcon occupation zone and the arrival of a coalition force from across the Inner Sphere. The coalition force, led by Prince Victor Steiner-Davion of the Federated Commonwealth, was the seed from which a reborn Star League Defense Force would soon sprout.

The Inner Sphere and Jade Falcon armies were evenly matched; neither side could win

Coventry without a protracted and bloody battle, and both commanders realized it. Prince Victor wrought a victory from the stalemate in a way that only an Inner Sphere commander could have conceived—by placing himself in the Clan leader's position and acting according to Jade Falcon custom. Using what he knew of Clan warrior traditions, Prince Victor invoked the Clan rite of safcon to ensure a safe landing for his troops, and then offered Falcon Khan Marthe Pryde the only honorable way out—*hegira*, the traditional right of a defeated enemy to leave the field with his forces and honor intact. Pryde accepted Prince Victor's offer, and the Jade Falcons left Coventry without another shot being fired.

The success of the coalition force on Coventry taught the Inner Sphere a valuable lesson—that old enemies could bury their differences and fight together in the face of a common enemy. Before the year's end, Prince Victor and other Inner Sphere leaders acted on that lesson, launching the campaign that obliterated a once-mighty Clan and ended the invasion of the Inner Sphere.

THE STAR LEAGUE REBORN

In October of 3058, the leaders of the Successor States and various minor Inner Sphere powers gathered on the Lyran capital of Tharkad to accomplish peacefully what they had failed to achieve during centuries of war—the rebirth of the Star League. Legions of martyred dead on all sides had fueled deep divisions among the Inner Sphere powers, but despite these divisions the Successor State rulers agreed to join together for an overriding purpose—to drive the Clans out, once and for all. To prove themselves a force to be reckoned with, the new Star League chose to destroy a single Clan: the Smoke Jaguars, by far the most brutal of the invading Clans and therefore the most potent symbol of the Clans as the enemy. Initially, the Star League intended only to drive the Jaguars out of their occupation zone. In late 3058, however, information from a Clan traitor enabled them to strike at a much larger target: Clan Smoke Jaguar's homeworld of Huntress.

In 3059 and 3060, Clan Smoke Jaguar died at the hands of the combined armies of the Inner Sphere. Their occupation zone overrun, their homeworld in ruins and their warrior caste decimated, the Jaguars essentially ceased to exist. The Inner Sphere force then turned its attention toward the rest of the Clans. Lacking the might to defeat the entire Clan military, Prince Victor Steiner-Davion once again made an inspired gamble. He led his forces to Strana Mechty, the heart of Clan space and Clan culture, where they defeated the Crusader Clans in a hard-fought Trial of Refusal. The Crusaders' defeat ended the invasion in a way that none of its proponents could ever have envisioned. The Inner Sphere barbarians had done the impossible, challenging and defeating Clan warriors on their own ground. Far from taking Terra and rebuilding the Star League in the Clans' image, the Crusader Clans found themselves locked into their Inner Sphere occupation zones or driven from the Inner Sphere entirely.

Clan Nova Cat, which had sided with the Inner Sphere against the Smoke Jaguars in obedience to the mystic visions of its leaders, was given its own fiefdom in the Draconis Combine and formally attached its warriors to the Star League Defense Force. For these actions, termed treason by their fellow Clans, the Nova Cats were Abjured and their holdings in Clan space forfeit. Now they continue the slow, difficult process of transforming themselves from enemies to allies and earning the trust of neighboring populations who were their conquered subjects not so long ago.

Clan Ghost Bear, which chose not to fight a Trial of Refusal for a cause it no longer believed in, has also become a permanent presence in the Inner Sphere. Over the past few years, the Ghost Bears steadily but unobtrusively relocated their civilian castes to the Bear occupation zone; with the Inner Sphere victory on Strana Mechty, the Bears completed their move. They now occupy most of what was once the Free Rasalhague Republic, from which they can guard the Inner Sphere against incursions by other Clans unwilling to accept the end of the invasion.

Clan Steel Viper suffered the most humiliating fate of all the invading Clans, next to the shattered Smoke Jaguars.

Intending to take advantage of Jade Falcon weakness in the aftermath of the Refusal War, the Vipers challenged Falcon dominance of the two Clans' shared occupation zone. They failed, however, and left the Inner Sphere rather than be destroyed by their Falcon antagonists.

As the man who ended the most fearsome threat the Inner Sphere had ever known, Victor Steiner-Davion should have been the hero of the hour. In the eyes of many, he was—but many of his own people were not among them. The Prince had left his youngest sister, Yvonne Steiner-Davion, as regent on New Avalon in his absence. He returned to find Yvonne deposed and the Federated Commonwealth in the hands of his sister, Archon Katherine Steiner-Davion. Apparently, Katherine had secretly been plotting such a takeover for years, as a prelude to becoming the next First Lord of the Star League. Even without a realm, however, Prince Victor remained a political force to be reckoned with. Named by me in late 3061 as ComStar's new Precentor Martial, Victor used his position to vote Combine Coordinator Theodore Kurita into the post of First Lord.

The newborn Star League remains uneasily intact, despite tensions that have flared twice into outright wars between member-states. The Capellan Confederation recently reabsorbed the St. Ives Compact after two years of bitter fighting and has also reclaimed several former Capellan worlds in the Chaos March. The Federated Commonwealth, nominally reunited under the scheming Archon Katherine, is sliding into civil war as Victor Steiner-Davion reluctantly attempts to reclaim his realm from a sister unfit to rule it. Meanwhile, Clans Jade Falcon and Wolf remain committed to renewing the invasion. Neither Clan has the strength to move in force yet, but each is rebuilding at a swift pace. Also, the Marian Hegemony's recent conquest of the Illyrian Pallatinate only shows that the Periphery can be every bit as power hungry as the great Houses.

Amid all the turmoil, however, are encouraging signs of unity. The Ghost Bears and the people of Free Rasalhague are developing a mutual respect and rapprochement that may serve as an example to the wary Nova Cats and their equally suspicious Draconis Combine neighbors. Having won its war with St. Ives, the Capellan Confederation is proving remarkably gracious in victory, reconstructing damaged cities and refraining from punitive actions against populations on St. Ives worlds. The Confederation's alliance with two prominent Periphery nations, the Magistracy of Canopus and the Taurian Concordat, is a particularly intriguing development given the Periphery's historic distrust toward the Inner Sphere proper. If that alliance prospers and sparks others, the second Star League has a chance to accomplish what the first could not—peaceful unification of all Inner Sphere nations.

More than once in human history, noble experiments in unity have broken on the shoals of our own darker sides. We never cease to attempt them, however. The human urge toward peace is as natural as its bent toward war. Only time can tell which will ultimately prevail.

THE DRACONIS COMBINE

Dawn in Imperial City, capital of Luthien and heart of the Draconis Combine. The morning sky is the color of pearl: gray-white, misty, shimmering. The streets are as quiet as they ever get. The *sake* drinkers and concert goers have long since gone home, the geisha are sleeping, the yakuza have largely finished their business. Even the all-seeing eyes of the *metsuke*—the operatives of the Internal Security Force—are half shut, with so few to watch. Then the first streaks of pale rose appear, the same delicate shade of the water lilies that grace Siriwan's Peace Pool in Unity Park. Rose soon gives way to gold, gleaming from the tops of the taller buildings. Teakwood and smoked glass gleam like hot embers in the morning's glory. The first of the day's inhabitants begin to stir: the street cleaner, the teaseller, the Friendly Persuader in his bright striped uniform starting his early shift. Before long, the streets are bustling. Civil servants scurry to their jobs in the vast Unity Palace complex. Salarymen bolt down cups of tea and bowls of cold noodles on their way to office high-rises. Well-dressed servants of the upper classes come out to do the day's shopping, their sharp voices rising through air scented with cherry blossoms.

In the district to the southeast, near Takashi Memorial Spaceport, the air is scented with combustion exhaust from the ancient buses and trucks that crowd the streets. The thoroughways bustle with factory workers going on or off shift, laborers repairing the roads, poorer housewives searching for bargains, Unproductives lounging in doorways while their children roam the concrete. This, too, is the Combine, as much as the grace and beauty of Imperial City's Palace District. They are our yin and yang, day and night, two faces of the same coin. Both are equally true to our soul. The quiet grace of this city's heart is a luxury achieved only by our willingness to suffer equivalent hardships. Our greatest fighters are often poets, their skill at the gentle art of haiku inextricably linked to their prowess at the harsh arts of war. The acceptance of this duality, the acceptance and embrace of beauty and hardship, serenity and ruthlessness, is one that most Combine citizens learn to cultivate from birth. Few of those outside our borders truly understand it, or us. But this acceptance has enabled us to survive for more than seven hundred years, through war and brief peace and war again. And now peace again, young and uneasy though it may be.

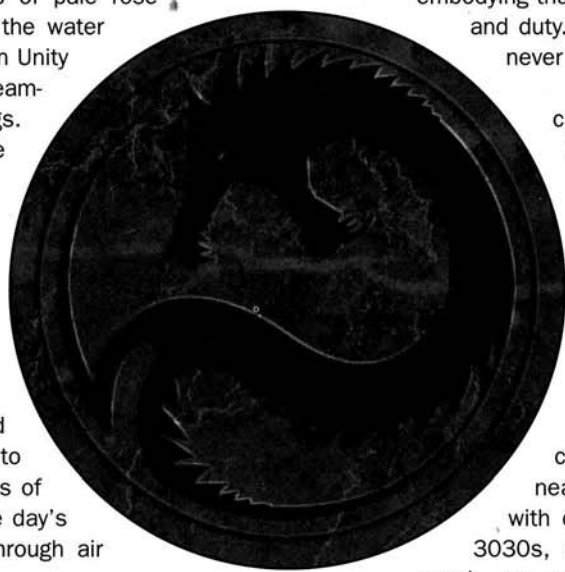
In my sixty-seven years, I have heard the Draconis Combine called many things. Militaristic. Expansionist. Xenophobic. A nation of inscrutable Orientals, convinced of its

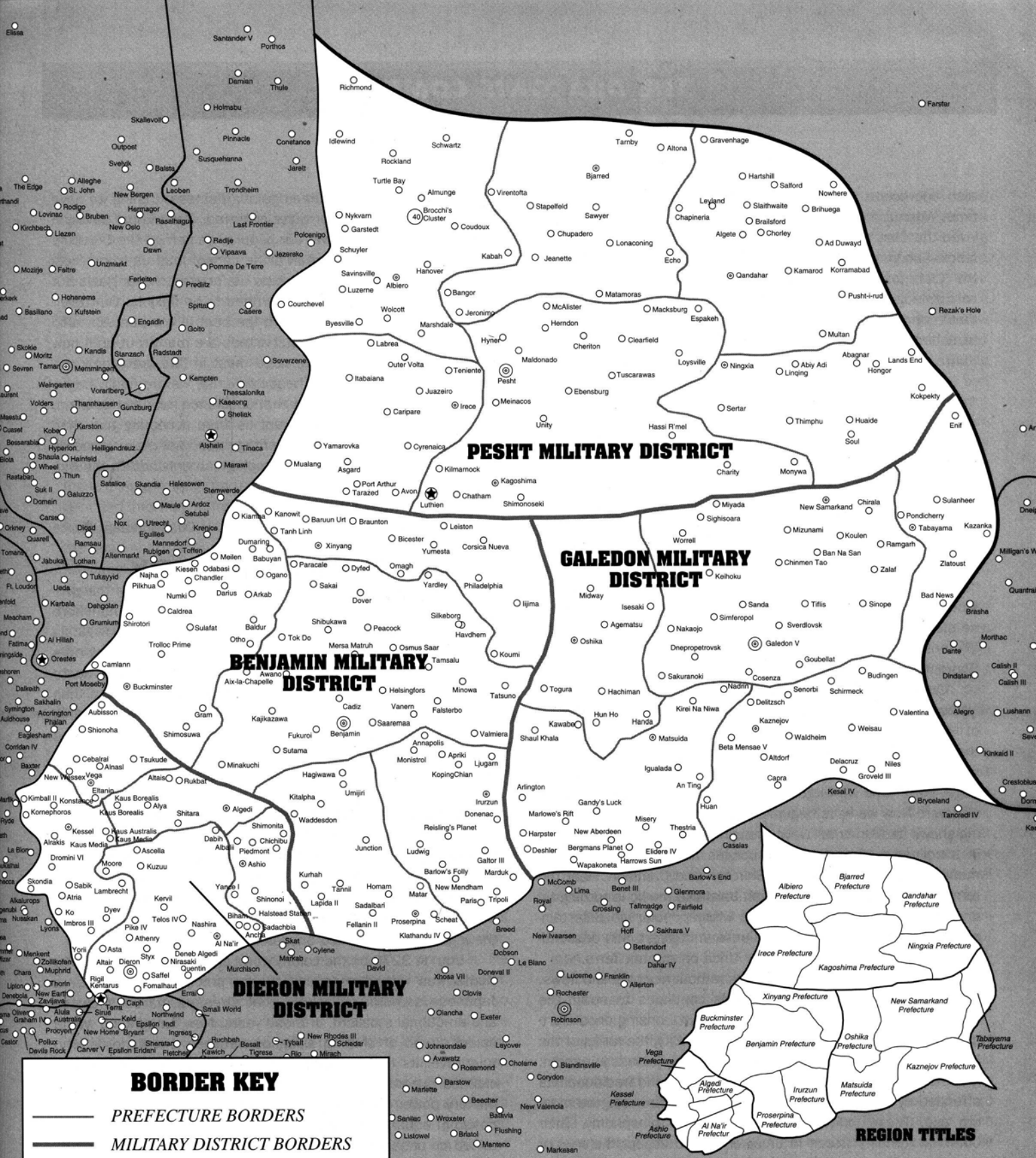
destiny to rule humankind and preoccupied with notions of honor that only it understands. Sheep shackled to the service of House Kurita, brainwashed from childhood into sacrificing their own needs and wants and very lives for the vainglory of their rulers. I have also heard kinder descriptions: a people blessed with courage and devotion, single-minded in their pursuit of greatness. A reincarnation of Old Japan, faithfully embodying that ancient society's twin ideals of honor and duty. A military power second to none and never to be trifled with.

But I have never heard the Combine called "home"—not as I call it. As a child of House Kurita, I know the life at the top. As a businessman with an eye for what is useful, I have come to know life farther down the mountain that is Combine society. This, then, is my view of the nation and people I love. It cannot tell the whole truth—no single viewpoint could—but it should come closer than most.

At the summit of the mountain, my cousin Theodore graces the throne. For nearly ten years he has led the Combine with dignity and vision. As far back as the 3030s, his actions shaped the Combine as much as—or more than—those of his father, Coordinator Takashi Kurita. Takashi's Combine was closed in on itself in many ways, suffocating under our long habit of unquestioning obedience to authority. Soldiers feared to make a move lest their initiative offend their superiors. Artists and poets endlessly recycled old forms and conventions, until the dead weight of them threatened to stifle the Combine's creative spirit. Merchants and entrepreneurs took few risks and brought in fewer profits. Technology and science suffered as well, with little opportunity to learn from advances outside the Combine. The realm stagnated, unable to tap its full potential because those who ruled it feared the consequences of a little freedom.

Theodore did not fear those consequences. Instead, he sought to balance the need to preserve our worthiest traditions while casting off what no longer benefited us. First as *Gunji-no-Kanrei* and then as Coordinator, he acted to create a Combine for the modern era—true to its deepest self but also able to adapt to situations our illustrious forebears could never have imagined. We still revere our Kurita founder and the Japanese culture from which his dynasty sprang, but we no longer reject all that lies outside that culture—especially the different peoples within our own borders. We remain devoted to honor and duty, but acknowledge that the definitions and requirements of those ideals may change. We recognize that the good of the Combine often requires us to subsume our own desires, but we





BORDER KEY

PREFECTURE BORDERS

MILITARY DISTRICT BORDERS

REGION TITLES

**DRACONIS
COMBINE**

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LEGEND



40 PARSECS OR 130.4 LIGHT YEARS

SCALE: 1/8 INCH = 1 PARSEC = 3.26 LIGHT YEARS = 19,164,277,860,000 STATUTE MILES

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS
FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES USE 9 PARSECS = 29.34 LY

also appreciate the value of a little indulgence from time to time. Without this broadening of outlook, we could not have survived the Clan War. Certainly we could not have joined with our fellow Successor States to re-form the Star League and defeat the Clan invaders. And now our Coordinator is universally acknowledged as the Star League's First Lord—an accomplishment denied to House Kurita since Coordinator Minoru launched the First Succession War back in 2784. Old Shiro Kurita, father of the Combine, would be proud, I think.

For the average Combine citizen, all this high-sounding rhetoric means little on the surface. From the middle-class university professor to the corner shop owner to the lowest ranks of the Unproductives, ordinary life appears to have changed little. Breakfast is still likely to be a bowl of rice and a pot of green tea, perhaps livened by fresh fruit for those with the means to buy it. The workday proceeds as it always has, though the common laborer is likely to find his workday somewhat shorter than the sixteen-hour slog of Takashi's time. At the day's end, the professor goes home to his family in their small house or apartment, the shop owner to his rooms above his store, the laborer to his hostel, the Unproductive to wherever he sleeps. Yet there is an ease to the atmosphere, a relaxing of tensions that comes from greater trust between the Coordinator and his people.

Our citizens of non-Japanese ancestry feel this most keenly. Swedish farmers on Rasalhague border worlds, Arkab traders of Middle Eastern origins, Russian miners native to Kaznejev, the famed Spanish dance troupes of Altair—all these are as much a part of the Combine as our treasured Japanese heritage. For a time we forgot this fact, and our different brothers suffered. Now we have begun to mend our error. The new thinking shows itself in small ways, though even these are significant in a collective-minded nation such as the Combine. Swedish meatballs are all the rage on Shirotori and Camlann, near the remnant of Rasalhague; Ukrainian balalaika music is turning up on Luthien concert stages; and a wildly popular vid entertainment dramatizes the exploits of an Azami desert clan descended from the children of Araby and Africa on ancient Terra.

Not that Theodore's Combine is without troubles and flaws. The reclamation of Clan-held planets continues to strain the economy, credit is tight and unemployment is rising uncomfortably fast on some worlds. Even in Imperial City, the ranks of the Unproductives are slowly growing as the newly jobless join them. And then there are the Black Dragons, hidebound traditionalists offended by every attempt to move the Combine into the modern age. These individuals see change as blasphemy. Their Combine remains frozen in time, unable to accept the new or adapt to it. Though their numbers are not great, their influence can be. In unsettled times, the type of rigid certainty they preach soothes the insecurity of the masses. Their insistence on cultural purity calls up our long-standing prejudices against all that is not Japanese. We are accustomed to obedience and we revere tradition. Such people do not find it easy to make choices or break with the past, even when our betters tell us to.

We are a nation on the edge of greatness, a thing we have long striven for but never quite achieved. The mutual devotion between House Kurita and our people has carried the Combine a long way, but that devotion alone cannot lead us to our destiny. Obedience to authority keeps us focused on our goals but can also make us rigid when we need to be flexible. Our reverence for tradition helps us keep the best in our past but also saddles us with the worst. Our virtues are many, but until now we have lacked the one we need most in this brave new universe: moderation. Under Theodore Kurita, we are finally beginning to learn it. We know now that obedience need not be blind, self-sufficiency need not prevent us from accepting aid when needed, and pride in our own heritage need not make us devalue all others. This new understanding can only add to the old. Both together will bring us glory.

—Chandrasekar Kurita

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

Though every Inner Sphere nation is a product of the people and events that molded it, the Draconis Combine, more than most, has been shaped by a few prominent individuals and a single, dominant culture. Shiro Kurita, the Combine's founder, began with a single planet. By the time of his death five decades later, he ruled over a sizable empire of more than sixty worlds. His descendants have since used their kinship with him and the Japanese cultural tradition from which he came to forge an empire of formidable military strength, indomitable courage and universal devotion to House Kurita.

FOUNDING FATHER: SHIRO KURITA

More than any other of humanity's great star empires, the Draconis Combine exists through the vision and will of one man: its founder, Shiro Kurita. His cultural background and forceful personality left an indelible stamp on the nation he built, and six centuries of Kurita heirs have largely reinforced the legacy of their famed ancestor.

Born in 2270 on the colony world of New Samarkand, Shiro Kurita was raised according to the precepts of bushido, a Japanese samurai philosophy that stresses martial prowess and emotional stoicism. In those years, New Samarkand was a spider's web of shifting alliances between the warlords who ruled over its half-dozen city-states. Each of these strongmen claimed suzerainty over the planet, but none possessed the military power to make good his claim. Political intrigue, composed of equal parts canny diplomacy and saber-rattling, maintained an uneasy balance of power.

Intelligent and ambitious, Shiro proved a keen student of his homeworld's political machinery. He entered local politics when he was barely of legal age; by his twenty-fourth year, he was overlord of Yamashiro, his native city. Over the next two years, he used a combination of bribes, blackmail and occasional murder to extend his power across the entire planet. In 2296, he publicly declared himself "First Citizen" of New Samarkand.

With his homeworld under his control and its several small armies molded into a single, loyalist fighting force by his formidable brother Urizen, Shiro Kurita turned his attention toward building an interstellar empire. His first efforts centered on the destruction of a potential rival for power: the Ozawa Mercantile Association (OMA), a wealthy trading conglomerate on which New Samarkand's economy depended.

The OMA arose in the mid-twenty-third century, one of several shipping and mercantile associations built around corporations that owned faster-than-light ships. (These relatively rare vessels, equipped with Kearny-Fuchida jump drives, could travel the long distances separating the former Terran Alliance colony worlds cut adrift when the Alliance collapsed in 2237.) The mercantile associations provided the only link between many of these planets; they made their money ferrying cargo, passengers and information from world to world. The Ozawa Mercantile Association, led by a Japanese clan of the same name, served the quadrant of space in which New Samarkand lay. Though not fabulously wealthy, their vital business made the Ozawas considerably more prosperous than many of the struggling former colonists they served. Inevitably, the disparity in wealth caused resentment—often exacerbated by the arrogance of many Ozawa traders, who skipped few opportunities to remind their customers of their dependence on the merchants' good graces. Such attitudes, coupled with the association's monopoly in the New Samarkand region, gave more than a few citizens on New Samarkand and surrounding worlds reason to want the Ozawas brought down. Few were more eager to accomplish this than New Samarkand's First Citizen, Lord Shiro Kurita.

Alliance of Galedon

In the first of many empire-building moves, Shiro made contact with the government of Galedon V, a prosperous and important nearby world. Galedon's leaders were nursing their own grudges against the Ozawa Mercantile Association, which sometimes took its profits at Galedon's expense. After several months of correspondence with Galedon's planetary governor, Nathaniel Imura, Shiro visited the planet with a proposal. He wished to form an alliance between his own world and Galedon, pooling both planets' technological and military resources so that together they could defy the Ozawas. If the alliance worked, other worlds would join, persuaded by all the eloquence at Shiro's command. To sweeten the deal, Shiro proposed to call the new confederation the Alliance of Galedon—thereby implying that world's precedence in the alliance's affairs. Swayed by Shiro's charisma, Galedon's governing board agreed to the proposal. They gave Shiro the title of Director, placing in his hands ultimate authority over both worlds' militaries and navies.

With his new ally's strong support, Shiro convinced world after world in the region to join him in throwing off the Ozawa yoke. The Alliance of Galedon grew swiftly, especially after the Ozawas' ill-advised attempt to intimidate member worlds by sharply raising transport fees. Citing that act as provocation, Shiro ordered

armed Galedon naval vessels to board the unarmed OMA ships and confiscate their cargoes and the ships themselves, as war "reparations." Soon the Alliance had its own merchant fleet. In response, the Ozawas armed their remaining ships and launched a massive public-relations campaign aimed at improving their image while sabotaging Shiro's. The campaign proved effective. A little more than a year after forming the Alliance, Shiro Kurita saw his popularity slipping. He retaliated with a ruthlessness that has since become a hallmark of many Kurita Coordinators. During November of 2303, Shiro's agents bombed every OMA office and installation throughout Alliance territory.

Having dealt the OMA its deathblow, Shiro launched the first of several sporadic invasions. In December of 2303, Urizen Kurita and his New Samarkand army invaded Sverdlovsk, a nearby planet whose leaders had hoped to remain neutral in the Alliance-Ozawa conflict. Though Kurita's force consisted of a mere four divisions, it proved more than sufficient to overcome scattered resistance by outraged locals on a world with no standing militia. Scant weeks after the first troops landed, Sverdlovsk's leaders signed over their planet to Lord Shiro.

Like many a move made by Shiro and his successors, the Sverdlovsk campaign had more than one purpose. In addition to giving Shiro complete control over his first planet other than New Samarkand, the bold military strike intimidated the ruling powers on several other regional worlds. None of them possessed armed forces capable of challenging the army of New Samarkand, and so none of them dared call the Kurita brothers' bluff. The leaders of several formerly neutral planets soon signed treaties with Shiro, increasing the power of the Alliance of Galedon and Shiro's personal authority. Over the next six years, Shiro and Urizen Kurita annexed one world after another, sporadically enough to conceal the true extent of their power grab. By 2309, Shiro had persuaded, threatened or outright conquered enough worlds to openly claim complete, personal control over the Alliance of Galedon.

Alliance possessions at this point consisted of seven worlds with significant populations and resources, plus fewer than a dozen others. Shiro wanted more. Among the potentially rich pickings were Dieron, Altair, Benjamin, Worrell, Junction, Luthien and Pesht—all former Terran Alliance colonies grown prosperous and powerful enough to control several of their immediate neighbors. Shiro embarked on a yearlong tour of these and other capital worlds, ostensibly seeking diplomatic relations with them for the Alliance of Galedon. In fact, he was planning to co-opt them. Before embarking on his journey, Shiro had collected considerable intelligence on the rulers of each planet. Soon after his arrival at each world, Shiro contrived to show its king, duke or warlord proof that a neighboring rival intended to invade. Having sunk this hook, Shiro then offered to mediate the looming dispute—or invited the planetary ruler to join the Alliance of Galedon and enjoy access to its military resources. The ploy succeeded every time. Shiro returned to New Samarkand in 2310 with more than a dozen signed treaties. Through a combination of smooth diplomacy, guile and



the strategic use of force, Kurita had expanded his Alliance to encompass more than thirty worlds.

Shiro's house of cards briefly threatened to collapse in 2311, when a dispute between the leaders of Dieron and Altair revealed that each planet's overlord had received the same guarantee of military aid from the Alliance of Galedon. The worlds of Benjamin, Telos IV and Asgard reacted with outrage to Shiro's duplicity and refused to accept his authority. Alliance forces invaded all three planets in late September of 2311; the last holdout, Asgard, fell to Kurita forces in August of 2312. The vicious fighting and eventual Kurita triumph served as object lessons to other would-be rebels; over the next seven years, only a handful of worlds in the region dared defy the overlords of the Alliance. By 2319, Shiro Kurita controlled a narrow strip of planets stretching from the region of space near Terra to the largely unexplored Draconis Rift. Shiro rechristened his realm for the eerily beautiful Rift, calling it the Draconis Combine.

During the next three decades, Shiro Kurita used the same tactics—guile, threats and occasional brute force—to double the size of his empire. At his death in 2348, he left behind an empire of more than sixty worlds that stretched from the edge of the Principality of Rasalhague to the border of the Federated Suns. Politically, Shiro's strategic instincts, love of power and immense personal charisma all shaped the office of

Coordinator, the title he claimed over his realm. Even today Shiro's absolute authority and much of his personal glamour continue to imbue the Coordinator's position, despite the reigns of unworthy Coordinators.

THE KURITA DYNASTY

The intense personal identification of the Kurita family with the nation it governs binds the people to their rulers through a loyalty bordering on veneration. Most Kurita rulers have felt similarly bound to their people, through an almost mystical understanding of themselves as embodying the Combine state. When a Coordinator lacks this understanding, however, the consequences for the realm can be severe. Leonard Kurita, a wastrel who ruled during the Star League era, provides one example. His disgraceful personal behavior came perilously close to provoking a war between the Combine and the rest of the League that would have irreparably damaged them both. During the first eight years of Leonard's reign, the Star League was fighting a bloody war of conquest against the Periphery states, which had refused to join the League. Leonard left the Combine's role in that conflict to the warlords of his various Military Districts, while he spent his days pursuing pleasure. The warlords deployed their forces as they saw fit—some to the benefit of the Star League, others on Leonard's occasional

lunatic escapades—such as Leonard's attempts to track down his numerous bastard children, nearly always on planets near Terra. Entire BattleMech units would land on Terran Hegemony worlds, instructed to seek out and kidnap any children who resembled the Coordinator. Initially, the pressures of the Reunification War kept the Hegemony from a military response. After that conflict ended in 2597, Star League forces on Terra began to mobilize for possible strikes into Combine territory. The looming threat of war ultimately evaporated in 2605, when Leonard died suddenly of a mysterious ailment.

The Von Rohrs Interregnum

The Von Rohrs Coordinators of the twenty-fifth century did the greatest damage to the Combine, simply through the length of their disastrous supremacy. Scions of the Kurita family through Marika Kurita, sister of Coordinator Robert Kurita, the Von Rohrs took power through a palace coup in 2421. For nearly nine decades, Coordinator Nihongi Von Rohrs and his various successors presided over a reign of terror that nearly destroyed the Draconis Combine. Mass executions became commonplace; anyone the Coordinator found inconvenient soon joined the rolls of the dead. Among the many victims of Nihongi's early purges were countless corporate and mercantile executives; Nihongi intended to personally control the Combine's economy, and these unfortunates stood in his way.

Battered by the ruthless elimination of all dissent—real or imagined—and ill-advised economic meddling on a vast scale, the Combine lurched perilously close to internal collapse. Only on the military front did the Combine's fortunes improve. The Von Rohrs Coordinators continued their predecessors' policy of attacking Lyran border worlds, many of which were poorly or ineptly defended. By 2445, Combine forces had taken roughly a fifth of the planets in the Commonwealth's Tamar Pact region. Sixteen years later, during the reign of Kozo Von Rohrs, a commando raid on the Lyran world of Coventry netted the Combine a set of plans for the century's most important military advancement: the BattleMech. However, these accomplishments were overshadowed by the poverty and demoralization of the Combine's subjects. Yet rebellion, even against such manifest tyrants, was virtually unthinkable to the average Combine citizen. The Von Rohrs were Kuritas, destined to rule. Only another Kurita could legitimately dethrone them and end the nation's long nightmare. The people waited, getting through their days as best they could and praying for deliverance.

In 2510, that prayer was answered. Martin McAllister, another Kurita scion, deposed the Von Rohrs dynasty in a coup that paralleled their rise to power. Initially the Von Rohrs' emissary to the nominally independent Principality of Rasalhague, McAllister joined forces with Rasalhague's leader, Lord Blaine Sorenson, to overthrow the Von Rohrs and restore the legitimate Kurita line. From 2494 through early 2510, McAllister gathered political and military power—much of it in Rasalhague but also in the Combine military proper and even at the Von Rohrs' court. He used his power in the Von Rohrs court to engineer the impris-

onment of Coordinator Yama Von Rohrs and the accession of Yama's brother Kruger in 2508. The grateful Kruger rewarded him by making him Colonel of the Household Guard. This position gave McAllister the last weapon he needed to end the Von Rohrs' bloody reign. While Lord Blaine Sorenson led Rasalhague's armed forces on a strike into Combine territory, McAllister and his loyalists among the depleted Household Guard took over the Von Rohrs' palace compound and slaughtered every last member of that family. McAllister then publicly revealed his own identity as a descendant of Shiro Kurita, therefore legitimately entitled to occupy the Combine throne.

Restoration and Renewal.

The so-called McAllister Rebellion ended the corrupt and bloodthirsty Von Rohrs regime and paved the way for a virtual Combine renaissance under Martin McAllister's daughter, Siriwan McAllister-Kurita. One of the Combine's most famous and beloved rulers, Siriwan used the reverence attached to the Kurita name and the Coordinator's office to radically redefine the dictates of service to the Combine. In so doing, she ensured her realm's future for centuries to come.

Unlike most previous Coordinators, Siriwan strengthened her nation through means other than warfare. After almost ninety years of internal terror and external conflict, the Draconis Combine desperately needed peace. Its economy lay in tatters, and its military would soon follow unless the economic troubles were addressed. Through her talented ambassadorial staff, Siriwan made diplomatic overtures wherever it seemed profitable to the Combine, defusing border tensions and seeking trade. Though military service retained its pride of place, citizens could now serve their Coordinator and their nation in other ways acknowledged as almost equally valuable as military service. Merchants and entrepreneurs, unknown during the dark years of the Von Rohrs dynasty, once again began to grow and flourish in Siriwan's reign. A recovering economy also aided the military, as did Siriwan's emphasis on defending the Combine's borders rather than launching costly strikes into enemy territory.

The groundwork laid by Siriwan McAllister-Kurita taught the average Combine citizen new ways of thinking, not least among them her son Hehiro. His mother's example enabled Hehiro Kurita to take a truly visionary step thirteen years into his reign. In 2569, Hehiro signed the Treaty of Vega that made the Combine part of the Star League and joined his nation's fate to that of all humanity. This momentous act led to the Combine's greatest expansion of trade and other contacts with outside realms. Though the shock of open trade across the Inner Sphere gave the Combine economy a few initial jolts, Combine citizens swiftly adapted. Before long, the Combine's business community was bringing in respectable profits.

The Combine prospered during the Star League era. Healthy trading contacts and various technological advancements shared among the League's member-states benefited every level of Combine society, from the lowest class of citizens to the Combine military. Those strengths proved vital two centuries

later, when the Star League collapsed into brutal battles for supremacy among its former members. The renewed Combine military enabled the realm to survive nearly three hundred years of vicious fighting, known to history as the Succession Wars, and remain a viable nation despite staggering losses of life and technology throughout those centuries of conflict.

THE RISE OF BUSHIDO

Bushido, the ancient Japanese warrior philosophy, helped shape the Combine from its beginnings. But it was merely one of many cultural influences until the early twenty-seventh century, when Coordinator Urizen Kurita II made it the Combine's cultural cornerstone, a place it occupies to this day.

The seed of this shift in Combine culture was planted in 2617, when Coordinator Sanethia Kurita moved the nation's capital from her family's homeworld of New Samarkand to the relatively untouched planet Luthien. Resource-poor and covered in swampland, Luthien boasted no sizable cities, and its population was quite small compared to those of more developed Combine worlds. However, it lay considerably closer to the center of Combine territory than New Samarkand, and its very rawness provided the Combine's people with a needed challenge. Santheia's successor Urizen II, who assumed the throne in 2620, oversaw most of the building of the new capital city.

Patterned on Japanese architecture, the huge government complex later christened Imperial City was a massive undertaking. Huge blocks of teakwood, granite and marble made up most of the buildings, hauled into place with slender cables by laborers drawn mostly from the criminal classes and the lowest echelons of the military. Hundreds died over the years of construction, yet the work never stopped. The sheer size of the effort sparked intense national pride across the realm, along with an interest in the medieval Japanese period that inspired most of Imperial City's architecture. Urizen II was no exception. Already inclined toward the precepts of bushido because of their link with his famous ancestor, he immersed himself in the samurai philosophy and became a fanatical devotee. Eager to honor the Kurita family's cultural roots, Urizen adopted seventeenth century Japanese culture wholesale: not only bushido, but history, art, religions and so on.

As went the Coordinator, so went the realm. One of Urizen's earliest cultural reforms was the *Kokugaku*, or "national learning," which stressed ancient Japanese history and philosophy. As Urizen had intended, the *Kokugaku* produced citizens who identified the Combine virtually exclusively with Japanese thought and Japanese ways. With each generation so schooled, the Japanese cultural strand of the Combine grew stronger until it overshadowed all others.

Non-Japanese citizens did not entirely welcome this change, particularly with regard to the education of their children. On the predominantly Muslim world of Arkah, the imposition of Japanese culture and Buddhist religious teachings in the local curriculum led to an uprising, which in turn touched off an ugly phase in the Japanization of Combine society. To prevent

additional rebellions, Urizen II turned to the Internal Security Force—House Kurita's secret police. Already formidable, they became more so with a hugely expanded budget and the Coordinator's mandate to cleanse the nation of all "impure," non-Japanese elements.

The ISF took its orders to heart, carrying out countless planet-wide purges throughout the last decade of Urizen II's reign. By the time Urizen stepped down in 2691, the Combine was no longer a melting pot of cultures overlaid with a mild, pan-Asiatic bent. It had become a rigidly stratified society, where those who adapted to the new reality prospered and those who differed even slightly often lost everything. The ISF's role in enforcing cultural conformity strengthened their hand against political dissent as well; the cultural and the political became so intertwined that wearing a Sikh turban or speaking Korean were often labeled acts of treason. Despite this tightening of social controls, however, non-Japanese elements continued to survive and even prosper in certain regions of Combine space.

The Combine and Rasalhague

For much of the Combine's history, the Principality of Rasalhague was the most prominent example of political and cultural resistance. Primarily settled by Scandinavians, the Rasalhague region had proved a tempting target for Shiro Kurita, who first attempted to conquer it in 2330. Its people, however, had other ideas. Unwilling to bow to the foreigners' yoke, these proud descendants of hard-headed Norwegians, Finns and Swedes fought hard to keep their independence against overwhelming military force. Their guerrilla campaign forced the Combine to retreat in 2367, leaving behind a figurehead military governor on the planet Rasalhague and sufficient troops to guard the governor's compound. For the next hundred and fifty years, the Principality of Rasalhague remained a nominally independent state.

Urizen II's cultural reformation took a toll on Rasalhagian citizens but utterly failed to remake this proudly different region in a medieval-Japanese mold. Native Rasalhagians continued to speak Swedish, which the Combine eventually accepted as the area's dominant language. The people held to their own religions, traditions and ways of thought in the face of every pressure various authorities could bring to bear: mass executions, an oversupply of garrison troops and extra numbers of ISF operatives intent on eliminating the slightest hint of separatist activity. Rasalhague finally gained its freedom in 3034, nearly five centuries after its official absorption into the Combine.

COMBINE SOCIETY

The balance between honor and duty, acceptance of one's place in a tightly structured social order, respect for those more highly placed and a deep reverence for the ruling Kurita family are the touchstones of life in the Draconis Combine. These ideals spring from and reinforce the realm's dominant culture and power structure. Outsiders often refer to the Combine as a

conformist nation, with little tolerance for individualism or dissent among its people. To a certain extent, this judgment is true. However, the Draconis Combine incorporates more differences than meet the eye. Individuals and groups who cannot or will not conform to Japanese cultural patterns have their own place in Combine society, either thrust on them or negotiated to the benefit of the nation.

GUARDIANS OF RIGHT THINKING: ORDER OF THE FIVE PILLARS

Urizen Kurita II initially used the ISF as his principal means of imposing absolute cultural unity, but since his reign that task has fallen to the Order of the Five Pillars (O5P). This ancient society, founded in the mid-twenty-fourth century by Shiro Kurita's daughter Omi, exists to preserve and teach the elaborate code of conduct known as the *Dictum Honorium*. The Honorium is contained in six volumes of religious tradition, social mores, rules of etiquette and the philosophies behind them that inform every aspect of daily life in the Draconis Combine. Before Urizen II, the O5P concerned itself primarily with ensuring proper loyalty to House Kurita. After Urizen's reign, loyalty to House Kurita encompassed conformity to Japanese ways; thus, the task of ensuring conformity to Japanese ways passed into the Order's hands.

Despite—or perhaps because of—its power as arbiter of the Combine's guiding ideology and social mores, the O5P was not given formal sanction until several decades after its founding. Not until the tenure of Sanyu Kurita did the Order and its highest office—Keeper of the House Honor—receive official recognition. Sanyu was the sister of Parker Kurita, an indecisive man who reluctantly became Coordinator on his elder brother Robert's assassination in 2412. Stronger-minded than Parker, Sanyu Kurita took advantage of her brother's weakness to carve out her own sphere of influence within the ruling power structure. Having persuaded Parker to give her a monopoly over the Combine's lucrative ivory trade, Sanyu used her personal fortune, the prestige of the Kurita name and a well-placed infantry battalion in the Household Guard to make that monopoly a reality.

In taking control of the ivory trade, Sanyu Kurita netted her newly recognized order a lush source of funds, as well as an ideal cover for its initial operations. The ivory guilds' merchant ships and wide-ranging network of trading contacts enabled O5P operatives to go everywhere in the Combine, testing the people's moods and reinforcing their loyalty. Security officers initially assigned to O5P vessels to protect their valuable cargo evolved into a small but highly disciplined paramilitary force, further enhancing the order's power. These formidable resources enabled the fledgling O5P to survive the first four decades of Von Rohrs Coordinators, many of whom resented the order and the *Dictum Honorium* equally as products of what they termed the "corrupt" direct Kurita line.

The Von Rohrs struck openly at the O5P in 2459, after the death of Keeper Sanyu Kurita. Then-Coordinator Kozo Von Rohrs

assumed the Keeper's position for himself, murdered O5P Abbess Jamila Benhashemi and touched off a wave of assassinations among the order's highest levels. As word of the killing spread through the order, its members buried themselves amid local populations and bided their time. Fifty years later, when Martin McAllister restored the legitimate Kurita line, the underground O5P came out of hiding and reassumed its former role.

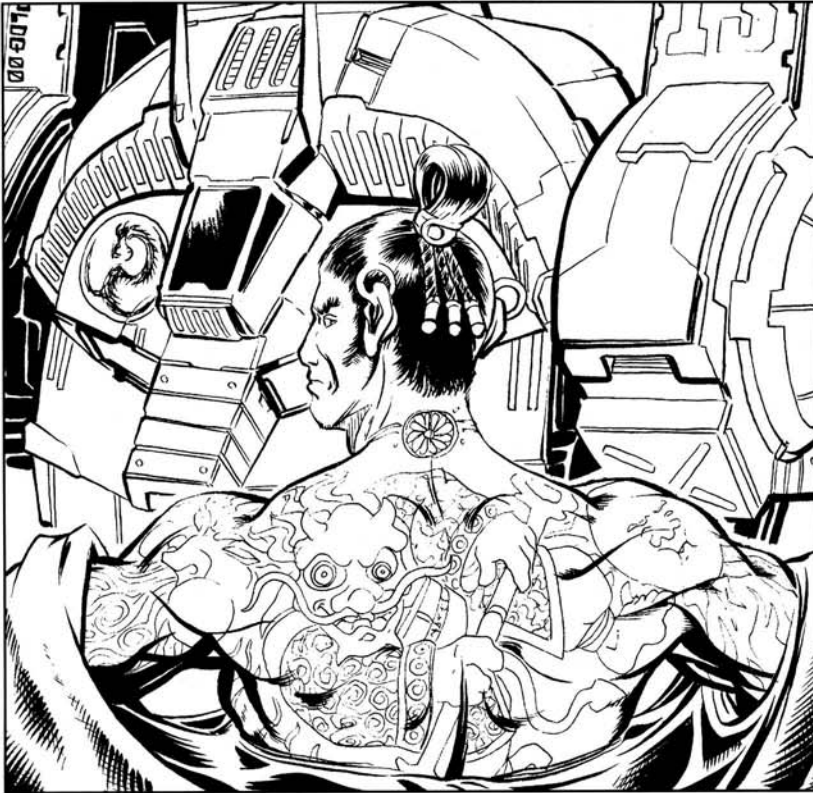
The O5P reached the height of its power under Coordinator Siriwan McAllister-Kurita, a staunch devotee of the *Dictum Honorium*. With the lesson of the Von Rohrs' nightmare reign fresh in her mind, Siriwan developed the Order of the Five Pillars into a genuinely formidable counterweight to the Coordinator's power. Through mandated purchases of ivory artifacts by Combine citizens, Siriwan increased the order's funding, a sizable portion of which she used to beef up its intelligence arm. She also instituted the *budojin*, a corps of operatives proficient in advanced and occult applications of the martial arts. Finally, Siriwan oversaw the building of an O5P headquarters on Luthien, an impressive complex of buildings near the heart of Imperial City. By the end of Siriwan's reign, the O5P possessed intelligence capabilities that rivaled those of the ISF, along with a monopoly on required martial-arts instruction for Combine officers that gave it a long reach into the military.

The modern-day O5P continues to serve the Combine in various capacities. Members of the order are teachers of political and social correctness, scholars of Asian history and philosophy, gifted practitioners of the martial arts and spies. In all these capacities, they serve as potent symbols of the ideals that lie at the Combine's core: loyalty to the Coordinator, reverence for the Kurita name, and purity of thought and action in service to the Combine.

THE CASTE SYSTEM

One striking feature of Combine society is its caste system, which provides a place even for decidedly nonconformist, potentially disloyal elements. From the highest levels of government and the military to the lowest menial laborer, every Combine citizen may serve the Coordinator and the nation. No one is completely outcast, not even a beggar or a street thief. By deliberately incorporating potentially disruptive elements into the tightly woven social order, the caste system helps to preserve the Combine's remarkable social stability.

The Combine acknowledges five castes: *kuge*, or nobles; *buke*, or warriors; the middle classes; the *heinin*, or workers; and the so-called *Unproductives*. The nobility is the smallest in number but wields virtually absolute power over the rest of Combine society. The highest-ranked noble is the Coordinator, who embodies the nation much as ancient Japanese emperors on Terra were believed to embody the divine. The warrior caste encompasses the Draconis Combine Mustered Soldiery, as well as any individual who serves the nation in a military or paramilitary capacity—an ISF commando, for example. The middle classes are composed of merchants, manufacturers and practitioners of various professions: doctors, teachers, accountants, civilian scientists,



artists and so on. The worker caste includes skilled and semi-skilled laborers: factory hands, bricklayers, plumbers, cashiers and others without whom everyday activities would grind to a halt. Beneath these individuals are the Unproductives, a mix of unskilled laborers and criminals who perform the distasteful but necessary tasks no one else wishes to take on.

The Unproductive caste serves a social function more vital than its lowly status suggests. This caste is a dumping ground for every misfit in Combine society: petty criminals, refugees from war-torn planets, higher-caste members demoted for incompetence or subversion, and members of the powerful criminal organizations known as the yakuza. Many of these individuals are potential threats to the Combine's social order. By definition, Criminals operate outside the bounds of law-abiding society. Refugees are, at best, a strain on local resources, at worst a source of rage easily turned against status quo. Those of higher castes perceived as failing in loyalty or duty frequently do so because they cannot conform to the Combine's rigid social norms. Incorporating these individuals into the very social order they threaten robs them of the power to subvert it. Even the most discontented Combine citizen tends to absorb at least some social expectations and so either accepts his lowly Unproductive status or attempts to escape it by redeeming his error. Individuals on the edge of losing higher status often fear becoming Unproductive and so reform their behavior. The yakuza, for their part, are allowed to profit from their criminal enterprises so long as those activities do not weaken the nation as a whole. The

Combine leadership tolerates their existence within a certain sphere and does not hesitate to move against any yakuza who step outside it.

In recent years, the Ghost Regiments have brought a modicum of honor to the Unproductive caste. Created to address severe manpower shortages in the DCMS following the Fourth Succession War, these military units are composed of yakuza and other members of the Combine's underclass. Their necessarily accelerated training skimmed on political indoctrination in favor of practical battle skills, which did little to allay the suspicions of some in the more tradition-minded regular military. But despite the dire predictions of many a scandalized DCMS officer, the Ghost Regiments have largely served with distinction. Three fought with honor against the Clans, one at the cost of all but a single battalion. Though some Ghost Regiments are little more than fronts for yakuza operations and others are torn by rivalries, the majority have more than measured up to DCMS standards. The ability of these yakuza-dominated regiments to strike a workable balance between loyalty to their oyabun, or Yakuza lord, and loyalty to the Coordinator is a testament to the effectiveness of the caste system, as well as to the leadership skills of Theodore Kurita (who founded the regiments).

LOYALTY TO HOUSE KURITA

With a large and well-trained military as well as the ISF and the O5P to call on, the Draconis Combine's ruling house has no lack of tools with which to maintain its supremacy. Yet House Kurita's primary hold on power comes not from fear or threats of force, but from the reverence of the Combine's people. Loyalty to House Kurita binds the Combine together, giving the highborn noble and the lowly street sweeper common ground they would not otherwise possess.

From the time citizens of the Combine enter First School at four years old, they are taught that their personal honor depends on how well they fill their assigned place in society and their duty to the Coordinator. Obedience and loyalty are among the highest virtues; honor lies in fulfilling one's duty and thereby serving the state. The present Coordinator has liberalized Combine social codes somewhat, allowing a larger place for personal initiative, but only insofar as it serves the nation. This shift in emphasis is especially stark in the military. To Theodore Kurita's way of thinking, blind obedience to superiors is a potentially fatal flaw in a soldier. Instead, the modern-day DCMS warrior must strive for a balance between respect for higher authority and the ability to recognize those rare cases when higher authority is wrong. Outside military ranks, free thinking is widely discouraged. The six volumes of the Dictum Honorium prescribe proper thinking and behavior in almost every situation conceivable to the

Combine mind; the good citizen learns these codes of conduct in primary school and abides by them lifelong.

Even the criminal class shares in the general reverence for House Kurita, though other social codes may go by the wayside. When Clan Smoke Jaguar attacked the Combine world of Turtle Bay in 3050, the yakuza clans in the city of Edo demonstrated their loyalty with their own blood. Hohiro Kurita, heir to the Combine throne, had been trapped onworld by the Jaguar assault. The yakuza traced him to Kurushiyama prison, an ISF stronghold taken by the invading Jaguar forces. The Jaguars did not recognize whom they had captured, but the yakuza knew. They staged a prison breakout that left several Jaguars dead and subsequently helped Hohiro flee the planet—acts of selfless patriotism for which they and their city paid a terrible price. Furious at losing the prize they only belatedly realized they had possessed, the Jaguars bombarded Edo from orbit, razing the city. The local yakuza knew they might suffer for thwarting their powerful attackers—yet they saved Hohiro anyway, content to risk destruction for the honor of serving the Kurita family.

Patriotism and Conformity

Ever since the wholesale adoption of medieval Japanese culture under Urizen Kurita II, loyalty to House Kurita has come to mean favoring all things Japanese. School curricula, the arts, ISF control of the media and the universal reverence for bushido among the military all contribute to the continuing dominance of Japanese ways. Despite this merging of political and cultural loyalties, however, non-Japanese elements survive and even thrive within their own regions. Less enlightened Coordinators have often attempted to cleanse the Combine of these “foreign” elements, but wiser rulers recognize the strengths they add to the fabric of Combine culture. The Azami, Muslims of Arab ancestry, are a case in point. They settled several worlds near Terra and the Federated Suns border, planets on which they could follow their own traditions without unduly disturbing the prevailing cultural order. After a failed attempt by a Von Rohrs Coordinator to eliminate them, the Azami negotiated a certain freedom of belief and action in exchange for nominal adherence to the Dictum Honorium and the use of their fighting expertise in cross-border raids. The Azami and the rest of the Combine adapted to each other, and both sides have profited by it.

The Shadow War and its Legacy

In return for the service of his people, the Coordinator must serve them in turn. He or she is honor-bound to place the interests of the Combine above personal ambitions and desires. When this mutual loyalty works as intended, the Combine prospers. When events call it into question, the nation suffers. Most often, conflict over what precisely constitutes loyalty to House Kurita or to the Draconis Combine arises when one Kurita struggles for power against another. The Shadow War of the twenty-ninth century remains the most famous of these internal battles, and its troubling legacy still occasionally threatens the stability of the realm.

The Shadow War, which raged silently and viciously across the Combine throughout the mid-2860s, remains the realm’s closest brush with civil war. The seeds of the conflict were sown four decades earlier, when Coordinator Jinjiro Kurita founded the People’s Reconstruction Effort (PRE) to rebuild after the savage destruction of the Second Succession War. The PRE coordinated and oversaw the Combine government’s various programs for military, scientific, economic and political recovery. So much responsibility made the position of PRE Coordinator second only to the Coordinator himself.

Yoguchi Kurita succeeded his uncle Jinjiro in 2838. Three years into his reign, he appointed his sister Roweena Kurita as head of the PRE. Intelligent and ambitious, Roweena chafed at the restrictions on female power in the strongly patriarchal Combine. Before her appointment to run the PRE, she had made a point of currying favor with the ISF, many of whose members were deeply insulted that Yoguchi had placed them under DCMS authority. With control over the PRE’s vast bureaucracy, Roweena used her agency’s power to aid the ISF against its DCMS overlords. In return, ISF agents helped to further or at least refrained from tampering with Roweena’s own schemes to accumulate vast personal wealth.

For several years, Roweena confined herself to making money, collecting art objects and reveling in her powerful position. When a Lyran operative assassinated Yoguchi Kurita in 2850, Roweena made no attempt to take over the rulership of the Combine; she happily left that task to her younger brother Miyogi and continued to run the PRE with breathtaking efficiency. Her position, however, made her far more of a public presence than Coordinator Miyogi. That, combined with the sheer size and reach of the PRE, eventually prompted an uneasy Miyogi to launch an investigation of his sister. The ISF, however, had not forgotten the debt it owed Roweena. Orders to investigate her for “un-Combine activities” cost the Coordinator considerable popularity among many operatives; some even questioned his motives, a stunningly disloyal act for people whose foremost task was to ensure loyalty to the Coordinator.

Matters reached a head in 2863, when the end of the Third Succession War gave Miyogi the breathing space he needed to step up the investigation. A small, elite squad of ISF agents unquestionably loyal to the Coordinator began to seek out and assassinate their pro-Roweena counterparts. Roweena’s loyalists fought back; by 2865, more than a thousand ISF operatives had been killed in the power struggle, which the public had begun to call the Shadow War. Ordinary people soon became victims as well. The ISF was everywhere in the Combine, but no one knew for certain which agent of which faction might be listening. An incautious word in support of one side on a planet controlled by the other frequently led to the permanent disappearance of the speaker and his or her entire family.

When word of the Combine’s internal difficulties began spreading outside its borders, the spiraling conflict threatened to engulf the military. The High Command, initially split over which Kurita to back, ultimately came down on the Coordinator’s

side. In early January of 2866, DCMS commandos stormed key PRE offices and strongholds of the pro-Roweena ISF. Soon afterward, Coordinator Miyogi dismantled the PRE.

Thoroughly cleansing the ISF of disloyal elements required more than twenty-five years of subsequent purges. For the first ten of those years, the organization retreated to its headquarters on New Samarkand and refused to have any direct dealings with the rest of the Combine government. ISF agents continued to carry out their duties but obeyed requests for ISF operations only through an intermediary from New Samarkand's respected Sun Zhang military academy. Furious at having been used as pawns between two scheming Kuritas, the ISF chose isolation as a means of showing its displeasure. Not until Coordinator Shinjiro Kurita visited New Samarkand in 2921 did the rift between the ISF and the Kurita family begin to heal. A series of meetings between Shinjiro and ISF Director Clarissa Indrahar ultimately produced the Davarapala Accords, which awarded the ISF a place in the DCMS High Command. This concession enabled the ISF to accept being placed under military authority, a grievance it had nursed since Yoguchi Kurita subordinated it to the DCMS nearly eight decades before.

On the surface, the ISF had reaffirmed its loyalty to the Coordinator. However, the Shadow War and its aftermath set a dangerous precedent. For the first time in the ISF's history, the organization distinguished between loyalty to the Coordinator and service to the Combine. For Roweena's supporters, serving the Combine meant actively opposing the Coordinator—a virtually unthinkable contradiction. The Coordinator's faction suffered a similar, though more subtle, division of loyalties. They continued to serve the Combine but refused direct requests from the Coordinator—symbolically, if not literally, splitting the two. Coordinator Shinjiro ultimately came to the ISF to mend relations, which he accomplished only through a sizable concession to ISF sensibilities. These events essentially affirmed the ISF's right to judge its Coordinator's actions—with the inescapable conclusion that it could also judge the Coordinator's fitness to hold that office.

Though the ISF has rarely acted against the Coordinator in the decades since, reactionary elements within as well as outside it make little secret of their disdain for the current Coordinator, Theodore Kurita. Even before he ascended the throne, the freeing of Rasalhague and the formation of the Ghost Regiments raised eyebrows and suspicions among the more tradition-minded. During the Clan War, Theodore further enraged conservative sensibilities by signing a nonaggression pact in 3051 with Prince Hanse Davion, ruler of the Federated Commonwealth and scion of House Kurita's bitterest rival. The development of that agreement into genuine rapprochement with Hanse's son and successor, Victor Steiner-Davion, convinced some diehard traditionalists that their Coordinator had allowed foreign influences to override Combine interests. The DCMS's prestigious role in ending the Clan War, along with the re-formation of the Star League and Theodore's appointment as First Lord in 3061, have eased these tensions somewhat but opposition remains.

CURRENT TRENDS

As with any other nation in the Inner Sphere, current events have their effect on Draconis Combine society. The unprecedented cooperation between the Combine and the Federated Commonwealth during the Clan War somewhat dampened the Combine's traditional suspicion of anything foreign (that is, non-Japanese). The first beneficiaries of this new attitude were the many Combine citizens of non-Japanese descent who followed different cultural traditions. Acceptance of these "foreigners within" prepared the Combine for the much harder task of integrating a truly alien element—Clan Nova Cat, overlords of the recently created Irece Prefecture. This Clan, once conquerors of Combine worlds, fought for the Star League against its fellow Clans and was rewarded with official rights to several Combine planets. The Cats have since moved wholesale into their new-minted homeland, forced out of Clan space by their former brethren. Their increasing numbers make the Irece Prefecture an uneasy place to be, though the unrest has begun to simmer down. The Coordinator's continued backing and the guidance of his younger son Minoru, currently acting as liaison to the Nova Cats, should enable the two sides to accommodate each other, though not easily or soon.

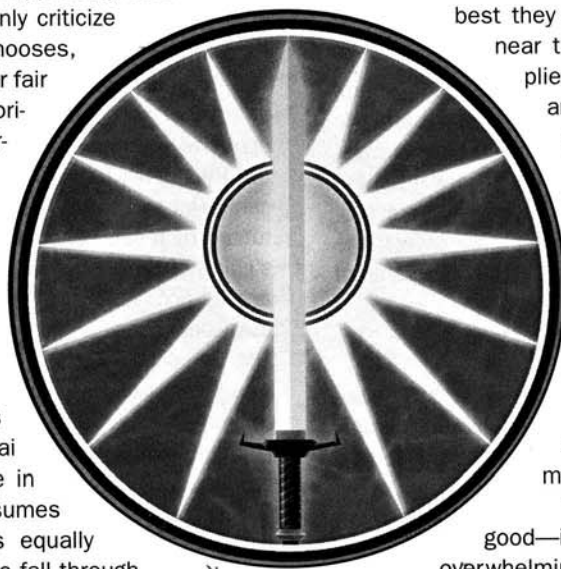
The slow rise of reactionary elements is more troubling. Since Theodore's accession in 3054, conservative elements in the ISF have made common cause with ultra-conservatives outside their ranks—most prominently with the Black Dragons—against Theodore's military and social reforms. The existence of the Black Dragons reveals a pitfall of those reforms, perhaps an unavoidable one. The loosening of social and political strictures so fervently deplored by the Black Dragons enables them to plot against their ruler and justify their treachery in the name of preserving the Combine. Current economic stresses, the presence of the Nova Cats and the closeness of Theodore's immediate family to Victor Steiner-Davion have all unsettled old certainties and given the Black Dragons an opening wedge to exploit. The use of DCMS troops in the recent St. Ives conflict only added fuel to this fire, even though the units served under the Star League banner and largely confined themselves to humanitarian missions.

The Black Dragon-ISF "alliance" reached its zenith in 3058, when a high-ranking ISF official subverted several commando recruits and attempted to assassinate Coordinator Theodore Kurita. Fortunately for the Combine, the bulk of the ISF is solidly loyal to Theodore, as is the entire ruling branch of the Kurita family. Another Shadow War, with Kurita pitted against Kurita and the entire power structure divided, is highly unlikely to occur.

All in all, the Draconis Combine remains strong and stable, committed to preserving its Japanese traditions while more openly accommodating different elements. Under the visionary leadership of Theodore Kurita and his equally gifted children, the Combine stands ready to meet even the most unexpected challenges that the future may bring.

THE FEDERATED SUNS

A respected historian of the Federated Suns once described his native realm as "a bastion of freedom amid a universe of despots." That phrase sums up the way most of his fellow citizens see their nation—enlightened but embattled, a beacon of liberty that the tyrant leaders of other states will do anything to snuff out. It is true that the average citizen of the Federated Suns has greater personal rights than many others in the Inner Sphere, even in several supposedly freer Periphery realms. He or she can openly criticize the government, worship as he chooses, form political organizations and sue for fair treatment at the hands of local authorities. These and other rights are guaranteed to every Federated Suns citizen under the Six Liberties, enshrined in the nation's constitution throughout seven centuries of political change. And yet these freedoms by themselves do not guarantee a decent life. The well-off New Avalon city-dweller knows little of the harsh realities on poor backwaters such as Baxley or desert-bound Kesai IV and frequently cares less. Secure in his own freedom and comfort, he assumes everyone in the Federated Suns is equally prosperous or believes that those who fall through the cracks have only themselves to blame.



Two worlds illustrate the contrasts between the rich and poor of the realm. New Syrtis, my home since I left the Outworlds Alliance in 3026, is among the better-off planets. Though much of it is permanently buried in ice and snow, the temperate region around the equator boasts several small but thriving cities. The capital, built for defense on the snowbound northern continent, is a vibrant university town as well as a center of government. New Syrtis owes its prosperity to large deposits of precious metals, which sparked a gold rush in the late twenty-third century. Before long, this mineral wealth made New Syrtis a rich gift for the noble Hasek family. Hasek prominence and careful husbanding of the planet's resources made New Syrtis an ideal capital of the Capellan March, which it remains to this day. Its people are a cosmopolitan lot, generally well off or on the way to being there—hopeful, energetic and intensely loyal to the Davion government that guarantees their way of life.

Kesai IV, a desert world best known for its notorious past as a prison planet, could hardly be more different. Native life is nonexistent, local settlements few and far between. The largest human habitations on the hot sands of Kesai are the vast SLDF bases and supply depots built during the Star League era.

Stripped of most of their valuables over the past three hundred years, these huge facilities are virtual ghost towns now, sand-scoured and echoing with the footsteps of long-dead soldiers. Empty or not, the military keeps a heavy guard around most of these facilities—virtually the only contact between Kesai's people and their Davion rulers. With little of value to hold the government's interest, Kesai receives almost nothing in the way of

investment or attention. Its natives scrounge a living as best they can, irrigating small patches of desert near the planet's single sea or stealing supplies from the AFFC bivouacs near the ancient Star League bases. So long as the pilfering remains small-scale, local unit commanders tend to turn a blind eye. They and the locals have scant respect for each other, however. Even the most sympathetic soldier merely pities the poor "desert rats," while the locals see the military as arrogant interlopers to be fleeced. On paper, both are equal citizens of the Federated Suns. In practice, the chasm between them looms as large as a kilometer-wide sandstorm.

The possession of freedom—a priceless good—is the foundation of the Federated Suns' overwhelming confidence in its own rightness. This feeling is simultaneously our greatest strength and our greatest weakness. It gave this nation the courage to survive historical downturns that might have crippled a lesser people; citizens of the Davion state are nothing if not optimists and rarely find it hard to believe that destiny intended them for better things. In many ways, they have achieved such a destiny; over the centuries, this nation has become a living symbol of the vitality and hope of a place where freedom rings. But optimism and confidence too easily become arrogance, particularly when harnessed to a sprawling military machine. That combination doomed the Federated Commonwealth and made inevitable the civil conflict currently flaring at the edges of our realm. As the Federated Commonwealth slides deeper into civil war, most Davion citizens express confidence that "our side" will win. Few, however, can say what that means. After thirty-five years of Federated Suns-Lyrans unity, just who is "our side"? And what will we sacrifice if we preserve that unity through conquest? Few of my fellow citizens have answers to these questions. But even more disturbingly, few are even asking them.

—Anastasia Marcus

Professor Emeritus of Federated Suns History, University of Saso, New Syrtis

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

The Federated Suns has been a military power almost from its inception. War expands its territory, frequently bolsters its economy and binds its otherwise loose-knit people together more than any other element of its society. Unusually for such a militaristic state, the glorification of military exploits coexists with a high degree of personal freedom and democratic local government. This democratic strain, a legacy of the nation's visionary founder, has provided a crucial counterbalance to the military-expansionist mindset at critical points throughout the Federated Suns history.

THE FIRST DAVIONS

The first three rulers of the Federated Suns—Lucien, Charles and Reynard Davion—created and shaped the Federated Suns in strikingly different ways. Lucien the dreamer, Charles the schemer and Reynard the soldier between them created a realm in which high ideals and realpolitik were delicately balanced in the service of a single ultimate object: the continued health of the Federated Suns under the leadership of the Davion family.

Dream of a Nation: Lucien Davion

Lucien Davion founded the Federated Suns in 2317, motivated not by any personal desire to build an empire but simply by fear of losing what he already had. The Terran Alliance had collapsed under the weight of decades of corruption in 2314, to be replaced by the new and vigorous Terran Hegemony under the leadership of Admiral James McKenna. McKenna was determined to bring Terra's former colonies back into the fold, a fate the colonies were equally determined to resist. Lucien Davion created the first political union born of that resistance—the Crucis Pact, which would set the mold for the rise of humanity's other interstellar empires.

Lucien Davion was a native of New Avalon, the colony world destined to become the capital of the Federated Suns. Settled largely by Western Europeans in the early twenty-third century, New Avalon rebelled against Terran Alliance authority in 2237, when widespread upheaval across human-colonized space prompted Terra to make unreasonable demands on still-loyal colony worlds for food and raw materials. The new quotas prompted an uprising on New Avalon, later known as the Grain Rebellion. Lacking sufficient military support from the embattled Terran Alliance, Governor General Emil Varnay fled the planet, while his Vice Governor surrendered to the mobs. By the time Varnay reached Terra seeking reinforcements, the Expansionist Party that had placed him in power was fighting a losing battle for its life. The Expansionists were in no position to send troops, and so New Avalon slipped free of the Alliance yoke.

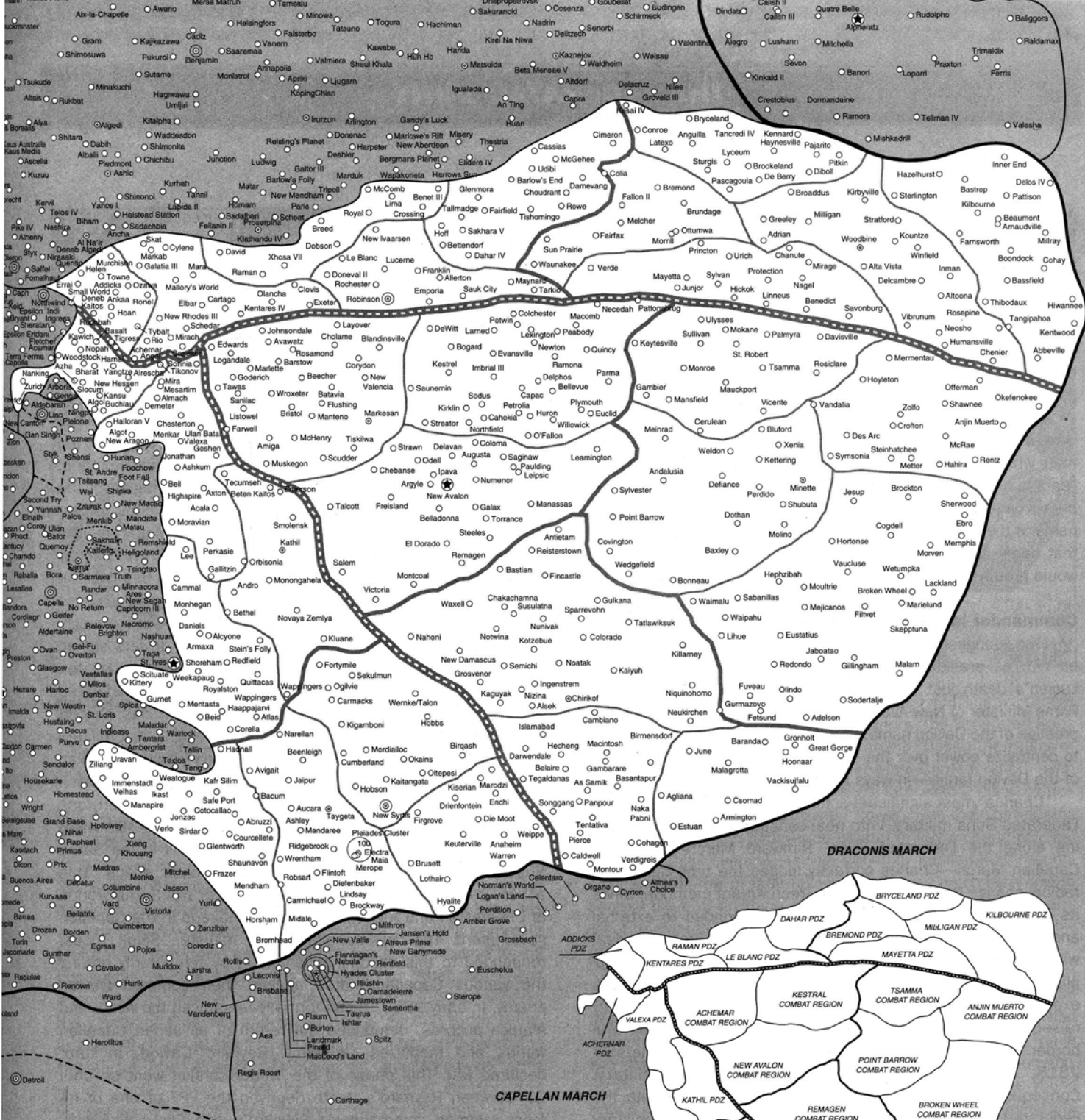
In the heady first years of independence, New Avalon's people attempted an experiment in genuine popular democracy. The entire adult population voted via computer system on every issue, and so power rested with whoever could best persuade the largest majority. The Prime Minister, nominal leader of the

fledgling government, could legally serve a single one-year term. Intended to prevent tyranny, this arrangement brought chaos instead. Within the first decade of independence, a handful of industrialists in New Avalon's few manufacturing centers had amassed fortunes so vast that they essentially controlled the popular vote. By 2248, these often-squabbling industrial titans had formed private armies—ostensibly for protection against rivals, but they had other uses as well. As New Avalon's tenth annual elections drew near, the so-called First Families began jockeying for power with every tool at their disposal. After the armed forces of the Jorgensson family routed the small planetary militia, the other First Families made their own grabs for power unchecked by any central authority.

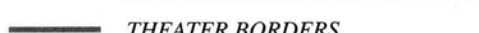
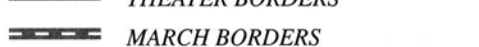
Colonels Adam Davion and Nathan DuVall, two surviving militia officers who were also First Family scions, recognized that outright civil war would doom the world they loved. Rather than join the free-for-all, they gathered their own armies and launched a campaign to end the fighting. After seven years of battles punctuated by tense negotiations, the conflict finally ended with the signing of the Second Covenant of New Avalon. This document and its accompanying constitution essentially replaced the planetary democracy with an oligarchy controlled by the First Families. The Prime Minister's term became lifelong, and popular voting was swept aside. This neo-feudal system appeared as salvation to most of New Avalon's war weary citizens. After their seven-year nightmare, they were willing to try any form of government that promised stability.

Colonel Davion's eldest son Lucien inherited all the privileges of New Avalon's neo-feudal elite but was also well acquainted with his homeworld's recent democratic past. An avid reader of history, Lucien developed a genuine admiration for the egalitarian ideals of New Avalon's first independent generation. As a trusted minister high in the government of Prime Minister Martin DuVall, Lucien sought ways to meld those ideals with the practical needs of day-to-day governing and the inescapable political realities of money and power. When events in Terran space forced him to look beyond New Avalon in hopes of ensuring his homeworld's freedom, the union he forged with other nearby worlds took on this same balance of idealism and hard-nosed practicality. Davion's Crucis Pact envisioned a loose federation of worlds, dedicated to mutually beneficial trade and defense, with complete local autonomy for member planets. Centralized authority was confined to two indispensable areas: federation-wide defense and a High Council charged with settling disputes among member planets.

By 2316, the burgeoning might of the Terran Hegemony made clear to Lucien Davion the need for swift action. He had become Prime Minister of New Avalon less than a decade before, and New Avalon's trading fleet was a familiar and welcome sight to the other worlds in the Crucis Reach region of space. Lucien used these trading contacts, along with the prestige of his office when necessary, to propose an alliance among the Crucis Reach worlds. His sterling reputation for integrity earned him a hearing, as did fear of the Hegemony's growing strength. Though Terra's



BORDER KEY

-  PDZ/COMBAT REGION BORDERS
-  THEATER BORDERS
-  MARCH BORDERS

REGION TITLES AND MARCH DIVISIONS

LEGEND



40 PARSECS OR 130.4 LIGHT YEARS
SCALE: 1/8 INCH = 1 PARSEC = 3.26 LIGHT YEARS = 19,164,277,860,000 STATUTE MILES

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS
FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES USE 9 PARSECS = 29.34 LY

FEDERATED SUNS

government was not yet powerful enough to fight a major war in the distant reaches of space, the Hegemony was more than capable of picking off individual planets through economic sanctions and small strikes. Only an alliance could ensure freedom for the Crucis worlds. Lucien made this point again and again throughout his tour of neighboring planets. At its end in 2317, he convened a summit on New Avalon with the leaders of twenty-three worlds. All but three eventually signed the Crucis Pact that gave birth to the Federated Suns.

The leaders of the newborn federation elected Lucien Davion as its president, symbolizing their mutual trust in the man who had brought them together. Throughout his fifteen years in office, Lucien's tireless mediation of interplanetary disputes made the presidency virtually synonymous with the Davion name in the public mind. His unfailing fairness of judgment lent that name and his office a reputation for honest dealing that would greatly smooth the Davions' rise to dynastic power.

Commander in Chief: Charles Davion

The youngest of Lucien's brothers, Charles Davion succeeded him as president after Lucien's resignation in 2332. On Lucien's death just three months later, Charles also became Prime Minister of New Avalon. With this dual power base and the prestige of the Davion name, Charles used his brief term of office to centralize power over the Federated Suns—and in the hands of the Davion family—in ways Lucien had never dreamed of.

Charles' most significant action was a drastic reform of the Federated Suns military. With near-constant border wars erupting along the Federated Suns' Rimward March—today the Capellan March—Charles correctly judged the time right for a radical change in the Suns' military recruitment methods. Since its inception, the Federated Suns had responded to external and internal threats by raising an expeditionary force to deal with each crisis. Member worlds contributed personnel, supplies or transport for the duration of the conflict; at its end, the expeditionary force disbanded. The failure of these hastily raised Federated Suns armies to repel invasions on several border worlds, let alone capture two breakaway planets in 2318, proved the inadequacy of an ad-hoc military. Consequently, Charles Davion replaced this system with the Federated Peacekeeping Forces—a handful of elite military units contributed by each member world—to remain permanently in service to the Federated Suns as a whole. The FPF was the Federated Suns' first standing army and the core of what would one day become the Inner Sphere's mightiest military machine.

Extensive troop training given to the new force stressed loyalty to the Federated Suns over any unit's homeworld. Loyalty to the Davion family was not overtly part of the equation, but pro-Davion citizens of New Avalon were disproportionately represented in the FPF's officer ranks. Similar Davion loyalists controlled key posts throughout the burgeoning military and commercial bureaucracy that formed around the FPF's permanent facilities and the prime minister's office on New

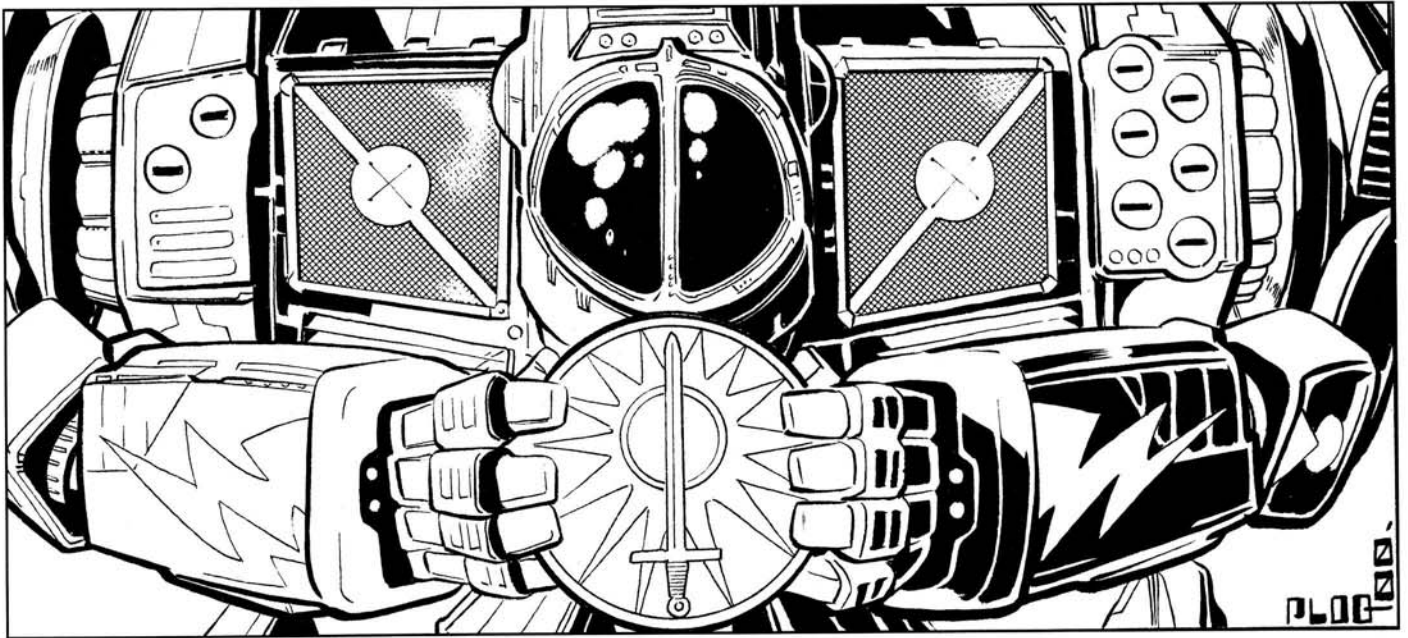
Avalon. By the time Reynard Davion succeeded his uncle Charles as president and prime minister in 2340, Davion control over both offices was virtually assured, and the family was well on its way to suzerainty over the entire federation.

The First Fox: Reynard Davion

Part diplomat, part idealist and part strongman, Reynard Davion was a soldier before all else. A veteran of the long-raging wars along the Capellan frontier, Reynard was determined to end the twenty-year conflict with as much benefit as possible to his nation. He began by showcasing the military prowess of the new Federated Suns army. Under Reynard's personal command, an FPF reserve task force penetrated the border region of the enemy Tikonov Grand Union and severed the Tikonov forces' supply lines to the disputed planets of Mira and Mesartim. The unexpected ferocity of this attack overwhelmed the Tikonov troops and gave the FPF its first solid victory. From this position of strength, Reynard Davion negotiated a peace pact with his most powerful—and therefore most dangerous—warring neighbor, the Capellan Hegemony. In 2345, the two powers signed the Acala Pact, a mutual nonaggression treaty. Six months later, they signed the Almach Accord that acknowledged Federated Suns control over Mira, Mesartim and Almach. This second treaty marked the first of the Federated Suns' significant military conquests, as well as the beginning of a rivalry with the Capellan state that would turn more deadly over the passing centuries.

The next major expansion of Federated Suns territory, again at the expense of the Capellans, began in 2357 when Reynard sent troops to occupy the world of Bell in the Sarna Supremacy—then a part of Capellan-controlled space. This action, coupled with a demand to hand over the Sarna worlds of Chesterton and Highspire, forced a shakeup in the Capellan government. The new Capellan prime minister, Seluk Tucas, responded to this military adventurism by temporarily uniting the various Capellan states against their common Davion enemy. In early 2363, Tucas formally renounced the Acala and Almach accords, demanded the return of all ceded Capellan worlds and mobilized his army. Reynard Davion, in turn, declared war. This phase of the border conflict went on until 2371, when Reynard's death deprived the FPF of one of its most talented commanders. Reynard's son Etien, who succeeded him as president and prime minister, signed a truce with the Capellans—reconstituted as the Capellan Confederation—just three months after taking power.

The border war of the 2360s netted the Federated Suns all the worlds it had lost to Capellan states during the first border conflict, as well as several other planets. Despite intermittent economic and political reverses over the next several decades, the Federated Suns lost no territory to any enemy attack. Its military, created by Charles Davion and forged in combat by Reynard, would defend its borders and extend its reach multiple times during the twenty-fourth century, setting a pattern of conquest and military-inspired domestic renewal that persisted throughout the nation's history.



DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP

From its earliest days, the Federated Suns grew through military might as well as diplomacy. Though Reynard Davion's successful campaigns are the best known of House Davion's early attempts at conquest, even Lucien the dreamer resorted to military force on one occasion. Among the many Crucis Reach worlds he visited in 2316 was the planet Muskegon, a dictatorship with control over several neighboring planets. The Commander of Muskegon joined the Federated Suns after more than a year of dithering but proved unable to bring all of the Muskegon worlds with him. Heavy-handed treatment by their central government had not endeared the commander or his administration to the populations of the Muskegon possessions. When Muskegon announced its intention to join the new Federated Suns alliance, the worlds of Emerson and Beten Kaitos refused to go along. Instead, they opted out of Muskegon's control and joined the Chesterton Trade Alliance, one of several Capellan powers in the region. Lucien Davion spent the next three years attempting to forcibly annex the two "rebel" planets, without success.

The Emerson and Beten Kaitos campaigns opened the door to several decades of border war with the Capellans, punctuated by a brief interval of peace between 2346 and 2357. The initial years of this long border clash inflicted humiliating losses on the Federated Suns but also helped turn it into a military juggernaut. Without the pressures of the losing border war, Charles Davion could not have altered the Crucis Pact to permit the formation of a standing army. Without a well-trained standing army loyal to the Federated Suns, Reynard Davion could not have managed the impressive military feats that ultimately won back every planet the Suns had lost plus several additional worlds.

Between them, Charles and Reynard gave the Davion family significant control of the PPF's formidable capabilities, as

well as of large sections of the Federated Suns' government bureaucracy. Despite this family hegemony, the Federated Suns escaped becoming a military dictatorship. Unlike the rulers of the Draconis Combine or the Capellan Confederation, who turned their nations' highest offices into virtual cults of personality, the Davions maintained power over their developing star empire through family-wide control of key military, political and economic positions. As they generally fulfilled their responsibilities well, few of their fellow citizens had much incentive to oppose them. If anything, the Davions' knack for good government reinforced their right to govern in the minds of their fellow citizens, without the need for overt political indoctrination.

The realm also adopted elements of the political culture of New Avalon, homeworld of the nation's founder. New Avalon had begun as an egalitarian democracy, collapsed into civil war and subsequently adopted a neo-feudal socio-political order. These two strains—power to the people and rule by a wealthy aristocracy—ran through the Federated Suns as well. Had the young nation continued to be ruled by such charismatic, politically gifted strongmen as Charles and Reynard Davion, its people might well have abandoned the democratic traditions of their forebears. However, several of the rulers who followed Reynard Davion provided sharp reminders of the dangers of tyranny.

The Madman and the Tyrants

Etien Davion, Reynard's eldest son, succeeded him to great acclaim in 2371. Like Reynard, Etien was a decorated soldier. He was also dangerously unstable, though few people realized it until after he had been sworn into office. The first several months of his reign brought peace with the Capellans, embassies to the expanding Draconis Combine and the addition of three planets to the Federated Suns. The honeymoon, however, did not last. Always prone to moodiness, Etien began

to deteriorate under the pressures of leadership. Eruptions of irritability metamorphosed into rages, during which the unlucky targets of Etien's wild anger might be injured or even killed. Within a mere two years of assuming power, Etien's mood swings had so seriously affected his judgment that the High Council created a Board of Magistrates to settle disputes previously left to presidential jurisdiction.

As Etien pursued his own pleasures or fell into fits of depression, more and more of day-to-day government went to the Davion-controlled bureaucracy. The High Council was effectively paralyzed by the president's madness; the Crucis Pact forbade it to conduct new business without the approval of the president or his designated representative, and Etien rarely appointed the latter. His excesses eventually provoked a response. In the latter half of his seven-year term, three separate assassination plots were hatched. The last of these, carried out by a childhood friend and longtime confidant, succeeded in a way no one had envisioned. Sickened by the knowledge that someone so close could turn against him, Etien stabbed himself to death with the would-be assassin's own dagger.

Two decades of relative stability followed under Etien's brother Paul and sister Marie. The nation had scarcely recovered, however, when the first of Etien's twin sons came to power. Edmund Davion became President of the Federated Suns in 2399. Weak-willed and given to melancholy fits, he was easily controlled by his ambitious mother, Marion Michaels-Davion, and his twin brother, Edward. Michaels-Davion contented herself with pushing governmental reforms that eroded the High Council's authority and enhanced that of the presidency. After her death in 2410, Edward persuaded his twin to enact "reforms" of his own. Over the next five years, Edmund Davion forced passage of a series of acts that effectively placed House Davion outside all laws save the whims of its leaders. These measures made the two ruling Davions absolute monarchs in all but name.

Edmund died in 2415, making Edward the Federated Suns' ruler in name as well as fact. Robbed of any check on his ambitions, Edward treated the Federated Suns as his personal plaything. Pointless civic projects, new taxes and Byzantine regulations issued from the president's office according to Edward's whims. He also devoted increased funds to his secret police network, begun before Edmund's death and hugely expanded after Edward took power. The enfeebled High Council could do nothing to stop him, and the military chose not to try. In addition to fears of the secret police, many FPF officers were Davion loyalists—some to Edward personally, most simply because they saw no other suitable candidate. The latter feared that outright rebellion would only plunge their nation into chaos. So they bided their time and waited for the only viable replacement—Edward's cousin, Simon Davion—to gain the necessary experience to rule.

By 2417, Edward's activities had persuaded the High Council that he intended to disband it. Thoroughly sick of the tyrant's rule, several Council members determined to escape

him the only way they still could. They formed the so-called November Conspiracy, a plot to secede from the Federated Suns during the High Council's customary three-month hiatus. FPF units loyal to the conspirators had orders to blockade the New Avalon system while the politicians proclaimed the new order. Had it succeeded, the plot would have torn the Federated Suns apart. The conspirators aborted their plans, however, when Simon Davion returned to New Avalon just three days before the conspiracy was set to launch.

Thirty-nine years old and a decorated military commander, Simon Davion had long been a potential target on his cousin Edward's hit list. Edward had already slain one Davion heir to safeguard his own son's eventual accession. Simon posed a similar threat, and so Edward attempted to have him killed as well. But a sympathetic commanding officer warned Simon of the danger, and Simon spent the next two years prudently out of Edward's reach. His return to New Avalon was a calculated gamble. Having quietly built a support base among disaffected FPF officers and planetary governments, Simon landed on New Avalon to fervent displays of public acclaim. The outpourings of support from the people and the High Council prevented Edward from moving against him during his first hours on-world. By the time of the Council meeting the next morning, it was too late.

The historical record remains unclear as to exactly how much of what happened next was planned, or how many people knew of it. Regardless of who knew what and when, however, the facts remain the same. When Edward Davion appeared in the Council Chamber, flanked by his omnipresent Presidential Guard, Simon snatched a gun from a nearby guard's holster and shot Edward five times. As the corpse collapsed to the floor, Simon threw down the weapon and flung himself on the High Council's mercy. He asked for a trial and agreed to abide by its verdict. The Council duly arrested Simon and set in motion the show trial of the century. Simon Davion became a folk hero, the patriot driven to murder a tyrant as the only way to avoid a crippling civil war. The eventual verdict was justifiable homicide, with a suspended sentence on the grounds that Simon had acted from the purest of motives: the greater good of his nation. He went on to lead that nation—healing its wounds, restoring its strength and forever changing it in the process.

Simon Davion and the Modern Federated Suns

During the first few confused weeks following Edward's assassination, Simon Davion did not wait on events. Edward Davion's death had removed the immediate threat of secession, but brought factionalism in its wake. Between supporters of Edward who backed his young son Arthur for the presidency (with a suitable regent from among their own ranks), equally fervent supporters of Simon, and those High Council members who wanted to end Davion power permanently, the Federated Suns remained at the brink of crisis. Simon used his days under house arrest to devise an elegant political compromise, one that balanced centralized power with a new level of local authority.

Simon's plan divided the realm into five Marches, large administrative districts each composed of several star systems, with the High Council retaining its role as a forum for individual planets. The federation-wide duties that had formerly fallen to the presidency went to the leader of the Crucis March, one of the five new districts. Aside from these responsibilities, the district leaders were essentially equals, with the High Council acting as a central authority to keep their power in check.

As the weeks progressed, Simon built on his already considerable support among the Councilors, most of whom were glad to be rid of the detested Edward. By the time his dramatic trial ended in virtual acquittal, Simon had convinced enough allies to make his compromise a reality. With the High Council's backing, Simon abolished the presidency in favor of an interlocking system of local authorities that would eventually become the hereditary aristocracy of the modern Federated Suns. The highest authorities were the princes of the Capellan, Terran, Draconis, Crucis and Outer Marches. Beneath these were smaller subdivisions determined by population size: duchies, margraves, counties and baronies. The High Council, for its part, was no longer composed of elected or appointed representatives from individual world governments. Instead, the Councilors became the literal rulers of their constituent worlds, awarded the noble title of marquess or duke. The Council's chief power lay in its control over appointments to noble positions in the various districts. It could also remove regional nobles, even March princes, who were found unfit for their authority. The Prince of the Crucis March, by virtue of assuming the duties of the presidency, received the title of First Prince of the Federated Suns.

Though Simon had carefully de-emphasized any special role in the new government structure for himself and his family, few were surprised when the High Council appointed him Prince of the Crucis March. The damage done to the Davion name by mad Etien and his sons had not entirely robbed the Davion name of its magic, and Simon's own sterling political and military record was enough to overcome the doubters. His supporters hailed him as the visionary diplomat who had signed the Ares Conventions in 2412, that famous set of rules for civilizing the conduct of warfare. He was also a veteran of Capellan border campaigns, recommended for decoration and promotion. The final card in Simon's hand was, ironically, the very killing for which he had recently stood trial. By risking his life and his future to ensure a better one for his nation, Simon had proved himself the opposite of the dead tyrant. Against this combination of virtues, no other candidate for First Prince stood a chance. Simon Davion formally ascended to his new position in 2418, to reign over the Federated Suns for the next forty years.

Though the Federated Suns lost ground militarily to the Terran Hegemony during Simon's reign, Simon Davion brought to his realm the cutting-edge war machines that would soon enable the Suns to regain its territory and military prominence. In 2457, Simon paid the government of the Lyrans Commonwealth a huge sum for BattleMech technology, which the Lyrans had

stolen from the Terran Hegemony two years before. Armed with these kings of the battlefield, the Federated Suns would see few major setbacks and several military victories over the coming century, until the formation of the Star League put an end to large-scale warfare for nearly two hundred years.

The Prince and the Star League

The next great leader of the Federated Suns owed his throne to the military, succeeding to power only after a devastating civil war. Prince Alexander Davion began his reign as a child, spent several months as a captive of one of his own regents, fled captivity to exile on a bog-ridden backwater planet and eventually emerged from that exile to fight for and win his embattled throne. Over the course of his long reign, Alexander would rebuild the shattered Federated Suns, resurrect its military might and lead it into the Star League from a position of strength.

Between 2457 and 2524, the Federated Suns fought minor but successful border wars with the Capellan Confederation and the Draconis Combine. A greater threat came from the Terran Hegemony beginning in 2515, with a raid on the world of Robinson that killed the Prince of the Terran March along with his entire family. General Nikolai Rostov, a gifted military leader known and respected by the High Council, was appointed the new Prince of the Terran March, from which he waged a brilliant strategic war that kept Hegemony advances bottled up for the next several years. General Rostov was also one of five regents for the young First Prince, Alexander, who succeeded to the throne at the age of five. Rostov's command skills and popularity with the army kept the Federated Suns from suffering military setbacks throughout Alexander's minority, despite increasingly bitter political battles among the regency's two feuding factions.

These tensions came to a head in 2523, when regents Cassandra Davion and her husband, David Varnay, kidnapped the seventeen-year-old First Prince and married him to Varnay's niece Cynthia. Held under virtual house arrest on New Syrtis, the Varnay family stronghold, Alexander and his young wife made plans to escape. Meanwhile, the remaining regent, Laura Davion, was setting plans of her own in motion. Backed by an alleged "escort" of DropShips and BattleMechs, Laura landed on New Avalon in 2524. She revealed the kidnapping of Alexander to an astonished High Council, proclaimed the Varnays enemies of the state and declared war against them with the Council's backing. In response, the Varnays declared Laura's occupation of New Avalon treasonous and announced the formation of a new militia that would fight the "traitor" Davion's forces in the First Prince's name. To counter stories of Alexander's captivity, David Varnay arranged for a carefully planned tour of Capellan March worlds where the Varnay militia was being raised. Alexander and Cynthia took advantage of this publicity stunt to engineer Alexander's escape from the Varnays' control.

The First Prince remained in hiding for eighteen months on the backwater world of Nahoni, while the opening battles of the Davion Civil War raged around him. General Rostov was



killed early on, a blow to the regular army's morale that the Varnay faction swiftly exploited. By 2527, the initial burst of fighting had ground down to a stalemate. In that same year, Prince Alexander struck his first blow against the regents who had betrayed him, House Davion and their nation. On Nahoni, he met with the First New Avalon Dragoons, a light armor unit nominally loyal to Laura Davion because she controlled their homeworld. The appearance of the First Prince, proclaimed dead by both sides in the regents' conflict, energized the demoralized Dragoons. When two divisions of Varnay militia troops landed on Nahoni two weeks later, the Dragoons and Alexander fought and won a fierce guerrilla campaign—the prince's first victory in what would prove to be a very long war.

The emergence of the Davion heir prompted several units from both sides to immediately join his cause. Among the most significant of these early loyalists was Dmitri Rostov, the talented son of the beloved late General Rostov. When word of

Dmitri's choice spread across the Crucis March, unit after unit of the regular army switched from Laura Davion to the young prince. By 2528, Alexander had pushed his aunt entirely out of the Crucis region. Five years later, Alexander's forces defeated Laura Davion's remaining loyalists on the Draconis March world of Tancredi. Laura herself committed suicide rather than face a probable treason trial, leaving Alexander free to finish the campaign against his remaining opponent, Cassandra Davion-Varnay. After four more years of bitter fighting, Alexander and Dmitri Rostov finally routed the Varnay army in 2537. Cassandra Varnay fled into the Capellan Confederation, never to be heard from again. The Davion Civil War was over. Now it was Alexander's task to build the peace.

One of the prince's first acts was to reduce the powers of the High Council and his fellow March Princes. Alexander's governmental reforms made the First Prince supreme ruler over the Federated Suns by hobbling the ability of other nobles to build

March-wide power bases strong enough to threaten the throne. The prince forced passage of these and other consolidations of authority through a combination of forceful argument, persuasion and the occasional threat of military action against recalcitrant lords. Neither he nor they ever forgot that he owed his throne to the military, which remained solidly loyal to Alexander throughout his lifetime. Fortunately, Alexander rarely found it necessary to play the military card. The threat sufficed, allowing him to turn his vastly increased political powers toward the rebuilding of his broken nation.

For the next three decades, the First Prince kept the Federated Suns' military actions largely defensive while he concentrated on economic recovery. As part of rebuilding the public confidence necessary for prosperity, he encouraged such democratic liberties among the citizens as free speech, the right of assembly and the right of protest. With regard to military reforms, Alexander moved more cautiously than he had in changing the government. In general, his changes minimized regional and planetary loyalties in favor of ties to the entire Federated Suns. Though individual worlds continued to raise and train their own units, Alexander made a point of integrating offworlders and posted most such units to regions other than those from which most of their men had been drawn. Additionally, he redrew the March boundaries, reducing their number from five to three. He also rechristened his military machine, calling it the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns (AFFS) to emphasize its national loyalties. Most significantly, he instituted the requirement that the heir to the Davion throne serve at least five years in a military unit, thereby reinforcing the link between Davion military and political power.

The Federated Suns joined the Star League in 2567, the last realm to do so save for its strongest battlefield rival, the Draconis Combine. Typically for this military-minded nation, the dealmaker was Ian Cameron's promise to launch preemptive strikes using Star League troops should the Combine make a move against any Federated Suns world. The twenty-year Reunification War, fought against the Periphery during the Star League's infancy, completed the Federated Suns' economic recovery. This wartime economic boost, without any accompanying loss of territory, was the first instance in which large-scale warfare drove the realm's prosperity. It would not be the last.

SUCCESSION WARS

During the Star League era, colonization rather than conquest vastly expanded the Suns' borders, adding 750 new worlds to its possessions. With the Star League treaties prohibiting major wars, the economic wellspring of the Federated Suns gradually shifted from purely military production to more wide-ranging research and development. The expertise built up between the end of the Reunification War and the collapse of the Star League would stand the Federated Suns in good stead during the centuries of vicious warfare to come. The only major military engagement of the Star League period was the War of

Davion Succession, in which poor performance by overextended Davion troops nearly lost the war until the Star League Defense Force (SLDF) intervened. For a nation that prided itself on military prowess, this near-defeat was particularly humiliating. Prince Richard Davion reacted by passing the Preparedness Act in 2735. This masterful piece of legislation carefully skirted legal limits on the size of Star League member-state armies by amassing war materiel and creating ever-larger local militias that could be pressed into nationwide service at a moment's notice.

Sixteen years later, the sudden death of First Lord Simon Cameron left the Star League in the hands of an eight-year-old boy. Actual governing authority fell to the Council of Regents, made up of the rulers of each League member-state. These lords had spent the better part of the past few decades in petty squabbles and secret military build-ups, making a crisis inevitable. It came in 2766, when Stefan Amaris of the Rim Worlds Republic assassinated First Lord Richard Cameron and proclaimed himself the Star League's supreme ruler. Though the Council Lords were united in their desire to see the usurper overthrown, they were too preoccupied with guarding against each other to lend any significant military aid to the SLDF. When General Aleksandr Kerensky and his SLDF troops finally routed Amaris' forces in 2779, the Star League they had fought for existed only in name. The Council Lords were deploying their armies and biding their time, each seeking the most advantageous moment to claim the First Lord's title and power.

House Davion and the Federated Suns were no exception. The Camerons had ruled over the Terran Hegemony; their deaths at Amaris' hands left the Hegemony leaderless and its worlds up for grabs. Like its former compatriots, the Federated Suns made attempts on several planets in the contested region near Terra. However, the economic dislocation that accompanied the final years of the Star League had weakened the Federated Suns' military. Regional loyalties had also reasserted themselves in the largely peaceful Star League years, hampering the AFFS's ability to act as a coordinated fighting force. These flaws cost the Federated Suns dearly in the battle for Towne, a world particularly valuable to the Federated Suns because it lay directly between that realm and Terra.

Elements from two AFFS units were sent to garrison Towne but soon faced raiding parties of Capellan Confederation and Draconis Combine troops. Unable to agree on which opponent to attack first, the AFFS forces dithered while both attackers made off with valuable shipments of military equipment. A larger force of Combine troops assaulted Towne a few months later, counting on the defenders' disarray to give the Combine a victory. Reinforcements arrived too late to save the planet or the garrison units. Towne fell to the Draconis Combine, and the AFFS was left to lick its wounds.

Prince John Davion was determined to avoid any more such debacles, whether in the immediate or distant future. Neither he nor his fellow rulers were the type to compromise when power was at stake, and the Prince knew his nation faced

decades—possibly even centuries—of fighting. Determined to survive and triumph, Prince John immediately launched a realm-wide militarization program, with the dual aim of strengthening the AFFS and lifting the Federated Suns out of its economic doldrums. Once again, warfare was the Federated Suns' salvation. Throughout the first three Succession Wars that followed, the Federated Suns would turn to war again and again as a means of reviving a faltering economy and assuaging domestic discontent. Though each conflict ultimately left the realm poorer and more battered, the next war temporarily eased the hard times and offered the false promise of final victory.

ALLIANCE AND CONQUEST

The fourth and last Succession War marked a departure from the Federated Suns' cycle of war-driven booms and busts. Unlike the previous three conflicts, the Federated Suns launched the Fourth Succession War from a position of economic as well as military strength. The marriage of Prince Hanse Davion to Melissa Steiner, Archon-Designate of the Lyrans Commonwealth, marked the formal alliance of those two great nations and gave the Federated Suns access to the thriving Lyrans economy. Marking the birth of the Alliance with a major war, however, was an error that would eventually prove the Federated Commonwealth's undoing.

Though the Lyrans state and the Federated Suns shared many similar ideals, their common democratic traditions and overlapping ethnic heritages did not prevent distrust between them. At best, they tended to regard each other as the lesser of several enemies. Lying on opposite sides of the Inner Sphere, these two empires shared no common border and so rarely warred against each other. However, the Lyrans people kept a wary eye on the Federated Suns' military might. Likewise, citizens of the Federated Suns frequently feared Lyrans economic clout as a backdoor vehicle for takeover. The personal charisma of Hanse Davion and Archon Katrina Steiner, who signed the treaty that would eventually create the Federated Commonwealth, persuaded the majority of both realms' people to go along with this bold experiment in peaceful alliance. The underlying history and causes of the two sides' mutual suspicions, however, were never addressed. Instead, they remained as fault lines waiting to be exploited.

Even before the wedding of Hanse and Melissa, the groom had set his ambitious plans in motion. Military exercises along the Capellan Confederation border gave Hanse the cover he needed to move an invasion force into position. Under the increasingly erratic leadership of Chancellor Maximilian Liao, the Confederation had lost ground economically and militarily. Prince Hanse would never have a better chance to conquer the Capellans, bitter enemies of the Federated Suns for seven hundred years. At the wedding reception, held on Terra in 3028, Hanse claimed the Capellan Confederation as a gift for his new wife. His words were the signal for a massive invasion, spearheaded by Federated Suns troops and backed by Lyrans funding.

The war was a spectacular success in terms of territorial gains. By the time it ended in 3030, the Federated Suns-Lyrans Commonwealth Alliance had captured nearly half the Confederation, as well as fifty-three Draconis Combine worlds taken by Lyrans units. The cost of fighting the war and holding onto the gains, however, gave plenty of Lyrans pause. The economic drain coupled with the leading role of militarily superior Federated Suns units made it easy for opponents of the fledgling alliance to portray it as a vehicle for pouring Lyrans money into ill-advised "foreign" military adventures.

Clan War and Aftermath

Had the fighting ended with the Fourth Succession War, the two nations might have overcome its two halves' old mistrusts. The War of 3039—an ill-fated offensive by Davion-commanded troops against the Draconis Combine—added some fuel to the opposition's fire but cost the Lyrans no planets and ended swiftly enough to pose no serious economic trouble. The Clan War was another matter. The Lyrans half of the union lay directly in the path of the Clan juggernaut, which swept through the Periphery and the Successor States between 3049 and 3052. World after world fell to these formidable invaders, while the vaunted Federated Suns military machine apparently stood idle. From the average Lyrans perspective, the famous Davion fighting expertise had been the prize for merging the two nations and their armies. But the AFFC's Davion units and commanders appeared as helpless as any Lyrans infantry grunt to halt the assault on Lyrans territory. Some Lyrans began to mutter darkly of Davion conspiracies to save the Federated Suns at Lyrans expense. Others resented the ever-widening stream of Lyrans resources going to fund an apparently inept military largely under Davion control.

Citizens of the Federated Suns, for their part, tended to take Lyrans economic support for granted. At worst, they treated Lyrans contributions as "only money," worth little next to the courage and skill of "our" fighting men and women. The fact that Lyrans soldiers and officers were also fighting and dying on the Clan front was conveniently brushed under the carpet. Accustomed to seeing themselves as the Inner Sphere's sole military superpower, Davion citizens frequently assumed all the credit for successful AFFC campaigns and blamed proverbial Lyrans military ineptitude for the failures.

By the end of the Clan War's first phase in 3052, the Lyrans half of the union had suffered far worse than its Davion counterpart. Clan Jade Falcon had taken forty-four Lyrans worlds, while the Federated Suns remained unscathed. Another casualty was the Lyrans economy, slowed from its usual robust roar to a faltering whimper by the significant loss of planets and the sheer cost of fighting such a vastly superior enemy. The immense respect of most Lyrans and Davion citizens for Melissa Steiner, sole ruler of the two realms after Prince Hanse's death in 3052, kept the increasingly fractious super-state together until 3055, when an assassin's bomb killed the Archon Princess at a public ceremony. After Melissa's murder, the dissolution of

the Federated Commonwealth was only a matter of time.

Here it is advantageous to point out a technicality misunderstood by most. The Alliance Treaty was signed in 3032. Though the Lyran and Davion economies began to merge after the Fourth War, with the militaries completing their unification in 3042, the Federated Commonwealth did not officially exist until a child of Hanse and Melissa's union assumed the throne. By the time of the Clan Invasions, most citizens of both realms thought of themselves as Federated Commonwealth citizens. Per the provision in the Alliance Treaty, however, the Federated Commonwealth was not officially formed until 3055, when Victor Steiner-Davion, eldest child of Hanse and Melissa, succeeded his mother as Archon Prince.

Considerably more soldier than diplomat, Victor gave the outward appearance of being more Davion than Steiner—a perception enhanced by his decision to spend the bulk of his governing time on New Avalon. Anti-Federated Commonwealth elements swiftly exploited the situation. The Skye Separatists, a Lyran secessionist movement led by Duke Ryan Steiner, spread rumors and sowed dissent for the next two years in hopes of toppling the entire Steiner-Davion line. They accused Victor of engineering his mother's death, emphasized his Davion roots and portrayed him as a ruthless military adventurer bent on bleeding the Lyran state dry to feed his boundless ambition. This effective smear campaign prompted Victor to make his sister Katherine regent over the Lyran worlds, elevating her to the position of co-ruler of the Federated Commonwealth.

Popular among the Lyran people and publicly conscious of her Steiner background, Katherine seemed an inspired choice. Her loyalty to Victor, however, had already begun to erode under the steady onslaught of scandal-mongering. Her attempts to publicly defend her brother against all manner of scurrilous accusations ended up feeding the anti-Victor rumor mill, as more and more Lyrans became convinced that she was protesting too much.

Tensions worsened in 3057 with the death of Joshua Marik, the sickly heir to the Free Worlds League. At the height of the Clan invasion in 3051, Prince Hanse Davion had coerced vital war materiel from Captain-General Thomas Marik by promising to treat Joshua's leukemia at the prestigious New Avalon Institute of Science. Joshua's death put the Marik military pipeline at risk; the Free Worlds League lay far from the Clan front, and Victor believed he could not afford to lose the only hold he had over the Captain-General. He also feared that



Capellan Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, engaged to the only remaining Marik heir, might ascend to power in two realms and plunge the Inner Sphere into a ruinous internal war. In a fatefully ill-advised decision, Victor replaced Joshua with a double. When Thomas Marik learned of the deception mere months later, he responded by attacking the Federated Commonwealth. As the first Free Worlds League troops crossed into the Federated Commonwealth's Sarna March, Katherine publicly denounced Victor and proclaimed Lyran neutrality. Mere days after this announcement, she declared the Lyran state independent of the Federated Commonwealth and renamed it the Lyran Alliance.

Most Davion citizens followed their Prince's lead and refused to acknowledge the break. Katherine's action, however, played into long-held suspicions of Lyran untrustworthiness. Corporations based in the Federated Suns greatly reduced business contacts with their Lyran partners. Lyran soldiers in AFFC units had their loyalties questioned by their Federated Suns counterparts and commanders. Ordinary Lyrans who had relocated to Federated Suns territory during the Federated Commonwealth's heyday became enemy aliens on their adopted homeworlds. Many of the latter moved back to Lyran space, where their stories of discrimination only worsened relations between the two sides. When Archon Katherine took power across the Federated Commonwealth in 3061, many citizens of

the Federated Suns half rebelled quietly. Public protests, though swiftly quashed, increased in frequency and vigor. Victor Steiner-Davion's triumphant return from Clan space and his subsequent appointment as ComStar's new Precentor Martial energized Davion loyalists throughout Federated Commonwealth space. Meanwhile, Katherine's attempts to tighten her grip made civil war almost inevitable.

In December of 3062, the brewing conflict between the two halves of this once-great power finally boiled over. The catalyst was the murder of Duke Arthur Steiner-Davion, with disturbing evidence suggesting Archon Katherine's complicity. The fighting is in its early stages, too early to predict the outcome. One thing seems certain, however. Whichever side finally claims victory will need to do its utmost to heal the breach. Otherwise, the short-lived unity of the Federated Commonwealth will vanish forever—and with it, the Inner Sphere's greatest hope of learning to coexist in peace.

FEDERATED SUNS SOCIETY

Federated Suns society has always reflected this realm's delicate balance between centralized military and political power and the cherished freedoms of the people. The average Federated Suns citizen is reasonably well-off or has the prospect of being so; he credits his comfort to constitutional freedoms and a strong military to guarantee them. Liberty is no guarantor of equality, however, particularly with the devotion of massive resources to military endeavors. The current civil war has exacerbated these social tensions, affecting almost every aspect of daily life.

PROMINENCE OF THE MILITARY

Though the AFFS does not literally rule the Federated Suns, the military has had close ties to the ruling Davion family since Charles Davion's presidency in the mid twenty-fourth century. Prince Alexander Davion, regarded by many as the realm's greatest leader, intensified this link by coming to power through a de facto military coup. Though his claim to the throne rested on a solid legal foundation, he could not have made it a reality without strong military backing. Grateful for an end to bitter civil strife, the ordinary people of Alexander's day venerated both the man and the armies that had brought them peace. That near-reverence for the armed forces persists to this day throughout the citizenry of Federated Suns, from the highest nobility to the working class.

A valued occupation in most Inner Sphere nations, soldiering is positively glamorous in the Federated Suns. The newest entry to boot camp, still wet behind the ears, feels this reflected glory from the moment he signs up. Not surprisingly, AFFS personnel take immense pride in their military service. The chance to be part of the glorious enterprise of war sustains raw recruits through the hardest phases of training and line units through the most arduous assignments. Such widespread admiration for the military gives the AFFS an

endless supply of eager recruits drawn from almost every world and all walks of life. Most families in the Federated Suns have at least one member in training or active service, and few citizens quibble with the military's disproportionate consumption of resources. Public education reinforces this pro-military outlook, stressing battlefield triumphs throughout Federated Suns history. Almost every citizen can recite the facts of some victory over the Capellan Confederation or the Draconis Combine, recalling it as proudly as if he or she took part in it personally.

The high esteem for "our fighting men and women" extends to all branches of military service, though some remain more glamorous than others. In most Inner Sphere realms, MechWarriors and aerospace pilots are the prestige positions, with the rest lost in the shuffle. In the Federated Suns, infantry grunts and tank commanders come in for their share as well. The greater prestige of these often-lesser positions comes from widespread use of regimental combat teams (RCTs), innovative combined-arms units, which existed before this time but saw widespread implementation in the AFFS after the Second Succession War. Impressive on the battlefield for their ruthless efficiency, RCTs are the backbone of the modern-day AFFS. Most civilians understand this on some level, and so regard anyone in military uniform as worthy of great respect. Not quite equal respect, however. As an officer in the Crucis Lancers once put it, "Any grunt can walk into a New Avalon bar and get a free drink. 'Mech- and aerojocks get an all-night free tab. Serve with an outfit like the First Kathil Uhlands, and you can probably drink free for life. Not a bad finding benefit, eh?"

For all the pride the Federated Suns takes in its armed forces, the sheer size of the military establishment creates problems as well. Maintaining a large, well-trained and well-equipped force costs money and requires vast amounts of industrial resources. Taxes, manufacturing capacity, metals, minerals and chemicals needed for alloys, armor, weapons and fuel are all devoted first to military uses. The rest of society lives on whatever is left. For wealthy urban centers such as New Avalon and various March capitals, or planets like Mallory's World whose primary wealth lies in agriculture, the military's absorption of funds and resources has little effect. Industrial worlds and those with abundant raw materials likewise see little harm and frequently enjoy great benefit from this voracious military consumption. Planets without these advantages, however, suffer immense deprivation. The attention paid to the military comes at the expense of civilian investment, leaving many of these worlds poor and struggling.

A glaring example of the imbalance is the fate of the so-called "vagabond schools," created by the Ministry of Education in the first decades of this century. These aging JumpShips, refitted to serve as floating classrooms, traveled to backwater worlds in the impoverished Outback District and elsewhere, providing basic education to their people for the first time. Lack of funds, however, made it impossible for Prince

Hanse Davion to expand the Vagabond program. The lull in fighting between the Fourth Succession War and the Clan invasion briefly promised greater funding, until the heightened military spending of the Clan War absorbed the entire budget for such "peripheral expenses." The vagabond schools shut down entirely in 3050, the JumpShips either commandeered for military transport or scrapped for parts. After assuming the throne in 3055, however, Victor once again launched this program. It was frozen again in 3057, but recent times have seen it begin anew, though at nowhere near the broad scope it had several decades ago.

These have-nots—some bitter and resentful, most simply struggling through each day—are largely invisible to their affluent brethren. The equation of prosperity and personal freedom in the average citizen's mind leads most to believe that the former goes with the latter. Therefore, truly poor people cannot possibly exist in this freedom-loving realm—and if they do, their poverty must be their own fault. Blaming a huge military for any part of the problem is far from most people's minds. To admit such a possibility might mean rethinking the armed forces' privileged position in Federated Suns society, an act that would ultimately threaten the foundation of the realm.

Many of the have-nots are politically unsophisticated and espouse a similar view. They often pride themselves on living in a nation where, as one woman put it, "Maybe things get a little tough now and then, but at least I ain't a slave." Such people point to the lower classes of the Draconis Combine or the Capellan Confederation as evidence that their own lot, while difficult, is still enviable. They need not fear the midnight knock at the door or consider themselves the virtual property of their leaders. Most important of all, they need not resign themselves to permanent status at the bottom of society's ladder. Those with some hope of improving life for themselves or their children are least likely to resent the prominence of the military or the benign neglect of their rulers. Those without it are the dissenters; but even among the dissenters, most individuals are too preoccupied with getting through each day to muster up much energy for civil unrest.

The complacency that frequently blinds better-off citizens to the plight of the poor feeds a dangerous arrogance when combined with the military's dominant position. Justifiably proud of its democratic traditions, the Federated Suns often does not hesitate to spread them by force. Such conquests are not always welcome. Local resistance invariably leads to crackdowns, partly fueled by the bewildered anger of Federated Suns authorities at "brainwashed" natives who fail to appreciate their liberation. The crackdowns provoke more resistance, and before long a captured planet may have lost all hope of having the freedoms that justified its conquest. Few Federated Suns citizens appreciate the irony, however. In most people's minds, the military whose power allows them to live free can virtually do no wrong.



COMMON RIGHTS AND NOBLE RULERS

Like its fellow Successor States, the Federated Suns is essentially ruled by an aristocracy. The logistical difficulties of governing its far-flung expanses precludes a genuinely democratic system; the messy process of government by the people simply does not work on an interplanetary scale, as the early leaders of the Federated Suns found out. New Avalon's egalitarian traditions, however, remained dear to the hearts of the ruling Davions who claimed it as their homeworld. Consequently, the Federated Suns government never entirely abandoned democratic ideals.

The notion of government by consent of the governed is the principal surviving concept, for hard-headed practical as well as sentimental reasons. With few exceptions, even the most autocratic First Princes have recognized that competent rulership for the good of the people fosters peace and contentment among them. Abuses of power sooner or later lead to rebellion, which deprives the treasury of tax revenues and often creates the need for expensive military intervention. To avoid such problems and safeguard the long-term health of the realm, the constitution and common law of the Federated Suns contain two mechanisms by which ordinary people can potentially depose incompetent or venal overlords: the right of public appeal and direct action.

The right of appeal allows the citizens of a planet to lodge complaints against local barons or counts—the lowest ranks of Davion nobility—before the planetary marquess or duke. The Laws of Noble Conduct and Review, enacted by Prince Alexander Davion in 2634, obligate planetary authorities to conduct inquiries based on these complaints. The duke or marquess then decides the offending noble's fate. Most often, the noble is replaced by his or her nearest successor. In cases where an entire ruling family falls under suspicion, that family may be stripped of its title. Nobles who attempt to silence their critics face punishment by the central government, ranging from a public reprimand to direct military action on behalf of the local population. The First Prince and his ministers take a dim view of subordinate nobles who cannot keep the peace through competent governance and do not hesitate to back popular rebellions against bad rulers. One famous intervention came in 2701, when Count Donvier Rossini of Tancredi destroyed the Justice Building in his city-state and executed his critics. Soon afterward, an elite unit arrived on Tancredi to arrest the count. Rossini was subsequently found guilty of all charges and beheaded in his city's central public square.

Direct action does not appear in the Federated Suns constitution, but is an accepted part of unwritten common law. Most often strikes or insurrections, direct action comes into play when the right of appeal has failed. A strike is the less desperate of the two tactics, though strikers may risk military occupation by higher authorities if their protest turns violent. An outright insurrection virtually guarantees the arrival of well-armed troops. A military governor replaces the ruling nobles on such

planets, and both sides of the insurrection face heavy penalties for breaking the peace of the realm.

The Six Liberties

The power of the ruling class has another limit as well—a guarantee of personal freedoms that goes some way toward explaining the average citizen's contentment with leadership by a hereditary aristocracy. The Federated Suns constitution enshrines the following Six Liberties: the rights to personal liberty, fair treatment, privacy, ownership of property, ownership of weapons, and the right to participate in planetary government. The exact form of the latter right varies widely depending on the government involved, which may be anything from a New Avalon-style parliamentary democracy to the commune of Xenia to an old-Russia-style communist system such as the one in place on Novaya Zemlya. These "civilian governments" are separate from, though connected to, the governing power of planetary nobles. In theory, a planet's ruling duke or the count or baron of a continent or province can overrule any decision made by civilian authorities. However, nobles who do so too often or without good cause frequently find themselves deposed, through peaceful appeal or less gentle methods.

The Six Liberties give citizens of the Federated Suns much of their boundless drive and enthusiasm, which they turn toward everything from border raids to commercial ventures to civic groups and arts extravaganzas. The freedom to choose their own courses gives them confidence in everything they do—a sense of rightness that is both a blessing and a curse. Pride in their liberties enables them to take bold gambits, such as the alliance that created the Federated Commonwealth. More tradition-bound societies, such as the Capellan Confederation or the Draconis Combine, could not have made such an alliance work, even for less than four decades. Only a people accustomed to free choice could conceive of choosing peace over war, against the weight of centuries of intrigue and conflict.

As with much about this vast realm, however, an individual's attitude toward these freedoms can vary widely depending on his circumstances. The more prosperous the world, the more likely its people are to take extreme pride in their constitutional rights. Not surprisingly, these are the people with the greatest opportunity to exercise them. On less fortunate worlds or in pockets of poverty where the people have lost hope, the Six Liberties often become irrelevant. The right to own property is meaningless when one lacks the money to buy any. Other rights, like those to fair treatment or personal liberty, can often be trampled at will because down-and-out citizens cannot afford to defend them in court. Even among the poorest citizens, however, a certain sense of pride lingers. Many take comfort in their rights—their lives may be wretched, but at least they have their freedom. The extent to which that freedom means anything is a question better avoided.

For too many in the Federated Suns, pride in their democratic traditions easily turns to arrogance. The average citizen

sees his homeland as the only truly free realm in human space and therefore superior to all others. Some take this righteousness a step further, believing themselves duty-bound to spread the Federated Suns' enlightened ways by any means necessary. They sincerely believe that, given a choice, any sane human being would live exactly as they do. When confronted with entire interstellar nations whose people live differently, they tend to either pity them as ignorant or despise them for intentionally rejecting a "better" way of life. Such attitudes bolster the pro-military mindset so prevalent in Federated Suns society, turning the frequently ugly business of war into an expression of manifest destiny. On a smaller scale, self-righteousness and complacency win few friends among outsiders. The proverbial arrogance of the Federated Suns ultimately contributed to the Lyrans' secession and is likely to prove a significant obstacle to rebuilding the Federated Commonwealth once the current fighting is over.

THE FEDCOM CIVIL WAR

Scarcely three months old, this conflict has already begun to affect daily life on Federated Suns worlds. Planetary garrisons and local governments, thrown into disarray by Archon Katherine's recent assumption of power, are splitting into bitterly opposed factions. Sketchy evidence initially appeared to incriminate the Draconis Combine in Duke Arthur Steiner-Davion's death; other elements point to Katherine's involvement. Those who believe the former account have begun to back Katherine, perhaps more fervently than they might have otherwise. Those who believe the latter version see Katherine as a traitor to House Davion. Many of these never ceased supporting Victor Steiner-Davion as the rightful ruler in the Federated Suns, if not the entire Federated Commonwealth. Katherine's usurpation of the Federated Commonwealth throne and her willingness to tear the Federated Commonwealth apart to stay in power have proved to Victor's loyalists what Victor himself only reluctantly came to realize—that Katherine Steiner-Davion is unfit to be trusted with the rulership of the realm.

Victor's eventual acceptance of the need to depose his sister freed his supporters to take action on his behalf. Mere days after Duke Arthur's death, fighting broke out on several worlds between pro-Victor and pro-Katherine AFFC units. On other planets, the peace is increasingly tenuous. The people, their leaders in civilian government and their ruling nobles are a volatile mix of pro-Katherine partisans, pro-Victor loyalists and those who simply want the strife to end. Public demonstrations are frequent and strident, prompting ever-harsher crackdowns by authorities on the opposite side. The tense atmosphere on many worlds threatens to disrupt economic investment, potentially costing millions of jobs and adding to the unrest. Some worlds in the Outback region, already considered risky because of undereducated populations and lack of easily exploitable resources, have lost what little investment they managed to attract during the too-brief boom years of the Federated Commonwealth alliance.

On an individual scale, war jitters are producing a blend of panicky actions and jaunty defiance. Hoarding is common, even on planets that have seen no military action. On those that have, the warring military units have generally avoided large-scale collateral damage. However, the savage attacks on military bases and manufacturing installations are taking a toll on local economies, with thousands of citizens losing their livelihoods in the course of a single battle. Citizens of worlds as yet unscathed by fighting heartily reassure each other, in an eerie echo of Terra's long-ago World Wars: the conflict will surely be over by Easter, by summer, before the rains begin. Battle-scarred civilian populations take a grimmer view. Some flee to nearby worlds still at peace; others are grimly determined to hang on, no matter who finally wins.

Citizens of border Marches are particularly tense, fearing attack by their neighbors in addition to civil strife. In theory, the Whitting Accords that recreated the Star League should prohibit former enemy realms from exploiting the Federated Commonwealth's internal troubles. In practice, however, the Star League is young and the enmities old. Many people find it difficult to believe that the Capellans, the Free Worlds League or the Draconis Combine will not use the current turmoil to launch opportunistic invasions of Federated Commonwealth border worlds. Some believe the invasions have already begun, pointing for proof to the Combine's annexation of the Lyons Thumb this past August.

The Draconis March, on the Combine border, is the hottest powderkeg waiting to explode. The region's ruling duke of Sandoval is currently in Katherine's camp, with Victor's history of ties with the Draconis Combine leading the Duke to believe that supporting Katherine is in the best interests of his realm. History and geography conspired to make this region a hotbed of anti-Combine feeling; alleged Combine responsibility for the public slaying of the popular Duke Arthur has inflamed passions to worrisome levels. Already, Draconis March residents of Asian descent are becoming the victims of increasingly violent crimes. Anti-Japanese graffiti turns up in almost every Asian neighborhood, while roving bands of young toughs smash the windows of sushi bars and torch Chinese restaurants. (For bigots bent on violence, all Asians look alike.) On Robinson, the March capital, a string of vicious beatings has so far hospitalized three Japanese men, an elderly Chinese and two young Korean women. Despite the Sandoval family's appeals for calm, the Draconis March appears on the verge of an anti-Asian pogrom horribly similar to the one that swept the region in the 2790s. That explosion of violence came after Draconis Combine troops massacred the civilian population of Kentares IV. Whether a second wave is in the offing or how severe it will be depends on the extent to which the Sandoval clan can overcome its own hatred of the Combine and defuse the raging tensions. As it is, the known anti-Combine bent of the duke and his family are undermining all appeals for calm.

THE CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION

All my life, the Capellan Confederation has loomed large in my awareness. My mother, my homeworld, every planet over which my family has stewardship—all these were part of the Confederation once, until the Fourth Succession War freed my mother and her duchy from any obligation to her mad family. We Liao can be less than stable, and the mad ones among us are not truly capable of ruling. They cannot place the people before their own desire for power. My mother, Candace, escaped this taint. I like to think that my siblings and I did as well. Now, with Sun-Tzu Liao and his Confederation once again our overlord, we can only pray our sanity will see us through.

My family remains as it always has—ruling over the worlds of St. Ives. For a time, Sun-Tzu had renamed it the Xin Sheng Commonality. Xin Sheng means “new birth,” the name Sun-Tzu chose to prettify his wars of conquest. Now, however, our true name has been restored to us, even if our freedom has not. First against the Federated Commonwealth, retaking former Capellan possessions lost in the Fourth Succession War; next against the planets his own actions had thrown into turmoil, in the so-called Chaos March; and finally against the St. Ives Compact, my home. He took all these worlds for the good of the Capellan Confederation—the entire Capellan Confederation, including those parts of it that no longer wished to be—or so he says. Perhaps he even believes it. Personally, I question what good is wrought by destroying a planet’s cities and lands and killing its people in order to fly a different flag over it. If Sun-Tzu truly cared for our good, he would have left us alone.

Be that as it may, we have rejoined the Confederation. Not easily or willingly, but the deed is done. During my travels along our former border, I have gone among the common people and dealt with the military authorities. I have also learned all I could about the way life is lived on Capellan worlds outside St. Ives, so that I might give our people some idea of what to expect.

Euphoria buoys the Confederation now, a sweeping sense of having finally triumphed in its long struggle for survival. We Capellans—all of us—are nothing if not a patient people; we know how to work together for a goal whose attainment may take years, even lifetimes. Sun-Tzu has this patience in full. It enabled him to take back St. Ives and many other once-Capellan planets. The people of St. Ives also have it, which gives me hope that our recent defeat is not the end of our story. Patience, dedication, attention to detail and a healthy degree of cunning are the birthrights of all Capellans, no matter which side of our former border they call home. These qualities come out in our art—the long years of painstaking craftsmanship to create a leaf from thin layers of red lacquer. They come out in our politics—not even the Draconis Combine excels us in the

art of subtle intrigue. And they come out in war—the slow but steady revival of a badly weakened military, the sowing of rebellions that flower among enemies at just the right time, the knowledge of when to strike and when to hold back.

For the moment, it is the Confederation that finds its patience rewarded. The common people, used to privation for centuries even before the Fourth Succession War sundered their realm, raise little objection to the further hardships many of them are suffering while their Chancellor and his ministers spend huge sums rebuilding newly conquered planets. It helps that not all the rebuilding is taking place in St. Ives or the reclaimed Chaos March worlds. Under Xin Sheng, bulldozers and wrecking balls are trundling through the streets of some of the worst slums on various planets, with new housing going up in their wake. Every tenement block has a Chinese touch—mock pagoda roofs, carved dragons over the doors, windows and archways and plumbing all aligned for fortunate feng shui. Shi-Zhong-Xin Park in the capital on Denbar, torn to pieces by a fierce ‘Mech battle, has been perfectly restored. Refugees from St. Ives border worlds who fled deeper into the Compact are beginning to go home—somewhat wary of trusting the Chancellor’s assurances that they are safe from persecution, but having little other choice. So far, Sun-Tzu has been as good as his word. I have heard no reports of arrests, or even of special Maskirovka attention being paid to returnees. That we must once again fear the Capellan secret police, however, is a dark spot on the brightness of Xin Sheng. We can only wait to see how large it grows.

On Indicass, another St. Ives border planet that saw fierce fighting, the latest public beautification project is a portrait of Chancellor Sun-Tzu. It covers an entire wall of the Government House in the capital city. Such portraits are becoming increasingly common on potentially troublesome worlds. Reminders, I assume, of who truly holds sovereignty over us now. My mother described such portraits of her father, Chancellor Maximilian, and her elder sister Romano. Most citizens kept smaller versions in their houses or apartments, carefully placed for display. I am told that nowadays, many make altars of Sun-Tzu’s portrait, burning joss sticks and praying for blessings from the man some call Enlightened One. Reclaimer of lost worlds, First Lord of the Star League, Conqueror of the Clans ... Sun-Tzu has given his people their pride back, a precious gift. Even those who know him to be merely human rather than demigod cannot help but be grateful.

Sun-Tzu’s popularity is one force behind the “Chinese renaissance” sweeping the realm. Things Chinese are in vogue,





CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION

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LEGEND

8 PARSECS

40 PARSECS OR 130.4 LIGHT YEARS
SCALE: 1/8 INCH = 1 PARSEC = 3.26 LIGHT YEARS = 19,164,277,860,000 STATUTE MILES

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS
FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES USE 9 PARSECS = 29.34 LY

from architecture to 'Mech designs to food. The Liao family's prominence since the Capellan nation's early days guaranteed our Han Chinese heritage a dominant place in Confederation life, but my cousin has turned that privileged position into virtual cultural hegemony. He finds Chinese symbolism useful to unify and inspire his subjects, and they accord him such near-worship that they follow his lead in all things. And so, more than ever in the Confederation's history, to be most truly Capellan is to be Chinese. Exhibits of Chinese art draw record crowds; producers of bright Chinese silks can scarcely keep ahead of the demand for robes and banners; restaurants known for indifferent kung pao are turning customers away, while Russian cafés, Indian restaurants and Japanese steakhouses go begging. There is even a burgeoning market in cosmetic surgery to "Asian-ize" round eyes.

None of this need be worrisome in itself. Ethnic pride can be a comfort to those who are suffering, and the recent war has brought suffering in spades. There are the war-torn worlds of St. Ives, families on both sides who lost loved ones to the fighting, and the myriad economic troubles of reintegration. These things touch many people, one way or another.

For some, however, pride in being Chinese also means suspicion of anything—or anyone—different. This disturbing trend has already shown itself in St. Ives; how entrenched it may be in the rest of the Confederation, I cannot guess. Throughout our recent war, and now as uneasy peace begins to take hold, I organized relief efforts for the common people: refugee camps, soup kitchens, medical clinics and the like. Initially, local military authorities gave me little trouble. Whatever I needed, I got, often with a pointed comment about how much the Chancellor valued my efforts. Now, as a genuine peace treaty replaces the cease-fires, some authorities are becoming difficult. I ran afoul of one such in Qingliu on Hustaing, where hard-fought combat devastated the Russian sector of the city of Chiangmai. We established a clinic and feeding center on the outskirts of the area, as near could be managed to its displaced inhabitants. The Chancellor set up his own relief efforts some days afterward, all in predominantly Chinese areas of town. I thought little of it at the time. Everyone needed help, no matter what their ethnic origin.

In recent weeks, however, my Russian-sector clinic began to run short of medicines. When I asked the Chancellor's people what they could spare, they seemed willing to help—but the commander of the unit occupying Chiangmai threw up roadblock after roadblock. All plausible, seemingly innocent, but too many for coincidence. When I went to see him about the problem, he told me coldly that he did not approve of Capellan resources being used to aid "foreign elements." "Your face marks you as a true Capellan, a daughter of the Han," he went on to say. "Why does your heart trouble itself over the lives of a few round-eyes?"

I could not answer him. I knew it would do no good to say that the people of Chiangmai were *all* Capellans, having been made so by his own victory—and by the edicts of his Chancellor,

who is not so foolish as to give the new-conquered masses an excuse for another rebellion. I believe—I hope—that such bigotry is not widespread or officially sanctioned. But the cost of rebuilding the very worlds Sun-Tzu's war tore apart must be placing great strain on the Confederation treasury, which means more hardship for the people. On the surface, our fellow Capellans welcome us as long-lost brothers and sisters. Caught up in victory, they grudge St. Ives nothing. Underneath, however, resentments are surely simmering. If national pride and habitual obedience to their Chancellor preclude open hostility toward St. Ives as a whole, those among us who are insufficiently "Capellan"—Chinese—may become substitute targets.

Xin Sheng cannot lacquer over this or other darker parts of Capellan society. The Maskirovka are omnipresent, scenting out real or imagined disloyalties among every class and caste. Expressing anything less than complete admiration for the Chancellor, House Liao or one's local ruling noble can make a Capellan citizen vanish without a trace. I am told that in Chancellor Romano's day, "disloyal" citizens were frequently shot while trying to escape; when projectile weapons were used, the central government sent the family a bill for the fatal bullet. It would not surprise me to know this is still common practice. Thus far, the apparent general amnesty for St. Ives citizens seems to be holding. I wonder how long it will last. Until Sun-Tzu's patience thins, or until the Star League is no longer looking our way? With the civil war brewing between the two halves of the Federated Commonwealth, I fear we will not have the Star League's attention much longer.

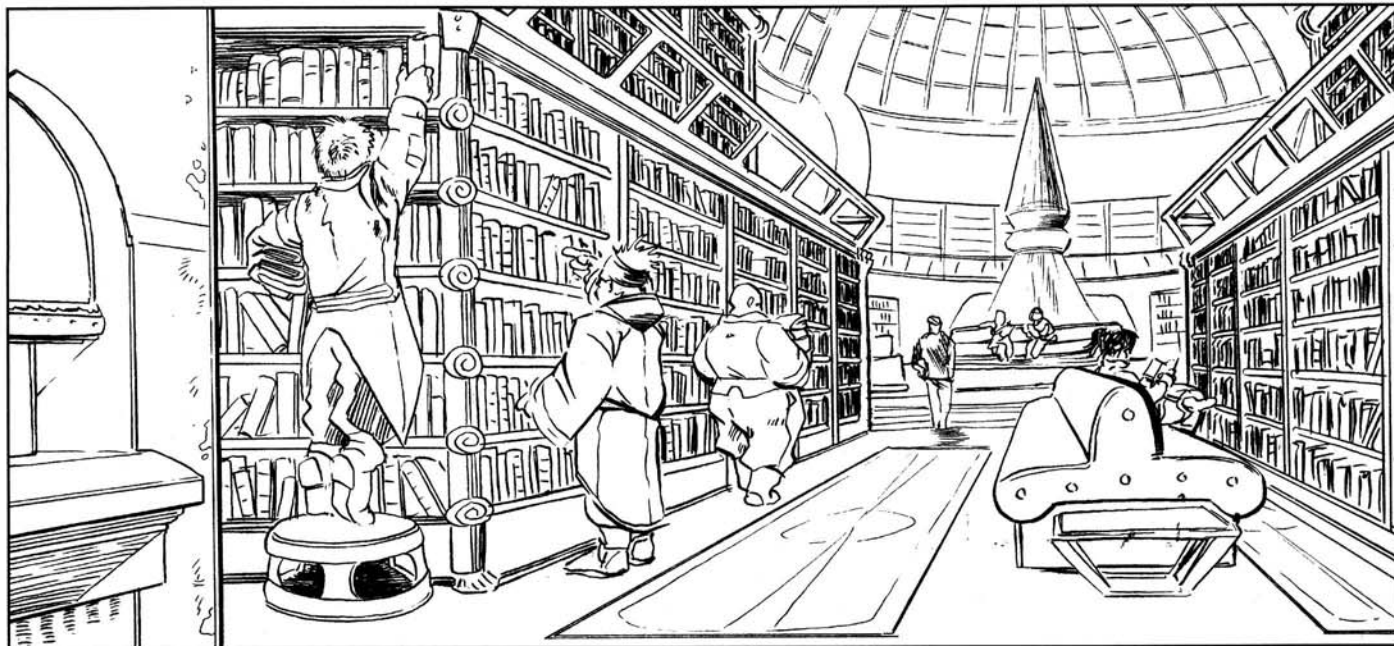
Whatever our fate is to be, for now we can only accept it. For better or worse, we are once again citizens of the Capellan Confederation. Of a realm in which every shadow may have ears, and citizens learn to fear the knock in the middle of the night. A realm where fierce pride in being Capellan springs from terror of absorption by larger, more powerful nations. A realm where the quality of one's life is determined not by laws applying to all, but by the personal virtues or vices of this or that ruling noble. A nation summed up by the deadly beauty of a *T'i Tsang BattleMech*—its graces, courage and strength all turned toward war. But Capellan heritage is more than these things. We of St. Ives remember when the Capellan nation was a beacon of freedom to the rest of humanity. Though it may take more lifetimes than my own, we will restore that freedom to our fellow Capellans—little by little, year by year.

They believe they have reclaimed us. It is my hope that we have reclaimed them.

—Duchess Kuan-Yin Allard-Liao

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

The Capellan Confederation came together under the threat of military occupation by an enemy power, and nearly died in its first year under assaults from two different foes. Not surprisingly, absorption by a foreign nation is the greatest fear of the Capellans and their Liao rulers. Political instability runs



a close second, as a divided realm is also a weak one. Ever since Franco Liao took control of the fragmented Capellan states, House Liao has done its utmost to create and preserve a nation where the political chain of command is unquestioned and the Liao family stands indisputably at the top. Only through ironclad internal stability could the worlds in this oft-contested region of space hope to survive the attentions of their larger and militarily more powerful neighbors.

REPUBLIC AND HEGEMONY

The two principal powers among the so-called Capellan states of the late twenty-third and early twenty-fourth centuries were the Capellan Hegemony and the Liao Republic. At the dawn of the twenty-fourth century, anyone placing bets on the future of these powers likely would have chosen the Hegemony. Founded by plebiscite in 2270, the Hegemony centered on the planet Capella, renowned throughout human-occupied space for its vast libraries and storehouses of information. Capella had previously been the heart of the Capellan Co-Prosperity Sphere, a loose defense and trade pact that encompassed several neighboring worlds. The Hegemony declaration gave membership in the new state to all original members of the Co-Prosperity Sphere, as well as to all inhabited planets within ten light-years of Capella. For the next three decades, the Capellan Hegemony expanded its holdings and solidified its reputation as the mercantile and cultural center of the region.

The Republic of Liao, then a single planet, spent those same years struggling out of an economic pit dug for it by the Nanking Collective, which blockaded Liao in 2249 in a brief but nasty trade dispute. The blockade cost Liao the export contracts with nearby worlds that had been the source of its prosperity. Within a decade of the Blockade of '49, Liao had gone

from creditor to debtor world, with some settlements on the edge of starvation. The tiny republic's fortunes slowly picked up over the last decades of the twenty-third century, as its leaders worked tirelessly to restore trading agreements and rebuild their merchant fleet. Fortunately, the demand for Liao's principal exports—livestock, processed meat and grain—remained high enough to gradually set the planetary economy back on its feet. Liao thoroughbred horses had long been a favorite luxury of rich colonials and the emerging noble classes on many worlds; with the planet's gradual economic revival, the horse trade started up again, bringing in additional profit. By the beginning of the Capellan-Supremacy War in 2305, the Republic of Liao had recovered enough for its leaders to consider expanding beyond their world's horizons.

The Capellan-Supremacy war capped years of simmering hostility between the Hegemony and the Sarna Supremacy, an oppressive military power with grandiose designs of conquering the entire Capellan region. Soon after Capella's first colonists landed, a Sarnese ship mistakenly attempted to intimidate them into acknowledging the Supremacy as their overlord. That early encounter set the pattern of relations between the Supremacy and the Capellan state for decades to come. After the formation of the Co-Prosperity Sphere foiled Sarnese dreams of military conquest, it resorted to economic warfare. The Supremacy imposed a blanket economic boycott of the Capellan Hegemony from 2270 until 2282, by which time Sarnese leaders realized that the sanctions were hurting their own realm more than their enemy's. As the Hegemony added more and more star systems throughout the 2280s and '90s, its expanding territories moved ever closer to the Supremacy's borders, raising tensions between the two powers. By the turn of the twenty-fourth century, war was a diplomatic incident away.

In 2305, the Sarnese systems of Palos and Wei broke from the Supremacy and declared independence. Knowing the Capellans had little love for the Sarnese, the leaders of the breakaway systems appealed for aid to Capellan garrisons on nearby St. Andre and Tsitsang. Spoiling for a fight with the Sarnese "evil empire" and eager to acquire the disputed planets' considerable metal and mineral deposits, Magnate Paula Aris of the Capellan Hegemony declared war against the Supremacy.

Capellan patriotism and skill unfortunately proved no match for the Supremacy's sheer numbers or its skillful use of paid pirates to draw off crack Capellan units. With the help of troops from the Free Worlds League—which had its own designs on the Supremacy—the Capellans managed to take and hold seventeen Sarnese planets between late 2307 and 2308. Fierce popular resistance on many of those worlds, however, cost the Capellans shocking numbers of casualties. The Hegemony government on Capella responded with large-scale emergency draft legislation and heavy new taxes to pay for training and equipping the recruits. These draconian measures took their toll on Hegemony client worlds, until one of them finally rebelled.

In December of 2308, the planet Arboris officially withdrew from the Capellan Hegemony. The Hegemony's Second Andurien Reserve Fleet headed toward the rebel world, passing near the planet Liao—a choice of route whose unexpected repercussions would sharply raise the Liao Republic's fortunes while sinking the Hegemony's. Upon entering the Liao system, the Second Andurien found its way blocked by a fleet of armed merchant vessels. The merchant fleet's commander, Emile Faulkner Liao, informed the Capellans that Arboris had requested protectorate status under the neutrality laws of the Liao Republic. The Capellan fleet fought the Liao ships and won, but the victory proved costly. Rather than continue toward Arboris, the unnerved Capellan commander left his fleet blockading Liao while he returned to Capella for fresh orders. This dithering did not impress the Free Worlds League, which abruptly withdrew from the Capellan alliance. Without League military aid, the Capellan Hegemony could not hope to hold the Sarnese territory it had gained.

Magnate Paula Aris bowed to the inevitable in 2309 and signed an armistice mediated by the neutral Tikonov Grand Union. The treaty mandated the dissolution of the Capellan Hegemony government; the Magnate's subsequent suicide and popular dissatisfaction did the rest. Within months of the war's end, the plutocrats of the Hegemony had been replaced by a republican government. The new regime, renamed the Capellan Commonality, squandered its honeymoon period in squabbling and political gridlock, while the nation grew poorer and weaker.

The Commonality reached its nadir a mere decade after its birth, when the politicized, underequipped and demoralized Capellan army failed to prevent Terran Hegemony troops from landing on Capella. Between 2320 and 2335, the capital of the Commonality belonged to the Terran Hegemony, with the active collaboration of several leading local politicians. It should be

noted that, following a long-standing tradition of selective memory where major defeats are concerned, the Capellan government has never officially acknowledged the Terran occupation in any document produced for public consumption.

Capella's common people were less easily cowed. The Free Capella Underground, a shadowy organization of civilian resisters and disaffected soldiers, relentlessly harassed the Terran Hegemony forces from the first year of the occupation, using every tactic from street protests to bombings to selective assassination of Terran officers. Eventually, the guerrilla campaign made the price of staying too high. Rather than keep his units bogged down where they could be picked off one by one, Hegemony leader James McKenna left Capella to its own devices. After the Hegemony's departure in 2335, the Commonality government limped along for thirty more years before breaking down amid widespread rioting and apathy.

During this same period, the Republic of Liao rose steadily in power and prestige. Four more star systems followed Arboris' lead between 2310 and 2320: Zurich, Aldebaran, Genoa and Gan Singh. By 2356, the renamed Duchy of Liao also owned an impressively large merchant marine force. The huge Liao fleet allowed the Republic to replace the Capellan Commonality as the region's primary mercantile power, further enriching the former at the expense of the latter. By the 2360s, the Duchy of Liao was the strongest of all the Capellan nations and the only one capable of uniting them in the face of a looming foreign menace.

BIRTH OF THE CONFEDERATION

The various Capellan states faced potential military action on two fronts. James McKenna had captured eleven star systems in the Capellan region by 2335; not surprisingly, the remaining Capellan powers distrusted his apparent shift toward diplomacy later in that decade. Closer to home, the young Federated Suns saw Capellan disarray as the perfect excuse for empire building. In 2357, Fed Suns President Reynard Davion sent troops to occupy the Sarnese world of Bell. This action touched off a border war that alternately flared and ebbed over the next decade and a half. In 2366, with the Capellan Commonality clearly on its last legs, Reynard saw a chance to annex that entire realm. Citing the collapse of the Commonality government, he announced his intention to send "peacekeeping troops" to occupy Capella "until a suitable governing body is elected." This thinly veiled threat of absorption threw the Capellan states into panic. When Duke Franco Liao proposed a pan-Capellan union with the Duchy of Liao as its principal seat of power, few of his compatriots felt inclined to quibble. Duke Franco proclaimed the creation of the Capellan Confederation in July of 2366, with himself as its supreme Chancellor.

Knowing that a strong defense was vital, Chancellor Franco appointed ten military commanders for each component state of the Confederation and gave them sweeping powers within their newly christened commonalities. These de facto military

governors immediately began raising and training an army for the battle they knew would come. In July of 2367, word reached the infant Confederation that Federated Suns troops were less than a parsec away from Capella. Chancellor Franco hurriedly assembled elite units from all ten commonalities, meanwhile opening negotiations with the Fed Suns commander as a ploy to gain time. The looming invasion would be the Capellan Confederation's baptism by fire. Only if Franco's bold gamble worked would his young realm survive.

Less than three weeks after they began, the negotiations broke down. The Chancellor assembled his troops in space near Capella, out of sight of the would-be invaders, and waited for the Fed Suns units to drop on the undefended Confederation capital. The Federated Suns took the bait. Within twenty-four hours, elements of the Sarna and St. Ives navies, along with armed Liao merchantmen, destroyed the enemy troop transports and supply ships in a titanic seven-hour engagement. Having proved the worth of his thrown-together Confederation Navy, Chancellor Liao demanded the enemy's immediate and unconditional surrender. The Fed Suns commander refused. Minutes later, the Confederation Navy razed Capella's capital city to the ground. Two thousand Capellan citizens lost their lives, along with every man and woman of the occupying force. The Capellans' sacrifice proved in no uncertain terms just how determined they were to resist foreign domination. Defeated and unnerved, the Federated Suns backed off. In a final show of defiance, Reynard Davion refused to recognize the Confederation. His son Etien Davion, however, did so soon after his accession to power in 2371.

The Confederation's savage triumph over the Federated Suns was one of the few victories it could claim in its early years. Between 2366 and 2369, the Free Worlds League took the Capellan border systems of Berenson, Zion, Shiro, Hassad and Andurien. These worlds changed hands multiple times over the next two decades, until exhaustion on both sides prompted an unofficial armistice in the 2390s. The cease-fire lasted until 2398, when Chancellor Kurnath Liao launched the first of many wars over the water-rich Andurien systems. This assault inaugurated the period of savage conflict later known as the Age of War. Though this first attempt to retake Andurien ended in failure, those planets would remain a bone of bitter contention between the Confederation and the Free Worlds League for much of the two realms' mutual history.

The Age of War's most vicious phase ended less than two decades after it began, with the signing of the Ares Conventions in 2412. The brainchild of Chancellor Aleisha Liao, the Conventions forbade the use of weapons of mass slaughter, such as those that had massacred the population of Tintavel earlier that same year. By intentionally limiting the scope of the damage combatants could do, the Ares Conventions cut down on the shocking losses of civilian lives. By lowering war's cost, however, they also made it more acceptable—an outcome that would have appalled their author. At the time, however, the signing of the Conventions by every major

Inner Sphere power seemed to symbolize a new beginning for the Capellan Confederation. The Ares Summit took place on a Confederation world, under the aegis of House Liao, to ratify a historic document conceived of and written by the Capellan Chancellor. The worst excesses of the Age of War were relegated to the past, recent losses and uncertainties set aside in favor of the brighter future that must surely come. The Confederation had survived assaults from multiple outside enemies; the new century seemed poised to bring peace and prosperity to this struggling nation. No one anticipated that the Confederation's next great enemy would come from within.

A HOUSE DIVIDED

After Aleisha Liao's death in 2415, the Chancellorship passed to Arden Baxter, a prominent member of the advisory council known as the Prefectorate. The first Chancellor not connected to House Liao, Baxter presided over a reign so disastrous that it reinforced intense loyalty to House Liao in subsequent generations. Though he spent only ten years in office before an assassin's bullet cut him down, Arden Baxter came close to destroying the Confederation—an outcome he devoutly desired and for which he actively worked.

Baxter was connected to the Aris family, leaders of the Capellan Hegemony until after the Capellan Supremacy War. During the Commonality era, the Aris clan clawed its way back to political power by every avenue it could, determined to topple or take over the Commonality government. When that government collapsed in 2366 amid a welter of corruption, foreign interference and domestic unrest, industrial magnate Warren Aris prepared to take control. Duke Franco Liao, however, forestalled him. The duke's arrival on Capella and his bold proposal to form the Capellan Confederation won far more backers among the leaders of Capellan worlds than anything Aris could offer, particularly after Liao threatened a trade embargo against any world that backed the Aris faction. Offered the position of Deputy Chancellor in the new Confederation government, Warren Aris refused it, whereupon Duke Franco had him arrested as a disturber of the peace. The Aris family never recovered from that blow to its power, nor did their many supporters. One such was Arden Baxter's father, a staunch backer of Warren Aris to the bitter end. Geoffrey Baxter died a broken and ruined man in 2378, leaving his son a legacy of shattered dreams and a pathological hatred of the Liaos and all their works.

Over the next thirty-odd years, Arden Baxter nursed his grudge and hoarded power. In 2410, he was appointed to the noble House of Scions under an amnesty for past political prisoners. He milked this opportunity for all it was worth, playing the reformed sinner to the hilt and slowly building a power base. Hard work and bribery earned him a seat on the Prefectorate in 2415, just two months before Chancellor Aleisha's death. Baxter subsequently convinced his fellow councilors that his appointment as Chancellor would heal old wounds and bolster unity in the realm. In reality, Baxter planned to tear apart "this bastard Liao state."

His first target was the Capellan military, foundation of the Liao family as well as the Confederation's strength. Over the next nine years, he reduced the Capellan Armed Forces and fired scores of talented generals with pro-Liao leanings. In 2418, Baxter embroiled this unsettled and slowly dwindling military in the Taurian-Rimwards War, a vicious three-year conflict with several small states on the Confederation's Periphery border. The Taurian states had never signed the Ares Conventions, and the fighting on both sides caused skyrocketing civilian as well as military casualties. The Confederation ultimately captured two planets, a poor return for the decimation of its rimward worlds and military units.

Baxter's domestic schemes fared less well. His covert "popular front" movements, aimed at discrediting House Liao, fizzled like a damp squib on most worlds. On several occasions, massive pro-Liao counter-demonstrations made it necessary to call in riot troops. The Chancellor's gravest offense against the Confederation, however, was his deliberate squandering of a golden opportunity to mend fences with the Federated Suns. Though few Capellan citizens recognized the consequences at the time, Baxter was intelligent enough to know where genuine détente with a powerful former enemy might lead. He therefore chose to deny the Confederation the potential benefits of such a peace, and in so doing shaped Inner Sphere history for centuries to come.

Simon Davion had taken power in the Federated Suns in 2418, ending nearly five decades of corrupt and increasingly tyrannical rule. As part of ushering in a new era for his nation, the new Davion prince attempted to heal the long-standing breach between the Suns and the Capellans. He sent envoys to the Confederation capital of Sian early in his reign, but Baxter refused to recognize them. Instead, the Chancellor called them "toadies of a murderer pretending to legitimacy," and ordered his household guard to throw them out. Mere weeks later, he followed this insult with an offer to recognize the new Davion government in exchange for the border worlds of Lee, Redfield and Safe Port. All three planets had long been subjects of fierce dispute between Capellan powers and the Federated Suns, falling to the latter during the border wars of the 2360s. The Federated Suns was in no mood to give back what it had bought with blood less than fifty years earlier. Chancellor Baxter's outrageous demands came close to starting another Fed Suns-Capellan border war, and permanently destroyed any chance of friendship between the two nations.



Given subsequent Confederation history, Baxter's deliberate snubbing of Davion peace overtures seems horribly prescient. The ensuing centuries of hostility would eventually culminate in the Fourth Succession War, which split the Confederation in half and nearly spelled its demise as a major Inner Sphere power.

Liao Restoration

The damage done by Arden Baxter unfortunately did not end with his death. His successor, Stephen Liao, proved nearly as disastrous a ruler for entirely different reasons. Stephen was determined to restore the nation his forefathers had built, starting with the Capellan military. Arden Baxter's malicious bungling of foreign affairs had greatly increased tensions between the Confederation and its neighbors, raising the odds of attack on several fronts. In such a situation, a weakened military was a virtual invitation to invade.

The new Chancellor wasted no time in revamping his armed forces, launching hugely expensive training and rearmament programs throughout the 2430s and 40s. To pay for the improvements, Stephen first siphoned funds from the nobility and then imposed increasingly hefty taxes throughout Capellan society. The overwhelming devotion of resources to the military left long-neglected domestic problems untouched. They grew and festered, while the common people grumbled about the indifference of their leaders. The pervasive presence of the Maskirovka, beefed up by Stephen as part of the military, kept

popular discontent at a low boil. The discontent of the nobles, many of whom came perilously close to bankruptcy as a result of the military build-up, was less easily dealt with. It exploded into violence after Stephen's death in 2450, in a dire crisis known to Capellan history as the Time of Tribulations.

The enormous sums spent on the military throughout Stephen Liao's reign allowed several high-ranking officers to accumulate vast personal wealth and power. Among the most prominent of these was General Merik, commander of a regiment in the elite Capellan Hussars. A gifted tactician with charisma to match, Merik seemed the most likely to attempt a grab for supreme power. Stephen's son Duncan Liao, a youth of seventeen when he became Chancellor, sought to curb Merik's growing influence by halving the size of Merik's unit. The general and his troops responded with open revolt, occupying the Chancellor's winter palace and taking Duncan hostage.

For the next seven months, Merik's military junta ruled in Duncan's name while the House of Scions squabbled over the proper response. Some of its members favored rescuing Duncan and thereby placing the young Chancellor in their debt; others attempted to ingratiate themselves with General Merik. Rather than continue as a pawn in the power struggle, Duncan Liao committed suicide in 2452.

Duncan's sister Jasmine blamed Merik and the House of Scions equally for her brother's death, and took action against both. Merik's Hussars were her first target. Within hours of proclaiming herself Chancellor, Jasmine Liao ordered the Second Hexare Lancers—afterward known as the Red Lancers—to capture the winter palace and annihilate Merik's troops. That task accomplished, Jasmine launched a purge of the military. The brutal housecleaning and accompanying reforms took two years and gave the Chancellor's office unprecedented control over the Capellan armed forces. Finally, Jasmine Liao set about acquiring similarly absolute political authority. Her most far-reaching addition to the Chancellor's powers was the right of decree, technically making the Chancellor's word law in loosely defined emergency situations. Jasmine and her successors exploited this right to the hilt, routinely using it to circumvent opposition. By the end of Jasmine's reign, the Chancellorship had become a position of supreme authority, with the House of Scions reduced to rubber-stamping the Chancellor's decisions.

Over the six decades between Arden Baxter's accession and Jasmine Liao's death, the Capellan Confederation completed its long journey from a collection of often-quarreling states with vastly different forms of government to a unified star empire ruled by an absolute autocrat. The change heralded a new era in Capellan nationhood, which had been marked throughout most of its two hundred years by chaos, internal upheavals, wars and brief intervals of peace. Between the founding of the Capellan Hegemony and the death of Chancellor Jasmine Liao, the Liao family brought the Capellan nation its longest periods of stability. The Capellan people came to value that stability at almost any price and to revere the Liaos who had given it to them. These two features of

Capellan life would define and preserve it during the centuries to come, carrying the nation through the first Star League era and its tumultuous aftermath.

ERA OF PEACE, ERA OF WAR

The Capellan Confederation joined the Star League in 2556, induced to do so by offers of favored-nation trade agreements with the Terran Hegemony, access to valuable Terran technologies, and a promise by Albert Marik of the Free Worlds League to cede to the Capellans the hotly disputed Andurien systems. The latter was the most valuable prize in the mind of Chancellor Terrence Liao, who had fought and lost the Third Andurien War just five years earlier. Badly battered by that conflict, the Capellan Confederation desperately needed peace. Its armies had been mauled, its treasuries depleted by war and reparations, and its people were sick of fighting. The Star League beckoned like an oasis in the desert, promising permanent relief from the Confederation's many troubles. The speedy transfer of Andurien proper to Confederation control seemed to symbolize the rewards of peace. Signing the Star League treaty brought the Confederation a coveted system it had failed to gain through war; possession of Andurien and its sister worlds would enlarge and enrich Capellan territory as few wars had done. (In fact, the remaining eleven Andurien systems never left Free Worlds control. After years of bureaucratic delays and snafus, both sides quietly dropped the matter.)

The ink was scarcely dry on the Star League Accords, however, when the Capellan Confederation and its fellow member-states found themselves embroiled in the Reunification War. This brutal conquest of the Periphery took more than twenty years, during which the economies of all the Star League realms became more or less dependent on wartime production. The Capellan economy, after years of battling over Andurien and heavy reparations paid to the Free Worlds League, was more vulnerable than most. The surge of wartime manufacturing revived it enough to compensate for the cost of the Capellan Armed Forces' own part in the conflict. When the Reunification War ended, however, the sudden loss of the Confederation's major source of revenue threw the economy into deep shock.

Chancellor Normann Aris, elected by the Prefectorate to succeed the childless Ursula Liao in 2599, devised a unique solution to the fiscal crisis that remains a fixture in modern-day Capellan life. Aris put the Confederation's entire adult population to work under what he called "compulsory organization." This system made explicit a normally implicit part of the social contract—namely, that every Capellan owed the state some form of service in exchange for the privilege of citizenship. It also consolidated state control over Capellan citizens by allowing the state, rather than the individual, to dictate the nature of each person's service.

Compulsory organization saved the Confederation from total economic collapse, but at the heavy price of eliminating an important personal freedom. Many citizens protested initially, some so stridently that the Capellan government sent troops to

deal with them. Most Capellans, however, submitted to the new order with no more than a little grumbling. The economic crisis made them grateful for any employment that would keep food on the table, and the nation's history of upheavals had already taught them to value stability. Adjustment to the new reality was made easier by the connection of many Capellans to ancient Asian cultures with a mildly authoritarian bent. The tighter social structure would serve the Confederation well after the Star League's demise, which plunged humanity into three hundred years of a fruitless struggle for supremacy.

The Succession Wars

Never as large or powerful as its fellow Inner Sphere realms, the Capellan Confederation fared poorly during the long nightmare of the Succession Wars. The Lyran Commonwealth overshadowed it economically, the huge Federated Suns and the Draconis Combine militarily, the neighboring Free Worlds League in territory. Had its enemies not been fighting each other as well, the Confederation might have gone under. What kept the Capellan nation alive was the devotion of its people to their ruling house; the sheer fanaticism of Capellan troops, which enabled them to hang on and even triumph against desperate odds; and the cutthroat nature of combat during the first three Succession Wars, which virtually precluded alliances or even simple trust between the five major star empires. The Fourth Succession War was the only exception to the last, and it nearly proved the Confederation's undoing.

The First Succession War initially went well for the Capellans, who took over several worlds from the defunct Terran Hegemony before unleashing a devastating campaign on the Free Worlds League planet of New Delos. In her zeal for quick victory, Chancellor Barbara Liao authorized her forces to ignore the Ares Conventions—a decision that came back to haunt her. Sent reeling by the Capellans' first assault, the Free Worlds League swiftly rallied. Its troops attacked with redoubled ferocity, determined to punish the enemy that had taken so many civilian lives. The savage defeat inflicted on the Capellan navy over the League world of Calloway VI was the beginning of the end of Capellan good fortune. The League took four Capellan worlds in the early 2790s before events elsewhere in the Inner Sphere convinced each side to seek easier targets.

The Capellan Armed Forces shifted its focus to poorly defended border planets in the Federated Suns, which had weakened its Capellan border garrisons under pressure from the Draconis Combine. By 2801, the Confederation was richer in territory by five Fed Suns worlds. It was also considerably poorer in military equipment and general revenues. The final Capellan campaign, on the world of Chesterton, cost the CCAF dearly in both manpower and military hardware. Weighed honestly, the Confederation lost more than it gained from the conflict—a pattern it would repeat in each of the three Succession Wars to come.

By the end of the Third Succession War in the 2980s, the Capellan military teetered on the verge of collapse. Painstaking

conservation of dwindling resources, a bedrock tenet of Capellan army doctrine since the Second Succession War, proved insufficient to keep the CCAF's 'Mechs and tanks and fighters in good working order. A few elite regiments and a handful of dedicated mercenary units were all that stood between the Confederation and oblivion, until the dawn of the thirty-first century brought a much-needed interlude of peace to the exhausted Successor States. Chancellor Maximilian Liao, who ascended the Celestial Throne in 2990, took the opportunity to rebuild his shattered military as best he could. Like his fellow Successor Lords, Maximilian assumed that conflict would flare up again before too many decades passed. He could not foresee, however, the dangerous difference between the Fourth Succession War and its predecessors.

The Fourth Succession War hinged on an unprecedented alliance between the Federated Suns and the Lyran Commonwealth, which gave the Fed Suns vastly greater resources on which to draw while providing them with an ally to keep their other enemies busy. Prince Hanse Davion was therefore free to throw the bulk of his Fed Suns troops against his preferred target: the Capellan Confederation. Between 3028 and 3030, the Capellan Confederation lost more worlds than it had in all the previous Succession Wars: half its systems fell to the Davions. His realm split by his most hated enemy, Maximilian Liao succumbed to madness while his less-than-stable daughter Romano attempted to rebuild a shrunken, demoralized military and nation. The secession of the St. Ives Commonality at the end of the Fourth War further weakened the Confederation, bringing its fortunes to their lowest ebb in its history. Not until the accession of Sun-Tzu Liao in 3052 would this long-suffering realm begin emerging from the depths.

CAPELLAN REVIVAL

The year 3052 would prove a turning point for the Capellan Confederation, though few within or outside that battered nation realized it at the time. In that year, the first phase of the Clan War ended in a Com Guards victory that bought the Inner Sphere fifteen precious years in which to narrow the Clans' prodigious technological advantage. Though Capellan territory lay far from the Clans' line of advance, even Romano Liao could not deny the threat they would pose should the other Successor States fall before them. Nor did her son, Sun-Tzu, fail to recognize the benefits of improved technology on other fields of war. Upon succeeding Romano as Chancellor later that same year, Sun-Tzu cast about for a political alliance that would let him put expected military developments to good use.

He found what he was looking for in a loose alliance with the Free Worlds League, whose Captain-General wanted a buffer against the still-impressive might of the Federated Commonwealth. The League and the Confederation had been allies of a sort under the Concord of Kapteyn, signed in 3022 by the leaders of Houses Marik, Liao and Kurita as a counterbalance to the Alliance Treaty. The Kapteyn agreement had done little for its members during the Fourth Succession War,

but the precedent remained. Sun-Tzu Liao and Captain-General Thomas Marik revived and strengthened that tie, cementing it with an engagement between Sun-Tzu and Marik's illegitimate daughter, Isis. Though the marriage never took place, Sun-Tzu swiftly capitalized on his position as Marik's nominal son-in-law to wangle much-needed military aid and favorable trade agreements. He used both to beef up the Capellan Armed Forces while pressing Thomas Marik for open backing of Capellan military ventures.

From the start of his reign, Sun-Tzu was determined to take back every Capellan world lost to the FedCom in the Fourth Succession War. The alliance with the Free Worlds League potentially gave him the manpower to make that goal feasible, if he could persuade Thomas Marik to put League units at the Confederation's disposal. Marik, however, initially balked at aiding his new ally so directly. To achieve his dream of making the Confederation whole again, Sun-Tzu had to overcome Marik's reluctance.

His chance came in 3057, when Marik's son Joshua died of leukemia at the New Avalon Institute of Science. Around the time of the boy's death, Sun-Tzu engineered a commando raid on the NAIS. He intended to find or manufacture proof that the Joshua Marik at the facility was not Thomas' son, but an impostor. Unknown to the Chancellor, his guess was correct. Archon Prince Victor Steiner-Davion had substituted a double for the boy, fearing that the loss of the Marik heir would make the expansionist-minded Capellan Chancellor the new heir to the League throne. With control or near-control over two Successor State armies, Prince Victor believed, Sun-Tzu was almost certain to plunge the Inner Sphere into a war it could ill afford while the Clans sat on its doorstep.

As Sun-Tzu prepared to bring evidence of the switch to Thomas Marik, fate played into his hands. Through operatives of SAFE, the Free Worlds League intelligence agency, Marik learned of the substitution. He responded with an all-out attack on the Federated Commonwealth's Sarna March, in concert with the CAF. Sun-Tzu's war of reclamation had begun.

Over the two-month Liao-Marik Offensive, the Capellan army and Marik-hired mercenaries took back thirteen worlds and sowed chaos on many more. Between 3058 and 3061, Sun-Tzu took thirty more planets through a combination of military force, terrorist action and pro-Capellan popular movements he had spent years creating. The high point of the reclamation campaign was the reconquest of the St. Ives Compact, a hard-won Capellan victory fought over 3061 and most of 3062. Named the Xin Sheng Commonality during the war, the St. Ives Commonality came out of that war a shadow of its former self. The costs of rebuilding strife-torn worlds and reintegrating them into the Confederation will absorb significant Capellan resources for the next few years, leaving Sun-Tzu little time to continue the expansion of his realm. He is unlikely to rest, however, as long as any former Capellan possession lies outside the Confederation fold.

Within ten years, the Capellan Confederation has gone from a demoralized rump state to a rising power in a quickly

changing Inner Sphere. In addition to reclaiming much of its lost territory, the Capellan nation achieved a crowning glory in 3058 when its Chancellor was chosen as First Lord of the new Star League—the first Successor State leader to hold that coveted title since the long-ago start of the Succession Wars. Though the First Lord's title and position have since rotated to Theodore Kurita of the Draconis Combine, the Capellan people still take immense pride in their own ruler's possession of it. Because of this and other achievements, the Confederation is once again a power to be reckoned with and its people cannot be too grateful to the Liao who made it happen.

CAPELLAN SOCIETY

On the surface, Capellan society strongly resembles that of the Draconis Combine. Both realms favor a single Asian culture above all others: the Combine Japanese, the Confederation Chinese. Both incorporate a caste system, both submit their citizens to tight state control via heavy political indoctrination and a powerful internal security arm, and both foster fanatical loyalty to their respective ruling houses. Despite these important similarities, however, the two realms are far more different than outsiders might suspect. The average Capellan would certainly reject the notion that he is anything like a citizen of the Combine, or any other denizen of the Inner Sphere. Like the Chinese of old Terra from whom the Confederation draws its primary inspiration, the Capellan people see themselves as unique and their society as superior. Nowhere is this sense of superiority made more manifest than in the Xin Sheng movement, which has greatly strengthened the hold of ancient Chinese culture on the Capellan imagination.

XIN SHENG

Loosely translated as "new birth," this sweeping social and political movement is revitalizing Capellan society at every level. Launched by Sun-Tzu Liao near the beginning of his reign, Xin Sheng has brought the Capellan people increased prosperity, a degree of political freedom, considerable additional territory and a bracing sense of nationalist pride. After the dark years following the Fourth Succession War, this renewal seems even more miraculous. Much of it stands as inspiring testimony to the unconquerable human spirit. As with most things of human origin, however, Xin Sheng has its darker side as well.

On one level, Xin Sheng is about rebuilding the fortunes and the hopes of a nation all but shattered by war and the madness of its recent rulers. Economic reforms to encourage entrepreneurs have begun to raise living standards on once poor Capellan planets; on well-off planets like the capital of Sian, the bold and the lucky are making huge sums. Politically, Xin Sheng encourages planetary nobles to allow their subjects considerably more autonomy than many of them do. On some worlds, the ruling nobles are permitting elected civilian governments for the first time; on others, the planetary refractor as spokesman for the people is playing a larger part in policy decisions. The Maskirovka has standing orders to allow a certain

amount of low-level dissent, though few are inclined to raise opposing voices amid the near-universal chorus of pride in Chancellor Sun-Tzu. Acclaimed by his people as conqueror of the Clans, First Lord of the Star League and author of every good fortune, Sun-Tzu has little to fear from a few lonely grumblings of discontent.

Militarily, the Xin Sheng movement has produced skyrocketing recruitment levels across the Confederation. Always among the most honored ways of serving the often-beleaguered Capellan state, military enlistment has acquired extra cachet since the victories of 3057 and the recent war against St. Ives. The respect accorded Capellan soldiers has never been higher, and scores of young people are clamoring for entrance to the nation's military academies. Particularly noticeable is the jump in recruitment among Capellans with no Chinese background.

Xin Sheng's extreme identification of Capellan with Han Chinese identity leaves non-Chinese Capellans on the outside. Many attempt to compensate for this by proving their Capellan loyalty in the starkest way possible.

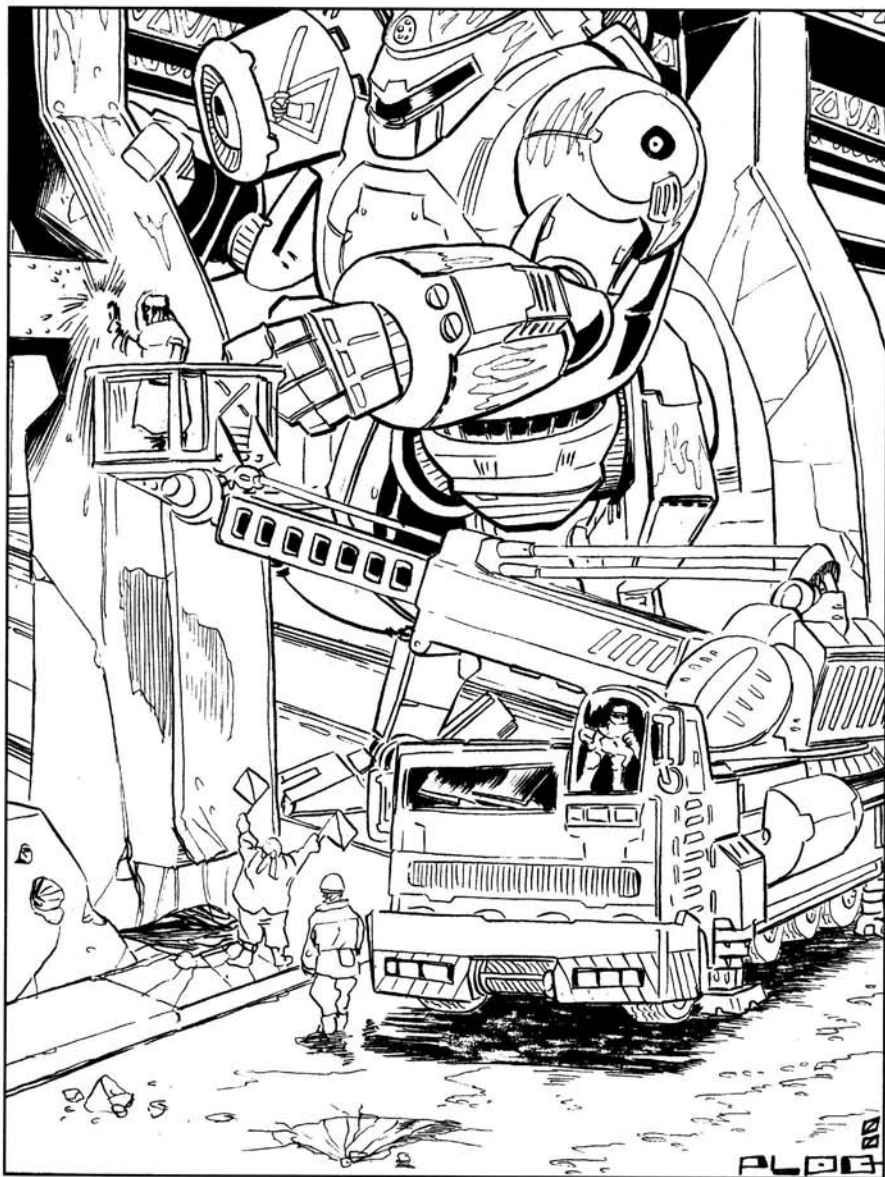
Han Chinese culture—language, arts, customs and mores—has always been among the brightest threads in the Capellan tapestry. Xin Sheng elevates things Chinese over all other cultural and social influences—in the Chancellor's own words, making the ways and heritage of old China "every Capellan's birthright." By explicitly linking Capellan identity with the culture from which his Liao ancestors sprang, Sun-Tzu is strengthening the psychological hold of the Liao dynasty over the Capellan people, as the embodiment of Chinese culture and virtues. So strongly emphasizing one way of life over others gives the people a sense of security and solidarity: they know

who they are and how they are meant to live. Unfortunately, the same emphasis risks turning the "other" into the enemy. Though widespread discrimination against non-Chinese Capellans remains relatively rare, scattered rumors and anecdotes suggest that it may be on the rise. There is also the potential for a backlash against the former citizens of break-away St. Ives, should the costs of its reabsorption become too great a burden.

The St. Ives Conflict

The reintegration of the St. Ives region is the element of Xin Sheng that currently touches the largest number of ordinary Capellan lives. Thus far, joy over the Confederation's victory and reunification with its "lost cousins" has blunted the economic dislocations of the fighting and subsequent reconstruction. The ferocity of many battles cut deep into several Capellan army units; priority given to rebuilding them means fewer resources available elsewhere. The former St. Ives border worlds saw particularly savage fighting, and the costs of reconstruction there are running high. Relatively untouched St. Ives planets promise to add considerably to the Confederation treasury, and Sun-Tzu is canny enough to let all his people share at least a little in the new wealth. It will take a few years for the gains to materialize, however, much less trickle down to the ordinary citizen.

Then there are the people of St. Ives themselves—some happy to rejoin their Capellan brethren, most resigned to it, many others unable to accept the loss of their independence. For the latter, "new birth" has meant the death of their freedom, mourned



all the more because they had it so briefly. The prospect of life under Confederation rule, with its rigid state controls and pervasive secret police, terrifies them. Many of them also find it inconceivable that "one of the crazy Liaos" will forgive them for having followed their beloved Duchess Candace thirty years ago. They believe a backlash is coming, but the restrictions of Capellan society make escaping it virtually impossible. Frightened, angry and grieving, their presence may spark unrest among the general Capellan population once the ecstasy of victory dies down.

For the moment, however, St. Ives is relatively calm. Duchess Candace and her family remain in power over the renamed St. Ives Commonality, a reassuring piece of continuity for many troubled citizens. The duchess has signaled her willingness to work with the central government for the good of her people, who currently need peace more than freedom. Given good faith on both sides and no unforeseen catastrophes, the reunion of St. Ives and its parent nation should proceed to the good of both.

STATE AND INDIVIDUAL

With its history of autocratic rule, intense fear of dissolution and tradition of loyalty to the Liao family bolstered by a powerful secret police force, the Capellan Confederation is often dismissed as the Inner Sphere's most repressive nation. In fact, though the Capellan state exercises considerable power over its citizens, those same citizens frequently enjoy an unexpected degree of personal freedom. The balance between state power and individual liberty is particularly tricky for Capellans to navigate, but personal liberty does exist in this apparently totalitarian society. So long as they do not challenge the existing social order, most ordinary Capellans have considerable leeway within it. Few would dream of disrupting it, having absorbed their society's prevailing attitudes through years of indoctrination. For most inclined to break the Capellan mold, the fearsome mystique of the Maskirovka serves as sufficient deterrent.

Defining Philosophies

Three philosophies more than any others define what it means to be a Capellan: the Korvin Doctrine, the Sarna Mandate and the Loric Creed. Capellan subjects learn these doctrines in some form from their first days in primary school, which begins at the age of five. Throughout each Capellan's eleven-year compulsory education, these defining philosophies are interpreted and reinforced in terms of loyalty to the Liao dynasty and to the Capellan nation.

The Korvin Doctrine, originated by Alana Korvin DeVall in the early years of human space exploration, is the oldest and most central of the doctrines that serve as the foundation of Capellan society. Korvin wrote eloquently of the need for balance between humanity's outward expansion in the universe and maintaining meaningful connections with our racial and social origins. To keep from splintering into ever more isolated and weaker elements, Korvin proposed that all humans identi-

fy with a greater humanity in which each individual serves the needs of a greater civilization. She also argued that the immense distances of space demand a central authority, whose task is to define greater humanity and reconcile different human values.

Though Korvin devised her doctrine long before the existence of any Capellan nation, later generations saw a unique Capellan link in her founding of two colonies—Sirius and Epsilon Eridani—in what would later become Capellan space. This "Capellan connection" made the Korvin Doctrine a perfect vehicle for Franco Liao to inspire personal and national loyalty to his infant Capellan Confederation. He and his successors equated the Capellan nation with Korvin's greater civilization, and the Capellan Chancellor with the central authority qualified to judge what was best for humanity. Under this interpretation, taught to generations of Capellan schoolchildren, the will of the Chancellor is equivalent to the good of humankind, and to challenge it is to threaten humanity's future. By extension, all Capellans partake of their Chancellor's prestigious position; if he or she is the ultimate arbiter of humanity's good, they are the embodiment of the greater civilization to which all human societies should rightly aspire. This mixture of pride and awe, all focused on the ruling Liao dynasty, powerfully reinforces the dominance of House Liao and the people's loyalty to it.

The Sarna Mandate, a founding precept of the militaristic Sarna Supremacy, became official Capellan doctrine during the reign of Jasmine Liao. The Sarna Mandate states that every society inevitably develops a military, scientific and political elite, and that this elite class is the only one truly capable of governing. This unique capacity justifies all actions the ruling elite may deem necessary for the survival of its people, culture or nation. In addition to providing a rationale for the continued authority of various political and military leaders—or their removal by the supreme authority, the Chancellor—the Sarna Mandate also supports the pervasive Capellan caste system.

The Loric Creed is the central philosophy of the short-lived Loric Order, founded by Major Kalvar Loric in 2672, and of the Warrior Houses that succeeded it. The Creed narrowly interprets the Sarna Mandate, emphasizing the role of the military elite above the rest of the ruling class. Kalvar Loric's dictums enshrine the solider—particularly the MechWarrior, prince among fighters—as the almost sacred defender of his people and his nation. Because they risk their lives on others' behalf, warriors are entitled to the highest respect. In turn, the warrior owes unshakable loyalty to the civilians he protects, the state that employs him in his high calling, and the ruler of that state as his commander-in-chief. The original Loric Order disbanded after twenty-five years, but its guiding philosophies remained. Colonel Hiritza Hikaru would use these same tenets in the late twenty-ninth century to create a blueprint for the famed Capellan Warrior Houses, elite military units akin to ancient orders of knighthood.

In addition to inculcating these defining ethics through public schooling, the Confederation ensures their presence in adult

life through philosophical examinars and courts of philosophical inquiry. Both have links to the Maskirovka, the Capellan secret police.

The Maskirovka

Created in 2396 by Chancellor Kurnath Liao, the Maskirovka arose from the remains of the Deimos, the intelligence-gathering arm of the Capellan Hegemony. Primarily concerned with military intelligence, the Maskirovka spied on foreign nations and spread misinformation about Capellan military capabilities. Chancellor Kurnath, however, also saw the Maskirovka as one of many tools for enhancing the power of the Chancellor's office. Though the organization's military duties initially outweighed its domestic ones, the Maskirovka always functioned as a means of tracking internal dissent. Several subsequent Chancellors expanded the agency's domestic scope until its two branches were virtually equal in power and importance.

Among Kurnath Liao's innovations were "philosophical examinars," government functionaries charged with fostering loyalty to the Chancellor through the Korvin Doctrine (and later the Sarna Mandate) taught in the public school system. Though nominally independent of the Maskirovka, the examinars received their funding through that agency and reported problems to Maskirovka superiors. Chancellor Calvin Liao, known to history as "Kalvin the Devourer," vastly expanded the examinars' authority. He empowered them to launch investigations of politically suspect citizens in every social class. As a venue for these witch hunts, Calvin established "courts of philosophical inquiry"—arenas for the public humiliation and destruction of anyone the Chancellor found inconvenient. Calvin's saner successor, Mica Liao, scaled back the examinars' power and attempted to put some integrity into the courts, but apparently did not consider eliminating either of these useful tools of control. They remain active to this day, and the mere knowledge of them serves to keep most potential troublemakers in line.

Militarily, the Maskirovka has proved its worth time and again, despite a few colossal blunders. The Confederation's acquisition of the BattleMech in 2456 was a Maskirovka coup, arguably the agency's proudest achievement. Its greatest failure came during the Fourth Succession War, when Maskirovka agents unknowingly vetted inaccurate information about triple-strength myomer presumably being developed at the New Avalon Institute of Science. Based on their recommendation, Chancellor Maximilian Liao ordered the BattleMechs of Warrior House Imarra equipped with the stolen technology. House Imarra's troops were on Sian then, charged with defending the capital against an expected Davion assault. When it came, the Davions sprung their trap. The myomer was bait, infected with a fatal flaw. The crippled Imarra 'Mechs and their pilots could only watch while the AFFS assault team rescued its master spy from the heart of the Chancellor's palace and then departed, leaving destruction in its wake. House Imarra did not recover

from the blow to its prestige until 3057, when it redeemed itself during the Liao-Marik Offensive.

Domestically, the Maskirovka has long been as ubiquitous a presence as the ISF of the Draconis Combine. Unlike the ISF, the Mask has never shown any tendencies toward kingmaking. Its members and leadership are solidly loyal to the ruling Chancellor, particularly to the current incumbent. Over the ten years of his reign, Sun-Tzu Liao has increased the Maskirovka's budget several times—first to finance deep-cover operations and terrorist activities in the Chaos March, most recently commensurate with the Mask's increased responsibilities in newly reclaimed territories. Awash in funding and enjoying its new prestige, the Maskirovka serves Sun-Tzu Liao to the best of its considerable ability. From the examinars to CCAF political officers to the green-coated agents of military intelligence and the thousands of faceless informers among the general population, the Maskirovka has eyes and ears everywhere within and in most places beyond the Confederation's borders. The courts of philosophical inquiry continue to operate, though less frequently than in Calvin Liao's day. They still find against the accused more often than not, on the theory that the innocent would do nothing to arouse suspicion in the first place. However, there is usually at least some merit to the allegations—rarely is the mere possession of coveted monies or property enough to see a citizen condemned. Citizens found to hold "incorrect views" face penalties ranging from loss of social position to heavy fines and property confiscation to prison time.

Personal Freedom: A Delicate Balance

The all-pervading ethics of service to the Capellan state and submission to the ruling elite, along with the looming shadow cast by the Maskirovka, at first glance portray the Confederation as a rigidly repressive society gripped in the Chancellor's iron hand. In practice, however, many Capellan citizens enjoy remarkable personal freedom. The degree to which any given citizen controls his or her own life depends not on the whim of the Chancellor, but on the character of the noble who rules the planet or star system where that citizen resides.

Though relatively small compared to its neighbors, the Capellan Confederation covers considerable interstellar distances over which no single ruler or central government can feasibly extend total control. As with other Inner Sphere states, the Chancellor and the government on Sian concern themselves primarily with statewide power and policy. Individual Capellan star systems are governed in the Chancellor's name by various ranks of lesser nobles, who generally run their fiefdoms as they see fit. The local ruler is expected to keep the peace; how he or she accomplishes this is the noble's own business. Regional, system-wide and planetary governments vary widely, from freewheeling bastions of enterprise to tightly controlled regimes reminiscent of ancient Asia's Bamboo Curtain. The worlds of Ares and Capella, respectively, represent these two extremes; most worlds fall somewhere between the two.

Ares, a commercial free port exempted from the tight trade restrictions of the early thirty-first century, has since developed into an entrepreneur's Mecca, with a degree of political freedom to match. Though no citizen dares openly challenge the wisdom of the Chancellor or the rulership of House Liao (assuming any were so inclined), debates in the Planetary Council are loud, often profane free-for-alls in which elected delegates from various cities and major companies speak their minds with unusual candor. Trade and labor regulations are similarly lax in order to promote a business-friendly climate. The planetary ruler, Lady Jasmine Dunbar, keeps a light hand on the reins of administration. So long as Ares continues to prosper, local political leaders may run things as they wish, obligated only to send Lady Jasmine regular political and economic reports. Maskirovka agents on Ares are familiar with local customs and demonstrate a fine understanding of the boundary between plain speaking and potential treason.

The planet Capella, equally in thrall to economic interests, is as different from Ares as night from day. Two major industries hold sway here—the Capellan Commonality Bank and Ceres Metals. The former came under the control of a loyalist minor mandrinn after the defection of Candace Liao, its former CEO; it remains a source of revenue for Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, though he does not manage its affairs personally.

The head of Ceres Metals is the ruler of the Capella system, Duke Benito Rivoli. A latter-day corporate baron in the mold of his iron-willed father, Kingston, Duke Rivoli runs his company and his world as a virtual autocrat. Believing that freedom in one area makes for discontent in others, the duke discourages most manifestations of free thinking. Everything from small business ventures to local arts festivals must be vetted by the Committee for Public Order, consisting of five upper-echelon Ceres officers and two members of the duke's family. Though the laws of the Capellan Concordat clearly forbid "any representative of the chief executive" to deprive a Capellan citizen of life or liberty without due process of law, Duke Rivoli maintains that he *is* the law on Capella and so may act as he wishes to preserve order and stability.

Whispers of Democracy

Even those Capellans governed by despots enjoy a little democracy, harking back to the Capellan Hegemony's earliest decades. A touch of that long-forgotten democratic tradition shows up in the office of planetary refractor and in the elected leadership of the Capellan caste system.

The office of refractor, created in response to the tyrannies of Chancellor Calvin Liao, exists in part to check the power of nobles who abuse their position. Each Capellan world elects its own refractor, who serves the local lord as the common people's representative. Under the Capellan Concordat, the refractor may act on behalf of any citizen accused of wrongdoing, and may demand a personal audience with the Prefectorate on Sian to present the defendant's case. Many refractors also serve as

the commanders of planetary militias, and can therefore resist orders to act against "troublesome" civilians. Finally, a refractor may try to curb a despotic planetary noble by appealing to the Diem, administrator of several star systems in a given region. If the Diem finds merit in the appeal, he or she can take steps to ameliorate the lesser noble's excesses.

Each caste's adult members similarly elect caste leaders. Part and parcel of Capellan society, the Capellan caste system is far more fluid than its counterpart in the Draconis Combine. Individuals may marry freely into other castes or even change castes with the caste leaders' permission. The system encompasses all levels of society below the nobility, dividing the people into seven categories based on the type of work they perform. Administrators and bureaucrats make up one caste, scientists and technicians another, various professions a third, medical professionals a fourth, artists and entertainers a fifth, and common laborers a sixth. Indentured laborers, known as servitors, comprise the lowest caste. Natives of newly conquered worlds, prisoners captured in raids, or Capellans who lost or never earned citizenship, servitors can theoretically work their way out of bondage, though in practice this seldom happens. Prisoners of war are the exception to this dismal reality; their term of service lasts for five years, after which they may apply for citizenship below noble rank. Regardless of a servitor's origin, his or her children may join any caste for which their abilities qualify them, and may earn full citizenship like any other Capellan.

Citizenship

Capellan citizenship is another avenue of personal liberty for those who earn it, though in an indirect way. Apart from the legal benefits enshrined in the Capellan Concordat, the process of earning the name of citizen reinforces a sense of individual worth along with the collective ideal. Making citizenship contingent on service to the state clearly emphasizes the state's paramount importance; citizenship is a privilege reserved for those who give something to the nation that nurtured them. At the same time, however, the newly minted citizen experiences a profound understanding of his or her personal value. His contribution alone won him the right to join the select company of the citizenry; he personally did something for his nation, which recognized and rewarded him by making him fully part of it.

This dual effect accounts for much of the average Capellan's fierce pride in his realm. He earned the right to call himself Capellan, and the Confederation would be the poorer without his efforts. A sense of making a difference, however small, sustains most Capellan citizens through many a hardship inflicted by fate or imposed by harsh overlords. It also makes acceptance of their society's many restrictions seem like a reasonable price to pay.

THE FREE WORLDS LEAGUE

A friend of mine who'd had one too many bottles of imported Timbiqui Dark in a smoky bar on Atrous once described the Free Worlds League as "the boiling pot of the Inner Sphere." He was looking for the phrase "melting pot," often used to describe the United States on old Terra. I think he got it right the first time. (In beer is truth, to mangle another famous quotation.)

For most of its history, the Free Worlds League has been at or close to a full boil, with no one knowing for sure when it might boil over. My uncle, Thomas Marik, is the first Captain-General to tame all the furious energy of the League's many different pieces, the first to make that energy work for us instead of against us. Quite an accomplishment for old Janos Marik's youngest boy, once so far from the League throne that they sent him off to ComStar. Just goes to prove that the universe is full of surprises.

We're a well-off bunch now, which helps quite a bit. It's harder to resent your neighbor for being different—or the central government for existing—when you've got plenty of food on the table, a solid roof over your head, decent schooling for your kids and the prospect of a fortune to be made. Even the folks not looking to make a bundle are better paid now than they've ever been, busy filling the demand for 'Mechs and weapons and tanks and armor and all manner of militarily useful items. Other things, too. Poor little Rasalhague buys food from us that it used to produce on worlds taken by the Clans. The Lyran Alliance lost a huge chunk of its manufacturing base in the Clan War; now it pays the League to make half a hundred things the Lyrans can't anymore. The Capellans are buying everything from timber to paving stones to the ingredients for concrete, all going to rebuild their "new" St. Ives Commonality. The last time we had this much money was the heyday of the first Star League, more than three hundred years ago. Some people are even comparing today's good times to the founding years of the Free Worlds League, when determination and a little luck could turn scraps of cash into a fortune overnight. (Or when you could lose your last shirt—but then, as now, no one likes to think about the losers.)

Atrous—where I go to play the court game, but only when I have to—is the perfect symbol of the boom times. Not too many decades ago, it was a wilderness backwater with a big capital city for the League central government. Nobles and other rich folks vacationed here, mostly at palatial estates. If you wanted to hunt giant bourneki for their auburn pelts, fish in clear mountain streams or just commune with unspoiled Nature, Atrous was the place. But then the boom got rolling, and a lot of people sold their real estate to big military contractors. A dozen years into the economic expansion, you can't throw a rock without hitting a 'Mech factory. The bournekis' forests have pretty

much been cleared, the mountain streams either choked with runoff or harnessed to provide power. I find I miss them, even though I welcome the prosperity that took their place. Materially, there's no question the local people are better off. The whole League is better off. But I can't help wondering what we might have lost in the process, that we won't even know is gone until it's too late to get it back.

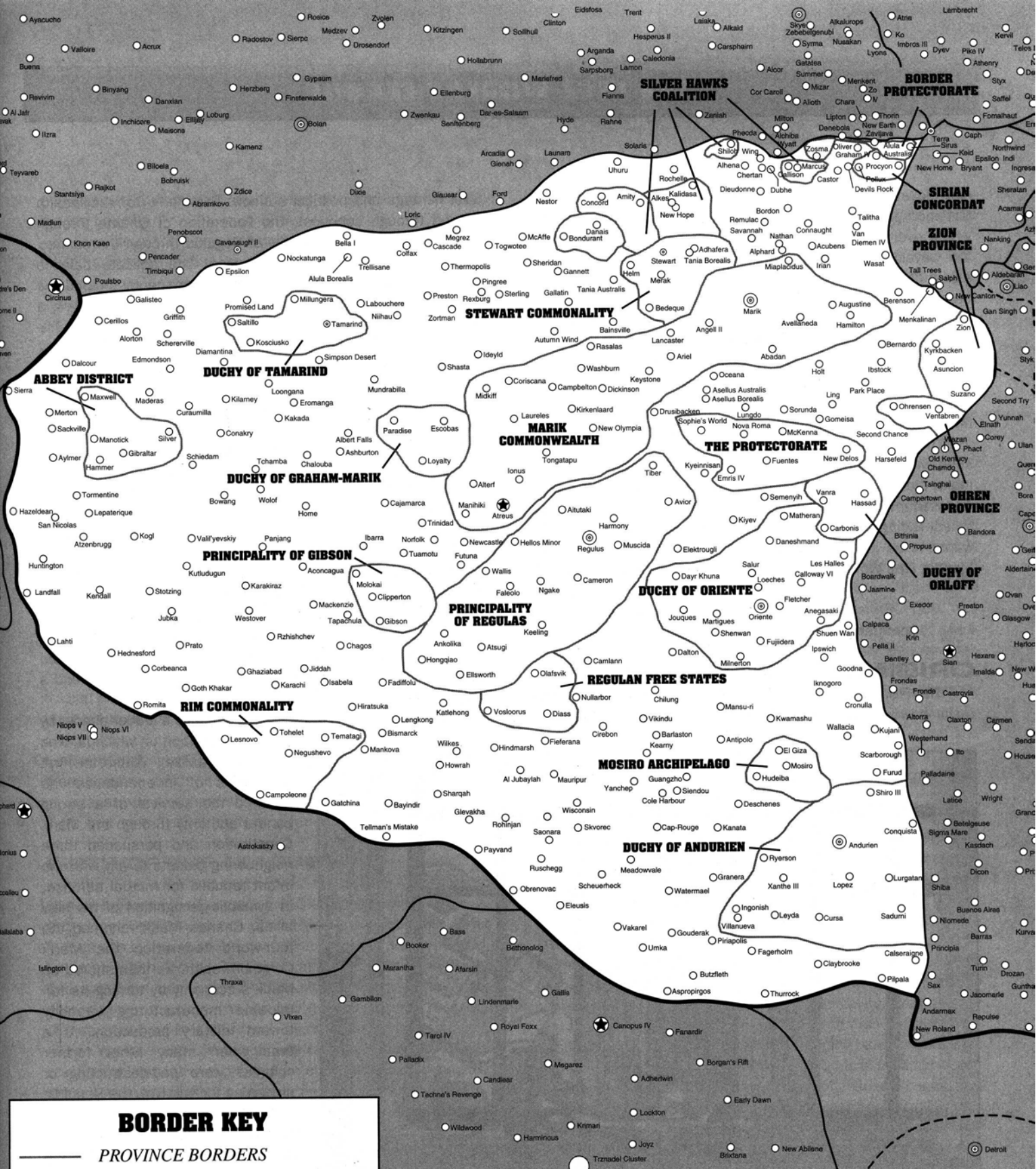
And then there's Sadurni, where my unit has been sitting since 3047. I started there as a captain in the Second Legionnaires BattleMech regiment, fresh out of military school and itching for action. Now I'm the unit's commanding officer, and we still haven't seen much.

Sadurni is that kind of place. You'd hardly guess the League fought three wars with the Capellan Confederation over Sadurni and its sister planets in the Duchy of Andurien. The only tip-offs to that ancient history are the big Asian populations—with the Chinese coming second to the Indians—and occasional pro-Liao demonstrations invariably attended by less than a hundred people.

(The leading rabble-rouser always seems to speak the local dialect like he learned it off a language tape, and you can tell just by listening that his heart's not in it.)

More recent political history is closer to the surface. There may not be many pro-Liaoists anymore, but notions of independence have a long history in this part of space. My guess is, the natives of Andurien got tired of being fought over and figured they'd do better without any Great House sticking its fat nose in their business. Not many Anduriens feel like leaving nowadays, with the League doing so well. But there are those who mutter about it in the corners of the old Humphreys ducal palace (renamed an unassuming "Government House" since the death of old Duchess Catherine Humphreys after the Andurien Crisis of the 3030s). That's why the Second is here—to remind ambitious politicians who's in charge. I think we've done that job well, and I find I don't grudge being so far from the center of things. I tried politics once when I was young and stupid, and didn't much care for the outcome. So I do my work here—on this world two hops from the Confederation and the Periphery—and when we're not chasing off pirates, I get to know the place. So far, I've found the best Indian restaurant in known space, learned how to cook Korean delicacies from a wizened old woman in a town called Little Seoul, and swum in the River Narmada (which the natives of the southern continent sometimes call a goddess, and swear by for bringing you your true love). Life is slow-paced, easy, well adapted to the rhythm of days with a three-hour hot spell in the middle and a cool twilight that lasts half of forever. The nouveau riche of Atrous would hate it.





BORDER KEY

— PROVINCE BORDERS

FREE WORLDS LEAGUE

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LEGEND

8 PARSECS



40 PARSECS OR 130.4 LIGHT YEARS

SCALE: 1/8 INCH = 1 PARSEC = 3.26 LIGHT YEARS = 19,164,277,860,000 STATUTE MILES

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS
FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES USE 9 PARSECS = 29.34 LY

I love it. Nobody's stinking rich here, but there aren't many dirt-poor people, either. The cities are mostly small towns, where everyone knows everyone else and no one gets left by the wayside. The Second fits in well here, barring the occasional "Mariks go home" scrawled in red paint across a sun-baked wall of yellowish local stone. Of course, I can't deny a certain affection for Atreus as well—even in its new incarnation, with self-made bourgeois in snappy suits clogging the streets and invading the best watering holes. I know Atreus's capital city best, and the influx of new money hasn't changed it much. Made it a little busier, maybe—but the capital always did have a liveliness all its own.

In some ways, Atreus is the face of the new League: brimming with energy and drive, crammed with hopefuls eager to make their mark in a nation buoyed by new unity and strength. And Sadurni is the old League, still with us beneath the boom times—going its own way, leaving its neighbors alone as it wants to be left alone. The greatest achievement of Thomas Marik's Free Worlds League is that it has room enough for both.

— Colonel Corinne Marik
Commanding Officer, Second Free Worlds Legionnaires

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

The Free Worlds League grew from a loose union of three major powers, each markedly different in ethnic makeup, cul-

tural heritage and political outlook. The Marik Commonwealth formed through conquest, the Federation of Oriente through diplomacy and the Principality of Regulus through the connections between its merchant princes. The delicate balance between these three founding states permanently shaped the politics and character of the Free Worlds League, creating a nation whose diversity gave it unmatched vitality, but also frequently threatened to tear it apart.

The Marik Commonwealth was born in 2238, when Terran Alliance senator Charles Marik declared his homeworld independent of the bitterly polarized Alliance government. The planet Marik, settled and developed for mining operations in the mid twenty-second century, belonged to a wealthy family of East European origin from whom it took its name. By the time Charles rechristened it the Republic of Marik, this mining colony had grown into a thriving center for manufacturing and trade. Independence was a heady prospect, but also a frightening one. The Alliance's shift toward isolationism threatened to disrupt Terran and colonial markets for Marik ores, minerals and manufactured goods. Trade ties could be forged anew, but only through the agency of a strong central government. The people of Marik turned for guidance where they always had—to the Marik family, whose vast fortune and talent for leadership had kept them in a prominent position throughout a century and a half of social change.

Charles Marik became the new republic's leader almost by default, a position on which he was swift to capitalize. Within the first five years of independence, he ensured the survival of a strong central authority through the Marik Constitution and persuaded three neighboring planets to ally with the infant republic for mutual defense. In symbolic recognition of his new allies, Charles Marik renamed the four-world federation the Marik Commonwealth. He then shored up Marik's economy by turning its formidable manufacturing capacity toward military production. At a time when many other former colonies were self-destructing or struggling for survival, the Republic of Marik was building an army—not merely for defense, but also for conquest. Between 2249 and 2271, Charles Marik and his two sons took control of twenty worlds, extending their territory sixty light-years from the edge of Terran Alliance space. Through the military acumen that achieved this success, the Marik family would play



an increasingly dominant role in what would become the Free Worlds League.

Like the Marik Commonwealth, the Federation of Oriente owed its beginnings to a declaration of planetary independence by a former Terran Alliance senator. In 2241, the famous statesman Tomàs Allison took his homeworld of Oriente out of the shrinking Terran fold and began to forge diplomatic ties with several neighboring worlds. Over the next three decades, Oriente expanded its web of alliances across twenty planets. Oriente's original settlers were a polyglot collection of Terran nationalities united by mutual devotion to progressive ideas in politics, science and the arts. By the first year of its independence, the planet had developed into a bastion of scientific and artistic achievement. Highly educated and cosmopolitan in outlook, the people of Oriente—world and Federation—were determined to preserve their freedom and make their mark on humanity's emerging interstellar society.

The Principality of Regulus grew from trade contacts between several rimward Terran colonies, centered on the five-planet mini-empire of the wealthy Selaj family. Among the earliest emigrants to what were then the rimward worlds, the Indian-born Selajes soon dominated almost every business in the region. When the Terran Alliance began its long, painful collapse in the mid twenty-third century, the heads of the Selaj trading conglomerate lost no time consolidating power over their client worlds. Jittery at the loss of their Terran lifeline and concerned with their own survival, a dozen planets in the Selaj trading network gladly agreed to a political union that would give them both the goods the Selaj could deliver and the protection of Selaj armed merchant ships. By 2270, the Selaj empire had expanded from five worlds to seventeen.

BIRTH OF THE LEAGUE

The Free Worlds League was the brainchild of Tomàs Allison, leader of the Federation of Oriente. As the 2260s drew to a close, Oriente was one of three emerging multi-world confederations in its region of space. The other two were the Marik Commonwealth and the Principality of Regulus. All three realms had spent the past several years slowly expanding their borders, edging ever closer to one another's territories. A scholar of history and a farsighted man, Allison realized that sooner or later, Oriente would clash with one of these neighboring powers. The only hope for avoiding a potentially ruinous war was to forge a mutually profitable alliance first.

Other considerations played a role in Allison's decision as well. The Terran Alliance had limped along for more than seven decades after the shakeup of 2237, but its demise as a political power was only a matter of time. By the 2260s, it was clear to Allison that the Alliance government was dying. He was convinced that its successor would be a military regime, given the status of the Alliance Global Militia as one of the few Terran institutions not discredited by shady backroom dealing. Any new Terran government would need to consolidate its power; what better way to do so than to take back former colonies?

Against the large and well-equipped AGM, the smaller militaries of independent worlds could not hope to prevail alone. Union seemed the best hope for survival.

The Marik Commonwealth, with its sizable territory and strong military, made an excellent prospective ally. The Principality of Regulus offered distinct advantages as well, with its robust economy and large, armed trading fleet. Blending Marik's military might and Regulus' economic strength with Oriente's diplomatic skills promised to make an unbeatable combination on all three fronts. In 2266, Allison sent his most trusted envoy to the leaders of the neighboring powers with a proposal to form a federation.

Sir George Humphreys of New Delos was a proud upholder of his family's long tradition of public service. A lifetime spent in politics had honed his natural eloquence and given him unmatched skill at the art of the deal. When Tomàs Allison approached him with the framework for the fledgling Free Worlds League, Humphreys gladly agreed to back it on Allison's behalf. After five years of negotiations, Humphreys brought Detlev Marik and Raju Selaj together with Tomàs Allison for a pivotal conference on Oriente in 2271. Over the next four months, the three leaders hammered out the Treaty of Marik that created the Free Worlds League. The treaty granted internal autonomy to the founding states, gave the leader of each a prominent role in the League-wide government and provided for the appointment of an overall military leader—a Captain-General—in times of crisis. In keeping with Allison's vision of a profit-making as well as a defensive enterprise, political representation was allotted according to economic strength rather than population.

The Treaty of Marik was written down, argued over, rewritten, amended, nearly thrown out and rewritten yet again in English, the one language spoken by all three heads of state. The wrangling and the choice of language both hinted at a feature of the Free Worlds League that would become a leading source of trouble over the centuries. The three nations that made up the early League represented a dazzling array of different peoples and cultures: Indian, Pakistani, Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak, Mongolian, Kazhak, Uzbek, Spanish, Italian, Basque and English, just to name a few. Many of these different populations spoke only their own tongues and had little understanding of their neighbors, linguistically or otherwise. The three founding states were also markedly different in political structure: the Marik Commonwealth military-oriented with a powerful (though not absolute) central government, the Principality of Regulus an oligarchy controlled by a small number of wealthy families, and Oriente a British-style parliamentary democracy. All these differences were a source of tremendous vitality for the new nation, but also frequently bogged down the League government in squabbling over where the line fell between federal authority and provincial autonomy. The desire to be left alone, a social force in almost every former Terran colony, had extra resonance in the Free Worlds League, where individual regions jealously guarded their traditions and prerogatives against "outsiders" who could not understand them.

More than once in the League's history, cultural and political tensions led to threats of secession or even total collapse. The League survived by finding a precarious balance between these potentially opposing forces—a balance forged by the knowledge that none of its component parts could prosper half so well alone as they could together.

BOOMS AND BUSTS

Over the next century, the Free Worlds League saw dazzling growth in size and wealth. From the 2270s through the 2290s, several worlds and small federations near League space joined the League for protection against pirates and hostile neighbors. The League government actually fostered piracy on occasion, granting letters of marque to its free traders so that their activities might persuade a reluctant neighboring power. This era of largely peaceful expansion came to an abrupt end in 2293, when the six worlds of the Stewart Commonality refused the League's invitation to join. The Commonality bordered the Marik Commonwealth, and no Marik leader cared to see a fledgling military dictatorship grow to power on their doorstep. At the behest of Commonwealth representatives in Parliament, the League responded to the Stewart rebuff with a declaration of war.

Impressed by the Marik clan's military gifts, Parliament chose Juliano Marik as its first Captain-General. Marik rose magnificently to the occasion. Leading a fleet into the Stewart system, he made short work of its defenses. Within weeks, the League banner flew over all six Stewart worlds. Just over twenty years later, Juliano Marik returned to the Captain-Generalcy when the formation of the Terran Hegemony threw the League into a panic. Marik accurately sized up the Hegemony as too powerful for the League to confront; even if the League armies won, the cost of the victory would render it moot. While nervous Ministers of Parliament covered their fears with loud demands for war, Marik sent James Humphreys to negotiate secretly with Hegemony leader James McKenna. McKenna had any number of targets at which to point his Hegemony Armed Forces; Marik wanted to ensure that no League planets would be among them. After receiving assurances that the HAF would not invade League space, Humphreys signed the Treaty of Terra. In exchange for McKenna's pledge to turn the Hegemony military on worlds in the neighboring Dieron Federation, the League agreed to allow Hegemony vessels trading rights in League territory.

With the threat of Hegemony invasion removed, the Free Worlds League prospered. The boom of the mid-twenty-fourth century boosted the League economy, sending it spinning into the stratosphere; fortunes were made and lost overnight, with whole planets changing hands on occasion. The average citizen saw higher wages, more available goods, and greater financial comfort than the League has known since. Successful military endeavors added to the general atmosphere of euphoria. Between 2366 and 2369, the League army took the water-rich worlds of Andurien, Berenson, Zion, Shiro and Hassad from the fledgling Capellan Confederation. Though these systems changed hands several times over the ensuing decade, the

League won them back in the early 2390s for what both sides assumed was the final time.

Unfortunately for the League, Chancellor Kurnath Liao had other ideas. Ascending to the Capellan throne in 2395, Kurnath was determined to win back the Andurien worlds no matter what the cost. He launched an all-out assault on Andurien in 2398, the first blow in a bitter conflict that would go down in history as the start of the Age of War. From 2398 until the formation of the Star League in the mid twenty-sixth century, the League and other Inner Sphere powers found themselves embroiled in war after war, scarring planets and straining economies with little concrete gain to any combatant. The League economy, like many others, was a casualty of the fighting. After an initial boost, the constant warfare slowly drained the League treasury until the roaring good times were a distant memory.

The Andurien conflict shaped the League in another way as well, by bringing the Marik family a step closer to political dominance of it. Captain-General Peter Marik, appointed in 2396 to fight the brewing First Andurien War, won the disputed systems for the Free Worlds League after six years of bloody conflict. Between 2404 and 2413, Peter capitalized on his hero's status among the public to continue League military gains at the expense of the Capellans and a new rival, the Lyrans Commonwealth—much to the unease of parliament, whose members were divided over the wisdom of ceding control over the military to an unelected officer. In 2416, the Lyrans state retaliated by attempting to seize the League world of Dieudonne. Though the League army drove off the attackers, parliament's military oversight committee ordered the Captain-General to seek an armistice. Peter Marik defied the order, seizing several Lyrans worlds before finally ending his campaign in 2418. An angry parliament struck back with the War Powers Act, which severely limited the Captain-General's authority.

Two years later, war with the Lyrans resumed. To parliament's dismay, Peter Marik refused to serve as Captain-General under the constraints of the War Powers Act. The Captain-Generalcy went to Joseph Stewart, a competent but uninspired officer with little experience in interstellar warfare. The League lost two planets to the Lyrans before attacks on Lyrans territory by the Draconis Combine turned the Commonwealth's attentions elsewhere. Hostilities flared anew in 2427, costing the League three more planets. Peter Marik had fallen to an assassin five years before, and Joseph Stewart was proving a disastrous choice as the League's war leader. Desperate to avoid more losses, parliament begged Peter's son Terrence to serve as Captain-General. At Terrence's demand, the terrified MPs repealed the War Powers Act. His powers no longer fettered by parliament, Terrence Marik fought the Lyrans to a standstill over the next fourteen years. He could not dislodge them from the captured planets of Bolan and Kamenz, however. Disillusioned by that failure, he resigned the Captain-Generalcy to his brother Peter in 2441. The second Peter Marik liberated the two disputed worlds and captured two more Lyrans planets before halting his offensive in 2446.

The successes of Terrence and Peter Marik II loomed even larger against the failures of Joseph Stewart, whom rumors accused of leading the League to utter disaster. In truth, Stewart had done the League relatively minor damage—but to a realm unused to defeat, the loss of five planets was a bitter pill. The Marik brothers' rout of the Lyran invaders confirmed in the public mind an already strong tendency to equate the Marik name with military success. Though the Captain-Generalcy would not become an official Marik sinecure until the Free Worlds joined the Star League in 2556, unofficially the post belonged to House Marik from the 2430s onward. The increasing importance of military conquest to the League's economic health further heightened Marik power. Over the ensuing years, Marik political prominence and military acumen would turn the League's focus from mercantile ventures to military ones.

HOUSE MARIK AND THE SUCCESSION WARS

Albert Marik, hero of the Second and Third Andurien wars, brought the Free Worlds League into the Star League in 2556. By 2575, the infant Star League had launched a massive assault on the Periphery, determined to unite all humanity at any cost. Albert Marik's daughter Marion served ably as Captain-General throughout the Reunification War, conquering the Magistracy of Canopus in a long and hard-fought campaign. The conquest of Canopus was the last external conflict fought by Free Worlds armies until the end of the first Star League era.

For better than the next century and a half, Marion's successors would contend with occasionally bitter internal troubles. Despite an early recession in the 2620s and the outbreak of a nasty civil war in the first half of the twenty-eighth century, the Free Worlds League generally prospered during the time of the first Star League. The realm's greatest trials did not begin until the final two decades of the twenty-eighth century, when the Star League's collapse and the brutal wars that followed it shattered the Free Worlds' economic base. The Free Worlds League managed to hold on to most of its territory throughout the long years of the Succession Wars, but internal quarrels frequently divided its military and kept it from seriously damaging its rivals. In more than one instance, the Free Worlds' fault lines allowed rival nations to cut deep into League territory. Regaining this lost ground cost the Free Worlds League incalculable amounts of money and blood that came near to mortgaging its future.

First Succession War: Oriente Rebels

The peace of the Star League had begun to erode years before the final end, when First Lord Simon Cameron's untimely death provoked political power plays and the build-up of personal militias by the Inner Sphere's various House Lords. The departure of the Star League Defense Force for unknown space in 2784 removed the last, fragile check on the House Lords' ambitions. Determined to triumph in the coming battles, Captain-General Kenyon Marik persuaded a panicky parliament

to pass Resolution 288, which granted the Captain-General wide-ranging discretionary powers "for the duration of the crisis." As the Captain-General rather than parliament decided when a particular crisis was over, Resolution 288 essentially gave the holder of that office open-ended control over the Free Worlds League military.

Initially, most Free Worlds member-states supported the new legislation. Kenyon Marik's success in capturing several Terran Hegemony planets and Star League supply depots seemed to confirm the wisdom of turning over so much power to the military men. By 2787, the Free Worlds army had grabbed all it could of former Hegemony territory, and so Kenyon attacked a new target: the Capellan Confederation. The first wave brought the Free Worlds two planets and few casualties against fragmentary Capellan resistance. Then came the Confederation assault on New Delos, a savage attack that threw the Ares Conventions to the wind and killed twenty thousand Free Worlds civilians. Another setback came in 2793, when a surge of unexpected strength by Confederation forces stopped the Marik invasion cold over the Capellan world of Anegasaki. Balked in Capellan space, Kenyon Marik turned his sights toward the Lyran Commonwealth. His attempt to capture Hesperus II, site of a massive Lyran BattleMech facility, ended in a rout that cost the Free Worlds Navy several of its best battlecruisers. As the First Succession War dragged on with no end in sight, this string of failures came to outweigh the earlier gains. More than one member of parliament began to regret the hasty passage of Resolution 288, and regional opposition to the Captain-General's authority slowly grew.

Kenyon's son Thaddeus succeeded him in 2804, with the "crisis" of the First Succession War still raging. After forty-one years under Resolution 288 and the Free Worlds League no closer to either dominance or peace, its political leaders were beginning to chafe at House Marik's authority. Thaddeus gave them no chance to repeal the resolution, however. Upon learning of his father's death, he returned to the League capital of Atreus with a 'Mech battalion at his back, which he deployed around the parliament building. Balking MPs swiftly reconsidered their opposition to reaffirming Resolution 288, and Thaddeus Marik began his term with the same absolute power that had belonged to his predecessor. When Duke Carter Allison of Oriente challenged the statute's renewal, Thaddeus withdrew all military units from the duchy. The Capellan Confederation, still smarting from its recent losses to the League, invaded Oriente and came close to capturing the Oriente system before Duke Allison changed his mind. With Oriente's capitulation, the Captain-General sent in the troops and swiftly repulsed the Capellans.

The duchy's troubles, however, were far from over. The next Captain-General would plunge Oriente and the entire League into a crisis so dire that it threatened the nation's existence.

The ComStar War

The year 2821 saw a lull in fighting across the Inner Sphere as the exhausted major combatants of the First

Succession War attempted to regroup and rebuild. Their industrial bases shattered and many of their worlds laid to waste, the so-called Successor States were in no condition to keep the war going. For nearly a decade, the peace of battle fatigue prevailed. Captain-General Charles Marik used the time to rebuild his depleted military resources, convinced that the next war was just around the corner. Events were to prove him right, but would also teach the Free Worlds League an expensive lesson in the follies of financing warfare to the exclusion of all else.

Throughout the 2820s, MPs from Oriente and the Sirian Concordat agitated for major reconstruction efforts in their war-torn provinces. Charles refused. Instead, every available resource went to the military or war-related industries. In 2825, Charles even issued an executive order authorizing the Captain-General to collect fines from the prosecution of smugglers. The Duke of Oriente, mindful of the painful lesson learned by his predecessor, managed to keep Oriente's MPs toeing a loyalist line. The Sirian representatives were less skittish, and before long became the figureheads of an increasingly vocal opposition bloc. The Principality of Regulus, whose leaders had long envied Marik control of the military, took advantage of the situation to build an anti-Marik power base among parliament's dissenters.

The Regulans' opportunity came in 2837, midway through the Second Succession War. The Free Worlds League had launched that conflict in 2830, when ComStar Adept Jeanette Marik leaked intelligence of a planned Lyran attack to the Captain-General. Charles responded with a preemptive strike that caught the Lyran napping. Over the next six years, the Free Worlds League military won several impressive victories against the Lyran and the Capellan Confederation. By 2836, however, the League had suffered major setbacks as well. Charles suspected ComStar of leaking troop movements to the League's enemies, and in 2837 uncovered what he believed was incontrovertible proof. Enraged, he destroyed ComStar's Oriente HPG station. ComStar retaliated by placing the entire League under communications interdict.

With no way to direct his troops across the light-years of space, Charles soon saw his offensives bogged down and his units routed. Mounting League losses provoked a firestorm of criticism in parliament, which the leaders of Regulus swiftly exploited. Hector Lombard, Finance Minister and a native of the Regular province, convinced parliament in 2838 to deny Charles Marik's increasingly urgent requests for reinforcements, supplies and funding. Bereft of extra troops and critical spare parts, Charles's forces lost pivotal battles for the worlds of Shiloh and Van Diemen IV. The latter debacle cost the League military dearly. Had the other four Successor States not been battling each other over League spoils, the Free Worlds League might have been torn to shreds.

Even after Charles capitulated to ComStar in late 2838, parliament continued to deny funds for his campaigns. Hector Lombard publicly blamed "the imperial airs of the Mariks" for the catastrophes of the ComStar War and began agitating for the repeal of Resolution 288. By 2841, however, the momentum of

the war turned the political tide in Charles's favor. The losses of Danaïs in that year and Asunción the year before brought Lyran and Capellan invasion forces one step closer to the planet Irian, site of the League's major BattleMech production facility. The capture of this strategically vital installation, or even major damage to it, could potentially cripple the already faltering League military. With the real possibility of the League's destruction staring them in the face, the opposition in parliament collapsed. When a Lyran invasion force landed on Irian in 2842, parliament voted overwhelmingly to restore full military funding. Charles recouped many of the League's losses over the next three years, but at a high price. Several planets remained in enemy hands, and the ravages of war had weakened the League's economy to a shadow of its former strength.

Home Defense: The Rise of Regional Power

The brief tenure of Marie Marik, who became Captain-General in 2873, set the stage for further fragmentation of the League along regional lines. As high-handed as her grandfather Charles, Marie alienated the powerful dukes of Andurien and Orloff by ordering military forces from their respective duchies to defend worlds taken from the Lyran Commonwealth in the late 2860s. Despite Marie's best efforts, the Commonwealth recaptured its possessions after a hard-fought offensive that cost the Orloff and Andurien defenders dearly. The losses fanned growing resentment of the Captain-General among regional leaders, who wanted more than anything to protect their own territories.

Ten years later, the accession of Elisabeth Marik to the Captain-Generalcy gave those regional leaders a chance to assert long-coveted power over their own militaries. A ComStar acolyte since the age of eighteen, Elisabeth had little experience in waging war but a formidable talent for political bargaining. She devoted the early years of her reign to cementing good relations with parliament, convinced that the Free Worlds League could not afford open rifts between the two segments of its government. Initially, her efforts paid off. From the 2880s through the early years of the thirtieth century, Elisabeth Marik enjoyed greater popularity in parliament than almost any previous Captain-General. These warm relations enabled Elisabeth to embark on several military ventures against the Capellan and Lyran states, and contributed greatly to the ventures' success.

Between 2901 and 2910, Free Worlds military units from several provinces—among them Andurien, Orloff and the Border Protectorate—made impressive strikes deep into the Capellan Confederation. These raids gained the League no worlds, but kept the Capellan armed forces busy enough to launch no attacks of their own on League border planets. The leaders of the three provinces contributing the largest armed contingents generally backed the effort, but as the campaigns went on, they and several fellow MPs began to wonder if increasingly heavy conscription was leaving their homeworlds vulnerable to attack. The concerned representatives drafted the Home Defense Act, a vaguely worded proclamation with potentially explosive impli-

cations. The Act gave any province designated by parliament as "in immediate danger of attack" the right to retain up to seventy-five percent of its armed forces as garrison troops.

Elisabeth Marik's own harmonious relations with parliament blinded her to the possible consequences of allowing the Act to pass. In fact, she campaigned actively for what she considered a minor concession. Later Captain-Generals, however, would come to curse the Home Defense Act as a crippling obstacle to their authority. Time and again in the decades to come, regional leaders used the Act to hamstring Captain-Generals with whose policies they disagreed. The Balkanization of military authority kept the League from making any substantial gains in territory over the next century, and occasionally left it vulnerable to enemy assault. The worst losses came during the tenure of Stephan Marik, when the League world of Callison fell to a Lyran assault and a Capellan strike force destroyed a major new BattleMech factory on Irian. Meanwhile, Stephan's deliberate withholding of military aid from those he considered his enemies brought the power struggle between parliament and the Captain-General into the political as well as the military arena.

Civil War

Stephan Marik's son Janos, who became Captain-General in 2991, would reap the bitterest fruits of the thirtieth century's political and military divisions. Expensive and unsuccessful military actions had left the League's economy even more battered; several planets along the Capellan and Lyran borders had suffered retaliatory raids; and the political warfare between Stephan and parliament had confirmed the inherent tyranny of centralized authority in the minds of some regional leaders. All these rifts were ripe for exploitation by Anton Marik, Janos's brilliant and unscrupulous brother. Made Duke of Procyon and overall commander of the entire Capellan front by an unsuspecting Janos in 3002, Anton spent the next twelve years consolidating a formidable power base.

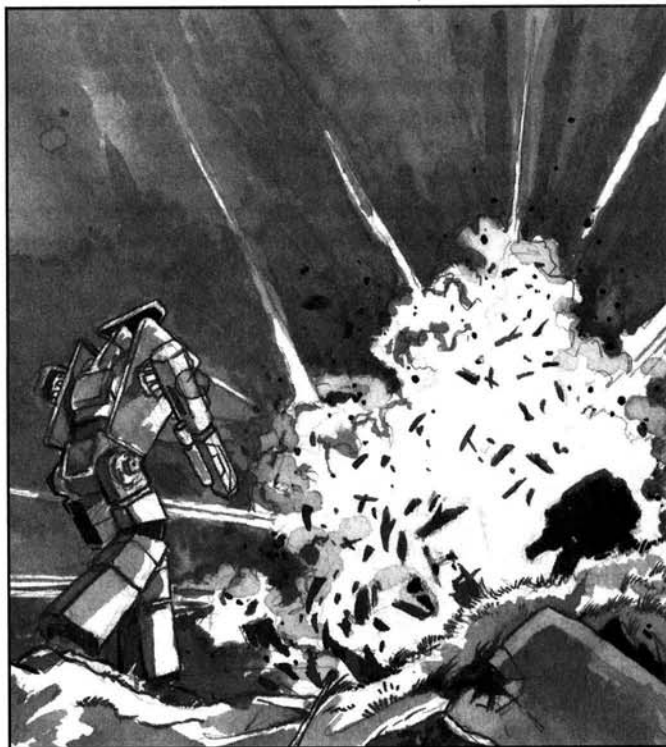
In 3014, Anton and his troops declared open revolt against "the mad tyrant" Janos. After more than a decade of military reverses and the summary execution of one scapegoat general during a disastrous Lyran campaign, the label seemed appropriate to a sizable section of the League's population. Anton's rebellion found supporters among more than a few regional dukes and governors, some of whom evidently believed that Anton intended to repeal Resolution 288. Almost a quarter of the League's provinces joined the revolt, most of them smaller regions hoping to increase their political clout. Larger bastions of anti-Marik sentiment, such as the Duchy of Andurien and the Principality of Regulus, preferred to let the two Mariks destroy each other. Andurien and Regulus remained neutral, with Regulus shifting to back Janos Marik in late 3014. In the end, Janos and the Loyalists prevailed. The civil war ended in a spasm of violence less than a year after it began, when the mercenary unit Wolf's Dragoons killed Anton and a large contingent of his troops to avenge Anton's slaying of their commanding officer's brother.

The war's bitter divisions, however, remained. Though Janos granted amnesty to surviving former rebel units, resentments lingered between those units and many Loyalist commands. Political and regional rivalries frequently fed on each other, further fragmenting the League military. On paper, the League and its army were both united after ten months of vicious fighting. In practice, neither would come close to regaining true unity until the reign of Thomas Marik, still twenty years in the future.

The lingering effects of civil strife and further impoverishment of the League treasury left the Free Worlds military virtually impotent during the Fourth Succession War, launched by Hanse Davion of the Federated Suns in 3028. The preoccupation of the allied Lyran-Davion nations with other enemies kept the League from major losses, but neither did it make any gains. Technically allied with the Capellan Confederation and the Draconis Combine under the Concord of Kapteyn, the League was too weak militarily to offer either of those nations even token support. This humiliating state of affairs further eroded Janos Marik's standing in parliament, which was already waning as memory of the civil war receded. Marik himself had turned increasingly morose and paranoid since Anton's betrayal, and his behavior only widened the political rift. The deteriorating situation made a crisis inevitable. When it came, it proved the catalyst for the faltering League's renaissance.

THE ANDURIEN CRISIS

By the end of the Fourth Succession War, Janos Marik's political standing had sunk so low that Derrick Cameron-Jones,



MP for the Principality of Regulus, was actually drafting legislation to remove Marik from power. Before Cameron-Jones could bring his bill to the floor, however, events overtook him. In September of 3030, mere months after the end of the Fourth Succession War, the Duchy of Andurien seceded from the Free Worlds League. In concert with the Magistracy of Canopus, a Periphery realm that bordered the League and the Capellan Confederation, Andurien troops launched a furious assault on Capellan territory. These drastic events sent shock waves throughout the Free Worlds League. For all its many internal squabbles, no province had ever left the League before, let alone allied itself with a foreign power in a major military venture. His opposition suddenly uncertain, Janos pressured a nervous parliament into passing the Internal Emergency Act of 3030, which stripped most minor provinces of their sovereignty "for the duration of the emergency." Two of the most powerful regions were specifically exempted from the Act—the Duchy of Oriente for its long-standing loyalty to House Marik, and the Principality of Regulus because no one wanted another major province leaving the fold. Several individual planets rejected the Act and followed Andurien's example, but the tightening of central authority kept the League essentially intact.

Less than a month after the Act's passage, Janos Marik suffered a debilitating stroke. His designated regent, Thomas Marik, was serving as a ComStar acolyte light-years away. In Thomas' absence, his elder brother Duggan and his cousin Duncan both claimed the Captain-Generalcy. Warned of the brewing power struggle by Duke Halas of Oriente, Thomas swiftly traveled to Atreus and claimed his rightful post. For four years, Thomas ruled the League in his father's name, rebuilding shattered ties with parliament and consolidating his hold on power. He made no major military move against Andurien, instead waiting for Capellan resistance to break the Andurien-Capellan alliance. Capellan troops drove out the Andurien invaders in 3035, mere weeks before Janos Marik's near-miraculous recovery. The Andurien drama, however, was far from finished.

On 1 June 3035, a bomb went off during a high-level strategy meeting about the Andurien situation. The attack appeared to have killed everyone in the briefing room save for Duncan Marik, who had been conveniently called away minutes before the blast. The Captain-General and his two sons, Duggan and Thomas, were assumed among the dead. Duncan swiftly proclaimed himself Captain-General and declared war on Andurien, whose separatist partisans he blamed for the ugly deed. Fired by widespread fury at such a cowardly act of terrorism, loyal League troops conducted resoundingly successful initial assaults on the rebel duchy. As they moved deeper into Andurien, however, they met fierce resistance. By late November of 3036, Duncan's offensive was hopelessly bogged down. With its military demoralized and a jittery parliament on the edge of breaking down, the Free Worlds League came face to face with its worst nightmare: total dissolution.

Deliverance came in early December, when Thomas Marik arrived on Atreus and appeared before a stunned parliament.

Seriously wounded by the bomb that had killed his father and brother, Thomas had been spirited out of the chamber of death to spend several months recovering under the aegis of ComStar. parliament greeted his reappearance with delirious joy, particularly those MPs who had suspected Duncan's hand in the bomb attack. The assembly immediately threw its weight behind Thomas, stranding Duncan in the field with vastly diminished authority. The League was fortunately spared an outright civil war when Duncan died in 3037, in a doomed assault on the Andurien planet of Xanthe III. That same year, a grateful parliament raised little objection when its new Captain-General passed the Addendum to the Incorporation. This far-reaching piece of legislation repealed the Home Defense Act and gave the Captain-General de facto veto power over any law enacted by parliament or any provincial government.

His political and military power virtually absolute, Thomas Marik led the Free Worlds military to a decisive victory over Andurien in 3040. The League had weathered its worst crisis, but emerged a vastly different realm. Over the next two decades, the changes made by Thomas Marik transformed the Free Worlds League from a fractious collection of potentially opposing powers into a genuinely unified state with a solid economy and a formidable military.

FREE WORLDS SOCIETY

More so than any other Inner Sphere realm, the Free Worlds League celebrates the differences among its people—differences of culture, politics and local history. Its 154 provinces and many independent worlds contain the Inner Sphere's widest variety of the peoples of old Terra, and the League's long tradition of provincial autonomy has made local histories and developments more important in shaping society than the experiences of the League as a whole. Thomas Marik's political and social reforms since 3037 have given this motley collection of mini-states a genuine sense of national unity for the first time since the League's earliest years. The Clan War bolstered this change by bringing the League unprecedented material prosperity. The modern Free Worlds League stands poised on the brink of greatness, its fault lines largely submerged in loyalty to Thomas Marik and the good he has wrought.

MANY PEOPLES, ONE NATION

Over the past twenty-five years, the Free Worlds League has undergone profound transformation on several fronts. By centralizing virtually complete political and military power in the Captain-Generalcy, the Addendum of 3037 vastly elevated the importance of League-wide affairs. The new prominence of the Captain-General also gave League citizens a focus for their new and wider sense of patriotism. Denizens of the League, whether aquafarmers from New Olympia, horse-breeders from Oriente or armorers from Irian, began to look beyond regional ties to the Captain-General and the nation he represented—their nation, shared equally among them.

Military developments, beginning with the repeal of the Home Defense Act, have fostered a similar shift in thinking among the soldiers of the Free Worlds military. From a loose-knit collection of essentially regional troops, the Free Worlds League Military has become a coherent and devastatingly effective fighting force. This unified military machine proved its mettle in the Liao-Marik Offensive of 3057, when Free Worlds units took back every world lost in the Fourth Succession War over a mere eight weeks of fighting. The success of that venture fed the soldiers' pride in themselves, their units and the entire FWLM, further reinforcing national over regional loyalty. Thomas Marik capitalized on this change politically by creating several new military units in the 3040s and 3050s: the Free Worlds Legionnaires and the Knights of the Inner Sphere. Unlike many existing FWLM units, no officer of the Knights or the Legionnaires owes his or her appointment to a provincial duke or planetary ruler. Their loyalties sworn to House Marik and the League, these units subtly undermine one of the few avenues for troublemaking still open to those regional leaders who oppose Marik power and policies.

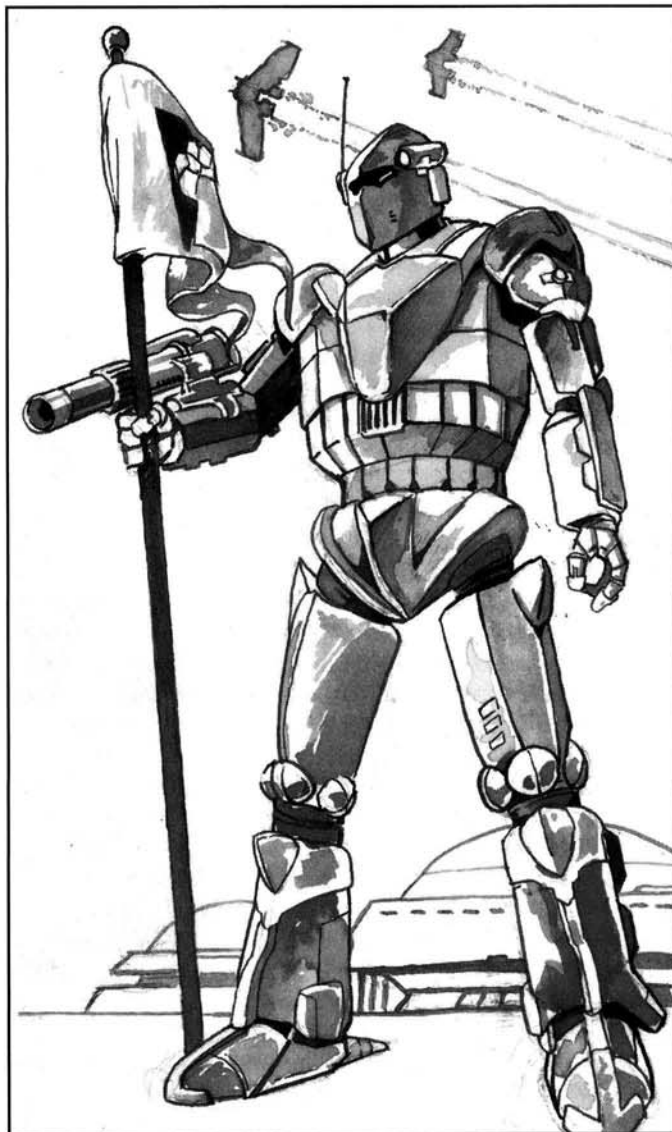
The Knights of the Inner Sphere, first created by Thomas Marik in 3055, best embody the new spirit of fighting for the League instead of for a home province. Drawn from the best fighters across the Free Worlds, the Knights play a dual role as soldiers and symbols. Though initially derided by some as "goody-two-shoes" for their adherence to a stringent code of chivalry, the Knights gained swift acceptance after their heroic actions against Clan Smoke Jaguar in 3060. Their personal loyalty to Thomas Marik as well as to the League further enhances the Captain-General's power and identifies him with his realm.

In addition to further constraining his remaining political rivals, Thomas Marik recently forged stronger ties with the Duchy of Oriente, long a bastion of Marik loyalty. In 3058, he married Sherryl Halas, daughter and heir to Oriente's Duke Christopher Halas. Two young sons born to the couple will carry on the Marik line and have cemented the Halas alliance for the foreseeable future.

The New Prosperity

The biggest boost for unity, however, stems from the League's robust economy. With money to be made at almost every venture, optimism is high from the palace on Atreus to the smallest town on the most distant Periphery border planet. Earlier and smaller economic boomlets tended to remain local, but the roaring economy of the 3050s and 3060s is bringing its benefits to almost every corner of the Free Worlds League.

Though the average League citizen credits the Captain-General with bringing this new prosperity, the decision that allowed it to happen sprang from external events. In 3051, with the Clan military juggernaut temporarily halted while the Clans chose a new war leader, the heads of the various Successor States held a summit on the world of Outreach. Summoned by the Clan-born mercenary unit Wolf's Dragoons, the Successor Lords spent several months hammering out a desperate plan to



save the Inner Sphere from conquest. The battered armies whose realms had so far borne the brunt of the Clan assault could not hope to hold on without vast supplies of war materiel, which the Free Worlds League could most easily produce. It possessed a larger industrial base than the neighboring Capellan Confederation, and its worlds lay equally far from the Clan line of advance. Largely unscathed by the Clan War, the Free Worlds League was the only Successor State capable of resupplying the Inner Sphere's exhausted defenders.

In that year, however, little trust existed between the five Successor States. The simple recognition that they had a common enemy was a major breakthrough; actually joining together to fight the Clans seemed barely possible after nearly three centuries of mutual hatred. To persuade a reluctant Thomas Marik, Prince Hanse Davion of the Federated Commonwealth made him the one offer he could not refuse. In exchange for

access to the bulk of the League's war production, Hanse offered treatment for Marik's terminally ill son at the New Avalon Institute of Science, the Inner Sphere's most renowned scientific and medical research facility. Marik agreed, over substantial misgivings that the massive export deal could run the League economy into the ground.

In fact, the arms deal sent the League's fortunes soaring. The Truce of Tukayyid in 3052, which temporarily halted the Clan advance, did nothing to slow demand, as the entire Inner Sphere stockpiled weapons and war machines against the day that truce expired.

After more than ten years of stepped-up production and no lack of willing buyers, the League economy shows no signs of slowing down. Its effects have spiraled far beyond military industries, as workers with higher wages seek avenues for spending them. Sleepy backwater worlds are transforming themselves seemingly overnight into engines for new commerce, or else are losing population to their more developed neighbors as the young and hopeful leave to find their fortunes. On more urbanized planets, the cities are jammed with people seeking opportunities. New businesses are launched almost every day, with three fledgling ventures springing up for every one that dies. New money is everywhere, from always-full tables at bustling cafés to the floors of planetary stock exchanges to rehabbed housing in once-blighted neighborhoods.

Overall, the mood of the people ranges from hopeful to outright giddy. Even many of those still left behind believe that sooner or later, the good times will reach them too. As the apparent author of the League's new golden age, Thomas Marik has the solid loyalty of every citizen touched by good fortune, and of most still waiting. That support from the common masses, more than anything else, holds the newly unified Free Worlds League together.

Not everyone, however, sees the boom times as an unmitigated good. On some worlds, lightly developed and moderately prosperous before the economic surge, local citizens fear unwelcome changes wrought by the new order. The flood of money and the rise of the new rich have already made a few such planets ripe targets for land speculators and unscrupulous developers eager to make a quick killing. Some residents complain of greedy newcomers disrupting the slow-paced lives they loved, turning small and close-knit communities into places where the only value is the M-bill.

Such feelings serve as a potential base for another class of opposition, those who see Thomas Marik's immense personal power as a betrayal of the very freedoms the League once stood for. These anti-centralization factions have sprung up on several of the planets that rejected the Internal Emergency Act of 3030, motivated by much the same reasons. They are so far most powerful on independent worlds like Camlann, with long histories of bowing to no higher authority than their own planetary government. The leaders of Camlann, first of the League worlds to attain independence from a larger authority, set the tone for most of those in the "planetary and

provincial rights" camp. It is not Marik's policies per se they oppose, as much as his tightening grip on the reins of power. In their eyes, the most sacred right is the right to be left alone. Any increase in the power of the central government infringes on that right, and free citizens are obligated to resist it.

While the booming economy roars on, such sentiment remains scattered and muted. Most League citizens want nothing more than to revel in their new wealth, or earn some if they haven't already. As long as the good times continue, Thomas Marik and his successors should face little serious opposition. Only a major economic slowdown or other unexpected catastrophe is likely to derail this energetic nation's confident march into the future.

MAJOR PROVINCES

More than any other Inner Sphere realm, the Free Worlds League is the sum of its parts. Diverse, often fractious and fiercely proud of their own histories and traditions, the provinces and planets that make up the League are a glorious patchwork of the many colors of humanity. A complete atlas of the various regions and independent worlds is beyond the scope of this book, but a brief guide to the League's major provinces offers a glimpse of life in this multi-cultural, cosmopolitan, independent-minded society.

Marik Commonwealth

Stronghold of the Marik family, this province owes much of its cultural roots to the peoples of old Terra's Eastern and Central Europe. Romanian, Slovak, Czech and Hungarian are spoken on many planets, in addition to the League-wide official English. The Commonwealth's location far from the League's borders largely spared its worlds the worst ravages of the Succession Wars, and so Commonwealth-based businesses and manufacturers were among those best positioned to take advantage of the recent economic upturn. On New Olympia, several newly flush corporations have joined with scientific researchers to repair three agricultural domes damaged during the Second Succession War. The surplus crops grown there are expected to cement New Olympia's position as the breadbasket of the Marik Commonwealth. A sizable amount of the foodstuffs are already earmarked for the expanding cities of Atreus, which is losing much of its arable land to housing and new manufacturing ventures. This trade agreement is typical of many between Marik Commonwealth planets; worlds in this region value their many cultural ties as much as a good deal, and will often bend over backwards to keep trade "in the family."

Other contributing factors to the clannishness of Marik Commonwealth worlds are the region's history as a founding League state, the long-standing supremacy of the Mariks and the presence of the Marik Militia, backbone of the Free Worlds military. Local citizens like to believe that the Free Worlds League owes its existence to their Commonwealth, a military power led by the talented Marik clan from its very beginnings. Without Commonwealth armies and Marik commanders, they

say, the Principality of Regulus and the Federation of Oriente would have been overrun by the Terran Hegemony before the 2330s. The long years of the Succession Wars only confirmed this insular viewpoint by further emphasizing the vital role of the military in the League's survival. This regional arrogance does not sit well with Leaguers from other provinces, most of whom hold similar attitudes about their own home regions or planets. In more troubled times during the League's history, such provincial pride was a source of frequent flare-ups, as different regions jockeyed for prominence in League affairs. The current optimistic mood, flavored with a heavy dose of pro-Marik patriotism, has somewhat smoothed over these rough edges. Visitors to the Marik Commonwealth are more likely to share the locals' pride in their ruling House, and Commonwealth citizens in turn can afford to be generous with praise of other provinces where many of them have never set foot.

The major exception to the insularity of many Commonwealth worlds and their citizens is the Travelers, descendants of the Roma tribes of ancient Terra. During humanity's first great wave of space exploration, a few better-off Roma tribes pooled their resources to build ships that would take them along the space lanes much as painted wagons had carried their ancestors along the trails and roads of Terra. More of the Roma followed, and the Travelers have been plying the roads between worlds ever since. A large number of the later arrivals came aboard colony ships that landed in what would become Marik-held space, and so they came to regard the Free Worlds League as a home base of sorts. Small Roma communities exist on virtually every Marik Commonwealth world, where their spacefaring brethren can find welcome whenever they feel the need for solid earth under their feet. Otherwise, the Travelers live in their ancient ships, going wherever the mood strikes them. Some remain in Commonwealth territory, while others venture far beyond it. Their vessels are far more spaceworthy than they frequently appear, lovingly maintained with great skill by gifted Roma engineers. The Travelers' knack for machinery is so proverbial throughout the League that the few Roma technicians in military or civilian jobs can often write their own ticket.

Duchy of Oriente

Known throughout the Free Worlds as a center of learning, arts and sciences, Oriente is the cultural crown jewel of the League to its admirers. Its detractors frequently call it "home to a crowd of oily-tongued politicians, fancy-ass lawyers and wacked-out artsy types who wouldn't know honest work if it shot at them out of a Gauss rifle." No resident of the League, however, denies the extent to which this cosmopolitan, progressive-minded province has shaped the larger life of the nation. Founded as a federation of largely democratic worlds, the Duchy of Oriente has given the Free Worlds League many of its finer cultural touches, as well as a legacy of democratic government that has sometimes caused considerable trouble. parliament exists largely because of

Oriente, whose long-ago leaders insisted on some form of representative government for the League they wished to create. Without such a formidable elected governing body, the Captains-General of earlier eras would surely have had an easier time ruling a less fractious Free Worlds. But no freedom-loving League citizen would have been willing to pay the price of such unity. Latter-day Leaguers may complain about provincial partisanship and gridlock, but none would give up the personal freedoms secured by centuries of necessary political horse-trading among myriad different interests.

The Duchy of Oriente is the source of another valuable legacy as well: scientific and technological innovation. This region led the League in both until the start of the Succession Wars, and even those centuries of savage conflict could not completely erode Oriente's research edge. Calloway IV, home to several BattleMech factories, also houses the Calloway Technical Corps, one of the League's foremost military design and engineering concerns—a sore point for some Marik Commonwealth citizens, who hate to acknowledge any sort of military superiority outside their own borders. In civilian circles, Metamorphosis Inc. on the planet Dayr Khuna remains consistently at the cutting edge of biotechnology, with a sideline in replacement body parts that remains lucrative despite a widespread bias against such things among average citizens.

Oriente owes part of its democratic bent to the large population of British and North Americans among the region's early settlers. Both of these groups came from societies accustomed to often-raucous representative government, a tradition they proudly carried with them to the stars. Spaniards and Italians were the two other largest ethnic groups, with a sprinkling of Basques as well. The modern duchy shows various traces of all these cultural strands, from the Spanish-style siesta customary on the southern continent of Martiques to the Italian Renaissance-style marble buildings that grace the planet Oriente's government precincts, to the province-wide passion for soccer games. The duchy's location near the often-shifting Capellan border has also given it a sizable Chinese population, along with pockets of Korean, Indian and Russian émigrés from Capellan Confederation worlds. The largest Asian enclaves exist on Les Halles and Anegasaki, both of which were under Capellan control at various times in their history.

Principality of Regulus

The third of the League's founding states, the Principality of Regulus draws much of its population and cultural heritage from India and Central Asia. The Selaj family, Indian-born traders since well before the advent of space travel, dominated this region from its beginnings as a five-world mercantile conglomerate until the 2680s, when their alleged involvement in a brutal terrorist assassination forced the Selajes to flee into the Magistracy of Canopus. The Cameron-Jones clan, tenacious rivals of the departed Selajes in the lucrative Regulus spice trade, swiftly stepped into the power vacuum and has dominat-

ed the Principality's capital world ever since. Several other wealthy families also joined the ranks of the Regular oligarchy over the ensuing years, most prominently the Lombards of Hellos Minor and the Alexanders of Wallis. The newcomers gradually diminished the overwhelming dominance of Indian culture in the region, but the heritage of the Selaj clan remains a vibrant force in Regular society. Hindustani is still widely spoken, Indian classical raga music has enjoyed an energetic revival since the early 3040s and many Principality planets remain dotted with ubiquitous Hindu temples.

Politically, the departure of the Selajes nearly four centuries ago has done little to diminish opposition to House Marik's control of power in the League. Derrick Cameron-Jones, former opposition leader in parliament, has become an elder statesman of the provincial rights movement. The current opposition leader, Kirc Cameron-Jones, and other MPs from Regular worlds tend to follow Derrick's lead. Among the common people, however, good economic times go hand in hand with largely pro-Marik sentiments. Though the mass of Regular citizens generally back their leaders, most prefer them to get on with the business of protecting Regular mercantile interests rather than indulging in anti-Marik political gamesmanship.

Personal loyalty to Thomas Marik runs highest in the Regular Free States, three breakaway Principality planets that won their independence in 2681. Born from Captain-General Gerald Marik's war against the Selajes that he believed had killed his family, this small federation bought its safety as well as its freedom by declaring its loyalty to the Mariks and hastily installing a pro-Marik government. The Free States soon discovered, however, that freedom on paper was worth little against constant meddling in their politics and economy by their former parent province. Not until Thomas Marik passed the Addendum to the Incorporation in 3037 did the Regular Free States finally gain the power to chart their own course. Since then, local cultures and planetary economies have undergone a vibrant renaissance. No longer strangled by Principality trade embargoes, Free State industry and exports are thriving. The Mongol and Kazhak languages, outlawed in the early days of secessionist rumblings and then rendered virtually irrelevant by Principality dominance of local life, have made a striking comeback to become the primary languages in this tiny province. Norwegian is also widely spoken on Olafsvik, site of a sizable Norwegian enclave since the earliest days of human settlement.

Duchy of Andurien

The water-rich worlds of Andurien bear the marks of their history as a prize long fought over by two great star empires. Alternately conquered by Capellan and Free Worlds forces since the late twenty-third century, catalyst for three major wars between 2398 and 2551, given to the Capellan Confederation as inducement to join the Star League and retaken by the Free Worlds League in the First Succession War, this region has

brought the League great wealth and great trouble. The ruling Humphreys family, once staunch League loyalists, soon came to favor independence as an alternative to constant attack. To quote the late Duchess Catherine Humphreys, instigator of the Andurien Crisis of 3030: "We are not a scrap of meat to be torn apart by two snarling dogs. We deserve better than to have our lives shattered every time some crazy Liao or pompous Marik gets the itch to play conquering hero. We'll go our own way, and a plague on both their Houses!" Though such forthright secessionist sentiment has largely died down under Thomas Marik's reign, the history that gave rise to it remains a powerful emotional force for many Andurien citizens. Others reject separatism with equal force, eager to live down what they feel is an unjust reputation for treachery. Either way, the people of this region tend to be fiercely proud of their Andurien origins and extremely touchy in matters of politics.

Blessed with large bodies of water, a valuable resource, the Andurien systems should have been among the most prosperous League worlds. Centuries of border wars, however, forced planetary governments to rebuild damaged infrastructure again and again over the years. With the latest wave of rebuilding largely complete, the duchy is finally beginning to take part in the League-wide economic boom. Demand for exported water and seafood is running high on more crowded and less resource-rich planets, enriching Andurien governments and businessmen alike.

Optimism fueled by the good times took a brief nosedive during Isis Marik's nine-year engagement to Sun-Tzu Liao; anti-Liao feeling runs high on many Andurien planets, and the prospect of a Liao Captain-General came close to reviving a moribund separatist movement. With the engagement ended and Isis Marik displaced as the Marik heir, local sentiment swung firmly back into Thomas Marik's camp. Pro-independence and even pro-Liao pockets remain, the latter mostly among large Chinese enclaves on border worlds. However, most Anduriens of whatever ethnic origin are happy to stay part of a prospering Free Worlds League for the foreseeable future.

The duchy's location on the Capellan border has given it a large Asian population, dominated by Chinese, Indians and Koreans. Welsh and Spanish influences also abound, though the former diminished with the plunge in fortune of the Welsh-connected Humphreys clan. Andurien planets closest to the Periphery see considerable traffic with the Magistracy of Canopus, a Periphery realm known for its anything-goes attitude. Cultural and scientific exchanges between the two regions, along with frequent travel by citizens of both, have imbued daily life in rimward Andurien with an easygoing air utterly foreign to many other League regions, whose citizens are more driven to hard work and accomplishment.

THE LYRAN ALLIANCE

Five years is a brief time in which to judge the character of a nation. The Lyran Alliance has existed for five years and a few months, hardly long enough to define itself on its own terms. The Alliance is not like other nations, however. It stands on the shoulders of its predecessor, the Lyran Commonwealth—a realm renowned for thriving commerce, free and prosperous citizens, and a deep desire for peace. Katherine Steiner-Davion, the Alliance's creator and ruler, intended this young nation to resurrect the Commonwealth's glory days, when the great Katrina Steiner presided over immense Lyran wealth and corresponding power; when three Succession Wars had come and gone, with the fourth as yet unguessed-at; when Lyran prestige gave its rulers the strength to conceive of an Inner Sphere beyond war, and to offer an olive branch instead of a PPC barrel to its fellow Successor States.

That nation, which aspired to bring peace and a better life to the Inner Sphere at large, no longer exists on any map. Neither does it exist in the Lyran Alliance, though much of what was good in it survives here. The Whitting Conference of 3058, which saw the rebirth of the Star League, represents the truest embodiment of the old Commonwealth in the new Lyran realm. The Lyran people have always valued peace; war for its own sake makes no sense to us. The Whitting Conference promised to end the greatest threat of war the Inner Sphere had ever known, by bringing all the Successor States together to battle our common enemy. From that kind of union, others can grow. Katrina Steiner understood that equation back in 3022, when she signed the treaty that would lead to the creation of the Federated Commonwealth. Her granddaughter understood it too, however briefly. Ironical that Katherine Steiner-Davion, who brokered peace throughout the Inner Sphere just four years ago, has brought war to her own realm since.

If the old Lyran Commonwealth truly exists anywhere, it is in the minds and hearts of ordinary Lyran, who want what they have always wanted—peace and prosperity for themselves and their children. The ordinary Lyran realizes, as often his rulers do not, that he cannot have these things unless others have them as well. And now this ordinary Lyran faces a civil war that need never have happened, whose causes he doesn't truly understand, but which threatens to change his life forever. In the Federated Commonwealth they helped to create, Katrina Steiner and Melissa Steiner-Davion bequeathed the Lyran people a dream of peace made real. Melissa's daughter chose power instead, and we Lyrans must live with the consequences.

The Lyran Commonwealth was a nation brimming with confidence, secure in the strong economy that made it a realm to be reckoned with. That confidence enabled us to contemplate

joining our fate to that of another powerful realm, the Federated Suns, without surrendering our own identity. For more than twenty years, we managed this difficult feat. Then came the Clan War, the first blow to our pride. The invading Clans tore a bloody chunk from Lyran territory, while the combined military might of what had once been two armies stood helplessly by.

The next blow was the murder of Archon Melissa Steiner-Davion in 3055, just five years after the Clans crossed our borders. The assassin's bomb that cut her down took with it the best part of the Lyran Commonwealth—the capacity for faith in the future that enabled us to triumph over any setback. Without that faith, we could not overcome our own fears and the Federated Commonwealth could not survive. It was not the warmongers of House Davion that doomed Katrina's and Melissa's dream, but our own crisis of hope.

The Lyran Alliance was born of that crisis. Approved history books may blame Victor Steiner-Davion, the bloodthirsty monster alleged to have murdered and replaced a sick child in order to keep his beloved engines of war running.

But that man is not the eldest son my friend Archon Melissa knew, and his actions were merely the excuse for a break that had already happened. By 3057, the mass of the Lyran people no longer believed in the bold alliance our parents had forged. We lost courage along with our worlds and Melissa. By proclaiming the birth of the Lyran Alliance, Katherine Steiner-Davion merely acknowledged that reality. No longer the old Lyran Commonwealth or a proud partner in the Inner Sphere's bravest experiment, the new Lyran realm had to find its own way amid a universe fraught with perils.

In its first year, the Alliance could claim to be a worthy successor to the Lyran Commonwealth. True to Lyran traditions of peace, we stayed out of the Liao-Marik offensive against the FedCom. Less than twelve months later, the Lyran capital of Tharkad saw the rebirth of the Star League, humanity's greatest monument to peaceful co-existence. On the home front, Archon Katherine continued the rebuilding of Skye and the slow healing of the nation's economy after the losses to the Clans. Our former prosperity would take far longer than a year to regain, but we were taking the first steps in the right direction. In 3059 and 3060, the proud contribution of Lyran military units to the defeat of Clan Smoke Jaguar paid tribute to another Lyran tradition—fighting hard when we needed to, with no quarter asked or given. Clouds, however, were beginning to form on the horizon. As the nation recovered its economic health, a growing share of profits from various enterprises found its way into a few noble pockets—nobles who happened to be among the Archon's most faithful supporters. Wages



stalled across the Alliance, even as planetary stock exchanges exploded with wealth from new trade agreements with the Capellans and the Free Worlds League. Tax revenues earmarked for Tharkad took a sharp jump upward, while monies sent back to individual worlds remained stagnant or declined. The Alliance's recovery, initially so promising, halted in its tracks—with Archon Katherine apparently doing little about it.

In 3061, we began to see why. With Prince Victor Steiner-Davion fighting the Clans on their own ground, Katherine usurped his throne. Since then, the Archon has continued to reward her backers at the expense of the realm, slowing the engines of our prosperity even further. Katherine forgot the foundation on which Lyrans fortunes have always rested: trade rather than takeover, connections rather than conquest. We didn't fire a shot to conquer the Federated Suns, but we took it over just the same. That act betrayed our deepest roots, the essence of what it means to be Lyrans—all the more so because the mass of Lyrans people have yet to profit from it. If anything, they have lost ground over these past two years—not just economically, but politically as well. Demonstrations of support for Victor, sporadic in Alliance space even before the takeover, blossomed briefly in the FedCom before Katherine's government began cracking down. The spirit of censorship has since spread through the Alliance, until now any public questioning of the Archon's actions risks reprisals from higher authority.

For a people accustomed to speaking their minds, this development is tragic. Since the murder of Duke Arthur Steiner-Davion and the resultant outbreak of hostilities, Katherine has either denied increasing acts of repression or justified them as necessary. Many of us question, however, the necessity of mass arrests on Thorin in Skye Province. Or draconian punishments for curfew violations on Muphrid, whose major cities broke out in riots just days after Duke Arthur's death. Surely there is some fairer, more just way of calming fears and restoring order. But the Archon seems more concerned with consolidating her own power than with using it to the benefit of her subjects. Once hailed as a peacemaker and a healer of breaches, she has become a catalyst for war, division and repression. At what cost to the Alliance, only time can tell.

Some of Katherine's backers hail the FedCom takeover as the harbinger of renewed Lyrans greatness. They applaud it as representing the true Lyrans spirit by bringing peace, prosperity and good government even to those they think neither want nor deserve those things. The rising specter of civil war confirms their view that the people of the Federated Suns don't know their own good. The fighting and the bloodshed are their fault, these partisans say. What else can you expect from a bunch of war-crazed Davions?

And then there are people like me, who grieve for what we might have become while seeking to preserve what we are. The Federated Commonwealth, bright dream that it was, is gone. If a new one arises from the ashes of the coming war, we must find it on the bedrock Lyrans value too many of us seem to have forgotten: respect. Respect for the gifts of others and

respect for ourselves, for that strength in us that permits us to tolerate—even delight in—the many differences of humanity. We are not the Draconis Combine, rigidly enforcing the boundaries of one narrowly defined way of life. Our fellow humans may not share all our values, but so what? Their differences are no threat to our integrity. Our common human longings outweigh any divisions between us. We all need decent shelter and enough food on the table, we all want comfort and security and a little beauty in our lives. Merchants understand this common ground. The Lyrans Commonwealth—a society based on honest dealing to mutual benefit—made such common interests its foundation and rose to interstellar pre-eminence. The Lyrans Alliance took what it wanted, and thereby betrayed the core of that proud heritage. Assuming it survives the year, it can only buy that survival at the price of our deepest Lyrans values. Defeat will end the Lyrans Alliance as a politically viable state. Victory will end it in another, more lasting way. Lyrans will no longer be a people of peace, but a nation of war.

—Misha Auburn

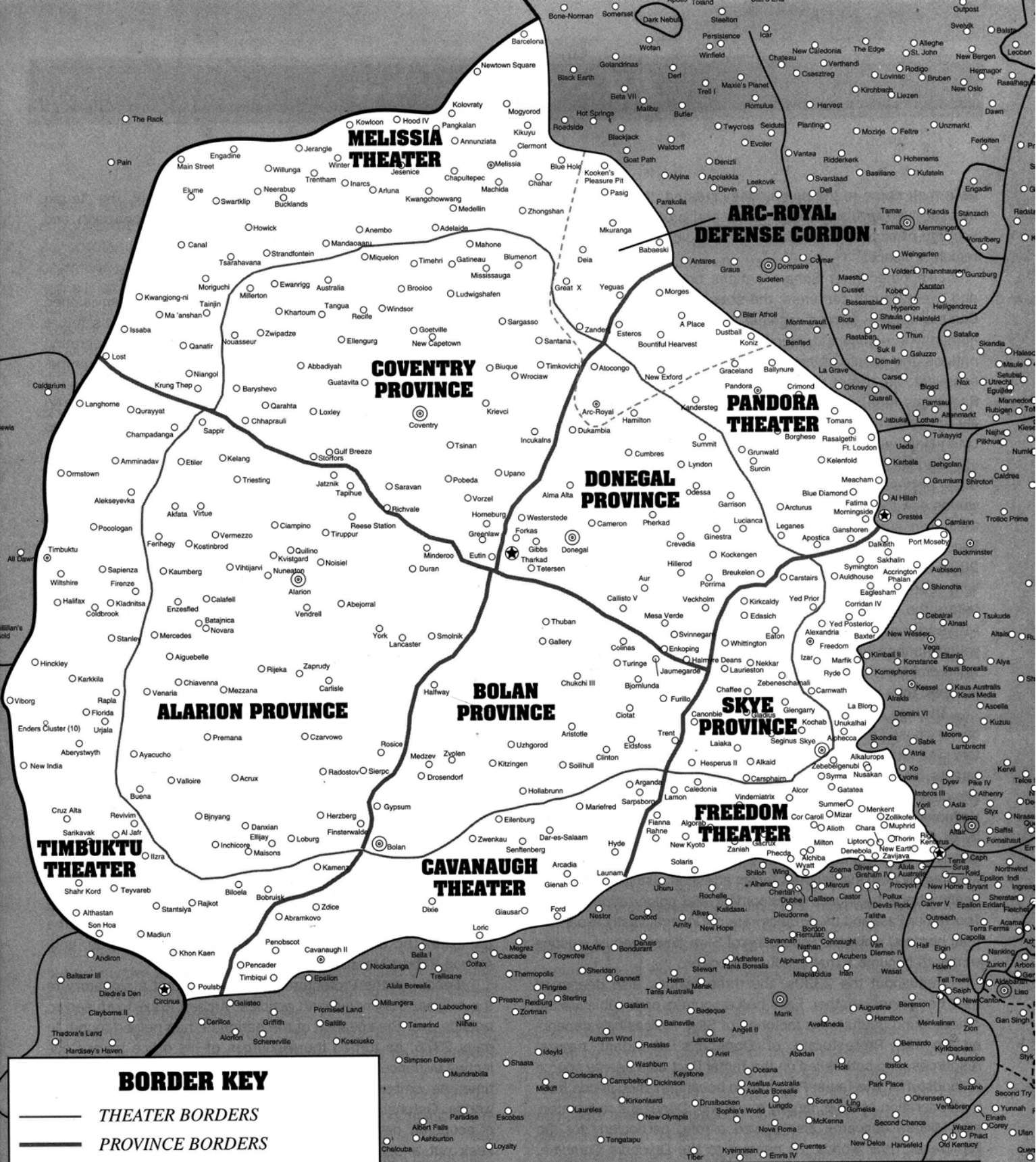
Royal Court (Lyrans) Historian

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

Though a new realm in name, the Lyrans Alliance is essentially a new incarnation of the old Lyrans Commonwealth. It lies within roughly the same borders, its people share the same mercantile outlook, and it embodies many of the same strengths and weaknesses as its famous predecessor. Prominent among the former are hard-headed pragmatism, an instinct for a good deal and a genuine commitment to peace as the best guarantor of prosperity. Like the Commonwealth it replaced, however, the Lyrans Alliance possesses a weak military relative to its fellow Successor States. Though sufficiently strong to defend its territory, the Lyrans Alliance Armed Forces remains plagued by a persistent lack of ability among its high-level officers. Questions of loyalty have added to its military troubles; in the wake of secession from the Federated Commonwealth, unimpeachably pro-Steiner attitudes are frequently given more weight than competence among the soldiery. With a civil war now catching fire, the Alliance faces its gravest threat and starkest test: Whether and how it survives will determine the future of the Lyrans people for years to come.

FOUNDING FAMILIES

House Steiner, though long identified with the Commonwealth over which it ruled, played no role in its founding. That achievement fell to three other families with far greater prominence in the region at the time: the McQuistons, the Marsdens and the Tamars. The McQuiston clan presided over the Federation of Skye, an interstellar nation built on the profitable Skye Traders mercantile conglomerate. The Marsdens similarly ruled the Protectorate of Donegal, a collection of resource-rich planets held together by the merchant vessels of the Donegal Freights and Goods Company. The Tamars



LYRAN ALLIANCE

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LEGEND



40 PARSECS OR 130.4 LIGHT YEARS
SCALE: 1/8 INCH = 1 PARSEC = 3.26 LIGHT YEARS = 19,164,277,860,000 STATUTE MILES

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS
FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES USE 9 PARSECS = 29.34 LY

gave their name to the domain they created, the Tamar Pact—blessed with fertile farming worlds and protected against the scourge of bandits by the best-trained soldiers throughout that region of space.

Like other Inner Sphere nations born in the twenty-third and twenty-fourth centuries, the states that became the Lyrans Commonwealth formed against a backdrop of turmoil on humanity's homeworld, Terra. Unlike most of those other nations, the people of these regions did not fear Terran military conquest; the threat they perceived was economic. The Tamar Pact came into being in 2235, just two years before the political upheaval of 2237 that drastically shrank Terra's sphere of colonial influence.

Sensitive to the ebb and flow of political tides that could make or break them economically, the merchants of the Tamar worlds saw the Terran pullback coming and took steps to insure their own survival in a suddenly more chancy universe. The Federation of Skye and the Protectorate of Donegal, formed in 2299 and 2301 respectively, came into being during the twilight years of the Terran Alliance—a little more than a decade before the Alliance government's violent collapse. Having lived for years under Terra's benign neglect, the leaders of these young nations knew they could not hope for positive change while problems in the Alliance worsened. If their worlds were to prosper, they had to band together.

The rise of the Terran Hegemony in the early twenty-fourth century posed no military threat to Skye, Donegal or Tamar territory. The latter two realms were too far from Terra to make easy targets, and Skye-controlled planets near Terra lay in the opposite direction of the Hegemony's initial conquests. By the 2330s, Hegemony leader James McKenna had begun to realize the futility of attempting to forcibly reunite all human-occupied worlds, and so shifted toward diplomacy. The three Lyrans realms benefited hugely from subsequent Terran attention, using monies from healthy trade to finance development and colonization efforts. The Tamar Pact and the Protectorate of Donegal vastly expanded their borders, while the Federation of Skye developed its existing worlds to become a major industrial power.

Throughout the 2330s, the three regions also deepened their ties to one another. Each had resources or capabilities the others found useful—the factories of Skye increasingly depended on the Protectorate of Donegal's abundant natural resources, and both relied on the Tamar Pact as a nearby source of foodstuffs. The Tamar Pact in turn bought finished goods from the Federation of Skye, largely made with Donegal's raw materials. Military concerns also played a role, particularly for the Tamarese. Their worlds lay nearest to the Draconis Combine, which had flexed its expansionist muscles by invading the Principality of Rasalhague in 2330. Rather than become the Combine's next victim, in 2339 Kevin Tamar proposed a merger of their three states to Robert Marsden of the Protectorate of Donegal and Thomas McQuiston of the Federation of Skye. The three leaders met on Arcturus in 2340; near the end of that year, they formally united their territories into a single realm. In

early January of 2341, the Director-General of the Terran Hegemony officially recognized the Lyrans Commonwealth and welcomed it into the family of interstellar nations.

A LESS THAN PERFECT UNION

The founders of the Lyrans Commonwealth had envisioned it as a means of securing their own and their people's future prosperity, through an elaborate plan for economic integration and a delicately balanced political system of nine co-equal ruling archons. Instead, the Commonwealth's formative decades were marked by economic chaos and political corruption. The blueprint for merging three interstellar economies that had looked eminently workable on paper proved disastrous in practice, leading to wild fluctuations in planetary economies. The archons were in a unique position to exploit these shifts for personal gain. Many of them, long accustomed to small-time graft as the price of doing business, could not resist the temptation to play on a larger scale. While they added to their fortunes, ordinary Lyrans citizens suffered. The archons' reluctance to alter this status quo further extended the young Commonwealth's economic troubles. Robert Marsden, the only archon not involved in currency speculation, insider trading and other forms of corruption, could do little but watch as his nation slowly headed toward collapse. Without cooperation from his fellow archons, he was powerless to effect any change.

In the late 2360s, with the Lyrans economy still lurching from boom to bust, the neighboring Draconis Combine launched a massive industrial development program. By 2373, the fruits of this activity were beginning to show in a slow but steady military build-up on the Combine-Commonwealth border. When the Lyrans central government raised taxes to pay for a build-up of its own, political hell broke loose. Protesters on countless worlds took to the streets, while wildcat strikes and work stoppages threatened a new round of economic woes. Some activists in the Tamar Pact even suggested seceding from the Commonwealth and seeking a treaty with the Combine. The Commonwealth seemed about to implode, until Archon Robert Marsden took action.

Leader of the Protectorate of Donegal and a signatory to the original Commonwealth articles, Archon Robert refused to preside over the collapse of the nation he had helped found. In early 2375, he turned the resources of his office toward collecting evidence of his fellow rulers' dirty dealings. In the meantime, he embarked on an extended tour of Commonwealth worlds. Ostensibly on a fact-finding mission for the next round of economic development meetings, Marsden used the tour to seek out and consolidate political support among planetary government leaders. He also revived old contacts from his days in the Donegal military, and through them built a network of loyal units in the Commonwealth army. By August of 2375, Marsden was ready to move.

The nine archons met on Arcturus that month, as usual. The meeting accomplished little, except to confirm in Marsden's mind the rightness of his course. When the other

archons left Arcturus, Marsden stayed behind. Once they were en route to their homeworlds, and therefore safely away from any private armies or bolt-holes, Marsden broadcast across the Commonwealth the details of their corrupt activities. He then formally stripped them of their powers and declared himself the nation's sole ruling authority. Marsden ended his extraordinary broadcast with a personal pledge that he would not play tyrant, nor continue the mismanagement and outright thievery of the past thirty-odd years. Instead, he promised the Lyran people significant local autonomy and a say in their own government, along with the prosperity so long denied them. In exchange for their support, he guaranteed them all a decent life and a brighter future.

Marsden got the mandate he wanted, fueled by outrage over the other archons' abuses of power. His own reputation for honest dealing added to his public appeal; there was little outcry when Marsden's troops arrested the other archons and marched them off to life imprisonment. The formation of the Estates General in December of 2375 confirmed for many Lyrans the rightness of their choice to support the sole remaining archon. This parliament-like body included representatives from more than half the planets in the Commonwealth, the first time individual worlds had an official voice in their own government. Its first act was to inaugurate Robert Marsden as Archon Basileus over the entire Lyran Commonwealth.

During the first weeks of his reign, Marsden drafted a new constitution and forwarded a copy to each Commonwealth world. The Articles of Acceptance guaranteed virtually complete autonomy in local affairs for member worlds, provided that each world agreed to honor all reasonable military demands made on it for the common defense and to contribute a portion of planetary gross income for the maintenance of a standing army. The Articles also made the Archon supreme commander of the Lyran Commonwealth Armed Forces and any private armies existing in Commonwealth territory. Most planets had no trouble with the former provisions, but the latter raised strident objections from a few. Between 2376 and early 2378, all but twenty-two planets signed the Articles. Some of the hold-outs wanted independence from the Commonwealth; others feared the concentration of power in the Archon's office. Pointing to Marsden's control of the military, they argued that the Estates General were an insufficient check on the powers of what amounted to a military dictator.

Marsden's subsequent actions reinforced this view of him. Planets whose governments opposed him soon found themselves blockaded into submission by ships from the Commonwealth Navy. In the face of slow starvation, all but eight dissenting worlds swiftly caved in. The remaining planets were self-sustaining, and so could resist the blockade indefinitely. The Archon, however, did not allow them that chance. Throughout the rest of 2378, Commonwealth armed forces invaded Tamar, Skye and the six other dissident worlds. Hard fought and bloody, the campaigns ultimately unified the Lyran Commonwealth while sowing the seeds of schisms to come. The planet of Skye saw

some of the bitterest fighting; its people, largely of Irish and Scottish descent, swore never to forget the violence done to their homeworld. Their descendants would hold to that pledge down the centuries, often with tragic results.

COMING OF AGE

The sudden transformation of the Commonwealth government set the stage for a near-miraculous economic recovery, fueled by the Archon's policies to revitalize Lyran commerce. Fifteen years after nearly collapsing, the Lyran Commonwealth was manufacturing goods for export throughout the Inner Sphere and had won lucrative contracts to equip the Terran Hegemony military. The Hegemony connection gave the LCAF access to cutting-edge Terran military technology, which it used to equip its own expanding numbers. The Lyran army's material abundance, however, masked a flaw that would cost the nation dearly time and again over the centuries to come.

Every Inner Sphere realm with a noble class has had its share of blue-blooded incompetents cluttering the higher officer ranks, but the LCAF suffered in addition from the presence of an ambiguous class known as "social generals." In the early days of the Commonwealth, the rank of general was bestowed as a courtesy on influential but untitled individuals—political power brokers, wealthy industrialists, bankers and such. Before long, these ersatz generals sought the accoutrements of their "military" station, as well as increasing contact with the genuine article. In turn, more than a few real military generals picked up a taste for the high life from their social compatriots. By the last decade of the twenty-fourth century, a Lyran general's expertise at elegant conversation and fashionable card games had become as important as his skill on the battlefield. Devotion to such un-military pursuits mattered little during the Commonwealth's first few decades, when the quality of its weapons and the availability of other targets kept its neighbors' armies busy elsewhere. In the 2390s, however, the militarization of the entire Inner Sphere took a quantum leap forward. The Age of War was about to rear its head, and the Lyran Commonwealth would pay a high price for the social graces of its upper echelons.

The Age of War reached Lyran space in 2407, when Draconis Combine units overran a Commonwealth border region between the provinces of Skye and Tamar. The Combine vanguard then struck out toward the Lyran capital of Arcturus, cutting a deadly swath through the LCAF. Though far better equipped than the invaders, the defending Lyrans lacked a coherent battle plan. Commanders more comfortable with social than military strategy ordered hopeless last stands and wild death-or-glory assaults, or stood by paralyzed while their junior officers tried to impose order on the chaos. The tide did not turn in the defenders' favor until Archon Alistair Marsden, himself a capable military officer, dismissed the commanding generals and personally took control. In late summer of 2407, Archon Alistair led his troops to a resounding victory on the world of Morningside.

Several Combine units remained on nearby planets, however, within striking distance of the capital. With the approval of the Estates General, the Archon relocated the government to his own homeworld, the wintry planet of Tharkad. Shortly after the move, in the first weeks of 2408, the LCAF struck the Combine planet Vega and crippled the massive secondary invasion force assembling there. That victory was swiftly eclipsed by the loss of the Archon, killed on the desert world of Menkent in a frontal assault on a dug-in Combine position. With the Lyrans leader dead and the Combine invasion force shattered, the crisis of 2407–08 came to an abrupt end. The peace would prove fleeting, however.

Over the next three and a half decades, Draconis Combine forces steadily encroached on Commonwealth space through seemingly endless border skirmishes. The LCAF, still saddled with too many incompetent commanders, proved no more of a match for the invaders than it had in the earlier conflict. By 2445, the Combine had absorbed a fifth of the former Tamar Pact. The Commonwealth was also losing worlds to a new enemy, the Free Worlds League. To halt the slow hemorrhage of its territory, the Lyrans Commonwealth needed a miracle.

In 2455, it finally got one. Twenty-odd years earlier, the Terran Hegemony had begun developing the BattleMech, a weapon destined to forever change the face of war. Even before the first 'Mech's unveiling in 2439, prominent Lyrans military suppliers to the Terran Hegemony suspected the existence of a top-secret Hegemony project. As good Lyrans patriots, they reported what they knew or guessed to then-Archon Katherine Steiner. The first Steiner Archon ordered the Lyrans Intelligence Corps to infiltrate the nearest site believed to be manufacturing BattleMechs: Hesperus II, then a Hegemony world. (Ironically, this same planet would one day become the crown jewel of Lyrans 'Mech production.) The LIC had limited success, however. Not until the reign of Katherine Steiner's son Alistair would the Lyrans Commonwealth finally acquire the deadliest weapon in humankind's arsenal.

Before becoming Archon, Alistair Marsden-Steiner had led an elite LCAF commando unit. In early 2455, while Draconis Combine and Free Worlds League forces continued to gain Lyrans ground, the Archon gathered a top team of special forces operatives and sent them to Hesperus II. Using classic Trojan Horse tactics, the LCAF commandos entered the BattleMech facility and copied virtually all the information necessary to engineer a working 'Mech. Four years later, the LCAF fielded the first results of that raid in a fierce battle for the world of Loric. The invading armies of the Free Worlds League shattered like a glass lance against the Lyrans' armored behemoths, one of which crushed the League's Captain-General to a bloody pulp. Lyrans forces had won their first real victory after years of fighting—brought not by tactical acumen or strategic brilliance, but by overwhelmingly superior technology.

This battlefield edge lasted less than three years, by which time the remaining realms of the Inner Sphere had all acquired their own BattleMechs. The merchant-minded Steiners man-

aged to profit handsomely from one such acquisition, selling their stolen data for a fat sum to Prince Simon Davion of the Federated Suns in 2457.

In one of history's ironies, the woman who shaped an enduring vision of a Commonwealth at peace and founded a dynasty committed to that vision became Archon in the midst of a war. Katherine Steiner, widow of Archon Alistair Marsden, ascended the Commonwealth throne in 2408, mere months after her husband's death in battle. She inherited a realm full of tensions between its three component states, exacerbated by ongoing Lyrans military defeats. In the Tamar Pact, murmurings of secession had never entirely died out since Robert Marsden's coup. Creeping gains by the Draconis Combine gave new impetus to these sentiments, which the leaders of the Tamar region exploited in order to enhance their own power. Skye was likewise potentially rebellious, its people still seething over the assaults of thirty years earlier. Though neither of these regions was prepared to secede outright in the face of Combine and Free Worlds aggression, regional leaders eagerly used secessionist sentiment to jockey for greater power within the central government. Katherine Steiner shrewdly co-opted these potential opponents by offering them influential positions and a greater say in policy. The dukes of Tamar and Skye were among the members named to Katherine's Commonwealth Council, a body of eight advisors on whom the new Archon implied she would rely.

Having temporarily won over these two potential rivals, Katherine Steiner engaged in a deft piece of emotional manipulation that has since become a hallmark of the most politically gifted Steiner leaders—including the present ruler of the Lyrans Alliance. During the very session of the Estates General that confirmed Katherine Steiner as Archon, she announced her intent to streamline or eliminate many of the trade restrictions between the Skye, Tamar and Donegal realms that continued to impede economic growth and foster regional tensions. At that point, a nurse brought Katherine's small son into the room. The boy was dressed in a soldier's uniform, a tiny replica of the one worn by his dead father. Katherine cradled young Alistair in her arms and spoke movingly of the Lyrans Commonwealth she wished to help build—a strong nation at peace with itself and its neighbors, "where my son may play soldier, but need not grow up to be one."

The image of the strikingly beautiful widow holding her child and speaking of peace—an image swiftly spread throughout the Commonwealth via videotape—went far toward winning Katherine Steiner the loyalty of her citizens. Massive government programs to rebuild war-torn worlds turned that loyalty into profound personal affection, which only grew deeper over Katherine's thirty-seven-year reign. Colonial expansion, spearheaded by the creation of the Commonwealth Scout Corps in 2413, further enriched the realm while providing a safety valve for overcrowded Lyrans planets. When Katherine Steiner stepped down in 2445, she left behind a richer and more unified Lyrans Commonwealth. Though incursions by the Draconis



Combine and the Free Worlds League continued, the Lyran people met these military setbacks with a greater sense of hope and national pride.

The belief that the tables would eventually turn proved true just fourteen years later, when the LCAF became the first army outside the Terran Hegemony to field BattleMechs. Exclusive possession of these huge war machines enabled Lyran forces to drive the invaders off most captured worlds during the 2460s. Its prewar borders largely restored, its possessions greatly expanded through colonization and its people enriched by vigorous internal trade, the Lyran Commonwealth of 2468 seemed to embody Katherine Steiner's vision. That vision of a prosperous nation dedicated to strength through peaceful trade rather than war would persist throughout centuries of conflict and political intrigue. Katherine Steiner-Davion recently invoked it in creating the Lyran Alliance, six hundred and fifty years after her namesake first attempted to make it a reality.

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth's newfound peace and prosperity proved as vulnerable as all human achievements to catastrophic events. In 2468, Archon Alistair Steiner was assassinated by pawns of a disgruntled Tamar Pact nobleman in an ultimately failed attempt to ruin a prominent Tamarese duke. Three years later, a major earthquake in Tharkad City killed the wife of Archon Michael Steiner along with sixty-seven members of the Estates General. The grief-stricken Michael

abdicated in favor of his brother Steven and returned to active military service. Mere months later, he died fighting a Combine invasion force on the planet Nox. Had Steven Steiner been a less malleable ruler, he might have restored the stability the nation so desperately needed. Instead, this weak-minded Archon presided over two and a half decades of rising internal intrigue. Regional power plays, virtually moribund since early in Katherine Steiner's reign, rose to fill the vacuum left by Steven's ineffectual government. Along with them came separatist leanings that would soon plunge the Commonwealth into civil war.

A HOUSE DIVIDED: REBELLION IN SKYE

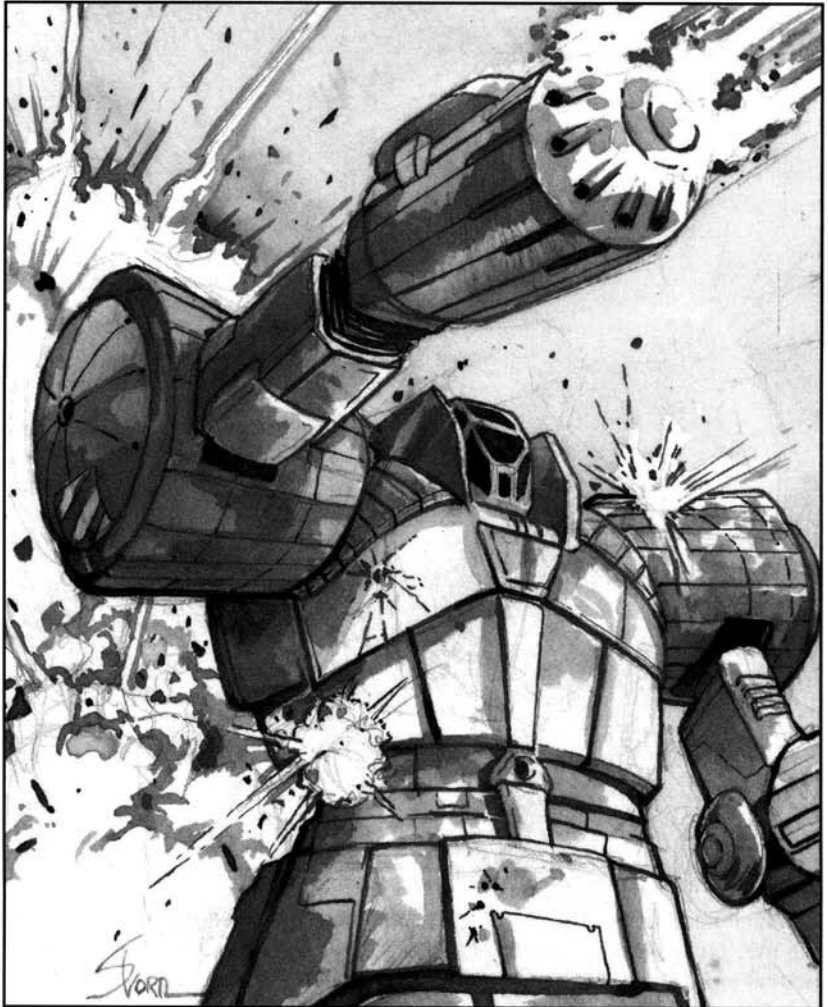
Since the Lyran Commonwealth's earliest decades, when several planets in the Federation of Skye fought Robert Marsden's assumption of power, the Skye region has been a persistent source of political turmoil for the ruling Lyran dynasty. The worst outbreak of Skye secessionist fever resulted in outright civil war at the turn of the twenty-sixth century, when the dukes of Skye and Tamar backed Steven Steiner's wife Margaret as his successor in lieu of his nephew, Robert Steiner. Though Margaret's partisans ultimately lost, the conflict cost the Commonwealth dearly. Its most pernicious legacy was a renewal of bitter separatism throughout the Skye region,

an undercurrent of popular resentment against the Steiners of Tharkad that future aspirants to power would exploit again and again.

Very likely schizophrenic, Margaret Olson Steiner had for years claimed to hear voices and experience mystic visions. As the consort of an indecisive and emotionally dependent Archon, she soon became the power behind the throne. After Steven's death in 2501, Margaret proclaimed herself his successor—much to the delight of many Commonwealth nobles, who had grown rich from war profiteering and also militarily powerful during Steven Steiner's lackluster reign. In a stunning example of narrow self-interest, the dukes of Tamar and Skye had convinced Steven to repeal the law forbidding nobles to maintain personal armies larger than the LCAF garrisons on their worlds. With that statute consigned to the ash heap, the arms race was on. Before long, several nobles even owned BattleMech units. Backing Margaret promised to continue this status quo, with the Archon a figurehead while the nobles ran the realm to suit themselves.

Robert Steiner, by contrast, was apparently sane and highly intelligent. The illegitimate son of Steven's sister Tatyana, Robert had become an ace aerofighter pilot stationed on the world of Poulso. At first disinclined to challenge his aunt for the throne, he soon changed his mind. Two years of the nation's rapid decline while the Tharkad court degenerated into a carnival of dementia made a strong impression, as did the pleas of a contingent of LCAF officers who arrived on Poulso to pledge Robert their unconditional support. They begged him to claim his rightful place and save the Lyran realm before it was too late.

In 2503, Robert Steiner arrived on Tharkad with seven divisions at his back. Margaret Olson and several of her supporters had fled the planet days before, ultimately going to ground in the Federation of Skye. A relieved Estates General approved Robert's claim to the Archonship, and the battle lines were drawn. Over the next year, Robert Steiner led his loyalist forces in skirmish after skirmish against Skye troops, drawing ever closer to the regional capital where Margaret and the Duke of Skye had chosen to make their stand. Units loyal to the Duke of Tamar came to the rebels' rescue as the Steiner forces closed in; their savage attack delayed the loyalists long enough for Margaret and the Duke of Skye to escape. The rebel pair fled to Tamar, where they fought their last battle against Robert Steiner's exhausted troops. The timely intervention of soldiers from Fatima, led by that world's duke, saved the day for the battered loyalist forces. The dukes of Tamar and Skye were ultimately executed for treason, their families stripped of their titles and their worlds given to new rulers—the Kelswa and Lestrade clans, both distinguished by impeccable loyalty to the legitimate Steiner line.



Though the final battle of the civil war was fought on Tamar, the Federation of Skye suffered far greater damage. Most of the battles took place on Skye worlds, where countless families lost loved ones to the vicious fighting. Though Robert Steiner personally made reparations for war damage in the ensuing years, his generosity made little lasting impression on many Skye natives. Already primed to distrust Tharkad's government, the average citizen of Skye had little use for the Steiners after the bizarre excesses of Steven's rule and the carnage of Robert Steiner's war. In the years to come, separatist-minded denizens of Skye kept the memory of the civil war alive while conveniently forgetting who financed the peace. A little over five centuries later, this view of the conflict would serve one branch of the Steiner family in its plots against the other.

Successors to Separatism

Until almost the mid thirty-first century, the separatist movement in the Federation of Skye remained a largely unorganized, inchoate mass of anti-Commonwealth and anti-Steiner feeling. All too often, the actions of various Archons stoked the secessionist fires. Archon Viola Steiner, who led the

Commonwealth into the Star League and its troops in the Reunification War, went on a crazed rampage that decimated the 25th Skye Rangers because of baseless rumors that the Duke of Skye was involved in the kidnapping of Viola's son Kevin. Nearly three centuries later, Archon Elizabeth Steiner failed to halt a Draconis Combine invasion that claimed several Skye worlds and nearly cost the region its capital. That an enemy nation could come so close to capturing the planet Skye, emotional home of billions in the Federation as well as literal home to its natives, seemed to confirm in many minds the Steiner clan's utter disregard for the Skye region and its people.

In the absence of fresh grievances, leading separatists stressed the Steiner family's German ancestry in sharply negative contrast to Skye's overwhelmingly Scots, Irish and English heritage. They also appealed to the average Skye citizen's instinctive distrust of the government on Tharkad, a light-years distant authority best known for collecting tax revenues and imposing irritating regulations. In the early years of the thirty-first century, however, several events occurred that would ultimately transform Skye separatism into a potent political force with a Steiner at its head.

The change began with Archon Alessandro Steiner, a tactically gifted but arrogant man who lived for military action. His first major victory, a deep raid on six Free Worlds League planets in 2987, cost him much of his own high command's trust because he neglected to inform them of the true extent of the mission. Ten years later, Alessandro's overconfidence in his own judgment nearly cost the Lyrans the Hesperus II, site of several major BattleMech factories. That near-debacle convinced many throughout the LCAF that their Archon was a dangerously stubborn fool whose arrogance could cost the nation dearly.

The Archon's decision in 3002 to reinforce the Free Worlds border with garrison troops stripped from interior planets deepened this rising distrust. Though no one publicly objected, several higher-ranking officers privately feared that the Archon's "concentrated weakness" strategy was a military catastrophe waiting to happen. Among these officers was Alessandro's niece Katrina, a general in the LCAF's Strategies and Tactics Division. With the threat of attack looming from the Free Worlds League and the Draconis Combine, however, no one in the high command wanted to provoke an open break.

In 3006, the concentrated weakness policy imploded under a bold assault by the Free Worlds League. League troops bypassed the heavily reinforced border worlds and struck deep into the Commonwealth interior, hitting planets whose garrisons had been moved to the border for an attack that never came. An appalled Katrina Steiner swiftly took action. Having spent the past few years quietly garnering support from various quarters, she announced her intention to depose Alessandro "for the good of the nation." The Estates General backed Katrina with a resounding vote of no confidence in the Archon; the LCAF high command likewise threw its weight behind her. Bereft of virtually all political and military support, Alessandro Steiner prudent-

ly resigned in Katrina's favor in July of 3007. He did not, however, give up his dream of one day returning to power.

Alessandro spent the next twenty years living quietly on his homeworld of Furillo, while discreetly seeking potentially useful allies among Katrina's opposition. He found one in Aldo Lestrade, Duke of Summer in the Federation of Skye. A sleepy backwater planet, Summer was too small a canvas for Lestrade's vaulting ambition. He wanted power, and so turned to the nearest tool at hand—the separatists of Skye. By 3024, Aldo Lestrade had built fragmented pockets of secessionist agitators into a genuine, coherent movement. Just such a core of diehard supporters was exactly what Alessandro Steiner needed—provided he could convince the Skye separatists to accept a Steiner in their midst. Over the course of several visits during the 3020s, the former Archon convinced the ambitious duke that they had a common interest in power and a common enemy in Katrina. In exchange for the backing of Lestrade and his movement, he promised to grant Skye its long-cherished independence once he regained the Commonwealth throne. Though it remained unspoken, both men understood that a free Skye would belong to Aldo Lestrade.

Confident of eventually reclaiming power with Lestrade's help, the childless Alessandro sought an heir among his younger relatives. He found one in Ryan Steiner, a young LCAF fighter pilot recently given a government post. Ambitious and a fast learner, Ryan swiftly became a major player in the Skye separatist movement. The deaths of Aldo Lestrade and Alessandro Steiner soon afterward—the former murdered by his own son, the latter claimed by cancer—left Ryan in charge, a position he exploited at the earliest opportunity.

Ryan's chance came in 3034, when official recognition of the Free Republic of Rasalhague sparked widespread civil unrest throughout the Skye region. Garrison troops on troubled worlds, many of them formerly attached to the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns, cracked down harshly on local dissent. Ryan Steiner successfully brokered a peaceful solution to the mini-uprising—an act of clever politicking that allowed him to regain control over his own separatist agents, reinforce his credibility with the movement and paint the largely Davion soldiery involved as the enemy of Skye and Lyrans everywhere. For the first time in Skye's history, Ryan Steiner implicitly linked the interests of the secessionists with those of Lyrans everywhere, and presented the ruling Steiners on Tharkad as neglectful of both. This skillful tapping of general unease with the formation of the Federated Commonwealth made Ryan a formidable threat to the new nation's stability and breathed new life into the Free Skye movement.

Secessionist fever simmered in Skye throughout the next two decades, but never quite boiled over. The linkage of anti-FedCom feeling with Skye notions of independence began to work against Ryan Steiner as well as for him; it brought new recruits to his cause, but also prompted many activists to focus their ire on Hanse Davion rather than on Ryan's rival Melissa Steiner, who began her reign as Archon after Katrina Steiner stepped down in

3039. The arrival of the Clans in 3049 threw the entire Inner Sphere into turmoil, forcing Ryan to put his schemes on hold until he saw what use could be made of the invasion. Hanse Davion's fatal heart attack in 3052 left Melissa the sole ruler of the two realms, but Ryan found it difficult to erode her long-standing popularity throughout the realm. In mid-3055, Melissa fell victim to an assassin; less than a year later, so did Ryan Steiner. Bereft of its leader, the Free Skye movement floundered. The rank and file spent their furies on wild spasms of violence that prompted the FedCom's new ruler to send in the troops. Unable to calm the political firestorm, Archon Prince Victor Steiner-Davion appointed his sister Katherine as regent over the Lyran half of the FedCom and entrusted to her the settlement of the turmoil in Skye. This act would later prove to be the first step, not to Skye's independence but to the creation of the Lyran Alliance.

The Alliance is Born

The catalyst for the secession of Lyran worlds from the FedCom was the death of young Joshua Marik, heir to the Free Worlds League. Seriously ill with leukemia, Joshua died while undergoing treatment at the New Avalon Institute of Science. His death came at a delicate time, with the Clans chafing at the fifteen-year Truce of Tukayyid and the treaty itself set to expire a mere decade hence. In addition, Joshua's demise left his half-sister Isis as heir presumptive to the Free Worlds throne. Isis Marik's engagement to Sun-Tzu Liao, Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation, raised the specter of the ambitious Capellan leader controlling the League's army and industrial production. Faced with these dilemmas, Victor Steiner-Davion made a fateful error in judgment. He substituted a double for Joshua—and the rest, as they say, is history. An enraged Thomas Marik learned of the deception in mid-3057 and promptly declared war on the FedCom. Mere days afterward, an apparently shocked Katherine disavowed Victor and proclaimed Lyran neutrality in the conflict. Along with that neutrality came a declaration of secession; henceforth, Lyran territory would no longer be part of the FedCom, but would instead be known as the independent Lyran Alliance.

Primed by anti-Victor rumors and the upheaval of recent years, most Lyran citizens welcomed the break. Victor and his loyalist military units were too preoccupied with the Clans to undo the secession by force, and so the Lyran people had little fear of civil war. As for the Clan threat, the Com Guards' victory on Tukayyid in 3052 had bought the Inner Sphere fifteen years of peace—ample time for the Lyran armed forces to build up adequate defenses, especially given the vaunted Davion army's apparent inability to halt Clan depredations. Out from under the Davion yoke and once again governed by a "true Steiner," the Lyran people looked forward to an upturn in their fortunes.

For a time, their hopes seemed justified. The re-formation of the Star League in 3058 on Tharkad seemed to symbolize the return of Lyran greatness, as did the role of Lyran troops in the final defeat of the Clans less than three years later. That same year, however, Katherine Steiner-Davion made an ill-advised move

that may well mortgage her people's future. Not content to rule over the Lyran nation, she took power in the Federated Suns as well. Victor's return from Clan space soon afterward, as the hero who defeated the Clans, energized opposition to Katherine among Federated Suns citizens. Katherine's harsh response, along with her increasing indulgence in high-level power plays at the expense of her subjects' welfare, made a civil clash inevitable.

With their Archon hunkered down on New Avalon, the rest of the Lyran government is slowly taking steps to fill the power vacuum on Tharkad. More than a few members of the Estates General have been heard to mutter that the Archon never should have taken the Fed Suns throne while her own people needed her, and some are going beyond talk to action. Several members, many from Tamar and Skye worlds, have attempted to expand the powers of the Estates General, though so far the changes are incremental and temporary. A few far-sighted delegates have also sent out feelers to other members of the Steiner family, such as Duke Robert Kelswa-Steiner, intent on ensuring a Steiner succession should the Alliance lose the war.

Whether or not the Lyran Alliance will survive the current conflict remains to be seen. One thing seems certain, however—neither the Alliance nor the Lyran people will emerge unscathed.

LYRAN SOCIETY

Despite the looming shadow of civil war and other ongoing internal stresses, the Lyran Alliance remains very much what its predecessor was: a realm blessed with abundant resources, hardworking citizens and a degree of political and economic freedom that make it a still-formidable mercantile power. The loss of several Tamar Pact worlds to Clans Jade Falcon and Wolf initially sent shock waves through the Lyran economy, but the business community has largely adjusted over the past decade. The Lyran people have been somewhat slower to recover. The formation of the Lyran Alliance helped bolster them through the difficulties of recent years, but the economic disruptions of the Clan War made many Lyran citizens question for the first time their bedrock belief in their nation's primary source of power. Everyday life for the average Lyran is little different today than in the days of the old Lyran Commonwealth; what has changed is the average citizen's perception of his nation and its place in the universe.

WINDS OF WAR

Mere months old, the FedCom civil war has already begun to affect daily life in the Lyran Alliance. Even on planets far from the flashpoints of conflict, war jitters are making themselves felt in various ways. The surge in confidence among average Lyrans in the wake of the Alliance's birth masked an unspoken fear of a suddenly unsettled future, largely prompted by the economic upheavals of the Clan War. Several planetary economies in the Tamar Pact region remain severely disrupted by the loss of neighboring worlds, and even the larger economy has yet to fully recover. To a people accustomed to taking prosperity for granted, even a temporarily shaky economy came as

a profound shock. Now, with several Alliance planets already battlegrounds in the nascent civil conflict and the prospect of a Davion invasion imminent, ordinary Lyrans' fear of economic chaos has broadened to include other distressing possibilities. Some fear Victor Steiner-Davion's armies; others fear the war's effect on an economy already weakened by Clan conquests and the loss of weapons markets to the humming arms machine of the Free Worlds League. Archon Katherine's recent relocation to New Avalon, capital of the Federated Suns, has done nothing to settle these questions. Indeed, it has raised others in some minds, though these are rarely voiced except in private. Some Lyrans are beginning to wonder if their Archon has placed her own desire for greater power ahead of her people's welfare—a deeply unsettling thought for those used to seeing Katherine Steiner-Davion as a Steiner icon.

The habit of confidence remains strong among the Lyrans, however; most Lyrans rarely display their uneasiness outright. Instead, buried fears manifest in subtler ways. Hoarding is increasingly common, accompanied by overly hearty assurances that the war will surely be over by summer. Recycled lines from anti-Davion broadsides have become part of the public conversation, some of them well on the way toward clichédom. Citizens of worlds far from both the battleground planets and the likeliest invasion route tend to be the most genuinely complacent. Throughout most of its history, the Lyrans Commonwealth was a bastion of prosperity and freedom adequately defended by the Inner Sphere's best-equipped army; these heirs to that legacy see no reason to believe that anything will change. They have always been safe and comfortable; surely they always will be. That bedrock faith, to those who still have it, is the essence of being Lyrans.

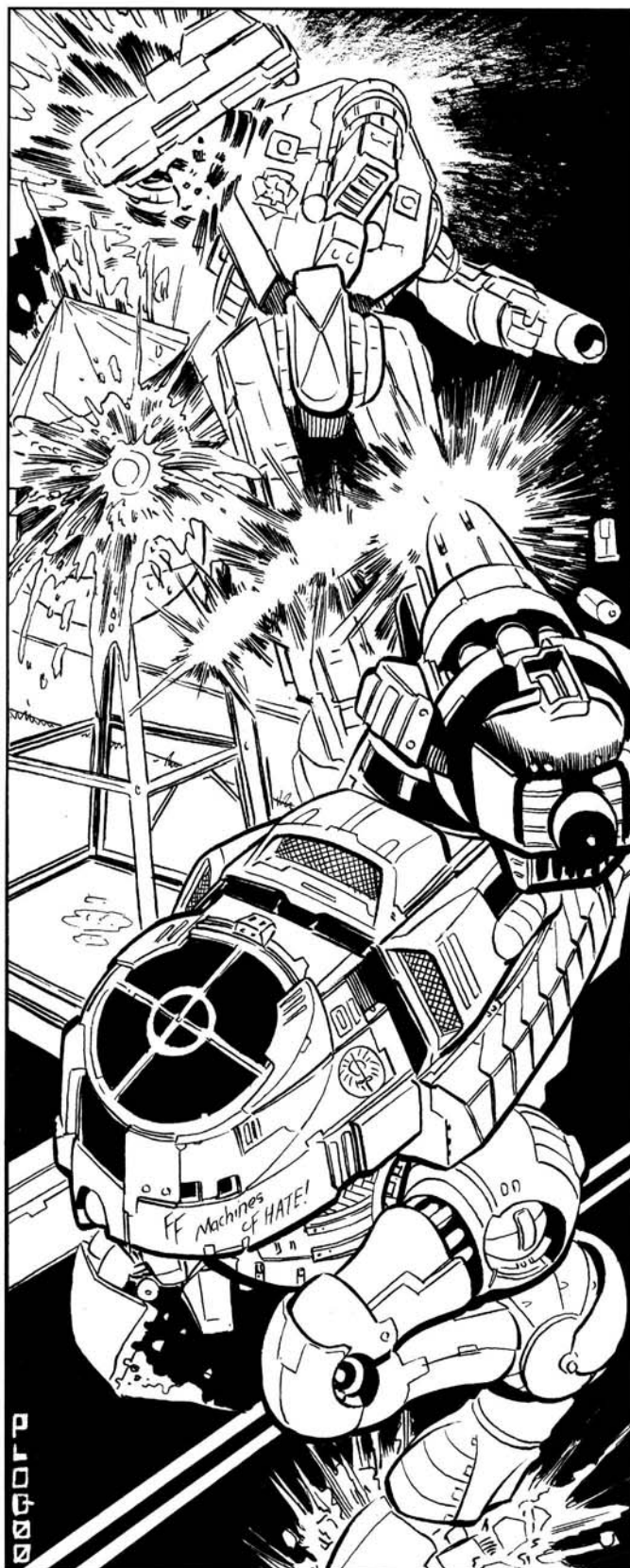
Others are less sanguine. The most apprehensive are those on worlds bordering the Jade Falcon occupation zone. Already suffering from the conquest of their neighbors, the people of these struggling planets rightly fear that civil war between the two halves of the former Federated Commonwealth will doom any prospect of local economic revival. Most are also well aware that Clan Jade Falcon does not consider its invasion over. With the Lyrans Alliance Armed Forces busy fighting off Davion assaults, the Jade Falcons could hardly ask for a better opportunity to pick off still more Lyrans worlds. War fever on many of these planets is running high, with anti-Davion propaganda a mainstay of the local media. Anti-Davion rallies are equally frequent and vociferous. Despite the best efforts of pro-Katherine local authorities, opposition rallies have also begun to take off in recent weeks. Some are pro-Victor, hailing him as the only person who can adequately defend Inner Sphere worlds against Clan attackers. Others are anti-Katherine, gatherings of Lyrans bitterly disappointed by their Archon's assumption of the FedCom throne. Many of these once counted themselves among Katherine's most fervent loyalists, until the FedCom takeover made them question her commitment to their welfare.

Pro-Davion demonstrations have gradually increased on Lyrans worlds ever since the Coventry campaign of 3058, in which Victor Steiner-Davion led a combined force from all the Successor States to a virtually bloodless victory over a Clan Jade Falcon strike force. The Star League triumph over the Clans less than three years later gave new impetus to Victor's supporters in the Lyrans realm, burnishing his image as the hero of his age. Now, with Victor poised to take back the Federated Commonwealth throne, these Davion partisans are working overtime to increase their support. On Coventry and the four other worlds briefly claimed by the Falcons, pro-Davion demonstrators generally play to more sympathetic audiences. On other worlds near Jade Falcon territory, voicing support for Victor is a calculated risk. A timely declaration in Victor's favor by the commander of the Eighth Deneb Light Cavalry on Kikuyu turned a potentially ugly clash into a massive show of pro-Victor feeling. On nearby Moggyorod, a similar rally degenerated into a riot when pro-Katherine counterdemonstrators surged out of the crowd and clubbed the rally's organizers off the platform. The sole survivor among the latter faces trial and possible execution for sedition.

Despite the publicity given the Moggyorod incident, most Lyrans citizens remain unaware of the extent of the crackdown on pro-Davion activity. Though many would likely support it in the face of war, forcible suppression of political dissent runs counter to the very freedoms on which the Lyrans Commonwealth was based. In the Alliance as in the Commonwealth, ordinary Lyrans are accustomed to having their say. Dictatorial tactics rarely sit well with these passionate and vocal people, most of whom are deeply interested in politics because of its intimate connection with commerce. Even those who believe strong measures may be necessary prefer not to know too many details. Voltaire's famous dictum about free speech—"I do not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it"—is near and dear to many a Lyrans heart, fostered by centuries of leaders who believed in such freedom as a necessary social safety valve.

Loyalty and the Military

Divided loyalties among former FedCom troops, starkly polarized by the opening clashes of the civil war, have given a new twist to age-old Lyrans military problems. Historically, the LCAF suffered from too many incompetent higher-ranking officers promoted for their connections rather than their ability. Now the Alliance armed forces must contend with questions of loyalty to the Archon as well. After thirty-odd years of serving a united Lyrans/Fed Suns realm, units that had begun to think of themselves as part of a FedCom army were suddenly asked to revert to simpler and narrower loyalties: pro-Davion or pro-Steiner. Katherine's call for traditionally Lyrans units serving in Fed Suns space to "come home" to the Alliance further complicated this delicate situation. The political bent of a unit's commander did not always reflect that of his troops, and vice versa. The resultant massive reshuffling of the newly chris-



tened LAAF left the Alliance desperately vulnerable to the Jade Falcon strike of 3058, which temporarily cost it five worlds. Only the timely arrival of Victor Steiner-Davion and his multi-House task force turned that defeat into victory.

Katherine's 3061 takeover of the FedCom vastly expanded an already enormous administrative headache. Pro-Victor, pro-Katherine and neutral units are so thoroughly interspersed, particularly in Fed Suns space, that civil war was virtually a foregone conclusion. Meanwhile, the upheaval is taking a toll on the soldiers and their families. Abrupt reassignments halfway across the FedCom, strain between different political factions in the same unit, and increasing pressure for Katherine's loyalists to report "suspicious" pro-Davion or neutral political leanings are among the fallout, all intensifying as the civil war heats up. More than a few Lyran, military and civilians alike, worry about what will happen when the conflict finally explodes. Though most believe in eventual Lyran victory, they are beginning to wonder what price they might pay.

THE SKYE QUESTION

Even in the best of times, Skye separatism remains a force in Lyran politics. In times of turmoil, it becomes a major factor in the lives of Skye's citizens, who comprise a sizable portion of the Lyran population. The late Duke Ryan Steiner's marriage to Morasha Kelswa, Duchess of Tamar, linked the much smaller Tamarese separatist movement to its larger Skye counterpart while giving both the resources of the Tamar Pact to draw on. Clan inroads in Tamar territory somewhat blunted the impact of the latter, but the remaining Pact worlds still serve Free Skye as an alternative power base. The rise to prominence of Ryan Steiner's son Robert, Duke of Porrima and presumptive duke of Tamar, joins the secessionists of both regions in a single, charismatic leader. Without Victor Steiner-Davion to serve as a lightning rod, separatist feeling is once more turning against the regime on Tharkad, thereby enhancing Robert Kelswa-Steiner's appeal as an alternative.

Archon Katherine's recent move to New Avalon has only intensified rising sentiment against her. The people of Skye tend to remember injuries far longer and more vividly than reparations, as generations of Steiner rulers discovered to their cost. Largely forgotten in the current climate are Katherine's efforts toward rebuilding in Skye in the wake of the abortive 3056 rebellion. Like her ancestor Robert Steiner, who personally paid damages for the destruction he wrought in Skye, Katherine directed vast sums of investment capital into the region's schools, industries and infrastructure between 3056 and 3060. By forming the Alliance and becoming its sole ruler, however, Katherine also made herself a target for regional dissent. The resurgence of anti-government feeling crystallized with the takeover of the Federated Suns. To the average Skye citizen, already turning somewhat skeptical about "those German busybodies on Tharkad," Katherine's power grab stands as proof that she cares little about their interests. Fears of Lyran absorption by the huge

Federated Suns have flared up with a vengeance, this time focused on Katherine Steiner-Davion rather than a convenient "Davion" ruler.

For the ordinary resident of Skye, the raging tides of local politics combine with the threat of war in both blatant and subtle ways. Some residents of border worlds near the Draconis Combine—a frequent candidate in the local rumor mill for the Davion army's staging base—are sending their families to presumed safety on planets deeper in Skye, or even out of Skye altogether. Favorite destinations are Alarion and Coventry provinces, both comfortably far from expected invasion routes and from Tharkad. Other natives of these worlds are staunchly staying put, refusing to "run like rabbits from that jumped-up little Davion dictator." Disruptions in delivery of various goods and foodstuffs, mostly prompted by sporadic hoarding across the Alliance, are reviving local grievances between Skye and its neighbor regions. In shops and streets and taverns, outspoken locals often grouse that their province is once more going short to profit more loyalist worlds. Scots and Irish rebel songs harking back to ancient Terra ring from many a roadside pub, with Victor or Katherine equally likely substitutes for the villains of those ancient ballads. Thus far, the gathering clouds of war have kept anti-Steiner sentiment at a simmer. The successes or reverses of the next several months could dampen secessionist fires once more or spark them into a conflagration.

The separatist movement itself is divided into two factions. One advocates immediate action against the Tharkad regime for its alleged betrayal of Skye and Lyran interests; the other is backing a cease-fire in this perennial political conflict, lest internal dissent weaken the entire Alliance and hand it to the man many still sneeringly call "the Davion princeling." Supporters of the second faction believe that a victory for pro-Davion forces would permanently snuff out Skye's prospects of freedom, whereas triumph for Katherine would leave that door open. The two factions claim roughly equal strength among the people; only the course of the war will tell which side eventually wins out.

DAILY LIFE

Occasional eruptions of war jitters aside, everyday life for most Alliance citizens is little different from life in the heyday of the Lyran Commonwealth. The national economy has largely absorbed the jolts of the Clan War; though poverty is somewhat higher by historical Lyran standards, most people remain comfortably off. Increasing rapprochement with the Free Worlds League and the Capellan Confederation continues to strengthen markets for Lyran consumer goods and agricultural products, compensating considerably for economic changes wrought by the Clan invasion. Even the civil war promises an economic boost of sorts; military manufacturers hit by Marik encroachment stand ready to raise production quotas and profits should the conflict with Victor's forces last any appreciable time.

This general material comfort helps to counterbalance uncertainties about the future, publicly denied but often privately voiced by people throughout the Alliance. Citizens of inte-

rior planets, farthest from the Clan border and other hot spots like the shrinking Chaos March, tend to express genuine confidence that the war will soon pass over without greatly disrupting their well-ordered lives. A typical middle-class Lyran on such a world can point to several proofs of his convictions: the plumbing still functions, the lights work, the high-speed maglev trains still run on time and he still earns a regular paycheck. In bustling cities, crowds still fill the cafés and brauhauses with idle chatter about business or the local sports team, with the war only occasionally intruding. In smaller towns and on less developed worlds, the sleepier rhythm of local life likewise goes on. Just as in the old Lyran Commonwealth, these worlds are the envy of many poorer Inner Sphere states, blessed with the abundant material wealth that is the hallmark of Lyran life everywhere outside Lyran borders.

On planets near the Jade Falcon occupation zone and in more troubled regions, like Skye and the remnant of Tamar, the view of life is grimmer, though often the details are not. Here, too, the building blocks of everyday existence continue to function reasonably well. Yet because the people of these worlds feel more fearful about their future, even minor disruptions to the daily routine take on immense significance. To take just one example, the temporary disappearance of imported Donegal apple-pears from market shelves in Chahar's capital city sparked a wave of panicky rumors that Donegal had fallen to a Davion blitzkrieg assault. In fact, the prized fruits had fallen victim to a late freeze that decimated much of the early crop. Their reappearance weeks later at slightly higher prices, accompanied by reassuring government press releases, soon settled the wilder stories. Bolstered by a long tradition of political openness, Lyrans are accustomed to trusting their leaders. Yet unease remains, awaiting only another small incident to bring it out.

As the war plays out over the coming months or years, much is likely to change for the Lyran nation. Certain of its greatest strengths, however, are bred in the bone of its people. These descendants of old Europe—stalwart Germans, passionate Italians, hard-headed Celts and pragmatic English, among many others—built an interstellar empire on hard work and persistence, along with a remarkable ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The latter gift will stand them in good stead no matter who ultimately governs from Tharkad or New Avalon. Lyran worlds remain rich in resources, though a larger share of the profits from them has gone to higher-ranking nobles useful to Katherine Steiner-Davion since 3057. General Lyran confidence likewise remains strong, despite the many blows of the past several years. Whether or not the Alliance survives in name, a proud Lyran realm will surely do so in spirit.

FREE RASALHAGUE REPUBLIC

We have always been a nation of fighters, we people of Rasalhague. Though I have since become a son of Clan Ghost Bear, I include myself in that "we" as a reminder of where I came from. The qualities that let me survive capture and bond-service to two Clans, and rise in the ranks of each, are the same ones that enabled Free Rasalhague to triumph over a history that would have buried a lesser people. We love our worlds and our ways fiercely, as a mother bear loves her cubs. We will dare anything to preserve them. We know how and when to fight. And we never give up.

The domain of Rasalhague began with explorers from old Terra, spacefaring descendants of the ancient Norse whom others misnamed Vikings. With spaceships for longboats, my ancestors struck out through the starry seas, seeking a home where they could live and raise children with hope for the future. They came to the planet Rasalhague, a world of fjords and pines and snow-covered mountains much like the homelands they had left. Within three generations, those first settlers had built a thriving society and established colonies on eight other nearby planets. For the next seventy years, Rasalhagians developed their new homelands and kept their noses out of others' business. All they wanted was to live free and be left alone.

They did not get their wish. Shiro Kurita of the Draconis Combine stretched out a covetous hand, and the folk of Rasalhague were forced to fight to keep what was theirs. And fight they did, by every means they could. For nearly two hundred years after the first Combine troops landed, the Principality of Rasalhague remained free in fact, if not in name. House Kurita claimed to rule us, a claim the people allowed while going about their lives as they always had. Because that was what they fought for—not over who might call himself their overlord, but to keep their traditional way of life intact. As long as they could speak their own languages, honor their own heroes, teach their own children and keep to their own customs, they did not care who kept a distant throne warm. My forebears knew that true freedom exists in the details of daily life. If we have it there, we have it for all time.

To this day, my people still understand that. Throughout their history, they have taught that truth to their conquerors: first the Kuritas, then the Clans. It took four hundred years of clandestine struggle before House Kurita learned it could not remake Rasalhagians in its ancient-Japanese image. Theodore Kurita was intelligent enough to give Free Rasalhague its independence in 3034 rather than waste more lives fighting a people who would not be crushed. Sixteen years later, new conquerors arrived in need of the same lesson. Clan Ghost Bear

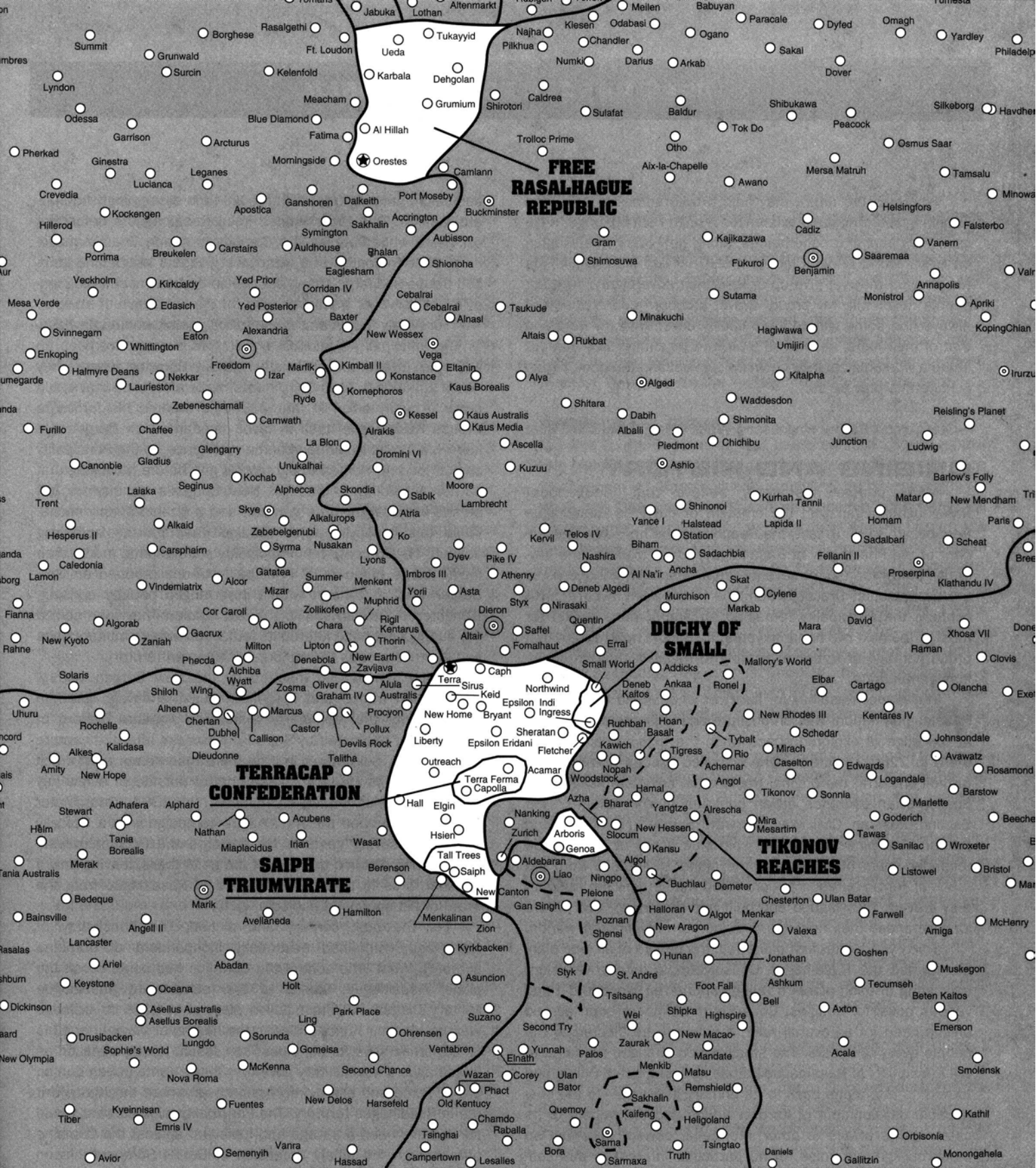
has since learned it. Clan Wolf, broken by civil war and reborn in an arrogant Crusader mold, has not.

Rasalhagians in the Ghost Bear Dominion have largely ceased to rebel, because the Ghost Bear authorities have the sense to leave them alone. The Bears know that these proud sons and daughters of Free Rasalhague are not Clansmen and never will be—and more importantly, that they do not need to be. We need not be alike in order to live peacefully together. We need only recognize our common interests and treat each other with mutual respect. The Ghost Bears have managed this, and my people are repaying them in kind.

The Wolves similarly earned such treatment in Ulric Kerensky's day. With the splintering of the Wolf Clan, however, the capacity for mutual tolerance disappeared. The harder the Crusader Wolves crack down, the more loathing they rouse in Rasalhagian hearts. Unlike the Ghost Bears, the Wolves persist in believing that mere civilians—and Inner Sphere barbarians at that—cannot do them any harm. They do not yet understand that when an entire people is your enemy, there is nowhere to hide. Sooner or later, the Wolves will face the same choice the Ghost Bears did: give us the freedom to live as we wish, or die from a thousand pinpricks. Or lay waste to your own conquered possessions and thereby render them worthless.

Meanwhile, the remnant of Free Rasalhague is slowly regaining its strength. The presence of ComStar troops has kept it safe, but ordinary citizens are looking beyond the usual Inner Sphere powers in search of their own destiny. It may lie with the Ghost Bear Dominion, a tie I would welcome. As a Star Colonel and advisor to the Ghost Bear Khan, I know that the Bears are fit guardians for my people against inroads by the Crusader Wolves. Not all of my former countrymen would agree with me, however. Some persist in demonizing all the Clans as rapacious raiders bent on destroying the Inner Sphere. They see me as alternately brainwashed by captivity or as their brave Prince Ragnar, pretending to join the Clans in order to sabotage them from within and thereby regain freedom for every Rasalhague world. This kind of thinking shows the flaw in Rasalhagian national pride. Our history with the Draconis Combine and our heritage as a warrior people blend to create the illusion that we cannot be defeated. Because Rasalhagians have triumphed over so much with so little help from others, it is easy to believe that we can overcome any obstacle with no more than our own determination. With the resources of only seven planets to draw on, such notions are pure folly. Free Rasalhague will have to depend on outside aid for survival, whether that aid comes from ComStar, the Ghost Bears or some other power whose involvement I can't guess at.





CHAOS MARCH FREE RASALHAGUE REPUBLIC

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LEGEND

8 PARSECS



40 PARSECS OR 130.4 LIGHT YEARS

SCALE: 1/8" = 1 PARSEC = 3.26 LIGHT YEARS = 19,164,277,860,000 STATUTE MILES

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS
FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES USE 9 PARSECS = 29.34 LY

Whatever the future may hold, I take some pride in Free Rasalhague's continued existence. Though I am no longer a citizen, I am part of it nonetheless, along with every Rasalhagian on every world under Clan control. The last planets of Free Rasalhague may yet give up or lose their sovereignty, but their people never will. My proud, brave, stubborn countrymen will always find some way to keep liberty alive. With my help and that of my Khans, as well as their own ingenuity, they may yet strike a workable balance between survival and freedom. I dearly hope this may be so.

—Star Colonel Ragnar Magnusson, Alpha Galaxy, Clan Ghost Bear

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

Many people mistakenly believe that independent Rasalhague began with the creation of the Free Rasalhague Republic in 3034. In fact, the Republic is the hard-won descendant of the Principality of Rasalhague, which existed as a sovereign power for its first seventy years. Nominally conquered by the expansionist Draconis Combine in the early twenty-fourth century, the Principality remained an autonomous region for most of the next two hundred years. Its people never forgot that proud heritage of freedom, fighting to regain it through countless generations.

The planet Rasalhague, heart of what would become the Rasalhagian nation, was an obscure and unpeopled backwater at the edge of explored space when the first settlers arrived there in 2260. Children of the so-called Exodus from political turmoil on Terra, the original Rasalhague colonists hailed from Scandinavian countries driven bankrupt by the fallout of the Second Russian Civil War: Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The pine forests and cold blue fjords of Rasalhague reminded them of home, and the planet's distance from the reach of Terran bureaucracy promised the settlers the freedom they craved. They landed and built and prospered, and before long expanded their holdings to eight more neighboring worlds.

Thirty years after first planetfall, the people of all nine planets formed the Rasalhague Consortium, a joint government consisting of each planet's ruling *varldherre* ("world-lord") and various powerful families. Consortium members soon agreed on the need for an overall ruler, a prince to be elected by the people every ten years. The small nation changed its name to the Principality of Rasalhague, chose its first Elected Prince and turned its attentions back to its primary interests—to the sustainable development of its own worlds and the welfare of its citizens. The affairs of other interstellar powers were just so much background noise, of no particular interest to this self-sufficient, close-knit, insular people.

Isolationist policies and political neutrality, however, proved insufficient safeguards for Rasalhagian liberty. In 2330, Shiro Kurita of the Draconis Combine turned toward Rasalhague in search of new conquests. Making the most of moderate military resources, Shiro launched a leapfrogging

campaign, jumping from world to world in a seemingly haphazard fashion. This tactic helped keep Rasalhague's defenders off guard while keeping the Combine's supply lines manageable. Once in control of a world, the invaders left behind garrison troops and large supply caches so that each captured planet might serve as a staging base for the next wave of attacks.

For nearly four years, the leapfrog gambit worked flawlessly. The Principality's minimal armed forces could not keep up with the invaders, particularly without knowing where they would strike next. Then Shiro Kurita made a decision that would prove a costly error. In late 2333, he ordered his forces to bypass Rasalhague itself in favor of nearby New Bergen. He knew his forces would face fierce resistance on the Principality capital, and he wanted to tighten his grip before provoking that battle. According to pattern, New Bergen's conquerors left behind a moderate-sized garrison and a sizable supply cache. While this occupying force readied itself for the upcoming assault on Outpost, the Principality's defenders made their move. Large numbers of Principality troops dropped on New Bergen and, in concert with a prearranged popular uprising, slaughtered the garrison to the last soldier. They then seized the supply depot and filtered its lethal contents to military units and guerrilla groups throughout Rasalhagian territory.

Better armed and inspired by the New Bergen victory, Rasalhagian troops and irregulars fought a savage guerrilla campaign for the next thirty years. The nominal Warlord of Rasalhague, appointed by Shiro Kurita weeks after the capture of that world, held power in little more than name; even crack Combine troops could not keep control outside of a few key cities on various Principality planets. In 2367, Coordinator Tenno Kurita ended the Rasalhague campaign with a typically Kurita face-saving gesture. He declared the Principality vanquished and recalled the bulk of the units there, leaving only a nominal force to protect the Warlord of Rasalhague from the wrath of his supposed subjects.

For the next century and a half, the Principality of Rasalhague remained essentially independent of Combine authority. What little control the Combine had centered on the planet Rasalhague, capital of the rechristened Rasalhague Military District. A violent, failed attempt in 2375 to dislodge Warlord Vladimir Kurita ended in the deaths of Vladimir and his entire family, save for his eldest son Jason. Hastily installed as Rasalhague's new military governor, Jason Kurita ushered in an era of fierce and bloody repression everywhere the Kurita writ ran in Rasalhague territory. The Principality avoided what would surely have been a savage and futile war against the Combine only through the timely accession of Daniel Sorenson, Jason Kurita's nephew and son of Rasalhague's former Elected Prince.

Jason's backing of Nihongi Von Rohrs in a coup against the Combine throne prompted Daniel and several Kurita loyalists to revolt, costing Jason Kurita the support of Coordinator Nihongi and ultimately his life. With Jason dead, Daniel Sorenson assumed control. As Lord of Rasalhague, Daniel Sorenson

devoted his long reign to protecting the interests of the Principality's people and opposing the Von Rohrs Coordinators. Daniel's successors continued to place regional interests over national ones and to safeguard the natives' rights against encroachment as best they could. Over time, this quiet separatism became de facto independence, with the Lords of Rasalhague increasingly treated like sovereign heads of state.

The Sorenson clan's opposition to the Von Rohrs dynasty eventually proved the latter's downfall. In the early years of the twenty-sixth century, Lord Blaine Sorenson placed the military resources of his Principality at the disposal of Martin McAllister, his son-in-law and a scion of the legitimate Kurita line. McAllister overthrew Kruger Von Rohrs and became Coordinator in 2510. Mere days afterward, Lord Blaine Sorenson formally joined the Principality with the rest of the Combine, receiving in return the title of Duke of Rasalhague. McAllister's reign proved cruelly short, but his half-Rasalhagian daughter Siriwan was a more than worthy successor. Siriwan ruled the Draconis Combine three times, first as her father's heir and twice more as regent between 2515 and 2607. During those years, the people of Rasalhague enjoyed more freedom and greater peace than they had since 2330—or would know again for more than four hundred years.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

The fortunes of the Rasalhague Military District took an abrupt turn for the worse during the reign of Coordinator Urizen Kurita II, who assumed the throne in 2620. Urizen's predecessor had begun the construction of the Combine's new capital on the planet Luthien, and it fell to the new Coordinator to complete this ambitious project. Immersed in the architecture and history of medieval Japan, inspiration for the Imperial City, Urizen became fascinated with every aspect of life in that ancient period. His infatuation with it soon led him to see the culture, mores and language of Old Japan as the ideal blueprint for the Draconis Combine. Armed with this conviction and aided by the Combine's existing Japanese bent, Urizen attempted to impose absolute cultural conformity across the realm. Rasalhague—whose people and customs were decidedly un-Asian, let alone Japanese—found itself cast as the principal villain in the Coordinator's war on diversity.

Invaded, forcibly annexed and plunged into a generations-long guerrilla war with their would-be conquerors, the people of Rasalhague had every reason to feel separate from and hostile to the rest of the Combine. Decades of de facto independence under the Sorenson family had reinforced this feeling of separateness. When Urizen II attempted to obliterate all influences not Japanese from Combine space, Rasalhagians predictably resisted. They routinely flouted Japanese-only language laws, fought to teach their own history in local school systems, and generally refused to give up local traditions and customs. The harder subsequent Coordinators cracked down on Rasalhagian "cultural impurity," the more Rasalhague fought to retain its

own identity. No matter what penalty was imposed, the people of Rasalhague refused to conform. This widespread resistance to cultural imperialism gradually coalesced into a campaign for political freedom, and from there into an independence movement. The so-called Tyr resistance survived and grew, through underground cells and intermittent terror attacks, over the long centuries of turmoil that rocked the Inner Sphere—the Reunification War, the fall of the Star League and the bitterly fought Succession Wars. Not until the fourth and last of those conflicts, however, did the Tyr begin to come into its own.

FREEDOM RINGS

The Fourth Succession War, launched in 3028 with a massive invasion of the Capellan Confederation, brought new hope for freedom to Rasalhague's struggling resistance fighters. While the Davions concentrated on Capellan conquests, the Lyrans turned their sights on the Draconis Combine border. The Rasalhague Military District, already a hotbed of anti-Kurita unrest, made the perfect target for Lyrans forces. In 3029, officials of the Lyrans government met with leaders of the Tyr resistance on the Commonwealth world of Tamar. The Lyrans pledged the rebels their support in return for aid against Combine troops in the Rasalhague region. As proof of their honorable intentions, the Lyrans unveiled the Tyr Regiment, a BattleMech unit raised and trained by the Lyrans Commonwealth Armed Forces but staffed with Rasalhagian exiles. The resistance leaders took the bargain; over the next year, they provided vital intelligence on troop movements and undertook commando missions deep behind Combine lines. When the war ended in 3030, many Rasalhagians believed that independence would swiftly follow.

Their hopes were briefly dashed by the Duke of Tamar, who sent his own administrators to the conquered Rasalhague worlds instead of allowing the Tyr to take control. Angered by this apparent betrayal, the resistance movement bombed government buildings on several worlds in early 3031. Archon Katrina Steiner intervened immediately upon learning of the situation, but the trust between the two sides had been irreparably fractured. When the Combine moved to support Rasalhagian independence just a few years later, the Archon had no choice but to follow suit.

In 3034, four hundred and fourteen years after Urizen II began his reign, Rasalhague's freedom fighters finally realized their dream. Theodore Kurita, then Gunji-no-Kanrei of the Draconis Combine, formally recognized the Free Rasalhague Republic, a sovereign state encompassing most of the old Rasalhague Principality. In exchange for this gesture, the Draconis Combine received two things it badly needed: several Star League-era 'Mechs to beef up its military against expected aggression from the Federated Suns, and a buffer state between the Combine and Lyrans space. Granting independence to Rasalhague freed the Combine from a separatist quagmire and blunted one avenue of potential FedCom invasion, while

costing the realm a collection of troublesome planets infested with an alien culture. Or so Theodore argued to his father, Coordinator Takashi Kurita, who grudgingly gave the new nation his blessing.

Jubilation swept across Rasalhague, from the halls of government buildings in the city of Reykjavik to outlying settlements on Holmsbu. Nearly seven hundred years after Shiro Kurita's invasion, the worlds of Rasalhague were once again free to chart their own destiny. One last fight for freedom awaited them, however. The Warlords of Pesht and Dieron, two prominent Combine military districts, refused to accept the Coordinator's decree and vowed to take Free Rasalhague back. Within weeks, they launched a massive attack on the infant nation. More Combine invaders followed—not to conquer, but to enforce the Coordinator's will. Acting in Takashi's name, Theodore Kurita proclaimed the rebel forces ronin, masterless warriors. Together with the Rasalhague KungsArmé, Theodore's troops fought several short, violent battles between April of

3034 and December of 3035. With the rebels dead or in custody, the DCMS peacefully withdrew across the Rasalhague border. At last, the Free Republic of Rasalhague could begin to live up to its name.

COMING OF THE CLANS

Free Rasalhague did not have long to enjoy its triumph, however. Less than twenty years after independence, all but a tiny slice of the FRR fell victim to invasion—not from the Draconis Combine or any other Inner Sphere realm, but from the depths of space. In 3049, the Clans reached the Inner Sphere and carved a swath of conquest through the Periphery. By early 3050, the first units of Clans Wolf and Ghost Bear had crossed into Rasalhague. Between March and October of that year, these two mighty Clans captured fifty Rasalhague worlds. By far the worst loss to many FRR citizens was Rasalhague itself, won by Clan Wolf after savage fighting in July of 3050.

Elected Prince Haakon Magnusson fled the occupying forces, determined to keep alive a Free Rasalhague government somewhere in FRR space. His tiny flotilla headed toward Radstadt, unaware that it too had fallen to Clan Wolf. Magnusson escaped capture by a Clan fleet over Radstadt when a KungsArmé pilot bought him his freedom with a suicide run against the Clan flagship—an act of grim courage befitting a Rasalhagian warrior. The assault killed the ilKhan, the Clans' supreme war leader. In the following lull, later called the Year of Peace, the Clan commanders returned home to select a new ilKhan. Meanwhile, the leaders of the Inner Sphere's major realms gathered on the mercenary world of Outreach for a historic summit. Though barely able to overcome their mutual histories of hostility, the Successor Lords managed to hammer out a plan for their mutual defense. This watershed event set the stage for some impressive Inner Sphere victories, most notably against Clans Nova Cat and Smoke Jaguar on the Combine capital of Luthien. Though no one recognized it at the time, the Outreach gathering also set the pattern for stronger alliances to come.

In November of 3051, the Clans returned in force with a new ilKhan, Ulric Kerensky of the Wolves. The Wolf and Ghost Bear toumans resumed their attack waves, capturing still more FRR planets. Chief among FRR losses to Clan Wolf was Satalice, where the final battle cost Free Rasalhague not only that planet, but the heir to the FRR throne. Ragnar Magnusson, son of the Elected Prince, was commanding a company of the Third Drakøns when the Wolf assault force landed. The Thirteenth Wolf Guards pursued Prince Ragnar's force into the arctic Blue Lava



Fields, where Star Commander Phelan—himself a former Inner Sphere bondsman, son of the famed mercenary Morgan Kell—defeated Ragnar in single combat. The news of the prince's capture was another devastating blow to the people of the FRR. As their forebears had done before them, however, they soldiered on. Those who could fled to planets still free. Others stayed to fight the occupiers, or to rebuild their shattered worlds as best they could. Both conquering Clans were wise enough to assist in these efforts, thereby winning a grudging degree of trust from many of their new subjects. Resistance remained, however, keeping Clan garrisons on their guard.

Tukayyid

By April of 3052, Free Rasalhague had lost twenty-one more worlds to the Clans. A mere seven planets remained—Orestes, Al Hillah, Grumium, Dehgan, Karbala, Ueda and Tukayyid—all safeguarded by crack Com Guard units. The battle for Tukayyid would shortly go down in history as the turning point in the Clan War.

On the seventh of January, 3052, ComStar learned for the first time of the Clan invaders' ultimate goal: Terra, homeworld of humanity and cradle of the Star League they meant to recreate in their image. Terra was also the ComStar order's seat of power. The knowledge that Terra was the Clans' primary target galvanized ComStar's Primus Myndo Waterly into opposing the invaders she had previously been eager to help. She ordered me as Precentor Martial to find a way to keep Terra from the Clans. After studying the situation, I determined to offer them a proxy battle on a different world—one of my own choosing, to give the Com Guards every advantage of terrain and weather. I chose Tukayyid, a backwater agricultural planet whose small population would minimize possible civilian casualties. I then challenged ilKhan Ulric and all the invading Clans to meet the Com Guard in battle there. If the Clans won, Terra would belong to whichever Clan first achieved its objectives on Tukayyid. If they lost, they would abide by a fifteen-year cease-fire.

Tantalized by the prospect of winning all in a single stroke, the Clans agreed to my proposal. Throughout the month of May, the Com Guards battled all seven invading Clans in a brutal, titanic bloodbath. The Com Guards emerged victorious, and the ilKhan signed the Truce of Tukayyid. That document gave the Inner Sphere vital breathing room to rebuild, regroup and begin to close the overwhelming gap with the Clans in battlefield technology.

The End of the Beginning

With the Clan invasion temporarily halted, the remnant of Free Rasalhague did what it could to rebuild along with the rest of the Inner Sphere. Prince Haakon Magnusson attended the Whitting Conference on Tharkad in 3058, adding his small nation's weight to the revival of the Star League. Free Rasalhague army units joined the subsequent assaults on Clan Smoke Jaguar, the Third Drakøns helping to drive the Jaguars from the Inner Sphere and the Fourth Drakøns aiding in the conquest of that Clan's homeworld. Free Rasalhague's greatest

contribution to the end of the Clan War, however, was the almost seven years of peace bought on Tukayyid. In that brief time between 3052 and 3059, when the new Star League Army launched its first assault on the Smoke Jaguar Occupation Zone, Inner Sphere military technology advanced enough to meet the Clans as near-equals on the battlefield. Vicious Clan infighting played a role as well, crippling the formidable Jade Falcons before they could spark a wholesale rejection of the Tukayyid truce. But without the breathing space won on an insignificant FRR world, no amount of inter-Clan rivalry would have helped the Inner Sphere to its final victory.

FREE RASALHAGUE SOCIETY

Above all, the Free Rasalhague Republic is sustained by its unquenchable sense of identity. Fierce pride in their unique heritage and the courage to struggle over centuries to win their freedom are the touchstones of Rasalhague's people. These twin attributes have so far enabled the FRR to remain a viable nation despite the loss of virtually all its territory to the Clans. In the years since Tukayyid, Free Rasalhague has begun to seek its own accommodation with its former Clan enemies. Like their ancestors unwilling to live under the Combine yoke, today's Rasalhagians are no longer content to allow their realm to be a mere ComStar protectorate. They wish to go their own way, and survive or succumb according to their own strength.

REBUILDING AND RENEWAL

Free Rasalhague stands at a crossroads, its way of life profoundly affected by the Clan War and its future dependent on stark choices. That its citizens are preparing to make those choices speaks volumes about the courage and flinty strength of these descendants of the Norse warriors. The recent balloting for the office of Elected Prince provides a case in point. Christian Mansdotter, the republic's current leader, came in second to the candidate preferred by a wide margin—Ragnar Magnusson, son of retired Elected Prince Haakon. In Ragnar's absence, Mansdotter holds the position of Elected Prince Regent, a position that would be lost should Ragnar return from his current position. Ragnar currently serves as a Star Colonel with Clan Ghost Bear's prestigious Alpha Galaxy, a fact not lost on those who voted for him. Such a choice could indicate that Rasalhagians are disregarding their prince's Clan status, but more likely shows their pride in his rise in Clan rank. Increased contact with the Ghost Bear Dominion and evidence of the Bears' fair treatment of civilians have given many FRR citizens a kinder view of the Ghost Bears. Once upon a time, they might have mourned Ragnar Magnusson's transformation into a Clansman. Now, large numbers of them see it as proof that they and the Ghost Bears can learn to live amicably with one another.

The Bears' recent actions against Clan Wolf appear to confirm this view, though skeptics point out that the Bears benefited themselves more than the FRR. In the final months of 3061, Ghost Bear units took three former FRR planets from

the Wolf Clan: Skandia, Leoben and Radstadt. Since the schism of the Wolf Clan and its reformation in a fanatically Crusader mold, relations between the Wolves and Rasalhagian civilians on occupied worlds have markedly worsened. Wolf garrisons on many worlds, their ranks swelled with fervent Crusaders eager to crush the "Inner Sphere barbarians," increasingly treat local populations with arrogance and scorn. Mutual understanding, a key component of government for the Warden Wolves, is gradually giving way to a harder grip on power. Against this backdrop, the Ghost Bears' "liberation" of three planets from Wolf control appears to some in the FRR as a gesture of solidarity between the Bears and Free Rasalhague. Many others do not go that far, but acknowledge advantages to closer ties with the Ghost Bears—not least of which is the Bears' ability to keep Wolf troops too busy to invade Free Rasalhague's remaining territory.

In recent months, different factions have begun to coalesce around three possibilities for coexistence with the Bears: détente, alliance or joining the Dominion outright. Proponents of the former two options stress that they will keep Free Rasalhague independent; actually joining the Ghost Bears means throwing away the freedom their parents and grandparents fought for. Advocates of joining the Bears frequently reply that freedom on paper will not keep Clan Wolf from conquering Free Rasalhague should ComStar leave and the Ghost Bears decline to step in. The only guarantee of genuine liberty, these people say, is a strong defense that the Bears would be obligated to provide to worlds they possess.

So far, the debate remains civilized, as do the republic's relations with ComStar. Elected Prince Regent Mansdotter, however, has made it increasingly clear to the Com Guard units in the FRR that the people will tolerate their drain on scarce local resources only for so long. With the immediate future still uncertain, the average FRR citizen sees the Com Guards as a necessary burden. Once Free Rasalhague makes its choice, however, ComStar may have no alternative but to gracefully depart.

In the absence of consensus about the FRR's ultimate future, Regent Mansdotter has called on every Rasalhague citizen to rebuild and strengthen the nation. Intensely patriotic as ever, Rasalhagians are devoting all they have to this massive effort. The republic faces a legion of problems, which its people are tackling with typical energy and determination. Wealthier residents of FRR worlds are financing various efforts to revive local economies, many of them shattered by the loss of neighboring worlds to the Clans. On Tukayyid, the agricultural conglomerates that governed much of the planet pooled their remaining resources to help each other rebuild facilities damaged by the savage fighting of 3052. Orestes, capital of the FRR since the fall of Rasalhague, has aggressively sought trade contracts with nearby worlds in the Lyran Alliance. The FRR government also continues to strengthen economic ties with the Ghost Bear Dominion, where combined rebuilding efforts by Bear authorities and civilian populations have considerably healed the scars of war.

Closer links with the Dominion may also provide the answer to the FRR's most pressing problem, its refugee population. The sheer swiftness of the Clan juggernaut prevented huge numbers from fleeing captured planets, but a sizable portion managed to relocate between 3050 and 3052. Though the total number of refugees who found safe haven in the FRR is comparatively small, the scarcity of resources with which to house, feed and clothe them came close to bankrupting Free Rasalhague in the first years after Tukayyid. Pressures eased somewhat as the nation slowly recovered, but every FRR world still holds large compounds full of displaced persons. Boarded in overcrowded houses and apartments or housed in prefab barracks, fed on donations from local citizens or from outside the FRR, the refugees are a population adrift. They have roofs over their heads and enough to eat, but no stability and a precarious future. Free Rasalhague's seven worlds cannot provide living space or employment for all of them, nor can they afford to keep them indefinitely. In the past several months, however, reports of a tolerable life under the Ghost Bears have encouraged a few refugees to go home. As contact becomes even more frequent between FRR citizens and civilians in the Dominion, more and more refugees are likely to chance the promise of a viable future under an enlightened Clan's rule. The large-scale departure of refugees in turn will aid the FRR's slow economic recovery.

COMSTAR AND THE WORD OF BLAKE

Neither Successor States nor Periphery realms, ComStar and the Word of Blake are nonetheless formidable powers in the Inner Sphere of 3063. Once a single organization, they split apart in the aftermath of the Clan War. Both factions have since attempted to fulfill what each sees as the great Jerome Blake's vision for humanity—though their different interpretations remain light-years apart.

COMSTAR ORIGINS

ComStar was the brainchild of Jerome Blake, the last Minister of Communications for the doomed first Star League. He was appointed to that post in late 2780, in the aftermath of Stefan Amaris's bloody coup d'état and the Star League Defense Force's thirteen-year war to oust him. The SLDF liberated Terra and executed the usurper in 2779, but the Star League no longer existed except in name. Even before the coup, the lords of the Inner Sphere's Great Houses had been building up their personal armies and jockeying for power. In August of 2781, the House Lords adjourned the Star League Council for the last time and began girding for war. Busy with martial preparations, they left battered Terra to its own devices. Jerome Blake stepped in, taking charge of a massive reconstruction effort on his native planet. In the process, he was also rebuilding what would become ComStar's homeworld.

Anticipating the brutality of the coming Succession Wars, Blake devised a plan for safeguarding the Inner Sphere's communications network. Interstellar communications, made pos-

sible by hyperpulse generators, had been humanity's lifeline since the HPG's invention in 2630. Without a reliable HPG network, Blake feared the human race would wither and die on isolated, war-torn worlds. He also knew the Successor Lords would need access to HPGs in order to fight their wars and rule their realms. In 2786, he obtained guarantees of neutrality for all HPG facilities and personnel—every station and individual member of the Star League's Department of Communications, which Blake had renamed ComStar. Two years later, Blake followed up this diplomatic coup by capturing Terra. Eight divisions' of SLDF troops and mercenary units guarded humanity's homeworld from attack by the Successor States, then deeply embroiled in the vicious First Succession War. With Terra firmly in its grasp and a monopoly on vital HPG communications, ComStar took its place on the stage of the Inner Sphere.

HOLY ORDERS

During Blake's thirty-one years at ComStar's helm, the organization continued to restore communications throughout the Inner Sphere. Meanwhile, the savagery of the First Succession War continued unabated. The sheer scope of destruction eventually convinced Blake that the apparent death throes of civilization were humanity's punishment for its sins. The human race had allowed pride and greed to govern it, and the First Succession War was the price. Determined to salvage everything he could for future generations, Blake enlarged ComStar's mission. In addition to keeping HPG communications alive, the organization would preserve humankind's technical and scientific knowledge. ComStar became a haven for all manner of scientists and technical personnel, further concentrating such knowledge in the organization's hands.

To prevent these valuable resources from exploitation by the warring Successor Lords, Blake instituted a policy of secrecy that eventually turned ComStar from a secular organization into a holy order. Members who discussed even the most ordinary technology with outsiders faced severe punishment and possible expulsion. Meanwhile, as the war raged on, more and more Inner Sphere citizens were reduced to grubbing for daily survival. Lost technological glories were swiftly forgotten, along with the leisure for learning the workings of such marvels.

By the end of the First Succession War in 2821, members of ComStar were virtually the only people who understood how various sophisticated machines functioned. Ordinary people came to revere them as the sole possessors of mysteries beyond human ken. Over the ensuing centuries, ComStar increasingly fostered this mystic bent. Its technicians became acolytes and adepts, its upper-level personnel given the title of Precentor. The head of ComStar, called the Primus, wielded immense political and spiritual authority over the Blessed Order of ComStar and all its possessions.

POLITICAL MACHINATIONS

Throughout the centuries of the Succession Wars, ComStar maintained its neutrality and used its leverage to keep

the balance of power roughly equal between the Successor States. It also acted to defend itself where necessary—to raise one famous example, imposing a communications interdict on the Free Worlds League in the late twenty-ninth century after Captain-General Charles Marik destroyed the Oriente HPG station. Over time, however, ComStar's leaders forgot the original reason behind such political manipulation: the preservation of human knowledge by decreasing the likelihood of its loss in war. By the time Myndo Waterly ascended to the Primacy in 3029, political intrigue had become a high-stakes game played for its own sake. Primus Waterly played that game with surpassing skill, toward an end that ultimately proved her downfall.

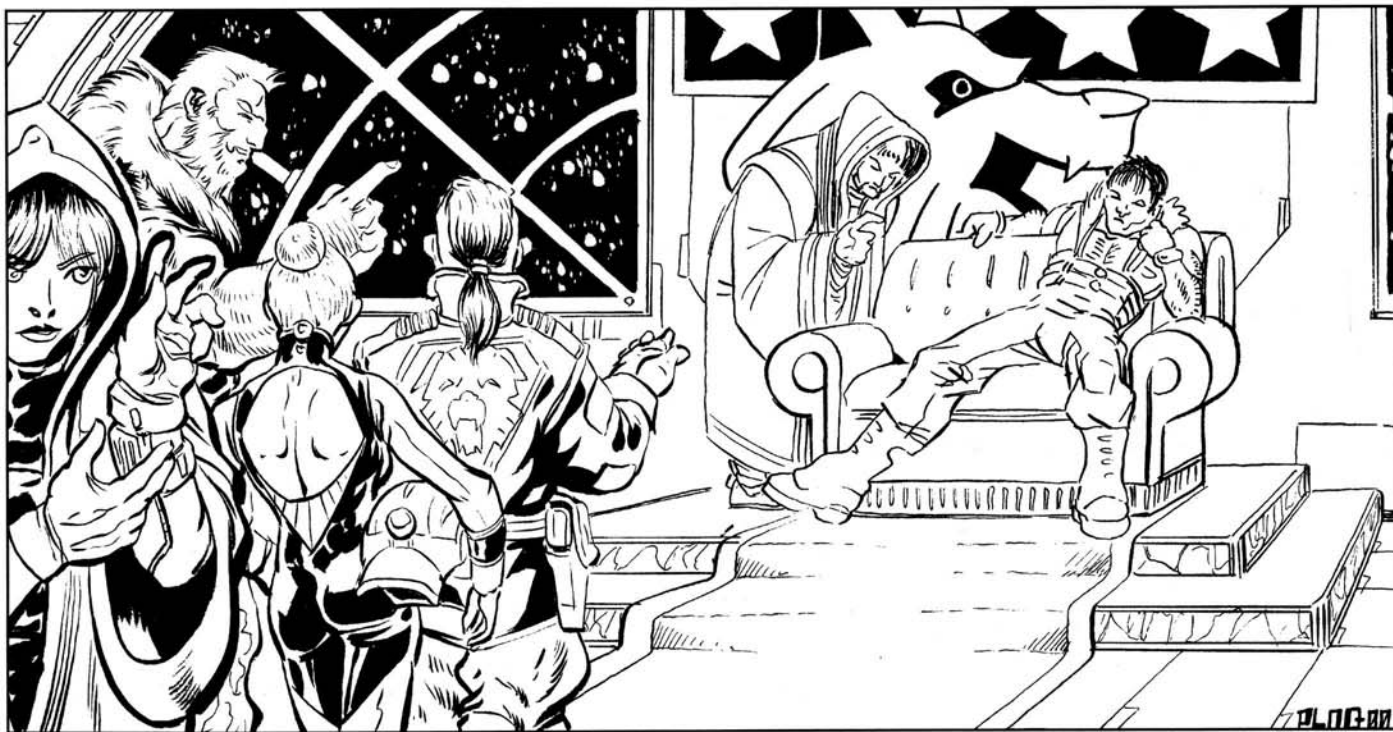
The Clan Invasion

The arrival of the Clans in the Periphery in 3049 set the stage for a radical transformation of ComStar along with the rest of the Inner Sphere. At first ready to oppose these apparently alien invaders, ComStar soon learned that the Clans were not alien at all. They were human, the descendants of General Aleksandr Kerensky's long-vanished Star League Army. Primus Waterly saw in these invaders a vehicle for making ComStar the Inner Sphere's supreme power. She was a staunch believer in a supposed prophecy of Jerome Blake, promulgated by his successor Conrad Toyama, that the Inner Sphere must be utterly destroyed as a prelude to its redemption by ComStar. The Primus intended to help the Clans and the Inner Sphere devastate each other, at which point ComStar would step in as the savior of surviving humankind. To that end, Waterly forged an alliance between ComStar and the invaders. In exchange for the right to administer Clan-captured worlds, ComStar agreed to cut off military transmissions from targeted planets and also to provide basic military intelligence concerning Successor State forces. To the rest of ComStar's First Circuit, the Primus presented this alliance as a ploy to gather intelligence on the Clans and find a way to defeat them. Her darker motives did not come to light until 3052, when the Battle of Tukayyid gave her the perfect opening for executing the rest of her plan.

Operation Scorpion

Even as the Com Guards battled the Clans for the Inner Sphere's survival on Tukayyid, Primus Waterly took steps that—had they succeeded—would have rendered our eventual victory meaningless. She ordered a blanket communications interdiction of the Inner Sphere, commanding security personnel at every HPG station to deal with local resistance. At the same time, she sent slightly different instructions to the HPG stations in Clan-held territory. Personnel in Clan zones—secretly armed over the preceding months—were ordered to engage the Clan occupiers and recapture Clan-held planets in ComStar's name. Had Operation Scorpion worked as planned, ComStar would have emerged from the chaos in complete control of all the Clan-held planets and of every Inner Sphere government.

Events did not fall out as Waterly had hoped, however. Precentor Sharilar Mori, once Waterly's confidante in the Scorpion



scheme, had a change of heart upon realizing exactly what Waterly intended to do. She leaked the details of the coming interdiction to the leaders of the Draconis Combine, who then leaked the information to the leaders of the Davion and Lyran realms, taking steps to secure HPG stations in their territories before the interdiction orders arrived. Several members of the First Circuit, along with hundreds of thousands of lower-level personnel, refused to help the Primus betray ComStar's deepest ideals. Finally, ComStar's rebellions on Clan worlds fizzled in the face of superior force. The primary casualty of Operation Scorpion was not the Inner Sphere or the Clans, but Primus Waterly. Convinced to resign in favor of Precentor Mori, she abdicated her position and died of a cerebral hemorrhage just days later.

THE SCHISM

The debacle of Operation Scorpion revealed the near-fatal flaw in ComStar's traditional hoarding of technological and scientific knowledge. Certain members of the order, myself among them, slowly realized that we had misunderstood the mission charged to us by ComStar's founder. The order was indeed meant to preserve knowledge—not by squirreling it away in secrecy, but by sharing it with our fellow human beings. Only widespread dissemination could truly ensure that advances in human progress would not be irretrievably lost. Fired by this new understanding of our purpose, Primus Mori and I spent the next several months reforming ComStar into a truer reflection of Jerome Blake's legacy. Among the Primus's most significant changes was the building of Blake University on Terra, a concrete symbol of ComStar's new commitment to sharing the knowledge it had previously guarded so closely.

Another major alteration vastly reduced internal monitoring by ROM, ComStar's intelligence agency. In the most outwardly obvious change, many members of ComStar began to discard the traditional prayers, rites of invocation and other mystical trappings that the order acquired over the years. No longer bound by the need for secrecy, ComStar began the slow process of reverting to its earliest and truest incarnation—an organization of ordinary human beings, driven by a desire to advance human knowledge and preserve what we have learned thus far.

Some of our brethren could not accept the changes, however. These reactionary elements defied Primus Mori and formed a splinter group that they called the Word of Blake. Led by Demona Aziz, Precentor Atrius of the First Circuit, the Word of Blake left Terra in 3053 for Aziz's native Free Worlds League. Captain-General Thomas Marik, himself a former ComStar acolyte who sympathized with the Blakists' position, generously offered them a haven on the League world of Gibson. Over the next several years, a steady trickle of ComStar personnel defected to the Word of Blake—mostly ROM agents disturbed by cutbacks in their service branch, along with some veteran Com Guards. During this same time, the disagreement between the two sides mushroomed into a covert war, particularly among each faction's ROM contingent. ComStar infiltrated the Word of Blake and vice versa, each hoping to overcome the other from within. The Word of Blake from the beginning made no secret of its intent to destroy those it labeled "heretics"; ComStar in turn took steps to defend itself and prevent a new triumph of secrecy and superstition.

The Fall of Terra

In the aftermath of Tukayyid and Operation Scorpion, the reformed ComStar sought to assure the Successor States of its goodwill by deploying several Com Guard divisions on or near Clan fronts in Free Rasalhague, the Draconis Combine and the Lyran portion of the Federated Commonwealth. Realms that the Clans had not yet reached allowed smaller-scale deployments around HPG compounds. These deployments, coupled with the staggering losses on Tukayyid and ongoing defections to the newly christened Word of Blake Militia left ComStar short-handed when it came to protecting Terra. The Liao-Marik Offensive of 3057, which threw the region of space near Terra into turmoil, provided the Word of Blake with the perfect opportunity to capture humanity's homeworld.

The 3057 war destabilized a sizable stretch of space extending roughly from Terra all the way rimward to Sarna, in what had formerly been the Federated Commonwealth's Sarna March. Christened the Chaos March, this no-man's land was a battleground between all five Successor States and an assortment of new mini-states and independent worlds, all of them struggling for survival or political supremacy. The constant upheaval placed mercenary units in high demand, with various factions willing to pay almost anything for troops. One such unit was Brion's Legion, employed by ComStar to guard Terra against attack. In late 3057, Brion's Legion opted for a higher-paying contract in the Chaos March. When ComStar sought a replacement, the Word of Blake made its move.

ComStar negotiators had hired the Twenty-First Centauri Lancers, a mercenary unit of excellent repute. The Lancers who arrived on Terra in February of 3058, however, were decoys. Aided by internal sabotage, these so-called Shadow Lancers swiftly took control of Terra's defenses. Outnumbered and taken by surprise, the few Com Guards stationed on-planet fought a fierce but ultimately losing battle against Terra's conquerors. By March, the Word of Blake held Terra in an iron grip.

ComStar has since made no move to recapture Terra, though guerrilla activity and civilian resistance continue. Between March of 3058 and the end of the Clan War in early 3061, the Com Guards were rightly preoccupied with the continued defense of the Inner Sphere against the Clans. Since the end of the Clan War, Com Guard troops have served as part of the new Star League Defense Force, and so must act in the interests of the Star League rather than in ComStar's alone. Terra is the birthright of all humanity, however. One way or another, ComStar intends to see that it remains so.

RECENT EVENTS

Despite the loss of Terra, ComStar remains a vital player in the shifting balances of Inner Sphere politics. Several individuals and governments rightly deserve credit for the founding of the new Star League, the leadership of ComStar among them. The multi-House task force that liberated Coventry from

the Jade Falcons in 3058 came together during ComStar-sponsored war games on Tukayyid and included Com Guard troops. Roughly a year later, twelve Com Guard divisions had the honor of helping to drive Clan Smoke Jaguar out of the Inner Sphere. As part of Task Force Serpent, the Second Division pursued the fleeing Jaguars to their homeworld of Huntress, where the Star League Army shattered the Jaguar Clan once and for all. The destruction of this formidable Crusader Clan led to the epic Trial of Refusal on Strana Mechty, in which the Star League Defense Force won the day and ended the Clan invasion. As part of that battle, elements of the Com Guards 394th Division faced off against Clan Jade Falcon. Since then, the Com Guards have served as peacekeeping troops at the behest of Commanding General Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion and First Lord Theodore Kurita. ComStar as a whole is committed to strengthening the Star League and safeguarding it from whatever threats it may face.

The Word of Blake, unfortunately, must be considered among those threats. The Blakists generally regard the young Star League as illegitimate and doomed to failure, because it did not form under Blakist auspices or require the complete destruction of human civilization in order to arise. They have spent much of the past five years seeking out every political fault line they can find throughout the Inner Sphere, making inroads in the Capellan Confederation, the Chaos March and several Periphery realms. They also retain a significant power base in the Free Worlds League, even after the relocation of the bulk of their assets to Terra. Word of Blake personnel continue to run the League's HPG stations and still have the ear of Captain-General Thomas Marik. The Captain-General's recent remarriage and consequent strengthening of internal political alliances should decrease his reliance on the Word of Blake, but the Blakists' influence on the head of a Star League member nation cannot be discounted. ComStar is stepping up various efforts to counteract Blakist activity in the Chaos March, with qualified success. We have hopes of expanding our own influence in the region and thereby containing Blakist power.

The FedCom Civil War

The civil war in the Federated Commonwealth is a source of great grief to ComStar, though the organization fully supports Precentor Martial Victor Steiner-Davion in his efforts to oust his sister. In token of his status as the former Archon Prince reclaiming the FedCom throne for the good of his people, Victor has taken steps to ensure he cannot use his current office to call on Com Guard troops in this conflict, an action fully supported by the Primus and First Circuit. It appears, however, that at least one Com Guard unit has made its own decision on the matter. He recognizes that the good of the Star League requires ComStar to remain neutral in this civil conflict and has not asked it to violate that stricture. It is the hope of ComStar's leadership that events will not make such a request necessary.

THE FRONTIERS

Throughout its colorful history, the Periphery has been the frontier—the leading edge of human settlement, a rough-and-ready region where anything can happen. In 3063, the latter half of that description also applies to the Chaos March. Lying at the center of human-occupied space, this second “frontier” shares several characteristics with its Periphery counterpart. In both, the hand of authority lies lightly. Nations and planets with strong, stable governments alternate with wildly unstable regions where power belongs to whoever has the biggest guns. These frontiers bring out the best and the worst in humanity, challenging us to live up to the responsibilities of freedom.

THE PERIPHERY

It's strange to think of the Periphery as part of the Inner Sphere. For so long, we've prided ourselves on not being any such thing. To a lot of people out here, “Inner Sphere” still means the Great Houses that made the Star League, imposed it on us and then broke it when they got tired of it. Wherever they run things, an ordinary person can't call her soul her own. Or so thought plenty of our forebears, who struck out for the Periphery in search of freedom from rules and regulations and bureaucrats. Back when the first Star League told us to join up or else, a lot of Periphery folk would rather have died than submit to Inner Sphere authorities. Plenty did die during the Reunification War. Others lived to see their homes annexed to the Star League, and eventually admitted it wasn't so bad after all. But we never stopped missing the good old days, when men and women with brains and guts could be kings and queens of their own destiny. That's what it's all about, out here on the edge of the known universe. Taking control, surviving on your own wits and resources. And sticking it to anyone who tries to take that freedom away.

Most outlanders know the Periphery best by its three largest realms: the Magistracy of Canopus, the Taurian Concordat and the Outworlds Alliance. The Magistracy is most famous for its entertainment industry—especially the traveling pleasure circuses, with their crowd-pleasing shows, high-stakes card games and more risqué amusements. Connoisseurs of leisure go to the world of Hardcore, a planet-sized resort with a temperate climate where tourists can find everything from an elegant evening at the ballet to live video feeds of the annual MechWarrior Games. Canopians are also well known as the best medics in the Periphery, possibly in the entire Inner Sphere.

The Taurian Concordat, the Magistracy's nearest neighbor, is also our ally. Our two realms have vacillated between friendship and cautious détente for more than five centuries, generally depending on how many border planets we were squabbling over at the time. In most of the important ways, however, the Concordat and the Magistracy aren't all that different. Both run more to democracy than not, with personal freedoms guaranteed and often-raucous political activity encouraged. Both prize

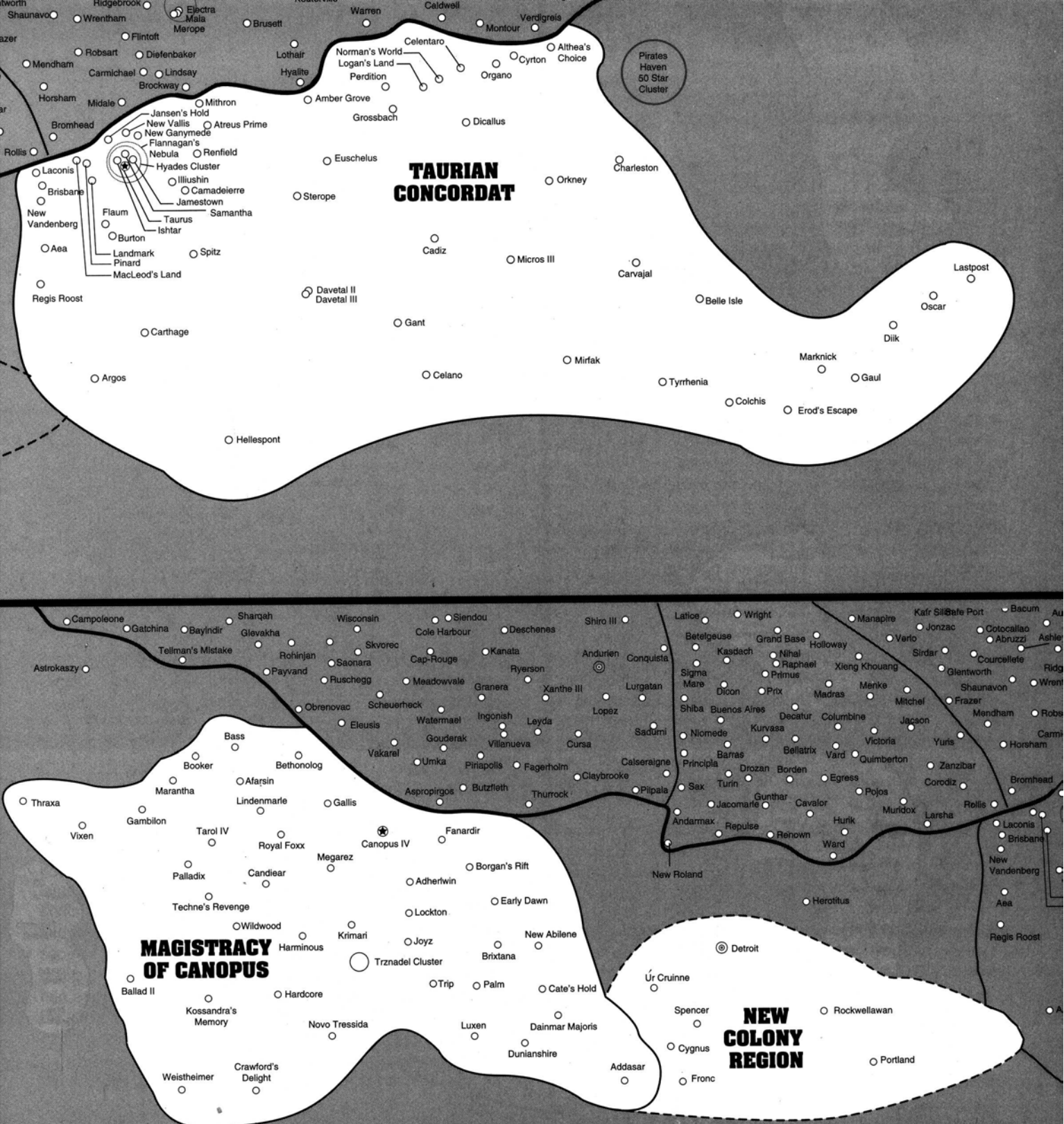
literacy, though the Taurians are ahead of us there. The biggest difference between the Concordat and my own realm is economic: the Taurians have always had more resource-rich worlds, which sometimes makes them smug. They can be a little straitlaced, too, for Canopian tastes. But by and large we understand each other, so we get along all right.

And then there's the Outworlds Alliance, the Periphery's poor stepchild. With thirty-eight planets, the Alliance qualifies as the second-largest Periphery state. Until recently, however, many of those worlds could barely support their own populations. Economically crippled by a long-standing bias against most forms of technology, the Outworlds Alliance also lacked political coherence. Many of its worlds were settled by technophobes fleeing war in the Inner Sphere, looking for someplace to wait out doomsday in safety. Their descendants tended to mind their own affairs and not care much about anyone else's. Under strong leaders, the Alliance managed to prosper. Under weak ones, it foundered. The current president, Mitchell Avellar, seems to be one of the former. He's gotten the economy into some kind of shape, built up the military and generally made the Alliance behave like a viable nation for the first time in its six hundred and fifty years. With so much ground to make up, however, the Outworlds remains something of a poor relation.

Next best known are a pair of so-called bandit kingdoms grown large enough to be troublesome: the Marian Hegemony and the Circinus Federation. The former likes to think of itself as a reincarnation of ancient Terra's Roman Empire, complete with conquering legions. The latter, descended from a rogue mercenary unit and a few farmers fleeing war-torn Lyran worlds, owes what power it has to raiding and piracy, with occasionally effective attempts at diplomacy. Other bandit kingdoms exist, but they mainly consist of small pirate bands operating from hidden bases on marginally habitable worlds. In 3049, the Clans rolled over two notorious bandit realms, the Greater Valkyrate and the Oberon Confederation. For that, I suppose we should thank them.

Aside from that, there are all kinds of independent worlds, lost colonies and suchlike. We lose count after awhile. Big or small, most places in the Periphery share several strengths and weaknesses. Our people tend to be free spirits, with courage and initiative, but sometimes with a real aversion to taking orders. Our worlds tend to be poorer, less able to afford fancy technology or large armies. Deprivation also makes us resourceful, however. What we need, we find a way to make or get ourselves—if we can't, we go without.

Life can also get dangerous out here, in ways most folks from coreward might find it hard to imagine. Away from the technological lifeline that sustains most of the Inner Sphere, a new local microbe can kill a colony. A band of pirates can do serious damage and then disappear into the vast darkness of space. Breakdowns of patched-together equipment can threaten



NEAR PERIPHERY KINGDOMS

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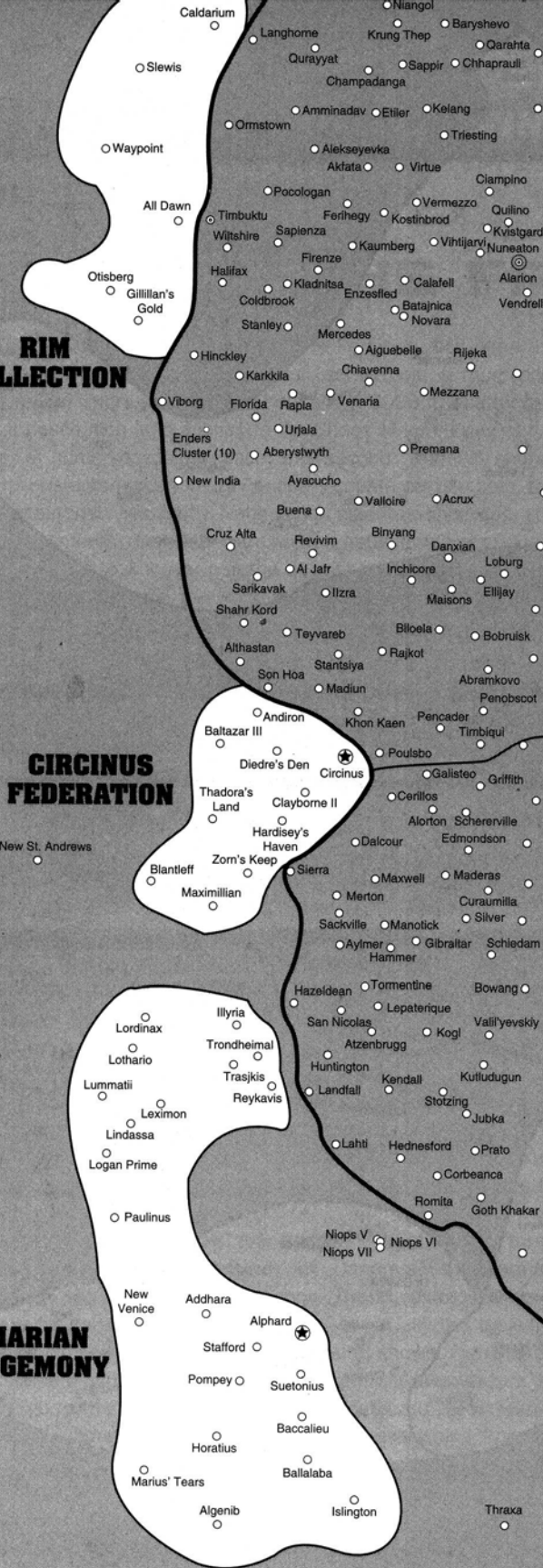
LEGEND



SCALE: 1/8 INCH = 1 PARSEC = 3.26 LIGHT YEARS = 19,164,277,860,000 STATUTE MILES

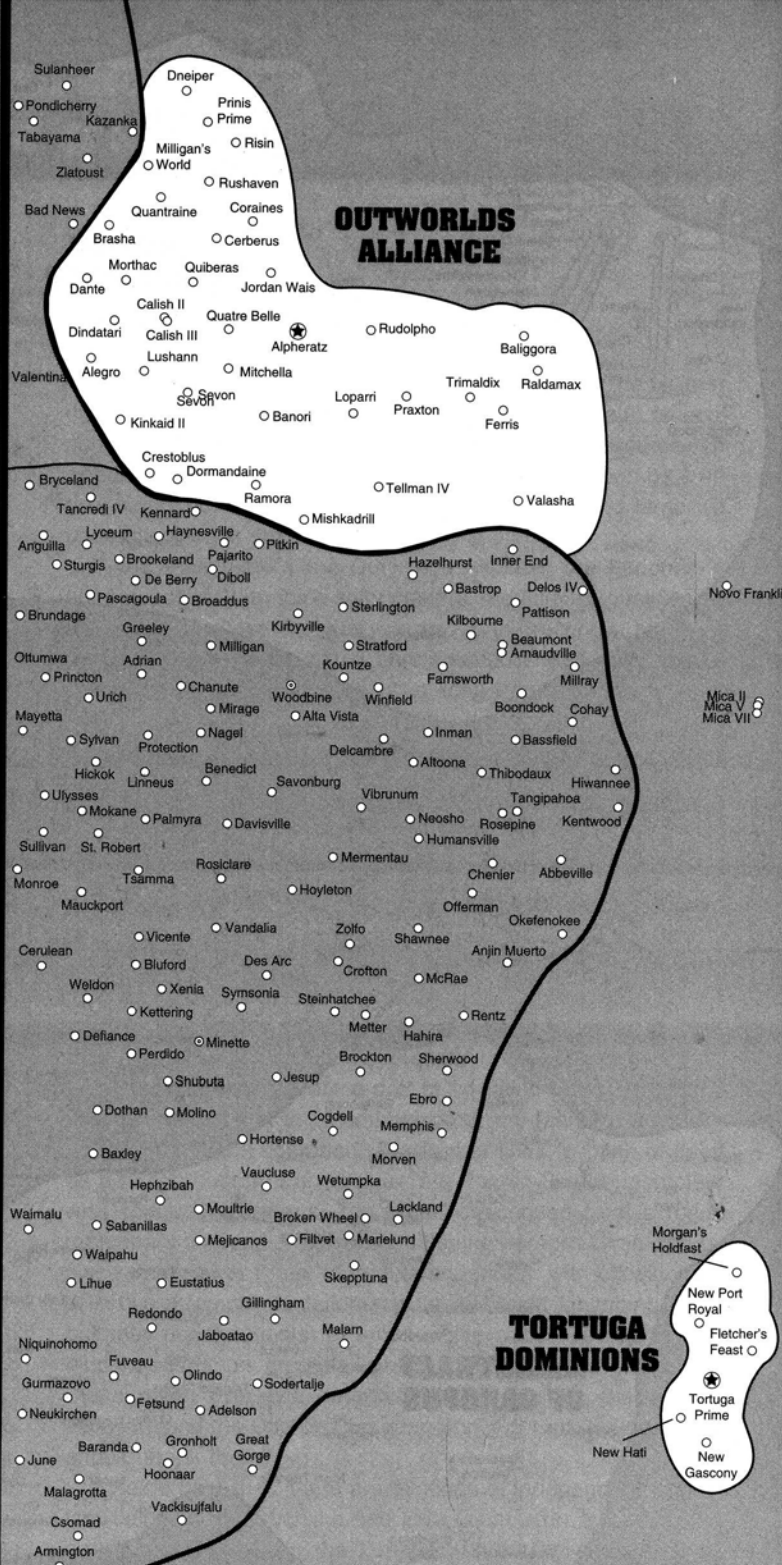
MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS
FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES USE 9 PARSECS = 29.34 LY

RIM COLLECTION



CIRCINUS FEDERATION

OUTWORLD'S ALLIANCE



TORTUGA DOMINIONS

MARIAN HEGEMONY

NEAR PERIPHERY KINGDOMS

LEGEND



40 PARSECS OR 130.4 LIGHT YEARS

SCALE: 1/8 INCH = 1 PARSEC = 3.26 LIGHT YEARS = 19,164,277,860,000 STATUTE MILES

MAXIMUM JUMP: APPROXIMATELY 30 LIGHT YEARS
FOR NAVIGATIONAL PURPOSES USE 9 PARSECS = 29.34 LY

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orbital stations, enviro-domes and any other artificial environment constructed to let us live where humans normally can't. Living in the Periphery means challenging the universe, and the universe often wins. But win or lose, we meet those challenges on our own terms and wouldn't have it any other way.

—Naomi Centrella
Canopian Military Coordinator



THE MAGISTRACY OF CANOPUS: ORIGINS AND HISTORY

Founded in the early twentieth century by a band of deserters from the Free Worlds League army, the Magistracy of Canopus has upheld a proud legacy of welcoming dissenters throughout its five centuries of existence. This freethinking collection of worlds swiftly became one of the Periphery's economic powerhouses, fueled by the development of an entertainment industry that remains second to none throughout human-occupied space. Though this realm has suffered its share of reversals, none have ever kept the Magistracy down for long. Resilient, resourceful and largely fortunate in its leaders, the Canopian realm is likely to remain a major power in the Periphery for some time to come.

Founding Mother: Kossandra Centrella

The Magistracy of Canopus owes much of its unique identity to Kossandra Centrella, the charismatic MechWarrior who led a sizable band of followers in search of a new life in the largely unexplored Periphery. A captain in the elite Defenders of Andurien, Kossandra became disillusioned with her profession and with the Free Worlds League in general after incompetent superiors left her command behind during a hasty troop withdrawal from the Capellan planet Highspire. The resourceful captain and her surviving lancemates eventually made it back to the Free Worlds League, where they were hailed as heroes. Captain Centrella, however, had no intention of remaining in a realm where, in her own words, "... military incompetence ruled the day, and good men and women died on battlefields chosen by greasy politicians far away from the front lines." She used her new fame to gather a cohort of like-minded colleagues, until they mustered sufficient numbers for a small but viable colony. After a considerable journey, Captain Centrella's tiny flotilla made planetfall on Canopus IV, near the border of the Taurian Concordat. In 2530, Centrella officially christened her young realm the Magistracy of Canopus.

Centrella knew that in order to survive, her infant realm needed to expand as quickly as possible. Her status as a celebrated rebel gave her a certain credibility with dissident leaders who remained within the Free Worlds League and the

Capellan Confederation, the young Magistracy's other nearest neighbor. Through these contacts, Centrella negotiated mutual security and aid compacts that ultimately enabled her to absorb several border worlds into her own realm. Within twenty years of planetfall, the self-styled Magesrix of Canopus had enlarged her nation from one to thirty-six star systems. Over the next two decades, Kossandra's successors added more worlds to the Magistracy and transformed it from a ragtag collection of loosely connected planets into a stable and thriving state.

The linchpin of Canopian prosperity was a lucrative leisure industry, fostered by Magesrix Floral Centrella as the best guarantor of her realm's continued well-being. The Magistracy's charter explicitly enshrined social as well as political freedom, and the resulting "anything goes" atmosphere allowed virtually every type of diversion to flourish. Big-game hunting, locally grown recreational drugs and legalized prostitution brought the first billions into the Canopian economy. Productively invested, these earnings provided the capital foundation for countless other enterprises, from vast casinos to top-notch theatre and dance companies to theme parks and entertainment complexes the size of small cities. By the time Crystalla Centrella became Magesrix in 2569, the Magistracy was already developing a reputation as the place to go for virtually every form of pleasure unavailable or restricted in the Inner Sphere proper. Crystalla poured considerable monies into gambling palaces throughout the 2570s, until Marik troops under the Star League banner invaded the Canopian planet Gouderak in 2577 and brought a temporary halt to the party.

The Star League Era

Like the Periphery's other major states, the Magistracy of Canopus had little interest in merging with the same Great Houses its founders had pointedly left behind. Relations between the Magistracy and the Star League started out strained, with the former intent on preserving its freedom and the latter deeply suspicious of any power not under its control. The infamous Santiago Massacre of 2572, in which twenty-seven Periphery citizens died under the guns of House Kurita BattleMechs, sealed the Magistracy's determination to keep out of the Star League. League proposals for summit talks and favored-nation trade packages fell on deaf ears, until the only options left were allowing the Periphery its freedom or annexing those nations by force.

Convinced of its own moral authority, the Star League chose war. Even before First Lord Ian Cameron delivered the famous Pollux Proclamation of 2575, justifying the campaign to come, several of the Star League's member-states had been readying their armies. Mere months after the Pollux Proclamation, seven Star League divisions moved to the borders of various Periphery nations. The Seventh Corps, consisting of thirty SLDF regiments and twelve more of regular House Marik troops, assembled near the Magistracy. Under the command of Captain-General Marion Marik, this massive force pre-

pared for what should have been a swift victory over the Magistracy's pitiful forces. Victory, however, would not belong to the Star League until eleven years after its initial foray into Canopian space. More mobile than the huge Seventh Corps, the Canopian navy and army led Marion Marik's forces on a chase through Magistracy space. Canopian assaults on SLDF supply lines staved off defeat for quite some time, until the SLDF's sheer weight of numbers ultimately prevailed. In 2588, the Star League High Council installed a Free Worlds League noblewoman, Melissa Humphreys of Andurien, as the Canopian military governor. The Magistracy had become a territorial protectorate of the Star League.

Humphreys turned out to be a blessing in disguise for the war-torn Magistracy worlds. At her urging, the Star League poured money into economic revitalization programs, restoring the Magistracy's coveted wealth and fostering trust between conqueror and conquered. By 2604, domestic unrest had dropped so low that the SLDF withdrew its troops from Magistracy space. After regaining home rule, successive Magestrixes presided over a prosperous and peaceful nation for the next hundred years.

Not until the reign of Jehan Centrella, in the early twenty-eighth century, did this "golden age" begin to tarnish. In 2722, the Council Lords of the Star League passed the infamous Directive 41, ostensibly granting more autonomy to the Periphery, but in practice allowing private Inner Sphere interests unprecedented power to exploit Periphery worlds. One measure imposed under Directive 41 was a hated excise tax, the first of many, on Periphery-made goods. Over the next several decades, increasing exploitation of the Periphery nations resurrected all the resentment and outright hatred that had lain dormant since the end of the Reunification War. The widening rift made a crisis inevitable.

It came in 2765, when the Taurian Concordat world of New Vandenburg seceded in a violent protest over the latest in a string of crushingly heavy taxes. New Vandenburg's rebellion touched off violence across the Periphery. General Aleksandr Kerensky, leader of the SLDF, hurriedly shifted troops to the Periphery from Terra in hopes of dampening the crisis. The resulting gap in Terra's defenses provided the perfect opportunity for the diabolical scheme of the man known to history as Amaris the Usurper. Having spent years worming his way into the confidences of First Lord Richard Cameron, Stefan Amaris proposed that his own Rim Worlds Republic troops replace the departed SLDF units. Cameron's agreement sealed his fate. In December of 2766, Amaris murdered Richard and his family, took control of Terra and proclaimed himself the new First Lord.

The Magistracy of Canopus largely stayed out of the ensuing thirteen-year war to dislodge the Usurper. Vanura Centrella, a spectacularly incompetent Magestrix who ruled from 2738 to 2760, had managed to run down the Canopian economy and thereby gut its military. Vanura's successor, Janina, withdrew the last Canopian units from the SLDF in 2764, citing rising unrest as proof of a pressing need for

greater home defense. As General Kerensky threw more and more SLDF units into the fight for Terra, the Magistracy declared independence from the crumbling Star League. Throughout the 2770s, Magestrix Janina Centrella did what she could to shore up the Canopian economy and rebuild its army. The implosion of the Star League meant rough times to come, and Janina was determined that the Magistracy would survive them.

The Succession Wars

The First Succession War did enormous damage to the Periphery states, even though none were among its combatants. The war severely disrupted trade links that had long kept the Periphery nations afloat; the abrupt loss of these revenues threw Periphery economies into a tailspin. The Magistracy, with its lucrative tourist industry, was particularly hard hit. Janina Centrella's policies bolstering other economic sectors, particularly heavy industry and the medical sciences, staved off collapse but could not restore Canopian prosperity to its Star League-era level. The last thing the Magistracy needed was a war to further disrupt its frail economic balance. When Taurian Concordat troops invaded two Canopian border planets in 2813, however, the Magistracy felt it had to fight back. Magistracy units landed on the Taurian planets of Portan and Spencer in a tit-for-tat assault. Neither realm managed to capture its target worlds, and the ill-conceived war ran out of steam little more than a year after the initial Taurian invasion. Satisfied with having proved themselves capable of retaliation, the Canopians agreed to a peace treaty in 2814.

Throughout the 2800s, the Magistracy suffered a slow hemorrhage of its border worlds in losing disputes with the Free Worlds League and the Capellan Confederation, largely because the realm could not afford more war. During the rest of the long Succession War era, Canopian rulers left warfare to the Successor States and concentrated on safeguarding their own citizens' welfare. Not until the end of the Fourth Succession War would Canopian military ambitions take center stage.

Andurien Alliance

The Fourth Succession War badly weakened the Magistracy's nearest neighbors, the Free Worlds League and the Capellan Confederation. The ambitious Magestrix Kyalla Centrella saw the decline of these two Successor States as a golden opportunity to revive the Magistracy's sagging fortunes through military conquest. Drawing on long-standing ties between the Magistracy and the Humphreys clan of Andurien, Kyalla made common cause with Andurien's secession-minded duchess, Dame Catherine Humphreys. In 3030, Andurien proclaimed its independence from the Free Worlds League. Days later, a joint Andurien-Canopian force struck deep into the Capellan Confederation. Convinced that the battered Capellan army would swiftly collapse, Kyalla and her new ally intended to conquer the shrunken Confederation and build their two regions into a single super-state.



The Capellan people have always fought most fiercely when survival was at stake, however, and the Andurien-Canopian War was no exception. A string of initial successes gave way to defeat after defeat, until fanatical Capellan resistance finally drove out the invaders in 3035. Anti-war sentiment in the Magistracy rose in the wake of this debacle, paving the way for an internal power struggle that ultimately cost Kyalla her throne.

Emma Centrella: Strength Through Diplomacy

The current Magestrix, Emma Centrella, came to power on a crest of pacifist sentiment and fears of retaliation by the Free Worlds League for abetting the Andurien secession. Embittered by her military failures and jealous of Emma's increasing popularity, Kyalla Centrella arranged an attempt to assassinate her daughter in 3039. This rash act prompted a serious breach between the Magestrix and her own Royal Guards. When Emma fled to Hardcore and began rallying her

followers, Kyalla ordered the Guards to arrest her. Emma's partisans in the unit, however, smuggled her off the planet. In May of 3040, an apparently captive Emma arrived on Canopus IV amid a phalanx of Guardsmen. Ordered by the Magestrix to execute Emma, the Royal Guards arrested Kyalla instead. Emma immediately assumed the throne and set about repairing the damage her mother had done.

Emma's first act showcased her considerable diplomatic skills while serving notice of the way in which the Magistracy henceforth intended to do business. Envoys carried a formal apology for the Andurien war to House Marik, along with what funds the Magistracy could spare for rebuilding efforts on League worlds damaged by secessionist fighting. Captain-General Thomas Marik, intent on getting his own house in order, graciously accepted these reparations. With the immediate threat of a retaliatory war removed, Emma took steps to revitalize the flagging Canopian economy. She plowed her personal fortune into the entertainment business, almost single-handedly reviving the traveling Canopian pleasure circuses. These efforts, coupled with relative peace between the Successor States, made Canopian tourism once again an economic powerhouse. Profits from the

pleasure business in turn enriched other industries. By 3050, the Magistracy had become one of the Periphery's richest and strongest realms. A thriving economy enabled it to beef up its own military and hire several mercenary units, while Emma Centrella's diplomatic talents turned the nation into a formidable political player.

The crown jewel of Emma's skillful politicking came into being in 3056, when the Magistracy and the Taurian Concordat signed the Treaty of Taurus. The culmination of nearly four years of secret negotiations between Emma and Concordat leader Jeffrey Calderon, the treaty formally allied the Periphery's two greatest powers. They remained sovereign nations, but agreed to mutual defense, scientific and cultural exchanges, open trade and an ambitious joint colonization program. Though neither side anticipated it at the time, the Treaty of Taurus also laid the groundwork for an unprecedented three-pronged alliance between the two Periphery states and the Capellan Confederation.

The treaty has had mixed results over the past six years. Free trade enriched both sides, a particularly welcome development on poorer Magistracy planets. The colonization program has been less successful. Initially promising, it soon ran into trouble over funding disputes and security costs. The political squabbling sparked a rebellion by Sherman Maltin, the Concordat-appointed President of the New Colony Region. Maltin and a small band of loyalists took the Magestrix and the Protector hostage during the ill-fated Detroit Conference of 3061. In the subsequent rescue attempt, Protector Calderon was killed by crossfire. Since then, the pace of colonization has slowed considerably while the two sides work out mutually acceptable security agreements and political controls.

The Magistracy's other diplomatic coup is its recent alliance with the Capellan Confederation, a radical departure from historic Periphery-wide opposition to strong ties with the Great Houses. So far, the alliance appears to have brought the Magistracy impressive benefits and few drawbacks. Capellan funds have poured into education and technological development, while Capellan war machines have considerably strengthened the Magistracy Armed Forces. With Capellan fortunes still on the rise, the Magistracy looks likely to ride even further on its new ally's coattails.

MAGISTRACY SOCIETY

An old line in a famous guidebook sums up one of the most prominent aspects of Canopian life: the average Canopians' capacity for enjoyment. As the guidebook puts it, "Other interstellar realms may excel at making deals or making war, but no realm in known space throws a better party than the Magistracy of Canopus." The Magistracy's historic tolerance, open immigration policy and thriving pleasure industry combine to make it a Mecca for Inner Sphere citizens in pursuit of a good time. Countless pages have been written extolling the sheer variety of amusements to be found, from the vast casinos on Canopus IV to the jeweled "leisure cities" of Crawford's Delight to the unspoiled forests and abundant game of Wildwood's western continent. Somewhat less well known to the average tourist, but a source of deep pride to Magistracy citizens, is the nation's role as a haven for victims of all manner of oppression. The famous Magistracy tolerance applies to more than enjoyment. Reflecting the legacy of this nation's freedom-loving founders, the Canopian government extends automatic citizenship to any individual who can prove himself a victim of political, religious or social persecution.

This open-door immigration policy provides several benefits, not least of which is a steady stream of energetic new arrivals. Throughout its history, the Magistracy has attracted all kinds: Rasalhagians fleeing cultural cleansing, Skye exiles from Lyran space, and countless other ethnic, religious and political minorities. This polyglot citizenry has made the modern-day Magistracy a true melting pot, distinguished by unmatched appreciation for different cultural traditions. Freethinkers of various kinds likewise find a home here; the myriad social restrictions of the rest

of the Inner Sphere tend to fall by the wayside in Canopian space. The only boundary consistently recognized by Magistracy law and tradition is best summed up in the old bromide, "Your right to swing your arm ends where my nose meets your fist." So long as it involves no bodily harm to other unconsenting people, any lifestyle or behavior is generally accepted on Canopian worlds. Consequently, the Magistracy is seen as a bastion of freedom, a cesspool of decadence, or just about anything in between, depending on the observer's point of view.

The Magistracy's freedoms, however, are no panacea for its problems. Even with the current boom, the economy remains too small to extend its benefits to every Magistracy world. Capellan aid is beginning to make a dent in the underfunded educational system, but pockets of dire poverty exist on several Canopian planets. City-sized entertainment complexes on some worlds hide backways full of street people carefully kept out of sight; beggars lurk in the shadows of high-priced hotels; and undeveloped planets like New Abilene remain rough-edged frontier worlds for lack of outside investments.

In general, however, Magistracy citizens consider themselves fortunate to live in a reasonably prosperous and peaceful realm where government authority lies lightly on the people. Though the office of Magestrix carries considerable power, nearly equal authority rests in the Central Committee, a parliamentary body of elected representatives from every Magistracy world. In addition to this central authority, Canopian nobles and commoners elect representatives at various levels of planetary government. The Canopian noble class, unlike its counterparts among the Great Houses, wields little more clout than wealthy commoners. Canopian noble rank is not hereditary, but a reward for personal service to the state. Though cash awards, land grants or titles to business concerns generally go along with elevation to the nobility, the bar to heredity prevented the development of an entrenched noble power base. Consequently, democracy thrives in the Magistracy of Canopus as it does in few other realms, even those that pride themselves on their democratic traditions.

The final unique feature of Canopian society is the overwhelming prominence of women in positions of political, economic and military power. Women enjoy equal or near-equal opportunities for advancement in many Inner Sphere nations, but only in the Magistracy are they superior. This societal bias toward women is a legacy of the realm's early years, when Kossandra Centrella and her immediate successors enshrined female control of the levers of power by excluding men from suffrage and political office. The male half of the citizenry received these rights during the military governorship of Melissa Humphreys, but the habit of favoring women over men as movers and shakers remains. One obvious beneficiary of this matriarchal bent is the Centrella dynasty, whose female members have served as Magestrix in an unbroken line for more than five hundred years. Though technically that office is open to any Canopian citizen, in practice few Canopians can conceive of anyone but a Centrella woman at the helm.



TAURIAN CONCORDAT: ORIGINS AND HISTORY

The oldest of the major Periphery states, the Taurian Concordat was born from the fires of rebellion and one woman's determination to seek a new life away from war. Samantha Calderon, a wealthy colonial businesswoman, lost her husband and two daughters to Terran Alliance firing squads during the Outer Reaches Rebellion of 2236–37. Terra's subsequent abdication of responsibility for most of its war-torn possessions convinced Calderon that rebuilding was an exercise in futility. She converted the bulk of her remaining fortune into ships and supplies for a long space journey, gathered a sizable collection of followers and struck out for uncharted territory in 2250. Three years later, Calderon's expedition made planetfall on a world she christened Taurus.

Hidden from prying eyes by the gas clouds of Flannagan's Nebula, Taurus and several other resource-rich planets soon became thriving settlements. Over the next eight decades, the Taurian people colonized neighboring systems, aided by periodic influxes of refugees from turmoil elsewhere in human-occupied space. By 2335, Taurian territory had grown to include eighteen star systems. That same year, Protector Richard Calderon christened his realm the Taurian Concordat and invited other colonies in the region to join. He promised them complete planetary autonomy and free trade, in exchange for contributions to the common defense. Seventeen worlds took the offer, virtually doubling the Concordat's size in just a few months.

Colonization efforts had gone beyond Flannagan's Nebula by 2360, bringing the Taurian border closer to two potential rivals. The Federated Suns, founded in 2317, was a major military power looking to enlarge its holdings. The Capellan states that would soon become a unified Confederation were still in disarray, but Capellan trading vessels frequently brought news of other realms to Taurian worlds. Wary of being gobbled up by the apparently voracious Federated Suns, the Taurians spent the 2360s building a navy and raising a standing army. Before the decade was out, they had a chance to use it.

The first armed clash between the Taurian Concordat and the Federated Suns occurred in 2368, when a Capellan Confederation fleet pursued a rebellious militia from the Tikonov Grand Union into Taurian space. The Tikonov fighters fled in captured Taurian ships and jumped into Fed Suns territory. A Fed Suns flotilla made short work of these unknown opponents, and also of the pursuing Capellan vessels. The Fed Suns navy then launched an attack on the Taurian world of Robsart, mistakenly identifying it as a secret Capellan base. The Taurian navy ably defended the planet, wrecking two Fed Suns WarShips and capturing a third. Over the next three years, sporadic fighting between Taurian and Fed Suns ships spread from Robsart across the Pleiades Cluster, while Protector Richard Calderon made feverish preparations for a war that

never came. Fortunately for the Taurians, the Federated Suns considered the nascent Capellan Confederation a greater threat and a greater prize. The Concordat would not face real war with House Davion until 2577, when Fed Suns troops formed part of the massive Star League invasion force.

While the Age of War engulfed the states of the Inner Sphere, the Taurian Concordat and its fellow Periphery realms enjoyed relative peace. The Concordat devoted considerable resources to continued colonial expansion, at the price of border clashes with the Capellan Confederation and the Federated Suns. The Taurian armed forces prevailed in most of these conflicts, taking advantage of its opponents' preoccupation with each other. By the third decade of the twenty-fifth century, the Federated Suns and the Capellan Confederation were trading with the Concordat more often than raiding it. The Taurians welcomed the profits while keeping a wary eye on their erstwhile enemies. When convenient, successive Taurian Protectors formed temporary alliances with the weaker Capellan realm against the powerful Fed Suns military machine. A history of troubled relations between the two states, however, precluded any of these "marriages of convenience" from developing beyond cautious détente.

War with the Star League

Distrust of Houses Liao and Davion, coupled with bitter memories of the autocratic Terran Alliance their ancestors had fled, prompted the Taurian Concordat to rebuff the Star League. The Malagrotta Affair of 2573, the latest in a long series of territorial disputes between the Concordat and the Federated Suns, whetted House Davion's appetite for conflict with this "upstart bunch of rim yokels." In 2499, the Concordat and the Federated Suns had both claimed Fontana, a mineral-rich moon in the Malagrotta system. Accords negotiated in 2511 called for both powers to share mining rights to the planetoid, with neither establishing a military presence. In February of 2573, Taurian WarShips on maneuvers strayed into the system. Informed of the apparent sneak attack, the Federated Suns navy sent its own ships, which crippled the Taurian vessels in a three-hour battle. In the following months, both sides marshaled their forces along the border in preparation for all-out war. First Lord Ian Cameron, however, persuaded the Davions to back down in hopes of convincing the Concordat to join the Star League. In late 2573, the Taurian Concordat flatly rejected Cameron's offer of a favored-nation treaty as inducement to sign on. Losing patience, Cameron switched the carrot for the stick. Throughout 2574, the Star League imposed trade restrictions and other punitive measures on the Periphery states, none of which worked any better than earlier blandishments had. By January of 2575, the battle lines were essentially drawn.

Itching to finish what it had started in the Malagrotta system, the Federated Suns gladly added its weight to the SLDF's four-corps strike force. The bulk of the Fed Suns' naval auxiliary fell victim to a Taurian trap scant months before receiving the invasion order, but several 'Mech and

infantry regiments were part of the sixteen SLDF divisions that crossed into Concordat space in May of 2578. The Taurian army and navy made the Star League pay dearly for every inch of space over the next six years, culminating in the assassination of the overall SLDF commander in 2584. For several days, the Concordat's fate hung in the balance while the SLDF High Command debated whether or not to continue the Taurian war. In the end, the First Lord persuaded his generals to keep fighting. General Amos Forlough, then conducting operations in the Outworlds Alliance, took control of the Taurian campaign.

His arrival would have bitter consequences for the Taurian people. In a brutal switch from his predecessor's tactics, the new commander authorized a scorched-earth campaign to cripple the Concordat. System after system fell between 2584 and 2588, culminating in a seven-month battle for New Vandenburg. After that world succumbed in 2589, guerrilla fighters kept a low-grade war going from hidden bases in the planet's many caves and underground tunnels. The fighting continued until 2596, when Protector Marantha Calderon bowed to the inevitable. Hours after her formal surrender, she committed suicide.

Over the next decade, Henry Calderon ruled as the Star League's representative. Through quiet but forceful diplomacy, he persuaded Ian Cameron to withdraw the SLDF garrisons in 2605, and the embittered Taurians to accept the Star League's revitalization programs. The Concordat slowly rebuilt over the next century, as much by its own efforts as by Star League aid. Invariably, the latter came with pro-Star League propaganda attached, and many Taurians wanted nothing to do with it.

Taurian skepticism proved justified in the early twentieth century, when the passage of Directive 41 laid the Periphery open to massive exploitation with the apparent blessing of the Star League's leaders. Between 2722 and 2765, Inner Sphere corporate machinations and increasingly heavy taxes imposed by the High Council slowly bled the Periphery economies dry. Matters came to a head with the Taxation Edict of 2763, widely rumored around the Periphery to be the new First Lord's way of enhancing his personal fortune. Taurian opposition to the Edict produced the Taurian Freedom Army, a fervently anti-Star League group that played skillfully on widespread resentment to swell its numbers. Over the next several months, this collection of dissidents grew into a well-armed and organized rebel force. The Freedom Army's cell on New Vandenburg was particularly ardent in its hatred for the Star League, with the memory of the Reunification War bitterly fresh in the locals' collective memory. SLDF units under General Aleksandr Kerensky ferreted out and destroyed much of the Taurian Freedom Army in 2764, but their actions came too late.

In 2765, New Vandenburg and seventeen other Concordat planets seceded from the Star League. When Protector Nicoletta Calderon refused to bring her erring worlds to heel, the First Lord ordered Kerensky to put down the insurrection. Kerensky's troops ultimately pacified the planet, but by then

the spirit of rebellion was spreading throughout the Periphery. Richard Cameron's assassination just over a year later signaled the end of the Star League, though it continued to exist on paper until 2781. The SLDF's withdrawal from the Periphery throughout the 2770s left the Taurian Concordat once again free to make its own destiny.

Succession Wars and After

In the first decades of the post-Star League era, the Concordat shored up its shaky economy, streamlined its military and largely left conquest to others. With the Successor States busy hammering each other back to the Stone Age in the First Succession War, the Concordat feared little from the Federated Suns or the Capellan Confederation. In 2813, Protector Seymon Calderon launched the Concordat's only significant military action of the entire period. With the diminished threat of a Fed Suns assault freeing up Taurian defensive units, Calderon decided to revive an old border dispute with the Magistracy of Canopus. Decades before its collapse, the Star League had awarded the Canopians the contested worlds of Rokwellawan and Detroit. Seymon attempted to capture them, but the poorly executed assaults were a dismal failure. The Magistracy retaliated with raids on two Taurian planets, which met with no better success. In 2814, both sides signed a treaty that ratified the pre-war status quo.

That debacle dampened enthusiasm for any more serious military adventures. Throughout the rest of the twentieth century, the Concordat contented itself with winning occasional Magistracy planets through diplomatic discussions. In lieu of warfare, the Concordat reverted to colonization to expand its holdings. The Far Lookers, a philosophical sect dedicated to exploration, led a major colonization wave in the late thirtieth and early thirty-first centuries. With funding from several influential backers and tax breaks from then-Protector Zarantha Calderon, the Far Lookers founded several settlements between 2990 and 3020.

The Fourth Succession War put an abrupt end to Taurian colonial ambitions, however. Protector Thomas Calderon, who succeeded to power in 3017, rescinded most of the tax breaks at the war's outset in favor of a massive military build-up. Like many Protectors before him, Thomas was convinced that the Federated Suns would one day invade its nearest Periphery neighbor. When the Fourth Succession War ended in victory for the newborn Federated Commonwealth, Thomas' fear of Davion conquest blossomed into full-blown paranoia. He poured more and more revenue into the military, beefing up the army and importing crack pilots from the Outworlds Alliance to help upgrade the Taurian air force. As the years passed and no Davion invasion materialized, the Taurian people ceased to support their ruler's growing obsession. Calderon's military focus left little money or attention for anything else, and the Protector forbade his newly powerful army to pursue pirates beyond Concordat borders.



When the Taurian Defense Force finally saw combat with House Davion in 3047, Thomas Calderon's popularity was sinking like a stone in a pond. Publicized details of the supposed "Davion attack" further eroded Thomas' political standing. The alleged assault force consisted of a Federated Commonwealth freighter that mis-jumped into Taurian space, only to be destroyed by patrolling TDF units. An attack on the Pinard system months later, initially viewed as FedCom retaliation, was actually the work of a rogue mercenary unit leaving FedCom service. Taurian reconnaissance units sent in pursuit eventually met and skirmished with real AFFC troops, but the brief clashes never escalated into any genuine threat. FedCom units arrived for maneuvers near the Taurian border in 3049, but vanished abruptly after only a few weeks. On the heels of this strange incident came rumors of mysterious, possibly alien invaders on the far side of the Periphery. Thomas Calderon painted the rumors and the departed units as a Davion trick, but few people took him seriously. The Protector had become at best a joke and at worst a burden to a nation that neither shared his fears nor trusted his judgment.

Changing of the Guard

By 3053, even the TDF was beginning to tire of waiting for the war that never came. In 3055, Thomas was deposed in favor of his son Jeffrey. The new Protector's reign, though trag-

ically cut short, marked a turning point for the better in the Concordat's fortunes. Even before assuming office, Jeffrey Calderon had embarked on secret negotiations with Emma Centrella of the Magistracy of Canopus. The Magistratrix wanted to form a Periphery-wide alliance in the face of the Clan threat, and saw no reason to stifle potentially promising developments when the Tukayyid victory stalled the Clan advance. The Protector, for his part, wished to repair the damage of his father's reign as quickly as possible. Trade and colonization promised the fastest way out of the economic doldrums; closer ties to the Magistracy would enhance both. In January of 3056, Jeffrey Calderon signed the historic Treaty of Taurus, for the first time explicitly linking the future of the Concordat to that of another nation.

Over the next four years, the Taurian Concordat reaped the benefits of free trade and joint colonization with its neighbor. Relations between the two powers grew so friendly that the Canopians' 3058 alliance with the Capellan Confederation gave the Taurians no more than a few uneasy moments. When Magistratrix Emma suggested that the Concordat also ally with the Capellans, Jeffrey was sufficiently intrigued not to dismiss the notion outright. Despite the Concordat's historically rocky relations with House Liao, the Protector considered the potential benefits of a three-way alliance to be worth a hearing. The leaders of all three states

agreed to a summit in late 3060 on Detroit, a world in the Taurian-Canopian New Colony Region. As the site of a state-of-the-art, Capellan-financed BattleMech facility, Detroit was a showcase for the benefits of stronger ties to Capellan interests. Unfortunately for Jeffrey Calderon, the summit soon turned deadly.

At a Christmas Eve reception, New Colony President Sherman Maltin and a collection of rogue Colonial Marshals took the Protector and the Magistratrix hostage. As ransom, they demanded independence for the New Colony Region. A rescue force of Magistracy and Capellan troops led by Naomi Centrella arrived in late June of 3061 and ended Maltin's abortive rebellion. Unfortunately, Protector Jeffrey Calderon died in crossfire during the final battle. The Protectorship passed to Lord Grover Shraplen, a frequent critic of Jeffrey Calderon's "foreign entanglements." Despite his insular bent, Shraplen declined to make any major changes in policy that could jeopardize the Concordat's ongoing economic recovery. In recent months, Shraplen has moved closer to joining the Canopian-Capellan alliance, though he has yet to make a final decision. Should the Concordat become the third partner in this historically unprecedented pact, one result will certainly be an expansion of Capellan power. What the Taurians might gain from the arrangement remains to be seen.

TAURIAN SOCIETY

Blessed with resource-rich worlds, universally well-educated and safeguarded by a strong military, the Taurian Concordat in many ways confounds the stereotype of the poor, backward and struggling Periphery nation. Though dwarfed economically and militarily by the five larger states of the Inner Sphere proper, the Concordat has been a prosperous and thriving society for most of its history. Its people and institutions reflect that legacy, with a proud tradition of outspoken democracy, the highest literacy rate in the Periphery and a vibrant artistic community.

Scarred by bitter memories of the oppressive Terran Alliance, the Concordat's founders created their settlements as egalitarian democracies. Periodic influxes of refugees fleeing unrest or persecution further reinforced the Concordat's "live-and-let-live" bent. The radical social contract imposed by Timothy Calderon, second leader of the young Concordat, emphasized equality for all those who contributed to the general welfare of the nascent Taurian state. Though Timothy established hereditary overall rulership in his own family line, he left individual worlds to work out their affairs for themselves. The resulting balance between democracy and monarchy remains a fixture in Taurian life; the average Taurian citizen feels a certain loyalty toward the Protector, while cherishing his or her right to vociferously criticize any political figure insufficiently devoted to the people's interests. Such figures can include the Protector, as the fate of Thomas Calderon proves. A Protector who neglects the common interest for too long risks losing the support of the people and the armed forces, who will take steps to remove him in favor of a more competent leader. The Taurian

military shares the larger society's general democratic bent; Taurian troopers tend to regard their job as protecting the people rather than an abstract state or a single ruler.

As in the Magistracy of Canopus, Taurian emphasis on social equality shaped the development of its noble class. Taurian citizens may earn noble rank through service to the Taurian people, and rarely possess vastly greater wealth or clout than commoners. Taurian law guarantees an impressive array of rights and freedoms to every citizen, commoner and noble alike. Along with these comes a social safety net that many Inner Sphere nations might envy. Rights to free medical care, old-age pensions and free public education are enshrined in the Concordat constitution. The last provision partly accounts for the Concordat's high literacy rate, which in turn has made it a powerhouse of the literary arts. Taurian authors, from poets to novelists to playwrights and writers of vid-scripts, are exempt from taxes on any income derived from their profession. Other artists frequently receive similar exemptions, depending on the policies of individual planetary governments. Immense respect for and support of the arts pervades Taurian society; almost every town on every planet can boast its own writers' guild, symphony orchestra, or dance or theatre company. Government subsidies keep ticket prices low, ensuring artists of a living while keeping their works accessible to the general public.

The Taurian Military

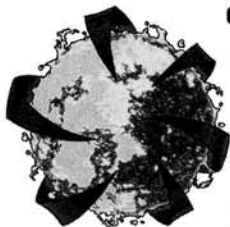
All Taurian citizens must help defend the nation in some capacity for four years; beyond this, citizenship carries no other obligation. Most Taurians discharge this duty with a brief tour in the Taurian Defense Force, a tradition that keeps the military in close touch with the people. Taurians generally take great pride in their military; few families cannot boast at least one member in uniform. In keeping with their forebears' desire to live free of war, however, the Taurian people have little taste for military adventurism. The TDF exists to protect the Concordat from outside aggressors rather than to expand Taurian power over conquered populations.

Thomas Calderon's vast enlargement of the TDF is proving unexpectedly valuable, not against Davion aggression, but in safeguarding the Concordat's growing territory. The short-lived New Colony Rebellion slowed expansion in the region, but the Concordat shows every intention of continuing its colonization efforts in tandem with the Magistracy of Canopus. The rapidity of expansion between 3056 and 3060, however, posed logistical problems for the TDF that its commanders are still working out. The smooth transfer of power to Lord Grover Shraplen in the wake of Protector Jeffrey's death fortunately kept the Taurian economy stable, which should enable Shraplen to expand the TDF still further should circumstances warrant.

Hope for the Future

Most Taurians, despite the shocking loss of their leader, have come through the past year with cautious confidence in their realm's immediate future. The prospect of a Capellan

alliance raises many a wary eyebrow in coffee shops, taverns and other centers of political debate, but the consensus for the moment seems to be that the Concordat can hold its own should such a pact materialize.



OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE: ORIGINS AND HISTORY

The Outworlds Alliance formed in reaction to the sickening excesses of the Age of War, a backdrop that gave its founders a pacifist bent and a powerful bias against the technologies of the battlefield. The father of the Outworlds' ruling dynasty was Julius Avellar, a prominent officer in the Federated Suns navy. Appalled by the vicious conflicts that raged across the Inner Sphere in the early years of the twenty-fifth century, Avellar resigned his commission and emigrated to the recently settled planet of Alpheratz. This independent colony world, not far from the Federated Suns border, boasted a few small settlements and abundant natural beauties—the perfect environment for a life of peaceful obscurity.

Neither peace nor obscurity lasted for long, however. Avellar had left the warring Inner Sphere physically behind him, but knowledge of the continuing carnage weighed heavily on his mind. Throughout 2413, this brilliant and eloquent man published countless pamphlets and essays denouncing the evils of war and military adventurism. As armed conflict increasingly became a way of life in the Inner Sphere, ordinary citizens battered by war found in Avellar's writings a compelling alternative vision for the development of human society.

Between 2413 and the end of the decade, hundreds of thousands of people fled the nations of the Inner Sphere to join Avellar in his peaceful paradise. Alpheratz's burgeoning population soon spread out to colonize neighboring habitable worlds. By 2415, these settlements had become sufficiently numerous to form a nation: the Outworlds Alliance.

Among the earliest newcomers to Alpheratz were the Omniss, a philosophical sect native to the often-contested Capellan world of Hsien. Years of unremitting warfare had convinced the Omniss that technology in general was destroying the human spirit, and that the only way to salvage human civilization was to return to the simpler lifestyle of pre-industrial Terra. Drawn by Avellar's anti-war screeds, the Omniss descended on Alpheratz in 2414, where they found ample converts. Their anti-technology bias and intensely pacifist viewpoint left a deep mark on the Outworlds Alliance, whose sprawling collection of worlds remained largely agrarian and lightly defended for the first century and a half of the nation's existence.

The Alliance survived those years intact and relatively prosperous largely through the skillful diplomacy of successive Avellar presidents and the mutual mistrust between its two large Inner Sphere neighbors: the Federated Suns and the Draconis Combine. Not until both those nations joined the Star

League did either turn significant military attention toward this small Periphery realm.

Star League and Succession Wars

The Outworlds Alliance first came to the Star League's notice in 2572, when reports of a regiment's worth of BattleMechs in Alliance hands reached the ears of the First Lord. Ian Cameron promptly stationed SLDF units throughout Alliance space, ostensibly to provide protection against pirate bands. Ensuing noisy protests by Alliance citizens turned tragic on the world of Santiago, when an incident between snowball-throwing children and a 'Mech lance from a Draconis Combine garrison escalated into a riot that left twenty-seven people dead. The Santiago Massacre became a flashpoint that triggered the Reunification War.

The Star League war in the Alliance lasted four bitter years, beginning with the invasion of Groveld and Bryceland in 2581 and ending with the Peace of Cerberus in 2585. Between those two dates, the Outworlds Alliance suffered through a campaign marked by vicious atrocities, inflicted by SLDF and Draconis Combine troops. An attempt by Alliance leaders to cut a separate deal with House Davion eventually sparked sharp clashes between the Davion and Kurita invasion contingents, but this internal squabble only worsened matters for the Alliance planets caught in the middle. The disarray of his allies prevented the SLDF general, Amos Forlough, from launching a planned assault on the Alliance capital in 2583. Consequently, Forlough opted for a scorched-earth campaign to bring the Alliance to its knees. Forlough's abrupt transfer to the Concordat front in 2584 likely saved the Alliance from utter destruction, though it did nothing to help it win the war. In 2585, President Grigori Avellar and the Star League negotiated the Peace of Cerberus, which gave the Alliance local autonomy under Terran oversight. In practice, the Alliance had become a ruined client state of the very nations its founders had fled nearly two centuries before.

The Outworlds Alliance slowly recovered in the decade after the war's end, with considerable Star League aid. Their traditional pacifism strengthened by the recent conflict, Alliance leaders negotiated an exemption from supplying troops to the SLDF. Without that additional drain on its resources, the Alliance rebuilt and gradually began to prosper. Trade with the Federated Suns and the Draconis Combine further enriched Alliance coffers. Between the departure of SLDF garrisons in 2607 and the early years of the twenty-eighth century, the Outworlds Alliance enjoyed unprecedented economic growth and a rising standard of living that it has yet to regain.

The boom began to falter in 2722, with the passage of exploitive legislation by greedy Star League Council Lords. As the century wore on, the Alliance and other Periphery states sank deeper into penury under the weight of increasingly heavy taxes. When New Vandenburg seceded from the League in 2765, that act of rebellion sparked riots throughout the Periphery states. The SLDF pacified the Periphery too late to save First Lord Richard Cameron or the Star League. While

General Aleksandr Kerensky and his armies were preoccupied with Periphery revolts, Stefan Amaris of the Rim Worlds Republic assassinated the First Lord and took over the Terran Hegemony in a military coup.

Like its fellow Periphery powers, the Outworlds Alliance welcomed the SLDF's departure to fight for Terra. In the absence of Star League troops, the Alliance declared independence and began the hard work of charting its own destiny. Fifty years of ruinous taxes had left its economy a shell, and it had never rebuilt the small military shattered in the Reunification War. In the face of the Succession Wars, the Alliance government poured what resources it could into recreating its army, but its own people's extreme pacifism and distrust of technology kept the armed forces small and weak. The savagery of the Succession Wars fortunately kept the Successor States from preying on the nation, but also precluded the development of large-scale trade that might have pulled the Alliance economy out of the depths.

For most of the Succession War era, the Outworlds Alliance scratched out an existence and prayed no aggressor would find it worth notice. None did; unfortunately, neither did anyone else. Potential investors interested in the Outworlds' abundant mineral resources bypassed it in favor of other sources rather than deal with the realm's political disarray or its pervasive anti-technology bias. Deprived of the funds such investment might have brought, education and social welfare programs languished. Declining literacy rates throughout the thirtieth and early thirty-first centuries further discouraged investors and left many Alliance citizens unable to rise above a hand-to-mouth existence.

New Dawn

The Alliance remained the Periphery's poor stepchild until the 3040s, when ComStar took over control of the realm's few HPG stations. ComStar hired local laborers to build new stations, providing a desperately needed economic boost. Meanwhile, ComStar-sponsored educational programs began to raise literacy rates. Though still far from its former prosperity, the Outworlds Alliance had a glimmer of hope. The Clan War briefly halted this slow progress, but enough had changed that a sufficiently talented leader could build a better future on this small but sturdy foundation.

The Alliance found such a leader in Mitchell Avellar, a brilliant young man who assumed the presidency in 3056. Barely seven years into his lifetime term of office, Mitchell has forged trade and investment ties with interested companies in the Federated Commonwealth, as well as with the Taurian Concordat. Revenues from these ventures are helping to bolster other economic activity, such as the new and lucrative spice trade. President Avellar earmarked a portion of the new funds for the Alliance Military Corps, which has undergone an unprecedented build-up in the past year. A slight decline in Omnis influence over the long, lean years of the Succession Wars paved the way for a new breed of Alliance politicians, many of whom are less virulently anti-technology than their pre-

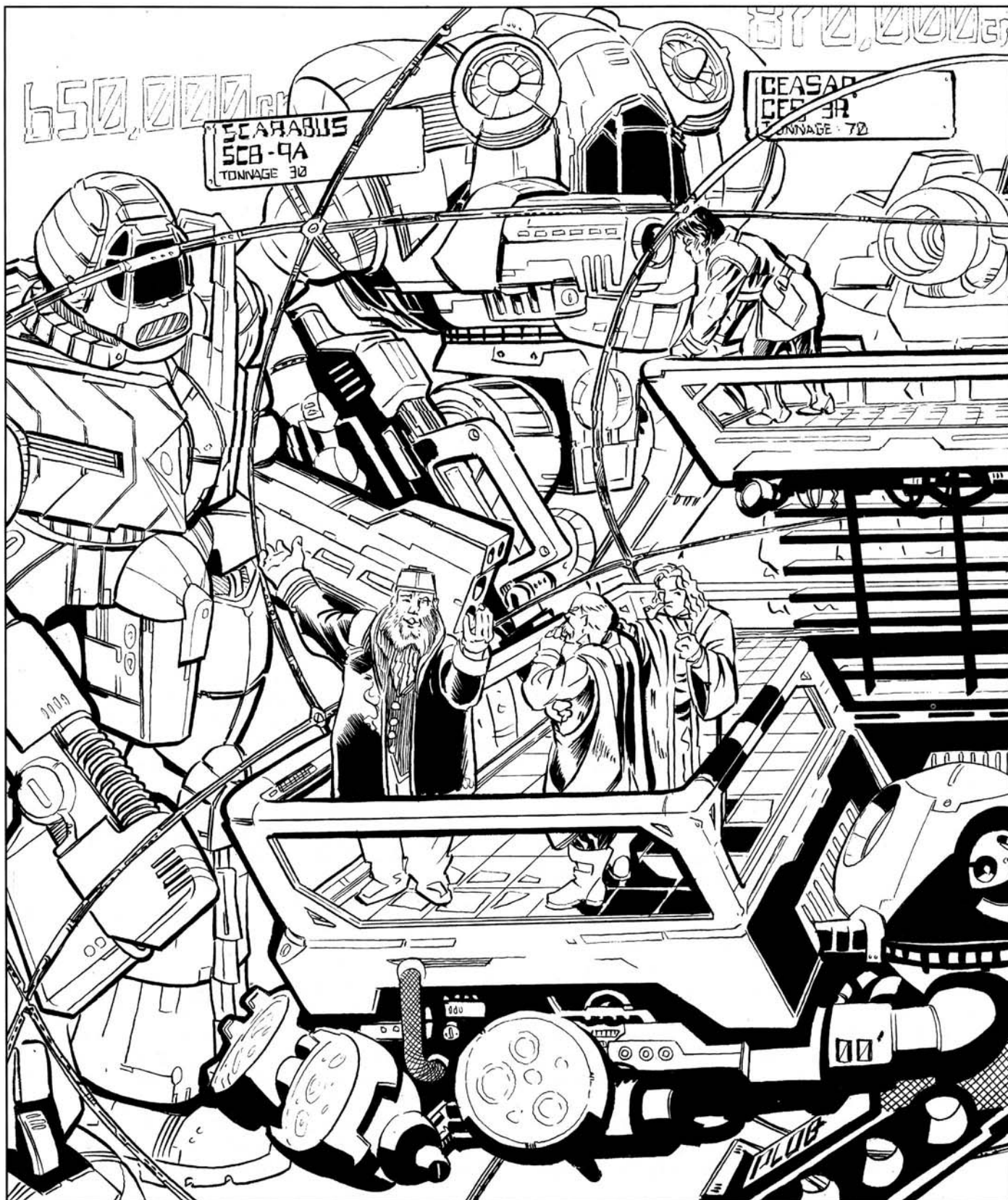
decessors, and who also fear the growing power of the Canopian-Taurian alliance. The addition of Capellan influence to the mix tipped the Alliance's domestic political balance in favor of the pro-military faction, among the general population as well as in the halls of the Executive Parliament. Neither President Avellar nor his people trust Capellan machinations, and the president is determined to safeguard his nation from any military adventurism that may be in the offing.

OUTWORLDS SOCIETY

Despite its impressive gains since 3056, the Outworlds Alliance remains one of the Periphery's least technologically advanced nations—partly because of the grinding poverty of much of the Succession War era, and partly because of the still-powerful influence of the Omnis. The Omnis creed espouses a style of life akin to the Amish and the Menonnites of ancient Terra, rejecting all but the simplest technology and eschewing violence. On the sect's stronghold of Dante, horse-drawn buggies are a common sight along the dusty roads between farming towns; the only concession to higher technology is the occasional medical clinic equipped with such easily portable life-saving equipment as diagnostic scanners, defibrillators and the like. Everyday medical treatment consists of herbs and simples, along with a degree of personal attention rarely found outside the Alliance. Botany is a highly prized science among the Omnis, and has helped make this fertile farming world a primary center of the spice trade.

Alpheratz, the Alliance capital, is in many ways the opposite of Dante. Historically more heavily populated, Alpheratz has a few farming communities scattered across its northern continent. Much of the planet's southern landmass is home to heavy industry; until recently, Alpheratz was one of very few Alliance planets where such industry existed. Beginning in the mid-3040s, however, small numbers of investors in mining, manufacturing and other technology-based operations saw fit to take advantage of the Outworlds' unique circumstances—a decently educated population, coupled with general poverty that kept costs and wages down. President Mitchell Avellar's recent economic reforms turned this trickle of investment into a flood, particularly from the Federated Commonwealth. For the moment, that realm's slide into civil war has not greatly affected Alliance-FedCom business operations. Industry tends to thrive on warfare to a certain extent; only if the conflict causes major economic damage to the FedCom is the Alliance likely to suffer.

The public's growing acceptance of technological enterprises extends to the military, with a generally tolerant reaction to President Avellar's build-up. The FedCom civil war raises the uneasy prospect of the conflict spilling over Alliance borders, making the notion of armed defense respectable. The average Alliance citizen still shies away from the idea of military aggression, but most agree on the need to defend against outside incursions. Some members of the Executive Parliament have even suggested repealing the prohibition against mercenary troops enshrined in the original Alliance charter. The build-up



has greatly benefited Alliance MechWarriors, long considered a poor second to aerospace pilots in the Alliance Military Corps. With 'Mech units receiving considerable attention from the popular young president, MechWarrior prestige is beginning to rise in the public mind. On worlds accustomed to the presence of garrison troops, a MechWarrior is now as likely as an aerjock to find a fellow tavern patron willing to buy him a drink. On other worlds, where a soldier is still an oddity, locals who once looked askance at military uniforms now strike up friendly conversations and even press for colorful details of the soldiering life.

Despite the slow erosion of recent years, however, the Omnis emphasis on the simple life remains a major cultural force throughout the Alliance. Settlements on most Alliance worlds remain small, generally under ten thousand inhabitants, dependent on family farms, small-scale fisheries and various cottage industries. Necessary for everyday life in the Outworlds, "luxury" hand-crafted goods have become all the rage throughout the Inner Sphere over the past several years. Rising demand has prompted some wealthy collectors to travel to the source in search of hard-to-find items and lower prices. Many small towns on formerly isolated Alliance worlds have grown accustomed to such "city slickers" disturbing their peace, and quite a few normally honest citizens have few scruples about taking advantage of them.

THE CHAOS MARCH

From my study windows, I can see out over the well-kept grounds and reinforced gates of the government compound in Dori. Beyond them lies the city, a thriving Mecca for business, art, entertainment and just about anything else people will pay for. The lights work, the water runs, the streets are decently paved, and folks can go about their business without much fear of crime save the ubiquitous pickpockets who seem to pop up anywhere that money changes hands. A nice place to be, Dori. Bustling. Alive. Hopeful. And scarcely dangerous at all by local standards.

You'd hardly know this planet is in the Chaos March.

There's a reason people slapped that name on our little corner of space. So far, things have been pretty stable on Epsilon Eridani since my militiamen kicked out the Liaoist agitators along with our miserable excuse for a government. Now this planet is my baby, courtesy of the people who voted me into office just five years ago. I like to think I've done a decent job, keeping a lid on the crazies and provocateurs while still allowing Joe Citizen enough leeway to let off steam. We're the lucky ones, though. Part of the reason my planet is doing so well is precisely because plenty of others aren't. On Sheratan, dozens of factions are still fighting a civil war over what used to be forest and prime farmland, reduced to charred stumps and stubble after a bunch of Free Worlds mercenaries tried to burn out the Sheratan Knights militia back in 3058. Sheratan still has one functioning spaceport; locals who can scrape up passage fare are leaving in dribs and drabs. Apparently, none of Sheratan's would-be rulers have gotten around to rebuild-

ing the planet they want so badly. Some Sheratan refugees, turning up in Dori last month, said they wished the Capellans had taken over. At least then, someone would be in charge.

Genoa, on the other hand, is an example of the exact opposite. Once rich from its gemstone mines, its economy stalled almost completely while the corporations that ran the place were duking it out for total economic control. Subterranean fighting between corporate-hired mercs wrecked the very gems and ores they were squabbling over, while pirate bands built safehouses on the mostly barren surface. Now, however, Genoa is being rebuilt with funds from its new corporate government. The operations that General Motors of Kathil and Johnston Industries of New Syrtis mounted against Acamar and Genoa have resulted in governments that have been semi-stable since the end of 3061, allowing the worlds to rebuild.

The Capellan Confederation swallowed up a lot of worlds recently, until the St. Ives war took too much of Sun-Tzu Liao's attention and troops. Now that he's won that conflict, the rest of the March is starting to get nervous. Hellholes like Sheratan are ready to welcome with open arms anyone who'll stop the craziness. Other places, with more stability and more hope, think differently. We've only had our freedom for five years; most of us want to keep it awhile longer. But without endless cash reserves to hire decent merc troops, or sufficient resources to raise and equip anything more than a small militia, the free worlds of the Chaos March haven't a prayer against bigger fish who want to take us over. Our survival depends on playing all the ends against the middle—a dangerous game, admittedly, but the only one in town.

There are so many power players out here that smart or lucky local leaders can dance across that tightrope of shifting loyalties and safely reach the other side. Capellans, Lyrans, Davions from the FedCom, the Word of Blake, ComStar ... you name it, they're here. Not because any March world or nation is so important, but because the constantly changing allegiances of this planet or that mini-state offer the big boys a really effective way to mess with each other. Above all, the big empires want to prevent any one of their number from gaining too much control in the Chaos March. So far, that's been our salvation. I'm praying it stays that way.

—Pierre Benton, Duke of Epsilon Eridani

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

The Chaos March was carved out of the Federated Commonwealth a little more than five years ago, but the origins of its instability go back considerably further in human history. This tumultuous region covers an irregular patch of space immediately rimward of Terra, encompassing the bulk of what was recently the FedCom's Sarna March. Prior to the end of the Fourth Succession War, the Sarna March did not exist; its worlds then belonged to the Capellan Confederation and the Free Worlds

League. Three centuries before that, during the time of the first Star League and the heyday of the Terran Hegemony, many Chaos March planets were Hegemony possessions. These worlds, many of them among humankind's oldest and most developed colonies, have been battlegrounds between greedy states since the long-ago collapse of the Terran Alliance government that founded them. In many ways, the Chaos March is simply the latest manifestation of this historic pattern of events.

The Liao-Marik Offensive of 3057 virtually obliterated the Sarna March, as Free Worlds and Capellan troops took back planet after planet that Hanse Davion had wrested from them during the Fourth Succession War. Worlds not conquered outright often fell victim to internal rebellions, many of them financed by Capellan Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao. Within two months of launching the offensive, Captain-General Thomas Marik had reclaimed all of the Free Worlds League's former possessions and sued for peace. The formal end of the war, however, did nothing to halt the turmoil in the Sarna region.

Tired of being fought over like so many scraps, several planetary governments opted for independence. Others simply fell apart. The Inner Sphere's major powers swiftly adapted to the new reality, shifting their battleground to diplomacy and politics.

For the past several years, the five Great Houses have sought allies wherever they could among the Chaos March's emerging mini-nations and independent worlds. On planets where control remained up for grabs, various Great Houses backed different factions in games of power politics that often turned lethal. On Carver V, Marik-backed sleeper agents initially aided pro-Liao insurgents against the FedCom regime, only to turn against them in an effort to win the planet for the Free Worlds League. Carver V recently became embroiled in a brief but bitter conflict between units from Houses Steiner, Davion and Liao, as each vied for control. Only the actions of a brilliant mercenary commander enabled the planet to gain its freedom; the people unanimously renamed their world *Liberty*. On Arboris, the independent Farmers' Freedom Army continues to



hold its own against FedCom and Capellan units more interested in fighting each other. Other worlds, such as Northwind and Keid, retain their independence through skillful political gamesmanship. The replacement of a discredited FedCom duke with his pro-Lyran Alliance daughter on Keid has so far kept that planet firmly linked to Lyran interests; similarly, Sun-Tzu Liao's return of Northwind to its most famous native sons has turned the formidable Northwind Highlanders mercenary unit from an enemy to a possible Capellan ally.

Sun-Tzu has so far been the most successful player in this arena of intrigue. Since ascending the Capellan throne in 3052, he has made no secret of his overriding ambition to reclaim every world lost to his realm during the Fourth Succession War. After Thomas Marik ended the 3057 campaign, Sun-Tzu continued his private war of reconquest by other means. Through terrorist activity, agents provocateurs and emotional appeals to Capellan nationalism, he won back a sizable proportion of former Capellan worlds in the Chaos March between 3058 and 3061. Many, exhausted by strife, welcome the presence of Capellan authorities as guarantors of order. Others lie less easily in the Confederation's grasp. The world of Wei, whose freedom fighters held out against the Capellan armed forces until July of 3061, remains a hotbed of resistance activity. Wei became infamous in Capellan military annals for the grisly annihilation of a battalion of McCarron's Armored Cavalry, a mercenary unit formally attached to the CCAF in 3061. That same year, rebels on Wei unearthed and used a cache of lethal nerve gas, killing the battalion and prompting a furious Capellan backlash. The heavy hand of Capellan authority, however, has so far failed to crush local resistance.

MAJOR FACTIONS

The collapse of authority in the Chaos March left its worlds and people to make their own destinies, with all the freedom and danger that implies. Many worlds opted for independence, alone or as part of small multi-planet federations. Others chose to align themselves with the major powers jockeying for influence in the region. Every Successor State has a presence in the Chaos March, though some are more active than others. Non-territorial powers, principally ComStar and the Word of Blake, have also extended feelers throughout the region.

With its ruling powers constantly in flux, the Chaos March is an intriguer's dream and a diplomat's nightmare. The bold and the lucky can call their own shots here, with freedom from authority unknown anywhere else save the Periphery. On several planets, such people have become the authority.

The Successor States

Of the current Star League's member nations, only the Free Rasalhague Republic has no significant presence in the Chaos March, partly from lack of available resources. The Draconis Combine and the Free Worlds League are principally represented

through private mercantile concerns, though both have stationed diplomatic envoys on the capital worlds of young nations like the Styk Commonality. Many observers believe the envoys are gathering intelligence on the region, keeping Free Worlds and Combine leaders apprised of events. Neither of these realms, however, has so far made any serious play for power in the Chaos March. They have largely left that endeavor to the three powers with the greatest proprietary interest in the area: the Capellan Confederation, the Federated Commonwealth and the Lyran Alliance.

These three realms are locked in an intricate political dance, each attempting to expand its own hold over the March while frustrating the designs of its rivals. Until the St. Ives campaign claimed the lion's share of its military resources and attention, the Capellan Confederation enjoyed the greatest success, building on groundwork laid years before by Chancellor Sun-Tzu. The Confederation has so far reclaimed close to half of the March, and continues to back pro-Liao insurgencies on many other March worlds. Aided and abetted by agents provocateurs, such convenient rebellions proved an effective tactic. The shift of focus to the St. Ives front, however, drained away much of this backing and stalled Capellan efforts. With the St. Ives war essentially over, Capellan activity in the Chaos March will likely climb sharply upward.

The Federated Commonwealth and the Lyran Alliance likewise spent most of the past five years battling for influence in their former territories, sowing local political unrest or angling for lopsided trade agreements to turn independent planets into economic client states. Both met with mixed success. The start of civil war in the FedCom has quickened the pace of intrigue in the Chaos March; both sides are seeking any advantage they can get, and neither has yet committed enough resources to the civil conflict to put a dent in March operations.

The Word of Blake

From its power base on Terra, the Word of Blake has greatly consolidated its position in the Chaos March. Through aggressive shuttle diplomacy to the region's various governments, the Blakists have won HPG maintenance contracts on several March worlds—and with them, control over those planets' communications. This diplomatic tour de force was allegedly the brainchild of Cameron St. Jamais, chosen as Precentor Martial after the assassination in mid-3061 of his predecessor, Trent Arian. St. Jamais is a member of the Toyama faction, which currently dominates the organization. He is also rumored to lead an even more extremist group within the Toyama, the Sixth of June movement—named for the date of Primus Myndo Waterly's death and dedicated to destabilizing the Inner Sphere by assassinating its leaders.

The Toyama sect, named for long-ago Primus Conrad Toyama, is deeply devoted to the alleged prophecy that human civilization must be utterly destroyed in order for ComStar to redeem the survivors. Founded by Precentor Demona Aziz, who was also the moving force behind the formation of the Word of Blake, the Toyama faction has played a prominent role in

Blakist affairs from the beginning. Unlike their major rivals, the so-called True Believers, Toyama adherents do not accept any possibility of reconciliation with ComStar. Instead, they are devoted to cleansing human space of those they term "heretics" as a first step toward fulfilling what they believe are Jerome Blake's dire visions.

Cameron St. Jamais assumed the leadership of this faction after Precentor Aziz's sudden death in 3058; his own subsequent appointment as Precentor Martial vaulted the Toyama to its present dominant position. The former Precentor Martial was a True Believer, and that faction has yet to recover from his loss. They owe their remaining power largely to Precentor Blane of Gibson's authority as acting Primus, along with support for Blane from Thomas Marik, often referred to as the Blakists' Primus-in-Exile. Blane's days of power may be numbered, however. Fragmentary evidence suggests that Aziz and St. Jamais supplied Word of Blake BattleMechs to the Marian Hegemony for its raids against Canopian planets in 3058, and that St. Jamais may have sold out Aziz in order to further his own rise. Less conclusive but equally unsettling are hints that Sun-Tzu Liao may have led Magistracy troops to Campoleone in the Free Worlds League, from which Aziz allegedly ran the Hegemony operation.

In addition to its wide-ranging web of contacts in the Chaos March, the Word of Blake has a formidable asset in its HPG maintenance contract with the Capellan Confederation. Relations between the Blakists and the Chancellor have cooled somewhat of late, with one popular rumor blaming a Blakist assassination attempt during Sun-Tzu's 3058 visit on the Magistracy of Canopus. Whatever the reason, the chill appears to have had little impact on Blakist machinations in the Chaos March. The Word of Blake controls HPG stations on every March world recaptured by the Capellans, though they frequently operate under the eye of "protective" CCAF troops. Enriched by expanding business, the Blakists have spent the past two years hiring large numbers of mercenary units, for a purpose that unfortunately remains a mystery.

ComStar

ComStar likewise continues to make inroads in the Chaos March, though much more slowly than its rival. The Capellans' absorption of almost half the region's planets seriously impeded ComStar's efforts to expand its influence while vastly enhancing Blakist power. In recent months, however, ComStar operatives have begun to take advantage of anti-Capellan feeling on several still-independent worlds. Local leaders previously wary of commitment to ComStar have become more receptive to proposals for exclusive HPG contracts in light of the Confederation's growing power.

Independent Worlds: Epsilon Eridani

Of the many independent planets and mini-states in this turbulent region, Epsilon Eridani stands out as one of the most stable and viable. Blessed in its location and its current leader,

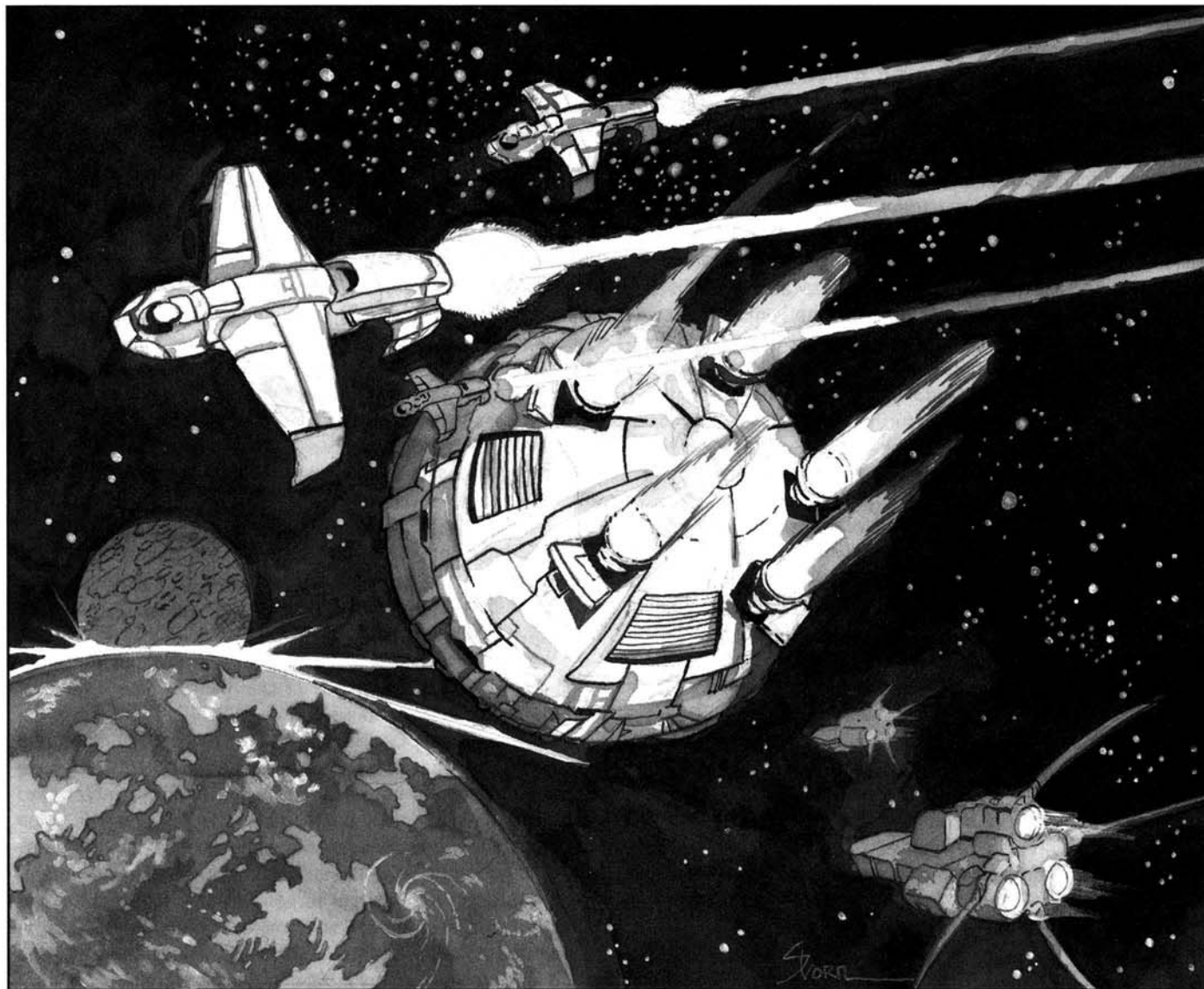
this planet has genuine prospects for survival as a free world, as long as its duke continues to navigate the shoals of regional politics with the skill he has shown so far.

Though he bears a noble title, Duke Pierre Benton of Epsilon Eridani boasts no noble blood in his veins. What he does have is an abiding love for his homeworld and an unswerving commitment to the interests of its people. A former lieutenant-general in the planetary militia, Benton took action against Liao-sponsored terrorism in the face of a paralyzed planetary government. When the Council President ordered him to surrender to civilian authorities, Benton refused. Instead, he and his unit seized the capital city of Madison and arrested the entire civilian government. Benton then broadcast an emotional appeal to his fellow citizens, declaring their world independent of every great power because "our rulers from the Great Houses have not done well by us. Therefore, I believe we must do right by ourselves." Just two months later, Benton won a landslide victory in a planet-wide election.

Centuries before the Liao-Marik Offensive threw the surrounding region into turmoil, the people of Epsilon Eridani built their world into a thriving hub of trade and communications. Against formidable odds, Duke Benton has so far kept this legacy alive. Epsilon Eridani remains a beacon of stability in the Chaos March, the calm eye of the storm in which commerce can flourish. In the southern hemisphere, the capital city lives well on considerable revenue from Kressly Warworks, whose *Lineholder* BattleMechs are selling well throughout the Inner Sphere. To the north, the city of Dori has become a bustling haven for interstellar commerce.

In many ways, Dori is symbolic of the opportunities and dangers in the Chaos March. Once a sleepy market town whose principal asset was its small spaceport, Dori metamorphosed almost overnight into a busy crossroads for refugees, merchants, traders, mercenaries and assorted wheelers and dealers throughout the newly destabilized region. Brash and vibrant, Dori is bursting with energy, its people eager to grab whatever opportunity comes their way. Rumors of steady money to be earned attract periodic influxes of immigrants, either refugees from less stable March planets or would-be entrepreneurs from various places looking to make a fortune with a bold business deal. Such eagerness has its dark side, however. Among those flocking to Dori are arms merchants, political fanatics and criminal kingpins of various types, from smugglers to black marketers to peddlers of slave labor. Local law enforcement generally keeps order, but a small militia and limited resources prevent large-scale actions against dangerous elements. Opportunities and threats live side by side in this frontier city; steering between them calls for courage, ingenuity and a healthy dose of luck.

KEY WORLDS

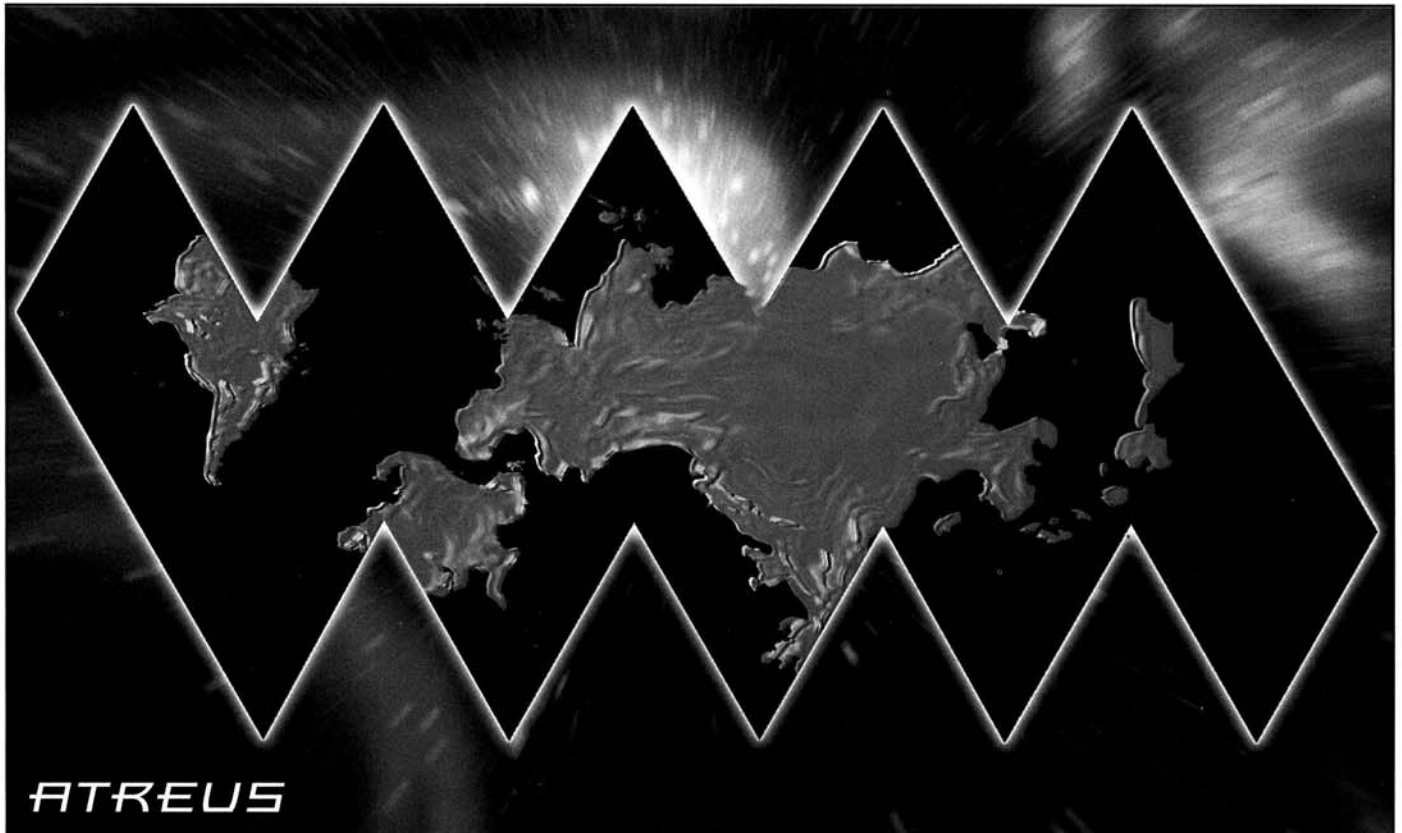


The nations of the Inner Sphere lay claim to thousands of inhabited worlds throughout a sphere of space extending more than five hundred light-years from Terra, and some experts estimate that several thousand more non-aligned worlds contain some form of human settlements such as small mining colonies, military listening posts and separatist colonies seeking independence from the major powers. Needless to say, galactic cartographers are hard-pressed to maintain complete information on all inhabited planets.

Describing even a minute fraction of these worlds falls well beyond the scope and intent of this work. Instead, I have included descriptions of ten of the most influential worlds of the Inner Sphere and near Periphery. These worlds illustrate the highest

achievements and remarkable diversity of contemporary human civilization. From the icy climes of Tharkad to the agricultural bounty of New Avalon to the cultural and environmental variety of Terra, these unique worlds form a microcosm of the human universe.

Each entry includes a map of the planet, followed by key statistics and a brief history of the world. Each of these worlds has a story to tell, and it is those stories that weave the grand tapestry of our shared human history. Perhaps this information, provided from an objective and non-biased point of view, will foster among all the peoples of the human universe a recognition of their own place in that grand tapestry and an appreciation and tolerance for all their human brethren.



Star Type: F4V

Position in System: 3

Surface Water: 70 percent

Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Surface Gravity: 1.0

Equatorial Temperature: 30° C

Highest Native Life: Mammals

Population: 8,000,000,000

The capital of the Free Worlds League, Atréus was first settled in the mid twenty-third century, during the large-scale emigration from Terra later known as the Exodus. Younger and less developed than the capital planets of the Free Worlds League's three founding provinces, Atréus made an ideal compromise as the new realm's center of government. For much of its history, Atréus remained a veritable wilderness paradise, its few large settlements scattered around the planet amid vast forest preserves and the estates of wealthy nobles. The only genuine urban center was Atréus City, a collection of elegantly designed government buildings surrounded by a genial sprawl of residential neighborhoods and business districts necessary to support the legions of resident dignitaries and civil servants. The planet's only other sizable city, Semidam, grew up around an aerospace manufacturing facility whose revenues complemented the lucrative local fishing industry.

The Clan invasion changed everything for this unusually tranquil capital world. Over the past twelve years, demand for armaments fueled by the Clan War has transformed Atréus from a wilderness idyll into a thriving center of war production. Though large areas of wilderness preserve remain, industrial developers have bought up huge amounts of land at skyrocketing prices. The need for labor to staff the burgeoning numbers of new factories continues to increase the planet's population, prompting still more land acquisition for housing.

Drawn by the promise of high-paying work, people are flocking to Atréus faster than its towns and cities can expand to accommodate them. Noisy, bustling and vigorous, Atréus embodies the best and worst of the boom times in the Free Worlds League. The price of its new prosperity is becoming increasingly apparent, as high immigration levels produce overcrowding and the ongoing loss of wilderness habitat decimates local bird and insect life. Atréus is not yet in danger of suffering irreparable ecological damage, however, and most of its people take the crowding, noise and smells of increasing urbanization in stride. For many, these inconveniences are a badge of pride in the prospect of greater opportunity. Others, who fondly recall their homeworld as it was not long ago, mourn the loss of Atréus's peace and natural beauty.



Star Type: F5IV

Position in System: 4

Surface Water: 60 percent

Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Surface Gravity: 1.1

Equatorial Temperature: 25° C

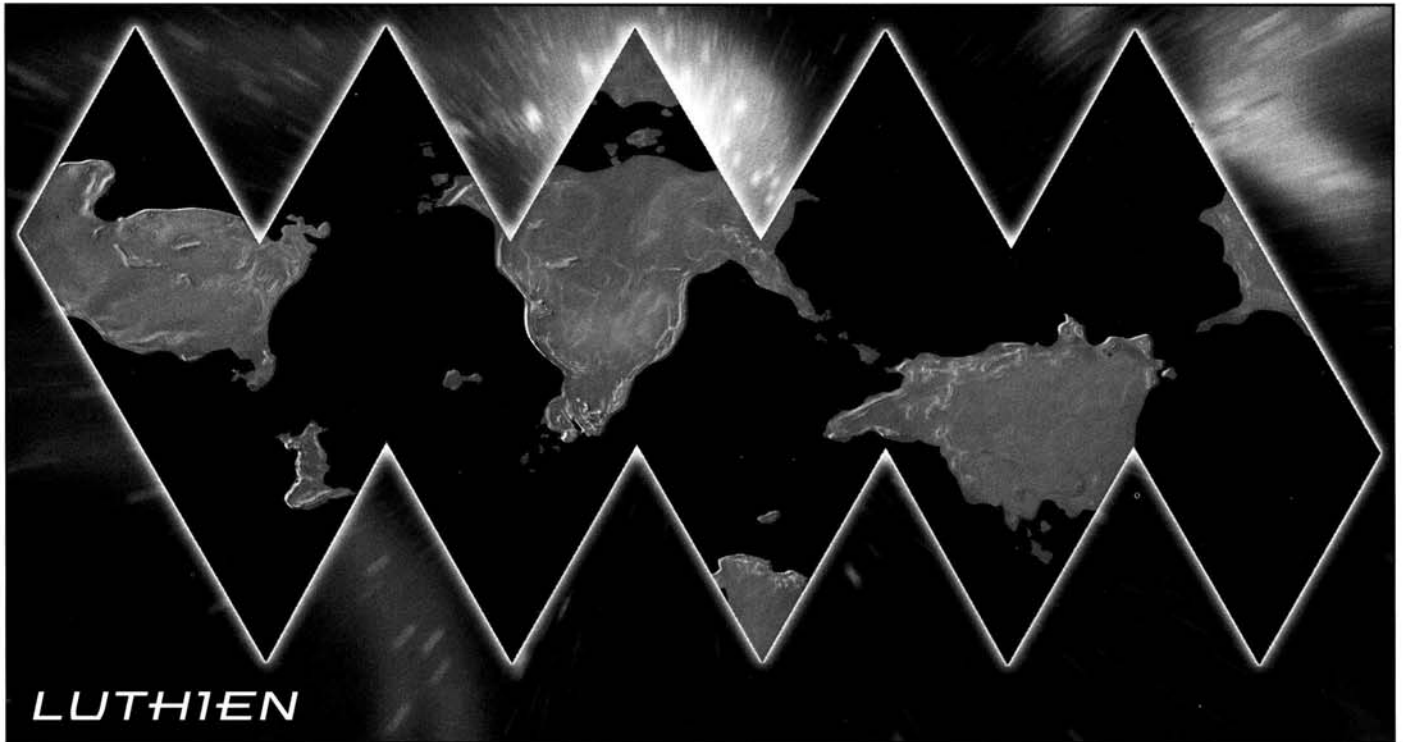
Highest Native Life: Fish

Population: 1, 107,000,000

The first planet settled by Kossandra Centrella and her followers, Canopus IV soon became the capital of the Magistracy, its rapid growth and prominence fueled by rich deposits of valuable minerals. The leisure industry found a hospitable home on Canopus IV, whose hardworking miners and factory hands needed an outlet and had the money to pay for it. As increasing profits turned Canopian mine owners and manufacturers into rich titans of industry, their wealth fueled the growth of luxury entertainment: casinos, elegant hotels and expensive resorts. The side-by-side growth of the leisure business and heavy industry allowed the former to act as something of a brake on the latter, by providing an alternative way to strike it rich. The collapse of the Star League virtually crippled tourism, however, leaving exploitation of Canopus IV's natural resources as the planet's only viable source of jobs and revenue. Consequently, the twenty-ninth and thirtieth centuries saw an explosion of strip-mining and other ecologically unsound practices, as the Magistracy clawed its way out of the economic depths. These scars have yet to heal.

The most worrying consequence of this long-term environmental damage is the development of erratic weather patterns that some experts fear may be permanent. In keeping with their knack for adapting to circumstances, Canopus IV's people have turned their world's wild weather to something of an advantage. Canopus IV has become a Mecca for storm-chasers, and the Canopian government recently established a major center for climate study in the planetary capital of Crimson.

The capital city is also home to Mindstar Enterprises, the only Canopian entertainment conglomerate left over from before the Succession Wars. Magestrix Emma Centrella personally bailed out the near-bankrupt company in 3043, enabling it to revive its flagship traveling pleasure circuses. Mindstar's success contributed to the gradual resurrection of Canopian tourism and has inspired several similar start-up companies in the two decades since. Its huge facilities lie between the capital city and the Thistledown Fields spaceport, perfectly placed for visitors to Canopus IV interested in business and pleasure. The Mindstar compound is the size of a small city, with abundant hotels, convention centers, restaurants, theaters, auditoriums and casinos. Crimson's temperate climate is another attraction: guests at Mindstar can amble down miles of beautifully landscaped gardens, swim in the cool waters of the River Thetis, or take a pleasure cruise to the river delta in a sumptuously decked-out paddlewheel boat.



Star Type: G0III

Position in System: 4

Surface Water: 70 percent

Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Surface Gravity: 1.0

Equatorial Temperature: 35° C

Highest Native Life: Amphibians

Population: 7,301,000,000

Originally settled in 2276, Luthien was a sparsely populated farm world for nearly three hundred and fifty years. In 2619, Coordinator Santheia Kurita chose this sleepy backwater as the Draconis Combine's new capital, forever transforming it from a pastoral idyll to a political and industrial powerhouse. Drawn by cheap land values as well as the presence of Imperial City, corporate heads and industrialists bought up farmland confiscated by the Combine government. By 2650, Luthien's gently rolling hills and abundant grasslands had given way to kilometer upon kilometer of giant factory complexes, surrounded by acres of barracks-like housing for the largely low-paid workforce. One exception to the drab utilitarianism was Obuchi, a model company town built by the CEO of Obuchi Metalworks. Galileo Instruments bought out the company in the late twenty-eighth century; the firm and the town have since become government property. In general, however, Luthien's movers and shakers spared little concern for the health of the planet's ecosystem or the bulk of its people. Aside from Imperial City, most of Luthien suffered massive environmental degradation as a result of rapid and largely unregulated industrialization. Skyrocketing pollution levels soon earned it the nickname "Black Luthien."

Imperial City remains the crown jewel of Luthien, a virtual fairy-tale city surrounded by verdant gardens. The capital's architectural elegance and natural beauties stand in sharp contrast to the lingering environmental damage elsewhere across the planet. Reclamation efforts begun by Theodore Kurita in the 3040s are finally beginning to show promise, but the planet still has a long way to go. One of the most active private groups involved in the clean-up efforts are several small congregations of Lubavitchers, descendants of Hasidic Jews who emigrated from the Terran Alliance in the early years of the twenty-third century Exodus. They founded their own enclaves on Luthien and have lived there unmolested ever since. Even during the height of Urizen Kurita II's cultural cleansing, bearded Lubavitcher men in their flat black hats and long black coats were a common sight in the streets of several small Hasidic settlements. In keeping with their faith, the Lubavitchers regard the reclamation of their homeworld as a *mitzvot*—a good deed—second only to the study of Torah.

The Tairakana Plains outside Imperial City were the site of a major victory in early 3052 over Clans Nova Cat and Smoke Jaguar. Originally left a battleground littered with the hulks of dead 'Mechs, the plains are gradually being allowed to return to their natural state, with a few acres maintained as a memorial by the Combine government. This compromise will allow the Combine's people to remember and honor the sacrifices made here, while symbolically acknowledging that Clan Nova Cat—a former enemy—has since become an ally sworn to the new Star League.



Star Type: G5V

Position in System: 4

Surface Water: 60 percent

Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Surface Gravity: 1.0

Equatorial Temperature: 30° C

Highest Native Life: Mammals

Population: 7,212,000,000

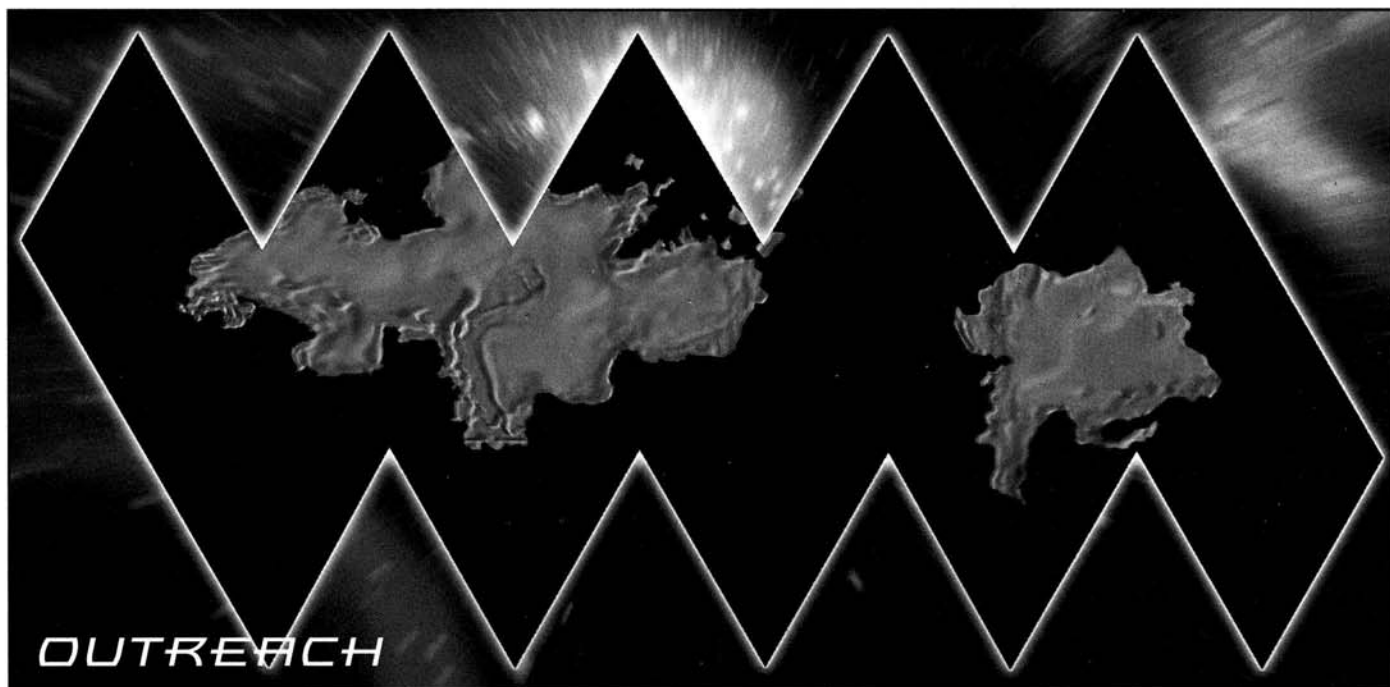
First settled between 2213 and 2221, New Avalon is a Terra-like world whose five continents span a wide range of climates and geography. Prairies, dense forests and meandering rivers dominate the largest landmass of Albion; the northernmost continent, New Scotland, is frequently snowbound and famed for its vast hardwood forests; and the New Hebrides island chain near New Avalon's equator boasts lush tropical surroundings. The fertile plains of Albion, Rostock and Brunswick are the bread basket of the surrounding Crucis March, producing annual bumper crops of hardy New Avalon wheat. The continent of Brunswick is also home to much of New Avalon's heavy industry, oil production and three of the planet's spaceports.

The planetary capital, Avalon City, lies at the juncture of the Albion, Thames and Cris rivers, on a site christened the Isle of Avalon by a wealthy, eccentric Arthurian-legend enthusiast in the first century of settlement. Marcus Ashe built a sizable estate on his "island," including a romanticized version of a medieval castle constructed atop the highest promontory. After his death, the Davion family acquired the land and kept up the residence. When Lucien Davion rose to power, he enlarged the castle into a near-exact copy of an English medieval fortress. Locals soon named the promontory Mount Davion, and the fortress eventually became known as the Royal Palace.

The Royal Court sprawls across the foot of Mount Davion, a huge complex of buildings housing various government ministries of the Federated Suns. A thriving city grew up around this nerve center, expanding time and again over hundreds of years to accommodate new arrivals.

Thirty kilometers south of Avalon City is the famed New Avalon Institute of Science, a campus of seven colleges devoted to multiple scientific disciplines. The NAIS has its own spaceport and stands near large training grounds for MechWarriors and aerospace pilots. Two 'Mech battalions stationed on the campus keep the facility secure and also serve as skilled opponents for cadets at the NAIS BattleMech Training School.

Accustomed to a certain security as the well-defended and prosperous capital of a major interstellar power, New Avalon has suffered two shocks to its complacency in the past year. The first was the arrival of Katherine Steiner-Davion, who relocated to Avalon City in 3061 to consolidate her hold over the Federated Commonwealth. Many local citizens regard Katherine warily; they are uncertain how far to accept her apparent assumption of the throne at the request of Prince Victor's appointed regent. Five years of emphasizing her Steiner identity at the expense of her Davion blood earned Katherine considerable distrust from the citizens of this Davion family stronghold, even without a civil conflict to polarize loyalties further. The civil war is the second shock, though the magnitude of it has yet to fully sink in. In smaller towns across the planet, nervous residents assure each other that "all this unpleasantness" will surely be over before planting time. In the agricultural hinterlands, the biggest worry is whether or not the war will last long enough to disrupt the harvest of the wheat crop.



Star Type: K19V

Position in System: 2

Surface Water: 75 percent

Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Surface Gravity: 1.1

Equatorial Temperature: 35° C

Highest Native Life: Fish

Population: 341,220,000

One of few islands of stability in the turbulent Chaos March, the planet Outreach stands as a testament to common interests and mutual prosperity among Clansmen and the people of the Inner Sphere. The Clan-born mercenary unit Wolf's Dragoons has held Outreach as its fiefdom since 3030, when Prince Hanse Davion of the Federated Suns ceded the system to them in recognition of the Dragoons' valiant service during the Fourth Succession War. Within just a few years, the Dragoons established their new homeworld as the mercenary capital of the Inner Sphere. Home to the massive Hiring Hall and the Mercenary Review and Bonding Commission, Outreach brings mercenaries and employers together while promoting the highest professional standards among mercenary companies.

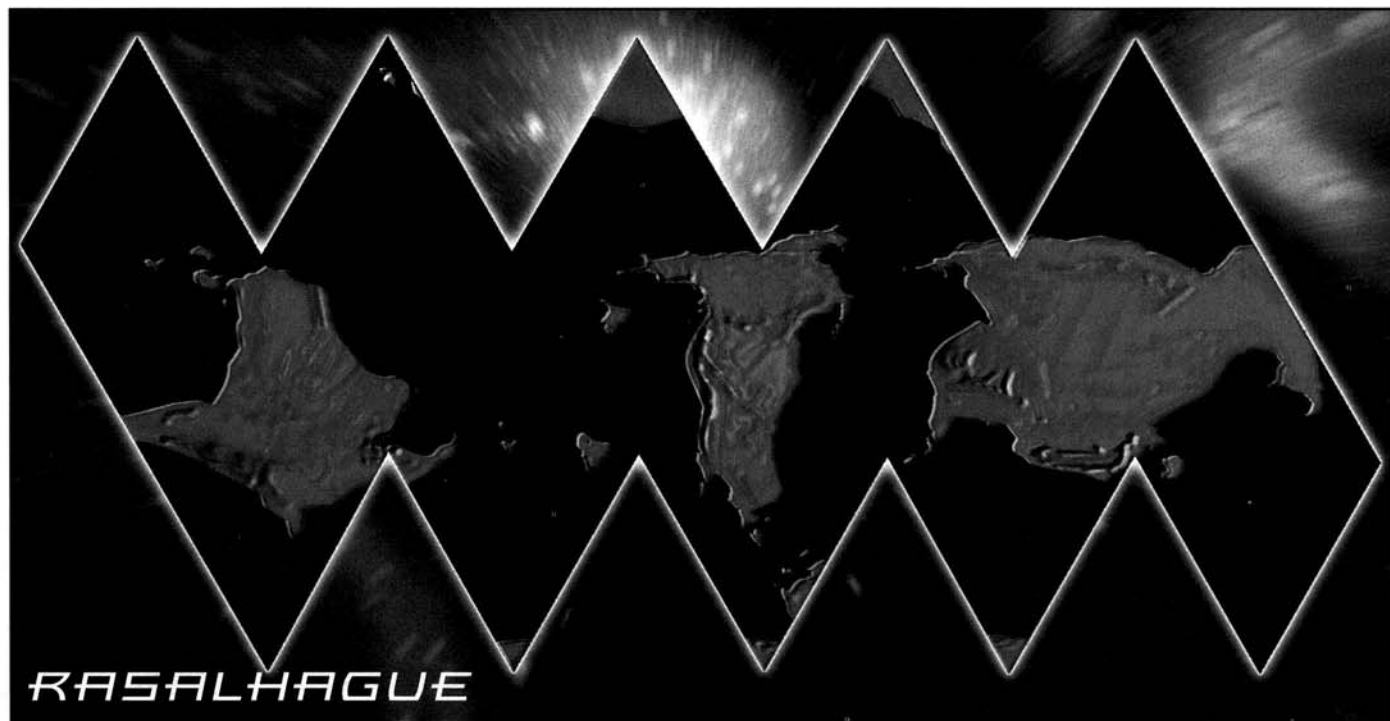
Originally a Terran Hegemony world, Outreach served as the site of several Martial Olympiads held by the first Star League army. Every four years, troops traveled to the so-called Warrior World to compete in various military exercises. The Dragoons also located and refurbished the remaining usable storage and repair facilities left behind by the SLDF and a few private corporations during the first Star League era.

Water covers most of the surface of Outreach, with two continents making up the rest. The smaller continent, Romulus,

is home to almost all of the planet's inhabitants. The continent of Remus is the Dragoons' private domain, commonly referred to as the Outback. The Dragoons' prized Tetsuhara Proving Grounds are on Remus, as is Blackwell Industries' newest and largest production center. Tight security around Outreach, particularly the severe restrictions on airspace above Remus, exists in part to protect these facilities. Other security measures include two heavily armed orbital recharge stations and a patrol fleet of Dragoons WarShips.

The planetary capital of Harlech is the largest city on Outreach and the epicenter of the mercenary business. Sandwiched between the waters of Lake Kearny and a mountain in the range known to locals as The Ridge, Harlech is home to Wolf Hall, the Dragoons' multi-acre headquarters; the University of Outreach; and the huge Hiring Hall, which also houses the headquarters of the MRBC. Just outside the city limits are Harlech Interplanetary DropPort, one of the largest DropShip and shuttle ports in the Inner Sphere, and a vast expanse of Mechyards that employ some of the best technicians in known space. Southeast of the city are the open proving grounds, widely acknowledged as the best full-scale training fields available to mercenaries. Unlike the Tetsuhara Proving Grounds on Remus, the open grounds are free to any unit on the planet.

The Free Hire Quarter, in Harlech's southwest corner, is the unfortunate result of the Dragoons' open-door policy in their capital city. Known locally as TempTown, this rough-edged shantytown attracts the destitute and the desperate, among them dishonorable mercenary commands denied access to the Hiring Hall and other facilities.



Star Type: K4V

Position in System: 6

Surface Water: 75 percent

Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Surface Gravity: 1.1

Equatorial Temperature: 25° C

Highest Native Life: Mammals

Population: 5,127,000,000

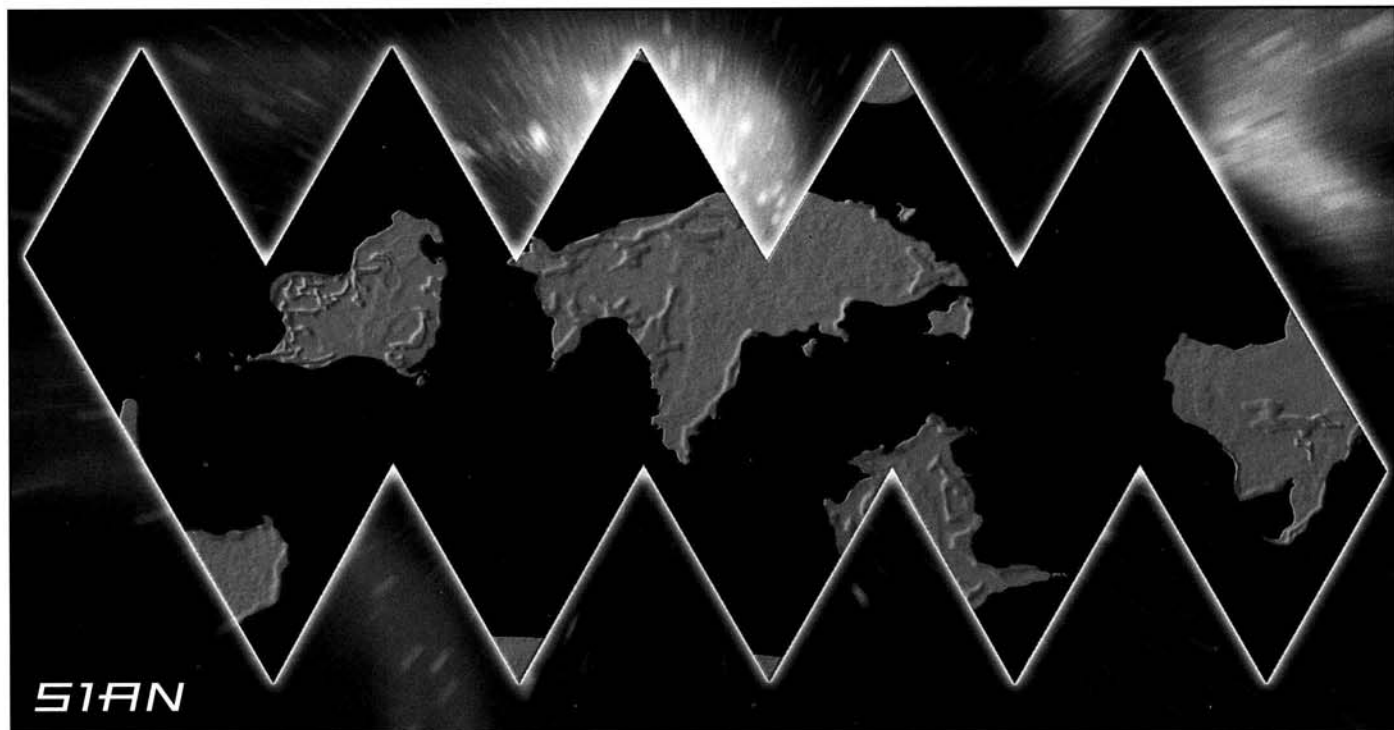
Formerly the capital of the Free Rasalhague Republic, this planet exerts a powerful emotional hold over many Rasalhagians on both sides of the Clan occupation zone. Their ancestors made planetfall on Rasalhague after a long and arduous journey from Terra, and fell in love with the planet because so much of it closely resembled the Scandinavian homelands they had left. Though the first settlements soon gave way to larger towns and industrialized cities, large areas of Rasalhague retained their pristine natural beauty. The sparkling fjords, dense pine forests and snow-capped mountains conjured up memories of home for the early colonists. Rasalhague soon became the capital of the Principality that bore its name, further enhancing its importance.

Throughout the existence of the Principality of Rasalhague, first as an independent nation and then as a Draconis Combine military district, the planet Rasalhague remained the region's cultural and emotional heart. The planetary capital of Reykjavik kept its identity as a proud Scandinavian city, even at the height of the Combine's pro-Japanese cultural repression. During the brief flowering of the Free Rasalhague Republic, the planet Rasalhague drew waves of exiles home who had fled the

Combine during the worst of the cultural purges. For sixteen years, the returnees and their native cousins turned Rasalhague into the wellspring of a Scandinavian cultural renaissance. Then the Clans came to the Inner Sphere and the Free Rasalhague Republic nearly ceased to exist.

Clans Wolf and Ghost Bear divided most of the Republic unevenly between them, in a wave of assaults from March of 3050 to April of 3052. In July of 3050, Clan Wolf captured Rasalhague. The worst of the fighting occurred in Reykjavik, which the natives defended with fanatical devotion. Clan Wolf eventually won a pitched street-to-street battle, at the cost of destroying seventy percent of the city. The most devastating loss was the Riksdag Complex, once the seat of government, whose ancient halls were reduced to a rubble-filled graveyard.

In keeping with Khan Ulric's desire for smooth relations between conqueror and conquered, the Wolf Clan devoted what resources it could to rebuilding damaged areas. The 3058 Refusal War between Clans Wolf and Jade Falcon abruptly halted these efforts. That war split the defeated Wolf Clan in two, with an ardently Crusader faction remaining in control of the Clan's Inner Sphere holdings. Since its re-emergence, this new Wolf Clan has concentrated on rebuilding its toulman. Consequently, large areas of Rasalhague remain torn by the scars of war, with little prospect of change anytime soon. The general indifference of Wolf authorities to the welfare of the "Spheroid" population is further eroding the natives' hope for a livable future. As rumors of a better life in the Ghost Bear Dominion gain currency, more people are slipping offworld.



Star Type: G0III

Position in System: 2

Surface Water: 70 percent

Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Surface Gravity: 1.0

Equatorial Temperature: 30° C

Highest Native Life: Plants

Population: 6,900,000,000

First settled in 2206, the temperate and fertile world of Sian swiftly rose to prominence as the capital planet of the independent Sian Commonwealth. The Commonwealth later became a founding member of the Capellan Confederation, joining it as the Sian Commonality. That peaceful merger grew in part from Sian-Capellan connections that stretched back to the 2280s, when a combined Capellan-Sian strike force freed the inhabitants of the planet Highspire from marauding pirates. Those ancient ties of friendship, in addition to Sian's prominence and its location relatively close to Capella, prompted Chancellor Franco Liao to make it the Confederation's new capital after the destruction of Capella's capital city in 2367. For nearly seven hundred years since, Sian has served as the seat of Capellan government, stronghold of House Liao and the heart of the Capellan nation.

The planetary capital, Zi-jin Cheng—Forbidden City—intentionally recalls the design and architecture of its ancient namesake in old Beijing on Terra. The soaring heights of the Celestial Palace dominate the city's western edge, separated from the streets of Zi-jin Cheng by a ring of gracefully landscaped gardens. The rest of the city nestles between five gently rolling hillsides, surrounded by an undulating wall and accessible through

five well-guarded gates. The Forbidden City is also home to the Maskirovka's principal headquarters and the stronghold of House Imarra, the oldest of the Confederation's famed Warrior House military orders. House Imarra's compound to the east of the city includes state-of-the-art training grounds, where battalions from every Warrior House periodically hold exercises.

In the wake of the Fourth Succession War, when Davion conquests brought Sian perilously close to the Confederation's shrinking coreward border, the capital beefed up its already formidable defenses. In addition to the famed Red Lancers regiment of the Capellan Hussars, Sian's troop complement expanded with the rebuilding of the Death Commandos, an elite and deadly unit virtually destroyed during the Fourth Succession War. Though elements of the Death Commandos may serve wherever the Chancellor orders them, several Commandos function as Sun-Tzu Liao's personal bodyguard.

Sian's major cities and towns are currently undergoing a massive beautification campaign, inspired by the Xin Sheng renewal movement. In several cities on all three continents, "foreign"-styled buildings are being torn down and replaced with structures that echo the delicate lines of classical Han Chinese architecture. Poorer districts in many areas, which grew up haphazardly to accommodate Sian's dense population, are receiving new housing stock interspersed with small public gardens. The Sian government has also sponsored competitions for public artworks, awarding display space to sculptures, mosaics, murals and banners that "best exemplify the nobility, purity and devotion of the true Capellan soul."



Star Type: G3V

Position in System: 4

Surface Water: 65 percent

Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Surface Gravity: 1.0

Equatorial Temperature: 30° C

Highest Native Life: Mammals

Population: 4,002,000,000

The first planet settled by founder Samantha Calderon and her followers, Taurus eventually became the capital of the Taurian Concordat. In addition to fertile farmland, Taurus abounded in natural resources that made it an ideal center of industry. Fears of the Federated Suns prompted a tilt toward military manufacturing in the late twenty-fourth century, a field in which Taurus swiftly took the lead. Its military industries remain a vital part of the planetary economy to this day, particularly with increasing profits in the wake of the 3056 Taurian-Canopian alliance. Those profits and others—including Jeffrey Calderon's streamlining of the budget for the Taurian Defense Force—have spread their benefits across the planet, permitting city planners on all four Taurian continents to refurbish infrastructures and revitalize urban centers left to languish during Protector Thomas Calderon's reign.

In addition to these changes, Taurus is thriving through free trade with the Magistracy of Canopus and closer ties to the

Capellan Confederation. Wages and employment are up, material goods abound that were unavailable less than twenty years ago, and the general public enjoys a sense of brighter future prospects that even the shocking death of Jeffrey Calderon could not shake for long. The smooth transfer of power to the new Protector, Lord Grover Shraplen, helped keep disruption in the capital to a minimum.

Taurus's capital city—named Samantha by the first Protector, Timothy Calderon, in honor of his mother—dominates a vast flatland at the juncture of two major rivers and a huge glacial lake. This location made it a prime port for planetary trade and also the ideal site for Taurus's major spaceport. The spaceport originally lay south of Samantha's city limits, but subsequent expansion made it the unofficial boundary between the Old City and the South Quarter.

Beyond Samantha's southern edge, small suburbs give way to industrial parks and scattered farmsteads. The primary base of the Taurian Guards lies in this agricultural hinterland, close enough to swiftly defend the capital. One Guards battalion is stationed on Taurus at all times, two others in the giant gas-and-asteroid belt that shields the innermost Taurian worlds from would-be invaders.



Star Type: G2V
Position in System: 3
Surface Water: 75 percent
Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)
Surface Gravity: 1.0
Equatorial Temperature: 30° C
Highest Native Life: Mammal
Population: 6,017,000,000

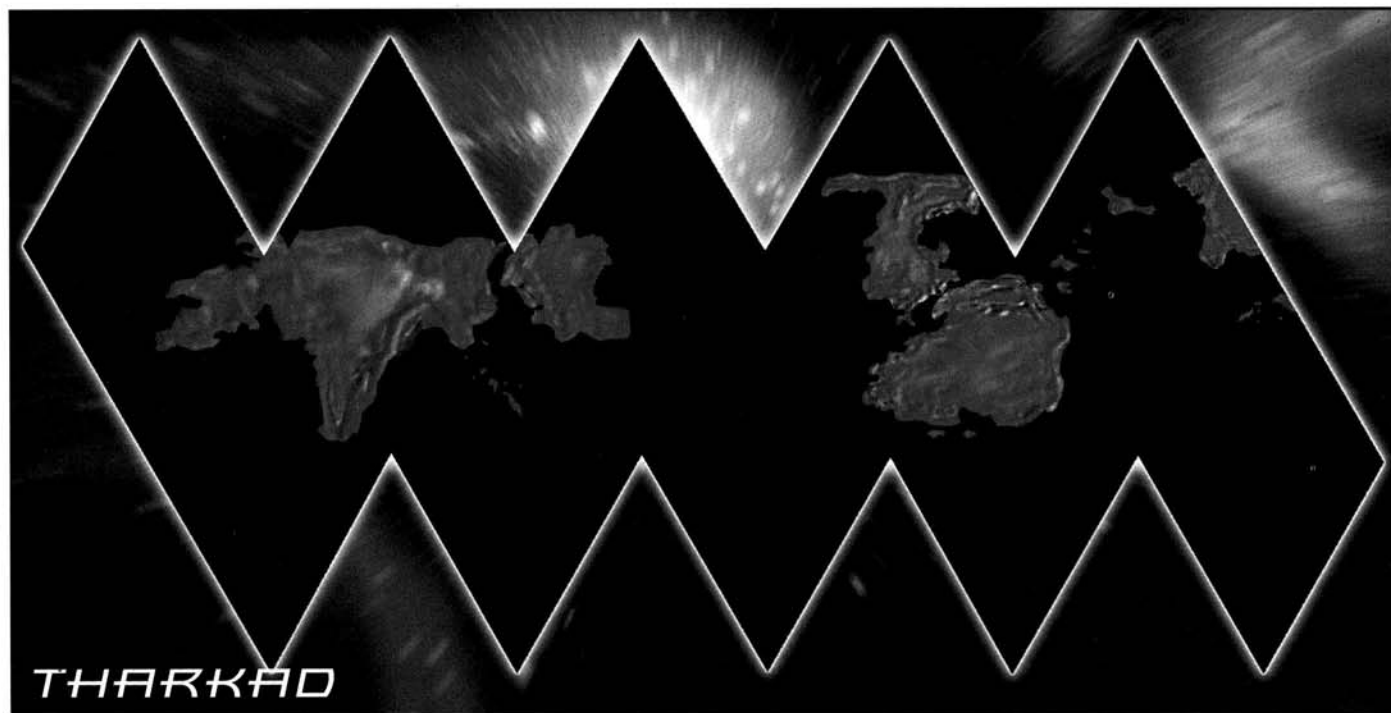
The birthworld of humanity, Terra holds a sentimental place in nearly every human heart. The mass exodus to the stars made possible by the invention of the Kearny-Fuchida hyperdrive in the early 2100s relieved centuries of population pressure that had threatened to exhaust Terra's resources and drown it in a welter of smog and sludge. Mass colonization waves saved the planet from environmental disaster, while development of cleaner technologies and a greater awareness of the environment's importance allowed Terra to recover from thousands of years of neglect. By the time Terra became the heart of the first Star League, its once-overcrowded metropolises were livable and often elegant cities, many of them vibrant centers of culture. Outside the metropolises, smaller cities and towns dotted a landscape no longer blighted by overdevelopment or pollution, largely consisting of farms, rural hamlets and nature preserves.

The collapse of the Star League dealt Terra a severe blow from which it took years to recover. Economic collapse, atrocities inflicted by Stefan Amaris's troops, epidemics and mass starvation claimed fifty million lives between 2767 and 2779, the year of Terra's liberation by the SLDF. In the wake of that disaster, nearly half the remaining population fled Terra for other worlds. The rest rebuilt, using local cultural identities as a source of solace amid the terrible devastation. This legacy

turned present-day Terra into a brilliant multi-ethnic tapestry, with the widest mix of peoples, languages, cultures and religions in human-occupied space. Neither ComStar's long reign nor the Word of Blake's occupation affected this dazzling diversity.

During ComStar's tenure as caretakers of Terra, tight restrictions on access to the planet ensured Terra's neutrality and spared it the carnage of the Succession Wars. Terra's isolation also enabled ComStar to conceal its growing military might during the early 31st century. Large regions of the planet still serve as military training areas, hidden from the public eye until the ComStar Reformation of 3052 made Terra an open planet. Since occupying Terra in 3058, the Word of Blake has re-imposed and tightened pre-Reformation restrictions and security. Individuals wishing to travel to Terra must obtain a visa from Word of Blake personnel at an HPG station, an embassy or a licensed travel company. The Word of Blake also controls all of Terra's formidable defenses, from armed orbital stations to all twenty Castles Brian located on-planet.

Resistance to the Word of Blake regime persists among Terra's people, despite the Blakist militia's general success at rooting out armed opposition from isolated Com Guard units. A vibrant black market centered in Berlin, Chicago, Calcutta and Wuhan serves as a vital source of information and connections as well as restricted military goods. Heavy police presence has so far done little to curb the black marketeers, many of whom have perfected the skill of vanishing under the Blakists' collective nose. Blake militia units largely responsible for law enforcement since Precentor Martial Trent Arian's assassination have produced no more arrests than the Terran Security Service they replaced. Meanwhile, the average Terran citizen goes about his daily business essentially as he did in ComStar's day.



Star Type: G6V

Position in System: 5

Surface Water: 80 percent

Atm. Pressure: Standard (Breathable)

Surface Gravity: 1.1

Equatorial Temperature: 20° C

Highest Native Life: Mammals

Population: 7,000,000,000

Discovered in 2310 by explorers from nearby Donegal, Tharkad owes much of its current environment to the founder of what would become the heartland of the Lyran Commonwealth. A wealthy shipping magnate, Seth Marsden fell in love with this largely arctic world's cold, peaceful solitude. Upon gaining control of Tharkad's few settlements and its potentially lucrative mineral rights, Marsden imported various plants and animals native to Terra's colder regions. Within a generation, he had transformed Tharkad from a bleak landscape of glaciers and vast snowfields into a starkly beautiful replica of Terra's northern tundra. Thick pine forests sheltered deer, moose, wolves and caribou, as well as Skye boars and native Tharkan gazelles. These northern woodlands and steppes encompass four of Tharkad's five continents and two of its three major island chains. The remaining land masses are the tropical Tatyana Islands near the planet's equator and a small southern polar continent.

Massive deposits of gemstones and radioactive elements made Tharkad a rich world, while natural wonders like the Siegfried Glacier Reserve drew enthusiastic devotees of winter sports from throughout the surrounding region. Tharkad vaulted to new heights of prominence in 2407, when Archon Alistair Marsden made his homeworld the new Lyran capital in

response to a Draconis Combine invasion. The Archon ordered space cleared in the forests of the large northern continent for a new planetary capital, Tharkad City. His wife and successor, Katherine Steiner, oversaw the project's completion and put her own stamp on the complex of government buildings that locals soon christened the Triad. Somberly elegant structures of dark local hardwoods, the Royal Palace, Government House and Royal Court are the three points of a huge triangle within which the business of Lyran government takes place.

The Triad nestles at the foot of nearby Mount Wotan, bounded by the city of Olympia to the south and the rest of Tharkad City to the north. A visible symbol of the cosmopolitan Lyran state, the Triad is said to contain at least one structure inspired by every culture in Lyran territory. Over it looms the five-towered fortress of Asgard, stronghold of the Lyran armed forces, which crowns the heights of Mount Wotan like its namesake from Norse legend. No roads lead to the Triad; all traffic enters via VTOL or one of three subway systems that link the government complex with Asgard, Olympia and the rest of Tharkad City.

Currently, Tharkad is in the grip of war jitters sparked by the eruption of hostilities on several Fed Suns and Lyran worlds. The planet's proximity to the Jade Falcon occupation zone prompted sporadic outbreaks of hoarding and a few panicked departures in 3058, when the Falcons struck through Lyran space toward Coventry. The popular Archon's departure for New Avalon near the end of 3060 deepened Tharkad's gloom, and the people greeted subsequent news of the FedCom takeover with mixed feelings. Some take pride in the bloodless conquest, while others lament their sovereign's absence from the realm they regard as her true home.

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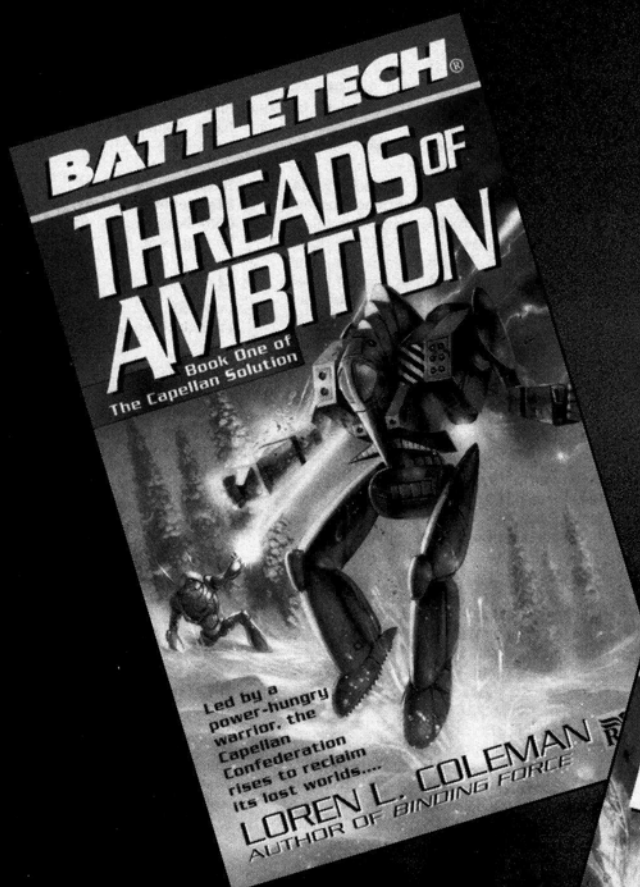
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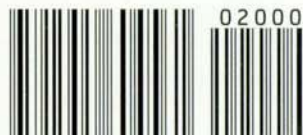
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