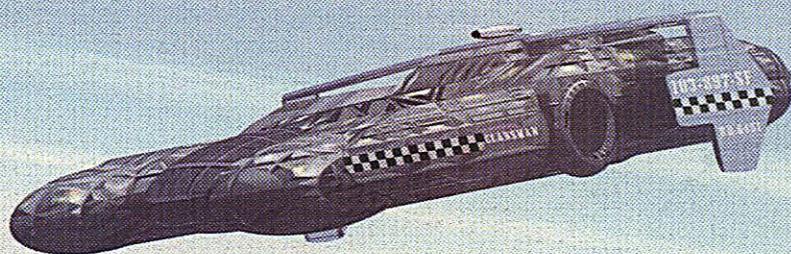


# TRAVELLER CHRONICLE

\$6.50 U.S.

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Aubaine:

Moments later other islands appeared, arranged in a huge ellipse curving from west to east toward the horizon.

— The Long Way Home

# The Traveller Chronicle

## ***A Magazine Devoted to Traveller In All Of Its Forms***

**Issue #13      \$6.50US**  
**September 1997**  
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Sword of the Knight Publications, Inc.  
2240 Schuette Lane  
Henderson, KY 42420  
Voice/Fax: 502-826-1218  
Net: swrdknight@aol.com  
Web: <http://members.aol.com/swrdknight/sok.htm>

**Publisher**  
Kevin D. Knight

**Editor**  
Harold D. Hale

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Submissions: We are looking for good articles and illustrations for TTC. When submitting manuscripts and artwork enclose a stamped and self-address envelope with appropriate postage for return (if you want it returned). We also require that articles be presented on IBM compatible diskettes or be sent to us over the Internet (the preferred method).

# The New Editor Speaks...

## Changes

There are many changes taking place in the world of Traveller.

Marc Miller, the creator of the original version of Traveller, announced that he would be heading up an effort to revise the game that carries his name, *Marc Miller's Traveller* (known commonly as "T4"). The new basic rules set should appear in game stores in November, and promises to include significant improvements over the previous version. Set nearly 100 years after the founding of the Third Imperium (as opposed to "T4" which takes place in year 0), "T4.1" should provide Imperium Games a much-needed opportunity to revise some of its previous sourcebook offerings, particularly the ill-fated "Starships" and "First Survey" which were plagued with problems.

It has also been announced that Loren Wiseman will be heading up an effort to produce a line of Traveller products for Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS*. "GURPS Traveller" will be set in the Imperial year 1116, and will proceed with a variant timeline that explores what would have happened had the Rebellion never taken place. No firm release dates had been announced at the time this issue was published (September), but according to SJG the first sourcebook should appear in early 1998.

There are also changes taking place at *Traveller Chronicle*. I have been named by Kevin Knight to replace him as editor of the magazine. Kevin will continue on as publisher and will still be in charge of all circulation-related matters. Submissions can still be sent to Sword of the Knight Publications, but it is preferred that they be sent to me directly. Details on where to send submissions appear elsewhere in this issue. I'd like to take a moment to thank Kevin for the trust he is showing in me, and to thank him for this opportunity. I hope that everyone is happy with the results.

## A Magazine Devoted to Traveller In All of Its Forms

Some things will remain the same at *Traveller Chronicle*. *Traveller Chronicle* will continue to be a magazine devoted to Traveller in all its forms and derivations. This includes the versions

produced by GDW ("classic" *Traveller*, *MegaTraveller*, and *Traveller: The New Era*), *Marc Miller's Traveller*, "GURPS: Traveller" when it appears, or any other Traveller-related products that might appear in the future. While to be sure everyone has their own personal favorite rules set (those who subscribe to the Traveller Mailing List on the Internet already know what mine is), this magazine will represent a universal forum for all.

Another thing that won't change is **quality**, something that *Traveller Chronicle* readers have come to expect. Kevin has set some pretty high standards with his previous work, and I intend to live up to them. I take quality control very seriously, and while no publication is perfect, I refuse to "throw something together" just to meet some artificial production deadline, unlike some other publishers. Yes, dates for completion of individuals issues will be set (after all, this is a periodical), but if something is a little late, it's because we're taking the time to do it right, something I would hope that everyone will understand and appreciate.

## A Little Behind But Making Good Time

Speaking of a little late (OK way late), this issue, #13, should have been produced back in May. For a variety of reasons it has instead become the September issue. Plans are at this point to come out with another issue in November (#14), and then get back on schedule starting in January (#15).

In closing, I'd just like to take this opportunity to address those of you without Internet access. I realize that there are times when you must feel out of touch with regard to news and information concerning Traveller (or worse, you're relying on the rumors down at the local gaming store). Indeed, there is information available through various mailing lists and other sources that the general public doesn't hear about until many days or months later, if at all. As I belong to three different mailing lists (TML, HIWG, and TNE-RCES), I have access to the majority of what's being broadcast. I'll make an effort in the future to pass along the most important stuff to you through this editorial section. That way, you can be one up on those guys at the game store starting rumors about a *Magic: The Gathering* version of Traveller (perish the thought).

HDH

The Traveller Chronicle is published three times a year at the beginning of January, May, and September. 4-issue subscriptions are \$18.00 (North America), \$22.00 (Overseas Surface) and \$30.00 (Overseas Air). Please make all payments in US funds. Visa and Mastercard accepted.

# A Long Way Home

by Terrence McInnes

## **The Story Thus Far**

*This is the story of Sean McKinney, a bright but primitive country boy on Fishers's World, being unexpectedly being caught up in interstellar war and politics.*

*Sean McKinney is the son of a well-to-do landowner in Arcola on Fisher's World, a tech level 3 planet located to coreward of the Reformation Coalition. Arcola, one of many nations on this balkanized world, is ruled by an emperor, a classic TED, bent on expansion. The emperor is being assisted by agents of the Guild, arch rivals of the Coalition, so that the Guild can establish a base on Fisher's World.*

*The Coalition rightly views this as a threat to their interests. In the first installment of "A Long Way Home", the Coalition tried to eliminate this threat with a decapitation raid on Arcola's capital. However, the raid failed when Coalition Marines ran into unforeseen opposition. Young McKinney was on his way to begin his university education when he found himself in the middle of a hot drop zone. A number of Marines were landing all around him when they were ambushed by the emperor's Iron Guard equipped with Guild crunch guns. McKinney, no lover of the emperor because of his harsh rule and confiscatory taxes, saved the life of a Marine sergeant, and was taken up to the RC's orbiting clipper Immanuel Kant during the mission's extraction.*

*Both the ship's captain and Marine and RCES officers realized Sean would be killed if he were returned to Fisher's World. They decided to keep him aboard the clipper and give him the choice of life on a primitive Coalition world or service in the Coalition.*

*During the story's second installment Sean made friends with Gunnery Sergeant Esteban Rodriquez, the sergeant he saved from the Iron Guards, the Marines who saved him including Pvt. "Tiny" Trask who became Sean's mentor in RC history and technology, and "AA" Alexandra Andropova the RC Navy nurse who worked tirelessly to save "Gunny" Rodriquez's life.*

*Kant and her crew did not have a smooth trip home to the Coalition, however. She ran into the Guild mercenary cruiser Claymore while attempting to refuel in the Corrig system. The Guild cruiser had been raiding shipping bound for the Coalition for several weeks before Kant arrived. Captain "Hellfire" Blaine, Kant's commanding officer, realizing that since nobody friendly in the immediate stellar neighborhood owned a Mercenary Cruiser ordered an immediate attack. Kant destroyed Claymore after a short, sharp fight, but not without casualties. One of Kant's fighters was destroyed by fire from one of*

*Claymore's two modular cutters. The remaining cutter survived almost long enough to ram Kant before the boat was hit with laser fire. Molten metal from the cutter hit Kant and the clipper's crew and Marines suffered several casualties including "Tiny" Trask. Sean's friend was killed by flying debris, and the ship took damage that required several days of emergency repair work in orbit.*

*Finally, Kant was homeward bound again.*

*Sean grieved for his friend but found help from an unexpected quarter, "AA" Andropova. She had become secretly attracted to the young man, and when she had let her interest be known, they became friends. Kant made a final stop at Helios before proceeding to Oriflamme, her home base. Sean learned that Helios was "Gunny" Rodriquez's home world, and that his brother Heladio and his family owned a ranch on the agricultural planet. While at the ranch, Sean was offered the chance to stay with the Rodriquez family and build a new life on Helios. Our story resumes after Sean makes his choice...*

## **Chapter 10**

### **Oriflamme**

Sean McKinnie watched the mountainous landscape of Helios drop away as *Immanuel Kant's* cutter rose to join her mother ship. Sean, AA, and Gunny Rodriquez rode in silence, each contemplating their personal visions of an uncertain future.

Sean knew he was heading toward yet another new world, Oriflamme, "The Golden Flame." After that, almost certain separation from his friends as he entered training and then service to the Confederation.

AA would lose her friends, too. Sean was leaving. She didn't know when or where she would see him again. Gunny would be transferred to the base hospital on Oriflamme for further surgery and rehabilitation. She had become closer to the gruff old Gunnery Sergeant than she had to most of her patients. He was almost like a father to her, treating her kindly in spite of the sometimes painful medical indignities she had compelled him to endure. Of all the patients she had cared for in her relatively short nursing career, Gunny was the patient who had come closest to death and then recovered. Gunny's recovery reminded her how precious life really is. As for herself, she'd most likely stay aboard *Kant* and ride out into the Wilds again on whatever mission the RCES dictated.

Gunny Rodriquez rather gloomily contemplated a near term future filled with doctors, nurses, operations, and medical procedures. If everything

turned out all right, the Corps would assign him to another strike company, and hopefully, eventually back to *Kant*. If things didn't go the way he hoped, he could wind up in a light duty desk job, or an early retirement. He only wanted to come back to Helios as a visitor, not as a permanent resident on his brother's ranch. If it came to that, he just might find a free trader looking for a new hand. Loading cargo would be far better than sitting around having everyone feel sorry for him. Oh, they wouldn't say it to his face, but he would read it on their faces nonetheless. "Poor guy, just when his career was going well..."

Soon the cutter docked and the three friends went aboard *Kant* with the rest of the returning liberty party.

All wanted to be alone with their thoughts. The time for socializing would come later. Sean returned to his stateroom, and AA returned Gunny to the medical module before returning to her quarters. She checked in with the Ship's Surgeon.

"Gunny made it through liberty OK, sir. I think the Captain's idea of letting him go ashore did him a world of good."

"Glad to hear it, Ensign," Dr. Banerjee replied. "You really lucked out with that special duty. I only got eight hours ashore. You really must have some pull with the Skipper."

For all of them though, it would be none-to-soon before the calls to set the maneuvering watch and to prepare to get underway would sound over the ship's General Announcement System.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Immanuel Kant* cleared orbit around Helios on schedule. Soon she was safely tucked into jump space with troops, officers, and crew becoming increasingly restless as the hours remaining toward breakout in the Oriflamme system wound down. Many would be seeing home and family again for the first time in months. Others contemplated a long shore leave on a modern, civilized world before a new assignment. And they wanted to be safe for a while, away from hostile ships and people that shot at them.

During the final jump before Oriflamme, Sean and AA spent many of her off duty hours together in the ship's public areas, talking over coffee and viewing videos of the Coalition's worlds, their histories, and cultures together. He told her about growing up on Fisher's World, while she told him about her family on Oriflamme. As they shared their lives, Sean and AA felt themselves growing increasingly close.

She explained that her father Sergei is a trader, exporting machine tools and electronics to neighboring worlds with lower technologies in return for agricultural products and precious metals.

"My mother Aliana," she continued, "is a doctor, specializing in xenopathology."

"Xenopathology? What's that?" Sean asked.

"That's the study of diseases that did not originate from Terra but that can affect humans. We've found cures for most native Terran diseases, but not for most xeno illnesses. Fortunately they are rare, but they can be devastating, especially on low-tech worlds."

AA also told Sean about Alexi, her twin brother. "He went into business with Dad. The last I heard, he was with the company's trading post on Spencer. We've been close, sometimes a little too close," she said with a small sad smile. "One reason I left home was to get out of his shadow."

From her body language, Sean sensed he better not ask about that point.

"We have a comfortable life back home," AA continued. "Although Dad's politics sometimes gets him in trouble with the rulers on our world. And Mom always has itchy feet, running off to some backwater world with her lab and medical kit."

"Sounds familiar," said Sean. "My dad was in hot water with the government, mostly about taxes. Your's too?"

"No, not about taxes. About the way Oriflamme is run. Too many government controls on where you go, what you say. Too many restrictions on travel and trade. He wants more open ties with the other Coalition worlds, a more open government like they have on Aubaine. Maybe even give people the vote.

"I'd like you to meet them, Sean. I know you'd like them, and I'm sure they would like to hear your story."

"That would be great," he replied. "Maybe you could show me something of your world, too."

"Of course! I'll give you the grand tour of the four continents! I have a month before I need to report back to the ship and plenty of back pay waiting. *Kant* will be in the orbital yards for maintenance and a refit. We'll have plenty of time together before I have to report back aboard. Then we'll take her on a test cruise out to Spencer and back, mostly as a show of force for the natives, I think. Hopefully I'll get to see my brother."

AA's mind raced a klick a minute. "We'll have to get the Skipper's OK, of course. She may have other plans for you. Let me ask Gunny to help. He has plenty of pull with her."

Sean beamed. He hadn't felt so happy since leaving home.

AA really cared for him, and they would have time together, time to really get to know each other.

Two days later, *Kant* stepped out of jump space in the outer Oriflamme system. As soon as the ship was secured from jump stations, off duty personnel clustered outside the ship's communications office, each waiting a turn at a personal communicator link with friends and family on the destination world. AA was near the head of the line and was able to get through to her father. Although light speed lag made two way communication difficult, she was

able to tell her father she was coming home and she had a special guest with her.

\*\*\*\*\*

Oriflamme. The most populated planet and would-be leader of the Reformation Coalition. Traveling in a tight orbit with a 45-day year around its cool orange primary, Oriflamme is a world of storms and climatic extremes. Her four continents straddle the equator, covering 41 percent of the world's surface. Her 40 degree axial tilt guarantee high winds, clashing storm fronts, and extreme seasons. Oriflamme's rugged landscape and stormy weather make her a hard world that breeds hard humans.

"Hellfire" Blaine sat in her control chair on the bridge as "Straight Wake" Brenner uploaded the minute course corrections needed to bring the big ship into orbital rendezvous with Bourgund Shipyards. Oriflamme's storms and mountains stood out clearly on the world's surface as Blaine viewed the planet through the bridge's canopy.

"How ironic," she thought. "What a perfect place for my career to become stormy and rocky. With nothing to show for a misfired raid except a scraggly farmboy, I'm sure to face a hearing before a bunch of Flamer officers. I'll be damned lucky if I command a yard tug when it's over."

She cranked up the visual magnification of her display. The display screen was set to show the view from the forward telescopic hull camera that was trained on Bourgund yards. The massive open frameworks where *Kant* would dock also held other vessels under repair or construction. She noticed that *Kant's* sistership *Helios* was nearing completion with most work being concentrated on her aft engineering section. Sealing should come soon, she thought. *Kant* would dock in the slip next to *Helios*. It would be good to take a close look at the newest starship technology built into the latest vessel. *Helios* would also be the first jump-capable ship built at Oriflamme, albeit with Aubaini technical help. This marked a major milestone for the port. One more such effort, one done without outside assistance, would upgrade the starport and its yard to a class "A" facility.

Bourgund Yards trails Dobroye Orbital Starport within visual range in a common geosynchronous orbit. Both yards and starport are constantly high in the sky over Dobroye, Oriflamme's capital city and the location of its major downport. Scanning the starport with the hull camera, Blaine counted nearly a dozen starships docked at or near the massive cylindrical structure. "Traffic's way up," she mentioned to Brenner.

"Yeah, Boss. Could be something to do with the new colony and bootstrap projects to trailing. Any chance we could get a run to So Skire or Poyzen? It would be good to see the bootstrap team on So Skire again and find out how they are

doing."

"You're right, it would be good to go back to So Skire.

I'll check in with 'Crusher' Kaminski at the RCES office. Maybe I can arrange a cruise out that way." (If I don't get court martial first, she added silently.)

Blaine remembered hauling the bootstrap team out to that distant world to trailing of the Coalition. It was *Kant's* first cruise and her first mission commanding the clipper. She left the bootstrap team on So Skire to elevate a primitive society into something approaching an alliance with the RC. That was more than a year ago. Progress should have been made since then. Maybe Holmgren, the ruler the RC sponsored, had been able to reunite some of the nations under his progressive banner. She made a note to look into it.

*Kant* slowly eased into her dock using small maneuvering jets on the hull to kill relative velocity to zero. Lines and grapples secured her to the dock, and shore power and communications umbilicals were connected. Crew members and troops cleared out their staterooms and packed their belongings. Before going on liberty, the crew would move to a quarters barge moored alongside so there would be plenty of room aboard for refit and repairs. The Marines would go dirtside for liberty and training. After the crew enjoyed their liberty, they would return to the yard to help and supervise the yard's technicians with the refit. Captain Blaine, would also spend some of her time at the shipyard office on Dobroye Orbital supervising *Kant's* refit. But first she had to go below to Dobroye Down and explain to the RCN and RCES brass the outcome of her latest cruise.

After packing her own things and making sure Gunny Rodriguez was safely placed aboard a medical shuttle, AA help Sean pack his few possessions. Along with other crew members, they boarded a yard taxi, a vessel barely more than a pressurized cylinder with cold gas thrusters, for the short trip to Dobroye Orbital. The orbiting starport was also a cylinder, but one thousands of times more massive as the little vehicle. A ring of docking bays encircled the station's equator. A number of starships and small craft were embedded nose-first in the bays. Others orbited in close proximity to the station. Sean watched as a small ship's boat left a larger ship and with bursts from its thrusters, headed toward the starport. The taxi headed for one of the smallest docking bays. It docked with a gentle bump. Sean's ears popped as pressure was equalized. The taxi hatchway opened and Sean followed AA out through a boarding tube into a crowd of milling bodies, a cacaphony of voices and a blaze of light.

"This is the central passenger concourse, Sean," she explained. All these people are arriving, departing, or waiting for ships."

Sean was nearly overwhelmed by a seemingly endless crowd of travellers standing in line, talking

with officials, or just sitting and talking. Some were well dressed; most likely merchants or government officials. Most wore worker's coveralls. Bright overhead lights illuminated the concourse while glowing letters in an unfamiliar script that Sean could barely read marked the various docking bay gates and ticket counters. AA grabbed Sean by the arm and led him to one of the counters. After standing in line for a few minutes, she handed a plastic card to a woman ticket agent behind the counter.

"We're travelling on official Coalition business and we have reservations aboard the shuttle *Stern Traeger* for Dubroye Down," AA announced.

The agent slipped the card into a reader and looked at her view screen. She then gave Sean a hard look.

"Yes, everything seems in order for you, but doesn't your young man have his own orders? He seems rather lost. Does he need extra assistance?"

"He's in from the Wilds, travelling under RCES and my protection." AA reached into her belt pouch and pulled out a note. It was written on Captain Blaine's personal RCN stationary and signed by her.

"Here. If you have any questions, call Captain Blaine. She's aboard ship and I'm sure she'd enjoy being disturbed by a clerk doubting her word while trying to get ready for a level 2 refit."

"Oh, I don't think that's necessary," the agent replied, flushing slightly with anger. "This'll do fine. Board the shuttle through Gate 18 in twenty minutes. Here's your boarding passes and seat assignments." She handed each a card with numbers written on them.

"Thanks," AA said.

She took Sean in tow once again and led him to an enclosed area with a large number of seats. A short time later, another agent announced the shuttle departure and the passengers walked through the boarding tube to the spacecraft where flight attendants showed them to their seats and made sure they were securely strapped in. Within minutes, the hatch was sealed, docking clamps were released, and the shuttle slowly maneuvered away from the station. Once clear, the shuttle's thrusters began a deorbit burn and the craft began its long spiral toward Oriflamme's surface.

It was not an easy ride. Oriflamme's winds are fierce at all altitudes. Once in the atmosphere, the winged craft bucked and lurched almost constantly. Try as they might, the shuttles grav compensators could not dampen out all of the fierce motion. There was no in-flight service, no one could stand long enough to deliver any. Sean held tightly to his arm rests, gulping frequently to help keep his stomach in place. AA appeared unruffled. For her, this was home and these were normal flying conditions.

Breaks in the clouds below revealed a rugged landscape. Jagged mountain peaks flashed by, then a coastal plain, then ocean appeared. The craft

banked left reversing course in a long, slow semi-circle. This time she came in over a city of thousands of low buildings laid out in a grid pattern.

"That's Dubroye," AA explained. "The smaller buildings are homes, the larger are shops and factories."

Sean noticed wagons in the street. However, he didn't see any hippos, or horses, or anything. The wagons moved by themselves.

"Where are the hippos?"

"The what? Oh, right. We don't need them here. Those are cars and trucks down there. Engines inside them move them along. They carry people and cargo, just like wagons, only they don't need hippos or anything to pull them."

"Gaia! So many things to learn!" Sean replied.

The shuttle made several more turns, bleeding off velocity. As lift was lost from the wings, contragrav units compensated with their own lift until the shuttle was making a slow, floating approach to the small craft section of Dubroye Down starport. After some moments, she settled gently onto the concrete in front of a low terminal building. Sean could see similarly shaped spacecraft lined up in front of the terminal. Metal tubes connected the passenger shuttles with the terminal, while cargo handling equipment removed metal containers from another shuttle off in the distance. The sky was overcast and rain was just starting to fall. Water sprays cooled the shuttle's hull. A boarding tunnel was rolled up, the hatch opened, and passengers began disembarking through the tunnel into the terminal.

Sean and AA walked quickly into the terminal's arrivals hall.

"Alexandra! Over here!"

AA turned toward a short, older man vigorously waving toward her from the other side of the customs barrier. Showing her official RCN ID got Sean and her past customs with no luggage check and she ran into the arms of the older man.

"Dad! It's so good to see you again!"

The two hugged tightly. After a minute, AA broke away, caught her breath, and asked, "Where's Mother?"

"So Skire. She's with the bootstrap expedition on So Skire. According to her last letter, they have some interesting diseases there, one or two of them that are totally unique."

"When's she coming home?"

"She says in six months. But with her, you never know."

"Who's this young man?" he asked, turning toward Sean.

"Dad, this is Sean McKinney. He joined our ship at Fisher's World, rather suddenly in fact. He's been put in my care until the arses figure out what to do with him. I'm hoping he can stay with us while he's on Oriflamme."

"Of course, of course young man! I'd love having the chance to talk with someone from the

Wilds. Andropov House has been too empty for too long. Come along now, both of you. The copter is waiting."

He motioned toward a young man wearing gray livery. "Andre, take these bags and get us home."

"At once, sir."

The group headed for a moving stairway leading upward. At the top, a door led them to a rooftop platform where what appeared to be a large metal insect with drooping wings waited. They walked through the rain toward the machine.

"This is called a helicopter, Sean." AA said. "It's a flying machine that will take us to Daddy's house."

In spite of his misgivings, he followed AA into the machine and settled into a large leather seat next to her and opposite her father.

Andre followed them in and strapped a sturdy belt across Sean's lap.

"Please keep this fastened, sir. We'll probably have a bumpy ride."

Andre went through a small doorway to the front of the machine and strapped himself into a similar seat in front of a bank of controls. A soft whining sound started up and the drooping overhead wings began moving in a circle. The sound increased to a roar and the helicopter rose suddenly from the rooftop, pushing Sean into the seat. Rainwater streamed across the nearby window preventing Sean and the others from seeing much beyond dark shapes in a gray haze. The helicopter bucked and lurched in the conflicting winds. Once again, nausea and fear gripped Sean.

AA reached over and took his hand.

"Don't be afraid, Sean. We are used to flying in this weather. Besides, we are almost home."

Suddenly, the sky lightened as the helicopter climbed above the clouds. Sean looked out and saw they were flying above a mountain plateau. He could see ruined buildings below, some shattered into pieces, others standing as hollow charred shells.

"This was once one of the wealthiest districts of Dubroye," AA explained. "After the Collapse, fighting and looting broke out until the army could get things under control. By then, it was too late to do much except to evacuate the survivors to the coast."

"Where do you live?" Sean asked.

"Andropov House is in the next valley just west of here. I spent most of my time there while I was growing up. However, after I left for nursing school and later the Navy, and Mom kept going out on her expeditions, Dad closed most of the house and moved to a flat close to his office in the city. It's really great to be going back to the big house again."

The engine's whine dropped in pitch as the helicopter settled lower and reduced speed. As the aircraft turned into its final approach, Sean could

see a large stone building with a high peaked roof. Built in a U shape with the longest wing at the base, the three sides of the building enclosed a large courtyard where several vehicles were parked. A mountain stream fed a small lake at the rear of the house. What appeared to be a small log cabin stood on the lake shore.

After circling the building once to shed speed and altitude, the helicopter settled onto the courtyard pavement with a gentle bump. After Andre killed the engine and opened the door, Sean and AA followed her father across the courtyard and through massive double doors into the building. The entrance hall was brightly lit. However, all the windows were small and set high up. A massive wooden staircase dominated the room.

A solidly built older man wearing a black suit welcomed Sergei Andropov and his guests. "It's good to see you again sir. And it's wonderful to see you Miss Alexandra!" He reached over, took AA's hand, bowed, and kissed it.

"Thank you, Yevgeny. It's really good to be back home."

Yevgeny snapped his fingers and two other servants appeared; an older woman and a younger man. "Misha! Yeylena! Show Miss Alexandra and her guest to their rooms."

Misha took Sean's light nylon jump bag and led him up the grand staircase and through a maze of hallways. After what seemed to be nearly a kilometer of walking, Misha opened a door into a wood-paneled bedroom with a high ceiling and a fireplace. A large canopied bed dominated the room.

"Welcome to Andropov House, sir. Dinner will be served at seven. I will return shortly before then to take you down to the dining hall. When we heard you would be visiting, I took the liberty of laying out some of Master Alexi's evening clothes for you. You are about the same size. For dinner, I suggest this black evening suit. It would look most elegant on you sir."

Misha walked to a large walk-in closet and removed a black jacket and matching trousers, a white shirt with a black band around the collar, and a burgundy vest. He placed these on clothing rack next to the bed, then brought out a pair of shiny black shoes and a pair of black socks. They were quite a contrast to Sean's travel-stained ship's coveralls.

Misha then opened a concealed door in the wooden wall panelling. It opened into the largest bathroom Sean had ever seen, a bathroom featuring a two meter wide pool that was at least a meter deep.

"Perhaps you would like a bath, sir, then a rest before dinner." Misha opened some valves and warm steamy water filled the pool. "Please enjoy the facilities, sir. I'll return in two hours. If you need anything in the meantime, please ring."

Sean tossed off his clothes and slipped into the



pool. Immediately, he felt deeply relaxed. After soaping and rinsing, he lay back for a long soak. Nearly an hour passed before he climbed out of the luxurious bath and into a soft cloth robe he found hanging on the wall. He lay on the bed for a short time and then began dressing. While he did so, he looked around the room and out the room's one tall window. He again noticed the log cabin next to the lake on the estate.

He was nearly finished when he heard a soft tapping at the door.

"Come!" he said. Misha entered.

"It's time to come down to dinner, sir."

"Misha, I have a question. What is that log cabin by the lake? It seems so out of place here."

"That's the Founder's home. Master Sergei's ancestor built that cabin when he and his family settled on Oriflamme during the Second Empire. We've kept it as a memorial ever since.

"If you'll follow me sir."

Misha lead Sean down the corridor and after several turns to the grand staircase. When they reached the bottom, Misha halted saying "Please wait here sir, Miss Alexandra will be down in a moment."

"Hello Sean," AA called as she descended the grand staircase. Sean looked up. Except for shore leave on Helios, all Sean had ever seen AA wearing was a shapeless white medic's coverall. She had always worn her hair drawn up in a tight knot at the base of her head, and her face was always freshly scrubbed.

Sean's jaw dropped and his heart leaped as he saw an entirely new woman. AA's luxurious raven hair fell in waves to her shoulders. Blue eyeshadow and red lips accented her face. What appeared to be diamonds sparkled in her hair. Her pale white skin contrasted with her slim black lace sheath dress, a d'colletage dress that accentuated her bosom and revealed her slender, shapely legs with a skirt ending above her knees. Her small, slender feet were enclosed in gleaming black patent leather high-heeled pumps. She carried a small patent bag on a slender strap slung over her left shoulder. She was absolutely the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Sean felt a strange feeling wash over him. Ever so suddenly, he fell in love.

## Chapter 11

### Beginnings

Dinner was fabulous. Sean had only imagined such occasions, and only in the palaces of Arcolaburgh. Sean, AA, and her father occupied one end of a massive table in a dining room that was easily 20 meters long. Crystal chandeliers illuminated the room; their light reflected off the table's polished dark wood surface. Pale cream brocade covered the chairs and walls. Yevgeny and his corps of household servants kept the fish,

meats, and wine flowing. Neither Sean's plate nor his glass were ever empty. Hart's "Terra Suite," Takamoto's "Ad Astra," Vivaldi's "Four Seasons," and other classics played softly through hidden speakers in the background. Throughout the evening, Sean could barely take his eyes off AA.

Sean felt very awkward, more like a country bumpkin in a rich landowner's home than anything else. Not only did he feel shy and nervous in AA's presence, he very much did not want to embarrass himself in front of her father. Thank Gaia his mother taught him table manners that were just as valid around a rough hewn plank table as around Andropov House's exotic hardwoods. Sean was enjoying a cream-filled pastry topped with chocolate when Sergei turned to him.

"I see Alexi's suit fits you well," AA's father said. "Since we know your size, perhaps we should take you shopping."

"Thank you sir," Sean responded, "But I really don't think...." He broke off in mid-sentence as he felt a sharp pain in his shin. AA had kicked him under the table with her pointy toed pump.

"Oh yes, we'd love to very much," she said. "I can take him to City Centre. I'm sure we can get him fitted out at Hermann's. He really does need something besides those ship's coveralls."

"Besides," she continued, "I haven't had any new clothes in months. I just don't know what the styles are these days. This would be a good way for me to find out. And, this would be a perfect way to introduce Sean to city life on Oriflamme."

Sergei winced inwardly, wishing he had not made the offer. He had a sudden vision of thousands of credits fleeing his bank account.

"Now Dad, I know that look. Don't worry, I have plenty of back pay. This will be my treat. Straight from my credit chip. If you will give us a lift into town tomorrow in the chopper, we'll have plenty of time for shopping, a nice lunch, then a little sightseeing."

"OK", Sergei responded, "We'll leave about 9:30. Please be sure to be ready on time."

Sean was amazed by all this. He was seeing an entirely new side of AA. Here was a bright, sparkling, delightful young woman, happily charming the socks off her father. She was totally unlike the serious naval officer and health care professional he had known up to now. With every minute, with each revelation about AA's character, he loved her even more.

"By the way Alexandra, there's another reason Sean need's his own clothes," her father added. "I expect that Alexi is coming home. As soon as I received your call, I dispatched a message on the next outbound ship to Spencer telling him you're back from the Wilds. If he reacts the way I think he is going to, he should be here in about two weeks."

The way AA's face lit up caused Sean to feel a stab of jealousy. Just when he thought they would have time alone together, Alexi shows up to spoil

it.

"That's wonderful news, Dad! I haven't seen him in nearly a year. We must plan a party for him, maybe even a ball. Oh Sean, I really do want you and Alexi to be friends."

"I'm sure we will be," he replied, not quite sure he meant it.

Dinner concluded rather quickly thereafter. Both Sean and AA felt fatigue hit and asked to be excused. The two walked silently together for a while. Eventually, they found themselves on an outside balcony overlooking the mountains, lake and the family log cabin. The light of three moons bathed the scene in a golden glow.

"AA, this is so beautiful, so grand, why did you ever give it up?" Sean asked.

"You can't look past this valley without seeing the misery in the outside universe," she answered. "I did not want to become a technarch's wife, stranded in a luxurious cage. I wanted to help. After all, my mother did, and she encouraged me to get into medicine. I guess I'm not quite as bright as she is, I couldn't get into med school. That really disappointed her. But I was able to get into nursing school just fine. And that's been really satisfying. Maybe not for her, but for me. We may not be the ones to write the orders, but we deliver the care and we save the lives, and that's just as important as diagnosing the disease and writing a prescription."

"Why did you join the Navy?"

"Life on Oriflamme can be pretty stifling," she answered. "There are all sorts of rules and regulations, and you're watched all the time by the police monitors. I wanted to get away from here and see new worlds, and enjoy some freedom. In a strange regimented sort of way, the Navy has let me do just that."

"What about after the Navy? What will you do with your life?"

"I'd like to go back to school and get some advanced degrees in nursing. You know, it sounds funny but you can actually become a doctor of nursing. After that, I'd like to go to a world where they really need help and set up and run a hospital. And, if the right man is around, somebody with the heart of a pioneer, maybe I'll marry him. I would like to have kids someday, too."

The two lingered for a while longer, then Sean walked AA backed to her room. They paused outside her door.

"AA, this has been such a wonderful evening, and you are so beautiful," he blurted out.

"Why thank you, Sean. I really appreciate that coming from you." With that, she leaned forward and kissed him gently on the lips. "Good night, my dear. Sleep well. I'll see you in the morning," she said, and slipped into her room. Sean was left standing alone in the hallway, practically floating with joy at hearing "My dear" coming from AA's lips. After a few moments, however, he felt himself feeling somewhat bewildered and yet wonderful. And the feel of her warm, soft lips

lingered in his memory for a long time.

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Sean woke to bright sunlight the next morning. When he returned to his room the previous evening, he had found a set of day clothes that Misha laid out for him, a navy blue suit with matching shirt. A tray holding a steaming pot of coffee and plates of pastries, bread, and fruit had been set out on a sideboard from him. A note on the tray asked him to be dressed and ready to board the helicopter in the mansion's courtyard by 9 a.m. The clock in his room indicated it was just past 8:30. After hastily washing, shaving, and dressing. He wolfed down a quick breakfast and then rang for Misha who showed him down to the courtyard. Sean still had not quite figured out how to navigate around the vast home.

AA and her father were waiting. Both were dressed conservatively for business. He wore black. She wore a tailored gray suit, a white blouse with a white scarf tied at the throat, a new pair of patent pumps with lower heels than the ones she wore the night before, and a large matching shoulder bag. Gold jewelry completed her outfit. This morning, her hair was done up in an elegant French twist held in place at the back of her head with a gold clip.

Andre was already in the cockpit going through his pre-flight checklist. As soon as Sean arrived, Misha helped Sergei, AA, and Sean aboard, making sure they were securely fastened in their seats. The helicopter lifted off and began bouncing through mountain turbulence. Since the weather was clear, they soon saw Dubroye in the distance. This time they could see the towers of the central city surrounding the vast bulk of a central high rise topped with spikes and spires.

"That big building in the center of the city is Government House," Sergei explained. That's where the Lord Technarch, our head of government lives and works. It's also where the Council of Technarchs meet, and where much of the government bureaucracy has its offices.

"The other local technarchs have offices in the smaller buildings, as do I," he continued. We're heading for the second one on the left."

"I was told that the weather here forced you to build low buildings," Sean commented.

"That's true for the most part," said Sergei. "However, with a lot of money and some off-world engineering help, our government and our richest technarchs have been able to build some rather magnificent structures."

Soon the helicopter drew close to the downtown area, and began descending toward a landing platform on the roof of one of the smaller towers. Sean noticed many other helicopters in the sky, flitting on and off the tops of buildings. Ground vehicle traffic was dense, too. Not very many pedestrians were visible, however. As soon

as the aircraft touched down, Sergei unstrapped, opened the door, and stepped out. A blast of hot air hit Sean in the face.

"This is our famous Dubroye weather," he said as he left the helicopter. "We couldn't have a city here without air-conditioning. Have fun and enjoy our city, I'll see you two later."

Sergei headed for a rooftop stairway, then went inside the building.

"Dad's right," said AA. "It can approach 60 degrees celsius in the afternoon. It's probably about 40 degrees right now. Most stores and businesses shut down during the heat of the day for three to four hours, and many people go home for a nap. Then everything reopens in the early evening, until we have dinner late at night. The streets are really lively after sunset!"

The helicopter lifted off and headed toward a large building that rose several stories near Government House. Sean could see at least a dozen helicopters and even a grav vehicle parked on the roof. A line of cars were also entering what appeared to be a ground-level garage.

"This is City Centre," AA said. "It's where we have our best stores and restaurants, as well as several theaters and entertainment facilities, and Dubroye's best hotels. Of course there are other centers in other parts of the city but nothing like this."

The building was solidly built with little ornamentation. The helicopter settled onto a parking spot on the roof. AA used the intercom to tell Andre that they would be in the City Centre at least three hours and that she would call him again with her communicator when she had a clearer idea about when they would leave.

The two walked through the heat and then down a moving stairway into the center's cool interior. Once past the entrance lobby, the interior opened into a six-story high central atrium in which tropical plants grew. Show windows and shop entrances opened onto balconies surrounding the atrium. A distinguished gentleman in conservative business attire approached the young couple as soon as they entered the lobby.

"Miss Alexandra, how good to see you again! Your father told me about you and your young man. It's my pleasure to serve you both personally."

"Why Otto, how kind of you," AA replied.

"Sean," she continued, "This is Otto Hermann. He's one of Oriflamme's finest tailors and owner of our best haberdashery. Dad called ahead and told him we were coming."

"Come with me good people," Otto said as he hustled off toward the atrium. The two followed him to more moving stairs. They all descended two levels and continued along a balcony until they came to a rather small shop almost hidden in a corner. A discrete sign on a brass plate proclaimed it "Hermann's."

AA explained the shop was rather small

because Hermann and his staff usually went to their clients' homes or offices to fit them out. However, because clothes were needed for Sean in somewhat of a hurry, there might be something he liked on Hermann's racks that would fit him.

They were the only customers in the shop. Indirect light and a brass chandelier lighted the wooden panelled sales room. Its floor was covered with a thick soft carpet. Racks of suits and jackets, display cases with shirts and accessories, and full-length mirrors at convenient locations were carefully placed about the floor.

Sean reached out and touched a jacket. "AA, this is so soft! This is nothing like the homespun kilts we have on Fisher's World. This must cost a king's fortune. You'd have to be in the imperial palace back home to wear something like this!"

"And now my dear, you are going to wear something like this," she replied.

"Yes indeed," said Otto. "Jeremy, oh Jeremy," he called. A short balding man came in from a back room. "Jeremy, please take this gentleman's measurements."

"Yes, Mister Hermann," he replied. He took a tape measure from around his neck and first measured Sean across the back, then along his arms, then the outside of his leg.

Suddenly Sean leaped back and screamed "What are you doing!?!?" as Jeremy attempted to run his tape up the inside of his leg to his groin.

"Sir, sir, please! I beg you, no offense intended! I was merely measuring your inseam so your trousers would fit properly."

"Sean, calm down!" AA said forcefully. "He was just doing his job! Relax and let him finish his measurements!"

"If I had my sword back home, I would have drawn on a man for that!"

"Well, you're not back home, and you've got to get civilized," she replied.

"Ok, ok. Let's get this over with." Sean calmed down but was not happy. He had never had THAT part of this legs measured before. It just was not needed for a kilt.

Soon the measuring was complete, Sean was shown several fabrics from which he chose three, and orders were placed for three tailored suits to be later delivered to Sean care of Andropov House. After selecting shirts and underwear to be delivered with the suits, Sean and AA headed back to the atrium. Now it was her turn to shop.

Instead of going to one of several large department stores where most of the shoppers seemed to be going, AA steered them toward yet another small discrete store.

"I just love Annelisa's," she said as they entered. "I've shopped here ever since my mother bought my school clothes and my coming out dress when I was a child. Every time I'm home I have to stop in and see what's new."

Again the shop owner, this time a middle-aged plump blonde woman assisted them. She parked

Sean on a sofa in the middle of the store, and then trailed AA around as she selected things to try on. Finally, after what seemed like an hour, she was satisfied.

"Hang on tight, Sean," she said as she headed toward the fitting rooms. "The fashion show is about to begin."

Minutes later, she stepped out wearing a bright red suit with gold buttons.

"Do you like this one, Sean?"

"Yes, very much."

"OK, I'll buy it."

She tried on several more dresses and suits and decided to buy two more items. She then put on her new red suit. AA arranged to have her other new clothes and her gray suit delivered back to Andropov House. By then, it was lunch time.

"I've made reservations for us at Dmitri's," she said. "It's one of the best restaurants in Dubroye. It's really nice because it features food from other worlds in the Confederation, including fresh seafood from Aubaine, flown in live in seawater tanks."

"Sounds great, and I am hungry," Sean replied.

The two walked back into the mall. They had just walked past an office of the Bank of Dubroye and were approaching a corner of the mall balcony when a bright flash of light and an earsplitting CRAACK shattered the happy shopping mood. At the same time a blast of hot air shoved them forward like a giant hot hand, slamming them into the atrium guard rail and nearly into the six-floor void. Other hurling bodies were forced into the young couple's backs. Sean felt a tremendous pain in his chest where he was smashed into the rail. The wind was knocked out of him, and it was nearly a minute before he could breathe again. AA was on the floor next to him, lying stunned, her once elegantly coifed hair disarrayed. Other people around them lay wounded. Closer to the bank, many were screaming in pain and shock.

After a few moments, AA groaned and began to sit up. Blood was oozing from several cuts on her exposed hands and back of her neck. Small plastic fragments had lodged in the back of her new red suit jacket and skirt.

As soon as he began recovering from his own blow, Sean knelt down next to her, taking her in his arms.

"AA! AA! Are you all right? What happened?"

"I'll be OK, help me up. I don't think anything is broken, and I think these are only surface cuts. They hurt but they're not bleeding too badly."

He helped her to her feet. She looked around. People had been thrown around and smashed into tree furniture like rag dolls. The windows of the bank office had been blown out and plastic shards had sprayed out onto the mall surface. The shards also sliced into dozens of people passing in front of the bank. White pieces of paper were also scattered around in front of the bank and some were

still settling to the ground.

AA looked at Sean and said, "You're a little cut up yourself."

Sean looked down and noticed blood dripping from his hands. He felt wounds in his hands and the back of his neck begin to sting. She quickly checked him.

"You'll be OK," she said. "We're lucky that we were fairly far away. But there are a lot of people that need help. Let's go!"

They ran toward the blast center where the most seriously wounded lay. A police monitor in a black uniform was trying to help a victim. AA took her ID from her bag and showed it to the monitor.

"I'm a nurse, let me help," she said.

"Thanks, we need all the help we can get," the monitor replied.

"I'll do what I can," AA said. "This young man is with me and he'll help as best he can."

Sean and AA found pieces of cloth from among the shredded packages and tore them into tourniquets and bandages. She applied them to the most severely wounded to help staunch the bleeding. Within minutes emergency medical crews began pouring off the escalators and took over the first aid work.

After the work load slackened, Sean picked up a piece of paper, a leaflet that had been scattered by the blast. It read:

#### DEATH TO HOMEGROWN TEDS!

and had a drawing of a huge fist smashing Government House.

It was signed by the 1st Revolutionary Marine Brigade.

"What is this?" Sean asked the AA, who grabbed the paper from Sean's hand.

"These damned rebel terrorists have done it again! Another bomb! First it was graffiti, then leaflets, now they're killing people. There are already three people dead right here!" she answered angrily.

"Right now, I don't think I'm in the mood for lunch," AA said. She dug her communicator from her shoulder bag and called Andre.

"We're ready to leave. We'll meet you by the copter in 30 minutes," she said.

After critical medevac traffic had cleared the rooftop heliport, they had a short, silent flight to the tower where they had dropped her father in the morning. Members of her father's staff met them when they landed, including her father's personal physician. They were taken to a small clinic in the building where they had their wounds cleaned and dressed. Her father joined them within minutes.

Sergei hugged AA. He was white and shaking with rage.

"Alexandra, I was so afraid when I heard about the bomb! I'm so glad you and Sean are all right. It's the revolutionary brigade again, isn't it?"

"Yes father, the leaflets confirmed it."

"I don't understand what's happening," Sean said. "Why the bomb in the first place?"

Sergei replied, "A lot of us, me included, have become impatient with the lack of government reforms on Oriflamme. Some, like me, are working from within to open the feudal technocracy system to more popular participation.

"Others, like the Revolutionary Marine Brigade, take a more violent approach. They are combat veterans of campaigns in the Wilds. They figure the technarchs are no better than the dictators they fought out there. And, they want to bring the technarch rulers down the same way they bring down dictators on worlds such as yours--with force.

"The bomb is just a warning of worse to come. Unfortunately, all it will do is make the technarchs crack down harder. There will be more bombs, more police raids, more regulations and controls until Oriflamme becomes unlivable.

"I'm caught in the middle," Sergei continued.

"The government knows I want reforms, so I'm under suspicion for backing the rebels. I'm sure the Security Service will want to question me again soon. I'm also a target for the rebels."

"Why?" Sean asked.

"You see Sean, I'm a technarch too," Sergei responded.

"That means AA is also in danger!" Sean replied.

"Yes, quite so. And since you are now associated with us, you are too."

"Since AA is in the Coalition Navy, they can protect her within the Coalition enclave at the starport." her father continued. As for you and me, the best place we can be right now is Aubaine. You two get back to Andropov House. You'll be safe there while I make some arrangements."

Father and daughter hugged and parted, and Sean and AA headed back to the helicopter.

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Two days later Sergei, AA, and Sean were standing in front of the airlock of the Free Trader *Clansman*, docked at Dubroye Down starport. While AA and Sean stayed at Andropov House, Sergei had his Coalition contacts place Sean in his custody for delivery at the earliest possible date to RCES headquarters on Aubaine. Copies of the order had been sent by courier mail to the Coalition headquarters world. AA was back in uniform. As soon as *Clansman* departed, she would board a boat from *Immanuel Kant* and rejoin her ship still undergoing refit in orbit. Because of the terrorist attack and because she was concerned for her safety, AA had ended her shore leave and remained dirtside only long enough to see Sean and her father off.

"I expect you two want some time together alone," Sergei said. He then checked in with the steward at the airlock, giving him both his and

Sean's name, and went aboard ship.

Sean and AA stood before each other, each knowing this would be the last time they would see each other for many months, possibly forever. No, not forever. Sean knew that he would move the stars above if he had to get back to her side.

Tears suddenly poured from AA's eyes, and she hugged Sean tightly, weeping uncontrollably. Sean was near to losing control himself.

"AA, please don't cry. We'll see each other again, I promise."

"I can't help myself," she replied between sobs. "I can't stop crying because I love you. Can't you tell? I've loved you from the first moment I met you. Now I'm afraid I'll never see you again!"

"I love you, AA. And I have for a long time. I don't know where, I don't know when, but we will be together again, and next time it will be forever. No matter what happens, I'll always love you."

The two embraced again tightly, and kissed each other hard as if they could not get enough of each other.

The speaker in the Free Trader's airlock suddenly began squawking: "All hands, prepare to seal ship. All passengers, the ship will be sealed in five minutes. Report aboard immediately and secure yourselves in your cabins. Liftoff in 30 minutes. I say again, liftoff in 30 minutes."

The steward in the airlock began motioning frantically toward Sean, urging him to come aboard. "Sir, please hurry," he shouted. "If we don't seal right now we will miss our departure clearance!"

The two tore themselves free of each other. "Farewell, my love," AA cried as Sean entered the airlock and then turned to face her sweet tear-stained face one last time.

"I love you!" Sean shouted. He waved a final goodbye as the steward punched the close button and the iris valve contracted shut.

Since she had some time before her flight was to lift, AA stopped by the starport observation tower. She stood watching the berth where *Clansman* was making her final preparations for lift. She imagined Sean, heading off into the cold unknown again, and wished she were there to comfort him. A half hour after she had bid him farewell, *Clansman* lifted from her berth on contragrav. Attitude jets slewed the ship around to her takeoff heading as she rose toward ignition altitude. After passing 1000 meters, her main hydrogen plasma thrusters lit off with a roar, accelerating her toward the horizon. As she gained aerodynamic lift, *Clansman* nosed up and arced into the heavens. AA watched as the bright plasma flame became smaller and the sound diminished. She continued watching long after the flame disappeared and the sound faded away.

## Chapter 12

### Loose Ends

"Hellfire" Blaine's stomach roiled from tension and impatience as she waited outside the hearing room. She was waiting to be called to testify about *Kant's* most recent mission at a combined services Board of Inquiry convened that morning. She didn't like to be kept waiting for anything. Most people wait on her. With her career is at stake, she didn't like being kept waiting at all. Capt. Jake "Slugger" Janaczek, *Kant's* troop commander; Lt. "Willy" ten Bosch, platoon leader and tactical commander of the Fisher's World drop; and RCES mission chief and covert operations specialist Earl "Planetfall" Esterhasz had all testified about the Fisher's World mission. In a few minutes, it would be her turn.

Rain from one of Oriflamme's frequent tropical storms pounded against the waiting room's window. "Hellfire" had been able to get off the orbital station and have some time dirtside in the RC enclave at Dubroye. She had also had time to visit "Red Dog" Rodriquez at the base hospital where he was undergoing a new round of regeneration treatments. The big man seemed to be bearing up well and should be able to walk again soon, after the regen treatments finished regrowing his spinal cord nerves.

The door opened and a Marine in dress uniform and armed with a holstered pistol called to her.

"Captain Blaine? Sir, they are ready for you now."

"Thank you, Corporal," she answered, and followed him into the hearing room.

The three-person hearing board sat behind a long table facing the doorway. The board included a representative from each of three services; Navy, Marines, and RCES. The RCES representative chaired the board.

"I am Survey Commander Jaime Navarez, commanding RCES station Oriflamme. This is Force Commander Heinz Stott commanding Dubroye Marine Support Depot and Captain Ian O'Bannon, assigned to take command of RCS Helios as soon as she is scaled.

"Captain, please understand that this is a Board Of Inquiry, not a Court Martial. We are here to find out what happened on *Immanuel Kant's* mission to Fisher's World, to find out why Coalition resources were expended without result. We are not here to assign blame or determine competency. We are here, however, to determine our mistakes and to learn from them, if possible."

"Yes sir, I understand." Blaine also understood that even though she might be found officially blameless, any unfavorable findings might result in her permanently commanding a desk in the growing Navy bureaucracy.

"Captain," he said. "Raise your right-hand and respond to the following question. Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the

truth?"

"I so swear," she replied.

"Very well, be seated." He motioned her to a chair facing the board.

"OK, then. Let's start at the beginning. Tell us your mission orders for the Fisher's World strike."

"Our orders were to land a force of Marines on the capital of the Arcola Empire, one of many nation states ruled by TEDs on that planet. The force was to assault the imperial palace and kill or capture the Emperor of Arcola."

"What was the purpose of this raid?" Navarez asked.

"This was to clear the way for a follow on Bootstrap Team to set up a government friendly to the Coalition," Blaine replied. "The mission planners believed that the new government would eventually unite a large portion or all of Fisher's World under a regime friendly to the Coalition."

"Pretty much a standard decapitation raid?"

"Yessir."

"Did you detect any opposition when you entered the Fisher's World system?"

"We entered the Fisher's World system without opposition. We didn't detect any other spacecraft. Nor did we detect any artificial satellites."

"None?" asked Captain O'Bannon.

"No sir. None. We then entered geosynchronous orbit and scanned the hemisphere containing our target. We detected no unusual EMS emissions, just the infrared readings from a low tech civilization, nothing inconsistent with a civilization of that level. We then moved in closer to a standard low orbit and repeated our scans with the same result. The weather appeared nominal over the drop zone, a clear night without any cloud cover."

"You're troops experienced a normal drop?" Force Commander Stott asked.

"Yes sir, the drop was normal until the capsules entered the lower stratosphere. The drop troops then encountered unexpected high altitude winds. These scattered the drop platoon's capsules and pushed them southward from the capital city. So, instead of a compact, coordinated strike force landing almost right on top of the imperial palace, we had single troopers, or at the most two or three together, landing in isolated locations throughout the countryside."

"Why didn't your troops rally and attack from the country?" Stott asked.

"Sir, they were kilometers apart. By the time they could have regrouped and attacked, the element of surprise would have been lost. And we ran into unexpected opposition. As I wrote in my report, we had several casualties, mostly light wounds, but Marine Gunnery Sergeant Esteban Rodriquez was critically wounded with what was later determined to be a crunch gun round. That means these people had Guild support, at least with

wcaponry, and probably in other areas as well. In effect, the opposition was of greater strength than expected.

"At that point," Hellfire continued, "It seemed best to recover the force and return to Coalition space to report the Guild presence."

"Captain, what about orbital fire support? Couldn't you give any? Seems to me that a few missiles into the palace would have done just as well," Captain O'Bannon said.

"Sir, that would have violated the rules of engagement for this mission. Our orders were to keep native casualties and collateral damage to a minimum. We had people inside the palace friendly to the Coalition, furnishing intell to us and anxious to help the bootstrap team set up a pro-RC government. They probably would have died if we'd used missiles. And we probably would have enraged half the civilian population. That would have done more harm than good for our cause."

"I have your written report here," said Navarez as he looked down on a computer screen in front of him. "You recommend going back with a stronger force including armored cavalry to try again?"

"Yes sir. The armor should be able to neutralize any Guild opposition as well as be used as fast transport to haul in reinforcements if the drop platoon runs into trouble.

"But first, we need to do some scouting to determine the extent of Guild opposition and target the Emperor's exact location just before the next strike. I believe we need additional reliable intelligence assets on the ground who can get this information. Also, these assets will be able to assess the attitude of the local people toward the Emperor and toward off worlders. We already know there is considerable opposition to the Emperor's government and the war they are fomenting with neighboring states."

"I see you brought back a youngster from Fisher's World. Is this the asset you had in mind?" asked Navarez.

"Yes sir. Your office approved his transfer to Aubaine and then onward to Nike Nimbus for Moonshadow mission training. Sean McKinnie is a Fisher's World native, very much motivated to improve the lives of his people and to bring down a corrupt government. His father has been harassed, beaten, and jailed by the government on several occasions."

"OK, I think we have all we need. Captain, you are dismissed. Please wait outside until we call you again."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Hellfire stood, saluted, did an about face, and marched out of the hearing room. Once again, she sat and waited.

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Hellfire Blaine was not the only one sitting

and waiting that day. Gunny Rodriguez was doing plenty of the same at the Dubroye RC naval base hospital. Only he was sitting in a powered chair in the hospital solarium with a regeneration stimulator pack attached to his chest. Leads from the stimulator pack ran into his chest and spine. Electrical impulses flowing along many of these leads encouraged heart and lung tissue to regrow at an accelerated rate. Impulses along others helped knit together damaged spinal column nerve trunks and restored the flow of Gunny's own nerve impulses along these neural highways.

Dr. Banerjee, *Kant's* surgeon, had transferred Gunny to the RC Naval Base hospital on Dubroye which included on its staff Dr. Ali bin Al-Mahmud, one of the RCN's leading surgeons and trauma regeneration specialists. The day after Gunny landed, "Dr. Al" opened up his chest and replaced temporary patches to his pulmonary artery with permanent artificial tissue grafts. Today was Gunny's first day out of bed following surgery. He noticed that the morning's storms had given way to sunlight.

"Gunny, you now have the heart of a thirty-year-old," announced Dr. Al as he strode into the solarium. "Those grafts will last longer than your own tissue, and while you were under, I took the liberty of cleaning out your somewhat clogged coronary arteries. This morning's tests showed that you have full blood flow restored throughout your heart and lungs. You're spine's healing up nicely and you should be back on your feet in about two weeks."

"Hey doc, does that mean I'll be able to rejoin my ship?"

"I don't see why we can't clear you for full duty again. It's just a matter of when your spine is fully healed. Then you will need a week or two of physical therapy, but it all goes well, I think you should be able to rejoin your ship after it gets back from Spencer.

"Do me a favor, though, OK?"

"Sure, Doc. What's that?"

"Try not to stick your neck out too far. You jarheads have a habit of doing that. I don't want to see one of my finest pieces of work coming back in a body bag."

"Hey, you got a deal. I really want to collect my retirement pay."

"OK then, I'll see you on my rounds this afternoon."

"Take it easy, Doc."

Gunny was elated, although his face didn't show it. It never showed much emotion. He was going back to *Kant* and her crew. He'd be with his squad mates again, and he would see AA. He wondered about Sean though. AA had called him from Dubroye Orbital and told him Sean was on his way to Aubaine. Gunny hoped the kid would be OK and that he would get through boot camp. He'd have to ask Andy Ellis, the Sergeant Major of the Nike Nimbus boot camp to keep his eye on

Sean and let him know how he was doing. He really liked Sean, he was almost like another son. He's as bright as Johnny, Gunny thought. Maybe he'd turn out almost as good.

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"Captain Blaine, sir?"

The Marine MP interrupted her reverie in the waiting room outside the hearing.

"The hearing officers require your presence, sir."

"Very well, Corporal. Lead on."

Blaine once again entered the hearing room and stood at attention before the board.

"Captain Blaine," Navarez said, "After due consideration of the testimony and the evidence presented before it, this hearing finds the failure of the Fisher's World strike to have resulted from the lack of adequate intelligence about opposing force capabilities and by unanticipated meteorological events. We believe that no action you could have taken at the time would have resulted in a positive outcome.

"Moreover, although not directly connected with the Fisher's World mission, you are to be commended for the swift and decisive action taken against the hostile merchant cruiser off Corrig. According to intelligence reports we received, piracy in interstellar traffic rimward of the RC has diminished. Evidently you destroyed a major Guild vessel that was responsible for considerable destruction of merchant traffic between the Coalition and potentially friendly worlds to coreward. You eliminated a major penetration by the Guild toward the Coalition AO, and gave them something to think about before they try that again.

"We've wasted enough of your valuable time, Captain. You have a ship to refit. And another mission to carry out. Report to my office at 0900 tomorrow for further orders. Dismissed."

"Thank you, sir." Blaine said. She saluted, did an about face, and left the hearing room. Once into the waiting room, she relaxed, relieved at the outcome. She'd have a good dinner at the O Club tonight, and a good night's sleep at the BOQ before receiving her and *Kant*'s next assignment. Then it would be back to the ship. A good steak and a good bottle of Nimban Cabernet would be a great way to celebrate keeping command of *Kant*. Too bad she didn't have anyone to celebrate with.

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The next four weeks were a time of hard work for all hands as *Kant* underwent her refit. Shipfitters from the Bourgund Yard complex strengthened *Kant*'s spine and replaced damaged conduits and wiring around the point of impact. The latest software and hardware upgrades were also installed in her computer and fire control systems. AA spent much of her time helping yard

technicians install a newly upgraded autodoc in the medical module and in restocking medical and first aid supplies throughout the ship. Everything from having enough scalpels in surgery to making sure each body sleeve had a full load of fresh pull tab drugs were the Medical Department's responsibility. Since Dr. Banerjee, three med techs and she made up the Medical Department, there was a lot of work for each. They were also responsible for at least the initial treatment of any injuries or illnesses that cropped up on board during the refit.

AA was glad for the work. It kept her busy and enabled her to shove her loneliness into the background. She missed Sean terribly. One night as she was coming off duty after a 12-hour shift, she noticed that the "Message Waiting" light was lit on her stateroom communicator pad. She punched the "Accept" button and the communicator's screen lit up with a message header.

It was from Sean. The header indicated the message originated aboard *Clansman* and had been relayed from Spires Port to the outbound free trader *Queen of Aquitaine*. This trader had in turn just arrived in-system at Oriflamme and beam-casted its messages to Dubroye Orbital starport. After some sorting in the message storage banks, and more relays, Sean's electronic letter finally arrived in AA's communicator. She sat down at her desk and pressed "Play." Sean's smiling face appeared on the screen.

"My darling, by the time you receive this, I should nearly be to Aubaine. I'm sending this from Spires where we arrived after two jumps. Except for too much carbon dioxide at sea level, Spires is a lovely world, and I've had a chance for some time dirtside while *Clansman*'s owners buy and sell cargo. I visited some of the high island communities and got to meet some Spiri. This world reminds me very much of my own, but with fewer, more primitive people. It's amazing, the Spiri don't care about technology. They prefer their log cabins and primitive homespun clothes. Instead of material things, they focus on the spiritual world. Material things only get in the way, they say. We could take lessons from them.

"Anyway, I am well and so is your father. He sends his greetings, too. He and I are becoming close friends. I miss you so much, my dear. I can't wait to hold you in my arms again. I just wish I knew when that would be.

"We're off to Kruyter now. I'll send you another message from there. I look forward to hearing from you, too. How is Gunny doing? Please let me know if he is going back on active duty. How is Captain Blaine? Did she keep *Kant*?"

"I'm running out of time for this message so I have to say good bye for now. I look forward to hearing from you, and I love you very much."

As the screen went blank, loneliness swept over AA. She dropped her head into her hands and



wept for the first time in days.

## Chapter 13

### Aubaine

Sean and AA were enjoying a picnic lunch together on a green grassy hillside overlooking their ranch and her new hospital. The sun was bright and warm. They were together, happy, and life was good.

He was just reaching out to touch her face when a loud buzzing sound woke him. The dream evaporated instantly. He rolled over, reached out and slapped a switch on the bulkhead communicator and grunted "yeah?"

"Time to get up, sir," the steward said over the intercom. "Breakfast in 15 minutes."

He opened his eyes to the sight of his cramped stateroom aboard *Clansman*. A deep sense of sadness, loneliness, and emptiness replaced the joy of his dream. AA was light years away, and even though they would land at Aubaine this day and he would finally be off the free trader, that did not bring joy to his heart.

He left his stateroom and went forward to *Clansman's* common room. This was a large open area forward of the individual passenger cabins. It was furnished with several tables and chairs with the ship's galley, the domain of the steward, hidden by a folding bulkhead off to one side. Because *Clansman* did not carry an air raft, what had been the air raft hanger had been modified into an extension of the common room. A large wide viewport dominated the forward end. Anyone standing next to the viewport could see the double-horned bow of the starship where the bridge and crew quarters were located.

Sergei was already waiting for Sean at a large central table. A star field with a bright yellow G class sun blazed in the center of the forward viewport. A bright bluish star stood off to one side. Sean and Sergei had been aboard for eight weeks, the time it took for *Clansman* to make five jumps and conduct business on nearly as many worlds as she sailed across Coalition space to Aubaine. Since Sergei had chartered the ship, they were the only two passengers aboard. However, port calls were made to refuel and to load life support stores and food. Nothing in the charter prohibited *Clansman's* captain from buying and selling cargo, so that business was taken care of while the ship was dirtside. This gave Sean a little time to see the sights on several strange worlds. He had visited the high islands of Spires and marveled at the habitats of Kruyter Belt, among many strange and wondrous sights he had seen on his voyage.

"Good morning, Sean. There's our destination," he said, pointing at the bluish star. "We should be landing on Aubaine in about 12 hours."

"I'm glad to hear that," Sean answered. "It'll

really feel good to have dirt under my feet again."

"You won't have too much dirt, here," Sergei responded. "More'n likely it'll be beach sand. If you think Fisher's World was full of water, wait until we land on Aubaine. Heck, the downport is mostly a lagoon surrounded by islands. You haven't met a Schalli yet, either. They'll introduce you to the water for sure.

"I don't know how much time you will have there, though. I'm supposed to turn you over to Sid Papagapoulos. I don't know what "Papa" has in mind for you. He might want to ship you out right away. Then again, that depends on what shipping is available to haul you to Nike Nimbus. You could be on Aubaine for weeks, even months. Hope you enjoy swimming."

"Just how much water is there?" Sean asked.

"Almost the entire planet is covered with water," Sergei replied. "There are a few islands here and there. The Trannis Archipelago is the largest collection of land on Aubaine. Trannis Island is the largest in that island chain, it's about 450 kilos long and 500 kilos wide, and is the home to most of humanity on the world. Trantown, the planetary capital and capital of the Coalition is located there. Brusman Atoll, down by the equator, is where we will be landing, though. That's where Aubaine's downport is located. In fact, we'll probably make a water landing and tie up to a pier on the lagoon side of the reef. That's how they handle most of the starships and shuttles that make planetfall here."

Breakfast came. More eggs and toast. The food aboard *Clansman* was becoming exquisitely dull. Sean was looking forward to fresh food, even though it would be mostly seafood and processed algae during the near future.

After breakfast, he returned to his stateroom and once again played the letter he received from AA when *Clansman* docked at Kruyter Belt nearly six weeks ago. As with every other time he viewed the letter, Sean's heart leaped when AA's face appeared on the communicator panel screen. By now, he had practically memorized the words and viewed the letter primarily to see her and hear her voice.

"My darling," her image said, "Thank you so much for your letter from Spires. I'm so glad to see that you and Dad are well. Seeing your face and hearing your voice means so much to me since we left each other's arms. I can't wait to feel your arms around me again, although I don't know when that will happen.

"We are about the leave for Spencer. It's been a hard four weeks but we've finished our refit work and it's time to test our systems and make sure *Kant* is ready for action. Captain Blaine is back aboard with us. The Board of Inquiry found that the results of the Fisher's World raid were beyond her control. In fact she received a commendation in her file for destroying the mercenary cruiser off Corrig. So, she is back in permanent command of

*Kant.*

"Gunny Rodriguez is walking again. He called me from the base hospital just yesterday and told me his spinal regeneration is complete. He told me that the physical therapists have dragged him out of his powered chair and are making him put one foot in front of the other. So far, he has not fallen down, he said. He also told me that he's requested reassignment to *Kant*, and barring any RCMC foul ups, he'll be coming back aboard when we return from Spencer.

"I miss you, my love, more than I can say. Thank Gaia I have all this work to do and that I fall to bed exhausted every night. It numbs the pain of your absence. I love you very much. Please tell Dad I love him, too. I'll send you another letter from Spencer addressed to you care of Aubaine's starport. Please send me another when you get to Aubaine. With luck, a courier will get it back to me at Oriflamme before we leave on our next mission. This is not official yet, but I hear we are heading into the Wilds to trailing. I'll also send you a letter before we leave Oriflamme. I should know more about where we are going and when we will be getting back by them.

"Until my next letter sweetheart, take care of yourself. Stay safe and be well. I love you and can't wait to be with you again."

Her image then faded as the letter ended.

Growing increasingly restless, Sean returned to the common room. Aubaine had grown visibly larger in the forward viewport. Sergei was still there.

"Hi Sean," he said. "I just spoke with RCES headquarters. Someone will meet us as soon as we land at Brusman Atoll and take us to Trantown. Depending when we get in, we'll see Papa either this evening or tomorrow morning."

"It sounds like we're important," Sean replied.

"More than you know, son, more than you know."

Just then the ship's Second Officer came in from the lift shaft to the cargo deck below.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "We expect to be landing in about six hours. If you'd like, you can remain here and view atmospheric entry and landing from the common room. Just make sure your seats are locked in a forward facing position and that you are securely strapped in.

"We'll pass the word when to secure, and a crew member will check to make sure you are strapped in."

"Thank you, sir. That'll be a lot nicer than being strapped in our bunks," Sergei responded.

"Weather reports from Brusman Atoll indicate that the winds aloft are fairly calm so we should have a smooth atmospheric entry and flight. We thought you'd like to take advantage of that and have a nice view.

"Well, I must get below and make sure the cargo containers are securely locked down."

"Thanks," said Sergei and Sean as the officer

entered the lift shaft.

"Sergei, have you been to Aubaine often? What's it like?" Sean asked, "I mean, besides being nearly all water."

"I've made a number of business trips here," Sergei said, "and they have always been a pleasure.

"It's probably the most pleasant world in the Coalition. Most of what little land exists is in the tropical or temperate zones. Because of Aubaine's low axial tilt, only 10 degrees, seasons don't vary much and the temperatures are fairly even. It never gets below 20 C in the day, and seldom above 25. The heat from stellar radiation is offset by nearly constant gentle breezes. Occasionally though, huge cyclonic storms develop and can cause massive damage. The low atolls are susceptible to flooding when these hit.

"Most homes and building are built with walls that can be opened so the winds can blow through. Air conditioning is seldom needed except in some sealed office buildings in Trantown, the capital. That's the only place where you have a lot of people crammed together. Most Aubaini live on scattered atolls and islets in the shallow equatorial seas. Many live in reef habitats that are submerged part of the time. They spend much of the time in the water and have developed close relationships with the Schalli communities. Still others, the Sea Gypsies, wander the world ocean on large community ships, fishing, hunting sea life, and trading.

"It's a relaxed world, compared with Oriflamme and several others in the Coalition. People are always friendly, and except for Trantown, they are not as wedded to clock and calendar as many Coalition inhabitants."

"It sounds like a great place. I wonder if I'll be able to go sailing," Sean said.

"Of course you will, assuming you have time. Almost everyone has his or her personal water craft. I have some friends down there who might be able to take us out to a reef habitat. Maybe we'll meet some Schalli in their native environment."

"Have you met Schalli? What are they like?" Sean asked.

"Yes I have, several times. Are you familiar with Terran dolphins?" Sergei replied.

"Yes, we have a colony in the tropics on Fisher's World."

"OK. If you don't take this analogy too far, Schalli are like dolphins with arms and a bigger brain. Except for the Hivers, who are more visitors or ambassadors from their own sphere of space than residents, the Schalli are the only other sentient race in the Coalition besides humans. Most are extremely intelligent by human standards, particularly in mathematics. They've learned construction techniques from us humans, applied them to their water environment, and improved them to beyond anything we've been able to come up with. Also, because they are such great mathematicians and have observed the stars from

their world for millennia, they have become great navigators.

"Once humans realized they were sentient beings late in the Last Imperium, we helped the Schalli deal with dry land and taught them our ways. They are now full members of Aubani society. Aubaine in reality is run by two races, humaniti and Schalli."

"How do the Schalli get around on dry land?" Sean asked.

"We helped them with a couple of inventions," Sergei answered. "There are a few grav platforms available that have been adapted to carry Schalli. More common are Schalli roller chairs. These are essentially a vertical tank half filled with sea water that has been mounted on wheels. They are powered and self-propelled and can take Schalli anywhere they want to go that has ramps or elevators for access. The Schalli can only take this for about six hours. After that they need to return to free water to exercise and feed for an hour or so."

"They've returned the favor," he continued, by becoming some of the best astrogators and computer scientists in Coalition service. The Schalli are also a major food provider to the human community on Aubaine. They cultivate algae and seafood farms, and trade these to the humans for metals and other goods. It's a rather unique economic symbiosis."

"Sounds like it must be," Sean agreed. "I hope I get to meet a Schalli."

"Oh, I'm sure you will, either in Trantown or if we can get out to the reefs."

Aubaine continued to grow in the viewport as the two were talking. By the time the steward interrupted them for lunch, it was nearly time to enter atmosphere. They got a spectacular view of the wheel-shaped Big Top station, the RCES base in orbit around Aubaine, as *Clansman* swung by on the beginning of her approach to the Brusman Atoll starport. Some twenty minutes later, as the merchant ship began slicing through the upper reaches of Aubaine's atmosphere, a thin keening whistle made itself heard throughout the ship. *Clansman* was oriented so that her bottom surface was facing the direction of travel and her heat shielding would take the brunt of the atmospheric friction. A bright orange glow built up around the ship as hot plasma formed from the friction. If the gravitic compensators failed at that point, every one aboard would have been smashed into their chairs with at least six gravities deceleration. As it was, they felt heavier as the deceleration exceeded six gees during the peak of reentry.

Soon the plasma faded as they slowed to flying speed. Sean saw through the viewport that they were dropping toward a vast blue ocean with no land in sight. As *Clansman* descended, Sean could see wave patterns. Soon he could see flecks of white foam on the wind-driven blue-black sea. Just as he began wondering if they were going to

crash into the sea, he saw waves breaking against a low gold and green island. Moments later other islands appeared, arranged in a huge ellipse curving from west to east toward the horizon. A large calm lagoon lay in the center of the atoll. As the starship flew eastward over the lagoon, Sean noticed houses and larger buildings on the islands. One of the largest islands in the atoll had landing pads holding small craft, and starships were lying on the water, moored fast to piers extending into the lagoon.

*Clansman* circled to lose altitude and then approached the atoll from the east. As she slowed, aerodynamic lift was lost, and contragrav took over. As her velocity neared zero, *Clansman* splashed onto the lagoon, her hot hull flashing sea water into a huge cloud of steam around her. She floated gently on the water. After several minutes time, enough for her hull to cool, a pair of small tugboats approached her and began nudging her toward a vacant pier. The tugs both placed her next to the pier on her port side, and gently pushed her double forked bow up on the sloping paved beach. Ships crew and dock hands made fast lines to the pier and ran a gangway from the pier to the port side airlock. The ship's bow door opened and a ramp dropped to the beach. Automated cargo haulers began unloading containers from the ship's hold.

A half hour later, Sergei and Sean had finished packing their bags and bade Captain Glencannon and his family thanks for a safe and comfortable voyage. They left the ship through the port airlock and crossed the gangway to the pier. They met a small ground car at the pier head which took them and their luggage to the port terminal building. It was typical of many of the buildings on the atoll, built low to the ground with large open windows, and painted white or light pastel colors. Although the sun was warm, a constant cool breeze made the day comfortable.

Sean and Sergei entered the building and headed for the Port Captain's office. The two walked up to receptionist's counter outside the office and identified themselves.

"Do you have any mail for me," Sean asked.

"Let me check," the rather attractive red-haired young lady behind the counter replied. She looked through a tray of data chips and picked up a labeled chip holder.

"Mr. Andropov you have mail," she said as she handed the holder and its chip to Sergei. "You can use a public comm over there. I'm sorry, Mr. McKinney, I don't see anything here for you."

"Can you look again?" Sean asked anxiously.

The clerk carefully looked through the chip tray one more time.

"No, sorry sir, nothing. Maybe it'll come in on a later ship."

Sean slumped crestfallen against the wall while Sergei used the comm to read his mail. Sergei then placed a brief call. Sean didn't pay any attention. He was miserable. He just knew a letter from AA

would be waiting; and for it not to be there...

Shortly, a man wearing a black RCES body suit approached them.

"Hi, I'm Bernie Kowalski from the RCES port liaison office. You have an appointment with Sid Papagapoulos in Trantown. I've been assigned to make sure you get there. Come with me."

Sean and Sergei picked up their luggage and followed Kowalski. The trio walked out of the port captain's office, through the terminal building, and outside to a dull-metal object about the size of a small car resting on the parking lot pavement among an assortment of ground cars. It looked like an open-topped car but without wheels.

"What's that?" Sean asked as they approached.

"It's my air raft," Kowalski replied. "Get in and fasten your seat belts."

The three seated themselves, closed the doors and strapped in. The car lifted silently several feet off the ground, then jet thrusters lit off with a dull roar and propelled them forward. The air raft continued climbing, passing over the port buildings and out over the lagoon. Soon they were approaching an island with a number of buildings and what appeared to be aircraft and spacecraft. They landed next to a winged craft similar to the shuttle Sean had ridden down to Oriflamme, but smaller. Sean and Sergei entered the main cabin, stowed their luggage and strapped down in soft leather seats.

"They are really eager to see us in a hurry," Sergei said. "Papa sent 'Hammer' Lathrop's personal pinnacle to meet us."

"Who's he?" asked Sean.

"Only the head of RCES," Sergei replied.

Kowalski went forward to the flight deck after Sean and Sergei were secure. The pinnacle lifted off its pad, swiveled toward the northeast on her attitude jets, and lit off her HEPlaRs. She pitched up into a ballistic arc that carried her above the atmosphere for a brief period, then sent her in a fiery plunge toward Trantown.

Minutes later, the spacecraft was on a gliding approach to Trantown spaceport. Sean marveled at the city's dense collection of towers lining the waterfront between the island's volcanic interior and the sea. The pinnacle circled, bleeding off altitude and speed before she turned left on her final approach leg to the spaceport. Rather than landing on a commercial pad, the spacecraft settled into a fenced-off government compound in a far corner of the field. Sean could see two men waiting for them, one weathered and balding, the other younger but standing with a bent posture and leaning on a cane. Sergei could barely wait for the boarding ladder to deploy. He ran from the hatchway straight toward the men.

"Hammer! Papa! Great to see you again! "

The three hugged like long-lost brothers. Sergei turned to Sean and motioned him toward him.

"Come here, Sean, I have someone very special

I want you to meet."

## Chapter 14

### Missions

Sean sat across from Hammer Lathrop at the RCES commander's desk. Sergei sat next to Sean and Sid "Papa" Papagapoulos sat to one side in Lathrop's rather Spartan office. They had gathered there after the two RCES officials met Sean and Sergei at the Trantown spaceport.

Sean had waited in the office's anteroom in the RCES headquarters building while Sergei met privately with Hammer and Papa for what seemed an hour. Sean was surprised at the apparent easy familiarity between Sergei and the RCES leaders. They seemed to have known each other for a long time. He wondered just how many of Sergei's business trips to Aubaine involved visits to RCES headquarters, and why.

Now he was face-to-face with Hammer and was receiving the full force of Hammer's charm and personality.

"We have job for you, Sean, that's both important to the Coalition and I think will be important for you too," Hammer said. "If you succeed with this assignment, the Coalition will have a strong ally and forward base to coreward, and you'll be back home with your family."

"I realize how important the Coalition is, Sir, and I want to help," Sean replied. "But I'm just one person, a student from a primitive world, here just by accident. What can I do?"

"Son, your world lies in a region of space critical to the Coalition," Hammer answered. "We're just reaching out to that region, and we're finding things that scare us. First, there's the Guild. Guild members call themselves "merchants," but all they're interested in is stirring up chaos so they can sell their weapons and extend their power over the isolated worlds out there. Second, there are other governments in and beyond that region that would like nothing better than to attack and wipe out the Coalition. The Empire of Solee' is probably the most dangerous of these.

"We don't know very much about what is happening out there. We need bases and outposts so we can keep track of the Guild and other forces, and mount operations to stop them before they can damage us.

"Now it's very rare that we find a native of these worlds that understands what we're trying to do and who is willing to help us," Hammer continued. "You seem to be one of these.

"We tried to overthrow the Emperor of Arcola so we could install a friendly government and eventually expand our influence across Fisher's World. We'd hoped to gain an ally and a friendly base of operations. We failed. We're going to try it again in the not too distant future, and this is where you come in," Hammer explained.

"How?" Sean asked.

"You know Arcola better than we do, better than any friendly source we have," Hammer answered.

"We need you to go back to Arcola and find out the mood of the population and how much support the Emperor has from his people. We also need you to be the native guide for what we call a Moonshadow team, spies on the ground who will target and keep track of the whereabouts of the Emperor, key members of his government, and his Guild advisors. With your help, we'll be able to quickly land our forces, then cleanly decapitate and take over Arcola's government."

Sergei looked uncomfortable. "You know, Sean. This is very dangerous work. There are plenty of other jobs you could do for the Coalition. On the other hand, if this mission succeeds, the Coalition will be a safer, less fragile place. It'll have a better chance of surviving, growing, and reestablishing a decent interstellar civilization."

Hammer Lathrop looked over at Papa Papagapolous. "Papa, this whole thing is your brainstorm. Tell the kid what we're going to do to cover him."

"Sure, boss. First of all, Sean, you won't be dumped in cold. We're gonna train you. You'll receive an abbreviated Marine Corps basic training course. We'll toughen you up and train you in unarmed, blade, and primitive weapons combat. I hear you're pretty good with a bow. We'll make you better. Then you'll go to Moonshadow school where you'll learn surveillance, communications, fieldcraft, and other spying and sabotage skills. After that, you'll be assigned to a Moonshadow team on a short training mission to another primitive world. Then, assuming the team leader clears you for the field, you'll be heading home."

Home, Sean thought, and a chance to do some good. The only thing missing from the picture was AA.

Papa paused, waiting for some reaction from Sean. The younger man merely blinked and Papa continued.

"Second, you won't be going in alone. You'll be part of the best Moonshadow team we can assemble, all experienced senior mission operators. You will also have backup support in orbit. At Captain Blaine's request, we've specifically tasked *Immanuel Kant* for this job. You'll have a lot of old friends looking out for you."

The *Kant*! That meant AA! Sean nearly leaped out of his chair with joy.

"How soon do I leave?" Sean asked. "I'm ready."

"Soon," Hammer replied. "We don't know exactly when we will be shipping out the next batch of recruits. That depends on available starships. It could be as soon as two days, as long as a month."

"But first, you have to take the oath. There will be a swearing-in ceremony tomorrow at the Coalition Assembly Hall. Be there at 0900."

"Yessir!"

"That's 'aye aye, sir.' Don't worry son, we'll teach you the difference. Meanwhile, we've arranged for some quarters for you and Sergei. After you're sworn in you'll be on your own with some free time. As soon as we know when we'll have a ship for Nike Nimbus, we'll let you know when and where to report."

"Well, it's been a long day and Papa and I still have things to discuss. So if you'll excuse us, Suzanne, my aide, will show you to your quarters."

"Thank you sir," Sean said, "for your help."

"Don't thank me yet, son. You haven't been through boot camp," Hammer replied. He pressed a touch pad on his desk console. An attractive blonde entered from the anteroom.

"This is Suzanne Montreaux. She'll take you where you need to go."

Sean and Sergei followed Suzanne out the door and through the anteroom. Normally, Sean would have found Suzanne interesting, but as usual he had AA on his mind.

The three rode an elevator down to the lower floors of the headquarters building. When they got off they found themselves in what appeared to be the lobby of a rather Spartan though comfortable hotel.

"Welcome to RCES Guest Quarters," the clerk behind a counter said. He handed each of them a card key.

"You have rooms 16 and 17 as long as you need them, complements of Commodore Lathrop."

The two went to their rooms and settled in for the night.

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Suzanne Montreaux called for Sean and Sergei shortly after breakfast the next morning. She escorted them out through the building lobby to a ground car on the street. After she punched some coordinates into the ground car autopilot, the car started out along the street and then sped along a series of elevated guideways leading to the ocean shore northeast of Trantown proper. Suzanne exchanged small talk with the two men while the car drove itself northeastward. After about 15 minutes, she pointed ahead to a large vaulted building standing behind a plaza along the shore. A wide, arcing entrance faced south toward the plaza while the building's north wall faced the sea.

"That's the Coalition Assembly Hall," she said. "That's where the Assembly decides Reformation Coalition policy, where the Secretary General has his main office, and where all recruits into Coalition service are sworn in, among many other ceremonies. Sean, you'll be one of about a dozen people being sworn in this morning."

As the car drew closer to the massive structure, Sean noticed a group of people gathering on the entrance steps. He saw a podium set up facing the steps and noticed Hammer Lathrop talking with a number of individuals near the podium.

"They're your classmates," Sergei said as the car pulled up. "Go over and join them. I'll join the spectators."

Sean walked over to the group somewhat anxiously. There were almost an equal number of men and women in civilian dress, a few wore the loose flowing skirts Sean had noticed on some people at Brusman Atoll. The remainder wore more conventional business clothes or coveralls. He noticed the southern islanders shivering in the northerly breeze. Almost all were human, but there was one Schalli in a powered roller chair. Few of his classmates were speaking. All seemed absorbed with their own thoughts.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let's get started this morning," said Hammer Lathrop from behind the podium. "Sergeant, line 'em up."

A squat, stocky Marine sergeant emerged from the group of friends, parents, and other onlookers that had gathered near the recruits.

"Aye, aye, sir," he replied as he saluted.

The sergeant had a voice from the bottom of a gravel pit. "Ok, people. Form up in two rows facing the Commodore."

The recruits shuffled into some semblance of a formation.

"Raise your right hands and repeat after me," Lathrop ordered. All except the Schalli raised their right hands. It raised a tentacle from inside the roller chair tank.

"I, state your name, solemnly swear or affirm to defend the Charter of the Reformation Coalition, to uphold the Reformation Coalition against all enemies both foreign and domestic, and to obey the orders of the Secretary General and the officers appointed over me. So help me God."

"So help me God," Sean concluded.

Commodore Lathrop came down from the podium and shook hands with each of the new recruits.

"Welcome aboard, son. I know you'll be an asset to the Coalition," Lathrop said as he shook Sean's hand.

It was time to go. Sergei came up to Sean as friends and relatives left their seats and mingled with the recruits.

"Congratulations, Sean. I'm damned proud of you. Now let's get back to town and see if we can have a little fun before you have to ship out."

Montreaux drove the two back to town for lunch. She dropped them off at one of Trantown's finer hotels before she drove back to RCES headquarters. After their meal, Sean and Sergei went shopping for some of the lighter, colorful clothes in fashion on Aubaine. They also bought some swimming gear, including a set of facemask and flippers for each. Late that afternoon they took a wet boat out to the Schalli city built into the reef off Trantown. They were able to swim along the surface and look down onto the city where they saw the aquatic residents going about their business swimming into and out of the cave-like dwellings built into the coralloid reef. There were shops near

the surface designed to accommodate visiting humans. After a gulp of air and a shallow dive, Sean and Sergei entered the shop through an underwater doorway and popped up in a pool in the middle of the shop. A ledge surrounding the central pool gave the humans a place to get out of the water.

Sean gasped when he looked around him. All along the walls and extending up into the domed ceiling, glowing paintings radiated a myriad of colors as they depicted underwater scenes. Some showed Schalli hunting, others exotic forms of underwater life, still others showed seascapes and Schalli cities.

"These are painted with bioluminescent pigments, Sergei explained. "Some glow more brightly than others, giving a variation in shade. Some do not appear to glow at all, but they really do in both infrared and ultraviolet. You should see these while wearing a wide spectrum image viewer. Then they're really spectacular."

"Can we buy some paintings here?" Sean asked.

"Sean, this is the Schalli equivalent of a tourist trap. As pretty as these are, they are at best mediocre, overpriced work. We may have a chance to travel out to one of the major Schalli reef cities. Let's wait until we do that before we buy some Schalli art. I know some legitimate dealers not too far from here. One of them sold me art for my office back home on Oriiflamme. We'll be able to get a good deal from her."

"OK, I guess I can wait."

With that, the two friends dove into the water and went back to the surface. By then it was dark and two of Aubaine's three moons had risen. Sean was fascinated by the myriads of stars visible both in the heavens and as reflections off the water. Floating in the warm sea, he felt as though he was suspended in heaven surrounded by stars. Sergei interrupted his reverie in time for them to catch the boat back to the Trantown docks.

Sergei and Sean returned to their quarters after a quick seafood dinner on the waterfront. The desk clerk hailed them as they stepped off the elevator.

"Mr. McKinney, you have mail," he said, holding up a chip. "This was forwarded to you from Brusman Atoll starport. And Mr. Andropov, I have one for you, too."

Sean eagerly reached for the data chip. He hastily bid Sergei good night and rushed to his room. Sergei grinned; he knew what was on that chip.

Sean slipped the data chip into his room's communicator panel. In a moment, AA's face appeared on the communicator screen.

"Dearest, I must send this letter in a hurry. *Kant* is about to leave Oriiflamme so I must be brief. First of all, I love you and miss you terribly. I'm well and Gunny is too. He is fully recovered and he is on board with me. I can't tell you too much about where we're going for security reasons,

but if all goes well we should be back at Oriflamme in about six to eight weeks. Thank you for your letters from Spires and Kruyter Belt, they were waiting for me when we returned from Spencer.

"We finished our yard maintenance and jumped for Spencer on schedule. I'm sorry I wasn't able to send you a letter when we arrived but there was simply no shipping available to carry a message from Spencer. I wound up working in a field hospital on Spencer. Officially, the Oriflamme government says the occupation forces and the cities they occupy are troubled only by minor bandit raids. But, judging by the number and the severity of wounded I saw in that hospital, there are more people fighting on that planet than bandits. Ever hear of a bandit armed with a plasma rifle? I haven't.

"We were in orbit around Spencer four weeks giving orbital fire support, air support from our fighters, communications support, and medical assistance to the Oriflamme Marines fighting dirtside. Some shakedown cruise. Somebody isn't being straight with us. Anyway, after some hard fighting, the Marines recaptured key terrain controlling approaches to Spencer's main starport and we were able to leave.

"We're heading to trailing now. I can't be more specific than that. There's a colony world out there that hasn't been heard from for quite some time, and we're going out there to check on them. As I said before, we should be back in about six to eight weeks. Send me your latest news, and tell me you're all right. Send it to me care of the Coalition base on Oriflamme; I should get it as soon as I get back.

"By the time you get this, you should be on Aubaine; and perhaps on your way to boot camp? Tell me where you are, my love, and I'll do my best at this end to get us back together again. I love you very, very much and I can't wait to hold you again."

She kissed the visual pickup and her image faded.

Sean slipped a blank memory chip into the communicator and dictated a return letter to AA. He confirmed that he and her father were on Aubaine and all right.

"My darling, I was just sworn into Coalition service today. It could be tomorrow, it could be next month, but I'll soon be leaving here for boot camp on Nike Nimbus. I'll send you a letter once a week as long as I am on Aubaine. If all of a sudden you don't get any letters from me, don't worry, you'll know I'm on my way to boot camp."

He described his experiences upon arriving on Aubaine and how much he enjoyed this world. He once again declared his love for her as he wrapped up his letter.

"My darling, I now realize you are the center of my life and that I'm a whole person when we are together. I hope that, when this is all over and we see each other again, we can spend the rest of our

lives together. Farewell, my love. The stars can't keep us apart."

## Chapter 15

### Boot Camp

The rain drummed on the canvas tent as Sean awoke in the middle of the night. He shivered on a thin hard cot under an even thinner blanket. He heard the snores of his squad mates as he rolled on to his back. A chill wind whistled through the tent. Although a hydrogen stove tried its best to keep up with the cold, Sean was too far from it to do him any good. This is what he got for volunteering, he thought. Instead of a long stay on Aubaine, he wound up with a couple of nights in the Marine Corps Recruit Receiving Station at Camp Brierly on Tranis Island's north coast, then a long voyage in the cramped hold of a *Victrix*-class sloop converted into a troop transport. Then, about four hours ago, they were loaded from the *Kelly Victrix* on to shuttles that landed them at Camp Zama.

They were then marched through the mud on one of Nike Nimbus's colder plateaus about local midnight and bedded down in cold and drafty tents. Being cold, wet, and in the dark about summed up his experience in the RCMC. That and having his head shaved, his body stuffed into ill fitting green coveralls, and a space bag full of clothing and gear issued to him at Camp Brierly. He had to admit, though, both Hammer Lathrop and Papa Papagalous had convincing arguments about why he should continue working for the Coalition. And now he was in its service up to his neck, with no turning back.

After some time, he drifted back into a fitful sleep, only to have that shattered by the blast of a whistle, a flood of bright light, and the bullfrog roar of a large gentleman in a camouflage RCMC body sleeve.

"Out of your racks and hit the deck! Move it, people, MOVE IT!!"

Sean's most recent antagonist walked bristly down the row of cots. Sean noticed he was carrying a wooden stick about a half meter long and was using it to whack the lower halves of recruits that did not move fast enough for his satisfaction. Since Sean was near the end of the row, his feet were able to hit the wooden duck boards that formed the tent's floor before the sergeant could reach him.

Sean and his fellow recruits tried to pull themselves into some resemblance of attention as taught by their escort NCO on the troop transport. He had also learned enough about RC uniforms while aboard *Kant* to know that the man wore Staff Sergeant stripes. The sergeant was followed by two Marines wearing corporal's stripes. All three wore curious broad-brimmed forest green hats low over their eyes. All had eyes as cold as stone and faces to match.

"Formation in five minutes! Fall in on the company street in four minutes! Move, move, MOVE!" the sergeant yelled. The recruits dove for their space bags, furiously yanking out fresh skivvies and fatigue pants and shirts as the drill instructors "encouraged" the slower ones with their swagger sticks. Sean was in the middle of the pack when the squad raced from the tent and formed up in the rain and mud outside. A glow tube on a pole provided the only light in the otherwise still black early morning. Two recruits trailed the rest of the squad into the street.

"YOU AND YOU!" the drill instructor screamed, pointing at them with his swagger stick. "HIT THE DECK AND GIVE ME TWENTY!"

The stragglers dropped belly first in the mud and started doing pushups the way they were trained during the voyage from Aubaine. Someone in the rear rank snickered.

"AW RIGHT, WHICH ONE OF YOU MAGGOTS DID THAT?"

No one answered.

"NOBODY? OK MAGGOTS! INTO THE DIRT WHERE YOU BELONG! HIT THE DECK AND GIVE ME TWENTY-FIVE!"

Sean dropped into the cold, clammy mud and started his pushups along with his squad mates. He felt like his arms were going to fall off when he reached twenty and lay gasping in the mud when he finished the twenty-five.

"ON YOUR FEET MAGGOTS!"

Sean gasped with pain when the DI's boot smashed into his ribs. Somehow, he staggered to his feet. Nothing was broken. The Sergeant had administered just enough force to get the desired effect without doing permanent damage. Eliot, a recruit from the Aubaini Sea People, lashed out at one of the assistant DIs, only to find himself sailing through the air at the business end of a shoulder throw. He screamed in pain when he tried to get up; the impact had broken his collar bone. The assistant DI muttered something in her communicator and within minutes a medical corpsman was helping him to the hospital tent.

"SEE THAT PEOPLE? THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TRY TO TAKE US ON! AT LEAST HE HAD THE GUTS TO TRY! ANY YOU OTHER MAGGOTS WANT TO TAKE A SWING?"

Every man and women in the squad stood stone silent.

"OK, since you maggots have SO MUCH ENERGY, let's burn some up! RIGHT FACE! FO'WARD, H'ARCH!"

The squad started marching down the company street, some sliding in the mud.

"DOUBLE TIME, H'ARCH!"

The squad broke into a trot. The DIs led them out onto a muddy, grassy plain just becoming visible in Nike Nimbus's ruddy first light. They joined other squads on their first morning run, circling the camp twice on a five-kilometer circuit.

Sean was fortunate, having grown up on a world with a substantially higher gravity than that of Nike Nimbus. He was able to keep up the pace easily during the first five kilometers, only feeling winded on the second time around the camp. Others were not so lucky. Be it lack of endurance caused by a low gravity home world or some other reasons, they began falling by the wayside.

Just ahead of him, a young woman slipped, fell, and didn't get up. Sean had to jump to avoid stepping on her.

"HOLD IT!" the DI roared. Sean froze.

"No marine ever abandons another marine! Not even maggots like you! McKinney! Kohlmeyer! Pick up Ngyuen and haul her along!"

Sean and Kohlmeyer each threw one of the woman's arms over their shoulders and lifted her from the mud.

"MOVE IT! DOUBLE TIME!" the increasingly familiar voice bellowed.

Sean and Kohlmeyer hauled her along at a trot. By the time they finished the second circuit and were back in the company street, they were all staggering and gasping. All of them except for the DIs. There was still not a hair out of place. They weren't even breathing hard. Again, the DIs assembled them into formation.

"We have been SO BUSY people that I haven't had the time to introduce myself. I am Staff Sergeant Fionda. I will be your senior drill instructor for the next 12 weeks. I will be your father, your mother, your coach, and your worst nightmare. You will rue the day we met. I will be firm, but fair. If one of you screws up, you all screw up, and you will suffer the consequences accordingly. By the time you leave here, you will either be dead, discharged, or part of a lean, mean, killing machine. You are no longer individuals. Right now you are maggots, one of the lowest, most loathsome forms of life in the galaxy. As of right now, you are part of a team. You will learn to march as a team, live as a team, fight as a team, and kill as a team. Maybe, with any luck, some of you may become Marines. I doubt it though, you're a pretty sorry bunch. Gaia, I can't stand this anymore. Corporal Chun, take over. Get these maggots cleaned up and off to chow."

With that, the senior DI did an about face and stomped off in disgust. Sean couldn't tell if it was real or feigned.

"Hit the showers, make your bunks, and fall in for chow in 30 minutes!" one of the assistant drill instructors roared. "Dismissed!"

The squad did a collective about face and raced for its tent. The recruits rapidly stripped off their fatigues and ran for the open air showers outside the rear of the tent. Once they were clean, they quickly dressed, made up their bunks and faced their first of many inspections. By then, Fionda was back in the tent. Cursing and roaring, he screamed at almost every recruit for the most minor infraction. By the time he was finished, the



squad's collective pushup count had reached into the hundreds.

Sean didn't escape, he contributed 25 for an alleged crooked "gig line," the vertical line formed by his shirt buttons and the fly of his trousers. Bunks, including Sean's were ripped up in a rage and remade two or three times before Fionda was satisfied.

After more than a hour, they were back in formation and finally marching toward the mess tent. Breakfast consisted of huge quantities of eggs, bacon, toast, pancakes, milk, and juice. The recruits were allowed 15 minutes to collect their food from the chow line and eat it. That quarter hour was mercifully free of "motivation" from the DIs. Meal times and class times were the only times that were relatively quiet, Sean was to learn.

Sean sat next to Kohlmeyer during breakfast. "Thanks for helping with Ngyuen," he said.

"Ja, dat's OK," the big recruit replied. He was two meters tall and must have weighed nearly 120 kilos.

"I'm Sean McKinney," he said. "What's your name? Where're you from?"

"My name is Klause. I'm from Oriflamme, the Holenthal district on Nordland."

"Good to meet you, Klause. Why'd you join the Marines?"

"Haff you been to Oriflamme?"

"Yes."

"Zen you vill know. And you?"

"I had no choice. It was either die in the Wilds or join the RC."

Before Sean had a chance to tell Klause any more, a whistle blew and they were marched out of the mess tent.

When breakfast was over, they formed up again and were marched to a large open area in the center of the camp. This was the notorious Grinder where they marched and drilled for hours on end. Learning to march and move as a team along with seemingly unending calisthenics and learning how to care for their uniforms and equipment occupied most of the first four weeks in boot camp.

Kohlmeyer, who looked like he was built like a young park's beast bull, took it all in stride.

"Ja, sure, this is no tougher than farming on Oriflamme," he told Sean at the end of the first day. Sean, on the other hand, was totally winded. He felt numb from exhaustion throughout most of the day. He had to be very careful to not fall asleep during lectures. More than once Klaus's nudge was all that kept him from the direct blast of Fionda's rath.

Every day, Sean hoped that sunset would bring relief and quiet time would come after evening chow. No such luck. The evening was devoted to yet another inspection of their space bags and their contents. The tent had to be swabbed out and the latrines cleaned. The squad was finally allowed to fall into bed exhausted, only to begin repeating the day four hours later. The

DIs looked as if they hadn't even breathed hard and their body sleeves and boots were always spotless. At least one of them would live close by in a hut adjacent to the squad tent. Except for Kohlmeyer, the recruits, on the other hand, looked and felt like they'd been overrun by a heard of charging parks' beasts. They all wore unmarked plain green shirts, trousers, and field caps. They learned they would only receive their body suits after completing their first eight weeks of training.

The DIs soon took notice of Kohlmeyer's quiet strength and stamina.

"You're sure a candidate for heavy combat armor school," Fionda told him, "if you make it through training. For sure when you get into the Fleet, someone's going to make sure you carry the light assault gun."

Fionda appointed the big Oriflammen the recruits' first squad leader.

The recruits soon received something most of them had been looking forward to -- their rifles.

During their third morning in camp, right after morning chow, Staff Sergeant Fionda marched the squad over to a large supply shed at the edge of the camp. They lined up and one by one were handed a rifle with a chunky, squared off stock and foregrip. Sean recognized the rifle as a weapon from the tutoring Tiny had given him aboard *Immanuel Kant*. He vaguely knew how to fire it and which end the bullet came out of. But he couldn't recognize all the gadgets and knobs that protruded from the weapon. He was surprised how short it was, the magazine opening was located BEHIND the pistol grip and trigger.

Fionda lined up the squad outside the tent after they drew their weapons.

"OK people, say hello to your Advanced Combat Rifles!"

The recruits stood dumbfounded.

"I said, SAY HELLO TO YOUR ADVANCED COMBAT RIFLES!"

"Hello Advanced Combat Rifles."

"LOUDER! I CANNOT HERE YOU!"

"HELLO ADVANCED COMBAT RIFLES!"

"From now on these will be your constant companions. They will be your sisters, your brothers, your mothers, your lovers. You will learn to march with them, sleep with them, eat with them, and fight with them.

"You will keep your rifle clean at all times. You will keep your rifle well oiled at all times. Remember, without you, your rifle is nothing. Without your rifle, you are nothing. Take good care of it and it will take good care of you. Gaia help you if I ever find any rust in your rifle. I will now demonstrate the manual of arms."

Fionda took a rifle from one of his assistants.

"Right shoulder, HARMS!"

He popped the butt on the ground and placed the rifle on his right shoulder.

"Left shoulder, HARMS!"

He transferred the rifle to his left shoulder.

"Port, HARMS!"

He move the rifle to his front holding it at a 45 degree angle.

"Present, HARMS!"

He held the rifle stiffly in the vertical position in front of his body, barrel up.

"Order, HARMS!"

He returned the rifle butt to the ground along his right leg, holding the tip of the barrel lightly with his finger tips. After a second, he tossed the rifle back to his assistant.

"Now you maggots try it. Right shoulder, HARMS!"

The recruits stumbled through a semblance of the maneuver. Eliot lost his grip and dropped his rifle.

Fionda hit him with an open handed slap, hard enough to send him reeling to the ground.

"DON'T YOU EVER DROP YOUR RIFLE IN MY CORPS!" Fionda bellowed, "AND GOD HELP YOU IF YOU CALL IT A GUN," beginning a tirade of obscenities that lasted ten minutes.

"You have to love your rifle," he concluded. "And to help you do that, you'll sleep with your rifle for the next ten days."

That night, while most of the recruits secured their rifles to the head of their cots with a steel cable and lock, Eliot tried to sleep with his ACR cuddled in his arms.

During the next several weeks, most of the squad wound up sleeping with their weapons for not mastering the manual of arms to the DIs' satisfaction, or for not properly cleaning their ACRs. Sean had steel company during the night on two occasions. But from then on, no one ever dropped their rifle again.

Kohlmeyer proved to have a natural talent with weapons. He had an instinctive feel for the mechanics of the ACR. He was a good teacher, too. He patiently and carefully instructed the other recruits how to clean and maintain their rifles. He was a great help to Sean who had the barest understanding of mechanics.

Day after day and into the evening the recruits drilled, ran, and did pushups, sit-ups, and other exercises beyond count. Gradually, bodies became hardened. Sean gained weight putting muscle on his thin farm boy frame. Eventually he could march all day with less effort and run longer more easily.

People dropped out. Eliot didn't make it, the strain of discipline was too much. Ngyuen, the recruit Lopez and Sean helped during their first day didn't make it either. One day she collapsed on a ten kilometer run and didn't come back from the medics' tent. A heart defect the medics somehow missed flared up and nearly killed her.

As the weeks rolled by, although discipline remained high, each DI gradually became more of a teacher and less of a motivator. Sean found himself enjoying the drill and the teamwork. He

felt himself really become a part of a larger whole.

At the end of the first four weeks, training moved into a new phase. They moved from the drill field to the weapons ranges. On the first day of the fifth week, Fionda marched them out to the rifle range and gathered them into a semi-circle.

"Today, you will fire your rifle for the first time. This is a very sophisticated weapon. It has electronic sights that let you see your target in any weather, and if you can see it you can kill it. It has a laser sight you can use to paint a dot on your target, and your bullet will hit the dot. Your rifle holds twenty rounds. It can fire explosive bullets that can blow a nasty hole in your enemy and give you a practically guaranteed kill. It can fire discarding sabot rounds that have an armor piercing sub-caliber slug. These DS slugs travel a long way and punch holes in light armor. Perfect against people in most of the combat armor you will find in the wilds. This rifle can also launch grenades, great for knocking out bunkers and small vehicles.

"However, children, these are all very expensive; and I don't want you to blow up the landscape and each other. So, the armorers have made some modifications. First, you can fire single rounds only with each squeeze of the trigger. You'll learn to fire on full auto later. Second, you'll be using plain ol' vanilla ball ammo; nothing fancy since you'll just be punching holes in paper, I hope. Third, your fancy sights have been disabled. You can only use your unpowered optic sight. It gives you a little magnification, but not much, about three power. Once you can hit the target using your optic sight, you can hit it with anything. Besides, if your electronics give out, you'll still be able to fight."

He showed the recruits a picture of a ring and post sight with the post resting on the lower edge of the target's center.

"When you have this picture, squeeze your trigger, don't jerk it. The shot should come as a surprise. Aw right, let's try it. McKinney, you're first."

"Sir, yes sir!"

He threw Sean a loaded magazine. "Slip this in the breach until it clicks. It holds 20 rounds."

Sean did as he was told.

"Advance to the firing line."

Sean stood and moved to a shooting position facing targets lined up in front of an earthen berm.

"Assume the prone position."

Sean dropped to his belly. Fionda knelt down beside him.

"Lock and Load. Pull the charging handle on the barrel housing below the sights back toward you and let go."

Sean heard the weapon "click-clack" as a round was jacked into the firing chamber.

"OK, hold your breath and squeeze off a round.

Remember, take up the slack only when you have a good sight picture."

Sean looked through the sights at the target.

He could see the post rising to the center of the sight from the bottom of the sight's ring. The target's central black disc jumped wildly around. He held his breath and it seemed to steady a little. Each time the post centered on the target, he squeezed the trigger and pistol grip a little tighter. Once, twice....

"CRACK!" The rifle fired. A red flag waved across the target.

"Maggie's drawers," Fionda said. "You flinched and missed the whole thing. Try again. Let's get something into the paper."

Sean fired and fired again until the twenty rounds were spent. He was rewarded with a small disc placed over the target three times indicating the position of three hits.

"You'll do better next time kid. Learn to control your breathing and let the shot happen. Don't force it," Fionda said as he sent him back to the watching squad.

Kohlmeyer was on the firing line next. He popped every round into the 10-ring bullseye. "Ja, easier than shooting whikkas at home," he said. Fionda mentally put him down for sniper school.

Sean and the squad spent the next four weeks on the weapons ranges becoming proficient on the ACRs, learning to fire RAM grenades, throwing practice and then live hand grenades, learning how to use the bayonet, and receiving familiarization with squad support and energy weapons. They also became familiar with the obstacle course and hand to hand combat techniques, including an exercise with something called pugel sticks. A combat environment course using live ammunition, lasers, and explosives, gave them a taste of the real thing. By the eighth week of training, Sean and his squad mates were in better physical shape than they ever had been in their lives, and could kill a human six different ways. The term "Maggot" was heard less and less.

Sean had received weekly letters of encouragement from Sergei. He replied nearly as often, giving the older man progress reports on his training. Sean also sent letters to AA but had heard nothing back from her during most of his time in boot camp. However, halfway through the eighth week Sean and his mates stumbled exhausted into their tent following a late afternoon session on the combat course when "Mail Call" sounded. They eagerly fell out into the company street as the mail raft floated slowly along down the street and the names of lucky recipients were called.

"Sean McKinney!"

"Here sir," he replied. The mail sergeant tossed him a data crystal. It was Navy issue, not one of Sergei's civilian brand name crystals. AA, he thought. It must be from AA! He couldn't wait until mail call was complete and he could dig out his Marine issue crystal reader from his space bag.

Finally mail call was over and the squad rushed into their tent and dug out their readers.

He slipped the crystal into the reader, flipped

open the tiny screen, and punched "Read".

AA's sweet face appeared.

"My darling, thank you so very much for your letters. They finally caught up with me by courier from Oriflamme. We've been out on patrol for nearly 12 weeks now to trailing of the RC. By the time you get this, I may be back at Oriflamme. I'm glad to see you're surviving training well. You look so good, so hard and fit, you're no longer the boy I've first met; you're the kind of man I've been looking for.

"I'm sorry I haven't written before this. We've been kept very busy with drills and inspections while we're in jump space. We've been supporting a bootstrap mission trying to help a relatively enlightened and stellar-minded king from being overthrown by a despot with planet-wide ambitions. There's a team dirtside that needs our help. We even had to give some orbital fire support to the bootstrap team and the king's troops when this creep tried to invade the king's home island. We used our lasers against his ships. The wooden galleys that were hit didn't stand a chance. But there were so many of them both the bootstrap team's Marine security detachment and our ship's troops had to help with the counter attack and drive the invaders off the beaches.

"Gunny is OK, he helped lead the counter attack and came out unscratched. We lost two troopies, though, both hit by boulders thrown by catapults.

"Now that the situation is secure, we're heading further to trailing to check on the colony I mentioned in a earlier letter, then after a while, back to Oriflamme. That's where Mom is stationed as colony medical officer doing her research in xenopathology. It'll be good to see her again, it's been a long time.

"My love, I have to close for now, the courier will be leaving soon. Yes, I do want to spend the rest of my life with you, and can't wait until we're together again."

Sean nearly wept with joy. AA would be his forever! Now if they could only get back together.

The next day as he returned to his tent after the squad's morning run, Sean had a visitor, a man wearing a black RCES body sleeve.

"My name is Winter," he said. "I have orders for your transfer to Moonshadow training, effective immediately."

He flipped a data crystal into Sean's hand.

"You are to come with me."

His squad mates stood around looking confused.

"Vat's going on here?" demanded Klause.

"It look's like they want me in Moonshadow training a little early," Sean replied. "I wasn't supposed to go until after I graduated with you guys."

Sean popped the crystal into his reader and confirmed the order. Just then, Staff Sergeant Fionda entered the tent.

"Son, I've confirmed it's a valid order. Pack up your gear and move out. You've done a great job here. I'm sorry you're leaving us, you would have made a great Marine."

"It was great knowing you Sean. Take care yourself buddy. We will see you again, it's a small Corps," Klause said as he enveloped him in a bear hug.

"Thank's Klause, it's been great know you, too, and all the rest of you guys."

"Coming young man?" Winter said as he headed for the tent flap. "You're needed elsewhere."

## Chapter 16

### Moonshadow

The four trainees and Winter, their senior instructor, stood on a bluff overlooking the ruined city. All wore the black body suits of the Reformation Coalition Exploratory Service, and all wore oxygen masks to counteract the high local concentration of carbon dioxide.

The remains of the city were circular in shape, ringed by the remnants of a smashed dome. Its interior had disintegrated into charred rubble. The thick, gray-black clouds common to Nike Nimbus's lowlands scudded close overhead. Surf from the equatorial ocean crashed onto the beach beyond.

"In case any of you ever wondered why you're here," Winter said, "This is a very good example. This used to be a major city on this world only two generations ago. It used to be a business and trade center, and home to a million people. Then one day, a starship that had been taken over by a suicide strain of Virus, crashed into the city and exploded, destroying the dome and starting massive fires.

The people the crash and fire didn't kill, were mostly finished off by the cee oh two. A few managed to escape to the highlands and tried to start over again. A few of those succeeded. The others mostly starved.

"This is one of hundreds of cities and towns destroyed during the Collapse. Your job, all our jobs, is to make sure this never happens again. Take a good look, then close your eyes and you may hear the cries of the dead calling out to you to remember them. Do that."

Sean closed his eyes and listened to the keening wind blowing over the desolate landscape. He shivered, and not just because of the chill wind.

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THWACK! Sean's first arrow plunged dead center in the middle of the target some 50 meters away. He smiled slightly with satisfaction.

"Think that's pretty good, eh?" said Armin Khan, the short, bronze-skinned RCES archery instructor standing next to him.

"Yes Mister Khan, I do indeed," Sean replied.

Khan grinned.

"Wait here," he said, turning to mount a short, shaggy-haired pony. He trotted away about 100 meters perpendicular to the target range, turned his mount and came galloping back. About 50 meters from where Sean was standing, Khan leaned forward around his pony's neck while maintaining his mount with a firm grip of his knees and let fly with an arrow as he thundered past Sean.

SPANG! THWACK!

Khan's arrow also hit dead center, splitting Sean's arrow in two.

"That's archery kid, at least the way we do it back home."

Sean stood, his mouth gaping in awe.

Khan was also from the Wilds, from Tequila, a planet with broad open plains with plenty of room for grazing herds. He was descended from the nomadic herdsmen of Earth's central Asia as were many of the peoples of his home world.

"My dad taught me that trick when I was about eight standard years. I could ride my first pony when I was two.

"Don't get me wrong, I think you're a pretty good archer and I think my training has helped make you better. Learning how to control your breathing while firing has really helped your accuracy. But you still need to get the maximum range and power from your bow while keeping your accuracy."

"I appreciate what you're saying Mister Khan. But it's tough with a bow that has such a heavy pull."

Sean received his RCES body sleeve and a new bow and arrows shortly after arriving at the Moonshadow training camp. The new bow looked like the one he had left behind on Fisher's World, but when he tried it for the first time he learned it had half again as much force and range as the one made by Uncle Nathan. The arrows were fitted with broad, razor-sharp, stainless steel arrowheads, much lighter than the iron arrowheads he had back home.

"That's because it has a flex steel core," Khan explained. "I have something that may help beat that problem."

Khan dismounted and reached into a backpack on the ground. He pulled out a long arm guard made of what looked like leather, and a glove with what appeared to be extra leather on the inner side of the index and second fingers.

"Try these on and take another shot. Try hitting the 100 meter target down the range."

Sean found he could draw back farther than before without the bow string biting into his fingers the way it did when he only wore a leather finger tab. He adjusted the elevation angle of the bow and arrow to allow for the increased range and released.

SPANG! The bowstring smacked into his arm guard. He hardly felt it through the new material. The arrow arced through the sky for a second

before plunging into the target; not dead center but close.

"Not bad, said Khan. Now try a shot into the 50 meter target with the same power."

SPANG! THWACK! The arrow drove up to its fletching into the nearer target.

"Atta boy! Now imagine taking out some Teddy just like that!"

Sean thought of some Iron Guards and tax collectors back home he'd like to nail with an arrow in their guts.

"Now," Khan said with a wry grin, "let's get a little more advanced technology and try a crossbow."

Khan handed Sean a crude rifle stock with a bow stretched across the front, and incongruously, a stirrup attached to the front of the stock. Khan picked up a second crossbow and a metal device from his pack that had a crank on one end attached to a geared claw.

"Here's how you cock and load these things. You'll see the rate of fire is a bit slow."

Khan placed the front of the weapon on the ground pointing down and put a foot in the stirrup. He attached the metal claw to the weapon's bowstring and then started to wind the crank at the top end. After a minute or so of winding, he was able to set the bowstring behind a pair of pawls on top of crossbow set on each side of the bolt groove. Next, he placed a short, thick arrow, a bolt he called it, in the groove with the bowstring placed in the bolt's rear end notch.

"This is ready to fire," he said, "all you have to do is release the safety on the side of the stock, aim, and press the trigger."

Khan took aim at a nearby tree trunk.

WANG! THUNK! The cross bolt burrowed halfway into the trunk.

"This'll punch through plate armor at 30 meters," Khan commented. "Hell, a good shot can put a bolt through a battledress visor at that range. High tech doesn't always protect you.

Now, load and fire your shot."

Sean sweated and grunted as he worked the surprisingly heavy crank. The bowstring was actually thin steel cable. After a couple of minutes he had the bowstring cranked up and set, and the bolt notched. As he fired, the recoil drove the stock back into his shoulder. He barely clipped the tree trunk.

"You jerked it," Khan observed. "Squeeze the trigger just like an ACR. You've GOT to get a first shot kill with one of these. If you miss, you're dead."

Several days later, all the bow and crossbow practice paid off. The trainees had left the relative comfort of their upland forest base camp for survival and infiltration exercises in the surrounding wilderness. The group was approaching a mock village through forest and heavy brush. The village was to be used as the target in the infiltration exercise. Sean had the

crossbow preloaded and set for the approach to the target. Once there, they were to get past patrols and shoot a dummy which portrayed the local teddy's representative in the village.

Suddenly, Sean heard a crashing and crunching noise in the bushes to his right.

"Sean, check your right!" Khan yelled.

Sean saw a black shape streaking toward him low to the ground. Sean snapped the crossbow around and fired. A horrible squalling noise filled the air as his attacker stopped in its tracks and dropped to the ground about two meters away. Its body resembled that of a wild Terran pig, rounded with short legs. Its head was something from Sean's worst nightmare. Instead of a pig snout it had alligator-like jaws with rows of razor-sharp teeth. Two short barbed grasping tentacles protruded from each side of the upper jaw. Blood poured from its mouth and after several reflexive spasms, the beast died with Sean's bolt in its chest.

"Congratulations, you've just killed your first grendel," Khan said. "They're not usually this far south this late in the year."

"I'll remember that the next time I see one," Sean said. He sat down and shook. This was as close to death as he had been since the shopping mall bomb on Oriflamme.

Moonshadow staff members playing the role of village defense troops came running at the commotion. The exercise was blown at that point and all Sean, Khan, and the rest of their team could do was evade and fade into the forest to fight again another day.

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Sean and the training team returned to their base camp after a week in the field. Hot showers, hot food, and most importantly mail waited for them. Sean received data crystals from both Sergei and AA.

In previous letters the older man told Sean he had joined the RCES as a senior administrator on "Papa" Papagapoulis staff. He was tasked with coordinating information about the political situation on Oriflamme, most particularly the activities of the Oriflammens rebels, as well as political and military developments on worlds in the Wilds to trailing of the Coalition. His contacts with both Free Traders and merchants in the Wilds, and dissidents on his home world, were particularly useful on this assignment.

"I was getting pretty damned bored sitting around and doing nothing," his image said in the viewer, "and I wanted to make a contribution to the RC. Of course, until the political situation changes back home and we get more of a democracy in place, I won't be able to go back to Oriflamme.

"Aubaine is nice and I could get used to living here. I have a nice apartment in Trantown within walking distance of the office. I can see the ocean

from my balcony, and I'm learning how to sail and have been visiting the nearby Schalli cities in what little free time I have.

"All in all, I'm pretty content but I do miss my family and Andropov House. However, I'm sure I'll get back to them again some day.

"Sean, I'm sure you're wondering why they yanked you out of boot camp so fast and put you into Moonshadow School. I know no one at your camp has any answers for you. They simply did what they were told. All I can tell you is that there is a very good reason and it will be happening soon.

"I just received a letter from AA. She is well and sends her love. She's also told me about your feelings for each other. You both have my blessing. I'll be more than happy to welcome you to the family when that day comes."

Sean had written several letters to both Sergei and AA during the weeks since he had transferred to Moonshadow training. He'd received a couple of replies from Sergei but nothing from AA since receiving her letter in boot camp. Now, at last, he had something.

AA's face appeared in his reader.

"My darling, I've not received any letters from you since the courier reached us at So Skire. We're in orbit around Poyzen right now, and they are not sending couriers this far out to trailing. I'll just hang on to this and mail it from Oriflamme. I'm sure I'll find a bunch of mail from you when we get back to Oriflamme base. So, when you get this, you'll know I've made it back to Oriflamme.

"Anyway, the colonists on Poyzen are doing OK. Best of all, I've had a chance to go dirtside and spend some time with Mother. She's the colony surgeon here as well as doing her xenopathology research projects.

"The colony is growing. Right now, they have about 300 people. It's a pleasant little town with surrounding farms in a river valley. The colony is located on Settlement Island just offshore of one of Poyzen's main continents. So far, the world appears to be deserted. The settlers have not found any signs of any inhabitants on the island or on the nearby continent's coast. They've found some rather exotic fungi which appears to yield a new form of antibiotic. We're taking samples back with us for further testing on Oriflamme. They've also spotted some petroleum deposits, and as soon as they get a small refinery going, they'll pave the streets. The colonists have already dammed a stream and set up a small hydroelectric plant. Now the town and some of the farms have electricity. Electricity distribution is limited, however, because copper wire is so expensive to import. They hope to find local copper deposits so they can make their own wire. The cattle and other livestock they brought with them in low berths are doing well. The local equivalent of grass seems to agree with them. A number of frozen embryos have been thawed and quickened, and some of them, pigs and goats mostly and a litter of German Shepherd

puppies, have been decanted and are being raised at the veterinary clinic. They also have some calves growing in vitro.

"Dearest, this may be a great world for us. There is plenty of opportunity and wide-open spaces. I know they will need all the medical help they can get, and you would do fine here if you want to get back to farming. If you didn't want to be a farmer, you could be an explorer or prospector. I'm sure your Moonshadow training would be a great start for that.

"Mom says hello and that she can't wait to meet you. I've told her all about you and about our feelings for each other. She's glad her one and only daughter seems about ready to settle down.

"Other than missing you terribly, I'm OK. I don't know how long we'll be at Oriflamme, but I'm hoping we will be able to catch up with each other there. Won't you just about be ready to graduate from Moonshadow School by the time you receive this? Anyway, my love, I know we will be back together again sooner rather than later. Take care of yourself. I love you."

And her face faded from the reader's screen.

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Sean stood on a street corner in Nygard, Nike Nimbus's largest city. It was a cold moonless night with only the light of a few street lamps to illuminate the row of houses across from him. A thin layer of snow covered the ground, but imbedded heating elements kept the streets and sidewalks clear and dry. It was quiet, and he could see nothing moving in the shadows. The street was in an upper class neighborhood where the streets rolled up early, home to industrialists and government officials. The homes were large, two or three stories in height. Time to service his mail drop. He crossed the street, trying to remain in the shadows as much as possible. The houses on both sides of the street lay back from the street with about 20 meters of lawn between them and the sidewalk. Large trees were planted in a dirt divider between the sidewalk and the street. Fences made from two-meter tall steel bars separated the lawns from the sidewalk. Paved pathways leading from the sidewalk to the houses were flanked with stone gateposts where path met sidewalk.

Sean turned left and walked quietly the second set of gateposts and began counting the trees to his left. Shadows cast by the trees concealed him from the streetlights. Sean stopped in the shadow of the third tree and reached into a hollow in the tree trunk about a third of the way up. After groping around for a few seconds, he felt a small metal capsule. He removed the capsule, unscrewed the top of a pocket pen, withdrew a similar capsule, and placed the retrieved capsule in the pen. After replacing the pen's top, he put a slip of paper inside the empty capsule and placed it and a pack of CR100 notes into the hollow, pushing both down and out of

sight.

With his mail drop serviced, Sean began walking back to the small apartment he had rented in the city's working class district the week before. A block away, he placed a chalk mark on a lamppost to signal other Moonshadow trainees that the mail drop had been made.

He worried about dodging the night patrols. Few people were on the street this late in this neighborhood and if found, they were always stopped and questioned. This may be a training exercise, but the cops were real. He didn't think his cover story of him being a day laborer would hold up in this district, and he knew he'd probably spend hours if not days in a cell if he were picked up. He didn't pick the mail drop site, the trainers did. He'd prefer one out in the country. But then, he needed experience working in the city.

More than once he ducked into the shadows as low whir of an electric car motor alerted him to a police patrol. He needed to cross several blocks of the city's commercial district to reach his apartment. Sean kept clear of the brightly-lit shop fronts and streetlights by ducking through the alleyways. He was about two blocks from home when he heard rather than saw his tail.

Footsteps not his own echoed his and didn't quite stop when he did. He looked around but didn't see anyone, only light and shadow.

The alley emptied on to a deserted street with a mix of small shops and apartments. Since it was in one of the city's poorer neighborhoods, the lighting was less bright than elsewhere. Sean turned right into the street, in the opposite direction of his apartment. Another alley appeared at right angles a hundred meters up the street. Sean turned into that one and waited, his back to a building wall in deep shadow.

He waited, breathing shallow breaths. Sweat beaded on his forehead and rolled down his spine in spite of the chill. The softest of steps announced his pursuer. Sean held his breath. A short, stocky figure crossed the head of the alley along the street. The figure hesitated and looked around. Sean willed every muscle in his body to be absolutely still; if it were possible he would have stopped his heart and restarted it later. After a minute that seemed forever, the figure moved on along the street. A minute after that, Sean quietly and carefully moved further into the alley. He doubled back around to the street he had first used, and then making sure he had no tail, turned toward the safe house.

Minutes later Sean climbed the dingy stairwell toward the safe house apartment. The stairwell was filled with grime and the stench of poor cooking and worse. The best thing about the building and its neighborhood, Sean thought, was that the neighbors minded their own business and kept their mouths shut. He opened the door to the studio-sized apartment and stepped inside. The first thing he had done when he moved in the week

before was to scrub the floors, walls, and furnishings. When he was finished he had a clean, functional, and sparsely furnished base to operate from. It held a bed, table and chairs, a stove and refrigerator in a side alcove, and a shower stall and toilet. Just enough for basic living.

His was one of several safe houses rented by the Moonshadow training team when they moved into Nygard. Each member had rented his own safe house separate from the others. Each team member knew the identities of two other team members, but not their safe house locations. Therefore, if a member was captured, the whole team would not be compromised. Sean had only communicated with one member of his three-person cell when she passed him a note in the street after he spotted a pre-arranged signal.

After hanging up his coat, Sean moved the bed away from the wall and pried up a floorboard he had worked loose after he moved in. He withdrew a small case from its hiding place and placed it on the table. He removed a small projector from the protective case and set it on his table. He opened the capsule he had retrieved from the mail drop and took out a small data crystal. Sean slipped the crystal into the projector and turned the projector on. The image of a document appeared on the apartment wall. It was the detailed itinerary of the Nike Nimbus interior minister. It gave the routes of that the minister would take on an upcoming visit to Nygard. As he paged through the crystal, Sean was able to view precise maps of the minister's route. The minister was to fly into Nygard tomorrow afternoon by air raft and was to travel among the city's police stations by ground car, the better to see the city up close and to gauge the mood of the population. Sean's team had the job of stopping him.

Sean's job was to report the minister's itinerary information and stand by for orders. His teammates would execute other parts of the plan.

He went back to his floor board cache and pulled out a second case. He opened it and took out what appeared to be a small furled wire-mesh umbrella. Next, he took out a smaller case and set it on the table. Then he took the wire object over to his window, unfurled it into the shape of a dish, and set it up pointing toward the south. Finally, he connected the wire dish antenna to the smaller case and flipped a switch on top. A green "power on" light came on. He donned a small headset with a built-in microphone, plugged it into the smaller case, and listened as he moved the antenna from side to side and up and down searching for a communications satellite's carrier wave. He locked the antenna in position when he heard a steady tone in his earphone.

When the tone came on he flipped a second switch from STANDBY to ACTIVE and spoke.

"Main Frame, Main Frame, this is Terminal, over."

"Terminal from Main Frame, go ahead," the

familiar voice of his controller said in his left ear.

"Are you ready to copy a data burst? Over."

"Affirmative, transmit at your discretion."

"Roger, stand by."

Sean inserted the data crystal into a small slot on the side of the case, pushing in until a click told him it was solidly seated. He flipped a second switch on top of the case from VOICE to DATA and pressed a button. A yellow light began flickering on top of the case. Sean knew this meant the data was flowing on the uplink to the relay satellite and then down to the Moonshadow headquarters.

When the flickering stopped, indicating the data transmission was finished, Sean returned the switch to the VOICE position.

"Did you copy that, Mainframe? Over." Sean asked.

"Terminal, this is Main Frame. Data received," his controller said.

"Monitor the local news transmissions and stand by for further orders. Report any unusual occurrences. Otherwise, contact this station again in 24 standard hours. Over."

"Roger, understand monitor and stand by. Will contact you in no later than two four hours from now. Orders acknowledged. Out."

"Out."

Sean repacked his equipment and stashed it in his floorboard cache. He then fixed himself a quick dinner and went to bed.

He was up before dawn the next morning dressed in rough laborer's clothes. He walked several blocks to a nearby plaza where about four dozen other similarly dressed men waited in the cold, huddled around fires burning in metal drums on the sidewalk. Shortly after he arrived, two open topped range trucks entered the plaza. Men dressed in khaki bush clothes got out of each truck's front cabin and climbed into the truck beds.

The older of the two spoke through a bullhorn: "We need forty men for ruin excavation work at the old naval base. We are offering ten credits an hour for a ten-hour day plus a fifty credit radiation bonus. Anybody interested?"

The crowd roared and ran toward the trucks. Sean ran with the rest of them, although without being obvious about it, hanging back just a little. Every man had their labor registration cards out, and as each was selected, the cards were scanned by the two labor contractors with a hand-held reader. Several were rejected because they had worked steadily for the four and the amount of radiation they had absorbed had reached their weekly limit. Another was refused when the scan showed he had quit early the previous day because of a mild case of radiation sickness. The trucks were filled with the lucky forty by the time Sean reached them.

"OK, that's it for today. We'll be back for more tomorrow," the older contractor said. "Better luck next time."

Sean and several others shuffled dejectedly away. Two beat cops watched them leave.

"Too bad, boys," one said. "Be sure to get off the street, we don't want to see you loitering around, and we don't want to see your faces again until you come back for tomorrow morning's pick."

Instead of going back to his apartment, Sean caught an electric ground bus to the city's mag lev rail station on the edge of the commercial district. He went to a rental locker in the station's lower level, opened it, and pulled out a suitcase. He entered a nearby men's rest room, entered a booth, locked it, and changed clothes. After a quick shave he looked like a local businessman on his way to work. A CR1 coin rented another locker for another day and he headed downtown.

Nygard is bisected by the Flame River. The city's main office and commercial buildings line each bank of the stream. A number of chic cafes and restaurants are located on the bottom floor of these buildings overlooking the river. Sean chose one of these for a late breakfast. He had a news pad delivered with his coffee and croissant, and watched the city news channel on his pad while he ate. Midway through the morning news, the anchorman interrupted a health feature story.

"We've just received word there has been an assassination attempt on the life of Interior Minister Raj Jehan. His Excellency was on a fact-finding tour of Nygard in the wake of last week's police corruption scandal. Witnesses said he was traveling south by limousine on Derzhinski Street enroute to police headquarters when a bomb exploded beneath his vehicle.

"First reports indicate that neither Minister Jehan or his traveling companions were not injured. Let's go to the scene with a live report from our Kerry Clark. Kerry?"

A young woman holding a microphone appeared on the news pad screen. Sean could see a billowing cloud of white smoke behind her.

"Thanks Clyde," she said. "This is Kerry Clark reporting live from Derzhinski Street where ten minutes ago a bomb went off under Interior Minister Raj Jehan's limousine. Witnesses have told me that the bomb went off with a flash, a bang, and a big cloud of smoke. But no one was injured. The bomb appeared to have malfunctioned. Police are speculating that it could have been the work of a local crime syndicate who botched the job. We'll get back to you as soon as we have more information. Police officials report that arrests are forthcoming. This is Kerry Clark for city news channel two."

Sean switched off the news pad and smiled. The Interior Minister had cooperated very well in the training exercise. His Excellency not only received some sympathetic publicity, the ensuing police sweeps would help flush out some dissidents. In the meantime, Sean and the rest of his team knew they had just graduated.

**Continued Next Issue...**



# Biotechnology In Traveller

by Matt Geisler

When the Science Fiction genre was created back in the early 20th century, most of the current advances were in the fields of physics, aerodynamics, and engineering. These advances were then projected into the future in order to create the background for science fictional stories. Even today, in the world of Traveller, the term "high tech" applies mostly to these fields.

In the last 15 years, a brand new type of science has emerged. This is the science of gene manipulation, and all of its consequent sciences such as biotechnology, gene therapy, and molecular biology. The potential ramifications of advancement in this field is both wondrous and terrifying. The experiments in physics were conducted on inanimate machines, there was always a distance between the research and the researcher. We, however, are biological entities, and the new science gives us the potential to manipulate and uncover the truths about ourselves.

As with all branches of technology, the game master should rule on how far along the 3rd Imperium and other nations carried biotechnological research. I would expect a minimum of biotech level 10 (BTL10) as an Imperial standard unless some major biotechnophobia has gripped humaniti for the last few thousand years. Enthusiastic researchers on key worlds may have gotten as high as BTL15, but progress beyond that level would seriously alter the tenor of the game.

What follows are technological advances listed per tech level, along with examples of available products. Costs for each technology are included for a world of that tech level. As with all technology, the cost drops dramatically at higher tech levels, the products also become more compact, more efficient, and have slightly broader uses. For most products, this is left up to the GM, a rule of thumb of halving cost per tech level, increasing efficiency 10-50%, etc. These changes should only occur for 2-3 tech levels, after which further improvements cannot be made (The technology has reached a plateau).

## Tech Level 8: Biotechnological Advances

Molecular Biology really begins at this tech level. genes can be identified, and traced through an organism s development. Genetic Fingerprinting of unique code is possible. It would be possible to identify every gene (i.e. Human genome project), but that would involve many decades of research and a budget of many nations. Simple genetic diseases can be combated by Gene Therapy.

Individual cells can be cloned, and simple tissues (skin) can be grown in vitro. This allows major surgery (Difficult to Impossible task), success implies that the patient has recovered from critical wounds (even from fire) with little permanent injury. Some growth hormones are crudely understood (such as steroids). Gene Therapy involves extracting some stem cells from the bone marrow, transforming them with new genes, and replacing them inside the patients bones. In this way, substances can be fabricated by the new cells, and injected into the bloodstream. In this way diseases such as phenylketonuria, and diabetes can be combated.

**BTL8 Steroid Program** (Cost: 3000Cr for 3 month program) - A three month program of BTL8 steroid usage can increase strength by +1. At the end of the activity period, an average roll vs constitution will determine side-effects. Failure indicates that minor side effects have occurred, these could include infertility, impotence, and acne. Catastrophic failure indicates that health has been seriously compromised by unequal development of the circulatory system, there is an immediate permanent -2 CON penalty, as the risk of heart attack and stroke increases.

## Tech Level 9: Embryonic Transformation/ Human Cloning

This tech level assumes that the human genome has been successfully sequenced, along with many other life forms. A better understanding of body development allows for use of several developmental drugs. Selection of offspring for sex, hair color, and a host of other factors is possible, but changes cannot be made after the embryo begins to develop. Gene therapy can now be used on embryos, correcting most genetic diseases permanently.

**Immortality:** Physical immortality can appear anywhere from BTL9-11 depending on the GM. It is the result of the shutdown of the natural death program (see notes). If modern experts are correct, this will involve a simple gene therapy applied to some cells in all tissues (20-50KCr) or to embryos (10KCr). It extends life by about double (150-200yrs), and death is usually due to cancer. At BTL10, the cure for cancer increases the average lifespan to 300yrs and death will be due to brain disfunction. Finally by BTL16-17, full immortality should be possible, and death will only occur through injury or disease. Ironically, this will have little affect on society, as we are already (at TL8) having fewer and fewer children, and living longer and longer. Physical immortality merely carries

this trend to its extreme.

***BTL9 High Hemoglobin Gene*** (Cost: 15,000Cr) - This gene can be introduced into the bone marrow via Gene Therapy. It increases the hemoglobin content of the blood by a factor of 10. This alters the blood chemistry to allow the player to go without oxygen for 20 minutes.

***BTL9 Toxin Resistance Gene*** (Cost: 10,000Cr ea.) - Introduced both through bone marrow and embryo gene therapies, each of these genes will give partial or complete resistance to a bevy of designer toxic substances. This has civilian uses (allowing transformed players to breathe normally on tainted atmospheres), as well as the obvious military and covert operations uses. For Military use, the toxic can also be purchased in liquid form (20cr/dose) or gaseous dispersed form (200cr/grenade equivalent). Toxins protected against can be Vomit-inducing, blood agents, blister agents, or nerve gas. *NB: Not all toxic substances can be protected against in this manner, and in many cases, the protection only reduces the effectiveness of the toxin (less damage).*

### Tech Level 10: Biotech Revolution

Finally, a good understanding of human development and genetic systems is available. Cancer is finally cured. Most of the body organs can be simply regrown and replaced. This dramatically extends expected lifespan of middle and upper classes (120-150yrs). The principle cause of death is invariably a brain disorder, which of course creates large social problems in dealing with the elderly. This is a threshold breaker which allows for a bevy of new technologies. Recombinant technology allows Gene Therapy on adult hosts, transforming living cells through a viral or parasitic vector.

***BTL10 Organ Replacement*** (Cost: 15,000Cr) - Private companies will now be able to clone and fabricate tissues and organs of the circulatory and gastrointestinal tract. Formerly fatal wounds can be recovered as long as the PC can get to the hospital in time. There is no chance of rejection, and morphogen treatments insure that no permanent damage (or even scarring) remains. Old scars can be re-worked into normal tissue (cost 100-1000Cr), cosmetic surgery is now fully natural (2-5000Cr).

***BTL10 Steroids*** (Cost: 3000Cr for 1 month treatment) - Finally, we understand how muscles work. Each treatment will increase strength by +1, but only 3 treatments can be undertaken safely. The use of BTL8 steroids prohibits this treatment.

***BTL10 Disease Resistance Genes*** (Cost: 5000Cr per gene) - These operate much like the toxin resistance genes, but they need to be introduced

into every cell of the body, not just the bone marrow. Military uses would include strategic use of specially tailored diseases (viral or bacterial) prior to operations.

### Tech Level 11: Dawn of Organic Technology

Other organisms developmental systems are now understood, this allows the Biotechnological industry to break away from medicine, and branch into other aspects of life.

***BTL11 Biofilters*** (Cost: 10,000Cr / metric ton) - These are artificial organs which process and detoxify atmospheres aboard ships and stations. The gaseous-type filters (G-filters) absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, poisonous gases, and some viruses, and replace oxygen and water vapor. G-filters can be placed anywhere in a ventilation system, but need a large surface area (20m<sup>2</sup>/ton). They passively absorb gas through tiny holes in their surface called stomata, while the processing cells are fed by chemical ions which are recharged electrically (requiring 10Kw per ton). Each metric ton will filter the gaseous wastes of 10 average humans when used a ship or station life support system. A second system filters and process liquid and solid biological wastes, it only processes 3 average humans per ton, but needs no surface area. Biofilters can only filter out toxins slowly (10m<sup>3</sup> per hour), and cannot deal with concentrated toxin attacks.

***BTL11 Epidermal Bandages*** (Cost: disposable 50Cr/Regenerating 500Cr) - Small living patches of plant/animal organs which can be applied to damaged tissues. At BTL11, these simply clean and disinfect wounds, as well as blocking bleeding. Regenerating bandages are fed a sucrose-nutrient solution, and kept in a special carrying case (0.5kg) T112 models digest damaged tissue, and stimulate cell growth amongst healthy tissues. T113 includes rapid regeneration (2x healing rates), and can stiffen up like a splint, but the bone still has to be correctly set.

### Tech level 12: Gene Families

At BTL12, an understanding of simple neural development has been achieved, but the complex development of the brain is still not approachable. More complex artificial organs can be constructed, their size decreases by a factor of 10 or so. Gene therapies now transform entire gene families into existing humans, but integration with existing genes is still a problem, and a lot of horrible genetic accidents occur in 1 of 10 transformations (Requiring wavers to be signed prior to treatment)..

***BTL12 Regeneration Gene Package*** (Cost: 10,000Cr) - This consists of a set of genes which allow rapid recovery from wounds, and offset the effects of shock and trauma. Knockdown value is

increased by +1, wounds (if not infected) recover at twice the normal rate. There are side effects however, food and water intake increases by 20%, the effects of dehydration and starvation are doubled, and the higher metabolic rate decreases lifespan by 10-20%.

**BTL12 Agility Steroids/ Gene Therapy** (Cost: 5000Cr per 1 month treatment) - Only one treatment will be of benefit, but agility is improved by +1. This cannot be attempted if lower tech level steroids have been taken.

**BTL12 Suit Bio-Respirator** (Cost: 3500Cr) - This is a miniaturized version of the G-filter, fitted to a suit backpack. It weighs 25kg, and uses only 1kw electricity. It can supply oxygen as long as electricity is available.

**BTL12 Anti-Toxin Filter/Secretor** (Cost: 7500Cr) - This is actually a potted (or hydroponic) plant which constantly scans an environment for toxic substances. Its reporter cells send samples of these chemicals to the rest of the plant, which then derive an antidote. This antidote is then secreted through the hydathodes at the tips of each leaf. Thus eating the dew of this plant cures most poisonings. The cost of this plant drops to 750Cr at BTL13, as it becomes easier to clone. Each plant normally lives for 20 years, and is sterile (no seeds-so they can sell you another one).

### Tech level 13: The Age of the Organic Machine

It becomes possible to extensively modify the basic human form, but very few of these changes are inherited. Gross modification of the human form at the genetic level is attempted, but mostly results in monstrosities, causing fear among populations. As a result, very few worlds have evolved beyond tech level 13 in terms of biology.

**BTL13 Hypodermic Homeostasis Root** (Cost: 5000Cr) - This is a small emergency aid device, which is quickly unpacked and clamped on the skin like an epidermal bandage. Its roots dig painlessly into the skin and seek out the circulatory and lymph systems. Secretions from the plant body then make an attempt to restore homeostasis to the patient, quickly stabilizing traumatic wounds without a doctor.

**BTL13 Body Replacement** (Cost: 40,000Cr) - The only organs not easily replaceable are the brain and spine. Even these organs can be removed from one body, and placed inside another. The second body can be salvaged from another human, or can be fabricated (takes 6-12 months) from organs generated by cloning. Some companies will synthesize and keep fabricated organs alive for an extremely high price.

**BTL13 Organic Machines** (Cost: 10x mechanical equivalent) - Simple mechanical devices can be replaced by living facimilies. These can include metal parts attached to muscles, bone, chitin, and sinew covered by skin. These machines eat a variety of substrates, from oxygen/sugar-nutrient, light, or electrolytic ions. These do not become more efficient than their mechanical counterparts until tech level 15. However, damage to an organic machine can be regenerated medically, making them ultimately more versatile than mechanics.

### Tech level 14: Heritable Genetic Alterations

Improvements to previous tech levels are made, along with improved chances of altering human forms.

Cosmetic gene therapy can alter appearance and abilities heritably, but horrible side effects in second and third generation children still occur with alarming frequency. Organic machines become increasingly more complex.

**BTL14 Living Suit** (Cost:4500Cr) - This is a self-sealing suit which acts like a second skin, wrapping around the body (which must be naked). It provides oxygen intravenously, and removes and processes wastes, requiring 4kw electricity to do so. A fully organic variant can survive on sunlight, but need to deploy 40m2 wings, and supplies sugars as well. This will enable a human to survive in the continuously habitable zone of a star (or closer).

**BTL14 Organic Wings** (Cost:5500Cr) - This is a simple one-person flying machine which can be strapped to the back of a person. It uses feathers and hollow bones, along with an ultralight metal frame.

### Tech Level 15: On the Verge of the Sentient Organic Machine

Tech Level 15 is a breakthrough level. The mysteries of the human brain have begun to reveal themselves, Gene family transformation is now fully heritable, with no side effects. It is possible to alter the race of a person, but not the personality or memories. Many people experimenting with this new technology have created major races of agricultural animals literally from scratch. Bio-organic machines made in secret now use brain matter as living computers (Though far inferior to silicon and other inorganic computers). It is also possible to integrate existing human brains into organic machines. The next advances in organic technology would have produced living cybernetic starships, with volunteer human brains incorporated directly into the architecture. This research was forestalled, ironically, because of the ethic problems of having sentient machines and

starships.

**BTL15 Organic Automed Facility** (Cost: 1-2MCr) - Still experimental at the height of the imperium, this is a large (11 ton) organic machine which consumes 200kw electricity, as well as a host of nutrient chemicals. A body is placed inside the mouth of the machine, which takes it into a sealed internal chamber. Inside the entire body is dissected, each organ is taken apart, while the spine-brain system is kept alive. New tissues or organs are fabricated, and then woven back into a body around the old brain-spine. This process takes anywhere from 2 days to 3 months, depending on the level of damage. In some miraculous cases, a severed head has been rebuilt into a body, after being kept in stasis (with a hypo-root patch) for 3 days...but this is far from the rule with this machine. Later models will allow the patient to communicate with the outside world (as the new body is being grown) through interface workstations, or even cybernetic robots.

**Notes:** I have deliberately avoided existing Traveller medical technology because it is so vaguely defined, and appears at inappropriate tech levels (e.g anagathics). Somewhere around tech level 10, we should be able to figure out how to keep our bodies young and fit artificially. By tech level 16 the human becomes effectively immortal,

replacing and regenerating all tissues externally, and perhaps by tech level 17 internally. What most people don't realize is that immortality is the default state of all biological systems, and that death is a deliberate genetic program.

There are some things which biology cannot do...biological changes are slow, and low energy and rely on complex interactions. Shape-shifting, high-energy weapons, and changing mass are impossible biologically, no matter what tech level. Altering the shape of existing tissue is nearly impossible, it is much easier to chop organs away, grow new ones of the desired shape, and knit them back into place. I have assumed that the many races of alien animals and humaniti have been fabricated from Terran primates by the ancients. This means that Terra (Earth) should be the only world in the Imperium with a geological record of evolution. Work of this kind is at least tech level 16, probably early in the Ancients development, what kind of biological breakthroughs they achieved at tech level 22 (their assumed peak) I dare not speculate.

## Traveller Chronicle Submission Guidelines

Unsolicited manuscripts become the property of Sword of the Knight Publications and cannot be returned unless accompanied by a large SASE. Sword of the Knight is not responsible for articles lost in the mail. Never send your only copy of an article. You will normally be notified within 30 days of your article's acceptance, rejection, or need for a rewrite. If you have not heard from us within two months, please inquire. Accepted articles will be subject to editing.

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**Artwork:** Always include clear, precise sketches of maps, diagrams, or pieces of equipment for artist reference. If you send photocopies for artist reference, always indicate the original source of publication. If your article includes tables, send a printout of each table the way it should appear to help our typesetters set it up correctly. Artwork can be sent in the same manner as manuscripts. GIF format is preferred, however, most of the other major formats (JPG, BMP, TIF, etc.) are also acceptable.

**Payment:** At this time Sword of the Knight cannot offer more than a token payment for any submissions which are accepted. The specific amount is dependent on content and quality.

**Content:** Sword of the Knight is interested in articles, adventures, artwork, or fiction from any era of the Traveller universe or Marc Miller's Traveller universe. However, any rules related information should be labelled with the game system which they utilize, and if any additional "house rules" have been applied.

### **Arrukir/Vega (2420 C59A7A9-8)**

**Date: 064-70**

#### **Outpost Odysseus**

¶ Naval activity of a level unprecedented since the Quasi War with the Dingir League continues in the Arrukir system. Approximately 32 hours ago, the Van Helsing Squadron jumped out of Arrukir to an undisclosed location. Hours later, elements of Fourth Fleet began arriving in orbit of Arrukir and began setting up patrols.

¶ Despite reports from free traders and other independent sources concerning the build-up in the region, Ministry of Defense and Naval authorities here at Outpost Odysseus continue to deny that any fleet actions of an offensive or defensive nature are imminent.

¶ Local speculation about the Navy's actions seems to favor an invasion of Shulgiasu (2319 E758867-8). Shulgiasu is a balkanized human world that was once part of the Vegan Autonomous District. While Gabreelist factions do exist there in a couple of regions, none are currently in a position to seize power of one of the local governments. This makes it unlikely that the Navy is planning an intervention there.

¶ Naval authorities were very quick to squash another rumor concerning reasons of the re-deployments, that being an assault of Muan Gwi, the Vegan homeworld. A spokesman in a recent briefing said, "while the recent comments of the Vegan ambassador from Muan Gwi were regrettable, there is not now, nor has there ever been any secret plan to attack the Vegan homeworld." He went on to say, "we are at peace with the government of Muan Gwi, and it is our intention to see that it stays that way."

### **Terra/Sol (1827 A867AA9-C)**

**Date: 072-70**

#### **Jerusalem/Israel Region/Southwest Asia District**

¶ A spokesperson for the Temple of the Faith today announced that Ellora Avila, daughter of the Priestess of the Faith Shoshanna, will be going on a six-week goodwill tour to the Prometheus and Junction star systems beginning on 090-70.

¶ While on Prometheus, Ellora will be involved in a variety of activities, including a visit to an elementary school and a hospital for veterans of the fighting on Lagash. There is also a meeting scheduled with Governor Vaidyana to discuss Faith plans to expand the number of facilities providing social relief on Prometheus.

¶ The visit to Junction will be the first by Ellora, and only the third by a member of the Dahnara-Avila family. Planned activities include a visit to a facility

that retrains workers in the use of TL 12 machinery, and a visit to a recently opened geothermal heated hydroponics garden, which should make Junction less dependent on imported vegetables and artificial food supplements during Junction's long cold winters.

### **Barnard/Sol (1926 C200400-A)**

**Date: 087-70**

#### **Commerce City/Jubara Region/Equatorial District**

¶ A Hseung-Jane Intelligence Services report released yesterday confirms rumors that one of twelve experimental sniper rifles stolen from a Tarantino Limited warehouse in Seattle six years ago has resurfaced here on Barnard.

¶ Originally intended for testing by battledress-equipped sniper teams in the Marine Force, the 15mm gauss weapons were equipped with special data links to increase their range. A small supply of discarding sabot rounds was also manufactured for the weapons in an effort to evaluate the practicality such ammunition in the field.

¶ Three days before they were to be handed over to the Marine Force, the weapons, DS ammunition and the crates containing them disappeared without a trace. It has long been suspected that individuals within Tarantino Limited with ties to the religious sect known as The Followers of Gabrec-el the Messiah stole the weapons, but an investigation by local law enforcement officials failed to uncover those responsible.

¶ While the sniper rifles have not been seen again until recently, it is believed by a source within the Ministry of Justice that they have been used in a number of assassination attempts against unpopular figures. The most recent was against a salvage operator on Nusku who is reputed to be a member of the Kagukan Mafia. It is not known how many of the weapons are currently in circulation, or who is responsible for their use.

¶ The appearance of the single sniper rifle occurred when two individuals, believed to be a Cassildan male in his mid-30s and a Terran male of similar age walked into the Hseung-Jane office here on Barnard and presented it to one of the analysts for inspection. While they seemed rather proud of the rifle and boasted of its capability to hit targets "in excess of 3 kilometers away," they were less forthcoming about whom they were actually working for, and why they chose this particular time to bring the weapon out into the open. They did indicate however, that it was not for sale.

¶ When contacted about the appearance of the sniper rifle, both Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Defense spokespersons refused comment, except to say that independent investigations were underway.

# Additional Skills for TNE

Here are some new skills to help spice up any *Traveller: The New Era* campaign. Players can be allowed to take these skills as substitutes for those listed for a particular skill cluster, or even as secondary activities.

**Sport Fishing** (Explore--INT): Ability to catch specific aquatic lifeforms using hook and line, traps, nets, harpoons, or other similar devices. Unlike "survival fishing" (an ability imparted by Survival skill), those with Sport Fishing ability have knowledge regarding how to catch a particular genus and species of aquatic lifeforms (i.e. rainbow trout) to the exclusion of others. Included with this skill is the ability to land particularly large aquatic lifeforms (those over 250 kilograms) such as swordfish or sharks.

Catching fish (or an alien equivalent) over 250 kilograms with adequate equipment is normally a Difficult task. This increases to Formidable without it. Fabricating proper fishing equipment for large aquatic lifeforms is an Average task, provided proper supplies are available. The referee should adjust the difficulty of these tasks according to the size and orneriness of the aquatic lifeforms the character is attempting to catch.

**Gunsmith** (Technician-AGL): Ability to construct, modify, maintain and repair small arms. The tasks performed by gunsmiths go well beyond the routine cleaning and lubrication that may normally be conducted by an individual with a small arms skill on their own weapon. A gunsmith's experience and background includes a working knowledge of currently available weapons, a historical knowledge of other weapons, and an ability to find references which help in handling otherwise unknown weapons.

The difficulty of Gunsmith tasks varies greatly with the task the character is trying to accomplish, and what tools the character may or may not have at hand. Most normal tasks (fitting and sighting in a telescopic sight, reloading CPR Firearm rounds) are Average with the proper equipment. Some tasks, like constructing an improvised CPR Firearm (aka "zip gun") or making adjustments to the internal ignition lasers on a plasma rifle are normally Average tasks, but become Difficult, Uncertain tasks with potentially fatal results if not performed the proper tools. Identifying an unknown weapon is normally a Difficult task, and can increase to Formidable if the character is forced to work from poor quality photographs instead of actually being able to handle the weapon.

In all cases, the referee should carefully evaluate what task the player wants his character to perform,

and advise against particularly risky actions ("mounting that on your gauss pistol is probably not a good idea").

**Scrounging** (Explore-INT): The character is skilled in finding relic items such as spare parts, tools, vac suits, weapons, etc. Scrounging involves more than just randomly searching through ruins. An individual with this skill is familiar with the kinds of ruins to search for a particular relic item and where within those ruins that item is most likely to be found. In the case of a previously contacted inhabited world, the individual will have knowledge of the proper inhabitants to contact regarding the availability of relics, local laws governing their sale and possession, and be aware of specific areas on the planet where relics are most likely to be found. When a character attempts to scrounge for a specific object, the referee determines difficulty based on his or her opinion of the likelihood the object is where the character is looking. The higher a character's Scrounging skill, the more likely he is to find useful things in unlikely places.

**Writing** (Social Science--INT): Enables a character to present insightful, entertaining reading materials, factual or fictitious. If used in combination with skills such as Computer or Mechanic, the character has the ability to write technical manuals. Print journalists (those that write for newspapers or magazines as opposed to electronic journalists which work on camera or in front of a microphone) would likely have high levels of Writing skill, and can take it as a substitute for the other skills listed in the Journalist career on page 47 of the TNE manual.

**Security** (Perception-INT): The individual is knowledgeable in the area of security procedures. This includes both physical security and anti-terrorism security.

*Physical security* reflects a familiarity with the proper use and placement of a variety of physical security devices, including mechanical and electronic locks, alarm systems, and a wide spectrum of sensors, including infrared sensors and cameras. While it is the job of experts in this skill to prevent break-ins (usually by individuals with Intrusion skill), their special knowledge can be of great assistance to someone attempting defeat a physical security system.

*Anti-terrorism security* covers a broad spectrum of security procedures designed to deter terrorism and other similar criminal behavior. These include the proper deployment and use of scanning equipment (bomb and weapon detectors), "hands on" physical search techniques, correct procedures for establishing security patrols and escorts, check points, motorcades, and convoys.

# Space Travel, Trade and Commerce In the Terran Republic

*Editor's Note: While this piece is intended to be used with the TNE manual, it is written in such a manner that it can be used with Marc Miller's Traveller using a few extrapolations.*

As the Terran Republic reaches out further into space, being able to get freight, cargo, passengers, and information from one point of the Republic to another reliably becomes increasingly important. Without reliable space travel, colonics cannot be established or maintained, and interstellar trade ceases.

It is the job of four ministries within the Terran Republic to insure the safety and reliability of space travel and to regulate trade. The Ministry of Interplanetary and Interstellar Transportation (MINIT for short, pronounced as 'minute' by spacefarers), and the Ministry of Interstellar Trade and Commerce (MITC, usually just 'ITC' to traders) are the policy making bodies in this regard. MINIT also carries out some enforcement actions, but the agencies primarily responsible for enforcement of MINIT and MITC regulations are the Defense Ministry (in particular the Navy), and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

## Interstellar Travel

**Travel Permits:** For the captain of a starship, travelling used to be a simple matter of filing an in-system flight plan with the local starport and then going to whatever star was within range of the ship's drives. That was before Virus.

In the Terran Republic travel permits are required to operate a starship, whether or not it is being used for commercial purposes. This step originally was taken in 32 (1164 IE) to cut down on the potential for uninspected ships without Virus protection taking to space and becoming the victim of infestation. Since then, it has also been used as a method of keeping track ships within the Republic as they travel from place to place.

Operating a starship without a permit is not only a bad idea, it can result in the destruction of your vessel and the premature retirement of a player character (sucking vacuum is proven to shorten life spans). The Terran Republic Navy is authorized to destroy any vessel operating without a travel permit, though as a matter of practice they will first attempt to seize the ship through other means. The issuing authority for all travel permits is MINIT, though MITC is responsible for setting travel permit quotas.

There are five kinds of travel permits:

- ◆ **Class A Permit:** This allows the starship operator to travel beyond the borders of the Terran Republic into the Wilds or to survivor worlds that have operational starports. It does not permit travel to the Dingir League, which is currently restricted because of the tensions between that government and the Terran Republic.
- ◆ **Class B Permit:** This allows the starship operator to travel to all the worlds within the Terran Republic.
- ◆ **Class C Permit:** This allows the starship operator to travel between two star systems, normally Terra and Prometheus, but it can be any two star systems within the Republic.
- ◆ **Class D Permit:** This allows the starship owner to travel up to one light year (within the same map hex) of the port of registry. Thus an owner of a Class 'D' permit could operate between Alpha Centauri A and B and Proxima Centauri without restriction.
- ◆ **Class E Permit:** Issued to starships registered outside the Terran Republic that have undergone a full inspection by MINIT. This permit allows the holder to travel to all worlds within the Terran Republic.

To obtain a travel permit, a starship must first undergo an extensive inspection and evaluation of all of its electronics and computer systems by MINIT (this usually takes one week), and be certified that all standard anti-Virus procedures are in place. Assuming that the ship passes this inspection, the owner or operator then files the proper paperwork requesting a travel permit, indicating how the starship will be used. Permits are awarded based upon need and a quota system (the criteria for which are kept secret by MITC) that limits the number of any one type of permit that can be issued in a given year. Class 'A' is the most difficult to obtain, while Class 'D' is the easiest. If requested, an operator can obtain a lesser permit in place of the one they originally applied for, should they not be selected (starship operators from outside the Republic do not have this option). There is no fee involved in obtaining a permit, and once a permit is awarded, it is good for the life of the vessel, so long as it continues to pass an annual inspection by MINIT (this normally takes 1D6 days) and abides by the restrictions of the permit. Violating the terms of usage of a travel permit is considered grounds for immediate suspension of the permit, and possible impounding of the

starship.

Permits are transferable, so long as the operator obtaining the permit has undergone the initial MINIT inspection. Thus an operator shut out from initially obtaining a Class 'B' permit (or another kind), could later buy one from someone else. This has created a market for permits, and speculators routinely purchase valued Class 'A' and 'B' permits from starship operators for extremely large sums (millions of credits) only to resell them later for even more. Both MITC and MINIT are currently reviewing their policies in light of this situation, and are considering increasing in the number of permits and placing new restrictions on transfers to reduce the amount of speculative buying and selling of permits that takes place.

*Forged Permits:* Finding certain types of permits difficult to come by, some starship operators resort to purchasing forged travel permits so that they can do business in places they would not otherwise be allowed. Forging a Class 'A' Permit is a Formidable: Forgery (Uncertain) task. If both rolls are successful, the forgery is undetectable. If the referee's roll fails, but the player's is successful, the forged permit looks good to the player characters, but could be detected as a forgery by local authorities (difficulty in detecting the forgery is determined by the referee). Forged permits can also be found on the black market, quality varying greatly with price. Operators of starships should also be aware of the following if they are caught: operating a starship with a forged permit is considered grounds for immediate impounding of the vessel and possible forfeiture under Terran Republic seizure laws.

*Mandatory Inspections:* All vessels that leave Terran Republic space must undergo a complete inspection for Virus contamination by the Terran Republic Navy or by the local MINIT office immediately upon their return (this procedure takes about 24 hours). Travel permits are also checked during this time. Failure to comply will result in the destruction of the vessel with extreme prejudice (no one wants to be the person that let a Virus infected ship pass and attack Earth). All other vessels operating in the Terran Republic must stand down and prepare for Virus inspection, or travel permit checks whenever it is deemed appropriate by the Navy or local authorities (this procedure takes about 8 hours). Failure to comply will result in the impoundment of the vessel or its destruction with extreme prejudice.

## Travellers

Those who do not own or operate their own starships (the vast majority of starfarers) must purchase passages to travel from world to world. There are six types of travel passage available to

travellers in the Terran Republic:

*High Passage:* As described in the TNE manual, it involves first-class accommodations and cuisine. High passengers have the services of the ship's steward, entertainment, and complete attention to their comfort. There is a baggage allowance of up to 1000 kilograms. High passage in the Terran Republic costs between Cr12-15,000 (final cost depending upon the size of the accommodations, plus any special amenities), which is higher than in the Regency. High passage fares are extremely difficult to find outside of dedicated passenger liners, though some smaller ships have been known to grant high passage for the right price (usually at least Cr20,000). A high passage passenger requires one entire stateroom (large or small).

*Middle Passage:* Unlike the one-per-stateroom standard of the high passage, middle passage fares usually require two passengers share a single stateroom. They do not receive the service or entertainment accorded the high-paying passengers. In addition, the quality of the cuisine is mediocre. Baggage totaling 100 kilograms is allowed. Middle passage costs Cr10,000.

Large passenger liners regularly offer middle passage passengers the ability to "upgrade" to high passage should a vessel be underbooked. Cost for this upgrade varies from company to company but is usually less than Cr1000. Upgraded passengers are accorded the same treatment as regular high passage passengers, though they can be "bumped" back to middle passage should a last minute full fare paying high passage passenger arrive.

On smaller vessels, "priority fees" (see TNE manual pg. 219) are the rule with regard to bumping of passengers. Additional "fees" can also be paid to receive better food, more baggage allowance, or better entertainment. Cost of these "fees" varies widely from company to company and even ship to ship.

*Working Passage:* This form of passage is quite common in the Terran Republic, particularly on free traders and light freighters where the starship captain is transporting a particularly valuable cargo and wishes to have some extra "muscle" to protect it. There are also a number of employment agencies within the Terran Republic (located on all worlds with a class 'C' starport and above) which specialize in hooking up individuals with starship-related skills to vessels looking for temporary crewmembers. Compensation packages frequently include a working passage.

Working passage in the Terran Republic is otherwise identical to working passage elsewhere in Known Space, and is detailed on page 219 of the TNE manual.



*Steerage:* Transport of passengers using steerage space was once a common practice in the Terran Republic. Four years ago, the Ministry of Interplanetary and Interstellar Transport began more closely regulating the use of steerage passage, and cracked down on the worst of its abuses. Today, government regulations require that at least one temporary bunk (set up in a stateroom or in the cargo hold) be provided to each two steerage passengers. Typically bunks are stacked two to three high to reduce the amount of space they occupy. In addition, starship captains are obligated to provide emergency first aid to steerage passengers should it become necessary.

Steerage passengers are not fed from ship's stores, and must carry their own food with them. Baggage is limited to 100 kilograms, which includes whatever food they bring along. Steerage passage costs Cr3,500. The purchase of a steerage passage requires the signing of a waiver that severely limits the liability of the ship owners and crew in the case of any mishap that might befall the passenger during the trip. This waiver does not however protect the owner or crew in cases where gross negligence of the steerage passenger's welfare is involved.

*Low Passage:* Transportation while in cryogenic sleep is described on page 219 of the TNE manual. Cost for low berth passage in the Terran Republic is Cr1500.

*Stowaways:* Stowing away on a ship in the Terran Republic is illegal. Stowaways can be fined up to Cr25,000 and be imprisoned for up to six months. Jail time is doubled for each repeat offense (thus a four time offender faces a maximum of four years in prison, a five time offender eight years in prison). Stowaways (especially repeat offenders) are extremely rare in the Terran Republic.

While stowing away is illegal, so is "spacing" a stowaway (once a common practice). Spacing a stowaway is considered premeditated murder in the Terran Republic, and makes the responsible parties subject to punishment under the Republic's the death penalty statutes if aggravating circumstances are found.

### Other Aspects of Space Travel

*Sojourner Society:* Operated by the Gabreelist Faith, the Sojourner Society is similar to the old Traveller's Aid Society, except that it provides aid to all interstellar travellers, not just members. Facilities for the Sojourner Society are located at every starport, and include a place to sleep (usually a large bay with cots), meals (quality varies widely), and a lounge area where news, world information, and entertainment are available (as

well as a variety of pamphlets about Gabreelism and copies of the Book of the Faith). A small donation (Cr5) is usually required to make use of the facilities. Membership in the Sojourner Society is available for an annual fee of Cr5,000, and includes free use of all Sojourner facilities, as well as discounts at local bars, restaurants, and hotel facilities on various worlds throughout the Republic. Members of the Order of Crusaders automatically qualify for a free membership.

*Hijacking:* In the Terran Republic, hijacking is considered an act of terrorism, punishable by death under the Republic's capital offense statutes. This does not stop the occasional criminal thug or neo-Solomani terrorist from trying it. Given the relatively small size of the Republic, it would appear that successful hijackings to points outside its borders would be easy once control of the ship was secured. That would be true, were it not for a group of special task forces which operate under the Navy's fleet structure called, "Recovery Squadrons". Recovery Squadrons (unnamed for security reasons) are made up of 4-6 warships that are tasked with hunting down hijacked starships wherever they may be taken. In one recent incident, a far trader that had been hijacked by criminal organization was tracked to the Dingir League world of Karkhar (1424 E675768-5). A single Recovery Squadron vessel with a team of naval security commandos went in to the system, disabled the vessel, killed the hijackers, recovered the ship's crew, and escaped back to Terran Republic space all before the Dingir League Navy could catch them.

*Skipping:* The vast majority of privately owned ships in the Terran Republic are bought by corporations who then employ crews to operate their vessels, or lease them out to a merchant for a percentage of profits. While these corporations do extensive background checks on all their employees and leasees, sometimes an unscrupulous crew sneaks through the cracks. Many shipping companies employ "recovery squadrons" in an effort to cut down on the number of ships lost to skipping. Both Ministry of Justice and the Defense Ministry cooperate in this effort as well, providing intelligence on the whereabouts of stolen ships, and if requested, participating in the apprehension of renegade crews.

*Piracy:* With a navy approaching 1,000 vessels in size, piracy is generally not considered a problem in the Terran Republic. But as the recent raid by pirates on Remulak proved, even a strong navy can not provide absolute protection. Because of the constant threat of pirate and Vampire ships encroaching upon Terran Republic space, commercial vessels are encouraged to maintain strong armaments and be ready to defend themselves at all times.

*Smuggling:* Interstellar smuggling of goods both legal and illegal has gone on for as long as there have been merchant vessels in space. The "special package delivery business" can be very lucrative for merchant companies and other owners of starships. It can also be very dangerous. Double crosses happen all too frequently, as well as Ministry of Justice enforcement activity, leaving the crew of a vessel facing serious jail time, or dead.

As a rule, large corporations rarely engage in such activities (more out of a fear of bad publicity than fear of government reprisal). This does not mean that individuals or individual ship's crews within the corporation don't operate smuggling operations without the company's knowledge (getting caught however usually means at the very least losing one's job).

Small corporations on the other hand more commonly engage in such activities, either on an occasion basis (to help make ship payments or to make up for losses incurred from a bad speculative cargo deal) or as a full time activity. When conducted as a full time operation, smuggling rings typically operate 1-3 vessels of less than 500 tons displacement. This makes their operations too small, and their ships too common, to attract much attention from local authorities.

It is common knowledge among spacemariners that crime syndicates (especially the Kagukan Mafia) set up dummy small merchant corporations to conduct smuggling operations. Smuggling rings operated by crime syndicates carry normal cargoes and freight in addition to their true money making "packages" as a cover in case they come under suspicion. An inexperienced broker could make the mistake of hiring such a company to haul goods for them, only to find out weeks later that the shipment was stolen and resold on the black market, was destroyed by the Terran Republic Navy, or was dumped overboard when the ship carrying it decided to make a run for it.

Smuggled goods can consist of literally anything from illegal robotic parts, to banned substances, to rare animals, to human slaves kept in low berths-the only limit is the limit of the referee's (and player's) imagination. Smuggled goods are normally carried as freight, though some adventure seeking captains, or those looking to make a quick killing engaging in illegal black market speculation, have been known to carry it as cargo. When carried as freight, smuggled goods can bring several times the normal freight amount (or more if there is great risk involved). The amount to be made from dealing with black market cargoes can vary from nothing to millions of credits (the amount made proportionate to the amount of risk involved, or at the referee's discretion, the

sliminess of the individuals the player characters are dealing with).

## Economics of Starship Operation

Certain aspects of the way starship operations are financed differ from those outlined in the TNE manual. These differences are detailed below.

### Starship Purchase

While starship ownership by private individuals is possible in the Terran Republic, only the wealthiest of Terran Republic society can afford them without assistance from government programs or loans from the Faith. The vast majority of starships are owned by corporations, ranging in size from a half dozen individuals to large conglomerates worth billions of credits.

*Starship Types Available:* By government regulation, the shipyards of the Terran Republic emphasize the construction of new TL 12 ship hulls over the refitting of pre-collapse Solomani and Imperial types. These regulations were introduced to help promote the growth of the starship construction industry, and make the Republic less dependent upon salvaged starships to meet its transportation needs.

Because of this, players making a roll for a starship as part of final stages of the character generation process are doing so for the TL 12 equivalents of the starships listed on the Ship Types table listed on page 39 on the TNE manual. This roll is made with a -5 Starship DM modifier, which is an addition to the Stellar Regions DMs table. Characters can still obtain TL 13+ pre-Collapse ships, but do so with a -20 Starship DM modifier.

*Bank Financing:* Bank financing in the Terran Republic works identically to the way that it does in the Regency, except that the individual or corporation must make a down payment of 30% of the cash price of the starship. Exceptions are made for medium to large corporations, which can usually get by with a 20% down payment (depending upon their financial solvency).

*Subsidies:* The Ministry of Interstellar Trade and Commerce (MITC) provides subsidies to small merchant corporations looking to purchase their first starship or expand their current fleet. Assuming they qualify, a small merchant corporation can get a low interest government loan (ultimate pay back in monthly installments is 110% of the amount borrowed over 30 years) to help with the required down payment for bank financing.

Small corporations can also qualify for MITC grants (one time gifts of cash) and short-term loans to help defray startup costs and operating expenses.

These grants and loans are designed to encourage the development of small business, and are only given out to qualified companies.

While medium and large-sized corporations do not qualify for the above loans and grants, they are given other forms of subsidies instead such as tax breaks, lucrative government contracts, and use of certain government facilities (i.e. the use of an office in a Terran Republic embassy outside the Republic's borders).

*Government ownership:* The government of the Terran Republic no longer engages in ownership sharing agreements with individuals and corporations, the last such arrangement having been terminated three years ago (1199 IE) by MITC. MITC determined that growth of interstellar commerce and travel is encouraged sufficiently now by the subsidy programs in place described above.

*Referee's Note:* However, there are several corporations operating small fleets of starships that are wholly owned through a series of holding companies by the Terran Republic itself. These companies engage in normal trade activities until such time that the government has a "special" delivery that needs to be made. In such cases the government freight takes precedent. Employees of such corporations may or may not be aware of the extent to which the government controls their activities, as such information is usually compartmentalized and issued on a "need to know" basis. Those running the operations are usually aware-ship's crew usually aren't.

*Faith ownership:* The Faith operates a substantial fleet of starships for a variety of purposes, including the transportation of missionaries to worlds outside the Terran Republic. It also invests in merchant companies of various sizes including small one-ship operations. Player characters with moderate to high Faith levels that have formed a partnership for the purpose of purchasing a starship can approach representatives of the Faith for low interest loans or grants in exchange for partial ownership of their new vessel. In exchange, the Faith asks from time to time that certain items of freight (usually no more than a quarter of the ship's cargo capacity) or passengers be carried pro bono (for free) to a destination on a ship's normal route.

*Referee's Note:* If the player characters prove particularly cooperative in their arrangements with the Faith, lucrative freight hauling contracts and other rewards should periodically be given to them. The opposite (being unable to find good freight hauling contracts) should also hold true if the player characters are uncooperative in dealing with Faith representatives.

*Corporate ownership:* Most player characters will end up operating a ship wholly owned by a corporation that has control of several (or even several dozen) other vessels. They are, in effect, employees.

The employer-employee relationship can take on several different forms. For example, the employees may only have to worry about getting the starship from point 'A' to point 'B' safely, the corporation taking care of such details as berthing costs, maintenance, obtaining freight and cargo, etc. On the other hand, the corporation may only provide a minimum of services (obtaining the proper travel permits and ship registration) and the use of a vessel, in exchange for which the player characters must give the corporation a portion of their gross profits. Whatever the relationship, the corporation will always try to ensure it is getting the best deal even at the expense of its employees. Both players and the referee should take this into consideration as they role-play out any employment contract negotiations.

*Cooperatives:* Player characters can also form their own small corporation for the purpose of operating a merchant vessel (this arrangement is sometimes called a cooperative). In cooperatives, the employees are the owners, each having a certain number of shares in the company based upon their individual investment and/or their position on the ship. Outside investors can also be brought in on a cooperative, but their share of stock cannot exceed 50% of total shares. Net profits from a cooperative can be split amongst the shareholders, or reinvested back into the company. Provisions can also be made for salaries and benefits, which are of course deducted from profits. The referee should determine the details of any cooperative agreement, based upon input from the players.

### **Starship Expenses**

There are six basic expenses (in addition to paying off a ship, if necessary) that are associated with starship operations in the Terran Republic:

*Fuel:* Fuel prices are subsidized by the Terran Republic government to ensure that they remain relatively low. Starship fuel costs Cr400 per ton (refined) or Cr80 per ton (unrefined) at all starports. If the player characters are operating a ship owned by a medium to large-sized corporation, they may receive their fuel for free, provided that they use a company refueling point.

*Life Support:* Each occupied stateroom on a starship involves an overhead cost of Cr2,500 per trip (two weeks) made. Each occupied low passage berth involves an overhead cost of Cr125 per usage. Double occupancy of staterooms causes a corresponding increase in overhead expense.

*Routine Maintenance:* Annual maintenance overhauls are only routinely performed at four star systems in the Terran Republic: Terra, Prometheus, Hephaistos, and Kaguk. Sufficient facilities also exist at Barnard, but the overhaul must be performed by the crew and takes twice as long (because of Barnard's special status as a trade center, it is assumed that adequate replacement parts can be obtained there--though the cost is subject to severe market fluctuations--haggling over prices is practically guaranteed). All other rules regarding routine maintenance at starports applies.

*Crew Salaries and Compensation:* The standard crew salary rules listed in the TNE manual on page 222 apply. Assuming that the crewmembers are employees of a corporation (as opposed to private contractors), there is the possibility that other forms of compensation and benefits will be offered as well, including medical coverage, disability and life insurance, bonuses, stock options, and profit sharing. Employees terminated from employment are sometimes given compensation packages if they left under otherwise good terms. Small corporations are unlikely to offer all the above benefits.

*Berthing Costs:* Landing fees, handling costs, facilities-use charges, and other starport fees are charged at every starport in the Terran Republic. These costs are standardized for all starports at Cr1,000 to land and remain for seven days (one week); thereafter a Cr100 per day fee is imposed for each additional day spent in port. Medium to large-sized corporations routinely lease out a certain number of berths from local authorities, thus allowing the crews of their ships to avoid directly paying for berthing costs. Lease agreements can also be worked out by small companies for individual berths, the average cost of running about Cr50,000 per year.

*Insurance:* Government subsidized insurance on ships (but not freight or cargo) can be obtained for an annual cost of 0.05% of the cash price of the ship. This sum can be paid annually or in monthly installments as part of the owner's monthly ship payment. Ship insurance pays for accidental damage to a starship and its berthing facilities--it does not cover acts of war, piracy, or deliberate acts of the ship's crew that result in damage to the ship. A liability rider (addition) on the standard ship insurance policy can be purchased for an additional annual cost of 0.01% of the cash price of the ship. This rider protects the ship owner and the crew from liability lawsuits from passengers for an amount up to Cr1,000,000. Individuals and small to medium-sized corporations usually have insurance on their vessels (most bank loans require it); large corporations are generally self-insured.

Insurance on freight and cargo, and other special policies can be purchased from private insurance corporations (20<sup>th</sup> century example: Lloyd's of London). Prices for such insurance will vary dramatically depending upon the size and condition of the vessel, the type of cargo or freight being hauled, where the ship is to travel, and the current status of tensions between the Terran Republic and its neighbors (whether they be the Dingir League, regional pirate bands, or the appearance of a new Vampire fleet). Generally speaking, the cost of insurance should be made affordable enough by the referee so that the players at least consider its purchase (or regret not buying it if something bad happens).

## Revenue

As elsewhere in Known Space, ships generate revenue from freight, cargo, passengers, and mail. The Ministry of Interstellar Trade and Commerce regulates the prices that can be charged in many cases.

*Freight and Cargo:* All freight shipments to and from Terra and Prometheus are carried at the standard Cr1,000 per ton. All other freight shipments to points within the Terran Republic are carried at Cr1,500 per ton. Freight shipments to points outside the Terran Republic are carried at whatever the players characters can negotiate (at the discretion of the referee), usually an amount between Cr2,000 and Cr5,000 per ton.

Starship owners can purchase cargo for the purposes of speculative trading on any world in the Terran Republic. In general, cargoes available from Terra and Prometheus will be finished goods of recent manufacture, where as the cargoes available from other worlds will consist primarily of relic technology and raw materials. The referee is the ultimate arbiter of what is available and at what cost it can be bought or sold.

*Passengers:* Standard fees paid by passengers are discussed in the Interstellar Travel section above. Passengers can also obtain passage into the Wilds, but at double or triple the standard rate.

*Mail and incidentals:* Mail-delivery contracts only go to the largest shipping companies in the Terran Republic. Standard rules regarding payments and dedicated space for Regency also apply in this case.

Other ships may, on occasion, be approached by an individual to deliver a private message. Customary charges for the delivery of private messages depend upon to where the message is to be delivered. Costs can vary anywhere from Cr30 to over Cr200 or more (particularly if the message must be delivered to an individual in the Wilds).

## Trade Customs

The standard procedures listed on page 224 of the TNE manual for interstellar commerce apply in the Terran Republic. The Ministry of Interstellar Trade and Commerce (MITC) is the ultimate authority with regard specific regulations regarding interstellar trade, where as in-system trade is regulated by the individual star systems' trade authorities. The Ministry of Interstellar and Interplanetary Transportation (MINIT) is responsible primarily for safety standards, such as those governing the proper transport of hazardous materials or lifeforms. MINIT also sets standards for cargo containers, and their proper use.

The following changes to trade customs apply in the Terran Republic:

*Shuttle Service:* Typical shuttle fares cost Cr15 per ton of cargo and Cr20 to Cr120 per passenger.

*Charters:* Nonstarships charter for Cr2 per displacement ton per hour, usually with a 12-hour minimum. Charter price for a starship is computed based on that particular starship's revenue-generating capacity. Starships are chartered in two-week blocks; the charge for chartering a starship is Cr1,000 per ton of cargo hold, plus Cr12,000 per high berth and 2,500 per low passage berth (these prices can be significantly higher depending upon where the charter will be travelling). Overhead expenses and crew are generally the responsibility of the owner, however, some portion of the costs involved can be paid by individual or company requesting the charter if some special requests are made (i.e. extra security).

## Interplanetary Travel

Worlds orbiting the same star are accessible by interplanetary travel, on ships operated by local entrepreneurs, or with a variety of small craft.

The write-up on interplanetary travel in the TNE manual thoroughly discusses most of the issues involved regarding interplanetary travel in the Terran Republic. Operating a vessel on a strictly interplanetary basis does not require a travel permit. However, agents of MINIT or the Terran Republic Navy can stop vessels for inspections, though ordinarily these are scheduled events that occur before the spacecraft departs for its destination.

In most systems there is an equivalent to MITC and MINIT that are responsible specifically for regulating interplanetary travel and trade.

## Other Trade and Commerce Issues

On the macroeconomic scale, the economy of the Terran Republic can be viewed as being somewhat circular. Terra, and to a lesser extent Prometheus and Kaguk, import relic Solomani and Imperial technology of value from other worlds within the Republic, which is treated as a form of raw material (analyzed, broken down, and recycled or reused as appropriate). In turn, newly manufactured goods (of the TL 12 variety) are then exported back to those worlds in exchange. This system is also fed to an extent by small stream of relic technology coming in from outside the Republic. While the exporting of goods outside the Republic has slowly increased over the past 20+ years, as of yet it has failed to materialize as a significant part of the overall economy.

Enlightened economists see that one day the supply of valuable relic technology within the Republic (and within its local vicinity of space) will dry up, and with it, so will the significant markets for new manufactured goods from Terra. Therefore it is important for the Republic to continue to expand and establish new trade relationships with survivor worlds, and find legitimate sources of raw materials (most such sources have been played out in this part of space many centuries ago). While at the same time, the Republic needs to re-establish the industrial and economic base of its less fortunate members worlds, thereby creating wealth which will allow them to buy Terrans goods with credits instead of pieces of broken TL 15 machinery.

To this end, the government fosters interstellar trade whenever possible. One of the ways it has done this is by establishing the Barnard system as a "free trade zone" (a secure world where trade can be conducted with little government regulation or interference). This encourages merchants from Terra, Prometheus, Kaguk, and even worlds outside the Republic to go there to do business. This has proven so successful, plans are being made to establish another at either Sirius or Sarpedon.

## Currency

It has been said that there are only two things worth less than an Imperial credit on Terra-one is a Solomani credit and the other is the word of a Kagukan merchant. Times change (the word of a Kagukan merchant means a bit more than it used to), but you still can't buy anything with an Imperial or Solomani credit anymore in the Terran Republic.

In Terran Republic space, the Imperial and Solomani credit have been replaced by the Terran credit (officially known as TCr). The Terran credit has a value roughly equivalent to the former currency, and is backed by the full faith and credit

of the Terran Republic government. Made from of a cupronickel-clad alloy, the one credit coin bears the image of Gabree-el standing atop the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (the site where the Temple of the Faith know stands). On the reverse side is a stylized image of an eagle in flight. There is also half credit, quarter credit, one-tenth credit, five-one-hundredths credit, and one-one hundredths credit coins minted from the same alloy which bear pictures of famous Terrans and Prometheans from history on one side, and pictures of Terran animals on the other. Denominations of currency larger than one credit are printed on special synthetic paper, using techniques that make it virtually impossible to create counterfeit bills. Currently there are Cr5, Cr10, Cr10, Cr20, Cr50, Cr100, Cr500, and Cr1,000 notes. Each feature a heroic leader from Terra's past on one side, and a famous landmark from a world in the Terran Republic on the other.

The Terran credit has the exact same value regardless of where you go within the Republic—a credit is a credit whether you are haggling prices with an air raft dealer on Terra or a merchant selling a live Donovan's wombat out of a stall on Nusku. Wages and prices therefore vary from world to world based upon the cost of living, availability and demand for merchandise, and other economic factors.

### Exchange Rates

Since the Terran Credit has a universal value within the Republic, exchange rates only come into play outside the Republic's borders. Currently the credits issued by most survivor worlds are worth anywhere from TCr0.75 to TCr0.50 (the referee should determine the exact figure after consulting the Currency Rates table on page 230 of the TNE manual). The Dingir League credit however, is worth approximately the same as a Terran credit (currency market fluctuations mean that on any given day, one might be worth more than the other).

### Barter

Bartering is still an essential part of the Terran Republic economy. The majority of bartering occurs not on Terra or Prometheus, but on the formerly high tech, high population worlds that hold much of the remaining population of the Republic. On worlds such as Agidda and Ilike, relic technology is often bartered for everything from food to Virus-proofed electronic components. The basic building blocks that go into rebuilding infrastructure (building materials, tools, etc.) are also in high demand. Some merchant corporations have made sizeable fortunes simply hauling freight lots of bartered goods between Nusku and Terra.

The markets on Barnard also present an opportunity to barter—some say "anything for everything", or skeptically "nothing for everything (in your wallet)." The fact is that Barnard presents a barter savvy individual abundant opportunity to obtain desired items, whether they are high tech jump drive components or low tech novelties.

Of course there are always stories of merchants who managed to obtain literally tons of virtually undamaged TL 15 electrical equipment for the price of a few trinkets paid to some native in the Wilds. Such stories are generally not to be believed, but some of the best bartering deals can be struck on worlds outside the Republic's borders if a merchant is willing to take a risk.

### Banned Items

The list of what can be traded, bought or sold is not universal in every system of the Terran Republic. Most worlds have at least some restrictions regarding the importation or sale of robotic equipment (from parts to whole robots) and certain types of cybernetic devices. These range from a virtual ban in the Prometheus system to inspection and registration only of such devices on Kaguk. Armed robots of any kind are illegal throughout the Terran Republic, and the ban also extends to programming a robot to use a weapon.

Terra has very strict laws governing the importation of weapons and explosives devices (in most cases it is illegal). Other worlds also have restrictions based on their overall law level. It is against Terran Republic law to import or sell poison gas, biological agents, or nuclear weapons. This ban also includes standard ship's missiles must be purchased from local sources (who include fail-safes to their devices which prevent them from being jury-rigged into nuclear bombs).

Other banned items include certain endangered or dangerous species of animals and plants (types to be determined by the referee), and any pro-Solomani Party literature including historical documents (most of which were propaganda in any event). The referee should feel free to add additional items to the list for a particular world to add flavor to their campaign.

Naturally, none of the above restrictions apply on Barnard, except where Terran Republic law may be broken.

### The Black Market

Black markets have existed since governments have attempted to tax and regulate economies (in other words, as long as there has been government). The Terran Republic is no exception. By far and away the type of item that ends up most on the

black market is relic technology.

The extent to which irreplaceable technology is lost through the black market is subject to some debate. Some experts fret at the loss of a single item, while others are more concerned that trying to suppress black market activities will only drive it outside the Republic's borders where even more valuable high tech relics would go undetected.

The Terran Republic takes a "hands off, eyes on" approach to the trafficking of relic technology on the black market. Agents of the Ministry of Justice routinely go undercover to monitor activities, occasionally buying particularly valuable pieces using government funds. Only if a particularly dangerous relic (i.e. a nuclear device) become available does the MoJ step in and confiscate it.

Much of the black market is rumored to be controlled by Kagkan crime lords (aka the "Kagukan Mafia"). While it is true that Kagukans control a disproportionately large amount of the relic technology market, and some Kagukans do

engage in black market activities (a few exclusively), it is unlikely that they dominate the black market. It would be proper however to say that they are a major player, and are far more likely to engage in activities that make them subject to Ministry of Justice investigations than their Terran, Promethean and other counterparts.

## The Kaguk System

Kaguk is a trinary star system, with two companion stars (Diira and Daarashi) in a far orbit in relation to the primary, L205-128 (known locally as Sinyagin). Diira and Daarashi circle each other around their center of mass and in turn orbit L-205-128, taking many thousands of years to complete their journey.

Planets in the system are with the exception of Kaguk and Dostoyevsky named after some of the original Terran settlers. Kaguk is a shortened version of the original Vilani name. The story of why the Terran colonists chose to retain the name is shrouded in local legend, but it is believed that it had something to do with a message left by the original Vilani colonists who abandoned the planet during the Interstellar Wars. Dostoyevsky, the system's only gas giant is named for the ancient Russian author. The planet's moons are named for characters in Dostoyevsky's writings.

All the planets and moons of this system have been thoroughly reexplored and sanitized of any Virus infestations. All outposts on worlds other than Kaguk have long since been stripped of relic technology and rebuilt using TL 12 equipment.

<i>Orbit</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>UWP</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Primary	L205-128	M0 V	
0.2	Kaguk	B648615-C	Outpost
1.0	[empty orbit]		
2.0	Zaimovsky	F301266-B	Ice-capped
3.0	Kouzetsov	G735169-B	
	40 Volkova	Y200000-0	
	60 Bolshagin	Y100000-0	
4.0	[empty orbit]		
5.0	Dostoyevsky	Large GG	
	1 Ring System	YR00000-0	
	5 Karamazov	Y210000-0	
	8 Raskolnikov	Y100000-0	
	12 Verkhovensky	YS00000-0	
	15 Yekaterina	F300265-B	Research Lab
	18 Myshkin	Y100000-0	
6.0	Noritsky	Y100000-0	
	Companion Diira	M3 V	
	Companion Daarashi	M3 V	
0 - 5	[empty orbit]		
6.0	Kasatkin	Y2A0000-0	
7.0	Butenko	Y312269-B	Research Lab

# The Kagukans, Part 1

*"OK, here's what you need to know about how the Terran Republic came to pass, in a nutshell. Terra reunited out of a sense for survival. Prometheus joined the Republic as a matter of faith-so did most of the other worlds as a matter of fact. Kaguk joined however, simply because it was good for business."*

Denniston McGraff  
Cuchulain merchant  
69 NT/5717 AD/1200 IE

*"The Divine Being speaks through its profits."*

Kagukan Pun  
Origin unknown

*"Look, I don't want a fight here. Either you want to barter the tubing for something else or you don't. If not, tell your friends with the boom sticks to back off and let me out of here or some of my friends are going to show up in about ten minutes and roast your village to the ground. Got it?"*

Unidentified Kagkan Merchant  
During some "intense" business negotiations in on Teucer  
71 NT/5719 AD/1203 IE

## Introduction

To many people, Kaguk is at best an anomaly, at worst a world of grave robbers that are making a fortune on the death of a civilization. Kagukans would of course disagree with both sentiments. For all practical purposes bypassed by most of the Universe, Kaguk for much of its history was a backward agricultural world. The flight of Emberians from their suddenly inhospitable world to Kaguk during the Collapse however, created a new hybrid culture on Kaguk, on one hand driven by a hard work ethic and pursuit of economic security, and on the other by entrepreneurial spirit and risk-taking.

## Appearance

Physiologically speaking, the internal structure of a Kagukan is indistinguishable in many ways from other humans. In fact, until the influx of the Emberian refugees they were as genetically close to being "pure" Terran stock as any world in Known Space, including Terra itself. Because of the nature of Kaguk however, there are some characteristics that make the average Kagukan different from other humans.

Because of the lower gravity (approximately half that of Earth) on Kaguk, Kagukans are taller (approximately six centimeters) and more lithe of build than an average Terran human, giving them an ectomorphic appearance. Because Kaguk's primary is a red dwarf, they are also generally fairer skinned and their eyes are more sensitive to light than the average Terran human.

It is in the area of clothing and accessories where many Kagukans (merchants as well as farmers) set themselves apart, in some cases rather dramatically. On Terra and other worlds in the Republic, clothing tends toward the conservative (even militaristic in the case of Prometheus, but that's another story), with darker colors predominating fashions. Kagukans on the other hand wear bright warm colors (reds and oranges being the most popular) in fashions that tend to be much more tailored to accentuate features and be a bit more revealing. It is not unusual at all on Barnard to see a Kagukan businessman in a bright red suit with padded shoulders (to make him appear broader in the chest), and a garish yellow and blue tie. Kagukan women's attire tends toward soft fabrics such as synthetic silks that designed to cling to the curves of the body. As is the case in most Terran-based cultures, there is a larger variety of apparel for women than men, and while exposing portions of the chest and torso are acceptable for both males and females, there are still lines that cannot be crossed (not that they aren't occasionally challenged). Outerwear (i.e. coats) for both sexes in contrast is usually very warm and functional (temperatures on Kaguk can get very cold). Kagukan overcoats are highly prized even on Terra as a result.

Both men and women wear large amounts of jewelry, whether it is in the form of rings, necklaces, headbands, bracelets for wrists and ankles, or earrings (jewelry designed for other body piercings such as the nose also being rather common). Gold is the most common metal used, though some more wealthy individuals tend toward platinum, with the less wealthy tending toward silver. A wide variety of precious stones and other precious materials are also incorporated. Kagukan merchants tend toward large pieces (which give all Kagukans a reputation for gaudiness), whereas Kagukan farmers tend to be a bit more conservative. Most Kagukans have three sets—one that they wear for formal occasions (this is usually the largest), one they wear for their normal daily routines (such as working at the office), and one that they wear when doing physically demanding activities (this is the smallest set, and contains jewelry design not to get snagged or interfere



motion). Kagukan members of the Terran Republic military naturally wear those items that are appropriate to their uniforms only. In some cases exceptions are made for ear loops and other larger pieces of jewelry, but this is done at the discretion of the local commander.

Sociologists believe that the Kagukan's love of jewelry has other motivations. Like the Jews and Gypsies of ancient times, Kagukans believe that putting your wealth into jewelry, particularly precious metals, is the one sure way to insure that you can take it with you, should you have to move on to a new location (an indication perhaps of Emberian influence). Also, while credits can become worthless overnight (ask the survivors of the Collapse), metals like platinum always retain at least some value regardless of what star system you're in. That is also why Kagukans frequently prefer to be paid in precious metals instead of Terran Republic credits (though they'll settle for credits if it would otherwise break the deal).

Another "fashion accessory" that no Kagukan is ever without is their filter mask. Kaguk's tainted atmosphere prohibits its population from working or exercising outside for long periods of time without protection. Even when they are on worlds with standard atmosphere, Kagukans feel ill at ease outdoors unless they have their filter mask close at hand (usually in a pouch attached to a belt or a shoulder strap). Not ones to allow breathing to destroy their fashion sense, Kagukans manufacture filter masks in a variety of styles and colors to go with the latest styles and colors of clothing, though it should be pointed out that most men prefer basic black.

## Culture

The original Kagukans were the descendents of hard working peasant farmers from a region on Earth known as Siberia. The farmers of Kaguk were usually forced during the Solomani-Imperial era to get by with the "hand me downs," used agricultural machinery purchased at discount from the higher tech worlds that surrounded them. Additionally, because Kaguk lay off the main trade and communications routes, even if spare parts were still manufactured for the equipment they bought, it was difficult to obtain, and took many weeks to arrive. This meant that many of those Kagukans that weren't working the land on a daily basis busied themselves with trying to jury-rig TL 14 harvesters or TL 13 planting equipment. Sometimes several pieces of surplus machinery had to be cannibalized to get one working version. Over time, the Kagukans developed into master salvagers and scroungers, farmers trading other farmers for a necessary part in exchange for some other item. Kagukans had a saying that "given the time and the materials, anything broken can be

fixed, even a heart."

When the Emberian refugees arrived after the Collapse, they added a new dimension to this basic Kagukan philosophy. No longer were there high tech worlds to sell the Kagukans their "hand me downs"-the Kagukans would have to go out gather what they needed for themselves. The Emberians brought with them the capability to do this in the form of starships, and also a wealth of technical knowledge gleaned from many centuries of advanced industrial civilization. The combining of the two cultures produced one that was very good at travelling to other star systems, recovering relic technology, and either repairing it well enough to make it work again or at the very least cannibalizing it for spare parts to make some other broken system work.

Working in the period after maximum Vampire activity in the subsector, but before the Terran expansion, the Kagukans were able move about the stars almost unhindered, ranging far and wide, learning what they could about what became of interstellar civilization while at the same time becoming even more proficient at salvaging and scrounging for relics. As word spread about their abilities, they also discovered that other people they visited were willing to pay for the things they gathered, in some cases very handsomely. The new saying became, "if you have the time, we can get you the materials to fix anything, even a broken heart." A new type of capitalist was born.

Kagukans prefer to negotiate over resorting to violence. This is not to say Kagukans are pacifists-the existence of the Kagukan Mafia should be some indication of that. Rather, given the opportunity, a Kagukan would rather make a deal first. Very early on in their exploration and salvage operations, the Kagukans discovered that they got more out of the worlds where they negotiated with local TEDs for salvage rights instead of using brute force to steal certain items. This "negotiate first" philosophy became part of the thought processes of many Kagukans, particularly merchants.

As was the case in the pre-Collapse era, family is very important to Kagukans. To be part of a Kagukan family means more than just having brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents you have to see on the holidays. Being part of a Kagukan family means being part of a clan, an extended family that can include individuals who aren't even blood relatives (but are married to those who are), who live with each other, take care of each other, and look out for each others interests before all else. Clans are the basic building block of Kagukan society. Clans can vary in size from less than a dozen to many hundreds. With a population of 6.4 million, there are a large

number of clans on Kaguk, but they break down into three basic types:

1) **Merchant clans** - Primarily made of the descendents of Emberian refugees, they are the wealthiest and the ones who most often dominate society through the Planetary Corporate Council. The Merchant clans are involved not only in trade, but also run many of Kaguk's salvage operations and are leading the effort to develop a manufacturing base for Kaguk and create a ship building industry.

2) **Agricultural clans** - These clans hold the majority of land on Kaguk and are made up primarily of Kagukan natives. As their name might suggest, they engage almost exclusively in agricultural and agribusiness activities.

3) **Mixed clans** - This class makes up a majority of the population, and consists of individuals who are at least part Emberian and part native Kagukan. The Mixed clans engage in a wide variety of business activities from farming to trade to salvage operations to business efforts not ordinarily conducted by the other two groups (i.e. the entertainment industry).

Loyalty to one's clan should not be underestimated. Ask a Kagukan merchant which he or she values more, a lucrative business contract or their clan and they will answer 'clan' every time. This loyalty sometimes extends to "looking the other way" when a family member breaks a law, or otherwise acts incorrectly (though in most cases the offending party faces discipline from the clan. The "Code of Silence" is most profound among members of the so-called Kagukan Mafia.

In most cases, it is members of the Merchant and Mixed clans that star travellers will encounter. However, it is possible for off-worlders to meet members of the Agricultural clan if they routinely deal in foodstuffs (which Kaguk still produces for export) or if they personally travel to Kaguk for a visit.

### **The Kagukan Mafia and the Black Market**

A few of the merchant clans (perhaps no more than a dozen or so) and individuals within other Kagukan clans engage in the illegal trade of relic technology and other items (including, it is rumored, human slaves). These clans and individuals established many contacts outside the Terran Republic before Kaguk became a member, and have maintained those contacts over the years as sources for goods banned by Terran Republic law, or the laws of individual worlds inside and outside the Republic. All Kagukan Mafia organizations operate some kind of legitimate business as a cover and as a place through much

credits and precious metals can be laundered. More often than not, the business is a small merchant company, but it can also include starport or spaceport facilities, a salvage operation, or even an unrelated business such as a bar or a health club.

### **Government**

The Planetary Corporate Council is made up of 36 representatives from the most prominent clans on Kaguk. While it is possible to buy a seat on the Council from another clan, most members who ultimately join are invited to participate by the Council through a selection process. Because the number of seats on the Council is strictly limited to 36, no new clan can be placed on the Council until after a vote is taken to throw another member off-such votes are rarely successful, since it takes 30 of 36 votes to remove a clan from Council. The Council has supreme legislative authority in all matters. A planetary and regional bureaucracy carries out enforcement of the Council's legislative actions.

An appointed governor from Terra serves as the Chief Executive Officer for the Council, and casts the deciding vote in case the Council is deadlocked on an issue. The governor also has veto power over the Council's decisions, and there is no possibility of an override. However, the Planetary Corporate Council has right to hold a "no confidence" vote if they feel the CEO is acting in a corrupt or incompetent manner. This would result in the governor's immediate replacement by another Terran appointed governor. Thus far there haven't been any "no confidence" votes, but there have been times when clan members have asked for one during a particularly heated political debate on Council.

There is also a separate judiciary, but its members are appointed and approved by the Planetary Corporate Council. There is no supreme court per se, but issues involving the constitutionality of a particular law or interpretation of a law are settled by an ad hoc legal committee made up of legal experts appointed by the CEO.

### **Politics**

Currently Merchant Clans control 15 of the 36 seats on the Planetary Corporate Council, with the Agricultural Clans controlling 12 seats and the Mixed Clans controlling 9. Because the Merchant Clans do not have a majority of the Council, they are forced to court the other two clan groups (especially the Mixed Clans) for support in getting legislation passed. This has resulted in some limited steps democratization at the local level (specifically town meetings where the populace can express their views on important issues), but all

other attempts at amending the constitution on the part of the Mixed Clans have resulted in failure. Neither the Merchant nor Agricultural Clans as a whole favor a change of government at this time.

While views vary somewhat from clan to clan, there are some things that can be generalized about with regard to other political issues. The Merchant Clans favor rapidly increasing the industrialization of Kaguk through imported and relic technology. Agricultural Clans on the other hand want to limit both the importing of industrial equipment from other worlds (particularly Terra, which provides the vast majority of it) and Kaguk's reliance on relic technology to speed up the process. While they see the need for Kaguk to become more self reliant through increasing the world's industrial capacity, they do not want to radically change Kaguk's essential agricultural nature. Mixed Clans on the other hand prefer a middle course-one that results in Kaguk becoming far more industrialized while at the same time doing so much more gradually with an eye at preserving Kaguk's status as a net agricultural exporter.

The political balance generally favors the Merchant Clans when it comes to votes on the Planetary Corporate Council, though at times both the Agricultural and Mixed Clans team up to limit the amount of industrial growth that the Merchant Clans want. On the other hand, sections of Kaguk are being set aside for agricultural production because of the Agricultural-Mixed alliance, though the Mixed Clans have shown that they have no problem crossing the aisle to the Merchant side when proposals for preservation go too far for their liking.

### The Relic Trade

The Kagukans have a large number of salvage operations ongoing in the Sol subsector, most notably at Ember (a cemetery world), and Junction and Nusku, where they employ large numbers of the inhabitants. Originally, Kagukan "Right of Salvage" claims included every uninhabited world in the Sol subsector. The Terran Republic saw Kagukan salvage claims as tantamount to actually claiming the entire star system, so the Republic immediately dispatched a sizeable naval contingent to curb Kagukan ambitions. It wasn't until several unofficial and one rather public and bloody skirmish between a Terran Republic and a Kagukan vessel that the Kagukans agreed to come to the bargaining table. In the end a compromise was finally reached-the Republic would recognize most of the Kagukan salvage claims if Kaguk joined the Terran Republic and accepted a Terran governor. The Kagukans, facing the loss of their salvage fleet (which although well protected was no match for true warships) and possible Terran occupation left that they had no alternative.

Today, much of the relic trade in the Terran Republic involves Kagukans, either as salvagers, sellers, brokers, or purchasers. The Kagukans are also active in the relic trade outside the Republic, travelling regularly as far away as the Thalassa subsector, and on special trade missions rimward and trailing outside the sector. It was a Kagukan that first brought word back in 1201 IE of rumors of a Hiver client state in the Old Expanses, a rumor that as of yet has never been confirmed.

### Refereeing a Kagukan Character

Because Kagukans are so disproportionately over represented in space, it very likely that player characters will encounter them as non-player characters (NPCs) in their travels. Kagukans merchants can be patrons, contacts, even rivals. When determining the NPC motivation for a Kagukan, the first card should always be drawn from the diamonds and spades *only*, adding in the rest of the deck for the drawing of the second card. This is used to represent how much Kagukan merchants are obsessed with the obtaining of wealth and power. Wealthy Kagukan merchants usually travel with family members (husbands, wives, sons, daughters, grandparents, even uncles, aunts, and cousins), a number of personal security guards, and several "associates" (American slang being "hangers on") which can be anyone from personal hair stylists to technicians. The referee should use their imagination when coming up with a list of individuals who make up a Kagukan's "people".

Kagukans can be played to great comic relief, or as deadly serious non-player characters. The referee should adjust how Kagukans are portrayed according to the needs of their campaign. The importance of family, and the double standards some Kagukans have with regard to business and family cannot be over emphasized. If you are looking for a model for Kagukan Mafia behavior, don't look to the short, large eared aliens on a certain science fiction TV show-read Mario Puzo.

Also remember this quote, "When you think that a Kagukan has told you all they know--you can bet they haven't, especially when credits are involved." Kagukan NPCs will usually know more than they are telling, and it is up to the player characters to determine when they aren't being told the whole truth. The kinds of information withheld will not be critical to the player characters' survival, but will usually involve matters of business and finance. For example, a merchant hires a Kagukan to help with trade negotiations with a world in the Wilds the merchant has never visited before. The Kagukan tells the merchant that he hasn't been there before either-which isn't true. The Kagukan in fact had visited two years earlier and negotiated for

many weeks with a local TED, only to come away empty handed. Since the merchant is paying the Kagukan by the week, the Kagukan is hoping to link the merchant up with the same TED and have a steady job for a good long while.

### Playing a Kagukan

It is also possible for a player to take the role of a Kagukan in a campaign. The player character will probably come from a lesser family on Kaguk and is trying to make a fortune for themselves and their family through adventuring, or they may be a disinherited son or daughter of a wealthy Kagukan family who is now out to build their own financial empire. There are even those rare Kagukans who disdain the pursuit of wealth and family honor in favor of public service (i.e. a Kagukan who is an agent for the Ministry of Justice). Such individuals will at any rate be ambitious and seek to influence the bureaucratic machinery to favor themselves, or Kaguk in general.

Kagukan players should, from time to time, have the referee pass them notes during a role-playing session giving additional details about a situation (or notes that say "hi" or "how about that World Cup competition?" to throw off the other players). This creates illusion that the Kagukan character knows more than he or she is telling-it is up to the player to decide if they will share the information thus obtained with the rest of the group.

### Other Notes on Kagukans

Note that in all cases, just because a Kagukan may be ambitious, greedy, ruthless, and unscrupulous, doesn't mean that they have the ability to follow through on all of their goals of galactic dominion (if they even are thinking that far ahead). By no means should the Kagukans be portrayed as being capable destroying the Terran Republic. Even if they could, they wouldn't because the Republic gives them a safe haven in which to do business. For that reason, they support the Republic and are loyal to it.

*Homeworld Effects on Attributes:* When a character's homeworld is Kaguk, certain modifications are made to their attributes before beginning the character generation process. The modifications necessary appear at the beginning of the Kagukan Merchant generation sequence, and apply to all Kagukan characters.

### Kaguk Mainworld World Data

*Note: the basic stats for the Kaguk system are listed on page 46.*

Kaguk has a diameter of 6,132 miles (9,866

km). Its atmosphere is thin and tainted by sulfur compounds that are the result of volcanic activity; a filter mask is required if activities are to be conducted outside for more than half an hour. The hydrosphere covers 80 percent of Kaguk's surface. There are three major continents, two subcontinents, and numerous islands. There are two major cities, where approximately half of the population is concentrated, the rest living in small towns or in the countryside on farms. There are no lifeforms native to Kaguk above microscopic levels. A large amount of flora and fauna have been imported to Kaguk from other worlds over the years, genetically engineered to be able to breathe Kaguk's air with no ill effects. Most of the planet's vegetation is in the form of agricultural products, which can be found in the equatorial, tropical and subtropical regions. Vast treeless tundras exist north and south of these regions on both continents. Kaguk has only a very minimal axial tilt, so there are no seasons per se, however, because the planet's orbit is slightly elliptical which means that temperatures vary slowly up and down by 5 degrees C on a monthly cycle. The worldwide average temperature on Kaguk is 10 degrees C (50 degrees F). The warmest day during a year reaches 20 degrees C (68 degrees F) and occurs in the equatorial region. The coldest night drops to -40 degrees C (-104 degrees F) in the polar regions. Kagukan days last 36 hours, 2 minutes, 1 second, and Kaguk circles around its primary once every 4 months, 1 day, 20 hours, 54 minutes, 39 seconds. Kaguk is very seismically active, though most of the activity is concentrated near the poles, away from civilized areas.

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# Additional Careers for the Terran Republic

## Part 1 - Kagukan Merchant

### Introduction

Your ancestors are a collection of simple farmers and refugees who were forced to flee their high tech industrial world when it turned against them. In learning to live with each other, they created a new culture, one that values those who know how to work hard and make money. Exploiting the ruins of a bygone era provides you with an avenue to achieve this. Doing it in the Wilds gives a whole new meaning to the term "risk capital."

**Prerequisites:** INT 6+ or CHR 6+. Homeworld: Kaguk.

**Homeworld Effects on Attributes:** STR(-1), AGL(+1), CON(-2), EDU(+1). Faith Level -2.

**Mandatory Background Skills:** none

**Default Skills:** Computer 0, Pilot (I/G) 0, Willpower 0.

### First Term

**Commission:** 6+, DM+1 if EDU 8+, DM+1 if INT 8+, DM+1 for SOC 8+. A commission makes the character an officer (if assigned to shipboard duty) or an administrator (if assigned to an orbital space station or ground installation); all other characters are spacehands (if assigned to shipboard duty) or technicians (if assigned to an orbital space station or ground installation).

#### Skills:

*Officers/Administrators:* Gun Combat 1, Spacehand 1, Space Vessel 1, Space Tech 2, Economics 2, Interaction 1.

*Spacehands/Technicians:* Gun Combat 1, Spacehand 1, Space Tech 2, Technician 2, Vehicle 1, Charm 1.

### Subsequent Terms

**Commission:** 7+, DM+1 if EDU 8+, DM+1 if INT 8+.

#### Skills:

*Officers/Administrators:* Charm, Determination, Economics, Explore, Interaction, Perception, Space Vessel, Space Tech, Spacehand.

*Spacehands/Technicians:* Charm, Explore, Interaction, Space Tech, Spacehand, Technician, Vehicle, Vice.

### All Terms

**Special Duty:** 4+ for Crime, Engineer, Explore, Gun Combat, Language, Medical, Melee, Vehicle, Vice.

**Promotion:** 7+, DM+1 if CHR 7+, DM+1 if INT 7+, DM+1 for SOC 8+.

**Contacts:** One per term, trader, government, or criminal.

**Other Effects:** 2 ship DMs per term served as a spacehand, 5 ship DMs per term served as an officer, both for a Trader ship. +1 SOC each term once rank O7 achieved.

### Table of Ranks

E1	Spacehand/Technician Recruit
E2	Apprentice Spacehand/Technician
E3	Able Spacehand/Technician
E4	Senior Spacehand/Technician
E5	Master Spacehand/Technician
E6	3 <sup>rd</sup> Mate/Supervisor
E7	2 <sup>nd</sup> Mate/Senior Supervisor
E8	1 <sup>st</sup> Mate/Master Supervisor
O1	4 <sup>th</sup> Officer/Junior Administrator
O2	3 <sup>rd</sup> Officer/Administrator
O3	2 <sup>nd</sup> Officer/Senior Administrator
O4	1 <sup>st</sup> Officer/Team Manager
O5	Captain/Section Manager
O6	Senior Captain/Department Manager
O7	Commodore/Division Manager
O8	Vice President
O9	Executive Board Member
O10	Chairperson

*Note: The exact title of an individual depends upon whether they are assigned to shipboard or other duties.*

# Soho Light Freighter Background Notes

## Naval Architect's Notes

The *Soho*-class is a variant of a design that dates back to the Long Night era. Well armed by merchant ship standards, its barbette and all its turrets can be controlled from the master fire director on the bridge. In practice, however, only the laser barbette is handled from that position, the laser turrets being manned by gunners and the sandcaster being controlled remotely by one of the other bridge crew (typically the astrogator).

Meant as a cargo hauler capable of light escort duty, not a people mover, the *Soho* lacks the large number passenger staterooms found on a typical far trader, though provisions can be made to set up temporary facilities in the cargo hold when required. Alternatively, the crew can "double up" in existing staterooms, increasing the maximum number of passengers possible to ten.

*Sohos* are noted for their durability. This reputation is due in part to the fact that their internal structures are constructed to take 3Gs (one G more than minimum engineering specification require). At least one *Soho* is reportedly being modified to accept a 3G maneuver drive, but this is being done at great expense to the cargo capacity.

The name of the class comes from the Soho District of London, which in the 25th century was an important financial center. Most ships of the class get their designation by taking the name 'Soho' and prefacing it with the name of a precious gem or mineral. Thus the first five *Sohos* were called *Ruby Soho*, *Diamond Soho*, *Jade Soho*, *Emerald Soho*, and *Sapphire Soho*.

## History

The first Soho light freighter was constructed at the Chakranarayan Ship Yards on Terra in 50 NT (1182 IE). Earlier that year, a clash occurred between a Kagukan merchant ship and Terran Republic naval forces. Tensions were high in the wake of the incident (which involved an ongoing dispute over Kagukan salvage claims), and it was feared that the Kagukans might resort to raiding Terran commercial shipping in retaliation.

In response, the Ministry of Interstellar Trade and Commerce (in cooperation with at least one museum and a government archives) re-introduced several blueprints for vessels dating back to the Terran Mercantile Community that were within the capabilities of modern day commercial ship yards to construct. The Terran Republic government hoped that by providing the blueprints, the funding required for updating them to modern standards,

and subsidizing the construction of the new vessels through tax incentives, that confidence in the safety of interstellar trade would in part be restored.

The *Soho* class turned out to be the offering at the 200-ton displacement level. Commercial ship architects were able with only minimal adjustments (mostly the adding of extra armor and better internal structure) to fit the original layout into the hull of a *Jayhawk* class far trader, an extremely common TL 12 design that was already in being. This dramatically cut down the construction time usually necessary for a new class of ship.

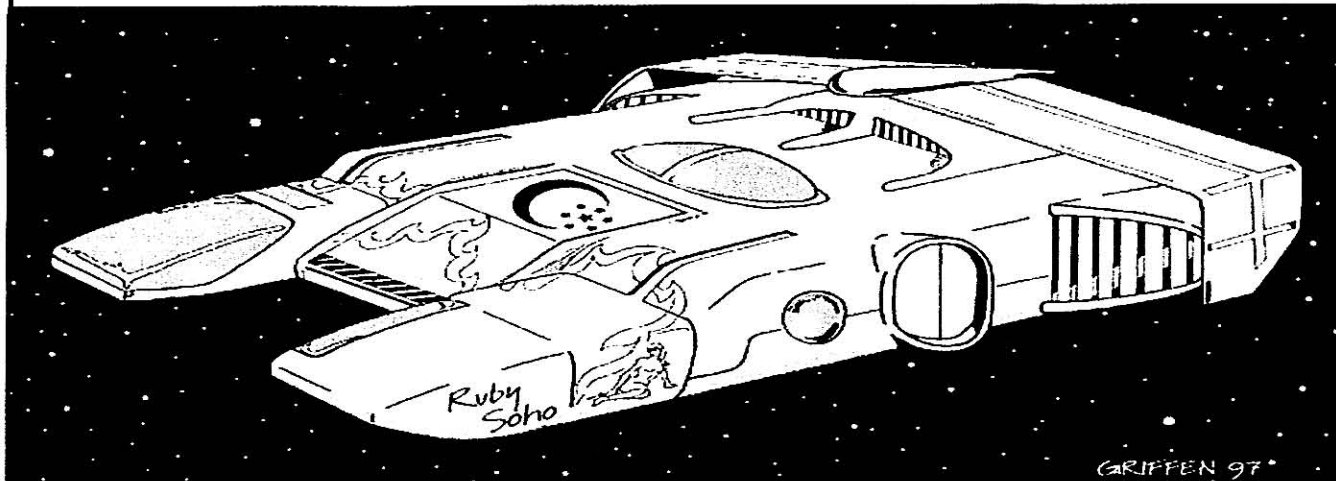
The similarity between the two vessels turned out also to be a selling point, since potential corsairs would not be able to tell the difference between a *Soho* and a *Jayhawk* until it was too late. Orders were placed for two dozen of the vessels within a week of their becoming available for construction. The first buyers were large shipping companies looking for a 'Q' ship to act as an escort for other vessels, but soon smaller shipping companies also purchased *Sohos* to make deliveries of goods on frontier worlds and into the Wilds.

After the crisis with the Kagukans passed, construction of *Sohos* continued, though orders came almost exclusively from Terran merchants engaged in speculative trade in the Wilds. Just as it appeared that particular market was becoming saturated, merchants families from Kaguk (now a member of the Republic) began purchasing *Sohos* and other Terran manufactured vessels to supplement or replace their aging fleets of relic starships.

Today, *Sohos* can be found throughout the Republic, and beyond its borders into the Wilds on trading expeditions to so-called "survivor worlds". Typically they are used as part of a merchant convoy, acting as an escort (or as a supplemental escort) to less well-armed ships. They can also be found operating alone carrying particularly valuable cargoes. Construction of new *Soho* class vessels continues, though the pace of construction is once again slowing as the market reaches the saturation point.

The stats listed on the opposite page are for a *Soho* as it rolls off the assembly line. Owners typically make modifications so that the ship will better suit their needs over time. Among the many modifications reported by owners include the installation of an extra fuel tank, a laboratory, an extra spacious entertainment facility, sensor decoy dispensers, a missile launcher, even a multibarrel rapid fire plasma gun (procured from a "surplus" *Fox* attack speeder).

# SOHO Class Light Freighter



## General Data

**Displacement:** 200 tons **Hull Armor:** 28  
**Length:** 43 meters **Volume:** 2800 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Price:** MCr 125.038 **Target Size:** S  
**Configuration:** Wedge SL **Tech Level:** 12  
**Mass (Loaded/Empty):** 2.686.45/1.995.45

## Engineering Data

**Power Plant:** 292 MW Fusion Power Plant (48.7 MW/hit), 6 month duration (2.071 MW excess power)  
**Jump Performance:** 2 (420 m<sup>3</sup> fuel)  
**G-Rating:** 2G (100 MW/G)  
**G-Turns:** 44 (79.4 using jump fuel), 12.5 m<sup>3</sup> of fuel each  
**Maint:** 114

## Electronics

**Computer:** 1xTL-12 Mod Fb, 2xTL-12 Mod St Computer (0.8 MW ea.)  
**Commo:** 300,000 km radio (10; 10 MW), 1000 AU maser (∞; .6 MW)  
**Avionics:** TL-12 Avionics  
**Sensors:** Passive EMS fixed array w/direction finder 120,000 km (4 hexes, 0.2 MW), Active EMS 240,000 km (8 hexes, 24 MW)  
**ECM/ECCM:** none  
**Controls:** Bridge with 4 x Bridge Workstation, plus 3 other workstation

## Armament

**Offensive:** 2xTL-12 120-Mj Laser Turret (Loc:8,9; Arcs: 1-3; 3.3 MW) 1xTL-12 250-Mj Laser Barbette (Loc:10; Arc: 1-3; 6.9 MW).  
**Defensive:** 1xSandcaster Turret (Loc:11-Arcs: 1-3; TL-12; 1D10x5 Reduc/Hit; 30 Canisters ea.; 1MW ea.)  
**Master Fire Directors:** 1 TL-12 (4 Diff Mod; Msl 10 hexes; 10 hexes; 3.1MW, 1 crew ea.)

	Short	Medium	Long	Ext.
120-Mj Laser Turret	4:1/9-27	8:1/9-27	16:1/6-20	32:1/3-10
250-Mj Laser Barbette	10:1/13-40	20:1/13-33	40:1/5-17	80:1/3-8

## Accommodations

**Life Support:** Extended (0.56 MW), Gravitic Compensators (3G; 14 MW)  
**Crew:** 8 (3xEngineering, 1xElectronics, 2xManeuver, 1xGunnery, 1xCommand)  
**Crew Accommodations:** 8xSmall Staterooms (single/double-occupancy; 0.0005 MW ea.)  
**Passenger Accommodations:** 2xSmall Staterooms (single/double-occupancy; 0.0005 MW ea.)  
**Cargo:** 650.97 m<sup>3</sup>, plus two large cargo hatches  
**Small Craft and Launch Facilities:** Internal hangar (Minimal) for 2 ton air raft, 1 launch port  
**Air Locks:** 2

## Notes

Fuel scoops, purification machinery (1.06 MW), 36 hours to refine 1,013.8 m<sup>3</sup>.

## DAMAGE TABLES

Area (1D20)	Surface Hits
1	1-8: CH, 9-13: LP, 14-20: Ant
2-3	1-4:Ant
4-5	1-3:Ant
6-7	
8	1-8: CH
9	
10	
11	
12-15	
16-17	
18-19	1: AL
20	

Internal Explosion
Hold
1-5: Elec, 6-19: Qtrs, 20: Hold
1-5: Elec, 6-16: Qtrs, 17-20: Hold
Hold
1-6: LT, 7-20: Hold
1-6: LT, 7-20: Hold
1-12: LB, 13-20: Hold
1-6: Sand, 7-20: Hold
Hold
1-8: Eng, 9-20: Hold
1-9: Eng, 10-20: Hold
Eng

System	
AMES-(2h)	FPP-2H
MFD-(4h)	LB-2H
Hangar-(1h)	LT-1H
CS-7H	Sand-1H
SSR-(2h)	All Other-(1h)
LS-4H	
ELS-1H	
AG-1H	
JD-3H	
PP-6H	
MD-(4h)	
CG-1H	

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The following is a list of new and used Traveller and Marc Miller's Traveller ("T4") material, listed in alphabetical order. **Title** = title of the publication. **Cost** = sale price in US dollars. **Publisher** = the people who made it (GDW - Game Designers' Workshop, IG - Imperium Games, SQG - Star Quest Games). **Cond** = condition of the item where 'n' is new, '5' is like new, and '1' is trashed. **Stock No.** = item's stock number. **System** = which version of Traveller said piece was written for.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Cond</u>	<u>Stock No.</u>	<u>System</u>
Adventure 04: Leviathan	8.00	GDW	4	GDW316	Traveller - Classic
Adventure 08: Prison Planet	12.00	GDW	4	GDW330	Traveller - Classic
Adventure 10: Safari Ship	8.00	GDW	n	GDW338	Traveller - Classic
Adventure 11: Murder on...	8.00	GDW	n	GDW339	Traveller - Classic
Alien Module 1: Aslan	15.00	GDW	5	GDW254	Traveller - Classic
Aliens of the Rim Vol 1	14.00	GDW	n	GDW0318	Traveller - TNE
Battle Rider	30.00	GDW	5	GDW0308	Traveller - TNE
Book 1: Characters & Combat	4.00	GDW	4		Traveller - Classic
Book 2: Starships	4.00	GDW	5		Traveller - Classic
Book 3: Worlds and...	6.00	GDW	5		Traveller - Classic
Brilliant Lances	30.00	GDW	n	GDW0303	Traveller - TNE
Double Adventure 1: Shadows...8.00	GDW		4	GDW312	Traveller - Classic
Double Adventure 2: Across...	7.00	GDW	5	GDW313	Traveller - Classic
Double Adventure 3: Argon...	6.00	GDW	5	GDW321	Traveller - Classic
Double Adventure 4: Marooned	8.00	GDW	4	GDW323	Traveller - Classic
Double Adventure 6: Divine...	8.00	GDW	n	GDW331	Traveller - Classic
Emperor's Arsenal	17.25	IG	n	IPG1500	Marc Miller's Traveller
Fighting Ships of the Shattered	10.00	GDW	3	GDW0218	Traveller - Mega
Fire, Fusion, & Steel	25.00	GDW	5	GDW0304	Traveller - TNE
High Passage #3	15.00	FASA	4		Traveller - Classic
Imperial Encyclopedia	8.00	GDW	5	GDW213	Traveller - Mega
Imperium	16.80	GDW	n	GDW0205	Traveller - Boardgame
Imperium - First Printing	30.00	GDW	n		Traveller - Boardgame
Journal of the TAS #08	12.00	GDW	5		Traveller - Classic
Journal of the TAS #12	12.00	GDW	5		Traveller - Classic
Journal of the TAS #25	10.00	IG	5		Marc Miller's Traveller
Journal of the TAS #25	4.25	IG	n		Marc Miller's Traveller
Megatraveller 1: The Zhodani...	15.00	Paragon	5		Traveller - Computer Game (IBM)
Megatraveller 2: Quest for...	15.00	Paragon	5		Traveller - Computer Game (IBM)
Milieu 0	17.25	IG	n	IPG1400	Marc Miller's Traveller
Path of Tears	18.00	GDW	n	GDW0309	Traveller - TNE
Players' Manual	5.00	GDW	n	GDW0211	Traveller - Mega
Pocket Empires	17.25	IG	n	IPG1600	Marc Miller's Traveller
Rebellion Sourcebook	10.00	GDW	n	GDW0214	Traveller - Mega
Referee's Companion	10.00	GDW	n	GDW0215	Traveller - Mega
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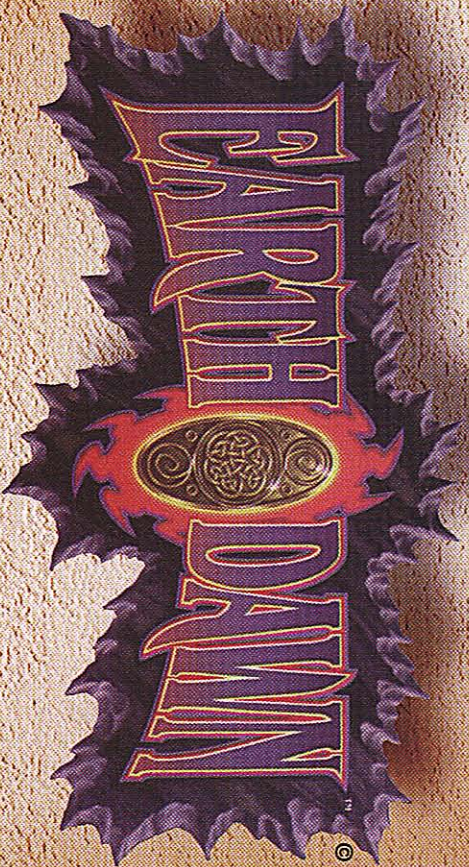
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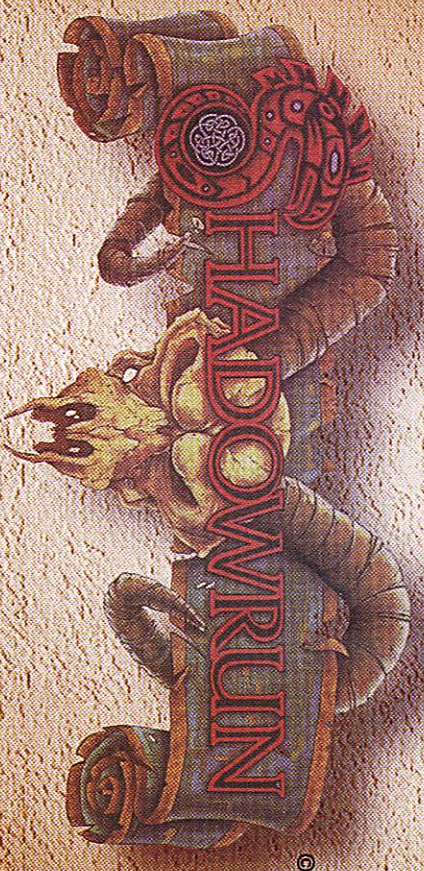


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