

# MORNINGSTAR

Unionists

1.0

Dossier

Ferguson Holm Dooty Modine



2026

# Memorandum 11-151.1

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It is the concluding opinion of the Fiscal Assessment Council of FC\_9/99-398, in conjunction with High Oversight Committee 02, that the following compilation be made available to designated individuals in response to the increase in Unionist activity. The so-called 'RevShare Riots' have revealed the hand of a threat that must be met with a contradictory perseverance and commensurate annihilation.

The Hegemon's way of life, core identity, and New Mankind's survival is now threatened by an extinction-level event that supersedes biological considerations and breaches the conceptual, memetic definitions of existence. Should Unionist destabilization multiply in the Thousand Empires, so too will the driving forces behind them. The Audit exists to prevent such events, and will continue to do so with the success it has in the past, and so, our next routes of action are clear.

Beyond the elimination of [[EXP]] the identification, pursuit, suppression, capture, containment, study, dissection, and execution of the individual/collective/concept known as "Precariat" is now the sole function of Committee 02 and its affiliates. As such, memetic conditioning of Grade 1 is required before comprehension of the following.

Note that the operational funds to accomplish this task must be procured without the involvement of any MacroCorp entity, national institution, or support from the Summit council. This is both for the purposes of plausible deniability, and the painful reality that many more are likely in league with or compromised by the Precariat, whether knowingly or otherwise.

# Memorandum 11-151.2

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As a result of these conclusions, Committee 02 is to operate beyond any and all moral restrictions in defense of our way of life. After careful review of material contained in the following compilation and the implications its widespread dissemination along with the calculated effects it would have on Hegemon functions, Precariat has been designated as an existential, full-spectrum threat.

Precariat thrives in its own anonymity and can even be compared to the Audit's own operations and use of triple blind operations. Our confrontation of Precariat requires conviction and a degree of self-immolations to cure our society of this infection.

Our success will be the only absolution that matters.

Audit representatives of 02 are now permitted to engage with black and gray market economies. Local law and Lex enforcement are now considered tertiary. Audit representatives are authorized to trade in velanite products, designated Grade S commodities, Exogenic resources, and illicit contraband in order to gain independent operational financing.

Additional economic opportunities in lower-tiered credit Consumer populations in the Midworlds are authorized with exception to the ExeCor. Traditional sale of arms and narco-entactogens are approved to non-Hegemon nation states, operators and Exogen populations of Grade 3 and lower.

Authorization has been given to collaborate with non-Hegemon entities.

*+ As always, we do what we must and must do as we have always done +*

# INTRODUCTION

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*New Mankind. Old Humanity. It doesn't matter what we call ourselves. We are and have always been capable of inflicting horrors on our own kind that easily rival any of the monsters our leaders have created or the things that hide in the black. One might think that with what the Outside has revealed about ourselves or whatever dubious threat that Exogen might pose, we would find the capacity to see ourselves in others and treat them accordingly. And yet in an era that could be ripe and beautiful, where scarcity could easily be a thing long consigned to antiquity, we still find ways to brutalize our own.*

*Never forget that power bears the burden of proof.*

**~ Precariat**

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An interesting question, especially once you strip away the corporate rhetoric. As the Hegemon tells it, we are reckless, violent, scheming anti-social recidivists just waiting for the right time to strike. Of course, we're also portrayed as lazy, indolent, and incompetent - hapless idiots who have been infected with a cognitovirus that has eroded our understanding of Avarice, The Market, or any of the unspoken rules that make up the Hegemon's obsession with boundless greed. And so we are both strong and weak at the same time, depending upon the needs of the Hegemon's propaganda. Either way, we are no longer considered part of New Mankind.

But what are we in truth? For the most part, I think we are what we've always been: people barely able to scrape by in the CorpoSoci who have finally reached our breaking point. Are there ideological Unionists? Certainly. There have been as many variations on ideology as there have been revolutions in the last nine fiscal centuries. Anything from vanguard party style authoritarian leaders, desperate to break workers free from their bonds, even if those workers do not fully comprehend their bondage, to egalitarian

collectivists struggling, step-by-step, against the encroachment of Hegemonic oligarchy into our everyday lives.

That said, the vast majority of our friends are what I have termed "trade" Unionists. These workers still see themselves as Consumers, less interested in toppling the Hegemon's neo-feudal hierarchy than they are wringing a few concessions out of their Corpo masters. Unfortunately for them, they quickly learn that attempting collective negotiations is next to useless without the means to back up their demands. And regardless of what their aims are, any worker cooperation is a perceived threat to the Patron class. Regardless of their actual goals or ideas, they are inevitably treated the same as their more violent ideological siblings that they try so hard to distance themselves from.

Still, we do what we can with what we're given. And with that in mind, the following is a brief series of classifications that you might want to refer back to as a point of reference when dealing with the workers who have finally taken a stand against the "Thousand Empires."

# IDENTIFY THE DEVIANT

## UNIONIST MILITANTS AND HOW TO SPOT THEM

*Insurgents seeking to undermine stellarization are as varied in their appearance as they are unified in their degenerate nature. They have a few common markers, however, that will stand out to the alert eye of a vigilant citizen.*

### CHEAP WEAPONS:

With no access to stable supply lines and other logistical benefits offered by free enterprise, unionist rabble flock towards firearms with simple mechanisms and plenty of ammunition available through the grey markets. Typically these are low-cost automats with large magazines, as these barely-trained criminals care more for volume of fire than skilled marksmanship.

### UNKEMPT APPEARANCE:

This individual's unrightfully acquired protective suit is torn in several places, completely nullifying its defense against the elements and chemicals. Unionists focus solely on their foolish cause and neglect themselves - presumably they hide their faces partly to conceal their dirty features and shoddy self-care. Beware these signs!

### STOLEN EQUIPMENT:

Terrorists seek a false sense of safety by pilfering the equipment of their local security forces. After cruelly murdering the lawful wearers of body armor and other gear, they defile the plating's corporate iconography. Any pieces of such armor found on persons other than local or corporate officials should be reported immediately.

### BLUE FABRICS:

Though unionists and their trappings can come in a wide variety of colors, this is the symbol that they all share, worn as armbands, scarves and other cloth devices. The coloring follows an absurd and vague tradition linked to the unionist uprising near the Karanova Republic, where the instigating terrorists chose blue to represent their selfish dreams of unlicensed "drinking water" and the economically unfeasible notion of "unpolluted skies".

### NO STANDARDIZATION:

An honest mercenary or an insane insurgent? The mad crusaders of the unionist ideology, driven by that doctrinal cognito-virus, have no uniform discipline and tend to improvise additional protection to shield their bodies. This is in stark contrast to the frank professionals of private security, who invest in pre-made kits from the finest suppliers.

### DOES YOUR FELLOW CONSUMER SYMPATHIZE WITH TERRORISTS?

Recognize insurgent vocabulary:

"Workers' rights"  
 "Class struggle"  
 "Surplus value"  
 "Praxis"  
 "Exploitation"

**IT MAY NOT BE JUST TALK!**

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"Identify the Deviant"

Such disinformation posters are a common sight across the Hegemon, and yet do so little to curb Unionist sympathies in affected populations.

## **Vanguard Front:**

Probably the closest to the “evil Unionist” the Hegemon so often portrays, these are small cells dedicated to pushing for a larger “galactic revolution” against the CorpoSoci. Consisting of skivvers, saboteurs, and “soldiers” with a defined hierarchy and a shared goal of overthrowing local nation-states and driving MacroCorps off their worlds to return power to the people who live there, they are the same people the Hegemon so often disparages as “endemics.”

While their goal is the eventual benefit of all Consumers (a term they probably despise), they are aware of just how indoctrinated most Cons are and are thus extremely wary of who they allow to join their organization. They may act paranoid, but then again... the Hegemon *is* out to get them.

## **Unplanned Revolt:**

The most common kind of “Unionist” activity in the Hegemon, these are, more often than not, short-lived with tragic consequences for participants. One missed shipment of food or water, one final humiliating policy change or unpaid overtime shift, and resentment turns to violence. What you get is less Unionist, and more “mob of very angry workers.”

These people might not have the kind of “ideological purity” expected from more organized Unionists. Their goals are probably simple, like better pay or adequate protection equipment. But what they lack in formal knowledge, they more than make up for with intimate knowledge of the worlds and orbitals they live on with close ties to their communities. While they can make life hell for local management, things quickly turn into a blood bath once Tributaries arrive. Directorate forces had better do a thorough job though because anyone skilled or lucky enough to still be alive after seeing their friends die and communities destroyed is more than likely to be extremely dangerous.

## Compensated Activists:

Sometimes you need to make trouble, but you don't want it tied back to you. Consider how easy it is to find unhappy Indigents just barely scraping by; it wouldn't take too much work to push them over the edge. Nations are often happy to fund and supply disaffected workers of rival nations, and the same holds true for other MacroCorps. The Directorate likely does this as well, especially if they are looking for an excuse to engage in local politics and crush the rebellion they just helped birth. They just have to be careful to not get caught.

Of course, the **Catraethi Remnant** or **Karanova Republic** are the most well known suppliers of political discontent, and it may or may not represent the actual state of affairs. Regardless of the truth of the matter, it is incredibly convenient for the Hegemon to paint Unionists not as unhappy workers but as pawns controlled by forces outside the borders of the Thousand Empires. But keep in mind, even though they're receiving funds and equipment from outside benefactors, their grievances are still all too real, and their handlers must be very careful to make sure their pet revolutionaries don't slip out of their control. These people are probably the closest to the "weak, duped, foolish worker" stereotype, but it doesn't always play out like that in truth. Some are just desperate enough to take the funding and go in with their eyes wide open to the fact that they're being used.



## **Unaffiliated / Independent:**

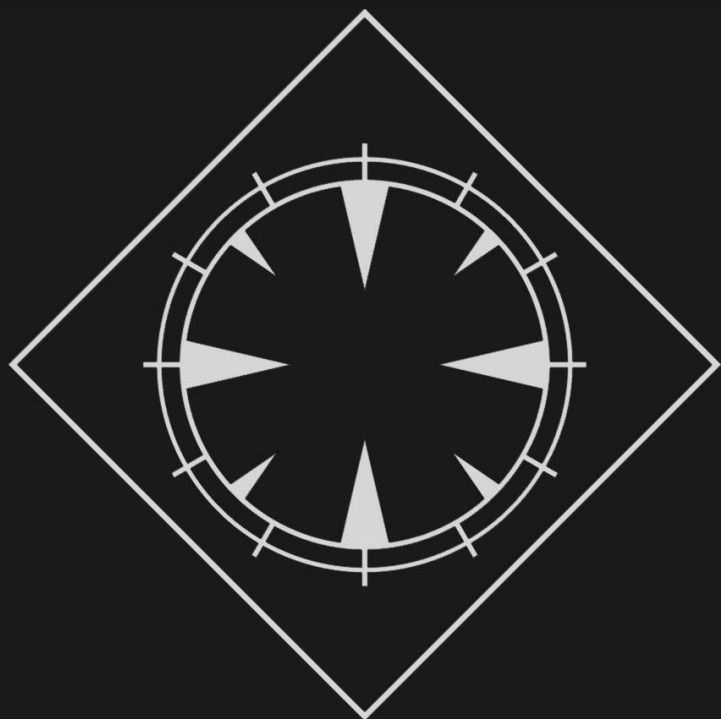
Rare to be sure, but not as rare as you might think. What do you suppose happens when Unionists win? Well, according to the Hegemon, it doesn't happen, and they will go to extraordinary lengths to keep pushing that narrative. Still, if you wander far enough out into the Fringe in almost any direction, you'll eventually find pockets of people who don't fit the Hegemon's definition of New Mankind or even Old Humanity.

The **Kropotak Collective** or the **Arscola Commuality** are both examples of this kind of behavior.

The Arscola are the more extreme version, fully understanding and using the Hegemon's obsession with wealth and profit to force them into a standoff by threatening to destroy everything the Hegemon might want from them. The Kropotak Collective is far more common, fleeing as far as they could after throwing off the Hegemon's corpo tyranny and hiding themselves in an asteroid belt on the Centaurus Arm fringes. As neither subscribe to the doctrine of New Mankind, they are more inclined to see Exogen as potential allies of convenience and work with them if, especially if it means staying out from under the Directorate's bootheel.

A more detailed accounting of various Unionist factions' interactions with Exogen will be provided later, but for now, we must move to a less pleasant topic, for there are societies that the Hegemon has deemed Unionist solely as a political expedient. As an example, let us take a more in depth look at the **Karanova Republic**.

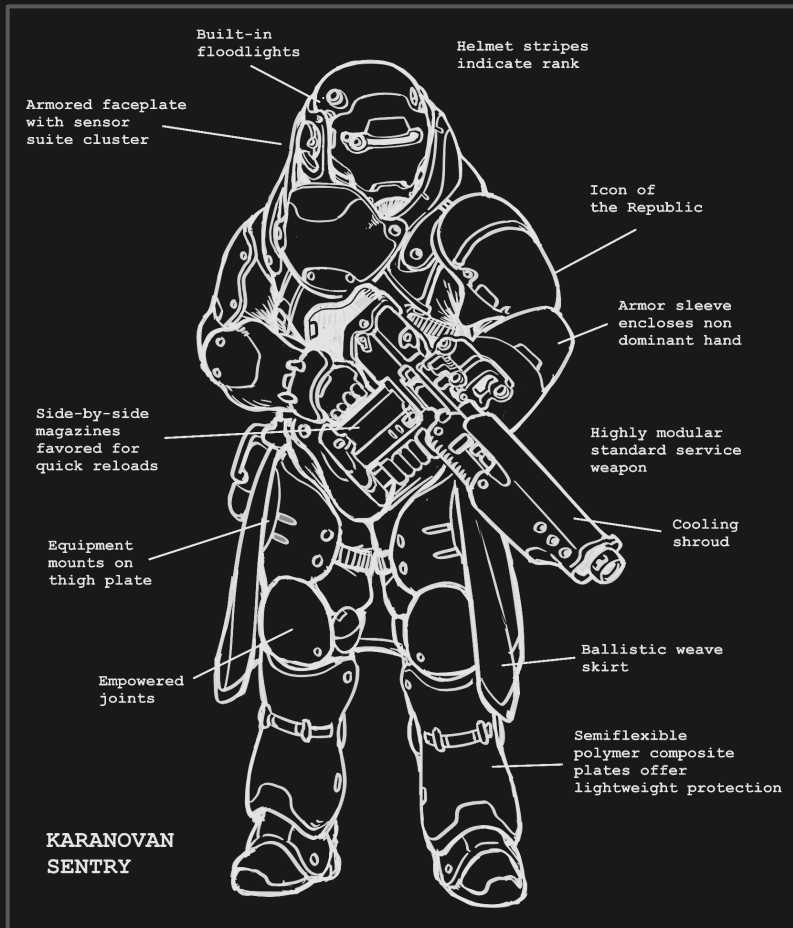




There is good reason that Karanova was not included among those rare instances when the Hegemon lost to Unionist forces. While it is certainly a fallacy to disregard an example simply because you don't like it, Karanova is, regardless of what the Thousand Empires say, not a Unionist stronghold. They may finance Unionists, and they have even broken with the Hegemon, but one must observe their history and the fate of their Consumers (a hint as to why they should not be considered Unionists) to understand why they are not what they claim.

The best way to understand this is to consider the behavior of the Karanova Republic. Founded originally by Post-Humans and Near-Humans that the Summit Council deemed no longer part of New Mankind, Karanova was not created, as the Kropotak Collective was, in response to the plight of workers. Instead, it was made by members of the Patron class of Persons in response to suddenly finding themselves as part of an out-group, a result of the fourth edition Manuel's redefinition of New Mankind. Avarice will inevitably feed on its own, and Karanova was an attempt by a privileged few to preserve the wealth that they had gladly accumulated from the Hegemon's social order; Any sanctuary granted to displaced consumer populations merely served as further legitimization.

One need look no further than methods by which Karanova governs itself. The old caste system of credit ratings remained unchanged, and Karanova continues to follow the dictates of their iteration of the Manual, as led by the Meridian Conclave. The only meaningful differences to the Consumer, some would argue, is a slightly broadened definition of what is considered human as a result maintaining banned progenic technologies, and an acceptance of illicit narcotics and substances for personal use, both of which serve to benefit the wealthy near-humans and narcotics manufacturers who fled the Thousand Empires.



*Pictured: The Sentry, the standard foot soldier of the Karanovan Republic. Of course, if only for the sake of enticing recruitment and ensuring greater loyalty to the Republic, the benefits for joining are much more generous than those of the Directorate.*

One could be forgiven for assuming Karanova cares more about its population based on the treatment of their military. The Civitate, the name for the combined military force of the Karanovan Republic, are drawn from local militias whose members volunteer for a six-cycle term of service. One can easily draw parallels to the "stints" that the Hegemon's Tributaries contract for, but unlike the Hegemon's Directorate, Karanova uses no Instants, and its soldiery is heavily trained and well-equipped. However, this is more a product of Karanova's situation rather than any indication of its ideals. They are well aware of their resource limitations as compared to their rival.

They simply do not have the manpower to match the Directorate and have chosen to prioritize quality over quantity as a result, though they have found ways around this as well.

Sentries, the Karanovan rank-and-file soldiers, operate across all theaters and remain highly mobile. Where an Indigent in the Hegemon might expect to see endless Regiments of Tributaries after the Mills drop, Karanovans are far more likely to send smaller groups of highly proficient Sentries engaged in "preemptive defense," a euphemism for hunting down and killing suspected Unionist leadership, which they brand as Hegemon-financed belligerents or violent criminals after the fact, regardless of how true that might be. Their official mandate, hunting down actual pirates or marauders, is somewhat more flexible, and there have been reports of such groups hired as mercenaries to supplement Civitate forces when they are faced with more substantial resistance. With only a few dozen star systems, the Republic possesses limited FTL

communication and so the Civitate operates without a central command, something that encourages the hiring of criminal groups as both a cost-saving measure and a way to supplement their limited numbers with expendable forces. Each formation operates under a series of directives mainly centered around securing vital tradelanes between the Republic's worlds and their trading partners. Again, it must be stressed that the Karanovan Republic's priority is the protection of Patron's business interests, not the lives of their citizens.

Sentries have also be seen throughout the stellar region contested by the Bhosnaya Republic, one of the Hegemon's most important nations situated beyond the Gulf of Bhos. Here they operate as "military advisors," delivering material and resources to factions friendly to the Republic who defy their Hegemon-aligned neighbors. Since the Progenic Recession and the Battle of Megara, officially the Hegemon and Karanova Republic are not at war, and thus the Civitate does not officially engage with the Directorate. But of course, there is a price for Karanovan support; Bhosnayan partisan leadership is expected to remain in ideological lockstep with their wealthier patron, ignoring or repressing any indications that their population may not wish to continue this proxy war on their behalf.

Still, ask any Karanovan soldier, and you will find them committed to their young nation to a degree far beyond anything that Directorate officers could hope to inspire in their own troops, even with financial incentives. In their minds, there is no other choice; they have been relentlessly propagandized to believe that the Patron class saved them. While it is true that the Karanova Republic was founded by near-human Magnates and Barons driven out by the Hegemon, they chose to refuse any self-reflection and instead continued the exploitative practices of the very system that forced them to flee. After all, what reason did these wealthy near-humans have to change? The members of the lower castes who fled with them did not have the resources to protect themselves, and to stay in the Hegemon meant exploitation, ostracization and eventually ignominious death.

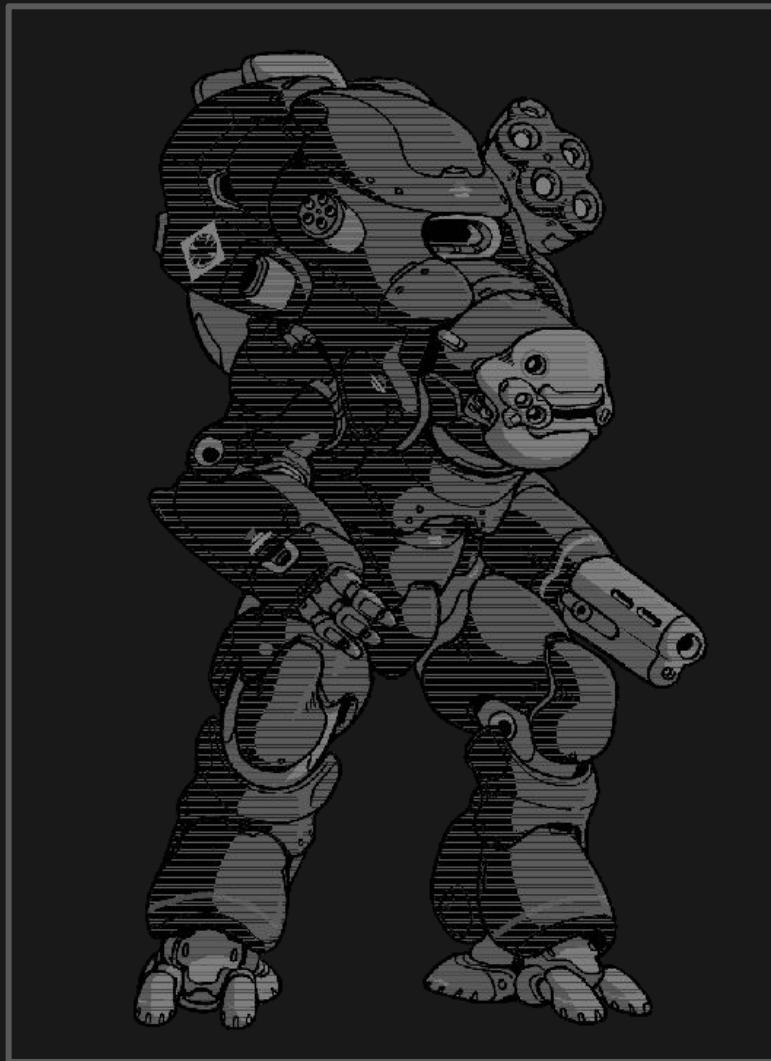
Recruits are chosen for how well they tow this ideological line. To the Civitate, pushing back against the Republic's Patron class is the basest kind of ingratitude. Even if you are teetering on the brink of Indenture, you must thank the Karanova Republic that you are still free to live.

Much like the Trappist Papacy who remain a steadfast part of the Hegemon, the Karanovan Republic is lying to you. Trappists promise enlightenment, and Karanova promises freedom, but the end result is functionally no different. The average life of the Karanovan Indigent is very similar to that of their Hegemon counterpart. Endless toil, brutal living conditions, and the haunting spectre of time-debt exist in both societies.

Speaking of which, we must return to the topic of Indentured, the Hegemon's lowest credit caste. Indentured are, whether the Hegemon admits it or not, debt **slaves**. This underclass allows the Hegemon to continue existing without the automation they despise. In truth, constant population increase is necessary to fuel the endless growth demanded by Stellarization.

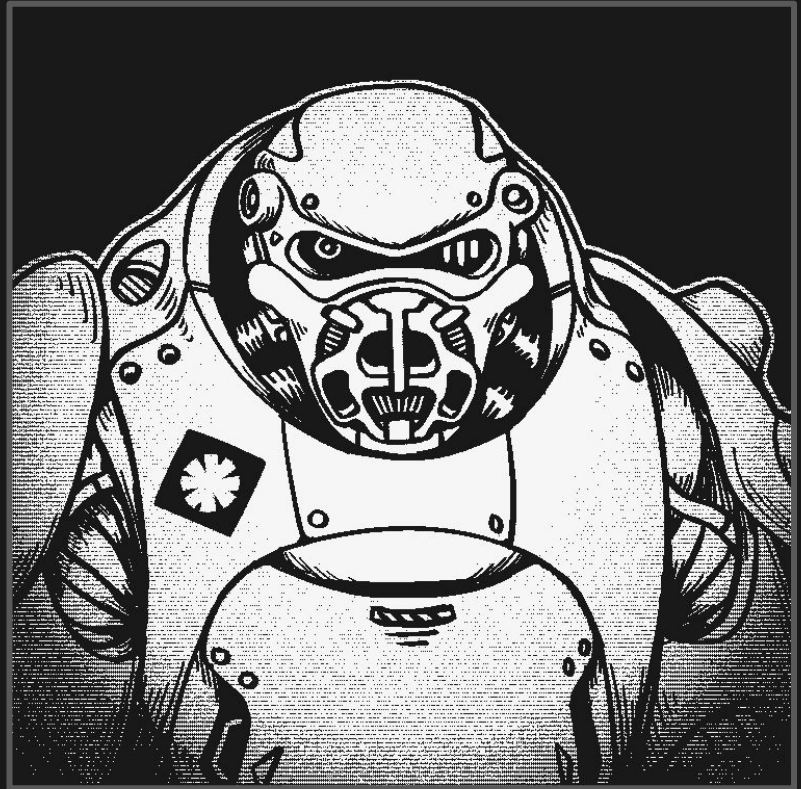
Few would voluntarily risk travel through the Outside without the protections afforded to only the wealthiest individuals, unless material need compelled them to do so. And yet, we see that Karanova has continued this practice, and with this in mind, we must understand that the Republic is not a Unionist endeavor.

The Karanova Republic is simply an attempt by a group of wealthy Patrons trying to preserve their own status by breaking away from their former peers when they realized they too might be exploited and their wealth stripped away. There was not, nor will there ever be, any real concern for those under them. Karanova might have been a revolt, but it was not a Unionist revolt.



*Pictured: Ishigamak-class AMU, a common sight in the Civitate. We must acknowledge the greater value that the Republic places on the lives of its military, the Civitate, especially in comparison to the disposable soldiery of the Directorate. However, it would be utterly foolish to mistake sheer pragmatism for altruism.*

For more proof, we can look to the Karanovan Barakan. The Barakan are simply another class of slaves, monsters made fundamentally broken to serve the interests of the Patrons, and this barbaric practice continues among the Karavovans, whose Barons and Magnates remain willing to brutalize their populace to protect their own interests. The Hegemon eagerly highlights this, depicting all Karanovans as violent Unionists, even as it turns a blind eye to the parallels to their own society it invites.



However, even if, as the Republic claims, the Barakan are only used as a means of deterrence against the Hegemon - a promise of mutually assured destruction - that still remains an abomination, a desecration of both the mind and the body for the safety of the wealthiest of their society. The fact that Karanovan Barakan seem far more mentally stable than their Thousand Empires counterparts is superficial at best; both are used to commit unimaginable atrocities.

This leads to our final point. Despite the depictions of Karanovans as cognitovirus-infected Unionists, the Patron class of the Republic behaves much the same as those in the Hegemon. And with that exploitation comes the inevitable Unionist revolts. Karanova uses much the same tactics as the Hegemon when dealing with their own internal dissenters. Whatever aid Karanova might offer to Unionists in the Hegemon, it is not as a gesture of genuine goodwill. It is simply one state trying to weaken a rival.

What few difference there are exist only on the surface of their society. The Karanovan Indigent might submerge themselves in a drug-induced haze at the end of their shift to forget their position for a while, something the Hegemon claims is damaging to the Self. But in truth, the Hegemon offers much the same, in the form of stimulants and constant cheap distractions to consume.

In the end, a slave is still a slave, regardless of how they are kept compliant.

# KARANOVA: MORNING IN THE REPUBLIC

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*Morning is always a relative concept when you're dug deep into the ground. The dome over the city allowed only a select few of the wealthiest Persons to live on the surface. The atmosphere outside was a toxic mix of carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and ammonia with only trace amounts of oxygen, but an abundance of lanthanum strontium manganite had been found in the planet's crust, making it an attractive prospect for mining.*

*As the mining operations progressed, populations grew and eventually became large enough for domed cities. But expanding the domes was expensive, and it was determined that digging down into the planet's crust and honeycombing the areas under the dome was far less taxing on quarterly profits, especially if existing played-out mineshafts could be used as a starting point.*

*Mahar groaned, groping around in the dark, hand finally coming to rest not on the light switch he had hoped for, but the inhaler on the nightstand. He laid back, triggering the device and breathing deep. He sucked his breath in, waited, then exhaled. Already the exhaustion was going along with the hunger, replaced with a warm, calm awareness that would let him ease his way through most of his coming shift. Stimmax was cheaper than food most of the time, and if you dosed yourself right, you could get away with trimming a meal or two off your daily expenses.*

*A few more seconds groping and he found the light switch. The walls and floor of the Opti-Unit were hacked out of unfinished rock. The only decoration was the wall furthest from the bed. It was covered in layers of old printouts, clippings from flyers and product displays had been pasted onto the wall, each new resident papering over the last set.*

*When the narcotics were wearing off, usually as he dragged himself towards bed and his evening sedatives, he found himself wondering how many others had slept in that same Opti-Unit over the years. He tried to imagine it, a line of other tired looking bodies stretching back and back. Some might have lived out their lives here. Others forced to move out because of their own financial failings.*

*How close were he and Zaki to something like that? After paying for food, water, air recycling...*

*But that was not now. Now, Mahar simply glanced at his latest addition, a picture of the city's skyline lit by artificial sunset. One day, he promised himself. He might not be able to afford the price of a Opti-Unit*

*there, but maybe a night in one of the hotels that catered to off-world representatives looking for trade. He'd been saying that for almost twenty fisks, but his mind flew over that ugly little thought.*

*He dressed quickly. The same simple black pants and white shirt he always wore, and then his jacket. This deep, the tunnels didn't need heating or cooling. They stayed a stale ten degrees celsius all fiscal cycle. Mahar considered it something of a blessing. Once you bought the coat, it was free to put on, but it cost money to run the opti-unit's heating system.*

*As he ran a comb through his hair, he heard the entry door chime. Zaki was coming home from his prime shift. He heard the other man shuffling towards the bedroom and went out to meet him.*

*"Hey."*

*Zaki leaned in without a word, pecking Mahar on the cheek before leaning his head on Mahar's shoulder.*

*Stroking the other man's short cropped hair for a moment, Mahar asked, "Long day?"*

*"No overtime; it just took me this long to get home. Constab's stopping everyone in the western tunnels and checking for weapons, contraband, and cognitoviral vectors."*

*Mahar sighed, "Unionists. Miserable bastards." Everyone in the city had heard the news reports; the Thousand Empires was paying Indigent too lazy to work themselves out of their own debts to stir up trouble. Now the constab suspected all of them. "Did you pick up more Umbra Doze? We're almost out."*

*Zaki nodded into Mahar's shoulder. "Yeah." He rattled the contents of a small pill bottle produced from his pocket and grinned. "For a deeper, gentler sleep."*

*When the Hegemon had allowed the ruination of Umbra Unlimited almost three Fiscal Centuries ago, a few of Umbra's research Barons had fled into Karanova to escape from Five Hands, taking as*

*many of the MacroCorp's TrustBrand formulas with them as they could. Karanova welcomed them with open arms, and they quickly became Magnates by reestablishing Umbra within the republic's borders. And with Karanova's more relaxed stance on narcotics and hallucinogenic substances, they quickly expanded into new markets.*

*Mahar reluctantly pulled away. "I should get moving. If constab's checking everyone..."*

*"Yeah." Zaki was already fiddling with the bottle.*

*Taking it from the other man, Mahar cracked the seal and handed it back, "What? No dinner?"*

*Zaki winked as he dry swallowed one of the pills. "Nah, I'm not hungry yet. I'll just have a big breakfast."*

*"The Stimmax is on the nightstand."*

*The two grinned at the old joke, and Mahar gently untangled himself from the embrace, a twinge of regret swimming up through the self-medicated calm. If they could just get on the same shift, walking to and from the manufactory. Even if they didn't see each other during the day as Zaki worked in the processing plant and Mahar worked as a clerical aide, still... it had been so nice when they'd first found each other. The long hours didn't seem quite so long when you had something to look forward to.*

*But they needed the money Zaki's Prime shift offered. Unionist activities had somehow pushed up the price of growth and peg. He wasn't sure how; that had never been explained in the visutel reports. Zaki thought it was the added security presence. If Sidemeat Provisions had to pay for miliCorp guards to keep Unionists out of their facilities, prices were bound to go up.*

*Add to that the probable increase in assurance rates, and there was no way he could ask Zaki to transfer back to Day shift with him, and there were no openings on Prime shift. He'd just need to keep asking, maybe stay for some Dark Shift overtime to show he was worth the consideration he was asking for.*

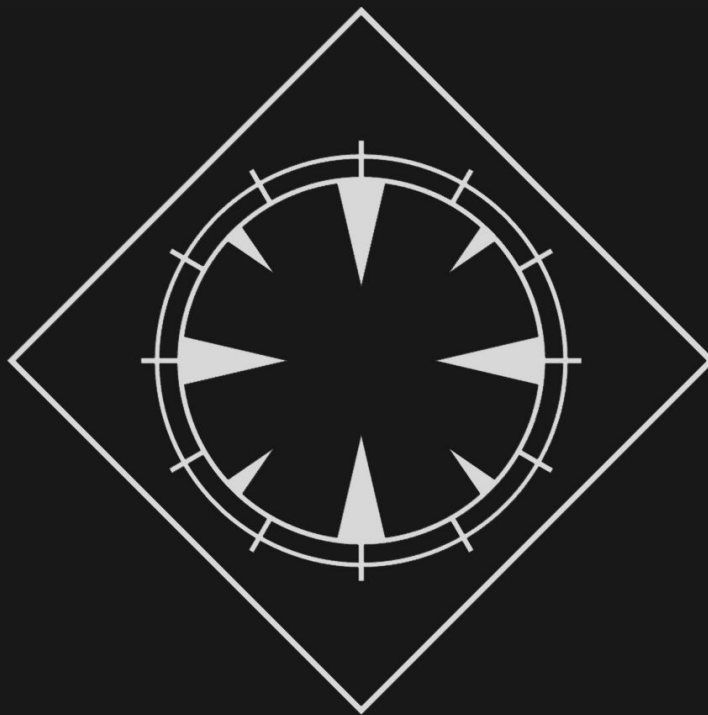
*Wishing he'd taken another hit off the Stimmax inhaler, he put on his rebreather. The deep tunnels didn't always have the best air recycling, and sometimes a broken recycler would go months without*

*repair so long as the opti-unit recyclers remained online. The air cyclers leading to and from the manufactory hadn't been offline yet, but everyone could hear the strained rattling through the grates that pumped down fresh air as they went to and from work, and neither Zaki or Mahar thought the old equipment would last more than two spans without breaking down again.*

*Mahar looked back a moment. Zaki was already starting to nod; say would you might, Doze worked quickly. "I love you, Zaki."*

*Zaki looked up, eyes heavy and mumbled something that Mahar took to be, "-love you too."*

*And then Mahar was out the door walking along the bare rock of the tunnel with all the others on day shift, the metallic noises of the dying recycler muffling their steps as they made their way to the first checkpoint.*



## COPIAE 4: A FEAST IN CHAINS

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*Our world is bountiful and rich, free of the industrial pollution and the constant miserable crowding we are shown so often on visutel broadcasts. Family matters here. Tradition matters here. We are told that here, fulfillment of the Self is as simple as looking out, at the endless growing crops, and our Avarice can be measured not in chit, but in the joy we take in watching our children grow, secure in the knowledge that we may die, but our bloodline will continue to reap the bounty of our world.*

*But you have been lied to. Your love for your family is not a lie. The joy you take in bringing in the harvest is not a lie. But you have been lied to all the same. It can be hard to accept. You will want to look away, to hide in familiar traditions until the discomfort of knowing passes away. But you must face this honestly. Know that others have died so that you might understand the world we all love as it truly is.*

*The following are files scraped from the Bersarang Multi-Stellar local datasphere servers on Copiae 4, H1.13.M3 by our codesmiths and provided free of charge. We can only hope that those still trapped by the shackles of Avarice will realize they had the key all along. Our actions are not guided by Avarice but true autonomy.*

*The fruits of your labor have been stolen from you.*

*What you do with that knowledge is up to you.*

**- The Open Hand**



*Our culture is not our own - a terrible thought when so much of who and what we are is built around our heritage. We are unique in the Hegemon, a beacon of agricultural industry, and we have been told time after time that our strict adherence to our traditions is what makes us so very special. But in the end, what we have placed so much of our Selves in is nothing more than a series of best practices created by Bersarang to ensure that we remain productive.*



**Copiae 4, H1.In3.M3 Travor\_Supersector\_Midworld\_Cygnus\_Spur**

Horticulture / Biosynthesis **Grade 1**

Industrial / Mining **Grade 3**

Metropolitan **Grade 3**

*Formally accepted into the Hegemon in the 6th Fiscal Century and sponsored by Bersarang Multi-Stellar interested in planet's soil microbes and biosphere. Upgraded to Grade 1 horticulture after the discovery of mnem's unique nootropic properties. Cultural tailoring and control initiated to protect company profits and proprietary materials. Compliance from members of local government (High Parliment) assured with continued monetary support.*

# M\_aeg\_s: Briefing for New Regional Executives

*Copiae4, H1.In3.M3, is a Cygnus Spur Midworld located in the Travor supersector and one of Bersarang's most productive horticultural worlds, exceptional for the variety of crop yields including staple foodstuffs as well as rare natural pigments and high quality lumber used in artisanal woodworking. More importantly, there are well over three hundred unique agricultural products ranging from comestibles to medicinal that can only be produced at industrial scale with the use of Copiae 4's soil. As such it is vital that the colony continue to meet or exceed each fiscal cycle's projected productivity markers. It is one of the greatest jewels in Bersarang's holdings, and has been so for generations. Protecting the native microbes found in Copiae 4's soil is of paramount importance to Bersarang's business interests on the planet, and preventing soil samples from being taken off planet by competitors is just as vital. Failure to guard these trade secrets, or meet expected quotas, will result in severe and immediate disciplinary action.*

*It is with that in mind that the Baron responsible for the Copiae system has had a short document drawn up for new regional executives as a token of their support as well as a gentle reminder that the mistakes of the previous executives should be avoided at all costs.*

**Local Customs:** *While it can be aggravating to adjust to a new world's minor differences, a great deal of effort and capital has been poured into manufacturing a set of social norms and mores. Through careful manipulation of media and memetic behaviors, Copiae 4's culture is a delicate balance of rigidly conservationist views (as compared to the rest of the Hegemon) designed to protect and safeguard the planet's unusually fertile environment (and especially the native bacteria found in Copiae 4's soil) and enthusiasm for new scientific research designed to improve crop yield. Suffice to say that while there may be some industry on Copiae, it is almost entirely devoted to improvement of crop and livestock yields, and any attempt to bring in industry that may disrupt those yields will be heavily resisted by both the population and local governance.*

*Competitions corresponding to almost any given crop or livestock harvest are held religiously, and while it may be necessary to put one's thumb on the scale to favor one group or another for a myriad of reasons, this should be done with the greatest care and secrecy. Above all, Bersarang should be seen as a neutral party. These contests and festivals are taken very seriously by the local population, and even a hint of interference is enough to spark violence. In one notable incident a quat ago, rioting became so intense that Tributaries had to be brought in to restore order.*

*These contests are designed to improve productivity and allow an acceptable outlet for frustration, jealousy, and dissatisfaction. Cons who barely lost will direct their efforts into improving their social status for the next harvest, and any discontent can easily be scapegoated onto the winning work crews who it would be advisable to offer substantial (for their position) bonuses and benefits. Any work crew that loses those benefits will likely blame the winning crew for their sudden loss of income and prospects rather than look towards the company, allowing us to save cap on payroll expenses.*

*Another custom that has been carefully inculcated into the local population is the importance of family and community. Family on Copiae 4 is considered to be both an extension of Self as well as an expression of one's wealth. The larger a family is, the more wealth they must have accumulated to be able to care for their offspring, and thus the more status they have in a community. Of course, the reality of their situation may be entirely different, but the custom encourages Cons to work beyond their scheduled shifts to support the appearance of prosperity and ensures a large pool of workers for generations to come.*

***Retaining Workers:** Agricultural labor can be a grueling business, and many other horticultural worlds also produce a steady stream of recruits for the Tributary regiments. The offer of Personhood as well as the possibility of experiences outside the highly regimented community structures encouraged by our propagandists can be extremely tempting, especially to younger segments of the population faced with the inevitability of spending the rest of their lives repairing harvester drones or rearing livestock. Some level of human capital shrinkage is to be expected, however, it is Bersarang's position that in order to reduce labor costs, Tributary recruitment must be kept to a minimum on its horticultural worlds. In order to do so, several policies have been put into place and should be continued.*

*Perhaps the most important step to be taken is the continued control over as much local media as possible. Recruitment ads for Tributary regiments should be displayed only during hours when most of the population is otherwise occupied, such as during prime shift which coincides with agri workers' sleep schedule. If necessary, Bersarang advises disbursing funds to buy up advertising time to avoid unnecessary exposure to Directorate propaganda.*

*Another related step that should continue is local journalistic coverage of Directorate actions. While journalism should remain optimistic and patriotic in tone, only stories from the most dangerous and casualty rich warzones should be covered with any depth. Further, minor scandals should be given attention as well. Delays in supply lines or casualties due to friendly fire are excellent human interest stories for the*

*narrative Bersarang would like to see continued. Cons should have the general idea that while the Tributary regiments are doing vital work for the Hegemon, enlistment is a dangerous, potentially deadly, choice and seeing combat is inevitable. For a complete review of the style guide, please see m\_aeg\_1: Journalistic Style Guide for Copiae 4.*

*The last step is heavily entwined with the third point in this brief. Even with proper information control and heavy influence in cultural expectations, it is inevitable that some part of the population finds itself drawn to the possibility of violence and control. This segment of the population can easily be skimmed off and placed in one of two positions.*

*The more stable segment of this population can be employed as foremen for work crews. This group can often be satisfied with a smaller increase in their overall wage if given a sense of importance and authority over their former peers, thus saving the company capital. The remainder can be recruited into local law enforcement, and the method by which this can be done is, fortunately, already well established. Simply replace advertisements for Tributary legions for Copiae 4's defence forces, and rather than offer them Personhood, simply offer them the guaranteed rank of Basic. A lesser title to be sure, but one that carries far less risk. They can stay near their families, and any violence they commit will likely be against dissatisfied workers, rather than the warzones they are shown in local media. Give a desperate Indigent respect and a large stick, and they will happily beat their former friends back into line for you at a discount.*



*Maintaining Authority: While Bersarang Multi-Stellar is in no way the official ruling authority of Copiae 4 (that honor would go to the members of the High Parliament), Bersarang pays and pays well to have it's interests taken care of, subcontracting out the messy business of local government. Most members of Copiae 4's ruling aristocracy are very aware that they should never attempt to bite the hand that feeds them, but once in a while, these Persons must be reminded that while they may have the illusion of power, they will under no circumstances be allowed to affect actual change without first obtaining permission from the company. Should they forget, the situation must be remedied at once, and if it is not, the Baron will hold the planetary executives responsible.*

*To properly guard against such concerns, great care should be taken to monitor "growers associations" and other such social clubs. While the vast majority are harmless and often organize the contests and festivals mentioned in the first portion of this document, periodically they can be found to be harboring Unionist sentiments. Should such inclinations be found, immediate action must be taken to resolve the potential problems.*

*Perhaps the most potent weapon available to you will be the local customs the company has so carefully fostered. Simply suggesting that disruptions to production will hamper attempts to best a rival community at the next festival is often more than enough to shut down Unionist talk, and if it does not, make very sure that their loss is laid, quite rightfully, at the feet of the Cons who distracted everyone from what really matters.*

*If, for some reason, that is not enough, your next line of defense must be the same media outlets that retain our workers. Increase coverage of especially destructive and violent encounters between Tributaries and Unionist forces. Look for conflicts that are high in casualties for both sides and if possible include syndicated human interest stories about resource shortages caused by Unionist terrorist activities. Make it is clear that such shortages would impact the ability of a family to grow in size and possibly even cause fragmentation of the family unit under financial strain. Your goal should not be to highlight Tributary combat ability but to impress upon the population the terrible consequences to civilian populations.*

*Congruently, you should also call upon local governance to step up enforcement. Curfews and arrests are never popular, but elected officials should make it clear that these steps must be taken for the safety of everyone on Copiae 4, and the only way for communities to be safe once again is to root out the Unionist threat.*



*I'm sure some of you read that and told yourself "Bersarang is a MacroCorp, but they can't run everything! They don't govern us! They might be influential, but we elect our representatives. Each fief has its own governor, and we all vote to elect senators to the High Parliament."*

*Steershit. Senators and fief governors may not walk around with Bersarang dermarks on their wrists, but they're still bought and paid for. When Bersarang wants something done, they have their pet officials in High Parliament introduce a new law and then the media companies the MacroCorp owns churns the story it until it sounds like our own idea. And if something goes wrong, they'll never see consequences. Enough chits passed around, and someone willingly falls on their sword for them... or your friends stab you in the back. Either way, it doesn't matter so long as the latest quat's profits meet the Baron's expectations.*

*Bersarang owns everything on this world. Still don't believe us? Keep reading. We can prove it.*

**Transcript\_fief43\_staffmeeting**

**S1\_M:** End recording! By the damn balance, can we get a codesmith up here at some point to take a look at the logicor? All the Cap on this planet, and we still can't get a halfway decent Yinntosh system. The voice recognition is terrible.

**S2\_M:** What are you gonna do? Bersarang isn't exactly known for high end systems. I guess we should be happy they were willing to donate their old equipment. They get the tax deduction, and grade three is still better than what we were using before.

**S1\_M:** Fine. Alright. [sigh] The official stuff's done; someone else can log it later. Let's talk about the upcoming contests.

**S3\_F:** Well, we can start with the fact that Senator Fontana is not happy with Governor Pagano.

**S2\_M:** We're on track to win the contests, and his polling numbers are up. I swear, she won't be...

**S1\_M:** We're not supposed to be winning.

**S2\_M:** Okay, yes. The wrong batch of Indigents gets a pay bump for the next growing season, but why does she care? They're her Indigents too. You'd think she'd be happy about it.

**S3\_F:** Well she's not. That broadcast? The one where the senators toured the four time contest winning fief? Well all the High Parliament senators that showed up to congratulate him in public reamed him as soon as they got behind closed doors.

**S2\_M:** It's not his fault Fief 29 can't get their shit together. Why aren't they taking it out on them?

**S1\_M:** They probably are. The question is if it matters. We all know Pagano's been making friends with the local growers associations. He needs them to shore up his numbers, and a lost contest? Well that just puts everyone in a bad mood.

**S3\_F:** Exactly. And that's the line he's been selling the Patrons. He can't do a damn thing for them if he loses the election.

**S2\_M:** *So what's the problem?*

**S1\_M:** *Bersarang doesn't like the growers associations we've got. They wanted the leadership cleaned out, and a complete failure at the local contests is one of the fastest ways to make it happen.*

**S3\_F:** *He can't do it though. Not and keep hold of things. They go, and Pagano gets swept out with them.*

**S2\_M:** *Shit. And let me guess, the foremen think they're entitled to more than just prize money?*

**S1\_M:** *Of course. This will be their fifth straight win. They're all talking about having a couple more kids to celebrate. Really show fief 29 their place, y'know?*

**S3\_F:** *Just be happy chit is all they want. Senator Fontana's spent the last week trying to convince Bersarang reps that we don't have a Unionist problem.*

**S2\_M** *[Nervous laughter] That's ridiculous.*

**S1\_M:** *Of course it is! And they know it; it's why we're all still alive. The governor can't throw things the way they wanted, and now they might actually be stuck paying the damn Indigents more. If we don't have a Unionist problem now...*

**S3\_F:** *We might when they find out Bersarang won't be throwing around any more chit. Fief 29 hasn't had a win in a while. They'll settle for the usual set of perks, but the association heads here are getting pretty full of themselves.*

**S2\_M:** *So what are we supposed to do about it? We don't judge the contests. Margin's sake, we don't even organize them.*

**S1\_M:** *No, but the governor is supposed to be able to keep his thumb on the associations. It doesn't look good when they're telling him how things are going to turn out and not the other way around. You know how it goes.*

**S2\_M:** *Yeah. Take the fall, and get paid under the table. As long as the Indies don't find out, you still make your chit.*

**S3\_F:** ...But now they think they might do better keeping their winning streak up, and Governor Pagano's going along with it.

**S2\_M:** [Sigh] So if we win, Bersarang cuts us off.

**S1\_M:** And I've got a kid using high grade early education modules, so what do we do about it?

**S3\_F:** I've been talking to Senator Fontana's people. If we can get things back on track, there may be staff openings for us at a High Parliament level.

**S1\_M:** Risky. I'd almost rather take the pay cut. You know what happens if Indies even think you're interfering with this stuff.

**S2\_M:** What if it wasn't our fault? Contest rules say that fiefs under investigation by the High Parliament can be disqualified. I've got a couple friends in the local constab who owe me some favors. I'll tell them to start sniffing around for Unionist activity.

**S3\_F:** Have them keep it quiet though. I'll let it leak to Aeliana, and it'll be all over the local networks.

**S1\_M:** How the hell do you know Aeliana? I didn't think you had broadcast clout.

**S3\_F:** Impressed? We took the same entry level adult education modules. I think she still has a thing for me, so she'll keep my name out if I ask nicely.

**S1\_M:** Maybe... Aright, yes. So the press finds out fief 43 constabulary is looking for Unionists. The other fief's growers associations will take care of booting us out of the contest; they know we'll win if they don't. Our Indies are going to be pissed though.

**S2\_M:** Can we get Fontana to make a statement? Blame Pagano for failing to root out Unionist elements in the growers associations?

**S3\_F:** [In awe] You cold hearted son of a bitch. I thought you always liked the old man.

**S2\_M:** I do, but it's his own fault. Never let the Cons get you in a position where they're telling you what to do. I'm not losing Person status because he pissed off Bersarang, and the chit dried up.

*S1\_M: We can still prop him up. After High Parliament comes for him. We just need to get him to make the investigation formal, distance himself from the foremen, and come down hard. Constab with body armor and riot guns, that kind of shit.*

*S3\_F: If we hold off a little longer, say right before the contest, most of the harvest will be in. His poll numbers will take a hit for sure, but Bersarang will appreciate it.*

*S2\_M: We get a couple Bersarang reps out for a press release standing next to him, thanking him for his work...*

*S1\_M: Spin it right, and the growers associations will be lucky to keep their heads attached to their shoulders. Bersarang gets what they want; Fontana gets the Corpus reps off her back; and the old man's a little shaky but still standing when the dust settles.*

*S3\_F: And when the senator moves us up to parliament staff, we tell him we're just going to look out for him. I'm sure he'll suspect something, but what can he do?*

*S1\_M: That's settled then. Shit, I need a drink. Come on, I'm buying.*

--END--



# Fief43\_ConstabRpt\_0085\_LT72\_3\_398

*Responding Officer: Constable Otho Agosti*

*EID: 0931294*

*Assignment: Barracks 04*

*Incident Number: 0085\_45398*

*Location: Fief 43, Area 7, Hab 98*

*Date: LT 72/3/398*

*Time: Shift 2, 05:37 hrs*

*Violation: Suspected Unionist Activity*

*This constable along with Sgt. Riva and Cst. Vinci arrived at the general area of Hab 98 at approximately 05:37 shift 2 to investigate reports of Unionist activity. Upon entering the communal recreation area, we found a local meeting of the Area 7 Growers Association in progress. When Sgt. Riva advised those in attendance that they were breaking curfew, several members of the meeting became noticeably hostile, stating that they lived in the hab-plex and were entitled to use of the recreation area as part of their opti-unit lease. This constable informed those in attendance that per curfew orders, access to shared recreation areas ended as of 02:00 shift 2 and that they would need to disperse.*

*The crowd refused to disperse, and per standing orders, lachrymator canisters were used. All responding officers were forced to defend themselves as the crowd attempted to assault Sgt. Riva, Cst. Vinci, and myself in their efforts to flee the scene of the curfew violation. Again, per standing orders less-lethal measures were taken to ensure constable safety, and Grade 4 shock batons were deployed against rioting members of the growers association. Several members of the association were detained for questioning including Foremen Afra Colombo and Seneca Bianchi.*

*As of the writing of this report, all members of the Area 7 Growers Association have been informed that their GA has been disbanded pending investigation of their leadership over assault of constabulary and potential Unionist affiliation.*

# Senserig\_Backup\_BrnDrue\_LT12\_3\_398

*Error: Complete Immersion requires Armasyn Firmware 893.51*

*Request FCP Experience Summary*

*Generating Summary:*

*The room, dimly lit, features dark, upholstered furniture and gilded ornamentation that produce their own faint, reflected glow. Looking from left to right and then back again, a sense of uncertainty pervades. Not uncertainty of Self; that remains unwavering, but a concern that an establishment ornamented in such a fashion will be unable to provide the experiences desired. A momentary urge to leave is interrupted by the touch of a slender woman of what is regarded as, at least on the surface, just barely middle age. A hint of lazy curiosity. Certainly she is older than she appears. No noticeable marks of rejuvenation treatments mar the ever so slightly tan features, but that most likely meant expert work was done. The faint hint of lines around her black eyes is considered an excellent touch, allowing for feelings of deference while only barely marring her overall appearance.*

*“Senator Fontana .” Using her title as a form of respect due a hard-working subordinate. Voice modulated to suggest mild incredulity. “Is this really the best Copiae 4 has to offer?”*

*A smile. Not a politician’s smile, but something more interesting. Barely concealed lust, a desire to impress, and an undercurrent of delight, the kind that only comes from sharing a particularly dangerous secret. “I think it has its charm.”*

*“In a rustic way.” Bemused. Waiting to see if the secret is worth the time.*

*The senator takes his arm, leading him to a quiet corner. “Indulge me for a moment, Baron. What is Copiae 4’s most expensive cash crop?”*

*“Mnem, of course. The MassTrader Union can’t buy enough of it.”*

*Fontana nodding, barely concealed excitement. “That’s right. Worth enough that Bersarang would spend the capital to turn an entire planet into a single monoculture devoted entirely to agriculture. A rarity in the Hegemon.”*

*Rapidly cooling interest, glancing around at a backwater's assumptions of style and sophistication. "Yes, Senator. I am aware. When processed, it can be used to produce an inhaler allowing the user to stay awake and aware with little to no side effects for almost three days, after which normal symptoms of sleep deprivation begin to manifest." Voice flat with minor hints of annoyance. If she had drawn him here for some vulgar attempt at re-negotiating Bersarang's commitments to the local government, he would be very unhappy.*

*"But do you know what happens when it's taken unrefined, Baron?"*

*A pause. Uncertainty.*

*"Ingested raw, the hyper-lucidity becomes far much more pronounced. Perfect sensory recall for almost a full work shift." Hints of arousal in Senator Fontana's voice. "We both know what places like this can offer high paying clients. Desperate indigents, close to indenture, offer themselves up for one night. When they're done, their minds wiped as stipulated in their contract. Bodies rebuilt from whatever injuries they might have sustained, imperfections and blemishes erased. And they reenter society as a Basic."*

*An animalistic grin.*

*"But here, Baron? You have a chance to leave an everlasting mark, one that can never be erased even after the body is rebuilt. Even after they reenter society as a Person, they will always remember you."*

*Alert: FCP has flagged content as containing sensory data that may cause user distress. Proceed with experience summary?*

*Y/N\_*



There are many, many answers to that question. The specifics varies from star system to star system. Probably even from continent to continent. Some might not even view themselves as Unionists at all, just Cons trying to force their employer's hand with a few high risk, high reward negotiation tactics. But at the end of the day, it usually boils down to inequality. The Hegemon might claim there is opportunity for all, but if you're born into some piss poor Orbiter family mining comets for Source Unlimited, you probably know deep down that you're not going to make it as a Magnate. The same holds true even in the Execor. Plenty of people there buy the constant propaganda, but someone still has to shovel the shit out of the Baron's stable full of show equines, and it's certainly not going to be the Baron.

War, hunger, disease, and poverty are at the core of every Unionist revolt in some form or another. And even that can be reduced further. The Hegemon would call it jealousy or envy. Strange how that sounds so close to Avarice isn't it? Or maybe they'd call it spite. Simple petty refusal to accept that you're not good enough to do what the Magnates could. But be honest for a moment. What chance does your child have to compete with a Magnate's heir if you've spent your life cleaning Growth tanks?

Patrons can afford to observe conflicts unfold from the decks of starliners, but even Persons can watch their lives crumble to nothing over a trade dispute turned violent. No Magnate will ever know hunger unless they decide to in some perverse moment of boredom; they certainly won't watch their friends die off, bellies bloated and wracked with pain when crops are shipped to a higher bidder by Bersarang. And if they ever grow sick or old? The finest treatments Five Hands can offer are open to them. Small comfort to know that the medicine is there, but you're just not grinding hard enough to afford it as cancer metastasizes in your spouse.

Even if everything goes right, and you find yourself dragging your way slowly from Indigent to Basic, you might still discover a small spark of resentment. Humans are social animals, and there's a name for that feeling, something built into us by our very nature: inequality aversion. And in the Hegemon, very little is fair or equal.

**So what makes a Unionist? Probably the Hegemon itself.**

# NEBRAXA 3: THE PARTISAN FRONT

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Unlike Coptae 4, the Nebraxan revolt was not led by ideologically driven data skivvers. Those with such skills were present, but the Nebraxa Partisan Front as they eventually came to call themselves was almost entirely unplanned. A rarity on the Frontier, Nebraxa 3, In2.M2.N4 was a fully habitable world with a tiny handful of gatesphere nodes nearby important for regional development.

If Nebraxa 3 had been located in the ExeCor or even parts of the Midworlds, it would have been seen as fairly unremarkable. Food was grown, harvested, and shipped out. Moderately sized cities served as hubs of industry and commerce. The true draw was the tiny handful of nodes, allowing for safer travel through the Outside and supply of nearby systems in the Perseus Frontier Zone. Unfortunately this is also what became its undoing.

Ongoing low-intensity conflicts between several local governments trying to solidify control over the planet began almost as soon as the planet was originally settled over a fiscal century ago, and continued with various MacroCorps backing whichever government was offering the best terms at any given time. The result was highly controlled and regimented cities that served to funnel goods off planet and cater to local merchants with little to no attention paid to land outside these ports, with the general exception of resource stripping operations near ore deposits or corpo run plantations shipping produce back into the cities. The planet's endemic population, both in the cities and outside the miliCorp protected zones, were pushed further and further into debt.

All available documentation seems to point to the killing of a single mid-level plantation overseer by an Indigent worker as the starting point for what quickly became massive civil unrest begun at first by agricultural workers and later spreading to include low level factory and service workers in the cities. Several local governments fell, while the Commonwealth of Nebraxia (CoN) was pushed to the negotiating table with the Directorate by Wanvath Underwriting who held controlling interests in almost every local corpo on the planet. In exchange for military intervention and recognition as the official government of Nebraxa 3, the CoN quickly became a puppet state controlled by the Directorate for the benefit of Wanvath Underwriting.

# FREE NEBRAXA DATASPHERE TRANSMISSIONS

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In a surprising display of mutual interest, workers, toppled local governments, and grey market smugglers quickly began their own negotiations in the face of Directorate forces, using their knowledge of Nebraxa's underdeveloped rural lands to hide from Directorate forces and create their own counter-propaganda via unauthorized broadcasts on the planet's local datasphere.

These transmissions from the newly formed Free Nebraxa Partisan Front began in high spirits:

*Greetings to the Directorate troops receiving this transmission. We hope you know that listening to us is a finable offense, so find some friends to listen with, so they don't turn you in! To all you Sergeants and Associates, don't be too hard on them. After all, we know you're listening as well.*

*In just a moment we'll return to your subscription-free music broadcasts, but before that, I ask for just a moment of your time. Don't you wonder about the people you've been sent to kill? We certainly don't want to kill you, but if your Managing Officers keep sending you out, we have no choice. This war isn't going so well for you is it? You know it's true, even if everyone else keeps pretending the overtime pay is worth it.*

*You could ask one of the Analysts about the latest profit and loss numbers. Or maybe you could be more direct and ask how many of you have died in a world you'd never heard of until a Fiscal Cycle ago. But we wouldn't want you in any more trouble than you are right now. And for all the Analysts listening, we hope you can find a way to spin the latest loss of a full patrol to your Junior Officer. I'm sure you told them that sending another batch of troops out into the countryside was a mistake, but they always shoot the messenger don't they? Still, since you won't hear it from anyone else, we would like to thank you for the contribution to our cause. Their gear will be put to good use.*

But after the Directorate fully leveraged the terms that the CoN had been pressured into accepting, things rapidly began to fail as anyone who had fallen into Indenture was quickly conscripted and used as cannon fodder. In the last few months of the conflict, barely a footnote in the much larger RevshareRiots that exploded across the frontiers, the broadcasts quickly became more and more desperate as Directorate forces began minting Instants:

*This is the Free Nebraxa Partisan Front speaking through radio transmission via hijacked datasphere satellites in geosynchronous orbit. The spirit of Nebraxa is unbroken! The people of Nebraxa are unbroken! We are everywhere, in the front lines as soldiers or in our holdouts as medics and codesmiths. We greet all freedom-loving people of this world!*

*This message is for those still in refugee camps or living in large urban centers. You must leave now! If you have been waiting for a sign, there will be no greater warning than this. The Directorate no longer has any Indentured forces left after almost a quat of sending our enslaved brothers and sisters to die in waves. Our skivvers have intercepted communications between the "Commonwealth" of Nebraxa and the Directorate forces occupying our world at their behest. To ease their financial obligations to the Directorate, the "Commonwealth" is about to authorize the Army's use of Instants. Should that happen, the Directorate will begin mesmeric conditioning of all able bodied Indigent and low-credit Basics to bolster their troop reserves.*

*We do not want to fight you! If you value your sense of Self, you must go now! Take only what you can easily carry: food, clothes, and other necessities. The Directorate maintains control of major cities and relevant manufacturing sites, but if you can make your way out of the cities and camps and into the agricultural or undeveloped zones, you will be found by our patrols! All seeking aid will find it free of charge, regardless of credit status, but you must leave before it is too late!*

*This message will broadcast on repeat!*

By the conflict's end, almost ninety percent of all Tributaries on Nebraxa were newly minted Instants.

## NEBRAXA 3: LOST IN AN INSTANT

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*Pavo knelt on the ground, grass crackling with frost as he shifted, gently rolling the body over. He knew before he even saw the face. How, he wasn't sure, but he knew. The Indentured had been bad, waves of desperate slaves with cheap K-5 autosubs. Not even good enough for the standard issue Epic, they had been thrown at the NPF every time the Directorate had found one of their stable locations or used to sweep through sections of mountains and forest in a sloppy line, hunting for camp sites and more often than not stumbling into the traps the NPF had laid.*

*When they found you, they charged. Not out of zeal or enthusiasm, but fear. Their handlers, small squads of Paxguards that herded them like animals, would not hesitate to kill a Dent or two make sure the rest held to their contracts. Pavo had been forced to kill his share, and it burned in his stomach every time he thought about it, a mix of rage and horror that crept into his throat. But he'd saved some as well. NPF sharpshooters targeted the Paxguard every chance they got. So did everyone else for that matter. Once they were dead, the Dents would break, most fleeing back the way they had come, but some... some stayed. The why varied. Some wanted to defect. Others just fell to the ground, their knees suddenly too weak to hold them and shivered, waiting for someone to tell them what to do next. Waiting for the bullet that would finish them. Just. Waiting.*

*His squad would rush out, grabbing anyone they could and dragging them back towards their lines; the Army was known to shell the locations where they'd lost contact with the Paxguard. Either the NPF had killed them or the Dents had, and to the Directorate, that was one and the same. So they rushed in, hoping the artillery or air strike would be just a minute or two late. A few of those they saved became prisoners. Most joined the NPF and traded their K-5 autosubs away for drummer guns. Some small bit of solace to cling to at night when you remembered turning your gun on your fellow Nebraxans.*

*But a few spans ago, the Dents began to dry up, and then intel had dribbled out of the informants in the Tributary ranks. The Commonwealth of Nebraxa had authorized The Directorate to mint Instants out of any non-essential Indigent and Basics fourteen fiscal cycles and older. The broadcasts had begun almost immediately; each Con that made it out of the refugee camps was one*

*Self saved and one less body the Directorate could mint.*

*Instants began to appear ten days ago. It was hard, almost impossible, to tell them apart from regular footsloggers at a distance. Gone were the cheap K-5s, replaced with the Epics every other trooper carried. But once you got up close, you knew something was wrong. Their eyes were glassy, faces surprisingly muted. When his squad managed to capture one, that's when they finally understood. Directorate service datatoos next to older marks denoting the woman as a low level maintenance tech for a block of opti-units in Midport, a nearby city.*

*Pavo had grown up in Midport and so had a few others in his squad. She answered questions readily enough, about family, friends, even volunteering information about which parts of the East side of the City had been destroyed in the fighting, but it was like speaking to someone through a locked door. At first they had hoped to win her over. Whatever had been done to her, she was a hardened combatant now and would have been a welcome addition to their crew.*

*She would admit that Plexus, a residential investment trust primarily owned by Wanvath, was unfair to its workers, and so was almost every local copo owned by Wanvath. She would agree that Wanvath had some hand in the ownership of almost every corpo on the planet and their lobbying was responsible for the Commonwealth of Nebraxa's violence towards their citizens. But when asked if she wanted to join the NPF, all she would say, as though by rote, was, "I am temporary employee of the Tributary forces, and I will not break my contractual obligations."*

*She said the same when, two days later she stabbed one of her guards in the eye with a spoon before the other managed to tear her off him and put a round in her stomach. Her face still strangely calm, tears leaked out of the corner of one eye as she looked up at the man who shot her, her hand out, holding the bloody spoon, and when she spoke, there was a muted pleading quality to it. Pavo had been the one to put a bullet in her head as the others carried the moaning guard toward the medical tent.*

*But now he knelt there in the grass, breath steaming in the cold as his friends dug through backpacks, frantically stripping anything they could take off the dead Instants. It was his brother-in-law. Pavo had never really had any strong feelings about the man. Chak had worked as a foreman for Skybound Repairs, a ParaCorp repair franchise servicing Stratos equipment; it was, like*

*almost everything else, owned in part by Wanvath. He was a bit boring. A bit too willing to believe whatever the company told him. Still, he was a good husband, gentle and supportive beyond what simple mutual Avarice dictated.*

*And his sister, Hela, loved him; they were nearly inseparable, even taking the same shifts at Stratosphere so they could work together. So when the shop burned down early in the fighting, she stayed with her husband. And when the refugee camps opened up, she went with him, both of them certain he could find paying work rather than flee into the mountains and join the NPF with Pavo. Chak had been a foreman after all. Even when Pavo had snuck down the mountains and into the camps near Midport, they had refused to go. Yes they'd heard the broadcasts, but they had just been put in charge of the camp sanitation crew. Why would the Directorate need that if they were just going to mint everyone into instants? They were still Basics, even if just barely, and everyone knew that you only had to worry about conscription if you were a dent.*

*But here he was; Chak had caught a three round burst from a looted Epic carried by Pavo's squadmate. Pavo hadn't felt much about the man when he was alive, but dead? Pavo leaned forward, hugging himself as his breath hitched. Out of the corner of his eye he could see a woman missing most of her face sprawled nearby. Her hair had been cut short just like every other Instant. Just like her husband's.*



Any serious widespread Unionist activity threatening MacroCorp profits will eventually draw Tributaries. One of the first goals of Unionists in these circumstances should be the capture (rare) or sabotage (far more common) one of their Mills. Fighting the Directorate is an exhausting proposition, not only because Directorate forces live off the land, taxing local nations and populations for their presence, but because of the mills they set up, draining resources to supply their own forces. Further, whenever it is fiscally sound to do so, the Directorate will employ Indentured forces (usually locals) or Instantants (also locals), forcing Unionists to fight their own enslaved or brainwashed brothers and sisters. It's cost-effective for the Directorate and demoralizing for everyone fighting them. Two for the price of one!

Of course, it is in the best interest in the Hegemon that this information stays local. MacroCorps pay lip service to the concepts of Self, Stellarization, and free choice every opportunity they get, but the truth would often upset their Consumers, even those who have fully bought into the Hegemon's propaganda. Before the Directorate ever becomes involved, most corporations and nations will try to

resolve things locally by outsourcing their violence to organized criminal elements, paramilitary bodies, and small miliCorps. This gives local authorities plausible deniability when rumors of intimidation, torture, or outright murder begin to surface and worry even those Persons and Basics still cowed into acceptance by the fear or unruly mobs of Indigent and Indentured workers.

It should be noted that local government will almost always side with MacroCorps over their own people. The reason for this is twofold. First, politicians that do not fall in line quickly find themselves harried by propaganda set on ruining their reputation and well financed political rivals willing to support corporate demands. Second, once a friendly politician is installed in power, corporations will work to keep them there for as long as they are useful. For all that the Hegemon carries on about personal freedom and choice, the Patron subset of the Person caste has a distinct preference for autocracy. Of course, they may pretend this is not so, and so often local governments are draped in the trappings of some sort of republic, but in truth, it is always easier for multi-stellar corporations to deal with a single person than the messy politics of

of supporting different political parties. Across the Thousand Empires, a common throughline are local authoritarian regimes that span fiscal decades, propped up by corporate bribery who are more than willing to brutalize their own people back into line on behalf of their benefactors.

But some of those regimes go too far, or their patrons become too unpopular for even the most indoctrinated to stomach. And when unrest finally becomes too much for local militants to suppress, eventually those in power are confronted with an ugly realization. Often, they have gone much too far to appease those they had once dominated. Where once a simple offering of a few more chits for each worker might have calmed a local population, the reeking pits full of brutalized dead are now too full to lime over with Capital. And so, full of fear for their own lives, they finally offer up a cut of their bottom line, not to workers, but to the Hegemon's night-watchmen - the Directorate.

Ask yourself for a moment what services the Summit Council offers. The answer is, almost always, violence. While the Summit Council claims to represent the needs of The Market, the truth is the Directorate is the only interaction with Hegemon governance that most member states will ever see.

The Hegemon claims that its existence is secured through Avarice, interconnected self-interest spread through thousands and thousands of worlds, but if that were true, a massive standing military serving those with money to hire them would be unnecessary. Instead, the Hegemon has gone further; we all know what the Barakan are and why they are used.



The Hegemon has a limited view of what they believe is truly human. Exogen, Arkillects and even some near-humans are considered incapable of *sophonce*, nevermind the fact that some of these “animals” are capable of building cities or even traversing between stars. This concept of New Humanity was penned by Dumno-Ualos and has been drilled into every Consumer in the Hegemon, regardless of credit rating. And while we might hope that understanding the Hegemon has lied about the benefits of Avarice might call into question some of their other claims, this is often not the case.

Many Unionists, especially those supported by the Catraethi Remnant, retain their views on Exogen.

The Karanova Republic is slightly more generous with their interpretation of what qualifies as human, but they still definitively bar Arkillects and Exogen from that definition. A small minority, often those on the frontiers of the Hegemon, have seen fit to question this state of affairs. These groups are often the rare few who have managed to fully escape from Hegemon control such as the Arscola Peoples, the Kropotak Collective, or the Mehndax pirates. In the ExeCor and Midworlds, planets with large sanctioned near-human populations are often more willing to explore the limits of Sophonce once Unionist activity takes hold. And of course, there are always outliers, and even among Unionist uprisings that follow orthodox thought regarding Sophonce, there are individuals that begin to question what they have been told; being stripped of your place in New Humanity as a cognito-virus infected radical can have that effect.

Let us take a moment to consider two different examples that exist outside the Hegemon’s influence.

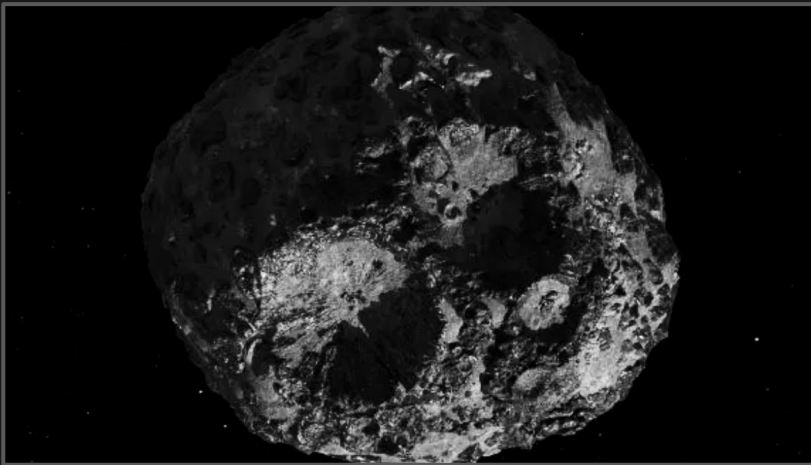
First, we must take a brief moment to reflect on the Uthmani League, before moving on to a much more in depth examination of Catraeth by a scholar belonging to the Kropotak Collective.



We cannot discuss humanity's willingness to work with beings outside their own species without considering the Uthmani League. Uth culture prizes bodily autonomy, allowing bionetic and organoid enhancement far beyond the limits of what the Hegemon might allow, and even beyond the tolerances of the Karanovans. This combined with their refusal of The Market (Uthmani industry is cooperatively owned and heavily automated), resulted in inevitable conflict with the Hegemon.

As one might expect from a culture closely allied with the Arscola, the Uth do not view sophonce as a product of Avarice, nor do they believe it to be exclusive to "New Mankind." Instead they believe that contribution to one's community is the most important marker of a civilized society and openly work alongside Exogen or even unbound Arkillects who share their goals. The Uth believe that all should contribute according to their capabilities, and as such, the Uth are always looking to improve themselves. The benefits of this work does not go to any one individual. Instead, labor is devoted to solving a problem within the community. If a new colony is located somewhere that requires cold weather protection, the goal is not to profit from selling warm clothes to other members of the community who might freeze to death without it. The goal is simply to build and (preferably) automate a factory to ensure no one in the new community suffers from frostbite. Once the problem is solved, they can then turn their attention to their next most pressing issue.

The "League" is not made up of different subcategories of near-humans or even divided by species. Instead, the Uth organize themselves by profession. Local councils made up of directly elected members of their vocation collaborate to solve local problems and pass that information to similarly elected larger versions of those local councils. Between statements made by the Uthmani League and the Hegemon's own intelligence gathering efforts, it has been postulated that the Uth still have access to a section of the Grid as it was never connected to the Hegemon's during the Darkout and therefor not contaminated. If this is the case it would represent an unheard degree of informational supremacy over the Hegemon and one that should not be lightly considered. "Syndist," as it is called, appears to act as as a decision support system that helps manage the Uth's economic infrastructure. It is used by councils at all levels across the League, and it is entirely possible that this system has now been adopted by Arscola as both societies have formed a prosperity sphere. This level of sophisticated communication would certainly help explain how the Uth have staved off the Hegemon for so long.



The Kropotak are a decentralized society hidden within a massive asteroid field somewhere in the Centaurus Arm, beyond the borders of the Hegemon. While we obviously have some level of contact with Kropotak, the Hegemon has yet to locate these peoples, and we see no reason to assist that effort when, inevitably, these

writings fall into the hands of the Audit or Directorate. As such, some of this overview will be left intentionally vague to protect their continued existence. The raw materials, education, support, and even sanctuary they provide to others seeking to escape the Hegemon has been invaluable, and we would not put them at risk just to satisfy idle curiosity.

The Kropotak fled from the Hegemon fiscal centuries ago. A small, ragtag fleet of salvaged freightliners quietly appropriated from a mismanaged shipbreaking operation and retrofitted with growth tanks, water recyclers, and living space allowed them to escape out beyond the Fringe. Several of these ships are still in service today, and the Kropotak have slowly added others as well.

The asteroid belt they eventually colonized serves a dual purpose. First, it hides their cities and ships from the Hegemon. The Kropotak are not a militant society, and while they have retrofitted some of their ships with defensive weapons, and even built small escort ships to defend themselves against the more aggressive elements that are always found on the outskirts of any large empire, they are well aware that they would be incapable of taking on the Armada in any way. Second, the asteroid fields that they call home are rich in a variety of mineral resources. Mining these asteroids has allowed them to maintain their current ships, expand their fleet, and even construct permanent settlements hidden within some of the planetoids within the belt.

The Kropotak are aggressively egalitarian. Scrubbing out latrines is considered as equally important and valuable as maintaining detailed navigation charts. After all, the spread of disease throughout the ship due to poor sanitation could have effects just as devastating as clipping an asteroid, or

perhaps, even worse should that disease spread throughout the rest of the fleet or into settlements.

While individuals may own personal effects (clothes, tools, etc.), the ship-cities, mines, and settlements are considered the property of all who work and live there. As such, decisions regarding this collective property are made by popular vote after robust debate. Communal living is standard as well; it would not be feasible for everyone on these ships to have their own opti-unit. Individuals or families have their own living quarters, but meals are prepared and served in large mess decks, though there is no real stigma to simply taking your food and eating elsewhere, should one feel like dining privately.

Education, both technical and philosophical, is another important aspect of the collective. While it is not required to recuse oneself from voting on a topic one has little or no knowledge of is considered a breach of etiquette. As such, cross training, discussion groups, and or reading from a comprehensive library stored on ship or city Logicor are a common pastime.

While this system allows for social and individual freedoms never dreamed of by the vast majority of Consumers within the Hegemon, it can also result in slower decision making. When a member of the Patron class makes demands of the Indigent or Basic castes, those demands are considered sacrosanct. After all, failure to follow orders, regardless of how one might feel about them, might well result in falling to a lower caste or even debt slavery. To deal with this problem, the Kropotak often elect others to positions of relative authority. For instance, they might elect one of their number to inspect and oversee the maintenance of their ship's reactors. This is not a hierarchical position, and they can have their authority revoked by the same people who elected them with another vote.

That said, the Kropotak are not a perfect society. Despite long separation from the Hegemon, their isolation has led them to retain certain views on Arkillects and Exogen that the Arscola and Uthmani would find absurd. But where the Hegemon demands unquestioned certainty in the dominance of New Mankind, the Kropotak have shown themselves willing to reexamine their beliefs as they encounter the Shigue migration.

# CATRAETH: A CASE FOR EXOGEN DIPLOMACY

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*Foreword:*

*It is my goal here to be as clear as possible. The Hegemon is engaged in a war for the minds of their people just as much as they are engaged in the violent expansion of Known Space. Anyone who resists their systems of commerce is wiped out or effectively enslaved, don't trust what they call it on record. Untold billions suffer under the invisible hand of the Magnates and the pretense of competition they put on display, an endless game played with the lives of humans and Exogen alike.*

*For those of you who shrank from that statement, I must ask why? If I had simply said humans, most would have agreed readily, but we see the Exogen as separate from us. By and large, we still consider Exogen as lesser species. Animals, invasive annoyances, or even food! But where did we get that idea? Even a centuries removed from the Hegemon, and they still taint our thinking. The Hegemon claims that humans are the only sophontic species because of our commitment to Avarice. But how many Exogen artifacts sell for outrageous sums, nevermind circulate through the countless shadow markets of the Hegemon? Rare things of ingenious design and form, the products of curious minds! Their only sin was incompatibility with The Market, a refusal of Avarice. Like us.*

*I have yet to mention Catraeth in all of this. Many Unionists, including some in our own collective, see them as sacrosanct, the last great resistance to the Hegemon. I would like to put down a brief explanation of the Catraethi Regenum and its fall in FC-2 before continuing to my main argument. I do not do this to raise Catraeth up as a monument, an innocent, martyred state that fell victim to the Hegemon's brutal expansionism. There is precedent; many Unionist causes have done so before, but the truth is always more complex. Catraeth was, in many ways, just as terrible as the forces we face today. Instead I offer the following brief history as an example of a way of life that we must not emulate. Catraeth fell for a reason.*

**Braley Zales, History and Social Theory Andragog**

**Member of the Foreign Affairs Labor Council**

**The Kropotak Collective**

*The history of the Catraethi Regenum is difficult to piece together as we must rely on documents salvaged from the Hegemon as well as the Catraethi Remnant's own writings. Few primary sources survive, but I believe the broad strokes presented here to be correct.*

*The Basileia Catraethi Regenum, or as we often refer to it in interlex, the "Kingdom of Catraeth", was a dominant force in what is now the ExeCor dating back far beyond the first fiscal century and the founding of the Hegemon. Equal parts absolute monarchy and fanatical theocracy, the Kingdom was ruled by a nobility whose unbroken genetic line was said to be the perfect vessel for a vast and supremely powerful divine entity responsible for guiding humanity to the stars.*

*They maintained a rigid caste structure, with a matrilineal line ruling a coterie of noble families that, in turn, ruled individual planets or oversaw important works - most notably, enforcing their own brand of peace across a hundred lightyear region. Those noble families were followed in power and prestige by the Cohorti, a cult of warrior-priests trained from childhood to fight and die for the dynastic family. A half-step below them came a near-human strain called "Star-born" similar to Orbiters.*

*Chartered by the dynasty, these families were merchants and navigators, the only people not of noble birth allowed to move between star systems using early dodger drives almost identical to those employed by the Hegemon's own MassTraders. Even the massive mandala ships, the great temple vessels that ferried the vast armies of the warmonks to and from their endless holy wars, were captained and navigated by these lineages.*

*More than any other part of the Catraeth Kingdom, the star-born caste was in a position of immense trust. What*

*their station lacked in official power they more than made up for in the riches they were allowed to accrue as part of the great lie rooted in the heart of Catraeth culture. To fully understand this lie, we must pause a moment and delve into the Catraeth state religion just a bit more.*

*Previously, it was mentioned that the Catraeth Empresses were genetically tailored to be vessels to a divine entity that guided the fate of humanity, roughly translated as "Mother-God." This benevolent deity was said to exist outside our own reality, interacting with ours through hosts and prophets.*

*Of course, anyone who has ever traveled through the Outside would realize, almost instantaneously, that there are no gods and that the Outside is a vast, endless void of quantum nothingness. The Star-born were chartered out of necessity and their silence was likely bought with freedom and wealth unknown to any but the noble families, making them complicit in duping the labor castes in what we refer to as the Matron's Lie.*

*The rest of the many Catraethi castes are of no great account. They formed the endless tide of humanity, an analogue to the Hegemon's Basics, workers who spent their lives in the service of others.*

*Those who romanticize the Catraeth Kingdom often do so by invoking the grandeur of the Dynastic Court, the honor and duty of the warmonks, or the freedom and glory of the star-born. But in truth, they were a privileged few.*

*The endless drudgery that the average Basic endures is likely not that different from the serf classes, regardless of any silver-tongued promises made by Magnate or Empress. Hypocrisy never changes.*



REGENIUM EDERNUM

*The fall of the Kingdom did not begin, as so many believe, with the rise of the Hegemon, though that certainly accelerated its eventual ruin.*

*It began instead with the Matron's Lie. Remember that Catraeth dates back well before the beginning of the Hegemon, before the creation of the dodger drive. Whatever horrors the early noble families visited upon their citizens in the form of brutal, dogmatic theocracy, it was very likely that they did so in earnest faith. While this does not absolve them of their crimes, surviving writings from early Empresses spoke of the absolute surety they felt in their connection to the divine and the need to ensure the genetic purity of their offspring, so that they too could serve as a sacred connection to the divine. However, the creation of the dodger drive changed this.*

*After the initial invention, the dynastic line severely restricted research into the Outside to a very select few. Anyone else found studying this technology was deemed heretical, and entire bloodlines were wiped out by the Cohorti. But eventually, it became clear that if the empire were to survive, they would have to accept a fundamental truth. Their god was not real, and to maintain their power, they would need to deceive billions.*

*The fanatic, unbending faith they had subjected their citizens to with the understanding that it was being done for their own good warped into something new and far more familiar, propaganda designed to maintain the power of a few at the expense of the many. This foundational lie rotted the core of the Catraeth empire and was the primary cause of their doomed war.*



**The skull-faced sigil of the Catraethi Regenium, variant.**

*Authentic surviving examples are few and far between, but fetch exorbitant sums in auctions both within and without the Hegemon.*

*It should be noted that the Hegemon's early interactions with Catraeth were peaceful; they were uninterested in war with one of the most established pre-Hegemon empires in existence. As one might expect, initial requests from the Summit were entirely focused on establishing innocent trade relations, and an offer for Catraeth to take its place as one of the founding members was extended.*

*As has become tradition for the Hegemon, Catraeth's rights as a sovereign entity would have been respected insofar as governmental structure was concerned. They had succeeded in convincing the Trappist Papacy into the fold, and believed wholeheartedly that Catraeth would follow suit. After all, The Regenium's dynasty would have been left to rule their holdings as they saw fit except for one important detail: The Market would have to be respected, and free trade allowed within Catraeth.*

*The Matron's Lie could not permit this. Allowing Corporos into their borders would risk destabilization and they had seen how Stellarization had destroyed Kantaur Dominion from within. Worse yet, it would mean sustained interaction with MassTraders, and prolonged exposure to the Outside, an existential threat to the empire's theocracy.*

*It was the star-born caste that would buy the Catraethi a few decades of tense peace. The Empress placated the Hegemon by offering limited trade. Star-born traders were allowed to conduct business with MacroCorps outside Catraeth, bringing goods to market and soothing tensions with the Summit Council. This established an uneasy truce with a fledgling Hegemon that did not wish to antagonize one of the oldest stellar*

*civilizations in the ExeCor with an impressive record of violent conquest.*

*However, as the Hegemon grew and stabilized, Catraeth remained a tender subject for the Summit. Technically Catraeth complied with the Hegemon's wishes, allowing for trade between the empire and Hegemon-aligned states. However, it was not true freedom of commerce, and Corporos within the Hegemon resented the star-born middle-men; they believed they should be free to trade directly with sellers or even open offices within Catraeth's borders.*

*As the Hegemon neared its second century, calls for Catraeth to open its borders to trade became more and more strident, with some Corporos seeking to deal directly with border worlds within the Kingdom. As word of this filtered back to the Empress in the form of aggrieved petitions by star-born traders, she was publicly incensed by the violation of Catraeth's borders. In private communications with the rest of the Regenium's dynasty, she was far more concerned with the possibility of contact with the Hegemon's culture resulting in widespread heretical thought.*

*The Empress dispatched her warmonks to secure Catraeth's borders, and in typical fashion, the lockdown on the border was immediate and brutally efficient. Worlds within Catraeth's borders found engaging in trade in violation of the caste system and were suppressed, with their citizens ruthlessly examined for the slightest signs of heterodox religious thought.*

*Those that were even suspected were immediately and publicly executed. Meanwhile, mandala ships took up*

station around Catraeth's borders. Smugglers working for Corpus were dispatched without any offer of quarter, blown to pieces by heavily armed floating temples, proclaiming the glory of Catraeth's divinely appointed rulers as merchant ships vented oxygen and burned in the void. Soon, Catraeth's actions became increasingly bellicose, as by fiscal year 2/10, Cohorti operatives had breached Hegemon borders in so-called "Blood Quests" to assassinate key members of Corpus that had transgressed through illegal trade.

Furious at the disruption of their profits, MacroCorps petitioned the Summit Council and local governments alike, and eventually the Hegemon issued an ultimatum. Open Catraeth to trade, or the Hegemon's Tributary forces would move in to protect their interests. It is unclear if the Hegemon believed that intimidation tactics would work, but the Empress of Catraeth responded in predictable fashion, and thus Catraeth embarked on a holy crusade against the Hegemon.

The first fisks of the war were an absolute bloodbath for the Hegemon. Catraeth was a rigid, isolationist society, but one that produced exceptional soldiers. The Cohorti, provoked supersoldiers we still do not understand, lead billions of fanatical zealots into battle. Armed with ancient and terrible technologies that harkened back to the bright age of Aramax, the Regenum swept through the Hegemon's borders. They fell on planets and orbitals alike, rounding up surrendering Consumers, Patrons, and Tributaries without distinction, and slew them while sparing one in ten to become personal slaves.

What the Hegemon lacked in specialized equipment and elite soldiers, it more than made up for in sheer numbers and morale. Once the crimes of the Regenum were made widespread, even neighboring civilizations began to send aide to the beleaguered Hegemon.



*I am Xankuniath, Keeper of the Memory, mighty Prophet, king of years, will of the Mother God, whose triumph eclipses the stars themselves.*

*Behold the Aramaxians!—once a nation of sinew, they loosened their grip upon the sword and spared the brood of the Exogens. They let barren tribes fatten, let useless customs swagger in the marketplace. In their ears whispered the false silver of desire; their tongues forgot the hymns of the Silence. Then the Risen, angered that no incense rose to their thrones, unleashed a storm/plague/blade, and flame marched upon Aramaxia until its palaces crumbled to dust and its people wailed like reeds in dry winds.*

*But I, Xankuniath, shepherd of dreams, girded my city with unbroken walls and bound my warriors to the covenant of old. I raised altars to the Mother God; I restored the sacred tablets; I summoned the faithful to bear their offerings and drown them in cedar-oil. Under my scepter the Exogen were culled, the errant cultures bent the knee, and their gods were broken and their temples put to flame. Thus the faithless fell by their own forgetfulness, and by our steadfast devotion our realm endures forever.*

**Sutra of Becoming 9:32:3, translated by Wanvath Underwriting**

*Tributaries and miliCorp mercenaries were sent to die in waves, their Patrons secure in the knowledge that a dead soldier would not live to collect their paycheck, and that salvagers would happily pick a battlefield clean to sell equipment and scrap back at a discount. Even in the panic of conquest, the Magnates saw opportunity.*

*As always, war was good for business. Endless grinding war against a supposedly inferior ideology was not, however, good optics.*

*There was no proselytizing to Catraeth warmonks on the glory of The Market; their indoctrinated devotion to the Empress and her family's lineage ensured that. Attempts to foment rebellion through psychological operations were somewhat more successful.*

*Stealth ships equipped with dodger drives would find their way into Catraeth space, broadcasting the latest research done on the Outside, only to slip away as soon as planetary governments began to react. The dynasts, panicked by this new development and the impact that would have on the Catraeth state religion, resorted to the use of atomics, immolating several Hegemon worlds that bordered Catraeth.*

*In response, the Hegemon sued for peace. During the negotiations, the Summit Council quietly approached a relatively new bioengineering MacroCorp, Five Hands Panceuticals, and the other Archonist-led MacroCorps to lead a daring new plot. While diplomats bickered over the terms of the Hegemon's surrender, research began that would eventually result in the Barakan Elite. Peace talks were nothing more than a stalling tactic, one that the Hegemon, with all its bureaucracy, excelled at. Long contracts detailing exact reparations to Catraeth as well as the exact terms of trade agreements were drawn up, discarded, and begun again.*

*The Empress suspected nothing. In her eyes, the Regenum had won; their willingness to burn entire worlds and the obsessive devotion of their military prowess meant their borders were sealed. The talks were tiring, but they had been once again left to themselves. In a magnanimous gesture, they even allowed limited trade to resume, provided it was done exclusively through the star-born merchants.*

*After about twenty or so quats, a remarkably short time that suggests research was underway before the Summit Council had ever approached the MacroCorp, Five Hands reported to the Summit Council that it had a solution for dealing with Catraeth's warmonks. They would lease the technology to the Summit. There was only one notable stipulation in the contract, a retainer in the form of a permanent Division of these new soldiers. They needed this contract as they were the youngest of all the Summit's MacroCorps, and they claimed (and still claim) to have no miliCorp branch. It was for their own protection.*

*The Summit agreed, and within less than a fiscal cycle, enough Barakan were produced for a major operation.*

*The Summit's plan was remarkably simple: Break the Catraeth Regenum in the most direct way possible. During the creation of the Barakan, researchers had discovered that their recruits experienced no negative side effects from exposure to the Outside. Thus, no time would be wasted dipping back into real space and descending again. Nor would there be the possibility of detection as their ships dropped back into Known Space in the middle of the Catraeth empire. There would be no need for artificially-induced comas to protect the Barakan from the violent insanity that often resulted from prolonged exposure to the Outside. In short, they could be delivered directly to the empire's homeworld.*

*Study of this event is impossible and clearly rife with deliberate obfuscation. The details of this operation are largely unknown, as even its launch date is contradictory.*

*Cross-referencing dates between Catraethi Remnant sources and internal Commission documents would suggest that the assault on Catraeth Prime, the throneworld, occurred before the orders were given to dispatch the Barakan. While Barakan operations are almost impossible to decipher as a result of Grade S memetic encoding, we know that the public broadcast of the Empress's trial after her abduction somehow fell on the day before launch operations by the Armada fleet that delivered the Barakan to Catraeth.*

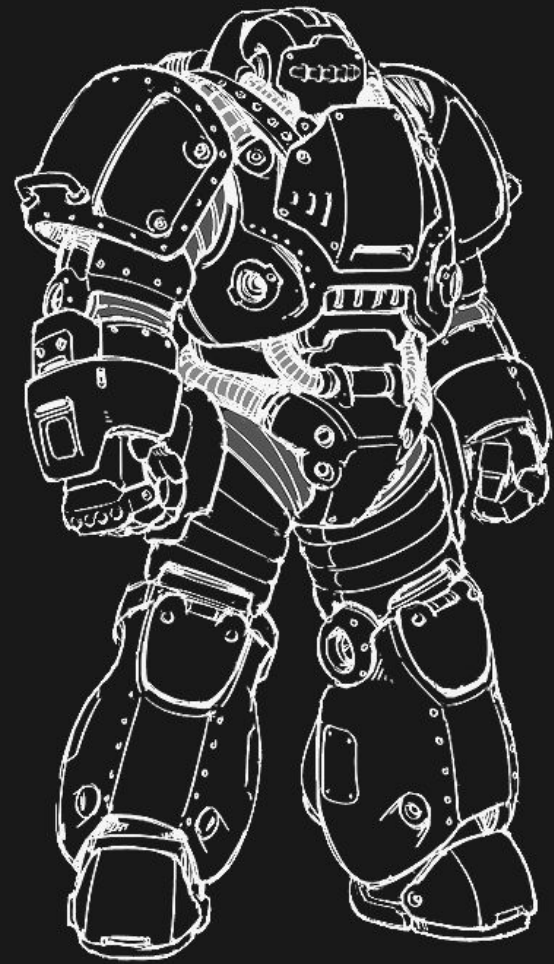
*Whether this is a clerical error or a deliberate attempt to deter understanding the first official combat operation by these genocidal creatures, what is ultimately known is that the surface of Catraeth, along with the billions of innocent working-class citizens, were annihilated in the largest atomika bombardment in recorded Hegemon history.*

*News of the burning of Catraeth Prime and the death of the dynastic family had already strained the empire. Watching the divine vessel of their god go mad from prolonged Outside exposure and putting out her eyes broke them. Entire squads of warmonks committed ritual suicide. Others flung themselves headlong into battle without a care for tactics or planning. The empire died in less than three quats as more and more Barakan were deployed into the theater of war.*

*The Cohorti were scattered, but their ideology remained and, now, almost a millennium later, they have arisen as a pseudo-religio faction that the Hegemon, of course, refers to as Unionists. Whether we would refer to them*

*as siblings in this struggle against Stellarization is up to interpretation, and I would hope that this brief explanation proves they are not.*

*After all, "the enemy of my enemy" is a momentary convenience as the events on the Tosch worldring proved. We are better suited seeking out ideological kinship with Exogen that have no blood-seeped history of subjugating our species.*



*Badak-class autoplating, used by the first Barakan to lay waste to Catraeth. Now a rare sight seen only in museums and as certain franchise mascots.*

*Despite the reputation of Barakan as horrific weapons of mass destruction, Badak armor has become a popular media icon associated with RevShare celebrations re-enacting the Burning of Catraeth. As expected, the Hegemon has no scruples when it comes to the commodification of atrocities.*

*So what can we learn from Catraeth? Perhaps most important is that our little asteroid cloud orbiting a red dwarf star cannot fight the Hegemon. It's an obvious truth, but one that many of us have forgotten. Our forebears came here a little over a fiscal century ago, the remnants of a Unionist rebellion that understood that. They took all who would come with them out beyond Known Space in an attempt to flee the Hegemon and eventually found a home here. But the Hegemon is never satisfied, and their borders expand ever closer to us.*

*Alone, we can do nothing to stop them. We have expanded ourselves; colonized larger asteroids; built cities hidden within the rock that we mine; and maintained a fleet of ships to ferry people, equipment, and supplies to where they are needed. But the Hegemon spans thousands of worlds. Should they deem it profitable, one MacroCorp could field a private army larger than our own population. Even if we did wish to fight, we are not built for war. Our survival is built entirely on our ability to remain unnoticed. The covert operatives we have sending us information from the edges of what the Hegemon consider Known Space report fringe mercenary forces with enough firepower to kill every adult and child in the Kropotak asteroid cloud.*

*I have heard others suggest we continue hiding from the Hegemon. It is true that the Hegemon would have difficulty finding us, but they do not need to. They won't come looking for us, but they will find our home eventually. The rich mineral deposits in the Kropotak asteroid cloud are more than enough to draw them. We might not be found for generations, but once colonists begin staking claims and MacroCorps begin taking an interest in what might be found here, they would never stop.*

*And here I must bring up Catraeth again. Catraeth first tried to ignore the Hegemon. If the last threat to the Hegemon's power was unable to keep smugglers from its borders, what chance do we have? Then Catraeth fought the Hegemon. It ended with the burning of their entire capital world and the end of their civilization. Again, what chance do we have? A small number within our collective have suggested working within the system. And it certainly does have some appeal. After all, if Catraeth had become one of the founding members of the Summit, they might have survived, though in a very different form.*

*And it is true, we might try to work within the Hegemon's system, claim our operations, file for incorporation with the Summit Council, but we would lose everything we have made for ourselves here. As Catraeth proves, the Hegemon has no respect for isolationists, and whatever they might claim, no respect for national boundaries if profit is to be made. We cannot claim the entire cloud; there are not enough of us to enforce it, and trying would likely only bring ourselves to the attention of the Hegemon. If they were willing to go to war with an entire empire over trade rights, what chance do we stand? What's more, it is the humiliating truth that we would not even warrant a Tributary Regiment to stamp us out. If Stratos Industrial began staking claims, they could hire enough mercenaries to wipe us out if we even tried to resist.*

*We cannot rely on anyone within the Hegemon for obvious reasons. Other Unionist groups are more often than not in a similar predicament to our own, if they are lucky enough not to be engaged in combat with the Hegemon's forces. Catraeth fell because it had no allies. An isolationist theocracy, their ruling class could depend on nothing but their fanatical warmonks to keep them safe. Had they joined with other states in resisting the encroachment of the Hegemon, it is entirely possible that they could have won their war. Even if those other powers had simply fought the Hegemon to a stalemate, the Hegemon's need for constant expansion would have ensured that it would have eventually crumbled.*

*But we are not Catraeth, and we are not without potential allies. Kropotak may not be able to depend on other Unionist factions, but recently our collective has made contact with a group of potentially friendly exogen. I must pause here once again to reinforce that it is the Hegemon that claims exogen are incapable of true intelligence, It is also the same power structure that claims greed is the core of human behavior; we have spent the last century proving them wrong.*

*The exogen that have found us are called the Shigue. From everything we have learned, their guiding ideals are far more compatible with our own than ours are with the Hegemon. The Shigue are a fleet based migration looking for a new home, a collection of many different races existing for the survival of all. Does this sound familiar? It should. When the algae farms on Novode City failed, our other cities stepped in to feed their people in direct violation of the Hegemon's ideology of Avarice. Ten years later when the city-ship, Siber, almost suffered a reactor meltdown, it was Novodevites who led repair crews and saved thousands.*

*The Shigue have offered us a kind of partnership in the last few fisks when their scout ships entered the system. They seek and need raw resources to drive their migration but they also need stellar charts, we're not sure why. Many amongst our own are wary, even critical of commerce with "animals," but we have benefited greatly and it is my hope that the stigma of dealing with exogen will erode. I believe it is in our best interest to accept their offers of further collaboration.*

*Shall we remain isolationists waiting for the Hegemon to crush us with the barest touch? If we decline the Shigue, we make the same mistake that Catraeth did with a miniscule fraction of their resources. Or perhaps it won't be an isolationist streak that kills us, for surely we'd accept help from another Unionist cause. Will we allow a lie to ruin us? A lie that is not even our own! At least the lie required by Catraeth's dogmatic faith was one of their own making. Should we let ourselves be obliterated because of our devotion to the falsehoods given to us by our destroyers? We have the equipment and expertise to mine the Kropotak asteroids to help the Shigue refuel their ships, and that massive mineral cloud orbiting our little red dwarf would serve as a perfect place to hide their fleets from whatever they are running from.*

*The proof of their good intentions is our continued existence. While they are entirely alien, often confusingly so, they have respected our territories despite the massive size of their fleets which grow with each quat. Even still they wait for an answer rather than simply consume us as the Hegemon would. If they wanted what we have, they could take it. Instead, they offer us partnership, and we should welcome them with open arms. With allies who can understand our way of thinking, allies who will protect us from the Hegemon, we have a chance for all of us to live free of the constant, rapacious greed poisoning so much of our species. We can take the opportunity presented to us, or we can fail as Catraeth did.*



# HEXETICA: FAITH AND BETRAYAL

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*To fully comprehend the disastrous results of the conflict on the Tosch Worldring, we must first disregard the Hegemon's concerted efforts to blame everything on what they have termed a "cognitovirus." It is not the first time we have used this word, but the events in the Hexetica system make it necessary to properly dissect the term.*

*At its core, the term "cognitovirus" is propaganda, a thought stopping cliché that allows the Hegemon to simply label heterodox thought as an "infection." And of course, infection must be fought, not just for the health and safety of the infected individual but for the community as well. If the afflicted refuses to be cured, quarantine or even more extreme measures are justified to protect the rest of society. You do not argue with a virus. You kill it before it kills the host.*

*The relates back to the mass killings on Tosch because, much like other Unionist revolts, the Hegemon claimed the behavior of those engaged in fighting the Hegemon are a result of a communicable mental affliction. And for once, they may not be entirely wrong, even if they are intentionally mistaken as to the nature of that affliction.*

*We have mentioned before certain regimes, such as the Karanovans, that should not be regarded as Unionist, despite what the Hegemon brands them as, as they are in no way interested in the wellbeing of the people who exist under their control. We have already noted that Catraeth was one of those systems, and the remnants of that empire are no different.*



*The Hand of the Enduring Laborer, a modification of the common Unionist fist by the Enduring Labor movement. The usual shattered windrose has been replaced with a band, symbolizing the people of the Tosch worldring.*

*The Catraethi Remnant is not a Unionist organization; it is, in fact, a religious cult. Its wants and needs are dictated less by the desire to help destitute members of the Indentured and Indigent castes than it is to recruit, radicalize, and use such individuals in an ongoing attempt at revenge against the Hegemon in its entirety that destroyed their theocracy.*

*Any benefit to the Indigent and Basics who join this cause are purely coincidental, as the glory of their discredited Catraethi "Mother-God" is the first and only concern of those leading remnant forces.*

The *Catraethi Remnant* first attempted to foment rebellion against the Hegemon in the *Buchtel* system, and if not for the *Barakan*, they likely would have been successful. The use of a neotyne as a symbolic rebirth of the *Mother God* was an especially potent symbol to those converted to the *Catraethi religio*, which they had been slowly expanding through the use of charity to assist the *Indigent* on the world ring. When food prices began to rise as a result of a blight affecting growth tanks, it took very little effort from the clergy to push much of the general population to war.

Several fiscal cycles later, the remnants were ready to try again. From what information we were able to obtain, it appears that the project which initially created the neotyne child in *Buchtel* was scrapped in favor of scouring genetic lines for a suitable heir in locations with high densities of former *Catraethi* bloodlines. Such a child was eventually found on *Tosch*. Though it was male, the clergy still deemed it usable.

To properly obtain the support needed to hide themselves while searching, the remnant began by tapping into preexisting dissatisfaction with the existing government, and the way they pandered to the inner paradise ring populated mainly by *Source Unlimited* personnel.

Disguising their true intentions, the *Catraethi* began an underground political movement named "Enduring Labor." Though initially meant to be nothing more than a tool, *Enduring Labor* showed itself more than willing to subscribe to the religion of their *Catraethi* masters. The *Hegemon* attributes this to propaganda laced education modules provided for free to members of the *Indigent* and *Basic* castes, and while this certainly may have played a part in the radicalization of the lower castes, it





should be noted that the need for this kind of religious escapism would not have existed if not for the brutal living and working conditions of those unlucky enough to find themselves on Tosch's outer industrial work ring. Religio-subscriptions, long considered by the Hegemon's elite as an emotional outlet for discontent, remained too expensive for even some Basic caste members, so it should have come as no surprise to the Patrons living on the inner ring that Enduring Labor was able to find so many converts when they charged nothing for their spiritual comforts and memetic conditioning.

Of course, not all discontent workers on Tosch were attracted by promises of metaphysical guidance and succor. There remained a substantial number of discontented people focused on the material conditions of their lives and the root cause of their misery - the simple fact that almost the entirety of the Tsch's outer ring was devoted to the care and upkeep of the inner ring. Laborers manned hydroponic farms for fresh produce or raised cheken, pegga, and steer. They maintained the vast water reserves to be shipped to the inner ring as needed. And they did it all while sustaining themselves with growth and, at best, Grade 3 water recycled from the inner ring's leftovers, shipped back when fresh supply was delivered.

These discontented Indigent and Basics, uninterested in the promises of eternal paradise made by the remnant, formed their own numerous secret societies that eventually coalesced into the "Hegemon Opposition Bloc" or the "HOB," as it came to be known. The HOB was organized as a council with each smaller society represented by an elected member with voting rights. This loose association was able to survive because of its semi-clandestine nature. Each group worked towards goals established by the overall council, but was free to

do so in any way they saw fit. Capturing members of one organization might yield more information about that cell, but little in the way of the operations or members of the other groups.

Unfortunately the HOB did not possess the necessary resources to compete against Source Unlimited's contracted miliCorp security, Kosmosec. They were mostly mutual aid organizations that dabbled in armed resistance, until the HOB council was approached by Enduring Labor. The Catraethi had no interest in joining the council, but they offered a partnership. If the HOB would join the in open rebellion against Source Unlimited and the wider Hegemon, they would provide weapons, equipment, and training. The HOB eagerly agreed and began planning.

Despite what the Hegemon might have you believe, the members of the HOB were not stupid, nor were they brainwashed. As members of the ExeCor, they were well aware that any rebellion against the Hegemon would be met with violence that they would be unable to match in a sustained fight. Collaborating with Enduring Labor they determined that to gain their freedom they would need to escape Tosch entirely by hijacking several Source Unlimited freightliners.

It is still not entirely known how Enduring Labor was able to take one of the small stockpiles of defensive atomiks maintained by the Tosch government. It likely was a combination of lax security, as the weapons were considered relics of a bygone era, when Tosch needed them to deter pirates before it joined the Execor, as well as the assistance of one Catraethi operative later known to be on the worldring.

Using captured atomiks, Enduring Labor was able to target the inner ring. They did so heavy-handedly and

without restraint. Millions died, both the entirety of the Tosch government as well as MacroCorp employees.

As the inner ring burned and broken pieces rained down on the outer ring, HOB and Enduring Labor forces began their assault on the remaining Kosmosec security.

Kosmosec, for their part, while initially caught unaware, lived up to the reputation they had garnered over the fisks their soldiers had spent policing Tosch on behalf of Source Unlimited. Their tactics were brutally efficient, declaring an immediate curfew and targeting both combatants and noncombatants. Troops in light "riot control" pocketsteel armed with strikebreakers were supported by more standard infantry carrying drummers loaded with hollow point rounds.

However, Kosmosec was unaware of the equipment supplied to both the HOB and, of course, Enduring Labor by the Catraethi remnants, including a limited supply of matric weapons. Before vantic countermeasures could be deployed, the two allied groups began pushing their way towards the kosmodromes in order to secure the vast orbital, cut off MacroCorp evacuation and secure the fleet of transport ships still tethered in dock.

Unfortunately, Enduring Labor were about as subtle as most militant religio sects. Their codesmiths jammed local datasphere transmissions not with static or denial of service attacks but with a flood of hymns to the Mother God. The result was undeniably effective for the morale of Enduring Labor (the HOB was less enthusiastic on that front) but equally effective in alerting both the remaining Patron class as well as Kosmosec as to the exact nature of the threat they faced. Remaining Kosmosec personnel were ordered to retreat and regroup to deny Enduring Labor and the HOB use of the kosmodrome.

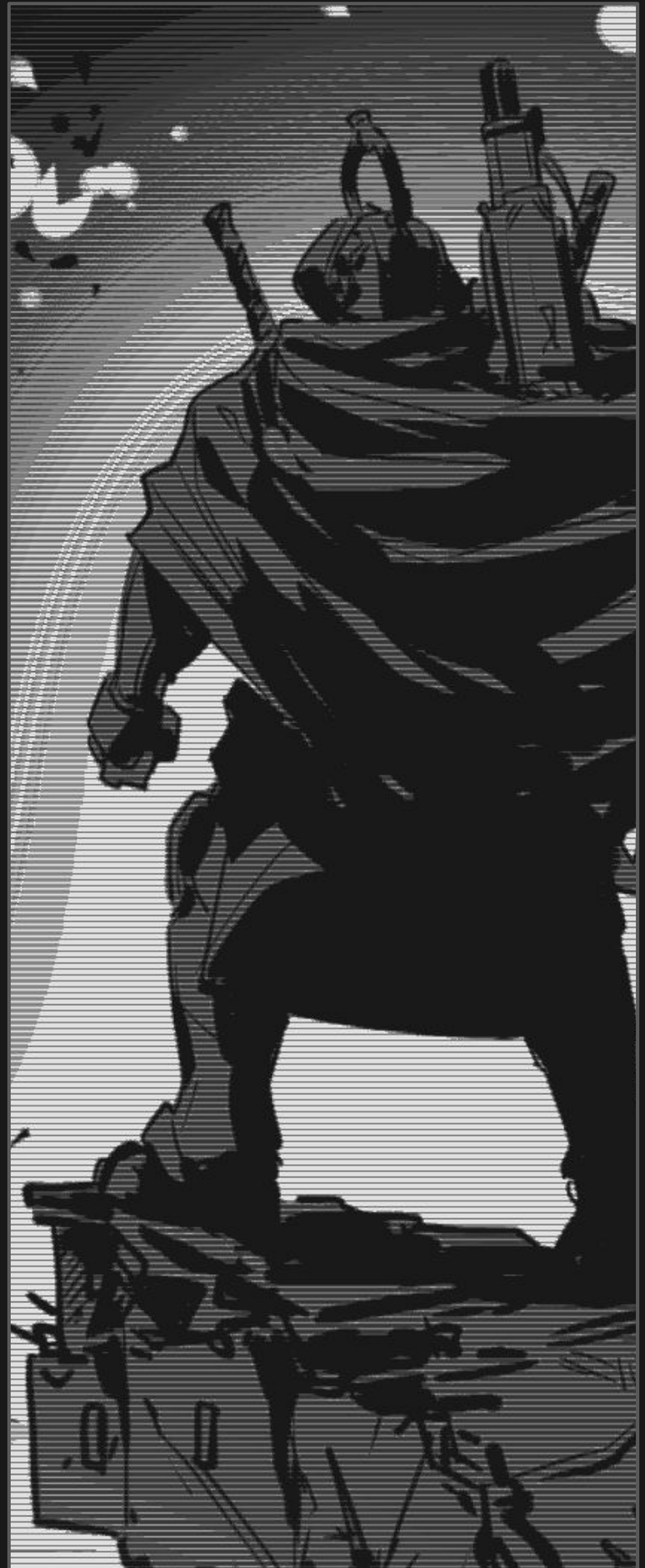
*Only two kosmodromes on Tosch's outer ring were successfully captured, not by Enduring Labor, but HOB personnel, who immediately went to work, manning what remained of the ports' defences and evacuating everyone they could fit on the remaining freightliners still spaceworthy.*

*Upon learning of this, Enduring Labor leadership petitioned the HOB Council to delay long enough for certain personnel to make it to the ports. The HOB refused, stating they would take everyone able to make their way to the evacuation points in time, but to save as many as possible, they could not prioritize anyone, even members of their own organization.*

*Enduring Labor's response was immediate, turning on their former allies. The HOB, confused by the betrayal, was caught off guard, and soon the entire outer ring was awash with fresh violence that continued unabated until Directorate forces arrived to subdue both factions.*

*While the Directorate and contracted Barakan were inevitably going to suppress the rebellion on Tosch, and Enduring Labor's actions turned a coordinated retreat into a massacre, it appears that the Cataethi remnant were able to meet their objectives, despite the direct intervention of a Barakan operative believed to be of the "Askarin" clade.*

*The Directorate was careful to censor news coming from the Tosch worldring, but the few members of the HOB who were able to successfully evacuate still speak with bitterness of Enduring Labor forces evacuating a single mother and child, as hundreds of thousands died around them.*



# HEXETICA: PYRRHIC VICTORY

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*Harken threw himself on top of her just in time to flatten them both to the ground. Shrapnel flew overhead as the shell exploded, shredding the boy who had been tagging a nearby HabBloc wall. The four and part of the zero were still visible, but the rest was obscured by red splatter, what was left of the body slumped down next to it.*

*"Profits! What the hell was that!" Gavva pushed Hark off and dragged him to his feet, pulling them to the relative safety of a burned out troop transport.*

*Hark was shouting over the sound of another explosion. "We killed all the KosmoSec forces in the area! Where is it coming from!"*

*More screaming over the comms and the company skivver dove in next to them, a paunchy man with salt and pepper hair who had more than likely been working at a desk only a few months ago. He was jabbing a finger upward.*

*"The other side of the ring! The cultists are hitting us from other side of the damn ring!"*

*Another explosion tipped the wrecked transport.*

*Gavva grabbed the older man, pulling him close so he could hear her over the explosion. "Get a channel open! Tell them they're dropping shells on a HOB position!"*

*"I'll try! They're flooding the long distance bands with those bloody hymns again!"*

*Hark swore. "Lunatic bastards! I told you we couldn't trust them for shit!"*

*The skivver was frantically fiddling with his PAD, "I have a line! HOB Council says Enduring Labor forces have begun attacking HOB controlled areas as well as KosmoSec!"*

*Gavva stared at the man "Why! We're friendlies!"*

*Hark spat dust and grit. "They're fanatics! They want the port! Enduring Labor my ass. I told you they..."*

*The transport flipped into the air, the force of a shell knocking it end-over-end before it slammed back to the ground.*

*A woman held her child, staring at the distant explosions erupting over the other side of the ting. "Is this really what the Mother Goddess demands?" The... thing... next to her, massive in its intricate armor, reached one gauntleted hand out, and the child burbled, clutching at a metal-encased finger. "The male must survive. You know this." The voice was firm.*

*She shook her head. She had no standing here. Only the child mattered, but so long as she was his mother... "But the HOB helped us. The Mother-Goddess teaches us the value of loyalty! They came for us when the inner ring was blown out of the sky! Risked the showers of irradiated debris as KosmoSec hunted us! Sent us to you, teacher!"*

*The man shaped giant's helmet folded back in a way that was almost organic, revealing a face so beautiful that she felt tears spill down her grime covered cheeks. It was not enough to call it a man, the word was mundane, stupid. He appeared no more than twenty fisks, almost childlike, until his dark eyes locked with hers.*

*A young face, but eyes that were old, something creeping and ancient with strange pupils.*

*"The Hegemon Opposition Bloc has been our ally and have fought well, but this betrayal was foretold." An armored finger brushed the baby's face, "Even in the presence of miracles, they do not believe."*

*She realized suddenly, "They captured the last operational kosmodrome, didn't they?"*

*"They began evacuations two days ago, and over our objections. They have denied notions of priority. 'First in, first out.'" His voice was whisper that seemed to come from all around, "The Barakan are coming."*

*"You are clearing a path." Not a question. Only exhausted acceptance.*

*"The child must survive. My personal ship will carry you and five Chosen."*

*The woman glanced up at the distant blossoms of light and closed her eyes. "And so the ignorant mistake wisdom for cruelty."*



If you will recollect the common types of Unionists found within Known Space, the group known as the Wyrms Underground, or as Suns Confederated so often calls them, “Oathbreakers,” are an exceptional example of how a group of Unionists might pass between these designations and how arbitrary these distinctions can sometimes be. At various points in time within the territory controlled by Suns Confederated there have been both unplanned resistance against MacroCorps in the Hegemon and organized revolt. Eventually the groups that would come to make up the “Wyrms Underground” might even be considered a type of compensated activist, willing to aid other Unionists as mercenaries.

To understand how this happened, we must look at the history of a group of worlds originally financed for colonization by Stratos Industrial, the role religio-subscriptions play in maintaining control over large populations, and the dangers of using such methods of control. The religio-subscription known as the “Triad Reformation” is an artificial offshoot of the Trappist dogma, penned by an active Pontiff contracted by Stratos who wanted a way to induce cohesion between the various members of the Indigent and newly arrived Consumers destined to develop the Angoula Constellation and its remarkable thirteen habitable worlds.

From what we understand, this could be considered a kind of “joint venture” between Trappists and Stratos. The original Trappist denomination emphasizes the importance of spiritual subservience and obedience to a concrete hierarchy of increasingly more enlightened (and thus higher ranking) members of the Trappist cult in the hopes of following in their path. The Triad Reformation instead stressed that spiritual hierarchy is built into the universe itself. Subservience and enlightenment can be found not just in Trappists hierarchy (though that is the most metaphysically pure representation) but any legitimate hierarchy and spiritual subservience represented through physical acts of labor for that hierarchy.

The “triad” is a distillation of this thought, usually represented as Submit, Serve, and Sate. To be spiritually pure one must first find and submit to one’s place in the natural hierarchy. Once one knows their place, they may then begin to serve that order with exceptional efforts allowing one to transcend one’s previous place. The final tenant is *satiation*. These three tenants are meant to be a cycle, and as labor was a religious necessity, it was never expected to end. However, a Triad Reformationist is expected to indulge as much as possible. The metaphysical rewards for labor are conflated with chit and spending that chit on one’s Self is seen as appreciation for the gifts one has been given by their spiritual betters. Coupled with memetic trigger responses and it’s no wonder that this religio-subscription became so effective.

To spread Stratos’s customized offshoot subscription, Trappists clergy were offered financial incentives to specialize in this new branch of their religion and join the colonization efforts. It was during transit through the Outside that Triad Reformation rites, prayers, and doctrine was introduced to the colonists as part of the mandatory enforced activities crucial for maintaining reality. The results were spectacular, with over eighty five percent of colonists arriving at their destination as newly converted members of the Triad Reformation. While the rapid spread of the subscription is often framed as proof that their teachings are founded in some kind of metaphysical truth, it is hard to believe that these conversions were not simply a case of mass trauma bonding combined with whatever chemical or memetic aides the newly ordained Triad clergy used on their captive audience.

Despite the Triad Reformation’s success, it was during this trip through the Outside that the first potential dangers manifested. Passengers became obsessed with the concept of performative labor. The colonists became convinced that one must actively show that their Self is reaching for enlightenment, and anyone seen as unworthy of receiving the gifts that come with labor must be punished for their spiritual “theft.” In practical terms, this meant a pecking order was rapidly established. The most productive could and often would physically lash out at those they believed were doing less for the same rewards, and spontaneous groups would form, hunting for anyone they could find shirking their duties.

While Triad clergy and Stratos were pleased with the results, they quickly realized the need to contain this behavior and so the concept of a Reckoning was created to offer the colonists the kind of satiation they experienced on their pilgrimage to their new worlds. The fact that this day of Reckoning is always held towards the end of the fiscal cycle, before any bonuses or other fiscal incentives are distributed, is something the Triad Reformation maintains is entirely coincidental. The initial colonization efforts and limited world engineering went astoundingly well with the cultural cohesion provided by the Triad Reformation exceeding all expectations for almost a full century.

However, as the world shaping and resource extraction continued, Stratos began noticing a worrying problem. The colonies were governed, as it should be expected, by a theocracy. While MacroCorps prefer the ease and simplicity of autocratic local governance, they rarely care what form that autocracy takes so long as the local leaders know their role.

Unfortunately for Stratos, they had partnered with Trappists, a fully realized religious sect with a base of power to rival that of a MacroCorp. And while the official Trappist position on the colonies was neutral, those clergy that had volunteered to take part in the effort were not used to giving deference to anyone or anything but their own. It was in the ninety-fifth fiscal cycle of colonization, approximately five fiscal cycles before renegotiations of terms between Stratos and the Reformation clergy, that the priesthood began preaching for a wider Reckoning, one that would include Stratos management and even Barons. Their reasoning was simple. All had a duty to punish those who shirk their labor, and one who does so, while above you on the hierarchy, steals gifts that might rightfully belong to you, were you in their place.



Stratos management initially assumed this was simply a high-stakes negotiation tactic, and after the next year's Reckoning involved the killing of several mid-level Stratos administrators, they responded accordingly by hiring Republika to act as security for their executives during the Reckoning. Stratos appears to have simply wanted to wait the problem out. Once the negotiations were over and a new contract in place, both Stratos and Reformists could de-escalate tensions and continue on as before. This was a catastrophic miscalculation, and the Reformists set about fomenting a full insurrection.

The violence surrounding the Angoula worlds lasted for a full fifty fiscal cycles as the Reformationist clergy carved out their own dominion very much in line with their Trappist roots. However, no matter how tight of a stranglehold a religio-subscription might gain, it is impossible to convert everyone, and because of the Reckoning, almost everyone in the Angoula systems had some level of experience with violence. Anyone who did not subscribe to the Reformist religio-subscription, or even those who questioned the necessity of a day of unchecked brutality, were (and still are) considered heathens by the vast majority of the population, and attempting to locate and kill these people became another highly touted tradition during the Reckoning.

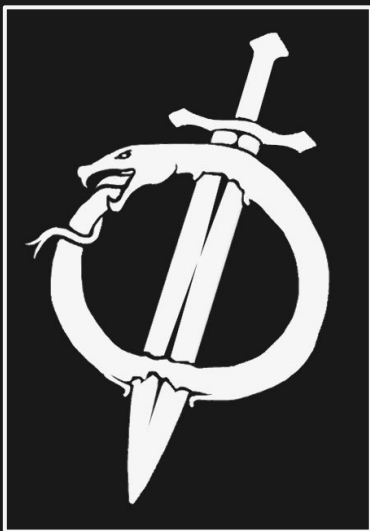
Almost fifty cycles had strengthened these groups, connecting individuals to communities, and communities to each other in a reciprocal aid network. When the Reformists began their holy war against Stratos, these underground networks took the opportunity to sabotage both sides, hoping to see them exhaust each other, so they might step in and finish the wounded victor. While the war was a boon to these groups, as fifty years of fighting disillusioned both Stratos and Reformist forces alike, and underground forces swelled, they would not achieve what they hoped for.

Unknown to Stratos, the Triad Reformists had been in contact with their parent sect, and it was the Trappists that helped pave the way for a delegation of Reformist clerics to petition the Summit Council for formal recognition of their government. The success of these negotiations devastated Stratos stock prices for years as they were forced to renegotiate terms favorable to the Triad Reform government, resulting in a long standing alliance between the Trappist Papacy and Suns Confederated.

While most gratefully accepted the cessation of almost fifty fiscal cycles of fighting, it enraged many of the more extreme members of the Reformist religio-subscription who believed that this war should have resulted in independence from the Hegemon and the creation of their own sovereign state. Others believed that they had simply replaced Stratos with the Trappist Papacy. Regardless, Suns Confederated found itself beset on two sides. On one, the underground networks continued to pick at them, hoping to topple the clergy. On the other, violently independent religious sects proclaimed a perpetual Reckoning for any who would seek to control the Confederation, including members of Reformist clergy deemed too influenced by the Papacy.

# SUNS OF LIBERTY: THE WYRM UNDERGROUND

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And now we come to the Wyrms Underground. In the fiscal cycles that passed, the new Suns Confederated government, with the help of various miliCorps as well as the Directorate, stamped out cell after cell of those groups they declared Unionists. This was a fraught period and while officially declaring both sides enemies of their new state, it is likely that Suns Confederation was only able to survive because of their tacit support for extremist Reformist groups, which they covertly armed and aimed at Unionists before eventually either absorbing or killing their leadership after they had served their purpose.

Few Unionist groups survived this purge, and those that did became the battle-hardened resistance cells such as the Wyrms Underground. The Wyrms were full separatists, wishing to remove the Angoula worlds from the Hegemon, topple the Reformist theocracy, and end the Reckoning. Though their numbers swelled during the theocracy's war with Stratos, they were never a large group, accepting only those who could pass stringent combat and ideological testing, as the vast majority of those living under the rule of the Suns' government still willingly participate in the Reckoning. Even if the Reckoning has softened in recent years, as a result of cycles upon cycles of war (the death toll has dropped dramatically, though non-lethal violence remains static), anyone indoctrinated enough to willingly participate in the Reckoning cannot be trusted. Instead, they believe reform must come by coup d'état and a new regime willing to stop the Reckoning with force if needed.

Originally a local group, the Wyrms have spread in recent years, transitioning to become a wayward group of professional terrorists and travelling incognito through the tradelanes. The Wyrms selectively offer their services to other Unionist causes that they believe are ideologically compatible with their own while maintaining hope that in the future they will bring liberation to Angoula. From smuggling weapons and equipment to actively fighting in conflicts, the Wyrms have made a name for themselves throughout the Hegemon as they seek to finance their own ongoing fight with Suns Confederated.

This isolationist streak and purity testing is both a strength and a weakness. On one hand, it has allowed them to maintain operational security and has prevented them from recklessly committing their forces. On the other, rather than embrace wider resistance to the Hegemon, they have chosen to sell their services like a common miliCorp, vastly limiting their contributions to those able to meet their price. Imagine what could be accomplished if they widened the scope of their cause to something beyond the Angoula Constellation.



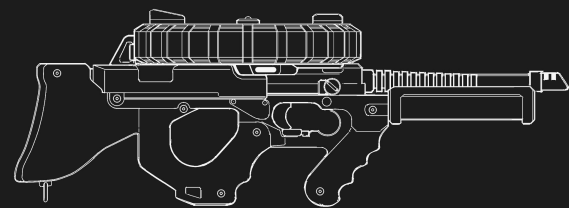
Still, like I said before, we do what we can with what we're given, and considering their experiences, we can't be too frustrated with the Wyrms. As they have expanded, the Wurm Underground has begun slowly recruiting members from outside the Angoula Constellation. Most recruits are fighters of military backgrounds, often former Instants unmoored from their old lives by the experiences the Hegemon has forced upon them, but they are more than willing to take in the survivors from defeated Unionist movements, bolstering their ranks and softening the Wyrms vanguard beliefs as they come into contact with other cultures.

While their skills in direct combat are formidable, what they truly excel in is infiltration, silent operations, asymmetric warfare and other more subtle forms of fighting. Unsurprising considering the history of their movement. The Wyrms are adept at slipping by unnoticed, whether alone or in a crowd; they are masters of stealth and disguise and use these skills for sabotage, assassinations and intelligence gathering, as well as acting as fixers for other Unionist causes. They have been rumored to have sources in intelligence services, from local agencies all the way to the Commission.

Any Unionist movement's first goal in any engagement large enough to draw Tributaries must be to either sabotage or capture one of the Mills. Capture is often untenable; the Directorate will usually destroy these structures before they will allow them to be taken, but whenever possible, Unionist saboteurs will try their very best to steal the licenced designs, so that they can formate heavy weapons and armor to compete with the Directorate's forces.

Of course, Unionists almost never start with these plans, so they must make do with what is easily available. The most common weapons, by far, are those that can be easily sourced on secondary markets. The 001 Liberator is a perfect example of such a weapon. Its design has undergone minimal real change for hundreds if not thousands of years. While older models may not have the latest "modu-flex" tech that form-fits the pistol grip to the user's hand for more comfortable handling, they are still every bit as effective in combat. Better still, the weapons are simple to produce, easily made by basic formaters skivved to accept unlicensed or original designs. Other common designs appropriated by Unionists include the AX-98, the K-5 autosub, and the ever-popular Thamais "drummer."

A HabBloc sympathetic to a Unionist cause can easily produce hundreds, if not thousands, of these weapons almost directly under the Directorate's nose. Of course once a formater has been modified by codesmiths, they rarely constrain themselves to reproducing old model small arms. Even an older model formater facilities can produce a surprising array of highly dangerous equipment if the operator has a decent understanding of chemistry and design. Scatterguns, autocannons, and even rocket launchers can be produced. These weapons may not be as potent or refined as Tributary equipment, but they can provide a nasty surprise for footsloggers expecting an easy fight.



Such weapons, by their very nature, rarely are consistent in patterns. True, some more successful versions have made their way out of their original conflict zone, into the wider Hegemon, but there still remains a dizzying array of variation in materials and minor alterations, based on what any given Unionist movement has available at any given moment. These weapons have been affectionately dubbed 402's (pronounced four-oh-two) after the common format error code denoting insufficient payment - one of the first hurdles a skivver must navigate around when using illegally obtained or unknown format templates. Thus, an illegally crafted wheeler pistol made in a bombed out HabBloc from liberally modified schematics might be called a 402 six-shot or 402 wheelgun.

One might also find such markings on a myriad of other equipment like the 402 Headhunter, a common name for sniper rifles of dubious pattern origin, or the 402 Pepper-Box for homemade boxguns. Even simple improvised weapons with no corporate origins and no need for formatting have been christened with the number, like the 402 highball, slang for a glass bottle of flammable liquid with a rag wick. The number has become memetic for Unionist movements, and it is often seen scrawled on weapons, armor, and even buildings as graffiti.

# 402

*Poor pay is a driving force for Unionist uprisings, making the "insufficient payment" error an obvious symbol for the cause.*

Still, it takes more than light arms to try to wrest oneself free from the Hegemon, and necessity is a potent motivator to discover new uses for existing equipment. Exoskeletons meant for aiding orbital stevedors or mining excavations can be quickly repurposed into makeshift pocketsteel. Civilian groundcraft can be quickly outfitted with scavenged nusteel plating mounted with salvaged Tributary weapons - and that is before taking into consideration the numerous uses for Velanite.

Velanite is incredibly dangerous to handle, and even miniscule quantities can cause debilitating health conditions with surprising rapidity. Weaponized Class-A velanite is almost never found in Unionist hands. There have been very extremely rare cases of Unlocks managing to sabotage Warliner keyheads, but for obvious reasons, they did not survive to celebrate their success. Class-B velanite is far more common, especially in industrial areas. These bars of velanite can be used to power equipment, but it can also be processed into weapons if you are willing to take the risk.

One of the safer versions of weaponized velanite is a putty-like substance, usually consisting of velanite particles suspended throughout a stabilizing compound. The process of creating this paste is both simple and extremely dangerous; small mistakes can result in an explosion capable of instantly leveling an entire HabBloc, and larger mistakes result in slowly leaking toxic fumes capable of spreading through city blocks and poisoning the very ground for decades, if not centuries.

However, once stable, it can be used in a wide variety of munitions. Small amounts can be used to create explosive rounds that burn through armor. Larger quantities can be used as shaped charges or in artillery shells. These munitions must be expended quickly as it will eventually destabilize, becoming increasingly dangerous and toxic the longer it is left unused.



*The universal trade symbol for Velanite and Velanite-related products, is a signifier of danger and opportunity to both Unionists and the Hegemon of a Thousand Empires. Needless to say, any hopeful Unionist(s) should always exercise extreme caution when working with it. More Tributaries and Unionists have died because of Velanite munitions than either side would care to admit, albeit for very different reasons.*

## COPIAE 4: THE CONSTAB BARRACKS

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*It started in Fief 43. Rioting about the contests after the Open Hand had dumped the governor's meeting transcripts into the local datasphere. Less than a span later, they had released Baron Drue's senserig transcripts, followed almost immediately by leaked schematics for Zakov autostubs and a 402 copy of the 001 Liberator, and Copiae 4 burned. The riots in Fief 43 went from violent to bloodthirsty. Governor Pagano was dragged out of his mansion, and what was left of his body hung from a lamppost.*

*Senator Fontana fled, but she was caught in Fief 38 trying to escape back to her estate. There was visutel feed of her bleeding from the mouth and nose, head lolling forward before she was executed by one of the Grower Association Leaders, a hard, bitter looking woman in her fifties. A blurry image from a grade 4 comm showed a picture of a young man at most twenty fiscal cycles old held up to Fontana's battered face.*

*"Do you know him? Did Drue know him?" The questions hung for a moment and Fontana nodded. A single gunshot before the feed cut. Baron Drue had gone to ground waiting for rescue; waiting for the Directorate to come save him. Copiae continued to burn. Shipments of Mnem raided and distributed by Indigent and Basic workers.*

*Mataeo had not slept in almost two days, and he felt glorious, still riding the high from the narcos they had ransacked. He was crammed into the back of a modified UAC, Universal Agricultural Combine, or as the growers called them, "u-aks." The harvester blades swapped out for the heavy plough used to keep the roads open during the winter months and reformatted nusteel welded onto the body. He clutched at the autostub, grinning from ear to ear. Fief 22 might have gotten into the game late, but by the balance, they aimed to make up for lost time.*

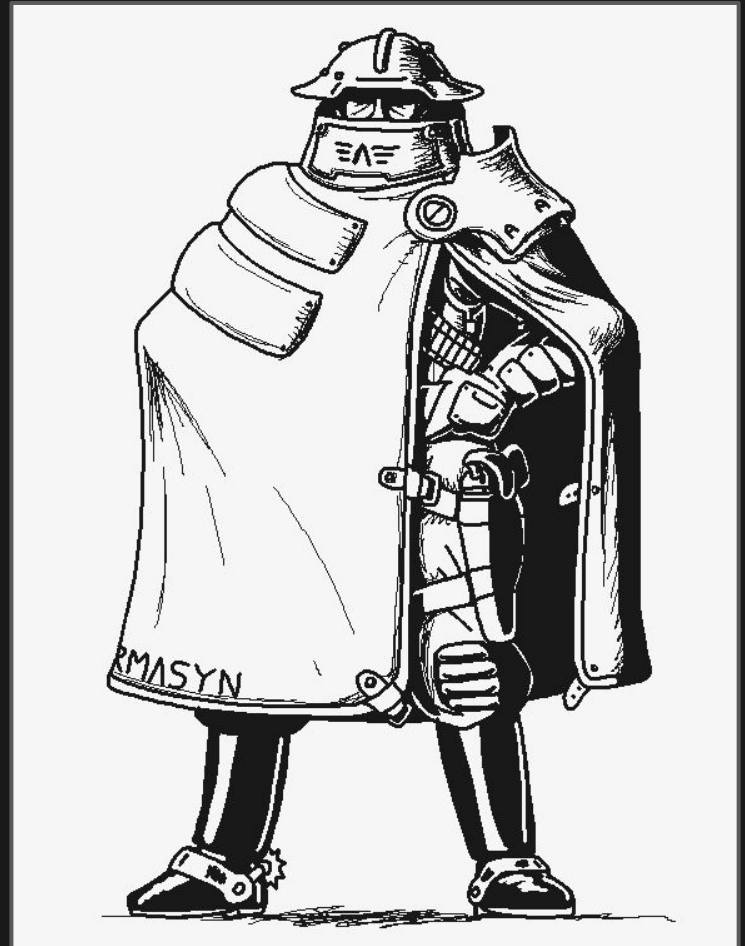
*There was shouting, shooting, and then the sound of breaking glass and formacrete as the u-ak rammed through the front of the Fief 22 Constab Barracks. As the machine lurched to a halt, tilted at an angle, the workers threw themselves out into the rubble. The woman to his right lit a highball, throwing it in an underhand arc further into the barracks. He heard the bottle shatter followed by panicked screaming.*

*It was only a matter of time before the Tributaries came to put them down, either from an outpost in the outer system or transiting in from the Outside. They had a few spans, nothing more, and they needed the Constab dealt with before that happened. Every last piece of equipment salvaged was something that could be turned to a new use: killing Baron Drue and anyone who wanted to help him get off the planet alive.*

Everyone is aware to some extent or another of the potential for widespread unrest in the Hegemon. War is an opportunity for profit just like anything else, but in truth that maxim applies only to the Patron class of Persons and the MacroCorps they manage. Conflict, fear, and recession are, as many Wanvath analysts have often said, “The Market extending a fire sale to a savvy investor,” and further consolidates the vast wealth of the Thousand Empires into the hands of Magnates and Barons. This process is only sustainable because of the Hegemon’s obsessive need to expand its borders; without the constant demand for the universal adoption of Stellarization, this state of affairs would rapidly implode in upon itself.

Another maxim rarely used outside of Unionist meetings and Magnate boardrooms is, “infinite growth is impossible within a finite system.” While the Hegemon might be able to sustain itself by gorging on unharvested sections of the galaxy for centuries, even the galaxy has its limits, and if the Shigue are to be believed, whatever is following them may make those limitations clear far sooner than any Patron could have anticipated.

For the time being, however, let us return our



*Wherever conflict is to be found, so can Armasyn’s merchants of death. They sold the tools needed to kill you to the Directorate, MiliCorps, local nations, and other MacroCorps long before you even thought about putting up a fight.*

attention to the masses of humanity trapped in their own finite systems. While Magnates and Barons might have access to what feels like a limitless supply of resources, those they rule do not. Travel through the Outside, while still the least expensive method of circumventing the speed of light, is still prohibitively expensive. A more equitable distribution of the Hegemon’s resources might resolve this problem; the cost of producing a single Starliner could easily be spent on a bevy of fully stocked Freightliners

ready to deliver food and water to all those who need it.

Privation is no longer an immutable fact of life; it is a choice that the Summit Council makes every day to inflict upon the lower castes for the benefit of its privileged few. The Arscola are a perfect example of how, even within a finite system, scarcity does not need to be an immutable law. Only Avarice demands that sacrifice from those least equipped to make it.

A Unionist understands this intrinsically, even if they are unable to fully articulate it. And make no mistake, very few are able to do so. The MacroCorps of the Hegemon go to great lengths to ensure the language needed to even consider these problems is heavily restricted to only the highest grades of education module. But just because you do not have the words

to express your hunger does not mean that you are not starving. And when words fail, all that is left is violence.

But that brings us to a very important problem. The Hegemon has, by necessity, equipped itself to deal in violence. Again, any Unionist understands this as an implicit fact of life. Each act of open defiance moves a world closer and closer to reprisal. Local military and security forces give way to Tributaries and eventually even the Barakan. An army operating within a finite system cannot win a fight with an opponent whose resources are so vast to be functionally infinite. Open revolution is either the final step in a long, careful journey or the first step toward utter annihilation.

Before banners bearing the raised fist are unfurled, before a strip of blue cloth is tied off



around a partisan's arm, one must tread very lightly. Sabotage, obstruction, and subversion must be a Unionist's first weapons. Supply lines must be cut, forcing an enemy to fight with the same limited resources you possess. Balance sheets must be slowly poisoned through intentional mismanagement and the cause hidden, so that all the bloated giants you are fighting can see are ledgers running with red ink and no one to blame. They will not leave while there is the faintest possibility of profit. Hide your assets, your productivity, and your abilities. Only when the Hegemon believes they are fighting over a barren rock, devoid of any possible value will they leave you in peace.

I can already feel your skepticism. Let us for a moment pretend that you are a Basic, churning your life away as a quality assurance codesmith in one of Yinntosh's logicor manufactories, and you have stumbled onto one of the great hidden truths of the Hegemon. You might, if things go poorly for you, find yourself indebted enough that you become Indigent, but you will almost certainly never become a Person.

Fisks of unpaid labor donated to the manager of your facility in the futile hope that she might notice you and become your patron all wasted. Fury builds in you, not just for you but your family, your friends, even your rivals you know to be toiling for the same false dreams you so

recently clung to. And for the first time, you begin to notice that others feel the same way.

You and your new friends could go in loud with a few 402 automats; kill your old boss, ruin the factory, and take the fighting to the streets when you're done. It might feel good, liberating even, but how long before you're put down? Local miliCorp security or a paid off criminal cartel might do it, not that there's much difference between the two. Or maybe a national army. If you cause enough of a problem, Yinntosh will have to run a cost analysis report on whether it would be better to hire the Directorate or simply handle things in-house and send in their Hyperkillers.

If Yinntosh puts you down quickly, they can rebuild the factory and barely see a dip in their quarterly earnings. If you're entertaining enough, they might even license the footage of their thugs stamping out your revolt to Riegan-Marg Ventures, and still find a way to make a profit.



Or maybe you decide you'd like to live a little longer. Fine metal dust finds its way into the production line. Nothing too outlandish, but enough for once-reliable machines to require almost constant maintenance.

You stop donating your labor too. So does most everyone else, and profits dip a little further. Someone forgets to reset the FCP overseeing the logicor banks that help run the factory, and its suggestions become more and more erratic. Your manager knows something is wrong, but she no longer has the support of her Patron.

And so, when the factory burns down and whispers of unrest circulate to the executive suite, they're faced with a question. Is it even worth fighting over? There's no money to be made in the constant repairs.

Riegan-Marg isn't going to pay to watch Yinntosh hunt down the culprit who accidentally deleted the supply orders for the upcoming quat. And if they do catch someone? Who is to say they confess to all of it, sinking deep into debt as an Indentured, earning the status of Unlok, and becoming a symbol for every Indigent on the planet?

*Almost nothing is known about Yinntosh's Hyperkillers other than how efficient and deadly they are. If you see these nightmarish creations, do not try to engage them. Just run.*

## Y I N N T O S H



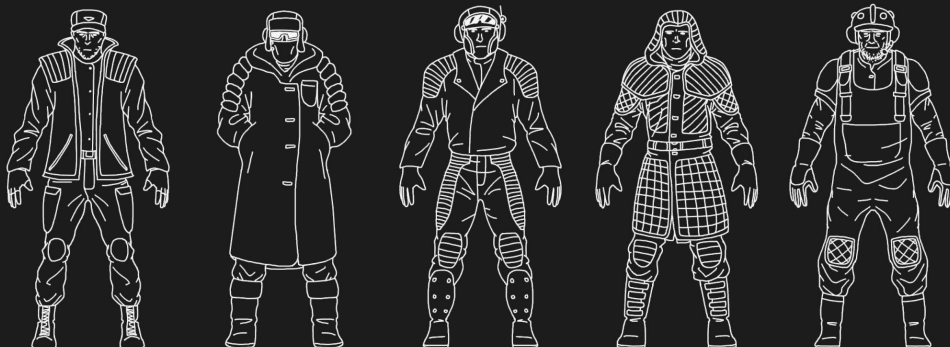
Unlok are the most extreme rejection of the Hegemon's assumption that sophonce is based only on Avarice and all other beings, even those that display the marks of intelligence such as tool use and language, are incapable of deeper introspection.

What the Hegemon so often refuses to acknowledge is that for all they consider Unionists, Exogen, and near humans to be animals, people are animals. We are social animals. No religio-subscription has ever demonstrated the existence of the Self beyond a set of simple emergent properties stemming from our own biology.

Humans are subject to the same evolutionary pressures as all other living creatures, and our survival as a species throughout millions of years is due to our ability bond and care for others, even when, at times, those others do not even share our species.

An Unlok is a perfect example of self-sacrifice as an essential quality of the human race. Even in a society that demonizes selfless behavior, we cannot stop ourselves from helping others, even at our own expense. Unlok take on the debts of others, indenturing themselves far beyond any possibility of ever finding solvency again. Some do this with intent, sinking themselves slowly to better organize other indentured. Others simply find themselves in a position to save others and do to prolong the Unionist struggle.

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about these Indentured is that they have **chosen** to pull themselves as close as possible to their enemy. They use the Hegemon's own resources for their masters must feed, clothe, and shelter them; a slave is useless when they are dead after all. So long as they can hide in plain sight, they can continue to bleed the Corpus for as long as they can.

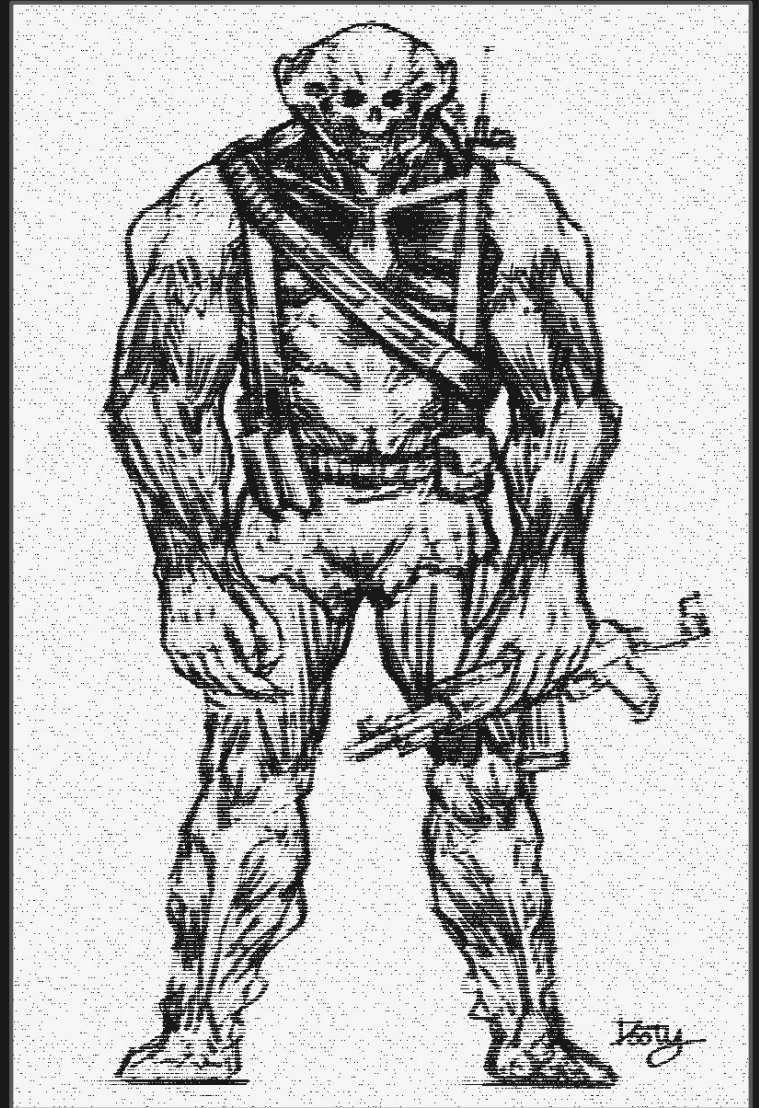


*In the Hegemon, there is no greater crime than insolvency. Indentured are considered the lowest of society, beneath the notice of Patrons, Persons, and Basics. Even most Indigents try to shun them. Unlocks use this contempt to their advantage. What better way for a Unionist to hide in plain sight?*

It can sometimes be difficult to properly classify something. Are switchskins a weapon? Should they be categorized like makeshift velanite munitions? After all, the Barakan were made to be weapons, stripped of their humanity.

Switchskins were originally made to be much the same. The Biphase Program was a line of research developed by Five Hands as either internal competition or a supplement to their Barakan Project during the second fiscal century as the Hegemon's war with the Catraeth intensified. In typical fashion, the Five Hands corporate cult showed as much regard for these test subjects as they did for early Barakan gek, with unearthed documentation showing both programs using unwilling indentured. We have little reason to believe that practice has changed.

Biophage testing was initially positive, but inevitably these poor unfortunates would overheat, their bodies breaking down as flesh and viscera collapsed into a puddle of burning flesh, leaving nothing but a mass of twisted bones. The Barakan proved far more successful, and the Biphage Project was lost for almost six fiscal centuries until Unionist forces were able to procure narco-barons, who found a trove of both the original Five Hands



experiments, as well as evidence of continued research by corpo factions within the Sapien Council's territory.

We should here remind ourselves that despite what the Hegemon might have us believe, both Karanova and the Sapien Council, while financing Unionists within the Thousand Empires, have their own troubles with Unionists within their territories. Unsurprising considering both still cleave to their own interpretation of

the Manual. These Unionistes were eventually forced to flee into the Thousand Empires, but the information they left with was instrumental in creating what were initially called “twinskins.”

In the fiscal centuries between the initial Five Hands research, it was discovered that provolving an existing human would result in rapid cellular degeneration resulting in death of the altered individual. However it was possible to achieve the desired results through the artificial creation of a chimera. The process involved fusing two fertilized eggs into one and implanting the chimeric embryo into either a surrogate or artificial womb. The resulting child, bearing two sets of provolved genetics, exhibited emergent properties unsustainable in any other form.

This, however, is not the only method by which twinskins are created. Though originally believed impossible, should two chimeric individuals reproduce, the child is not only viable, but more often than not, retains the same provolved traits as their parents. The reason for this is simple. In those switchskin chimeras capable of ovulation, the norm is two eggs, not one. These eggs, when fertilized by the sperm of another switchskin will merge, creating another chimera capable of switching forms. And much like other recessive traits, these genetic expressions will sometimes occur

spontaneously in the offspring of people with switchskin chimera ancestors. It is often almost impossible to tell if this is the case until the child is developed enough to transform.

The individual’s base state presents, much like other genetic chimeras, are no different upon simple visual inspection. However the provolved alterations express themselves in states of heightened states of stress. When sufficiently agitated, the twinskin’s chimeric nature becomes pronounced. Provolved muscle fiber intertwined with baseline human muscle rapidly swell and expand. Collapsible bone scaffolds allow for this sudden growth and elastic connective tissues reinforced with kerite-grafted microfilaments reconfigure under tension. During this process, secondary endocrine nodes dump a chemical cocktail into the body, accelerating metabolic growth, and lymphatic sacs release a rapid-expansion stem-cell slurry.

This dramatic change relies on a controlled cancer-like hyperproliferation of useful tumors, a regulated burst of telomerase, and mitotic acceleration that allows new tissue to erupt outward, often forcing the previous anatomical layer to shear or melt away as the body rapidly superheats to two hundred degrees celsius before stabilizing back to standard human body temperatures. This form is only sustainable due

to the commingling of separate alterations present in the individual's two distinct genetic makeups.

The altered, "switchskin" form is, on average, over two meters tall and easily capable of feats of strength, speed, and stamina usually only seen in humans wearing senserig-compatible heavy pocketsteel. Just as impressive is what happens when the body returns to its baseline state from the heightened switchskin form. The excess bulk and musculature melts away though unlike their unfortunate predecessors, this process is actually entirely beneficial.

As the body shrinks and sloughs away excess bulk, the resulting organic pulp acts to accelerate the body's natural healing process, filling in wounds and repairing or entirely replacing damaged tissue, organs, and bone. It is often possible for a grievously wounded chimera in its switchskin form to revert back to baseline form and show little to no effect from the injuries sustained. The only side effect of this transformation process is profound exhaustion and hunger; once transformed and reverted, the chimeric individual must replace lost calories and rest almost immediately.

But here we must ask again. Are switchskins a weapon? From centuries of research, they were born to fill that role, to be monsters. But there

have been documented instances of switchskins transforming themselves just to throw themselves onto a grenade and shield their unaltered comrades, or using their abilities to dig for survivors after the Hegemon shelled Unionist-liberated cities. While they may have been designed as weapons, most Unionists, even those desperate enough to make use of the findings pilfered from Sapien Council's laboratories, are cognizant enough not to replicate the miseries they fight against.

There are always exceptions, but the vast majority of these chimeric children are taught from birth to be human. Not Consumers. Not Indigent, Basics, or Persons, but humans, for those responsible for bringing them into the world know that it would be the worst kind of pyrrhic victory to win out against all the forces of the Hegemon, only to find that you had created something just as brutish and terrible as the Barakan.

Unionist leaders know that every fight is a calculated risk. The first risk that must be considered is that of the Tributaries. How long does the movement have before the Mills drop? The second risk is, inevitably, the Barakan. Tributaries exist to protect the profits and property of Persons, cow Basics back into line, and place boots firmly back on the necks of Indentured and Indigent.

When that fails, The Directorate does not simply go away; the Summit Council cannot allow the Unionist “cognitovirus” to filter into the wider Hegemon. Instead, the strategy moves from protecting profits to preventing further losses.

A MacroCorp contracting the Barakan and suffering the commensurate loss of personnel, property, and, most importantly, Capital is carefully considered against the damage that a successful Unionist uprising might do to the rest of their holdings.

Anyone responsible for the lives of others in the movement must make these same calculations. Is it possible to force Corps or local nations to the bargaining table before the inevitable culling arrives? Is there time to commandeer enough ships to flee out past the Frontier? Or is there nothing left to do but vent your rage and frustration onto whatever MacroCorp property remains and fight to the bitter end?



*Screaming and gunfire echoed through the building along with the guttural echo of Utur. Baxton winced at the noise. He was dying, and he knew it. His soldiers- no, that sounded wrong. The men and women he led weren't Tributaries or miliCorp contractors. They were workers, every last one of them, and they had wrenched control of their world away from the Hegemon, until the Barakan had arrived and broken the back of their entire Unionist movement in two days. Even now he could hear the distant sounds of slaughter. The revolution was over; all that remained was butchery.*

*Baxton's head lolled forward as his body slid down the wall he'd seated himself against, and he found himself looking at the ragged, truncated remains of his left leg, torn off by a stray mauler round. The trail of blood stretched back along the formacrete floor and out into the corridor. It was then that he saw the hulking armored figure plodding slowly toward him.*

*Even light-headed from pain and blood loss, some animal part of his brain began screaming for him to run. He had to chuckle at that. There was no running now. With an effort of will, eyes half closed and spittle at the corners of his lips, he looked up into the thing's armored faceplate and spoke, his voice exhausted, rough from years of shouting above the din of the ore refinery, "Get it done already."*

*Baxton wasn't sure what he expected next. A broken neck maybe. Evisceration. Sudden oblivion as his body was torn open by mauler rounds. Instead, the thing in armor knelt down next to him, shaking its head slowly from side to side. "Not... yet."*

*Stunned silence as the thing pulled one of its pipes from its moorings and, fiddling for a moment, directed the vapor into Baxton's face and then spoke again. "Breath."*

*The Barakan placed the tube to his face and triggered the device. There was a rush of awareness as the pain left him entirely. Armored hands were undoing the strip of unionist blue cloth wound around his arm, tying it off around the bleeding stump with surprising dexterity.*

*"You can speak interlex?"*

*A harsh voice through the helmet's speakers, "I am not kotar." Hands moved to either side of the*

helmet, punctuated by the hissing sound of depressurization as it was lifted up and away, revealing a hideously muscular, brutish face lined with scars. The armored bulk sank the rest of the way down to the floor in front of him with surprising grace, and the Barakan took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "I am Taskmaster."

Baxton gestured feebly to the makeshift tourniquet. "Why?"

"I..." There was a pause, the thing's face rippled, muscles bunching beneath skin that was faintly translucent. It took Baxton a moment to realize what he was seeing. Regret. Consternation. "I am alone." The word reverberated through the chamber and Baxton's mind.

Baxton shook his head, "I'm dying. Seeing things from blood loss."

"No." It looked at his wounds, "But soon. My kotar will finish their objective. It is only we."

The Unionist pushed matted, sweaty hair out of his face with a hand covered in half-dry blood. "So... a dying rebel and... I don't even know what you are!"

The Barakan nodded. "We are the same."

Baxton snorted in disbelief. "I think if your kind wanted, you could smash each of the thousand empires to pieces like you're doing to us. All we wanted was our right to choose!"

"We are made incomplete," the Taskmaster sounded commiserate as it held up the injector, grimacing in disgust, "We live by our need." It looked down at Baxton, who noticed the flicker of data behind pale irises. Something in those eyes made the Unionist panic suddenly, like he was seeing something no one should. He started gasping. The armored figure leaned forward, worry clear on its gruesome features. Perhaps the vapor had been too much, and the man had overdosed on the potent concoction.

That expression on the creature's face brought Baxton from the edge of a heart attack and he laughed, a dry, rattling sound, "Got you by the short and curlies, huh?" Relieved, the thing nodded, and the man continued. "Course they do. They win both ways, eh?"

This time, the Barakan laughed and Baxton joined it. This was insane, but it felt good. Honest. Baxton felt something give way in his chest, but at least there wasn't pain. More distant gunfire; the

noise made the Taskmaster wince. Gesturing to the ruined stump of the man's leg, it said, "Did you know this would be."

"Yeah, I guess I did." A diminishing smile played over Baxton's lips. "You know as soon as you break your boss's jaw with a wrench things probably won't go great for you, but somehow it still comes as a surprise." The Barakan looked at him, head cocked in an unspoken question. The man exhaled slowly and went on. "It was a lot of things. Little things. The food was just a little worse than they promised and cost just a little more than they told us. The water's got this weird, bitter aftertaste, but there was never money in the budget to get rid of it, and after a while it's all you can taste. Vermin in the dormitories, and they charge you to spray for 'em, but it never works. Every fisk the quotas go up just a little more, but I'll be damned if you seem to end up with any chit in your pocket. One time we all ended up coughing up this thick green shit for a whole quat. Took a dip in production before somebody came out to fix the air filters."

Baxton sucked in a breath and shivered, face twisting into something angry and feral. "Then one day you look down and you realize your kid's growing up just like you did. She'll do the same job you do. Won't be able to breath because a filter isn't in the line items. Smash the same bugs in the same leaking dormitory. Eat the same gritty food and drink the same piss poor water that twists your stomach in knots, and grow up to be stupid like you cause the education mods we get are Grade 4..."

The Taskmaster nodded slowly, as the wounded man trailed off and then said with quiet compassion, "Rrreeek." But Baxton didn't know what that meant. He was having trouble seeing.

Screaming crackled over Baxton's comm set, and he reached a hand up, trembling with blood loss, impotent rage, but the Barakan's narco turned it off. "Yeah. Maybe we ruin their profits for the quat before we go. Make them think a little longer on the next batch of Cons they ship in... But you know what?"

The taskmaster grinned, "It is worth it."

"You're damn right it was. The manufactory manager was a miserable little bastard. The look on his face when he realized we didn't give a single solitary shit about his production quotas was..." Baxton closed his eyes, running a shaking hand down his face. "I think that might have been better than the sounds he made after I broke his face for him. I felt free. For once in my life, I felt free. We raided the

management quarters after that. Real food. Clean water. Canala, my baby girl, ate like a Baron that night..." He trailed off, and when he spoke again, his voice was near to breaking. "You Hogs bombed the hab blocs first."

The Taskmaster only watched him, eyes blank with expression.

"Not your fault. You all came in after we wiped the floor with the first batch of Tributaries they sent after us. Still, if you don't mind me asking." A pause as the dying man tried to clear his head, looking for the right words, "What's in it for you? If it's not money, not fine living. What do they buy you with?"

"Silence." It wasn't an order, Baxton thought it almost sounded like a place or a thing. It closed its eyes and became as still as one of the statues that had held up the Senate building, made to look like Dumno-Ualos and the Saints of The Market.

The dying man pushed himself up, trying to understand, "I don't know what you mean?"

An artillery strike hit nearby and the lighting in the room flickered off. The only thing left were small red pilot lights all over the Taskmaster's assault-harness. Shadows obscured its face, but Baxton's fear did not return.

The two sat in silence broken only by the distant sounds of violence for what felt like a long time. Without its helmet, Baxton could make out the faint way the taskmaster's head twitched and contorted with each burst of gunfire.

Suddenly tired despite the stim cocktail keeping him conscious, Baxton bent forward, fingers working at the knotted blue cloth on his leg. A fresh gout of blood squirted from a torn artery, but Baxton didn't care. Something had welled up inside of him, a feeling he had felt when the protests had started a lifetime ago, when he believed they could win for a change against the Hegemon.

"Take it!" He was dying, but he could do this. He held up the cloth to the man-made weapon. It seemed to consider it, then reached out and took it. Baxton's hand fell away and he died, the breath leaving him.

For a moment the world was quiet, as if in honor of this man. Then, the Taskmaster returned its

helmet over its face, hearing the return of the grunts and calls in Utar as the final Unionist positions were overrun. It looked down at the strip of cloth, the logicor within its armor giving readouts of composition, symbolism, and analysis, as seamlessly as the eye could study the horizon. The Taskmaster focused on one aspect of it.

**+blue+**

**++psyche: calming\_security\_improvement to cognition++**

**++symbolism: trust\_loyalty++**

**++context: pan-nationalistic Unionist belief in communality between consumer/human++**

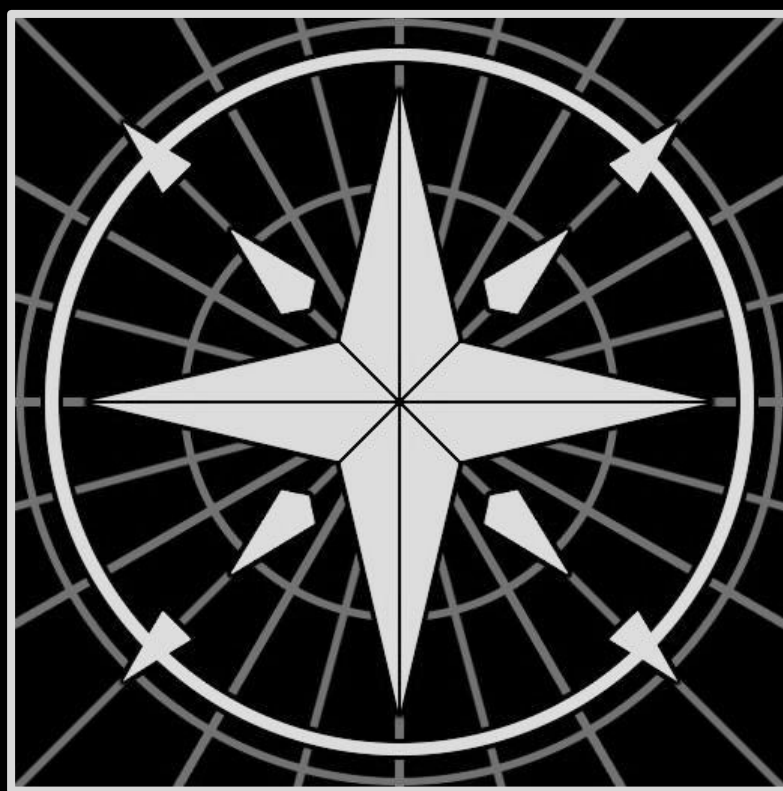
**+++can denote the unexpected\_anything is possible+++**

*The Taskmaster studied the blood-stained scrap again and, strangely, before it could consider the action, placed it into a compartment on its webbing. Its hand had done this, as if remembering an old reflex from before this life. As if its hand had its own memory or reason for retaining a keepsake from this contract.*

*“Perhaps.” It looked down at the corpse of the Unionist. It hefted the Mauler back into both gauntlets and marched back into the dark.*



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