FIELD GUIDE:

THE KARRAKIN
TRADE BARONIES

A supplement for LANCER RPG

MASSIF

FIELD GUIDE:

THE KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

RETRIEVED FOR CENTCOM/NAVCOM

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THE KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

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AT A GLANCE

HOMEWORLD
Karrakis

UNION RING
Ring 1/Rocky Mountain Line

BLINK ACCESS:
Grand Teton Station, serving Karrakis; Uinta Station, serving Khayradin; Bitterroot Station, serving Ispahsalar

CAPITAL CITY
Throne Karrakis, Karrakis

HEAD OF STATE
Prime Baron (elected by the Baronic Council)

GOVERNMENT HEAD
Premier (elected by the Ignoble House)

GOVERNMENT TYPE
Federal, constitutional elective monarchy with a bicameral legislature made up of an upper house (the Baronic Council) and a lower house (the Ignoble House)

KARRAKIN WORLDS

The Baronies' core worlds are called the Baronic Concern. The frontier of Baronic expansion, the Dawnline Shore, on the other hand, is known to Karrakins as the Baronic Interest.

Union's capital world, Cradle, is known to Karrakins as Earth. They consider the planet Karrakis to be the cultural center of the galaxy and the capital of humankind – not Earth. Cradle is recognized as the birthplace of humanity, but Karrakins consider the mass exodus during the Fall to mark the end of Earth's claim to humanity's heart.

THE CONCERN

Arrudye (House of Remembrance, Liberal)
Karrakis (House of Order, Federalist)
Ispahsalar (House of Glass, Federalist)
Tilimsan (House of Sand, Hagiographic)
Eyalet-a (House of Smoke, Federalist)
Khayradin (House of Stone, Hagiographic)
Umara (House of Water, Republican)
Begum (House of Moments, Federalist)
Bo (House of Dust, Republican)
Dawnline Shore/The Interest
San Simeon (House of Promise, Republican)

GIVEN NAME

When speaking of the people of the Karrakin Trade Baronies, there are numerous social codes, titles, and demonyms to hold in mind. Generally speaking, citizens and subjects of the major houses, whether in the Concern or the Interest, can be called "Karrakin" by those from Union, other states or corpro-states, and so on.

That said, although Karrakin might be acceptable shorthand for someone from the Baronies, that person would likely express their desire to be called by the demonym relevant to their homeworld – for example, someone from Khayradin would say they are Khayradi, someone from Eyalet-a would say they are Eyaleti, someone from Umara would say they are Umaran, and so on.

The particularities of social status add another level of complexity. Members of the Baronies' noble classes tend to insist on proper address from Baronic subjects and citizens. When interacting with outsiders, desire for exactitude in address is a spectrum: some nobles demand strict adherence to protocol and will take pains to have their staff inform any potential audiences of those protocols, while others may accept recognition in the form of a simple "lord", or similar.

ANNORUM

Periods of Karrakin history are organized by annorum. Annorum are a Karrakin form of dynastic, fate-sourced absolute monarchy. Best `imagined as an imperial arrangement, the concept implies a certain state of thought, being, and myth in addition to the era and form of rule. Annorum can extend far beyond the reign of a single ruler, though they are often thought of as being instigated or "torn" into being by the actions of a particular fated person.

Annorum can be used in a different context as a political equivalent to empire, or even in reference to the ruling family. An Annorum's leader is an "Anno", though "Emperor" is often used and understood to be an equivalent rank.

DATES

Dates in this book are in Union Standard Years, in which "u" refers to the current Union era and "bu" refers to the time before Union era. Years are measured according to Cradle standard (365 days/year).

INTRODUCTION

What is Karrakis? How to begin to describe that old throne. One could start by writing all of human history prior to the Fall in a single book and giving that book a single name. Is Karrakis today the same as its founding colony? Is Karrakis the Annorum Passacaglia or the Annorum Tyrannus? Is it the New Federation, or is it the Baronies?

To those who hate her, Karrakis is a wheezing crone, shambling towards an end in teeth and blood. To those who love her, she is a mighty amazon, unblemished and undaunted. The truth is that Karrakis is immune to the damnation of the partisan and undeserving of the praises of the worshipper. She is both crone and amazon: she stands alone in human history, for better or worse, and defines the arc of our species as both loadstone and diadem.

Begin here: Karrakis is a name older than any human civilization that ever lived and died on earth. Older than the great pharaohs of Egypt, the emperors of old China, the senators of Rome, the khans of Mongolia, the shahs of Persia, and every president and prime minister.

Against Union, Karrakis is a captivating mirror. The two great powers of humankind are fascinated with one another, scale notwithstanding. Though others may try to intercede, their mutual embrace is, ultimately, unbreakable. Where one goes, the other will follow; Union and Karrakis will live together, or die by mutual compact.

The Karrakin Trade Baronies is a member state of Union that considers itself both the cultural heart of humanity and its modern day capital. Boasting an unbroken, millennia-long history from their foundation to the present day, billions of souls under their banner, and dozens of worlds under their command, the Karrakins are a mirror to Union – if not in size, then certainly in their impact on the course of human history.

Karrakis was seeded by the first of the Ten[1] – the *Apollo*[2], a titanic generation ship launched pre-Fall. The millennia that have passed since then have seen a wealth of mythology and legends, rising kingdoms and crumbling empires, civil wars and interstellar conflict. This is a culture that has weathered the weight of history; now, it faces an uncertain future.

The Baronies' unbroken history is a rarity among galactic states. However, unlike the people of the the Aun Ecumene[3], who regard Cradle as their long lost homeworld, most Karrakins do not hold Cradle in that same regard. Instead, Karrakis, the Baronies' first world, occupies that venerated position in their cultural mythology. Cradle is simply recognized as the origin of the species, not a homeland to be reclaimed or longed for. Other than scholars, diplomats, and a few curious travelers, few Karrakins have an interest in Earth – let alone a desire to visit it.

The leaders of the Baronies do not seek to rule Union directly – though they do maintain a representative presence on the Central Committee – instead, they vie for control over Karrakis itself, and seek new worlds to add glory to her name. To sit steward upon the Annorum Dais on Karrakis is to mark yourself as the figurative lord of humanity – a chain unbroken since humans first stepped out from Olduvai.

Though the goal of the barons will always be control of the Annorum Dais, theirs is not an entirely insular culture. The houses of the Baronies pursue interstellar objectives and mount colonial expeditions, raise house companies, and participate in Union politics for varying reasons – some for gold, some for glory, some for adventure, and some who see interstellar ventures as a unique angle back into Karrakin politics.

1 "The Ten" refers to the ten massive generation ships launched from Cradle around the time of the Fall.

2 SOLEMN VIGIL CLEARANCE (EYES ONLY): We are aware of the incongruency with the Accepted Timeline. Please refer to report(s): NOMAD WATCHTOWER, ODYSSEY CANNON, and BREAKWATER CHARIOT for detail.

3 Another major civilization seeded by the Ten. See *Lancer* pg. 390 for details.

FOR ALL TIME

The history of the Karrakin people stretches from before the Fall to the present day, developing in parallel to and divergent from Union for thousands of years under the assumption that Karrakis alone had survived the Fall. Recontact occurred under Union's First Committee, but if it had not been for the Deimos Event and Union's meteoric technological ascendancy, Karrakis would have been the seat of humanity's power. Unencumbered by the trauma of the Fall, the colony on Karrakis flourished, and for thousands of years its people enjoyed a linear development. By the time of first contact with Union, the Karrakins had made landfall on nearby worlds. By the time of the Deimos Event, they had developed mass industries and megastructural engineering, and their people had spread out over numerous terrestrial worlds and moons.

There was friction under the Second Committee. Fearing significant resistance to integration from the Karrakins – which, indeed, took place – the Second Committee sent a fleet before its diplomats. The war between the Karrakin peoples and Union was short: bolstered by technological advancements guaranteed via the Deimos event, the Union Navy smashed aside their Karrakin opponents and secured a surrender. Their fleet eliminated, facing Union's singular control over paracausal entities and technology, and burdened with a baroque monarchy hamstrung by conventional interstellar communications and transportation, the Karrakins took the unprecedented step of ceding galactic sovereignty to Union.

In exchange, Karrakis became the raw heart of Union's industrial base, providing the unquestioned galactic hegemon with the vast boon of resources and extraction techniques that ensured Cradle and her colonies – by extension, the rest of the Core worlds in the galaxy – never wanted for any material good. The fractured and internecine nobility, suddenly united by the blink and the omninet, chose not to demand rule over the galaxy, but to fund the people who did. In time, their economic sway became inextricable from Union's galactic dominion. It is a grim truth of Union – and an uncomfortable source of tension among the center and left-of-center party coalitions that sit the Central Committee – that without Karrakis, Union as we know it today would not exist.

Now, however, all signs point towards the balance of power shifting away from this arrangement. The rich vein that was the Baronic Concern – the core worlds of the Baronies and their rulers, the major houses – is running dry. The worlds of the Concern choke under the demands of populations in the billions and tens of billions, and the resources that the barons were once so readily able to provide to Union's Core worlds are eaten up first by their own. A crown that thought itself inured to political upheaval – with its millennia of rising and crumbling empires, of states born from and returned to the ashes – is now struck to the core by a rising tide of republicanism. Familiar to the rest of the galaxy, but anathema to the most conservative Baronic factions, the demands of Baronic citoyens to be recognized not as noble or ignoble but equal and deserving of the right to self-rule is spreading among all classes. Burdened by a hungry and increasingly restless population, the Baronies' ruling classes have turned towards a fertile clutch of unusually resource-rich worlds: the Dawnline Shore, the Baronic Interest, where they meet not only long-settled indigenous populations seeded under the First Committee, but a swaggering Harrison Armory, hungry to expand its territory.

This slow but inevitable crisis grows steadily more intense and threatens to plunge all of the Baronies into an untold era of conflict. Union's Third Committee, haunted by its past and unwilling to repeat the dire mistakes of its predecessor, treads with the lightest step possible. It remains to be seen if the Throne can be remade anew, or if it will crack and break from the pressure.

The future of the Baronies, once immutable in the noble and ignoble mind both, is now uncertain. The great wheel Dis has come rolling back around. The center is crumbling: what happens next is unknown. The future – as the haruspices, oracles, and augurs on Old Karakiz would tell you – is for the taking.

SECTION 1
THE ANCIENT WORLD

THE LONG DEEP QUIET
(C. 6000BU)

```
>//QUERY::ALLCOMM
>//RESPONSE AS FOLLOWS::
>//[Triton Circle::AUTOMATIC
    RESPONSE]::[TRANSLATED???]:: *static*
>//END
>//[Enceladus Highpoint::AUTOMATIC
    RESPONSE]::[TRANSLATED???]:: *static*
>//END
>//[Castillo Relay::AUTOMATIC
    RESPONSE]::[TRANSLATED???]:: *static*
>//END
>//[Europa Highpoint::AUTOMATIC
    RESPONSE]::[TRANSLATED???]:: *static*
>//END
>//CONTINUE ALLCOMM QUERY? (y/n)
>//(y)
```

*– Pre-Annorum records retrieved from
Federal Karrakin Archives*

The terminal decline of Earth did not drag with it the colony on Karrakis, distanced as it was by a gulf of space and relative time so vast that information itself could take decades to arrive. As such, the Fall does not hold the same terrible weight in Baronic space as it does among Union's most Metropolitan Core worlds; the Fall was not a watershed in Karrakin history, but an unfortunate, distant event. The lessons learned by the people who would found Union were not learned by those who would build Karrakis.

A well-resourced colony on a verdant world of rich and diverse biomes, Karrakis flourished in a way that few other human colonies did. Supplied with regular wake-sent[4] shipments from Earth of goods, advanced machinery, refined resources, and civilizational catalysts, the colony on Karrakis rapidly developed its civic and industrial infrastructure, spreading industry and metropolitan environments across the world's continents. Even in its earliest incarnation, Karrakis was a resource base for Earth, keeping the homeworld supplied with minerals, gasses, resources, and organics extracted from Karrakis' earth. Wake trade made its speculators fantastically wealthy; expansion and extraction provided for the labor base, and for centuries there was always a steadily advancing horizon.

The Fall tipped Earth into an unrecoverable decline. Though its direct impact on Karrakis was not great enough to doom the world, it inevitably shuttered the colony's seemingly boundless horizon.

As the Fall ripped through Earth, Karrakis, with a wary eye cast back to her ancestral home, continued her business. To the majority of Karrakis' population, the Fall was a distant happening of little relevance[5]. To the ruling classes of Karrakis – the colonial administrators, the wake speculators, the shipping and infrastructure magnates, and their veritable armies of landlords, managers, and staff – Earth's slow collapse was cause for great concern. The loss of wake trade meant doom for their pocketbooks and monopolies on advanced goods. Pressured by the increasing speed of events on Earth, Karrakis' administrators decided to act, rather than respond.

4 "Wake-sent" cargo ships often followed Terran colonization efforts. Large, rudimentary cargo vessels crewed by automated onboard systems, wake-sent shipments were care packages launched in the wake of a colony ship's departure. Tracking the same flight path, wake-sent ships arrived at intervals regular enough to keep these distant colonies supplied with infrastructure-catalyzing equipment and resources. Upon receipt, these cargo vessels were meant to be repurposed for resource shipments back to Earth; once returned to Earth, they would be packed again with new technologies, equipment, refined goods, and so on, and sent back to the colony. This cycle, though slow, was the first interstellar trade in the galaxy; speculation on it made colonial Karrakins fantastically wealthy, providing the economic basis for the early Karrakin noble classes.

5 Already some five hundred or more years into the Karrakin project, Earth had lost the shine of "humanity's ancestral homeworld" in Karrakin culture. By the Fall, most Karrakins knew Earth only as a destination filled in on shipping manifests – the distant, insatiable storehouse to where they shipped ore, minerals, gasses, and other resources stripped from their own land.

MEMO ISSUED ON THE ACCOUNT OF CESSATION OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN EARTH AND KA-02B ("KARRAKIS")
FOR PUBLIC RELEASE. AUTHORED BY THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

My fellow citizens, it is with a heavy heart that I must inform you of our sister-world's silence, and issue a Standing Order of Emergency Administration.

Earth, our onetime home and the gentle mother of humankind, issued this morning a diaspora-wide Notice of Independent Mandate, indicating that the Administration is unable to continue to govern in any effective capacity. This message was sent with the correct verification and signature; repeated attempts to contact our relay point were met with an automated response that further confirmed the Administration's message.

In plain language, this means that as of this morning, Earth no longer holds fulcrum over the affairs of the galaxy. Providence has ordained that we must face this next chapter of our history alone. Pursuant to our colonial charter and the emergency powers defined therein, I have furloughed the Citizen Advisory Council in order to more effectively manage the affairs of the colony until such time that we have established minimum viability.

Ours is the great project now; upon our shoulders rest the hopes, dreams, and histories of all who have come before, and the potential of all who are yet to be. It is no longer Earth where Humanity will make its Glory, but here, in our land, on this world: Karrakis.

It is incumbent upon each person of Karrakis that we do not despair. Earth has not left us, only given us the Great Mission. Indeed, we may see her fair azure light during our darkest nights, and know that she watches us in her temporary repose.

We are a hardy race, and it is with trust in the same Providence that gave us this burden that I trust we have not heard the last of Earth, and that we shall succeed in our endeavors. In time, Earth shall reach out to us once more, and we will do what we can to assist her, as she did for us when we were young. Until then, our project does not change. Karrakis must be built, and must shine now as a light to beckon all humanity home. God bless this project, and all who work on its behalf. God bless us, the hope of humanity.

PRIOR TO PUBLIC RELEASE:
The Planetary Governor (or any Officer acting in that role) shall be issued full theater control, commensurate with the Emergency Administration Powers outlined in the Planetary Charter. The Citizen Advisory Council shall be furloughed until further notice, though informed prior to any new edicts.

UPON FORMAL CESSATION OF COMMUNICATION WITH EARTH:
The Pontifex shall offer solemn prayer. The Security Prelictor shall post guards at all storehouses, warehouses, supply depots, power stations, medical buildings, administrative buildings, and so on.

//Records retrieved from pre-Annorum Federal Karrakin Archives//

The planetary administration sent two missives. The first was directed to Terran space, offering Karrakis as a refuge for any who could reach it[6]. The second message, announced to the people of Karrakis, instructed them to shutter all communications platforms and devote the entirety of all administrative and technological expertise to managing their own world. Earth was lost. Humanity, if it was to continue, would have to be propagated in a new garden: Karrakis.

To the tens of millions of new Karrakin citizens – none of whom had ever walked on the surface of Earth, much less known of the world as anything other than a name in text, or an abstract idea, or as a place represented in histories and media – Earth, and by extension, old humanity's Fall, was a tragedy, but not an end. To the early Karrakins, the only home they had ever known, the only prize to be won, and the only motherland they ever had, was Karrakis.

The Fall swept over Earth and, for a time, extinguished its light. Karrakis was left alone, and far from giving into the terror of isolation, its people found themselves free of a distant rule. They could, they discovered, rule themselves.

And so they did, for a time.

6 Though Karrakis began to retain wake cargo vessels upon their arrival, the infrastructure was never established to refit these ships for humanitarian missions. These wake vessels were eventually mothballed in orbit, where they remained until the Annorum Passacaglia, at which point they were recovered and reverse-engineered by Annorum shipwrights.

THE MELEE
(c. 5500–4900 BU)

Following the cessation of communication with Earth, the planetary administration of Karrakis took steps to secure its control over the colony, dissolving nonessential civic bodies and enacting a wide portfolio of autocratic laws under powers granted to it by the planetary charter's emergency provisions. To keep the loyalty of Karrakis' upper classes, special administrative districts were doled out to magnates, wake monopolists, and factory managers, effectively creating a noble class in all but name. These newly invested administrators became petty lords, growing their secondary and tertiary colony sites into cities and towns built around their own estates. They maintained order through smaller population numbers, loyal and well-paid security forces, and monopolies on necessary resources.

The people of the colony's municipal core, however, responded to these dramatic orders with surprise and anger. Earth was a distant world – not one they knew well, nor one that they considered themselves dependent upon. They viewed their government's maneuvering – the claiming of emergency powers, the dissolution of labor committees, the granting of massive swathes of land to industrialists – as a naked, despotic power grab. The city center erupted in mass protests against the governor's declarations; in response, the governor ordered his colonial security forces to suppress the nascent uprising. The campaign that followed stretched into a bloody, roiling, year-long conflict that tore Karrakis apart, destabilizing what had once been a cohesive, centrally administered state into affiliations, alliances, and détentes of counties, municipalities, and landed estates. In its own attempt to maintain control, the ruling power on Karrakis completely obliterated itself.

Wake monopolists and newly enriched "special administrators" used their wealth and influence to raise private armies and build compounds, declaring independence from the colonial government and peeling away what little control it had until nothing remained. Karrakis' masses were cowed through massive applications of violence, or turned against each other along lines of municipal and territorial loyalties. In this sense, the Fall, in its own way, reached Karrakis. This time came to be known the Melee Period. It persisted for roughly six centuries before eventually quieting as regional powers coalesced around self-styled administrators and governors – warlords, in plain language – who held monopolies over resources and production facilities secured in the initial eruption of violence. Karrakis proper was lost, a city ruined by war. Ahead, the world awaited the arrival of its first king.

Passacaglia. The name that marks the "beginning" of Karrakin history. Passacaglia is a mutable canvas in the modern Karrakin cultural narrative, though most commonly associated with the aspects of martial and civic might: that of uniter, of warlord, of the Karrakin will-to-rule. In his youth[7], Passacaglia united Karrakis into a single world, defined the global capital, and laid the foundation for Annorum Throne; by his death, he planted the seeds for both Karrakis' expansion to an interplanetary empire and the next great conflict it would face.

The Melee Period persisted for roughly six centuries, during which the Karrakin people defined new borders around four city-states – Laurent, Reis, Cosimo, and Dellamar – and one coveted territory: Karrakis City. The four city-states were governed by powerful warlords in a rather traditional feudal style: their leaders were the heads of new dynasties, and their lands were held first by might and then by common laws created to justify land ownership, feudal dues, and fealty.

The coveted territory, Karrakis City, was little more than a hunting ground for the other city-states. What remained of the colonial government had long before folded under the pressures of neighboring city-states eager to annex the riches of the feeble capital. Karrakis City was not the world's capital during the melee, but a victim of repeated raids from the surrounding warlords. It was a rich corpse to be picked over and scavenged from. The four city-states fought bitterly over the remaining technologies (machine minds, all-but-inexhaustible nuclear supplies, autofabricators, refineries, etc). The development of most other technology was pushed back by centuries as critical resources, parts, and expertise became all but inaccessible. Small-scale warfare reigned in an age of scavengers and skulkers, of wandering bands of warriors and peasant levies pitted against them, of fearsome villains and local champions. It was into this hardscrabble world that Passacaglia was born.

7 Beyond broad strokes given in primary documents that indicate possible locations of his birth, the details of Passacaglia's early life are not well known. The efforts of the following regime, the Annorum Tyrannus, to suppress historical records of the Passacaglian era were broad and extensive. Specific histories of Passacaglia I were likely erased by Passacaglia's own agents in an effort to mythologize their ruler. What remains is the mythology of a ladder climbed and a throne under which a world was united.

A CROWN OF EARTH AND STARS

Karrakin mythohistories all agree that Passacaglia was born to an ignoble family pledged to serve the city-state of Reis and its ruler, Pasha Reis. A peasant, Passacaglia's life is written as simple and pastoral with a wealth of parables attesting to his virility, good planning, and filial piety. As a youth, Passacaglia worked the vast wheat fields of the Reis, a low-lying agricultural city-state that bordered the outermost ruins of Karrakis City[8]. It was in the humble wheat field that Passacaglia developed his martial prowess; it was in the humble wheat field, too, that Passacaglia was first tested by the world he would later conquer.

Raiding parties were a common threat to the peasants of Karrakis and death, natural or violent, came swiftly and often. To ward off both, ignoble families banded together in many-family communal complexes led by consensus councils pledged to their local pasha. They would tithe a significant percentage of their harvest to the pasha, who, in turn, would raise, train, equip, and maintain standing security forces to protect them from raiders. Unaffiliated bandits, minor warlords, and scavengers out from the ruins of Karrakis City and the unaffiliated countryside often targeted these communes. During times of diplomatic tension, so too would liveried soldiers from rival city-states attack, targeting fields, structures, and laborers.

This back-and-forth raiding had supplanted large wars, as no pasha really sought to upend the larger trade structures that maintained a rough equilibrium between them. A later portion of Passacaglia's mythohistories reveals that this was by design: the pashas held regular peace councils, negotiating over the number of "fairly contested" raids each would allow on their outlying tracts in exchange for guarantees that no larger battles would take place. The pashas feared the terrible violence that large-scale war could bring and were comfortable with the comparatively small number of dead they buried each year. To those in power, the system was stable and cost them little.

Passacaglia and his family were part of a commune negotiated away by Pasha Reis[9]. The epic poem, *At' Passacaglia Eta*, speaks of constant attacks on

8 The ruins of Old Reis, including a restored farmhouse and monument erected to honor Passacaglia, can still be visited today.

9 Recovered texts from the time describe this practice as "fallowing", referring to the agricultural practice of the same name.

Passacaglia's commune. The *Eta* notes that he once had fifteen brothers: each year another brother was killed in the fighting until only Passacaglia and his last three brothers remained. At the urging of his mothers, Passacaglia begged audience with the Pasha Reis, imploring him to act in defense of his home; he was refused. The next year, another brother was killed. Passacaglia was sent again to beg action, and was again refused. The year after, his eldest and favorite brother was slain. He begged once more, and was once more refused.

Three times refused, his home haunted with the weeping of his mothers, Passacaglia and his last remaining brother, Anaxandron, decided they must act. They devised a plan, and brought it to their mothers, who in turn offered it to the soldiers garrisoned there – they felt this to be proper, given that, along with the family and the harvest, the small garrison had suffered terribly: Passacaglia would seek the scavenger-kings and wastelords of Karrakis City, and offer them the commune's tithe in exchange for weapons and soldiers they might use to kill Pasha Reis. Meanwhile, Anaxandron would stay behind, using the cover of the long winter months to spread their message: that Pasha Reis was derelict in his duty to them; that he was a weak ruler, who would see them dead rather than warm and safe; and that Passacaglia would return in spring to bring the people a better rule.

The garrison agreed to the plan, and Passacaglia and a small group of soldiers soon left under the cover of storm and darkness. The dead months of winter were upon them, a time when all communes fell silent and buttoned up to face the chill, and no raids occurred for a time. Few would brave the inclement weather – certainly not the pasha's tithemen – and so the small band had a few months in which to enact their plan; when the spring thaw came, so would the tithemen, to account for how many had died in the winter and dictate which fields should be sown.

Into the dead, ancient city ventured Passacaglia and his band. When spring came, Passacaglia returned as promised, this time at the head of a great army of the lost and forgotten, bearing ancient weapons of status. They marched with one target – Pasha Reis's stronghold – and flew an old banner: the burgundy-and-gold of Karrakis, the ancient, unified colony.

10 Veracity aside, this story is likely the origin of the name Passacaglia – the title "pasha" likely replaced the hero's original name. This phenomenon of nominal replacement and reborrowing is common in the Baronies, especially among heroic, venerated, or otherwise "grand" figures. Anaxandron's name likely also derives from his deeds, or popular mythology around them. Like his brother, and Tyrannus after them, Anaxandron's birth name would have been much more mundane.

The attack took Pasha Reis blind. His stronghold fell within the first day, all but his most loyal and professional soldiers either surrendering or turning coat to join with Passacaglia. Anaxandron's whispering, his stealing away in the dead of night to nearby communes, his organizing among the farmers and the levies, had made a land fecund for revolutionary spirit: when Passacaglia himself threw open the doors of the dead ruler's stronghold, he was welcomed with cheers and cries of "pasha". The people nominated him to sit the throne of the city-state of Reis[10]. From there, Passacaglia would launch a campaign that toppled the three other city-states within a decade. The first Annorum was soon to come.

The facts of Passacaglia's reign are buried – often literally – in the depths of Karrakin mythos. Few hard facts remain, owing in large part to the rebuilding effort of later regimes. Beyond the founding legend of Passacaglia found in the *At' Passacaglia Eta*, the archeological record and a precious few instances of written text[11] are all that remain of Passacaglia's rule. What is known, however, is that his death was not the end of his dynasty. For a time, Anaxandron ruled over Karrakis, followed by other heirs of Passacaglia's line and, later, intermarried families, in what became known as the Annorum Passacaglia.

Passacaglia and the Annorum Passacaglia are topics of great interest in the modern Baronic consciousness, especially within conservative political movements. Passacaglia's artifacts and histories represent a part of Karrakin history that has largely been "lost"– a pre-Tyrannic, pre-Baronic time before the advent of the noble houses and ruling cartels, one far older than previous histories would have the public believe. Passacaglia's rule is not necessarily viewed as a counter to Baronic ideology or iconography – he was, after all, an absolute monarch who established a dynasty that ruled the world for thousands of years – and as such his newly revealed histories have not been suppressed.

11 An important note: most all historical records that survive from the pre-Tyrannic era of Karrakis are in hardcopy form – that is, written on paper – often penned in secret, with poor-quality inks, papers, and charcoal. These records are fragile at best, and difficult to decipher. Many were penned in shorthand, code, or nigh-unreadable script, as most records that survived the purge were those of rebels, hermits, heretics, Xenoglossian augurs, and other enemies of the crown. Tyrannus first targeted the royal archives, where the finest texts were kept: the records that survived were the ones made difficult to find, penned by those best at hiding. Most proximal texts were recorded well after the events they depict, transcribed from oral sources.

The Annorum Passacaglia would not reign in perpetuity. An apocryphal story, a legend passed down via oral tradition and recorded during the Narrentem of the Dynasticlade, speaks of a young Passacaglia meeting an oracle on the road to Karrakis:

In winter, the rest-time for the Four Lands, PASSACAGLIA and his band did venture to KARAKIZ, the ancient city of GODBIRTH. There they sought the tyrant of KARAKIZ, a great warrior named BALTAGJI.

The road was long and desperate, and many did die as their armor did naught to warm them, and their cloth was thin and torn, and their bellies were empty. All nights were cold and deep, but PASSACAGLIA was of good cheer, and his captains did lend him their heat as PASSACAGLIA had shared it with them, as was wanted.

It was on a cold and bitter night like this that PASSACAGLIA saw a ghost-light bobbing in the falling snow. "Do not chase it," urged one loyal captain. "It is a ghost-light, to bewitch travelers. In summer it leads to death – surely it begets the same in winter, if not worse."

But PASSACAGLIA, always of good cheer (for he already took their fill of suffering under the pasha, and grief was his name after ten-and-three of his brothers had died) took up his spear TUI and said to their beloved captain, "Take heart, o Captain. I am only a humble farm-boy, and you a strong soldier. If I fall, you will take up my name, and carry my dream in your breast farther than I."

And PASSACAGLIA left, and chased the ghost-light through the howling snow, and came to a small ruin of a home where the ghost-light was trapped. "Little ember," PASSACAGLIA called to the light. "Why have you led me here? What message do you carry for my ears?"

And from a deeper shadow yet in the home, a voice issued, saying "Do not seek out the speaker of this voice. Listen only to my words, and make no movement, and when I am done you will be guided back to your camp.

"I am ORACLE, and I have seen the end of all stories. You are called PASSACAGLIA, and your name will never be uttered in darkness. Before you lies six thousand years of empire, yours if you continue along your path. But know this: to continue will only feed a terrible wheel, whose name is DIS, and whose appetite is vast as the star-lit sky. Will you continue?"

PASSACAGLIA, without hesitation, said to the ORACLE, "Yes. Pasha has doomed my mothers and killed my brothers. I must continue. Why will this turn your terrible wheel?"

And the ORACLE said, "Your Empire would be built at the tip of a spear. Your fields watered with arrows, and then bullets, and then coherent particles. You would build a monument to your brothers, and to your mothers, and you would form it from the ash and bone of the brothers and mothers of your enemies, and hear only the cheers of your people, and not the cries of the children of those innumerable dead. This, PASSACAGLIA, is the fuel for the wheel that consumes the empires made by brave young heroes like you."

This ponderous whinging curdled PASSACAGLIA's fair features into a terrible mask of hate, and so storming into the back of the small house he found the ORACLE there, a creature wrapped in rags. PASSACAGLIA threatened the ORACLE with TUI at its neck and said, "Speak no more, ORACLE, but to beg for mercy! You do not know the life I have suffered, you have not heard the cries of my brothers, or the wailing of my mothers, nor the hope my words bring to those who have suffered as I have!"

And the ORACLE, laughing, said, "Do you think I fear death, PASSACAGLIA? I, who have seen the great wheel DIS grind across my own sky and gave it name? I, who have heard countless times those very words spoken from mouths like yours? I, who has lived and who has died? I, who has gained this knowledge and many other secret ones?"

So PASSACAGLIA stabbed the ORACLE through the throat with TUI, and the ORACLE laughed and said, "You are braver than most, PASSACAGLIA, and fool who must learn. Go, build your empire. I will meet you again at the end."

And the ORACLE died, though there was no blood, and when PASSACAGLIA tore off the creature's robes they found not a man, as he thought, but a golem in the shape of a man, made of like-skin, with black blood and green blood, and saw many ghost-lights blinking where its eyes should be.

PASSACAGLIA took the ORACLE's cloak, finding it a fine and sturdy thing, and left his spear TUI, and returned to his camp. There, PASSACAGLIA took comfort in his captains, and forgot the words of the ORACLE, and continued to KARAKIZ, where he would build their empire.

– **"Passacaglia on the Road to Karakiz", recorded by Xenogloss Augur Bartholome L'Optimisme (2230u)**

THE EARLY PASSACAGLIAN PERIOD
(c. 4899–3000ʙᴜ)

In time, Passacaglia completed his conquest of Karrakis and established the first Karrakin Annorum, uniting the disparate city-states and far-flung tribes of Karrakis into a single, global state. It was during this time that he officially adopted the name Passacaglia I. The nation that he ruled lasted for millennia, totalizing its control over Karrakis, spreading the Karrakin people to new worlds, and even settling colonies in the light of new stars. Historians break the Annorum Passacaglia into three periods across its nearly 6400 years of history: the Early Passacaglian Period, the High Passacaglian Period, and the Low Passacaglian Period.

The Early Passacaglian Period followed the unification of Karrakis and the establishment of the Annorum Passacaglia. According to the At' Passacaglia Eta, Passacaglia was said to still be in his mid-20s when he completed his conquest of Karrakis and established the first Annorum. With a world under his command, Passacaglia opened archives of hidden and recovered knowledge to legions of scientists, engineers, technicians, and planners, and a new revolution was catalyzed: this time, the revolution was one of rapid technological development across all levels of industry, economy, infrastructure, and countless other fields.

Sometime during this technological renaissance, Passacaglia I's scholars applied knowledge recovered during the unification to discover and retrieve the mothballed wake vessels. Held in orbit for millennia, these ships were deconstructed, returned to the surface of Karrakis, and studied, resulting in the production of the first Karrakin starships. With Karrakis conquered, the Annorum and the Karrakin people needed a new frontier – Arrudye, Karrakis' moon, was their first target. The moon's atmosphere was thin, but breathable, and the Karrakin explorers terraformed it to a nominal composition that could support and protect human life. Using the new starships, the Annorum settled Arrudye and the little moon became the first offworld Karrakin colony.

Existing histories record this as a triumph of the Annorum and an event that prompted an eager search for more worlds. Without significant war to provide civilizational impetus, offworld colonization provided a ready substitute; all eyes turned to the sky, and were rewarded with the discovery of Diadochi, a star in close proximity to Karrakis, and the habitable world that orbited it, Ispahsalar. Comparable in size and composition to Karrakis, Ispahsalar remained untouched only as long as it took the Annorum to grant a charter, build more starships and launch them towards the world. Colonial settlements cropped up across Ispahsalar, managed by new machine minds and the Annorum's most loyal officers. The reign and wisdom of Passacaglia was ascendant, but mortality eventually caught him, and though he left an heir, the death of the First was an event of utmost tragedy.

The Early Passacaglian Period saw the rediscovery of myriad technologies, chief among them spaceflight, machine minds, and the creation of Annorate mirror creches, which allowed for the duplication of bloodlines and the persistence of the Passacaglian dynasty. All things fade, however, and that preserved line of Passacaglia I came to an end after nearly 1,900 years. Karrakin histories do not mourn this event – and neither does the Eta. To the contrary, the end of Passacaglia's lineage is written of as a time of exciting change: a sunset without a following night, and a dawn that would last for millennia. The Early Passacaglian Period ended, and the High Period began.

THE HIGH PASSACAGLIAN PERIOD
(C. 2999BU–1U:)

The High Passacaglian Period began just before the second millennium of the Annorum Passacaglia, following the death of Passacaglia LII. Proceeded over by the lesser but competent successor lines of Anaxadrine and Mykelian kings, the High Period proved to be the longest era of the Annorum Passacaglia, lasting for just under three thousand years. During this time, the Annorum dramatically expand its interplanetary holdings on Ispahsalar and colonize Kharyadin – two worlds that went on to feature heavily in the downfall of the Annorum Passacaglia – as well as the Concern (now known as the Baronic Concern). Manned spaceflight, though still restricted to the elite, drastically expanded, and the tradition of ritualized space travel to pay homage and swear fealty to the Annorum throne was established.

KHAYRADIN

Khayradin, now the capital world of the House of Stone, was a gift world named for Khay Anaxandros Altiamos, a favored courtier of Passacaglia LIII. Recognized in Khayradi history as a generous statesman and acclaimed general, the details of Altiamos's rule are hidden behind layers of lost history, constructed mythohistory, epic poems, and apocrypha. Revelations in the Baronic era indicate that Khayradin appears to have had some form of indigenous human population prior to Karrakin colonization, but the Annorum's colonization campaign appears to have been so thorough that there is little known of this population beyond scant archeological curiosities. Following colonization, the great mines of the Khayradi were bored deep into the planet's core and the forging of a strong bond began. For the duration of the High Period, the Annorum Passacaglia viewed Khayradin as a sister world to Karrakis, and doted upon it with favorable trade policies, reduced feudal obligations, and frequent visits by the emperor.

12 An order of precognitive augurs central to Karrakin religion.

13 Ignoble mirror creches were offered as public services, offering only the most rudimentary of medical applications. The high nobility – the Anno, members of the royal family, and close courtiers – reserved the more advanced, near-mystical consciousness-extending applications for its own use.

ISPAHSALAR

Ispahsalar became the target of a targeted colonization effort by the Patrons of Dellamar, the noble descendants of the Pasha Dellamar, the founder of one of the original Karrakin city-states. In the millennia between the founding of Dellamar and the establishment of the Annorum, the Patrons of Dellamar had retreated from direct political participation and adopted a sort of monastic mercantilism. By the High Period, the Patrons of Dellamar had become a quasi-religious order of knights, merchants, and Xenoglossian[12] affiliates that muscled their way through bribery, mercantile cunning, and careful political maneuvering into the uncontested title claimants to the world, become its sole representatives to the throne. Throughout the High Period, Ispahsalar evolved without much Annorate oversight, developing a brash independent streak.

TOTAL MASTERY

During this time, the Annorum also dramatically expanded the use of mirror creches beyond the ruling classes and minor nobility, making some their medical miracles accessible to the ignoble classes[13]. The High Period also saw the expansion of the Annorum's interplanetary and interstellar fleets, the beginning of asteroid-mining operations, deep-field exploration, more advanced terraforming projects, the construction of the first Karrakin mega-engineering projects, and surveys of additional habitable worlds[14].

On the home front, the Annorum established global systems of coordinated resource management, education, language normalization, clean and persistent energy, and other civilization-tier cultural totalization efforts. Karrakis seemed to be an empire without rival, astride a golden land, with the frontier on all sides. In retrospect, there could be no other time for the Annorum to crumble, brought low by a combination of its own might and its childrens' ambition. The High Passacaglian period came to a shocking end with a missive sent from Karrakis' mighty, steadfast sister, Khayradin. The Khayradi desired independence, and a throne to rival Karrakis – one they would win by force.

14 Even with the dark ages of the Melee, Karrakis never had to recover in the same way as the rest of humanity did from the Fall, retaining a more or less unbroken connection to many of the technologies of old Earth.

THE LOW PASSACAGLIAN PERIOD
(c. 1υ–1908υ)

At its height, the Annorum Passacaglia commanded nine worlds considered to be of its "Concern" – the core worlds of its empire of frontiers:

Karrakis, the homeworld of the Karrakin people and seat of the Annorum Passacaglia. During the slide into the Low Passacaglian Period, Karrakis was an instrumentalized world, utterly given over to the maintenance of the ranks of imperial nobility, the Annorate guard of the royal family, and the billions of citioyens – serfs – who labored to ensure the empire of frontiers remained cohesive, functional, ever-expanding, and directing its wealth to the throne.

Arrudye, Karrakis' moon and first colony. By the beginning of the Low Passacaglian Period, Arrudye had been thoroughly developed and served as the seat of the Annorum Navy, which directed and policed the starways – the interstellar trade routes between the worlds of the Concern – and guarded the empire's records of trade, fief, and liege in its great vaults. The great arrays above Arrudye were visible even from the surface of Karrakis during the day, a reminder of the empire beyond the capital's orbit.

Ispahsalar, the first major colony of the Annorum, settled by imperial decree and now owned in title by the Patrons of Dellamar. It specialized in ship construction and heavy industry. An experiment in autonomy under the imperial crown, Ispahsalar's administrative structure became the model by which the Annorum conducted its business in the light of relativity. While the world was owned and commanded by the Patrons, it was still a world of the Annorum and subject to imperial law. This policy of satellite autonomy allowed for cohesion, though it also opened the door for the frontier independence movements that would bring down the Annorum Passacaglia.

Khayradin, the second world settled by the Annorum Passacaglia. By the Low Period, Khayradin rivaled Karrakis: equal in size and population, and home to much of the Annorum's frontier forces. The great mines of the Khayradi fed the empire's war machine and provided a steady source of labor and soldiers. The enormous ships of the Annorum's military and merchant fleets arrived and departed monthly, ensuring a steady flow of soldiers, administrators, merchants, and goods linked the worlds, drawing them close together – and providing more than enough points of irritation: Khayradin, unlike Karrakis, was still rich with the resources needed to feed the capital. In fact, Khayradi soldiers composed a solid third of imperial levies, and the world felt the cost of such a staggering number of deployments. Under a satellite system of rule, Khayradin could only remain loyal to a point – during the Low Passacaglian Period, that limit would be reached.

Tilimsan, colonized during the High Passacaglian Period, would eventually see bitter civil strife during the conflicts of the late low period. The clans that settled there eventually found it a rich source of rare metals, a fact that only exacerbated the conflict.

Eyalet-a, colonized near the tail end of the High period, became the chief supplier of the fuel necessary to power the Annorum's interstellar ships during the Low Period. Crouching under its gas giant, Eyalet, Eyalet-a saw little of the wars that gripped the more central worlds of the Concern.

Umara, settled during the early High Period as an aqua farming settlement given over mostly to small landowners and serfdoms. It largely stayed on the periphery of the Annorum's political struggles.

Begum, settled during the High Passacaglian Period as a monastery world by the Cult of Pangloss (now the Order Xenoglossia), a polytheistic order of oracles and augurs, long present on Karrakis and in Karrakin faiths. During the Low Period, Begum opened its borders to general colonization and kept its head down.

Bo, settled during the Low Period. A small and distant colony on the far edge of the empire with little interest or activity at this period.

The Annorum Passacaglia's interplanetary empire was built on the back of a conventional space program: massive, largely automated ships ferried goods and information back and forth between worlds after the establishment of initial colonies, with crewed voyages between worlds being largely restricted to functions of the elite, military, or nobility. Any such voyage was the result of tremendous investment by either the throne or wealthy consortiums of merchants with sufficient capital; likewise, colonization efforts were the product of tremendous investment and fanfare. The Annorum Passacaglia's imperial portfolio counted eight worlds, in addition to Karrakis' moon, Arrudye. Karrakis remained the capital. Beyond, the Annorum granted titles and colonial holdings exclusively to their most favored subjects.

Ultimately, the effort of managing those worlds – much less the hundreds of millions of subjects on Karrakis – frayed the institutions that kept the Annorum Passacaglia running smoothly. As the empire's interest turned toward nearby worlds and stars, those at home home front grew more and more dissatisfied with the successor Passacaglian emperors. Recovered texts from the period show that a series of ineffectual leaders cast the Anno into a deeply corrupt, unsustainable spiral.

As communication lag started to take its toll, colony worlds developed increasingly divergent ideologies. Ministers dispatched to corral the colonies grew idle and independent as the true distance and difficulty of sublight interplanetary administration ate away at any sense of cohesion; at the same time, the most zealous ministers grew more brutal, enforcing the Anno's laws with draconian enthusiasm. From Karrakis, the journey out to even the closest non-lunar colony took a staggeringly long time for humans – years of realtime travel, experienced as long and boring months for the crew onboard – and often when a minister arrived on the world they were meant to manage, they found the political realities on the ground had changed since they were briefed. Ports grew fat with the wealth of worlds, and customs officials skimmed shipments for their own enrichment – after all, the world they were destined for wouldn't discover the discrepancy between manifest and storage for years, decades, or even centuries in the most extreme cases.

THE ANTIANNORUM
(1908–1999ᴜ)

This corruption boiled within the Annorum before finally bursting its containment with the independence declaration of Khayradin. Announcing its intent to secede from the Anno, Khayradin declared itself a free kingdom, an Antiannorum, willing and able to manage its own affairs. Karrakis was too far away and too concerned with fattening its own coffers and belly off the labor of the great houses of the Khayradi.

Crowning its own Antianno, Perdio I, the Antiannorum declared its intention to cease its tithe, turn away any Anno ministers sent to the world, and refuse any communication that did not treat it as equal. It withdrew its levies, ordered its ships on return vectors, and demanded homage from the crown. On Khayradin itself, the great houses consolidated power, demanding vassalage and brutally dispersing the houses that remained loyal to the Anno.

Neither the Annorum Passacaglia nor the Antiannorum Khayradin would last. Their conflict would shatter the known stars and give rise to a new tyrant from the ashes: Tyrannus, who would forge a new empire from both of their remains.

SECTION 2
THE ANNORUM TYRANNUS
(2000–2089ᴜ)

The Anno responded to the Khayradin secession by sending one of its most loyal generals, Tyran of Dellamar, with an armada of ships and soldiers to suppress the Antiannorum. The transit from Karrakis to Khayradin took roughly a decade realtime – by the time the armada arrived in orbit about Khayradin, the Khayradi were ready and the situation in Annorate space had changed dramatically. From the moment of arrival, the Khayradi plagued Tyran's ships with surface-to-orbit missiles, destroying numerous shuttles before soldiers were able to land. When they did disembark, they found the Khayradi had refined their mines into fortresses and forged their peasant levies into an efficient professional army, ensuring the coming fight was a brutal affair.

Tyran's campaign ended a handful of years after landfall: a communications packet arrived in-system, ordering a halt to any engagements by word of the Anno – or rather, the Anno apparent, who was currently in-transit to Karrakis from Ispahsalar. A series of conflicting communications packets followed, evidently sent in close proximity to one another: the emperor was dead, and his heir was en route not from Ispahsalar, but Eyalet-a; the heir was illegitimate, and a true successor had been seated on Throne Karrakis; the successor on the throne, by virtue of temporal anomalies due to relativistic travel, was actually younger than they claimed to be, and the true successor had declared their capital in Old Cosimo on Karrakis; other colonies, as a result of the emperor's passing, had followed Khayradin's example and declared themselves independent of the Annorum or allied with Khayradin. The effects of sublight relativistic travel had finally overwhelmed the overstressed bureaucracy, and the Anno had no method for dealing with competing, legitimate claims.

Unsure of how to proceed, but exhausted by the multi-year campaign, Tyran ordered his forces to halt. He requested peace talks with the Khayradi, who had also borne witness to the communications blasts broadcasted in-system, and brokered a peace agreement: Tyran and his army would leave Khayradin, de facto granting them their independence, and travel home to Karrakis to enforce peace until the true heir could be determined. At this time – even after the war on Khayradin – Tyran's army and its fleet was the most powerful and professional fighting force the Annorum had together, rivaled only by the Annorate Guard garrisoned on Karrakis. With his ranks bolstered by Khayradi Anno loyalists, Tyran and his army left Khayradin and began their long, isolated journey home.

THE LAST ARGUMENT OF KINGS

Prior to integration into Union, the Karrakins had no access to omninet communication or blink travel. While underway, messages between ships in transit and their destination were subject to the intense delay of light-based communication between objects in space. Because of this lag, Karrakin naval protocol was conservative, and it was standard practice to quiet a ship's communications centers save for a small officer corps responsible for "timelining" the messages, placing them in context before issuing them out to the crew. Tyran's fleet, upon realignment into local Karrakin space, was met with a cacophony of communiques, a confusion of competing calls for his ship identities and loyalties – various factions on Karrakis and in local space delivered ultimatums, demanded to know who Tyran fought for, and insisted that he surrender his weapons.

After a decade of realtime travel, Tyran's army was eager to make landfall, but rather than invade, Tyran held his forces back. Gathering his ships in orbit above Karrakis, Tyran met with his communications officers aboard his flagship and opened communications with the world below. Seeking a reprieve from the countless targeting beams, firing solutions, and encroaching picket ships, Tyran announced that he acted in service of Karrakis. He would not fire upon any who stayed clear of his fleet's local space, nor would he land his soldiers. Instead, Tyran said, he would wait for the world below to declare its intent.

Meanwhile, Tyran's officer corps worked to determine the situation on the ground: who his allies were, who ruled the Annorum, and which of the factions encroaching on their fleet space posed the largest threat. Their initial survey returned grim data: Karrakis was crisscrossed with muddy, wasteland battlescapes – long networks of static trench lines spidered out around factories, cities, and strategic points, everywhere packed with millions of conscripted soldiers, peasant levies, and mercenaries. Whole forests burned freely or had been burned away. The Annorum's central palace had all but been bombed to rubble, as had Reis, Cosimo, and Dellamar. A massive crater marked the northern pole of Karrakis, where a projectile launched by separatists on Eyalet-a had flung an asteroid into the world. The Anno was dead, his body unrecovered, and the factions supporting the many heirs who had claimed birthrights and raised armies from the world's population had devolved into petty warbands. Beyond Khayradin, four of the Annorum's other worlds – Ispahsalar, Eyalet-a, Tilimsan, and Begum – had declared their independence, embroiling the Annorate Guard and its remaining ships in a slew of colonial suppression operations.

Tyran and his army had stepped into a multi-part, polytemporal struggle to determine the heir to the Annorum Passacaglia, and the first interplanetary war in human history. Exhausted, his leader dead with no clear heir, his home city reduced to rubble, his home-world cold beneath a blanket of ash, rain, and stagnating trench warfare, Tyran made his move. His response to all hails was simple, a curt statement now immortalized at the base of his monument on Karrakis: "I serve the people of Karrakis, and its throne."

Tyran ordered his battleships to open fire upon all ships targeting his fleet, and for his army to prepare for one last invasion: Karrakis. The campaign, later called Tyran's Landing, was swift and brutal, targeting from orbit the presumed headquarters of all heirs, all military production plants, and garrisons of significant size. His fleet, even two decades out of date, had been the largest concentration of military ships and ordinance ever put into space, and remained so after the massive splintering of Karrakin forces. The volume of ordnance rained down on Karrakis was terrible enough to trigger global seismic activity, destabilizing and demoralizing the entrenched peasant levies and conscript armies. At night, during the early days of Tyran's Landing, the sky was lit with the brilliant novae of successor ships flaring nuclear as Tyran's battleships engaged all comers that did not surrender themselves to his mandate.

This opening salvo marked the end of the Annorum Passacaglia. For the better half of a week, Tyran's battleworn veterans fought in the halls of the massive Annorum palace complex, rooting out the last of the besieged Annorate Guard that refused to surrender. The throne room itself was breached on the seventh day of the invasion, with Tyran leading the first wave into the facility. There, his forces found the last of the Annorate Guard – their highest commanders and most die-hard veterans – and engaged them in a brutal melee.

Excerpt from the Memoir and Notes of Baron Cassander-End:

The first time I visited Throne Karakiz, I did so against the guns of the Annorate Guard. I was a man o'line in Tyran's levies, a veteran of his wars on Khayradin and the long journey between worlds. I was born on Ispahsalar, and an old man of three-and-fifty (as I perceived it) when we stormed Throne. I had never breathed the Royal Air. I would not breathe it for years more, as my sealed-suit was necessary to keep me from death. I promised myself – I remember this – as our drop-ship carried me through flak, that I would one day return in the warm sun of peace, and breathe Royal Air. For it must be sweet to be kept from us.

The battle to that point had been one fought under the stern faces of patricians and Passacaglias – those who had ruled us, from distant, for time since before I could remember – in stone and monument. These the ancient halls wander'd only by the bare feet of Passacaglia's thousand-thousand children, these ancient halls only ever kissed by the sound of laughter and song – now the booted tromp of soldiery and the thundersound of our cannon and gun.

Did I profane the place I fought to save? Can one profane a place corrupted by the ones who haunt it? Questions for robed men and women, not for me. My task was to fight.

I led a unit of men o'line, some the sons of those elders who had left with us for Khayradin, others my brothers in age and veterancy. By the Annorum's word, we had seen all the World and void but for its heart: Kara-kiz, Fair-One. My veterans had been cast out of this garden (I, as I said, from a neighboring plot) to a distant, ungrateful land of mud and haze, told our prize was to claim it for this crown, this Throne.

We did and were abandoned. By vote and voice we demanded our right, and Tyran promised it. So who else would we follow? None but him.

From the belly of our drop-ship, under ashen Royal skies, we fought to the heart of the Throne. I laid low many by harshot and blade, and was first to the great sealed doors of the Passacaglian throne.

Craterus and Antigonus, my seconds, had been wounded, but they held each other up, slouched over their belt-feds. I had cut a loop-hole in the golden doors with my pen-beam, and felt a responsibility for their wounds, as the Annorate Guard had shoved their weapons from the hole and blasted, blind, towards us. Brave Craterus fired back, striking many of them, hollering Antigonus' name, for he loved him dearly. His efforts saved Antigonus and I, and the rest of my men, and silenced the Imperials within.

I had never wanted a drink more than how my throat begged for slake in that moment. Raw, I remember the word over and over. Raw like hot sand baked firm under Diadochi's unwavering light.

A hush. This, too, is what I remembered: a hush that fell over the battle, an oppressive veil that descended upon all combatants. The Anno pretenders inside the doors of the Throne even ceased their damnable singing.

Tyran approached, placed a hand upon Antigonus, and spoke whispers to him, and fair Antigonus did stand to his full height, to place his own hand on Tyran's enameled shoulder. Craterus rose from his slouch-cover, and Tyran lifted him up, and placed his hand on his opposite shoulder. I stood to the side. Tyran smiled, and spoke to me, asking, "The Claimants Resist Beyond This Door?"

And to him I could not speak, but nod. He drew his glittering sword made from starfall, and pointed it to the door and commanded it open. There was a moment of great groaning protest, then the door swung open, and from it charged our foes.

A great and bloody melee ensued, Antigonus and Craterus and I standing as the personal guard to Tyran himself, at the head of our great army as it clashed in the corridors of the Throne. We traded blade and blow with the Lords and Glorious Commanders of the Empire, whose names were blessed themselves by Passacaglia's own lips, and whose raiments were the finest electrum and adamantine, whose weapons smoked with light-heat, whose own forms were not the containers of their own will.

We struck them down, made mortal once more their soft flesh. Each bite my bayonet ate of them, a land was made free in posterity. Our was the righteous fight, the setting of a broken bone. As we tore them down, we made a land whole.

And then the last fell, and the long tall steps up to the Throne itself Tyran did walk. None attempted to follow, but to fall upon a knee, mutter a prayer for water and peace and thanks for a life beyond this one.

I watched as Tyran, approaching the Royal Form of the dead Anno, did set down his starfall blade. Did lift from the Royal Form the seat of empire. Did throw the Royal Form down from its sepulcher-throne and, sitting himself upon it, rest the Form's heavy crown on his own head, and speak to us his true name:

Tyrannus.

15

16

17

After declaring himself Tyrannus, a significant number of the successor claimants' levies and conscripts around the capital surrendered and pledged their service to the man who had been Tyran. No other claimant was able to sit the throne; therefore, Tyrannus must be the true successor. Today, Tyran's Landing is widely regarded in the Baronies as a cruel but necessary action – the only way, various histories claim, of breaking the stalemate. "As a broken bone must be re-set in order to heal," wrote Baron Cassander-End in his memoir and notes, "so too did Tyrannus need to re-set the Annorum."

TYRANNUS, ENTHRONED

Tyrannus's victory on Karrakis and the capitulation of the conscript ranks did not mean he had conquered and healed the world of Karrakis, let alone the Annorum. To the contrary, his early position was desperate at best. At the beginning of his rule, Karrakis was twenty years into a global war of attrition, with a population numbering just under two billion souls, divided by massive inequities[18], and having suffered decades of brutal attritional warfare. Dethroning the corpse of the Annorum Passacaglia was only the beginning.

Three campaigns established the Annorum Tyrannus. First was a campaign of propaganda: the people of what had been the Annorum Passacaglia needed to know that the Anno Passacaglia had been dethroned and that a new Anno ruled a new Annorum. To make a convincing claim to the mantle of Anno, Tyrannus needed not only to sit on the throne in Karrakis, but to pacify and rule Karrakis and her colonies. This pacification effort was a second, more literal campaign. The last campaign was constructive – the rebuilding and expansion of existing Annorum infrastructure at all levels, from the municipal to interstellar. This triumvirate mission ruled the rest of Tyran's life, and it was only with control over the Anno's mirror creches, a cadre of loyal lieutenants, and his fleet of warships that he was able to knit together the fractured empire.

15 Karrakin sealed-suits were a form of pre-hardsuit battle armor. Their power systems were rudimentary, but it was a formidable force multiplier at the time.

16 In Old Karrakin speech, "the World" was often used to refer to Karrakis and all her colonies.

17 Ispahsalar's home star.

THE CONTRAPATREM

The years immediately following Tyrannus's claim were marked by an uptick in fighting across Karrakis. Kept in supply by the Annorum armories now working in his name, Tyrannus's fleet was an unassailable orbital flotilla capable of launching soldiers and ordnance anywhere across Karrakis within a mere ninety minutes.

Tyrannus's armies swept across Karrakis, led by the veterans of his Khayradi and Throne campaigns and newly raised levies. Kilometer by kilometer, Karrakis fell under Tyrannus's banner, and in the space of another decade he brought Karrakis under the total control of his new Annorum, instituting the Contrapatrem, a total restructuring of Annorate history. Old imperial loyalists, artifacts of the Annorum Passacaglia and the millennia prior, old lands and city states – all markers of any previous age[19] were destroyed. The "re-setting" of the previous Annorum was a grim period among grim periods in Karrakis' history – Tyrannus, when dealing with noble rivals and opposition groups, was not above the use of secret police, widespread censorship, and ideological purges to achieve his political aims. Once the fighting was done, the ignoble classes of Karrakis celebrated Tyrannus's Annorum: the interfamily spats of the Passacaglias had started the succession war that sent tens of millions of people to their death – Tyrannus, according to official histories, had the will and the power to end it. Stability and peace, to the lower classes, was more meaningful than proper dynastic succession.

18 It is important to note that Karrakis at the dawn of the Anno Tyrannus had an average development level in line with a Union belle epoque/pastoral preserve world. This was due to the Annorum Passacaglia's policy of "royal separation", in which fantastic technologies (e.g., spaceflight, energy weapons) were restricted to the ruling family of the Annorum and its agents. In practice, this meant that, while the Annorate Guard, imperial bureaucracy, general nobility, and royal family enjoyed advanced technologies, the vast majority of Karrakis lived without access to – or in some cases, knowledge of – the very same technologies.

19 This purge was carried out to the best of the regime's ability. Apocrypha, ruins, and hidden histories (often in the form of oral histories, stories, folk tales, songs, and so on) persisted on Karrakis. Many more artifacts and texts survived in the colonies.

THE SUCCESSION WAR
(2003–2017U)

In this early period of his Annorum, Tyrannus announced the creation of his royal line and the establishment of a new nobility from among his loyal veterans. He announced reforms to the administration of Karrakis at large and an ambitious plan to expand the world's infrastructure, declaring that the Annorum Tyrannus was to be marked by great works. But Tyrannus knew his claim would not be complete unless he could bring the Concern back under his dominion[20]. Ignored by the crown for a time, the worlds of the Concern continued to fight their own wars of succession and independence, developing interplanetary combat doctrines – small scale, but advanced – and their own histories, cultures, and identities.

Tyrannus, if he were to found a new Annorum in anything more than name, could not allow this fracturing of Karrakin space to continue. With fanfare and glories promised to those who volunteered, he announced a second reunification campaign: a return to the Concern and the establishment of new colonies, to usher in a future more prosperous than that of the previous Annorum. Those from the nobility that rose to the challenge would be offered fresh commissions and titles should they volunteer for service; those of no rank could attain favored status within the Annorum Tyrannus by enlisting.

For years, the foundries on Karrakis churned out new ships, weapons, and armor. Levies and volunteers trained in terrestrial, orbital, and zero-g combat. Officer corps studied Tyrannus's strategies from the Khayradin and Karrakin campaigns. Astrologicians scoured the heavens for communications and signals between the worlds of the Concern and observed the interplanetary struggles that took place between them. Augurs cast bones and consulted the guts of slaughtered animals with the haruspices for signs of victory.

Tyrannus's Annorum was still young when the fleet launched, and his presence was needed to maintain morale and cohesion on the home front, therefore his colonial campaign launched without him at its head. While his eldest son, Tagetes, led the fleet, Tyrannus remained on Karrakis with his close advisors and his daughter Calendula, who he chose as his heir. Histories record that during the reconquest the old general spent hours each night observing the progress of the campaign from the palace observatory.

Peacetime never appealed to Tyrannus. His absence from the campaign was mirrored by his absence from rule: for the duration of the campaign, his administrators ran the Annorum. Once she was of age, Calendula managed the affairs of state as the Decurion[21] of the Annorum.

Tyrannus's colonial unification campaign was not solely martial. Ahead of his great fleet, he dispatched emissaries aboard light, quick ships. They carried messages of peace, as well as tributes of gold and technology from the Annorum Tyrannus. These emissaries successfully convinced some of the worlds to pledge themselves to the Annorum – Ispahsalar, Tilimsan, and Begum. Bo remained silent. Arrudye, Umara, and Eyalet-a, led by Tyrannus's old rival, Khayradin, resisted. They were subject to the full strength of Tagetes' fleets and armies, and fell in time.

The reconquest of the Concern lasted for decades and by its end Tyrannus was on his deathbed. Calendula essentially ruled the Annorum, but a formal ceremony was necessary to mark the transition of power, catching Tyrannus in a conundrum. Without Tagetes' return and pledge of fealty at Calendula's coronation, there could be no security of succession. Tyrannus wished to show the strength of his Annorum, but Calendula and her advisors urged haste: her father was near death, and Tagetes' return would take more than two centuries; by the time he returned, Calendula's successors would likely be sitting the throne. Depending on Tagetes' disposition, it was possible that another succession war would begin, tearing down the Annorum Tyrannus. To prevent this scenario, Calendula called Tyrannus and Tagetes to a dialogue, a summit via light by which the correct course of action could be determined.

The three of them met and came to a previously unthinkable conclusion: the Annorum Tyrannus must end.

20 A compelling argument advanced by modern theorists: A deeper, darker part of Tyrannus knew that he did not know how to manage peacetime, thus always his drive towards the martial solution. All his life, from a young man of eighteen on campaign under the Annorum Passacaglia's banner, to his command above Khayradin, to his return to Karrakis and the unification, Tyrannus had been at war. He never ruled an empire at peace – that work he left to his daughter, Calendula.

21 The highest ranking steward of the Throne, just below the Anno and with nearly equal powers.

DYNASTICLADE
(2025ᴜ)

For immediate release across the Annorum. To be broadcast on all platforms. To be translated to all languages.

BE IT KNOWN TO ALL:

In ninety-nine years (Imperial) TAGETES shall return to Karakiz; you of advanced age know the terror of time, how it ravages families, divides business partners, and confuses lovers.

TO PREVENT ANOTHER AGE OF TUMULT, I, TYRANNUS, DO DECLARE DYNASTICLADE AND HEREBY ISSUE THE FOLLOWING COMMAND:

Upon the DEATH and PASSING of TYRANNUS, ANNO OF THE ANNORUM IN HIS NAME, his beloved daughter and heir, CALENDULA, DECURION OF THRONE KARAKIZ, shall ascend to her imperial seat, naming no chosen to follow. She will rule from Throne Karakiz, with a glad and golden sunset ever at her right hand.

TAGETES, HAGIOGRAPH OF THE ANNORUM, IN TRANSIT, shall retain his title, subjects, and land, though make no claim over the Rights and Rules of the Empire. He will not be your emperor, though his presence in Annorum space shall bring a warm glow to all our hearts.

UPON THE PASSING OF MY FAIR DAUGHTER CALENDULA, MY ANNORUM SHALL END.

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UPON THE PASSING OF MY FAIR DAUGHTER CALENDULA, MY ANNORUM SHALL END.

My Annorum shall abdicate Throne Karakiz. In its place will sit a council of my most honored advisors. They shall serve for twenty years, and in that time they will establish the correct and just procedures by which each world may elect a representative to serve a term of another twenty years on this council.

Abdication of this duty is an abrogation of their right to rule, and all who see them should spit, curse, and strike them with my blessing.

Mine shall be the final Annorum. You, my people, deserve more than a crown to rule you: you shall rule yourselves.

– Anno Tyrannus, the Sole and Final

The Dynasticlade: the orderly transfer of power from the imperial monarchy of the Annorum Tyrannus to a New Federation of noble states. Tyrannus would rule for the rest of his natural life. Calendula would ascend the throne and name no heirs, managing the transition as a single, stable leader. Tagetes, upon his return, would make no attempt to rule. His claim would be an honorary title: a chosen name and an estate from which he would manage the affairs of the royal family, continuing the Annorum in a ceremonial capacity.

The decision to adopt the Dynasticlade was prompted by Tyrannus's experience of the bloody end of the Annorum Passacaglia. It was a plan without precedent, an attempt to guarantee a peaceful transformation from monarchy to noble federation. The plan, imagined by Calendula and her advisors, and accepted by Tyrannus and Tagetes, was to establish a ruling council chosen from the nobility, by the nobility. Each world would be represented, and together they would decide the fate of all peoples. The old family names would be done away with and new ones would be chosen. Each noble line and their world would be a single spoke of a wheel the hub of which was Karrakis: without the hub, all would fail, and without the spokes, the hub would fail.

The proposal sent shockwaves through the nobility and ignobility both. The missive announcing the Dynasticlade was broadcast to all worlds and ships in transit, printed and pasted to the walls of every city, cried out in town squares, and distributed to the public wherever they were. Tyrannus, who had ruled for nearly two centuries, was affixed firmly in the mind of the Karrakin people as a great,[22] unifying figure. For him to promise not continuity of rule, but another fracturing – even one orderly as his Dynasticlade – stoked great fear of another ambitious Anno-in-waiting. Despite these fears, however, the Dynasticlade, would prove peaceful.

Tyrannus abdicated before his death, crowning his daughter Calendula in a multi-day public ceremony on Karrakis. He threw the doors of the Annorum's palace complex open wide, allowing the common ranks of people inside the walled royal city for the first time. For those who couldn't make the journey to the coronation, Tyrannus ordered public ferries to be

22 "Great" in the sense of a person whose shadow looms large in history; not a wholly loved figure, but one whose impact was undeniable.

dispatched, and issued any who requested it a voucher that would allow them – or their descendants, should they not survive the journey – entrance for one day into the royal city.

Karrakis had not experienced a coronation since the Passacaglia LII, and the world burst with celebration. This coronation marked the beginning of a new era: Calendula promised before the world that hers would be a rule of peace, a project of unmaking the old ways in favor of the new. "Change," she is recorded as saying, "is a promise made to our children, and an honor to our ancestors. Our people survived the death of a world – we now usher in the birth of a new one."[23]

As Calendula managed the affairs of Karrakis – the pilgrimages, and the daily duties of giving speeches, remarks, and reassurances to the never-ending stream of petitioners to the fading throne – her advisors worked to construct an electoral system that could function in rough synchronicity across the Concern. Their first step was to define an electoral class free of the old ties of nobility and rank. This they did by stripping the great houses and noble families of their old ranks and titles, then granting them new ones, determined by the world upon which they made their home and the capacity and industry in which they had historically served the throne.

Thus, Khayradin, where the great mines had fueled the crown's ambitions for thousands of years, became the House of Stone; Umara, where aqua farming had fed the empire, became the House of Water, and so on. While their specific interests and philosophies have changed since their initial establishment, the nameless houses still exist, now simply called the major houses:[24]

- The **House of Order**, with Karrakis as its capital.
- The **House of Remembrance**, with the moon Arrudye as its capital.
- The **House of Glass**, with Ispahsalar as its capital.
- The **House of Sand**, with Tilimsan as its capital.
- The **House of Smoke**, with the moon Eyalet-a as its capital.
- The **House of Stone**, with Khayradin as its capital.
- The **House of Water**, with Umara as its capital.
- The **House of Moments**, with Begum as its capital.
- The **House of Dust**, with Bo as its capital.

The Dynasticlade's transitional project progressed with surprising ease, as the worlds agreed to participate one by one during the years between Calendula's coronation and Tagetes' return. Years of animosity against the crown, whole bloody histories of resistance and capitulation, of secret police and peasant levies – it all began to slip away, as the populations of the colonies realized that their voices would be made equal in the halls of Karrakis, if only they agreed to the terms of the Dynasticlade. They would no longer be independent, but they would have power in the form of their representative. The worlds, one by one, consented to participate in the New Federation. The new houses were established. Peace was at hand.

24 This change did not mean that people's names changed. No one became "of Stone", "of Temperance", or "of Sand", or similar. People came to identify as members of their houses, but not in the sense of blood relations – the major houses were more in line with party or state organizations, meant to collect the population of each world into a discrete voting environment; if one migrated to a different world with the intention of living there, they would register as a member of that world's house once certain immigration standards were met.

23 From *Calendula's Remarks on the Account of Abdication and Coronation, Revised*. Pub. by Bensalah-Ket of House Argo, 5001u, Karrakin Baronic Imprint No. 028736122.
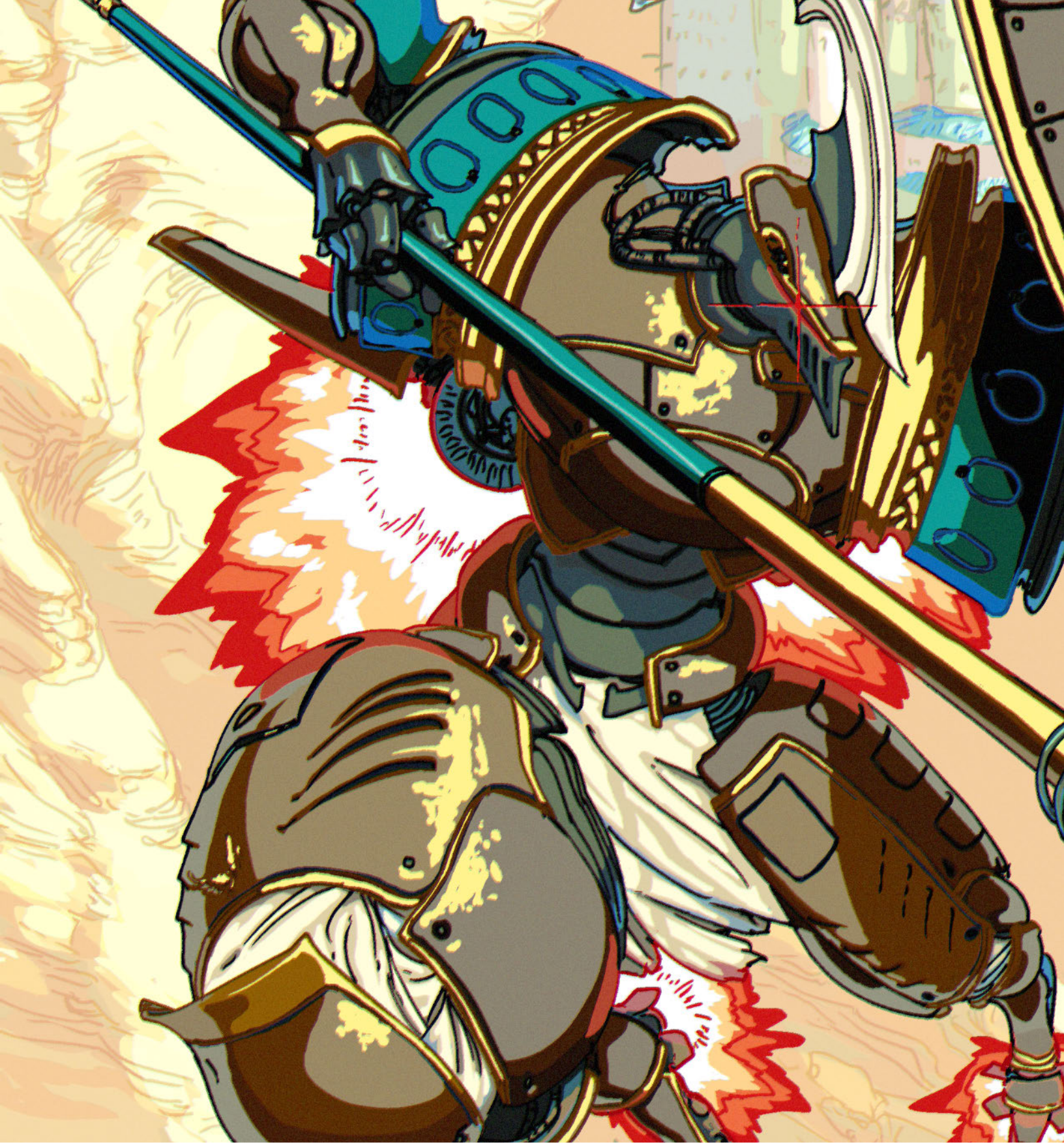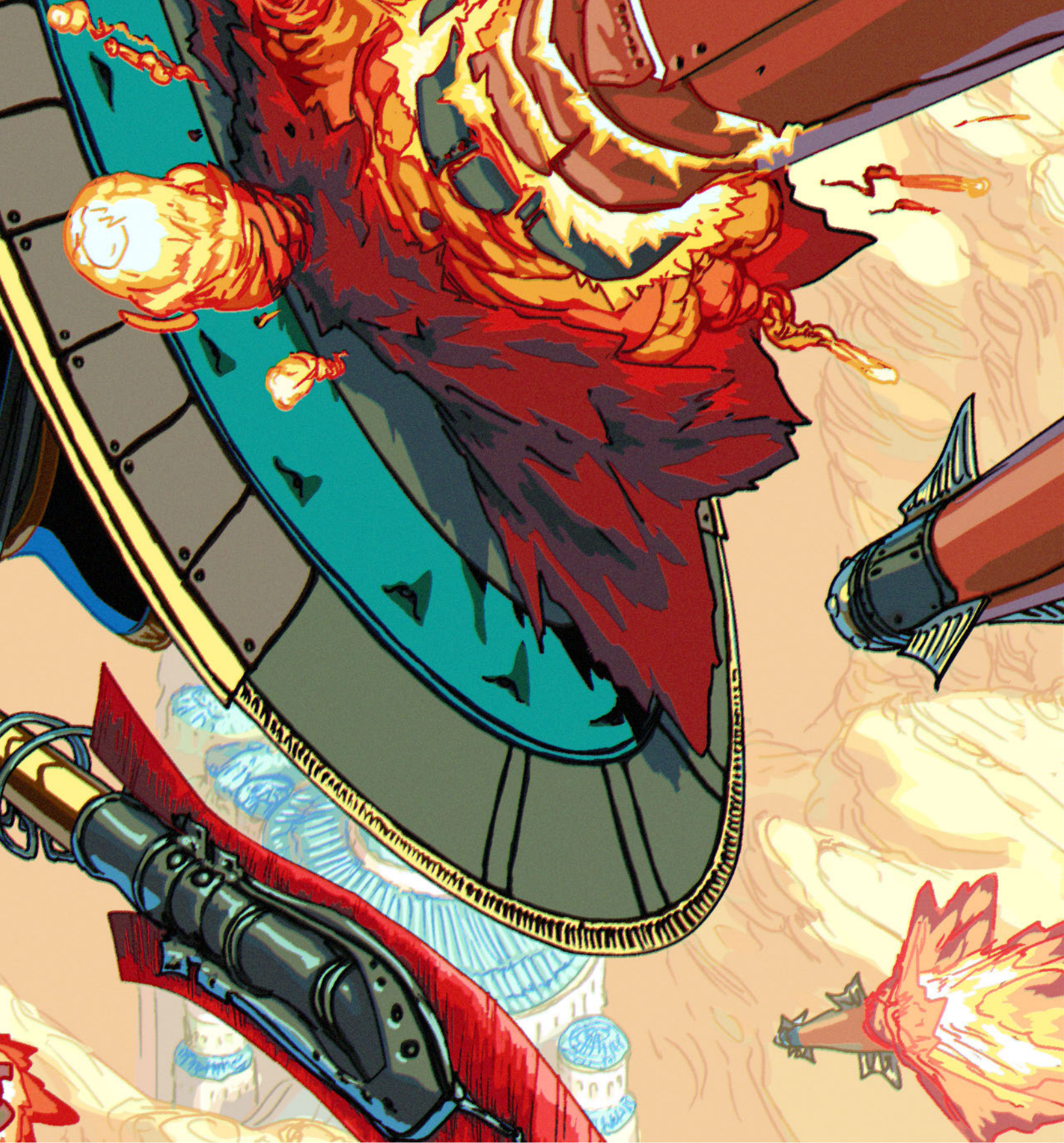
SECTION 3
THE NEW FEDERATION
(2089U–3150U)

In the late days of the new Federation, in 2805u, the high desert observatories on Karrakis where New Federal Navigation monitored the world's orbital environment, an old signal buoy, dormant since before Passacaglia, pinged to life.

This was an unusual, though not unprecedented, development: there were thousands of old signal buoys seeded throughout Karrakin local space, dumped in the world's Lagrange points, and in various long and short orbits around the planet. They had been placed millennia ago by the Apollo, powered by nuclear drives that, as far as the people of Karrakis were concerned, were inexhaustible. The buoys – old communications relays, data-collection satellites, theater-building autocartographers, breadcrumb nodes, and so on – had been tracked, but left alone unless they presented a danger to orbital traffic.

The buoy that pinged was a communications relay, a simple signal booster that accepted a tightbeam laser communication, sighted its next point, and passed it on, cleaning the signal and boosting it to prevent excessive data loss. In this case, it targeted the old towers that had been maintained on Karrakis since the earliest days of habitation by a series of professionals, monastic orders, cults, and, at the time of contact, a skeleton crew of New Federation flight control operators working to mothball the structures.

It took the crew the better part of a week to realize that the old buoy was pinging. It was a simple binary message, which they were able to translate into old Earth languages following ancient guides, then into Karrakin:

HELLO OUT THERE. DO YOU READ US? THIS IS UNION ON CRADLE [EARTH], CALLING ANY SURVIVORS [DESCENDANTS] OF THE APOLLO. YOU ARE NOT ALONE. ATTACHED ARE PLANS FOR CONTACTING THE SENDER OF THIS MESSAGE. THIS MESSAGE WILL REPEAT UNTIL CONTACT IS MADE.

The message contained plans for the construction of a compatible communications platform, but there was no need: the Karrakins were able to tune an existing platform to the correct parameters and send their own greeting to Union.

MESSAGE RECEIVED. WHO IS UNION? WE ARE KARRAKIN, OUR HOME IS KARRAKIS. IS YOUR HOME EARTH?

Attached in the Karrakin reply was a broad portfolio of data including images, texts, music, and other cultural artifacts. The distances involved meant that any reply would take years to reach its intended recipient, so it was years later – after a measured rollout of the announcement, a range of public responses, and growing speculation around what, if anything, Cradle would say in response – that the Karrakins received Cradle's reply:

YES. GOOD TO HEAR WE'RE NOT ALONE. FRIENDS, WE GREET YOU IN PEACE. EXPECT VISITORS SOMETIME – OUR DOORS ARE OPEN.

With this brief exchange of messages, Karrakis entered a new era of interstellar politics. The major test for the New Federation was to determine how to approach the senders of these transmissions. Data scraped from the tightbeams pointed back toward Earth, indicating that they were indeed sent from that world – one largely forgotten by the Karrakins, but of greater and greater public interest as the origin point of these messages.

Messages flowed back and forth, with cultural exchanges occurring once every sixteen years. Soon, the messages began to return faster – their origin point was a Union nearlighter, en route to Karrakis.

First contact had a complex effect on the Karrakin psyche. Some, chief among them the hagiographs – die-hard careerists of the New Federal Army – urged the barons to launch a fleet and meet the incoming ship. Others cautioned temperance and advised the barons to approach not with military ships, but civilian vessels. In the end, they decided to review old protocols and grant the arriving nearlight vessel an honor guard – a mix of military ships and diplomatic yachts arranged in an escort corridor.

Protocol queries flew back and forth between Karrakis and the approaching ship, establishing diplomatic handshakes, sharing health data and vaccination information, language guides, and other contextualizations and introductory information. The Karrakins learned a more detailed history of Union and the Central Committee[25], and, for the first time, were able to place themselves in a coherent timeline[26]. Accordingly, administrative and cultural reforms were announced across the New Federation, part of the ongoing package of reforms already underway as part of the transition from Annorum to federation. When the ships finally met, it was a bridging of splintered histories thousands of years in the making. The Union delegation was escorted with a gleaming honor guard and landed with great fanfare in the capital.

The New Federation is remembered today for its peaceful welcome of Union's representatives, its insistence on reintegration under the Union-standard timeline, and its inability to effectively address Union's political influence in the following centuries. While the relationship between Union and the New Federation was initially peaceful, this peace proved unsustainable. In the Federation, resistance to these reforms soon began to coalesce with the New Annorum movement around the surviving members of the Annorum Tyrannus – Tagetes and his children, who had become ceremonial cultural leaders, important figures whose favor was still sought even if they held no formal political power. Resistance took the form of reactionary fervor, spurred on by disillusioned hagiographs angered by the Federation's "attacks" on Karrakin culture. Meanwhile, on Cradle, a growing Anthrochauvinist movement recoiled at the idea that Union's mantle might reasonably be threatened by this distant cousin (or others, at the far edges of space), and began to agitate for a more direct form of rule.

For the space of a few centuries, there was an uneasy peace between the two stellar nations. Communications and cultural exchange were solely restricted to data-packet transfers on automated nearlight ships, with early-pattern, inorganic machine minds handling the rigors of any physical journey. The relationship between the Central Committee and the New Federation was top-heavy. At the grassroots, reactionary sentiment put pressure on both governments, slowly building into a powerful shearing force that would see both civilizations thrown into the first major interstellar war in human history.

26 This recontextualization (or retemporalization) is a contentious choice in the modern Baronies. Leading Neohagiographic thought argues that this move by the New Federation was a terrible blow to Karrakin independence. By agreeing to place Karrakis in the context of Union's coherent time, the barons of the New Federation implicitly shifted the weight of galactic control from Karrakis back to Cradle. Karrakis had just as much right to demand Union place itself in Karrakin Standard Time – after all, Karrakis existed prior to the Fall, and was able to survive and thrive, arguably better than those left on Cradle.

25 This entity did not become known as the First Committee until the Second Committee's ascension in 2880u.

THE FIRST UNION–KARRAKIN WAR
(2885–2998ᴜ)

Attention+++Attention+++Attention
++++++++++++++++++++++++++++
Missive+++Issued by FTMS Yond-Tyran to:::ALL HANDS
++++++++++++++++++++++++++++
AT 0300 KST LR/ED station BRICK-02 registered a SIX SIGMA CONFIRM breach at Local Termination Shock+++EXTRASOLAR ORIGIN +++BLUESHIFT+++MULTIPLE OBJ WITHIN RADIAN
++++++++++++++++++++++++++++
LR/ED BRICK-02 can say with HIGH CONFIDENCE that EX-OBJ-1 is DIRECTED+++COHERENT+++ HOSTILE+++Expected arrival in LOCAL KARRAKIS SPACE is in the range of 1 to 3 months (KS)
++++++++++++++++++++++++++++
As of 0600 I have issued an Order of ENGAGEMENT supported by this evidence. With assent from V-FTMS's 01 thru 10, this Order of ENGAGEMENT is TRUE and UNDERWAY
++++++++++++++++++++++++++++
ALL SHIPS SHALL GATHER AT THE FOLLOWING BREAK-POINTS. ALL SHIPS SHALL ORIENT TOWARDS OP/FOR RADIAN AND ENGAGE DESIGNATED TARGETS
++++++++++++++++++++++++++++
LAURELINE+++KHIZR'S WALL+++ORA+++PREVEZA+++LEPANTO
++++++++++++++++++++++++++++
Our endeavor is the defense of our home; we are correct in this stance, and shall conduct ourselves accordingly. CDE.
++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

CDE. Concursus delenda est, or, "Union must be destroyed". A few short centuries after contact, peaceful diplomatic cooperation between Union and the New Federation had deteriorated to the point of open warfare. Reactionary elements had gripped both governments, resulting in the Second Committee taking control of Union and a coalition of New Annorum firebrands gaining majority control of the New Federation. The long reign of the Union's First Committee ended following what the Anthrochauvinist movement on Cradle saw as repeated acts of "complacency" in managing other stellar states – refusing to reign in the Aun and the New Federation chief among them. On Karrakis, the New Annorum movement demanded the New Federation push harder to move the polarity of galactic power from Cradle to Karrakis, furious that their representatives had been so passive and accommodating to Union's demands.

These boiling waters spilled over with a bomb attack on the UNS Pilgrim, a diplomatic yacht sent with a small party of Union officials to tour Karrakis. Destroyed by militant Hagiographers[27] while docked above Arrudye, the Pilgrim became a rallying cry on Cradle for those who wanted Union to be a more aggressive central power. For the Second Committee, the Pilgrim's destruction was the first crisis their new government had the power to address. Union responded by announcing a proportional strike: it would raise a fleet, send it into Karrakin space, and cripple their shipyards.

On Karrakis, the Pilgrim's destruction showed Union could be hurt. Previously, Union nearlighters appeared largely untouchable, being built from far more advanced patterns than those available on Karrakis. The Hagiographers, having made Union bleed, were lauded as heroes who did what they needed to do to preserve Karrakin glory. Hawkish elements of the New Federation voted en mass to raise levies and bolster their fleet: Union had announced its incoming strike, and the Karrakin people did not want to back down.

THE BATTLE OF KANTUS VOID

Months passed. Union's fleet burned for Karrakis. The New Federation sent its own picket flotillas out in a broad defensive bubble around the world. Hagiographers continued to agitate across Karrakis, Arrudye, and nearby Ispahsalar, whipping the populations into a fervor.

Using tactics developed in its earlier wars, the Karrakins engaged the approaching Union fleet at extreme range, trading missiles and middle-confidence predictive kinetics as the encroaching fleet broke through the termination shock of Karrakis' home system. Both fleets held their main batteries in reserve; at full power, the Union fleet was still a month realtime away from its destination. The meeting place was a stretch of nothingness known as Kantus - "Priest", in the old tongue.

As the ships grew closer, skirmishes flared, and the predictability gap closed, the New Federation fleet picked up black gigaton kinetic projectiles fired by the Union fleet, gliding silent and cold through frictionless

27 By this point, the old Annorum military rank of hagiograph had been dissolved – zealous supporters of the New Annorum movement, many of them former hagiographs, adopted the name as the signifier of their movement.

void. This far out, they were easy enough for ships to sight and adjust around, but countering that ease was the difficulty of choice. Union, the New Federation fleetmasters realized, hadn't targeted their fleet with the salvo: they had targeted Karrakis and Arrudye.

The fleetmasters had a choice to make: they could order their ships to continue engaging the Union fleet, ignoring the kinetics in the hopes that the Union gunners had miscalculated orbits, and potentially stop the fleet well outside of visual range of Karrakis – or they could divert, change their courses and attempt to intercept the kinetics in an attempt to prevent them from impacting on Karrakis or Arrudye. At the range Union was engaged with the New Fed fleet and Karrakis beyond, the fleetmasters had a moderate-to-high confidence that at least one of the projectiles would find a target – an unacceptable outcome.

The New Federation fleetmasters decided to break course and intercept the projectiles. Union's ships closed the gap and engaged the fleet, opening up on their targets with high-confidence kinetics, missiles, and energy weapons. On paper, the Karrakin fleet – larger, more organized, better equipped, with better-rested crews, fighting on their home turf – should have won. However, the Union admiral's diversionary attack split the New Fed forces into small, beleaguered groups of isolated ships, each chasing a different projectile. Union's fleet was able to attack their foes in small groups, overwhelming the parts before they could form a greater sum.

But the loss of the New Federation fleet through a combination of capture and destruction was not completely in vain. Most of the projectiles launched by the Union fleet were intercepted, preventing a massacre on an unfathomable scale. One kinetic slipped through and hit Karrakis, illustrating what could have happened had the full flight not been intercepted: the projectile slammed into the ocean a few miles off the coast of Dellamar, a city with a population of roughly twenty million souls. The ensuing earthquakes and tidal waves devastated the city, killing hundreds of thousands of people and throwing up turbulent storms – mere fallout, triggered by the traumatic impact, with an environmental cost that trailed on for decades and contributed to the ongoing casualties of millions more.

AFTERMATH

Weeks later, Union's ships arrived in-system, engaging the remaining pickets – mostly subline corvettes, mothballed old capital ships, converted yachts and shuttles – and eliminating them. Karrakis, surrounded, with her fleets beaten back and a raw wound open on the surface of their world, prepared to surrender. The world below howled with air raid sirens and the clamor of people fleeing to their municipal shelters, the bellies of Union ships scraping the sky, flaring bright off Karrakis' atmosphere.

But the invasion never happened. Karrakis – its anti-orbital defenses either destroyed or dry of ammunition – never fell. With little fanfare, the Union fleet pulled back. Karrakin observatories reported torch signatures angling for Cradle – something else, it seemed, needed Union's desperate, immediate attention.

On Karrakis, Union's retreat did not feel like victory: Dellamar smoldered from Union's kinetic strike. The wounded and dead littered the streets. Damage control and fire suppression teams scrambled across the city, attacking fires and collapsed buildings. Sirens echoed across the flattened city. The footage of Dellamar razed by Union prompted widespread anger from the Hagiographers, who redoubled their agitation efforts as their ranks continued to swell. The houses, angered by the seemingly ineffective resistance mounted by the government of the New Federation, decided on their next moves. Capitalizing on the popular Hagiographic movement, the major houses gathered together their representatives and voted no confidence in their leaders.

As Union's ships departed, the New Federation was replaced by a new government, operating largely along the same organizational principles as its precursor and comprised of the heads of each house. As a nod to the Karrakin homeworld (a move meant to reemphasize the unity its members ultimately shared) the new government, to cheers and fanfare, declared itself the Federal Karrakin Monarchy.

The first acts of the Federal Karrakin Monarchy were the rebuilding of Throne Karrakis and the establishment of the Federal fleet, beating the recruitment drum with a salvo of chants, speeches, texts, and other media urging the peasantry, minor nobility, and surviving veterans to enlist. Concursus delenda est, the first order uttered in the battle of Kantus, was the rallying cry – "Union must be destroyed".

The reason for Union's sudden retreat remained unknown to the FKM until later, though there were hints in the form of malfunctioning technology and machine minds. It was the Deimos Event, triggered at 3000u, that interrupted the Second Committee's push to dominate Karrakis. SecComm, unsure what enemy it faced in its local system, issued a desperate call for all fleets to return in defense of Cradle – without RA's unknowing intervention, the invasion of Karrakis would have occurred.

THE NEW PROSPERITY AGREEMENT
(3007ᴜ)

Union survived the Deimos Event, though the phenomena of 3000–3002u forever altered its course. The First Contact Accords were signed following the Siege of Mars and MONIST-1 ("RA") disappeared into the blink. The Second Committee, reeling, sought a way to assert itself, and found one where it left it: Karrakis and the new Federal Karrakin Monarchy, gearing up for war.

The second Union–Karrakin war never happened. Utilizing the first NHP prototypes to pilot largely autonomous ships, Union outpaced the Karrakins' fleetcraft capability, a fact that became quickly apparent in early skirmishes. However, the Karrakins burned with patriotic fervor, and the shipyards and rallying halls of the empire were roaring with activity. Two things quickly became apparent to the stewards of the throne - that Union would ultimately win another war, but not before half the Concern burned with it, and with billions of souls from both sides thrown on the pyre.

Negotiations were swift as both sides realized the possibility of profit – Union agreed to help expand Karrakin infrastructure in exchange for a halt to the construction of the Federal Karrakin Monarchy's fleet. The Second Committee further guaranteed that the barons would remain heads of their houses and state – so long as they agreed to keep Union in supply from their vast material wealth. As a bonus, the Second Committee offered the twelve worlds of the Dawnline Shore (a colonial expansion area settled by Union). The barons found this agreement worthwhile: they and their descendants would remain in power, Union would foot the bill of rebuilding, and all the barons would need to do is produce raw materials and resources to feed Union's shipyards, blink station production, and other galactic infrastructure projects.

War, for the Karrakins, made them appear powerful, but was costly and less profitable than peace and trade. To win without death by capturing markets was the ultimate coup. Especially considering that the terms of this peace would enrich and protect Karrakis – to them, the ultimate prize. Earth, or "Cradle", as the Unionites called it, was never the goal. So, the barons signed the New Prosperity Agreement, a white peace that left both sides alive and enriched.

Under the terms of the New Prosperity Agreement, the Karrakins would formally become part of Union. They would not rule the galaxy, but that was never what they wanted. They would leave that trouble to the scheming denizens of Cradle, since they seemed to want it so much. The barons saw that their worlds were their own prize – Union, after all, came to secure them. What more evidence could they want than the self-styled masters of the galaxy attempting to claim their homeworld by force? No, they decided, let Union wear that crown and wrestle with its implications, tragedies, and crimes. The barons would own the only land that mattered: Karrakis, and all her colonies. With the gift-worlds of the Dawnline Shore added to the barons' territory – following the formal establishment of colonial dominion (or, "administration" as the Second Committee's treaty language put it) over the populated ones – Karrakis' majesty would only grow more evident.

THE KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES
(C. 3150U–PRESENT)

For a little while, there was peace. Fourteen hundred years of rebuilding, expansion, and investment as the Baronies worked to modernize their federal monarchy, integrating NHPs, blink travel, and para-causal advances into their own infrastructure. Alongside the Second Committee, the Baronies expanded into the Dawnline Shore, now called the Interest, landing its first colonial missions there in 3845u and securing these holdings by 4000u. The dynasties of the major houses climbed and fell in popularity and wealth – though never faded.

Over time, under this arrangement, the Federal Karrakin Monarchy became known, if not formally, as the Karrakin Trade Baronies, a moniker first appended to it by the freighter captains and harbor-masters that administered the NPA, then later picked up as common parlance. The term "baron", already in use as formal title in the Karrakin hierarchy, became more common as linguistic drift worked its way across the empire.

THE FIRST INTEREST WAR (C. 4600U)

In the 4600s u, as revolutionary elements in Cradle and across Union's capital worlds put an end to the Second Committee, the Federal Karrakin Monarchy decided it would make its own play on the galaxy: it would firm its grip on the worlds of the Interest – the Dawnline Shore Colonial Expansion Zone – and simultaneously deal a nose-breaking blow to the upstart Harrison Armory. The Armory, a rising power made of breakaway elements from the Second Committee, was young and vulnerable, though possessing of a great deal of military expertise, and had its hand on valuable colonial assets it had portioned aside for itself. The FKM saw a perfect opportunity to test the limits of its arrangement with Union and gain ground at the same time.

This campaign would be a limited action despite its scale: on one front, an expeditionary effort into the Armory space to secure Ras Shamra – a former GMS Special Projects world – and on the other, a broad, civilian-led expansion into the Dawnline Shore to make firm the Baronies' legal claims to the worlds there. The Armory had been busy making diplomatic overtures to win favor and, presumably, protectorate agreements. The purpose of this, as Karrakis saw it, was to "steal" a number of the Dawnline worlds out from under the Baronies; such maneuvers could not

stand. The war that followed this decision pitted the imperial aims of Karrakis against those of Ras Shamra, for as the Karrakins planned their two-front mission, so too did Ras Shamra plan its own effort.

Sensing the weakness of the newly minted Third Committee – and bolstered by a steady stream of defectors and Anthrochauvinist Party members, diasporan worlds, and naval units – Harrison Armory, then under the leadership of its founding director-general, John Creighton Harrison I, organized its own fleet to strike out for Cradle. Baronic intelligence monitoring the situation mistakenly believed this fleet to be a weapon aimed for Karrakis, and advocated for an immediate preemptive strike on Ras Shamra. But for this interpretation of the Armory's maneuvers, the Third Committee may not have survived its earliest days.

Early combat between the Karrakin Trade Baronies and Harrison Armory heavily favored the Baronies, but over time the Armory's terrestrial superiority and adoption of mechs as a primary fighting force over-whelmed Baronic forces and led to a stunning defeat. By 4620u a tenuous peace had been brokered, with direct involvement from Union's nascent Third Committee. The outcome was so unexpected by Baronic forces that it led to the complete overhaul of combat doctrine and the wholesale adoption of chassis in Karrakin space, as well as the creation of Baronic Unified Command, the cavalry college, the royal academies, and the house and free companies.

THE THIRD COMMITTEE AND THE BARONIES

The relationship between the Baronies and Union's Third Committee has grown stronger as Third has continued to distance itself from the Cradle-first Anthrochauvinism of the Second Committee. From representation on the Central Committee to cadet exchange programs in the Baronic Royal Academies and healthy, ongoing migration and trade between Karrakin and Union Core worlds, the Baronies today contains multitudes: it is a vast cosmopolitan polity, a proud and ancient culture, and an ally in Union's interests.

However, underlying this relationship is a funda-mental tension, a canker knot that continues to sour and threatens to destroy everything.

THE NEW PROSPERITY AGREEMENT: THE BARGAIN

The Baronies became a Union member state as a necessary condition of peace in the Second Union–Karrakin War, a compromise settled under the Second Committee with the explicit goal of preventing further mutual destruction. Over time, the New Prosperity Agreement, including the exchange of material wealth between both polities, has been thoroughly integrated into both Baronic and Union politics. The Third Committee relied on the agreement to bolster their strength in the early days following the revolution even as they understood it as a somewhat odious vehicle of its predecessor. Even to the present day, the Baronies' raw expertise in raw material extraction and resource exploitation has been vital in feeding Union's shipyards, printers, and colonial expansion efforts, and in upholding the Three Pillars in Core worlds across the Orion Arm.

At the same time, the size and relative political independence of the Baronies has allowed its subject states to flout, and at times, directly violate those Three Pillars with shocking frequency. Abject serfdom, though uncommon in the Baronies and officially banned, is still practiced, the most direct example of which was found on Ludra's World prior to the Ungrateful rebellion of 4601u. The very existence of the separation between the noble and ignoble classes – a core part of traditional Baronic culture and enthusiastically upheld by the hardline houses – goes heavily against Union doctrine, despite many such worlds enjoying official Core status.

In recent years, many conservative Baronic houses have flaunted their violations of core Union ideals with even greater liberty, sensing the unwillingness of the Third Committee to follow the hardline policies of its predecessor.

THE CONUNDRUM

This has created an uncomfortable tension in Third-Comm. Union relies on the New Prosperity Agreement to fuel its expansion and material prosperity, and to uphold its principles, yet the Baronies refuse to adhere to the central principles and policies of the Pillars as soon as they are no longer politically convenient, undermining them with each new transgression.

This paradox eats at the heart of ThirdComm's ideology – that Union does not unite by force, but by consensus and consent. ThirdComm's ideal form, in practice and in theory, is that of a polity that does not ever rule directly, but relies on its member states to hold themselves accountable, often across unfathomably vast gulfs of distance and time. There are various opinions in Union's inner political circles about the long-term viability of this arrangement, and the very existence of the Baronies is always at the center of these arguments.

Compounding this issue is the Third Committee's extreme reluctance to take a hardline stance on the matter. Outside of conservative factions in the Central Committee and general public, direct action and interventionist stances like blockades, extradition, and military action are extremely unpopular in modern Union, and growing increasingly so. Every military operation ThirdComm undertakes, no matter how small or morally uncomplicated, is seen as an abject failure of its core policies, and usually the end point of a long chain of mistakes. Even actions taken by the DoJ/HR – the Department of Justice and Human Rights – against extremist elements like slavers and pirates, as infrequently as they happen, generate decades of paperwork and court proceedings, and require heavy sanction, along with sanitization afterwards.

Out of extreme fear that it might repeat the mistake of its predecessor, ThirdComm generally treats the Baronies with the lightest touch possible, sending negotiators, running political and propaganda campaigns, and at worst censuring those individuals and organizations that are the most egregious offenders. This light touch has the twofold effect of neither mollifying more pro-interventionist factions nor satisfying those seeking more peaceful solution. As a consequence, Union's influence over Baronic politics is agonizingly limited.

For all the downsides, there is some wisdom to this restraint: political turmoil in the Baronies is at an all-time high, and civil war is distant but looming threat on the horizon. There is, perhaps, one faint hope for Third-Comm – a situation with an uncertain outcome, but that validates its ideals, and that, with patience and restraint, will ultimately create a more lasting solution

THE WHEEL

The Baronies is undergoing major political change due to the embrace of Republicanism by more and more houses, the Sanjak Revolution, and the movement away from a politically empowered nobility and towards a more equitable social order by many of its most outspoken citizens. Societal reform is coming to the Baronies from a deep and genuine place within, but its pace is slow, and it is hampered by the most hardline factions.

Time will tell if any of these movements have lasting effects on old Karrakiz, or if its ponderous size and the weight of its history will allow entrenched conservatives to drag it back into their envisioned glory days, motivated by the war-banner, the lance, and a myopic view of human nature.

While it is almost certain that factions internal and external to Union are involved in aiding these progressive movements, they cannot do so openly, and more centrist political factions in Union's core are deeply wary of the crisis that would unfold should any such efforts be brought to light. Common rumors suggest that Union's current policy is to rely on small groups of highly talented operators who can claim to be acting independently.
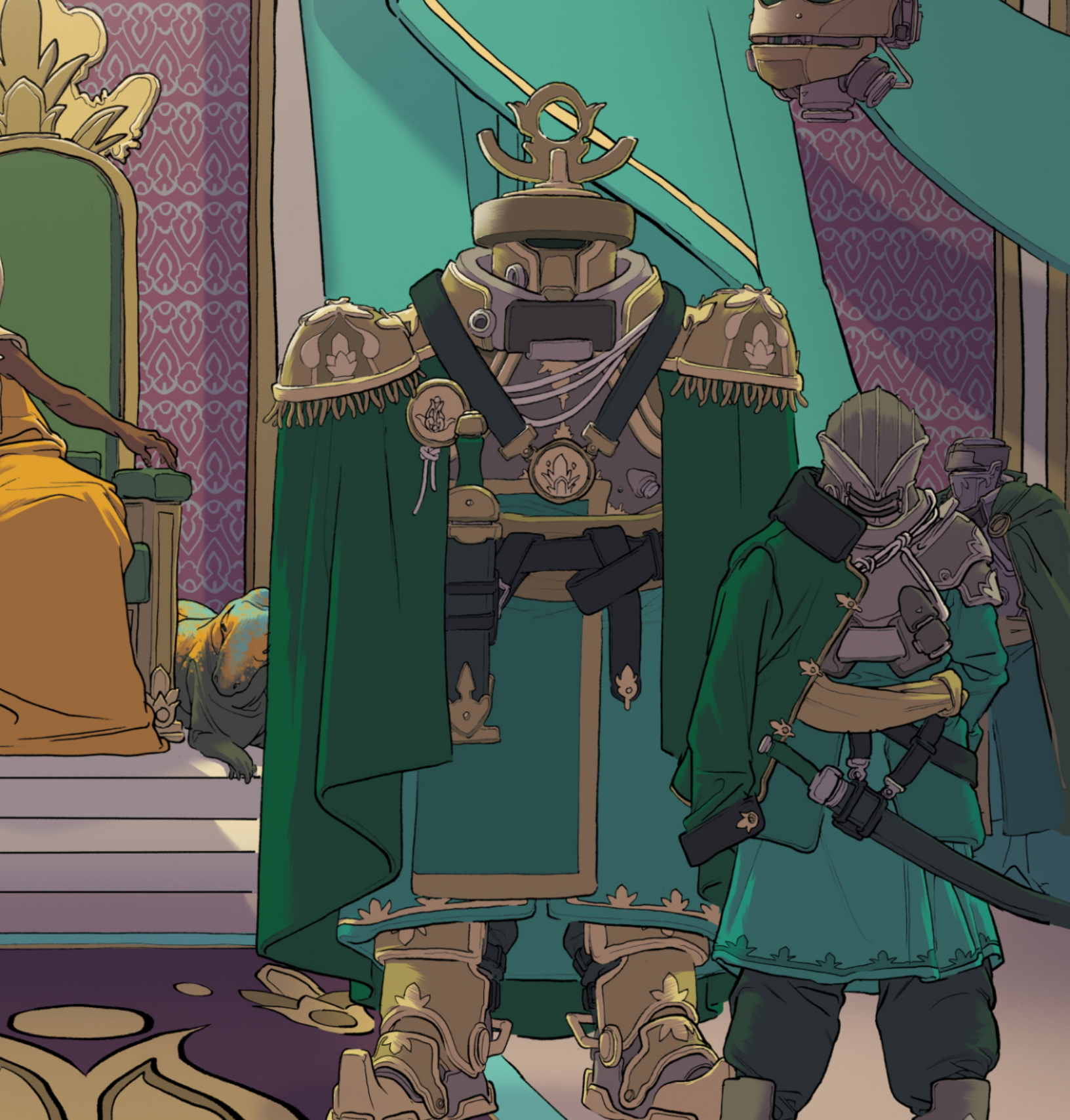
FEDERAL KARRAKIN MONARCHY

BARONIC COUNCIL

IGNOBLE HOUSE

ORDER XENOGLOSSIA

MAJOR HOUSE REPRESENTATIVES

MINOR HOUSES AND IGNOBLE PERSONS

BARONIC UNIFIED COMMAND

BARONIC INTELLIGENCE

HOUSE COMPANIES

FEDERAL KARRAKIN NAVY

FEDERAL KARRAKIN ARMY

FREE COMPANIES

The modern Karrakin state is, officially, a federation of monarchies with its executive power split between two houses of government – the Baronic Council and the Ignoble House – or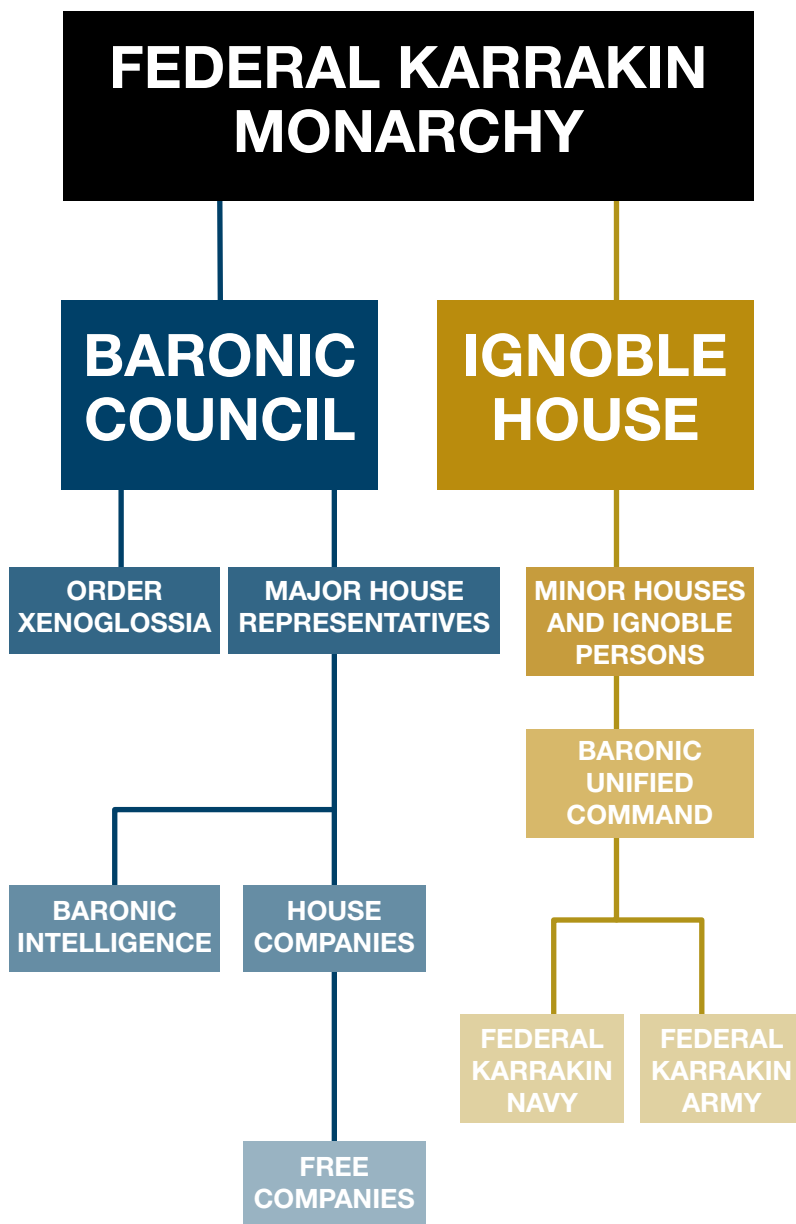ganized under an independent state body, the Federal Karrakin Monarchy (FKM). There are nine state governments subordinate to the FKG: the major houses. Each major house is composed of hundreds of minor houses – dynastic filial organizations that make up and reproduce the noble class, and manage the broad ignoble populations of the Baronies.

The upper house of the FKG is the Baronic Council, which is the chief officiating body of the royal provinces and bears responsibility for managing the affairs of the noble classes. Those that sit on the council as a representative of a major or minor house officially hold the title of Baron. The Baronic Council hears and sets broad policy goals, resolves disputes between the houses, and provides counsel to the Prime Baron – its chief executive, and the monarch of the Karrakin state. The Prime Baron is elected from their peers for a life appointment and holds extremely strong executive powers. Seats on the Baronic Council are similarly guaranteed for life; upon the passing or abdication of a councillor, the vacant seat is filled by a representative chosen via a vote and the assent of the Prime Baron. Candidates must be of noble title and seats are allocated between Major Houses based on a dizzying number of factors, some of which change frequently due to political maneuvering or court intrigue.

The lower house of the FKG, the Ignoble House, is much larger than the Baronic Council and has a much broader portfolio. The Ignoble House is the legislative body of the Federal Karrakin Monarchy, and sets the laws, budget, and policies for the entirety of the Karrakin Trade Baronies, not just the nobility. Despite its less prestigious title and the presence of ignoble legislators, the Ignoble House is thought to be the more important of the two houses when it comes to commanding power across the Baronic Concern. The head of the Ignoble House, the premier, is voted into power by the members of the Ignoble House, and is generally seen as subordinate to the Prime Baron, though their management of the house-neutral affairs of the FKG means they are still quite powerful in practice.

A BANNER OF STARS

With their largely unbroken line of human history, the barons of the modern KTB are unsurpassed titans of industry, using knowledge accumulated over centuries to crack stars, harvest nebulae, plumb the depths of frozen asteroids, and even unlock the secrets of the genetic code. Since their creation during Calendula's Dynasticlade, and earlier still, each house has specialized in one particular form of resource extraction, based on their traditional service to the crown under the Annorum Passacaglia. The scale and might of their operations enable the New Prosperity Agreement, made under SecComm, and feed raw materials into Union's industrial core. The relationship is mutually beneficial, if not without ideological tension.

Though the majority of the Baronic population has traditionally been confined to the Core worlds of the Concern, this has begun to change thanks to the mounting pressures of resource exhaustion and over-population. The Baronic Council and Ignoble House both are now focused heavily on acquisitions in the Dawnline Shore and elsewhere.

All of the major houses have extensive holdings outside of the Concern. In a sense, Karrakis has its own periphery, much like Union has its outer limits. These range from small colonies and settlements on other worlds to holdings of the minor houses, temples, and pilgrimage sites. Many of these are resource-extraction operations of truly staggering scale. In recent years, migration and population pressures have seen many of these minor settlements grow into populous hubs in their own right.

THE NOBILITY

The noble houses of the modern Karrakin state are both dynastic, filial organizations, and professional administrations. More than just families, the minor houses are diplomatic and administrative organizations endowed with a wide portfolio of powers backed by a combination of material and social capital, each oriented around the interest of their baron. The largest minor houses command their own militaries and hold vast swathes of lands – even whole moons or stations; the smallest can barely rub two coins together. Politically, the minor houses span a broad spectrum, from the arch-conservative Hagiographic houses to the reformist Republican houses. What unites them is their noble heritage – regardless of capital, all noble lines are recorded in the Baronic Record by the heralds of the Xenoglossary[28] and, by virtue of this, have certain rights not afforded to the ignoble masses. For the members of the Baronic noble class, there is no ceiling to how high they can rise, and a definite floor that they will always – at least socially – stand above. "Minor," in this context, only denotes a house's administrative role, and says nothing about its political or military power.

Increasingly, succession in the Baronies is based more on the approval of the current leadership than strict birth order. Minor houses, unless they are quite small or conservative, tend to operate less like pure sequential dynasties than as meritocratic, favor-based organizations: heirs are chosen by predecessors, formalized as such by the Baronic Council, and their claims assured regardless of temporal desync. This has significantly reduced occurrences of regicide and succession bloodshed, but even though nominally banned across the Baronies by the Federal Karrakin Monarchy, and typically not large scale, filial and succession violence is frequent.

Unsanctioned events (assassinations, off-book duels, small-scale combat, etc.) occur very often, and the penalty for openly committing such an act tends to be courtly censure rather than carceral or martial. Once the act has been committed, of course, the victor tends to have secured enough political power or capital to simply pardon themselves in the eyes of the state – in the halls and courts of the nobility, they may have even won acclaim and favor for their maneuvering.

28 The great Augurium on Begum and the religious heart of the KTB.

THE IGNOBILITY

The masses, the rabble, the might of the Baronies. The massed ignoble population of the Baronies dwarfs the nobility, but the development of a pan-Concern political consciousness has yet eluded them. This is changing, thanks in large part to the Republican movement (see p. 46), spearheaded by the houses of Water and Dust, that seeks to grant equal rights to all citizens and abolish the nobility's political power entirely. Conservative houses (Neo-Passacaglians and Hagiographers) are bitter opponents of Republicanism. The Federalists (see p. 46), meanwhile, find themselves strung between tradition and social revolution, struggling to manage both as the Baronies parades on through history.

To be ignoble in the Baronies – whether in the Concern or the Interest – is to be one of hundreds of billions. Owing to the kaleidoscope of development levels across Baronic worlds and stations, "ignoble" means many different things. On one world, it may mean pastoral feudalism, on another, it may refer to a broad strata of urban laboring classes. On Republican worlds, to be ignoble is a useless distinction inside the borders of one's house – you are simply citoyen, no more noble or ignoble in legal title than your fellows.

SOCIAL CLASS AND MOBILITY

To be a subject of the Baronies – whichever house you are born into – is to be a part of the great unbroken chain of human life that has persisted since the Anthropocene[29]. In school, by tutor, or at academy, students learn that Karrakis, not Cradle, is the cultural and historical center of the galaxy. While humanity may have come from Cradle – "Earth", as it is known across the Baronies – the species was saved by Karrakis, nurtured by that world, and sent back out into space once more. Cradle's time has passed, no matter what Union says: it is Karrakis that will lead humanity into the future. Patience, in the Baronies, is one of the high virtues (and, not consequently, enshrined in Karrakin faith as one of the Passions).

The Baronies is not a monolithic culture, despite how it may seem to outside observers. This perception is exacerbated by the insular nature of the Karrakins, their relative lack of concern with galactic politics, and their deference to old systems of monarchy. Though Union's Metropolitans might see the Baronies as a backwards-looking enclave – an albatross around the neck of their vision – they still acknowledge that powerful forces for reform are active within the borders of Baronic space.

Nevertheless, in a large swathe of the Baronies, social class is firmly enshrined in a massive apparatus of nobility and ignobility. Broadly speaking, persons of noble class have some claim over land or resources, with a recorded ancestral history. Karrakin nobility, even before the Annorum Passacaglia, has always been intertwined with the government that seeks to rule. Government, until the New Federation, was always viewed as the provenance of those with the power and will to rule – those willing to go through the trouble of it, who could rule, were usually accepted as the correct ruler. In the pre-Annorum and Annorum systems, rule was often patriarchal and cruel, unfair by modern standards – after the Dynasticlade and the brief New Federation, rule has been granted by Baronic consent. Depending on the politics of the person being asked, this could be seen as a less cruel method – or one that is exploitative and cruel in a different way. Regardless, to be ignoble in the Baronies is too often to be deprived of privileges afforded to a select few by accident of birth.

This system – a mix of conservative monarchy and cultural thought, plus a history spanning millennia – is (perhaps surprisingly) widely accepted as oppressive by most ordinary people in the Baronies. Despite this, many of the larger factions continue to uphold it out of a sense of momentum, cultural myth, and historic identity. Both Liberal (p. 47) and Federalist houses are famously slow to change and have little impetus to sign on to any such massive upheaval – and the Hagiographic houses (p. 44) and Neo-Passacaglian movements (p. 44) actively and fiercely support it. It is only the Republicans, growing in number and influence but not necessary in power, that have overturned the system, and only with tremendous and steady effort.

29 This is a similar cultural mythology to that of the Aun – both the Ecumene and Ascendancy – though with differences in interpretation. The Aun and the Baronies have no diplomatic communication, as they are on opposite sides of Cradle. Save for briefings from Baronic Intelligence regarding the Boundary Garden front, the Prime Baron has little interest – currently – as to the nature of the Aun.

KARRAKINS OUTSIDE THE BARONIES

It is common enough to see people from the Baronies in all corners of Union space – though not as common as might be expected given the sheer size of Baronic space. The simple reason for this is that the Baronies is simply large enough that few people have an impetus to travel beyond its borders. Those that do choose to leave their homeworld or emigrate are often drawn to the promise of settlement in the Concern and its familiar cultural milieu instead of outright leaving Baronic space.

Ignoble and noble citizens that do travel often do so for pilgrimages, service, work, political or military engagements, or to see family. Migration into and out of the Baronies from and to other Union member states is moderate and steady, and a constant source of hand-wringing for the more conservative Baronic factions. Immigrants into the Baronies occupy a strange social status - technically 'ignoble' due to their lack of titles, but also lacking the ties to Karrakin history and place that defines the ignoble citizenry.

One notable sight, especially common close to KTB space, is expatriate noble youth. Typically inexperienced, typically wealthy, typically bored with court life, the noble malcontent often seeks a life outside the Baronic Concern. It is a common enough thing that the nobility has structures in place to account for "Second Choice Syndrome". A whole industry has sprung up across the Baronies: structured adventures in wild territories, contracts with terraforming or colonial ventures, work exchange programs with Cradle, Harrison Armory, and other powers, enlistment with house companies, and so on are all offered to these restless scions.

The other (and rarer) sight are the black-clad, blue-skinned Stygos Grammaton – the warrior monks of the Xenoglossary, who are sent forth on pilgrimages and missions on behalf of the abbots and elder monks – often purportedly to influence the flow of future events. Traveling alone or in small groups, operating quietly and efficiently, the Grammaton are an odd and intimidating sight.

THE MILIEU

The history of the Karrakin people is many thousands of years long. Empires have ascended and been torn down. Heroes have become myth. To name the breadth of cultural affiliations, religions, and movements to be found in the Baronies is the work of a different text; in the modern day, there are a handful of intellectual, cultural, and spiritual movements that have come to define – and be defined by – the moment.

Here are five of the largest social groups, noble affiliations, and cultural movements that currently grip the Baronies.

NEO-PASSACAGLIANS

The Neo-Passacaglians are a hardline conservative faction who practice a religious and cultural veneration of Passacaglia I, who they see as the savior of the Karrakin people and the Imperial Messiah – a monarchal deity whose mandate to rule is evident in his creation of the Annorum prior to the discovery of the blink. In their view, the collapse of the Annorum Passacaglia was a result of the successor Passacaglias and other Annos turning away from the legacy of their founder: the system that Passacaglia I created crumbled because his stewards failed him. With the wondrous technology of the blink and the omninet – revelations, they believe, from Passacaglia I – the Neo-Passacaglians would truly carry out his legacy. Using the Helios Gate, a text that collects apocryphal lessons of Passacaglia I as their moral guide, they aim to abolish the Federal Karrakin Monarchy, subsume the major houses, and create a new, independent Annorum from the remains.

Neo-Passacaglians are generally viewed by other Karrakins as fringe hardliners, their goals incompatible with the modern Karrakin system. The era of the Annorum is as distant to modern Karrakins as the Fall is to a Cosmopolitan human in Union: thousands and thousands of years have passed since the last Anno, and a return seems arcane and backwards. Despite this, Neo-Passacaglians have enjoyed a minor, though notable, impact on the policy proposals of other, nominally more moderate conservative factions. Though their cultural aims may seem as if they have come from the grave of history, their ideas concerning the centralizing of the state, empowering of the monarch, and strengthening of the military are very much in line with the objectives of the Hagiographers.

There are a fair number of Neo-Passacaglian minor houses scattered across the Concern and the Interest. Most tend to be small to middling in size, and are more common among the military than civic institutions. While Neo-Passacaglians (noble and ignoble) may be targets of cultural ire or mockery, they are certainly tolerated by most Hagiographers, who they often align with politically. Federalists tolerate them, but view them as culturally backwards, with ridiculous political goals. Republicans and Neo-Passacaglians are diametrically opposed and view each other as existential threats to their respective movements.

HAGIOGRAPHERS

Hagiographers are the "true" monarchists of the Baronies. They seek to establish a powerful confederacy of consenting sovereign states, each in command of their own subjects. Hagiographers are distinct from Neo-Passacaglians in that they think centralization of the Baronic state around Karrakis is a mistake, one that can only lead to conflict; likewise, they are opposed to the Federalists and Republicans, as both of those groups imagine different versions of a centralized state.

Hagiography as a political theory first emerged from among the military and minor nobility before and the Union–Karrakin war, following the defeat of the New Federation fleet by SecComm forces. At first a militant anti-Union party and paramilitary "social" group, the Hagiograph movement swept across Karrakis and the bloodied veterans of the New Federation. Born from the shock of Union contact, and then the terrible losses suffered by the people of Karrakis, the ignoble soldiery, and officers of minor nobility, the Hagiographic movement gained steam as an angry response to the perceived mismanagement of a once-mighty power by the centralized New Federal government. As the first Union-Karrakin war drew to a close, the Hagiographers successfully gathered enough power to lead the ruling council in a no-confidence vote and, ultimately, ended the Federation.

Unable to fully grasp power in the turmoil that followed, the movement pulled back and evolved into a militant conservative political movement. In the centuries since, the Hagiographers have established themselves as a vocal plurality faction that holds sway in the Houses of Stone and Sand. Their party planks stand against what they see to be the liberalization of time-honored traditions, the degeneration of ancient Karrakin culture, the weakness of the Federal Karrakin Monarchy in addressing internal and external threats, the arrogance of Harrison Armory and its expeditions into the Dawnline Shore, and – as always – the overbearing presence of Union.

FEDERALISTS

Far and away the largest political affiliation among the noble classes and voting members of the ignoble classes, Federalism is the primary motivating ideology of the Baronic Council, the Ignoble House, and the broader constituencies of the Concern and the Interest. Federalists support the current status quo, though often along a spectrum of conservatism and liberalism that swings between Hagiography on the one side and Liberalism on the other.

Federalists support Karrakis' involvement in Union via the Prime Baron's seat on the Central Committee and leadership of the Fourth Column (see *Lancer*, p. 348); they imagine Union to be a useful ally and guarantor of the Baronies' continued stability. With Union taking the brunt of the burden for building and maintaining galactic infrastructure, the barons are free to concentrate on their own projects in the Interest and in the Concern.

To the Federalist major houses, preservation of Karrakis and the Baronic system via the Federal Karrakin Monarchy is paramount. There is no desired "return" – only continued, well-regulated development of the existing system. The gradual addition of more major houses is taken as a given, though not to be handled lightly; expansion into the Dawnline Shore is the right of the Baronies as dictated by the New Prosperity Agreement, but should be engaged with care and moderation; all-out war with opposed states is to be a last resort, and if avoidance of that end necessitates Union's involvement in Karrakin interstellar affairs, then so be it.

Most of the major houses are Federalist: the House of Order, the House of Smoke, the House of Moments, and the House of Glass.

REPUBLICANS

On the opposite end of the political spectrum from the Neo-Passacaglians, Karrakin Republicans desire the complete elimination of not only the current Baronic system, but of the systems of nobility that have persisted throughout the history of the Karrakin people, as well as the equalization of political power between the nobility and ignobility. Karrakin Republicans, by and large, desire for the Baronies to be united not under a crown, but under an elected, representative government: they demand the abolishment of both the crown and the social classes of "noble" and "ignoble". Instead of a Baronic Council and Ignoble House, there would be a reformed Federal Karrakin Monarchy beholden to a single council and its representatives.

Karrakin Republicanism is a relatively new phenomenon in the Baronies, having only two major houses stand behind it in the past two centuries of the interstellar state's history. Nevertheless, it has become increasingly popular among unlanded minor houses across the Concern, ignoble populations, and the wealthy merchant-shipping class; moreover, it is the system of government under which the newest prospective major house, the House of Promise, operates, and one towards which a major Federalist house – the House of Smoke – now leans. This change looms large in the mind of the Hagiographers, as it could ultimately swing the Baronies toward massive social upheaval.

So far, two major houses have abolished legal distinctions of nobility and ignobility, undertook vigorous land reform, enfranchised their populations, and adopted constitutional, representative democracies – the House of Water and the House of Dust. These major houses are "houses" only in administrative designation, and are federations in their own right made up of district based 'minor houses' with elected representatives. Those with former noble titles have been permitted to keep them for personal use, but they hold no legal distinction, title, or hereditary claims.

The House of Water was first to adopt Republicanism, following broad popular agitation in the wake of the Free Sanjak Revolution (p. 74). This process was not accomplished without significant attempts made by the Houses of Sand and Stone to disrupt the plebiscite, though after a tense and exhausting few weeks, diplomatic intercession, and many small skirmishes, large-scale anti-Republican violence was avoided. Shortly after, the population of the House of Dust advanced a similar plebiscite, and this time opponents held their powder, seeking to entrench their opposition via diplomatic and political channels instead, and publicly accepting fleeing nobles. To date, no other major houses in the Concern have attempted to abolish their monarchies, though a growing plurality of the Karrakin population express pro-Republican sentiment.

In contrast to the Liberal wing of the Concern's houses, Republicans are considered by conservative houses to be extremists: foolish hubristics at best, and enemies of the state at worst. Many Republican groups and sympathetic minor nobles backed and aided the Ungratefuls on Sanjak during their rebellion. Tolerated but not loved by the Federalists and Liberals, Republicans tend to find their friends in Union, among the ignoble classes, and in landless minor houses across the Baronies.

LIBERALS

The House of Remembrance is the Baronies' only Liberal major house. While not going so far as to abolish the system of monarchy like the Republican houses, the House of Remembrance has drifted far enough to the left of the larger Federalist movement on policy that it can accurately be called Liberal. Frustrated with the slow pace of the change that animates the Baronic Council, the House of Remembrance seeks to liberalize the existing system while maintaining the status quo. Despite media presentation in the more conservative houses, Remembrance is far from a revolutionary house. It seeks adjustments to current paradigms, not wholesale change. These adjustments include a broad expansion of personal speech liberties and major house–managed social safety nets for the ignoble classes, a reduction in the rigidity in class interactions between the ignoble and lower-rank nobility, and greater mobility between the worlds of the Concern and the Interest.

THE MAJOR HOUSES

Below is a list of the current major houses of the Karrakin Trade Baronies, as well as the House of Promise, which is currently petitioning to be enrolled. Major houses are best imagined as single-world states, rather than hereditary noble houses in the traditional sense; major houses hold sovereign power over their worlds, their bureaucrats managing and administering all facets of civil life from policing to infrastructure building, public healthcare and education, and so on. While ultimately – on paper – subordinate to the Federal Karrakin Monarchy in interstellar and interplanetary matters, major houses reign supreme on their own worlds.

Originally, major houses like the Houses of Dust, Stone, and Water were named after their trade relationships to the crown at the time of the Dynasticlade, though this tradition has faded with time. New houses tend to be named after ideals or Passions, such as Promise, Fealty, Temperance, or Courage.
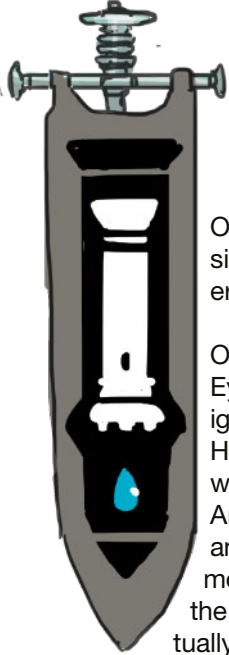
THE HOUSE OF SMOKE

Federalist
"Kolosi Fustarete Ente" (On the Shoulders of Giants)
Eyaleti/Eyaleti

On the moon of Eyalet-a, the House of Smoke sits beneath the ever-present, horizon-obliterating body of the gas giant Eyalet-1.

Once a terrestrial base for the gas miners of Eyalet-1, Eyalet-a was gifted to a union of ignoble laborers given rank and title during the High Passacaglian Period; development of the world continued through the end of the Annorum Passacaglia as its population grew and grew. As the Annorum fell apart, breakaway movements on Eyalet-a fought bitterly against the Annorate Guard units stationed there, eventually escalating to an interstellar conflict in which the independence fighters made good with their threat to fling an asteroid at Karrakis – they did so, causing massive destruction that plunged the world into a years-long cycle of shock winters and king tides. For this, Eyalet-a suffered terribly under the Annorum Tyrannus.

By Tyran's command, Eyalet-a became little more than a prison world – the Annorum's dumping ground for dissidents, remnant Annorate Guard, and others deemed criminal by the new Anno. Even so, the newly minted nobility of Tyrannus's reign and the few lines native to Eyalet-a carried on the business of making a home from lunar rock. In the thousands of years after the Dynasticlade, Eyalet-a evolved from hardscrabble moon to massively reworked terraforming project, with planned hydrologic systems, atmosphere domes, and raw-earth habitable canyons. Construction of the House of Smoke's Inverted Tower – a deep-plunging hollow "core tower" – began and was finished during this time. Now, in addition to being one of Eyalet-a's most populous cities (nearing thirty million souls), the Inverted Tower is also home to some of the galaxy's most cutting-edge research into homunculi (see *Lancer*, p. 380), thanatologic reconstruction, and other, more uncanny sciences.

Following the Dynasticlade, the House of Smoke worked to establish itself in the hearts and minds of the people who suddenly found themselves a part of it. Its leaders – primarily from the minor houses of Dufort, Reyes, and Bilal – implemented a strong campaign of granting titles to promising ignoble candidates. This uplifting worked, endearing the House of Smoke to the population. Such an effort has been attempted once more since the First Interest War, when the House of Smoke sought to formally recognize trade and diplomatic relationships that many of its minor houses had established with powerful clans on Sparr. As a result, Eyalet-a is one of the few places in the Baronies where non-Baronic citizens – Sparri immigrants – have been ennobled, and now manage their own minor houses.

The House of Smoke remains a Federalist house, long reformed from its earlier rebelliousness; however, its unique history has seen it leaning more and more toward Republicanism, with several strong abolitionist minor houses on the verge of forming a coalition, and resistance fading within the house's more conservative demographics. This trend is deeply worrying to the Hagiographers, especially the House of Sand, which is rumored to be running a campaign of deep social manipulation targeted at vulnerable or suggestible noble youth.

The House of Smoke lists its population as just under two billion souls, with a noble class composing around 2 percent of its total population. Its notable minor houses include House Dufort, House Reyes, House Bilal, and House Kauri – an old and successful Sparri house ennobled only a few centuries ago.

Color and Sign: The House of Smoke's primary color is Eyalet Sky. Its simplified canton-sigil (applied to the canton of its minor houses) is an upside-down tower with an open window.
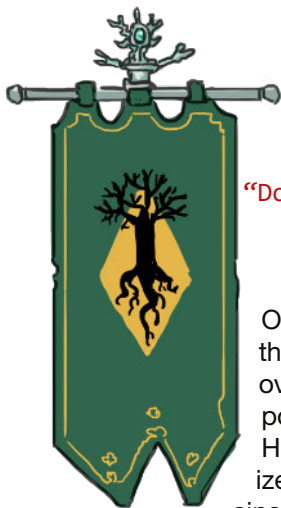
THE HOUSE OF REMEMBRANCE

Liberal
"Dorbano Piegi Bucho non Scizi" (The Oak Bends but Does Not Break)
Arrudyen/Arrudyens

On Arrudye, the moon of Karrakis, the House of Remembrance oversees one of the most densely populated worlds in the galaxy. Historically, Remembrance specialized in forestry, but that has long since sunk into irrelevance. An old world, Arrudye is not technically an ecumenopolis, as the House has worked to maintain very carefully planned greenspaces, natural parks, and breathing room – but it is certainly the next closest thing. With a population of two billion souls on a moon only 6500 km in diameter, green space is at a premium – those blocks bordering even vertical greenspace are widely sought after.

Remembrance's world, it is often remarked by Baronic commentators, runs deep: founded by Anaxandron, Passacaglia I's brother, the history of Arrodye has been buried in its earth and under its mega-city. Arrudye's carefully layered and curated architecture has been built upward over time into a stretching vertical landscape of stone balconies, gargoyles, buttresses, domes, and pillared canopies. It is a striking, even beautiful sight, one that narrowly avoids the unfettered urban blight so hated by its designers. Even then, in the deepest parts of its metroswathes, the density of the built environment is so great that raw earth is precious, as is natural light – the lower levels must be lit with artificial lights during the morning and evening hours to ensure substrate populations receive sufficient UV exposure.

The depth of Arrudye is more than literal: the histories of the minor houses of the House of Remembrance stretch back to the very foundation of Karrakis, as do their passions, cruelties, secrets, crimes, plans, and projects. The nobility of Arrudye's involvement in courtly matters on Karrakis has always outsized the world's martial capacity. In its Grand Archive, the House of Remembrance keeps the oldest continuous records of Karrakin civilization dating back to Passacaglian times, a matter that sometimes brings the House into conflict with the augurs of the Xenoglossary. The House's careful hiding of vital texts and mythohistories during Tyrannus' Contrapatrem is especially noteworthy and it holds precious some of the only surviving and unaltered records of ancient Karakkin history.

The House of Remembrance, seeking new territory, has relocated many of its younger minor houses and eager populations to its holding in the Dawnline Shore: DS10, or as Remembrance calls it, Crossland. Arrudye is blanketed with propaganda urging ignobles and unlanded nobles to seek a new life on the new world; the population has responded with vigor and enthusiasm, and now colonial land-charter services and work placement programs are just as busy shipping eager new colonists to Crossland as the facilities on Crossland are to receive them.

The House of Remembrance's current ruler is Decade Lord Alexander-Aaron Bend, Patriarch of House Alexander. House Alexander also controls the Crimson Memory, Remembrance's house company. House Alexander – and by extension, most of the powerful minor houses that make up the House of Remembrance – is the Baronies' lone Liberal house. Around 3 percent of Remembrance's population (spread across Arrudye and Crossland) are nobles.

Color and Sign: The House of Remembrance's primary color is forest green. Its simplified canton-sigil (applied to the canton in its minor houses' heraldry) is a bare tree with deep roots.
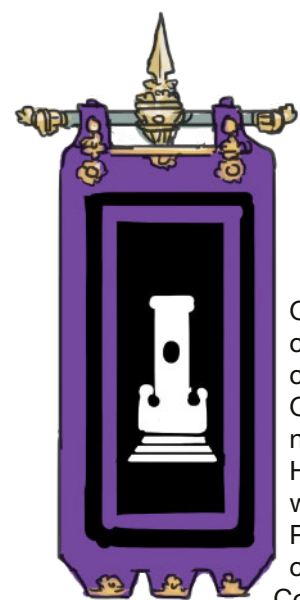
THE HOUSE OF ORDER
Federalist
"Glori Eterane Karakiz Tu" (Eternal Glory to Karrakis)
Karrakin/Karrakin

On grand Karrakis, the House of Order commands the affairs of the noble classes of the Baronies; The House of Order considers itself the steward of the new homeworld of humanity. Though the House of Order is the major house under which House Karraka – the house of Prime Baron Karra-Bem – serves, Order's current representative on the Baronic Council is from House LeFleur. The official house specialty (historically and currently) is labor.

A palace world, Karrakis is the capital world of the Federal Karrakin Monarchy, the ancestral home of all Karrakins, and the seat of the Karrakin Trade Baronies' power. Karrakis is home to Throne Karrakis, the palatial metropolis that is the beating heart of the Karrakin peoples, government, and nobility. Since the first colonists settled Karrakis prior to the Fall, through dark and golden ages, Annorum has been the ruling capital of Karrakis and, by extension, the Karrakin state. The first colony of Karrakis was seeded pre-Fall: its foundation, the Apollo Monument, now serves as a royal museum – an enclave set inside the crown district of Annorum that incorporates remaining artifacts of the generation ship into public monuments, art, and architecture.

Karrakis is now home to the flagship campus of the galaxy's premier naval and finishing college, the Royal Karrakin Naval Academy. Pro-Union Houses view attendance at the Academy as a necessary path for their children, and service as an honorable achievement. They are happy to send their children to the college, often at great temporal cost to their families, as local blink is far less developed in the Baronies than in Cradle – this, some barons grumble, is by design. Following the introduction of the mechanized chassis as a machine of war, the Karrakin Cavalry College adapted its curriculum for the new technology. Today it is known for the quality – not quantity – of officer and machine its cohorts produce.

Karrakis through the years has remained the jewel in the Baronic crown: a conservative, traditional world with rigid social structures, rituals, and protocol, though lit as well by small-but-bright cosmopolitan centers. Karrakis is the political and ancestral heart of the Baronies; few write poems or odes to Cradle in Baronic space, as Karrakis long ago replaced that old world in the hearts of the Baronic nobles and their subjects.

As caretaker of the throne world, the House of Order hews near-religiously to ceremony, ritual, and occasion. The millennia-old rituals required to keep the capital and palatial grounds clean, functioning, and sanctified are repeated daily by tens of thousands of clerks and attendants – noble and ignoble both. Ascension within this archaic social order is meritocratic, highly prestigious, and allows even ignoble citoyens to flex their power over the aristocrats that flock on seasonal pilgrimages to the capital.

The House of Order is a Federalist house – though it often caucuses with the more progressive houses – and the oldest of the major houses. Unlike the other major houses, the primary industries of Order's minor houses still do, by and large, conform to its archetype: Order's staff – noble and ignoble both – work across all levels of Karrakis' metro and orbital structures, as well as at all levels of the Federal Karrakin Monarchy. This investment in the functioning of the state has caught the House of Order's minor houses in an interesting ballet: torn between loyalty to their barons and lords and their institutional loyalty to the state apparatus that they operate and maintain, the minor houses of the House of Order are often the targets of ire from both progressive and conservative major houses, frequently mocked in public caricature as stiff, unfeeling, and protocol-obsessed servants or janitors. On the one hand, they are apparatchiks to an ignoble state seemingly designed to hamstring the powers of the nobility; on the other, they are stuffy institutionalists, stubborn in their refusal to change more than an increment at a time.

All the same, the minor houses of the House of Order are firm in their devotion to the noble traditions of their house; those traditions – as they see it – demand this delicate ballet between noble obligation and statecraft, one they are more than willing to dance. Unlike other major houses, a significant population of the House of Order – 5 percent across Karrakis and its orbital platforms and stations – are noble.

Color and Sign: The House of Order's primary color is purple. Their simplified canton-sigil (applied to the canton of their minor houses) is the throne.

THE HOUSE OF GLASS

Federalist
"l' Pinza do Roz Timorre" (Fear the Rose's Thorn)
Ispahsalari/Ispahsalari

On fair Ispahsalar, the House of Glass manages a widely distributed population of fifteen billion souls. Today, it is a beauty-planet: a clean world covered in a glittering archipelago of arcologies and high-altitude/low-orbit latticework skyhook resorts. Ispahsalar is a world designed to the square kilometer by the House of Glass, and its people are just as refined. The House trade specialty is tradition-ally shipbuilding, though it has recently shifted to mech production, an industry it takes great pride in.

The House of Glass is a Federalist major house, long intertwined with Karrakis and the history of the Baronies. Settling Ispahalar as the Patrons of Dellamar during the Annorum Passacaglia, the house reaped a bounty from mining diamonds and other precious stones, and won title to the world through political manipulation and raw influence. Fatted with wealth, the House went on to declare its independ-ence from the last Anno Passacaglia during the Last Argument, largely staying on the sidelines. After the success of Tyran's campaign on Karrakis and the eventual outreach by his Annorum, Ispahsalar peace-fully integrated into Tyrannus's new Annorum under Tagetes' outreach.

Since then, Ispahsalar has been a steadfast ally of Karrakis and the Prime Baron, standing with them through all adversity, most recently in the First Interest War. The Glass Brigade's famous defeat above and on Creighton's World is deeply scarred into the nobles of the minor houses of Glass; many lost heirs, champions, and lords during that ill-fated battle, not to mention the countless ignoble dead. In the wake of that defeat, the House of Glass invested heavily in the adoption of mechanized chassis. Now, one of the largest fabrication plants for the Karrakin Royal Foundry can be found on Ispahsalar, as well as some of the finest chassis-ateliers in the Baronies.

As a direct result of this focus, Glass has developed a reputation for the quality and the refined culture of its *kuirassers*[30] and *pankrati*,[31] the most popular of who cultivate public personas, seeking to uphold the reputation of the house and the knightly virtues of bravery, honor, and piety. Their deeds in battle are extensively recorded, as is their attention to fashion, behavior, and piety to the Passions.

The House of Glass is home to many famous minor houses, including Dellamar (the ancient family from which Tyrannus hailed) and Montague, which commands the House of Glass's banner company, les Fulgurites. Its current representative on the Baronic Council is from House Memphis. Roughly 2 percent of Glass's population is noble.

COLOR AND SIGN
The House of Glass's primary color is Marigold Yellow. Their simplified canton-sigil is a marigold flower.

30 A Karrakin term for mech pilots.

31 Competitors in the mech dueling sport of Pankration Mekani.

THE HOUSE OF STONE

Out from mighty Khayradin, the House of Stone looms. Long a rival of the old throne on Karrakis, Khayradin is today fiercely devoted to the noble heritage of the Karrakin people. As a firmly Hagiographic major house, Stone is a champion of the Baronies – often, in the minds of its rulers, more so than the current Karrakin leadership and the dominant tendencies of the other major houses.

Khayradin was a gift world named for Khay Anaxandros Altiamos, a favored general and statesman of Passacaglia LIII. Little is known of Altiamos beyond records indicating the bestowment of the gift world to him for its "taming". Archeological surveys have found and excavated multiple sites across Khayradin, including frescoes, mosaics, and statues of a figure assumed to be Altiamos engaged in combat against unidentified human enemies. There are little to no records of Khayradin's population prior to its colonization during the Annorum Passacaglia; these remains – along with others scattered across the world – likely point to an indigenous population that was violently suppressed by the Annorum. In the present day, the pre-Annorum habitation of Khayradin is a topic of interest to academics only; the people of the House of Stone consider themselves to be forward-looking people – despite their conservative adherence to rigid structures of Baronic nobility and ignobility – and there is little introspection about the origins of their global state outside academia and the odd progressive pocket of Khayradi youth.

In the intervening years between the collapse of the Annorum Passacaglia and the reunification of the Baronic state under the Annorum Tyrannus, Khayradin spent decades as the target of Karrakis' ire and military strength. The first world to declare independence from the aging Annorum Passacaglia, Khayradin's Karrakin population fought for decades against rule from Old Karakiz – first against the armies of Tyran of Dellamar, heroic general of the Annorum Passacaglia, then against Tagetes after victory over the last Passacaglia. Khayradin's history is awash in blood, cordite, spent solid-state pack batteries, and nuclear fallout; it has never been a virgin world claimed by doe-eyed settlers, but always

a fortress cracked open by ragged soldiers. After its final capture and surrender to the Annorum Tyrannus, Khayradin was remade and awarded to the House of Stone during the Dynasticlade. Since then, it has only grown in population, appetite, and power. Today, Khayradin is a titanic industrial and population base for the Baronies. It is the largest terrestrial world in the Concern, larger than even Karrakis, and host to the largest orbital infrastructure and population in the region, and the single largest source of the Baronies' military infrastructure and readiness.

Historically specializing in mining and heavy industry, the House of Stone is also the major house responsible for the Baronies' breakthrough in rapid planetary terraforming (the COMENCEMOS system, derived from the earlier COMMENCER terraforming system). The system was used to great effect in many of the House's holdings, including most famously on Ludra's world, the location of the Sanjak rebellion and a persistent sore spot for the House (see page 74).

Khayradin's strong industrial and military culture is evident across its territories. The most feared fighting force across the Baronies is the Khayradin Elites, a reserve house company kept for personal defense of commanders, nobles, and leaders of the House of Stone. Though few in number, their brutal training, conditioning, and spartan warrior culture has lead to a fearsome (and deserved) reputation. Many of them pilot mechs in orbital engagement in personal defense of a command ship or forward operating base, their mere presence enough to discourage direct assault.

With the House of Stone's relatively new[32] colonial holding in the Dawnline Shore, Upper Laurent (DS8), still ripe with resources to be extracted and land to be developed, Stone's power as an industrial and capital base for the Baronies seems all but assured. Never the heart of Karrakin civilization – but always the shoulders that bear it forward – Khayradin under the House of Stone is nevertheless a fulcrum around which the politics, culture, and future of the Baronies hinges.

Since the Dynasticlade, the House of Stone has become one of the most ardent supporters of the

32 "New" in the Baronic context means properties, ideas, methods, and people younger than a handful of centuries.

Baronic project. A Hagiographic house, it is eager to take the lead as the flagship major house of the Baronies, and has been positioning its representative to the Baronic Council, Stonelord[33] Hyderad-Cannamos, to replace the Prime Baron. Stone's vision for the future of the Baronies is decidedly more conservative and muscular than the current approach, and one that may seem uncouth to Federalist houses and downright objectionable to Liberal ones.

The House of Stone is quite active in the Dawnline Shore. Its banner company, House di Khayradi's Boulder Company, has transitioned the bulk of its administrative staff to the Shore along with its frontline personnel, and set down roots on Upper Laurent, where it manages the field operations of dozens of house companies and Free Companies. A storied force, the Boulder Company has fought on the frontlines against Harrison Armory since the First Interest War, and continues to engage the Armory via proxy wars to this day[34].

Around three percent of the population of the House is noble. Notable minor houses of the House of Stone include House Altia (descended from Altiamos), House Cannamos, and House di Khayradi. One other notorious minor house bears mentioning, though it has been formally "reduced" from Stone's rolls: House Ludra, which was responsible for the rise of the Ungratefuls movement through its ill treatment of its subjects.

Color and Sign: The House of Stone's primary color is burgundy. Their simplified canton-sigil (applied to the canton of their minor houses) is a Karrakin two-headed spear laid across a fulcrum in perfect balance.
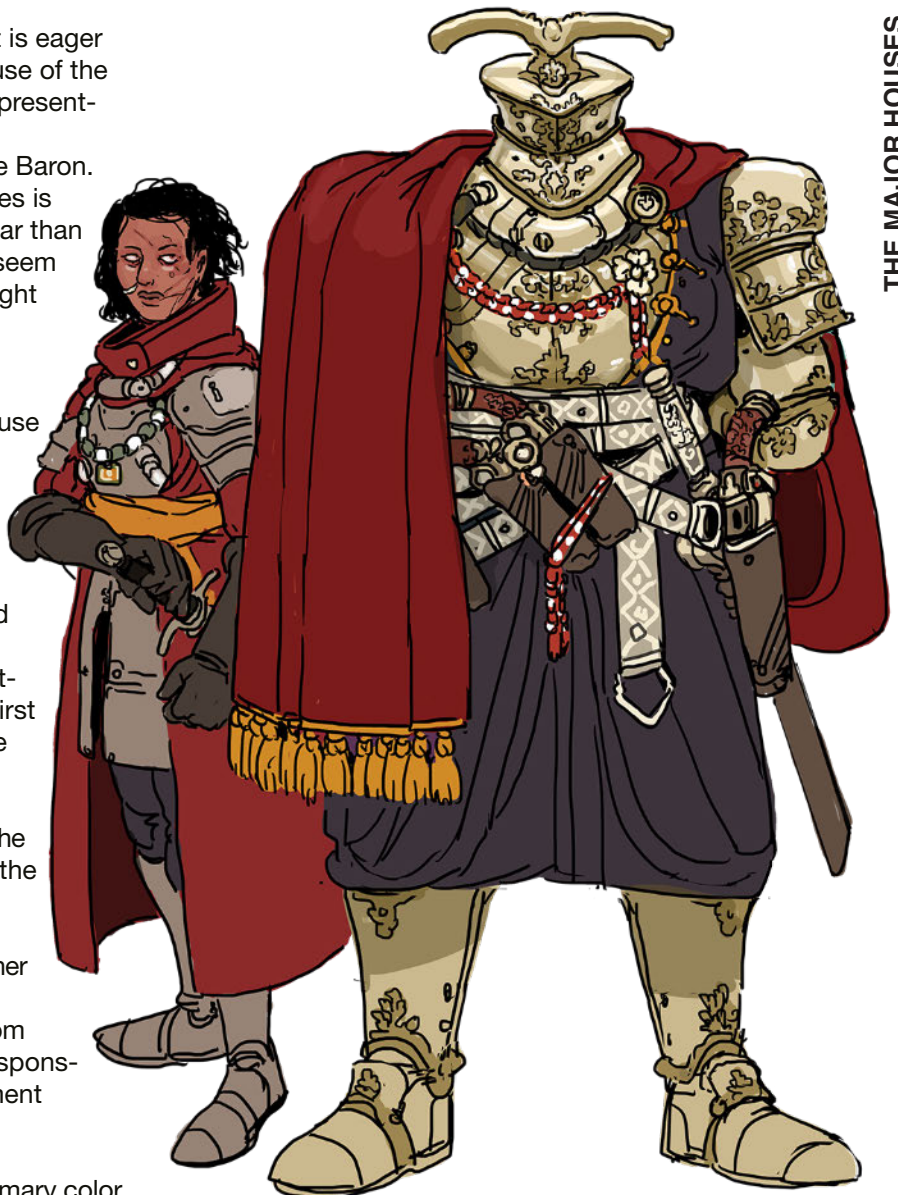
33 "Stonelord" is a noble rank unique to the House of Stone. Many of the major houses have devised their own structures of nobility; per the Baronic Council's Declaration of the Normalization of Noble Ranks, Titles, and Honors, these localized systems of ranking must conform to a 1:1 "normalized" noble ranking system as established by Karrakin tradition and codified in the Declaration. The various major houses that have their own internal ranking systems must register those ranks with the Federal Karrakin Monarchy, have them approved and matched by the Baronic Council, and make rank translation charts readily available to those who request them. "Stonelord" is equivalent to baron.

34 The Boulder Company commonly dispatches "security advisors" and "training staff" to bolster local opposition forces on Armory worlds; as the Armory does the same on Baronic worlds, and as the combatants in these fights tend to be local proxies, both sides tolerate the maneuvering – for now.
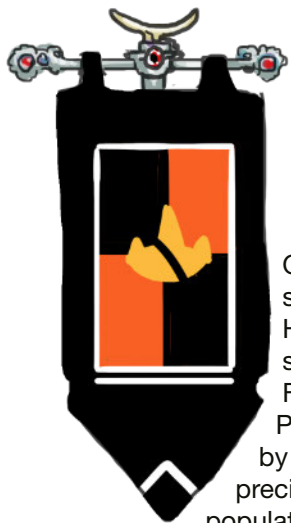
THE HOUSE OF SAND

On little Tilimsan, a hot desert world with shimmering oceans at its poles, the House of Sand oversees a mere billion souls split between two polar arcologies. Founded during the High Passacaglian Period, and with its early history marred by brutal civil wars over control of its precious minerals, Tilimsan is the least populated world of the Baronic Concern – its history, however, is no less poor for its size.

Tilimsan is 90% of the diameter of Cradle and it orbits the inner ring of its star's habitable zone; as such, it is a hot world, with large swathes of its equatorial regions essentially uninhabitable (or, as many enterprising Tilimsani have discovered, livable through great effort) desert. Beautiful and dangerous, most Tilimsani prefer the damp, tropical poles, where the bulk of the world's liquid water has formed cap oceans. The northern pole is home to a large single landmass with numerous internal seas; the southern pole is crowded with scattered archipelagos and island chains. The vast majority of Tilimsan's population lives around these poles, with access between the two guaranteed either by atmospheric or orbital flight, long solar trains, or – for the daring, desperate, curious, or foolish – grueling overland crossings.

The House's small size belies its influence. Sand's wealth mainly comes from its extraction of rare minerals needed for critical components in high technology, energy weapons, and large-scale printing. In the earlier periods of Karrakin history, this rich bounty led to brutal civil strife, eventually culminating in the dominance of House Laurent, a monopoly that allowed the house to leverage diplomacy heavily in its favor and earned it an unpopular reputation as a house of ambitious graspers, schemers and manipulators, a reputation that somewhat rings true to this day with the House of Sand in general.

The House is known to maintain one of the most sophisticated intelligence apparatuses in the Baronies – adjacent and closely tied to Baronic intelligence – with a large and highly integrated network of spies, diplomats, and informants across known space. These agents feed information in a great, steady torrent across the scorching sands to deep Tilimsan.

Tilimsani assassins are highly trained and extremely effective. Though rarely deployed, and never publicly acknowledged, a visit from the "Sand-men" is dreaded across the Baronies even in the most secure state rooms and chambers of office. This reputation is part of the House's strategy of manipulation and influence.

During the First Interest War, the House of Sand pledged its proto-house companies – led by its banner company, the Company Tempeste – to the campaign in the Dawnline Shore. Across the colonial front, Sand's forces fought alongside the federal Karrakin armies and the early house companies of Stone and Remembrance, trading strikes with the Armory's legions in rapid, small-scale skirmishes that were highly effective due to the House's outsized intelligence efforts. This contribution earned Sand a gift world, DS7, known to the Baronies as Crowngarden, once the Interest War concluded.

Like the Houses of Remembrance and Stone, the House of Sand is nowadays split between its original holding in the Concern and the colonial frontier of the Interest. Unlike conservative Tilimsan, Crowngarden is a cosmopolitan meeting-world for travellers arriving to and departing from the Shore: one of the closest Baronic worlds to the Long Rim transit corridor, Crowngarden's trade and transit districts are rife with galactic travelers and the eager, enterprising souls that stand to make a profit from them.

The House of Sand is ideologically Hagiographic. House Laurent and House Hardy are some of its more storied minor houses, though its current representative on the Baronic Council is from House Chiron. Only 3 percent of its population is noble.

Color and Sign: The House of Sand's primary color is Tilimsan Earth. Their simplified canton-sigil (applied to the canton of their minor houses) is a crown, cleanly split down the middle.

THE HOUSE OF WATER
Republican
"Al Sagio En, l' Paz" (In All Seasons, Peace)
Umaran/Umarans

On the bruised world of Umara, the House of Water maintains its representative democracy. One of two notable Republican outliers in the Baronies, Umara prides itself as a world of free people. On Umara, the saying goes, the only person above you is your neighbor.

Umara started out as a backwater farming world under the Annorum Passacaglia, drifting under the radar of the various mythic figures burning across the stars between Karrakis, Khayradin, and other, more important worlds. Little is known of the early status, politics, and history of Umara, other than that it too split from the Anno Passacaglia prior to the Succession War and resisted Tyrannus's initial advances. Records of the following annexation war on Umara detail Tagetes' bombardment of the planet and the punishing nuclear scouring of its gentle grasslands and low-lying cities that eventually lead to the world's surrender.

The House of Water was established during the Dynasticlade and given Umara to reconstruct a manageable state from the limping nuclear ruin. Supported by the early New Federation and subsequent Federal Karrakin Monarchy, the House of Water implemented dramatic social reforms beneficial to the noble and ignoble classes both. Realizing early on that universal social assistance and mobility was necessary if the world was to be reconstituted from its stagnant state, the people of Umara abolished the legal divisions of noble and ignoble altogether, creating the first representative democracy in the Baronies.

With its constitutional form of self-determined rule, Umara became an oddity among the worlds of the Concern – a world without nobility. Despite this break with tradition, Umara was never considered a threat to the other major houses until the revolution on Free Sanjak and the Material Scandal, during which House of Sand intelligence operatives discovered that Water was providing material aid to the Ungratefuls. Following intense diplomatic wrangling and a series of minor crises, Umara reaffirmed its commitment to Republican ideals. Today, it has come to enjoy Core status in Union and leads the coalition of Republicans in the Federal Karrakin Monarchy.

The population of Umara is an impressive fifteen billion free persons, of which none are noble or ignoble[35]. The House of Water continues to use Baronic terminology, though with differing definitions: "major house", when referring to the House of Water, is synonymous with the Republican idea of a nation-state (i.e., a government organized and empowered by an elected governing body to self-administer affairs of the nation, rather than a political entity attuned to the will of a single monarch), and "minor house" is simply the designation given to an administrative district, rather than a dynastic, landed or propertied family. Along with the House of Dust, the House of Water elects and sends its representative to the Baronic Council, drawing from a pool of candidates that pass an initial primary process. The House of Water's constitution divides Umara into 80 arrondissements – administrative districts managed by elected representatives, with populations numbering around 180–190 million persons – from which elected representatives are sent to the Ignoble House.

Aside from its strong reformist streak, Water is also notable for its commitment to projects of ecological conservation, reconstruction, and biological preservation. Umara is unusual in that the majority of its cities and urban centers are on reclaimed or raised land over its oceans, with aquaculture providing most of its food and major resources for export. This interest has extended in recent years to xenobiology and frontier exploration, and many Umarans are committed to Union scientific or survey expeditions.

Large portions of Umara are still uninhabitable due to the presence of toxic compounds from the weapons unleashed during the old war, and the presence of these compounds has had varied effects on growth and mutation of the local plant and wildlife. This has created large zones in which human habitation is impossible but the wilderness has flourished, in sometimes unpredictable ways.

As a constituent state of the Federal Karrakin Monarchy, the House of Water maintains a house company, though without the filial and dynastic implications of other major houses' house companies. Its representative on the Baronic Council is from House Umarit (the capitol administrative distinct of Umara), and its banner company is the 1st Oceanic, also "from" House Umarit.

Color and Sign: The House of Water's primary color is Umaran Sage. Its simplified canton-sigil (applied to the canton of its minor houses) is a profile view of three blades of grass.

35 Union surveys of Umara recognize that, while social class plays an undeniable role in measurements of economic and social equality in the Baronies, Umara's population enjoys a relatively equal standard of living compared to the other worlds of the Baronic Concern; its class divisions are not feudal or cultural, but economic.
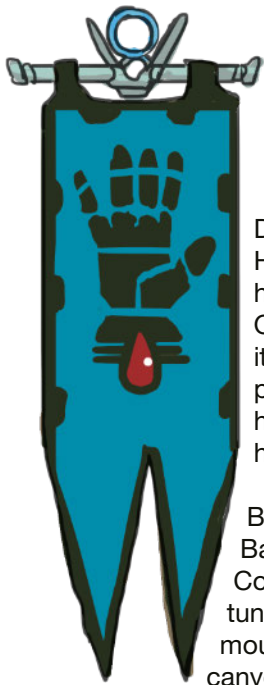
THE HOUSE OF MOMENTS

Deep in the canyons of Begum, the House of Moments pushes the human form from beyond its limits. On its rime surface and deep within its humid "cathedral" canyons, the people of the House of Moments have built for themselves a livable home from harsh rock.

Begum is known throughout the Baronies as the ugliest world in the Concern. A small ball of bitterly cold tundra wrinkled and cracked by mountains and kilometers-deep canyons, there is indeed a little beauty to be seen, but of the harshest and most austere kind. The world – as with its people – takes getting to know; Begum's beauty is hidden precisely because of its severity, and the seriousness with which its people go about their work.

Founded as a monastery world by the Xenoglossians and later opened to non-Order colonization, Begum declared – in its own private way – independence from the Anno during its long, slow downfall. Begum wisely submitted before even Tyrannus' return to Karrakis, and compared to worlds like Karrakis, Ispahsalar, and Khayradin, Begum made it through the fighting largely undamaged. It was one of the few worlds that supplied Tyran's armies with soldiers and armor to aid his consolidation campaign across Karrakis, Khayradin, and the other worlds of the Concern. One of Begum's legendary figures from this time, the Brightstar[36], persists in facsimile form to this day.

As valuable as they were, arms and armor were far from the most significant additions Begum made to Tyran's war effort: it was the world's advanced medical and rapid facsimile programs that proved to be the most important contributions. Miniaturized to fit aboard Tagetes' battleships and automated to produce "rapidfax" in transit, Begum's people-makers proved indispensable for supplementing Tagetes' ground forces. After the war, demand for soldiers gave way, replaced with demand for ready labor and domestic police forces; Begum was uniquely positioned to distribute, manage, and maintain the technology that could produce orders of rapidfax to fill gaps in local recruitment. From this, the houses of Begum (who would go on to become the minor houses of the House of Moments) built the foundations of the vast wealth and influence they hold in the modern day.

The House of Moments is the only major house that continues to work as one planet towards a single goal: the production and perfection of the human form, the processes of its replication, and the broadening of its possibilities. Moments works closely with Smith-Shimano Corpro, perfecting cloning processes for 1:1 facsimile orders and user-specified biocompatible technologies as well as luxury, lifestyle, industrial, military, and other blue-sky augmentations. Moments provides to the Baronies, per capita, the most medical doctors, technicians, and bio/pharma personnel of any world in the Concern. Thanks to a healthy virtual and physical exchange program with SSC's Constellar Congress, Moments is a surprisingly cosmopolitan House, with an outsized expat population in Constellar space.

Begum is home to the Xenoglossary, the main monastery of the Order Xenoglossia, the precognitive augurs and warrior monks that maintain a separate but parallel society to the core Baronic houses. The relationship between the House and the monastery is surprisingly threadbare and at times frosty.

The House of Moments is a Federalist house with a population around 15 billion souls, only 1 percent of whom are of the noble class. Its banner company is House Moulin's Endless Company. Other notable minor houses include House Miroir, House Kathreftis, and House Mylos.

Color and Sign: The House of Moments's primary color is Begum Umber. Its simplified canton-sigil (applied to the canton of its minor houses) is a hand, palm facing out.

36 The first Brightstar was Underbaron Moulin-Noel, who went on to become a general in Tyran's armies before dying during the assault on the Annorum Throne. Their body was recovered, and has become the standard template for all pilots in the Endless Company.

THE HOUSE OF DUST

On the quiet moon of Bo, the House of Dust withers away. The most distant world of the Concern from Karrakis, Bo was settled during the Annorum Passacaglia by a one-way colonial expedition and left isolated until the Last Argument of Kings. Physically recontacted by Tagetes' fleets, the people of Bo refused the Anno's emissaries and forces, prompting a bitter siege that lasted for decades before the world relented.

During the Dynasticlade, Bo was granted charter as the House of Dust, and became the ninth and final major house of the Baronies. Due to its distance from the other worlds of the Concern, Bo was a ready candidate for the Federal Karrakin Monarchy's advanced terrestrial blue-sky development facilities, as well as a reliable supply point and gravitational tether for isolated stations geared towards researching powerful weapons. For centuries, Bo's industry and metroswathes developed in tandem: the FKM, despite hiccups in the First Interest War, was a stable steward, and its state-run campuses proved again and again to be safe, secure, and well-managed.

Overseen by the FKM – and in no small part owing to their distance from the rest of the Concern – the people of Bo never adopted a firm monarchist system of government: theirs was always a world beholden to a constitution. In the wake of Free Sanjak, Bo saw its own limited Ungrateful agitation with the use of the HORUS Kobold pattern group by mine and docking workers to mount small scale strikes, blockages, and violent skirmishes. While the uprising was eventually suppressed, the people of Bo – with agreement from the landed nobility, which made up less than 1 percent of the population – were firmly set on avoiding the fate of Ludra's world. They converted their government via plebiscite to Republicanism. Following the House of Water, the House of Dust was able to make a peaceful transition through lengthy negotiations with the other major houses, with the transition being finalized in 4630u. Nobles that refused to participate in the transition were guaranteed equivalent land in the Interest; most, however, chose to stay. Partisan enclaves were eventually pardoned and their needs and leaders coopted in a long but peaceful deescalation. Though Republican, Bo was no less Karrakin, and the people of Dust took great pride in the fact that they managed a transition with minimal violence.

That all changed in a moment. In a bout of monarchist fervor near the end of the conversion process, a group of Boan Hagiographers crashed an automated shuttle into one of the world's orbital R&D stations. This act spiraled far beyond the group's initial plan – to destabilize the FKM's presence on the world by disrupting its weapons research and to delegitimize the new Republican government – sending the station plunging into the ocean near one of Bo's designated poles of inaccessibility, thousands of kilometers away from any populated landmass.

Known to the FKM but unknown to the people of Bo – likely unknown to the young Republican government as well – the station contained divergent, experimental branches of the House of Stone's COMMENCER nanites. Released deep under the surface of the ocean, these nanites began their work immediately, consuming and digesting the landmass at the bottom of the ocean. Surveys of the damage were used to model the future progression of the nanites: eventually, but inevitably, Bo would lose a critical amount of its landmass to nanite consumption, mounting as the nanites' capacity for consumption outstripped the remaining landmass. With no sure method to prevent the nanites from proceeding about their RACR (replication/adaptation/consumption/refinement) cycle, the terminal state of the wound became clear: Bo would be lost.

Now, Bo is a dying world, and the House of Dust is eager to quit its crumbling surface; already nearly 2 percent of the world's landmass has been consumed by the metastatic terraforming nanites, prompting an increasing, cascading series of climate changes and tectonic instability. The logistics of moving a population of five billion, however, into a Concern already burdened with so many are daunting. In part to solve this, the House of Dust has turned its attention towards the Dawnline Shore. Though it has no official holdings there, a brace of worlds sympathetic to or outright controlled by the Baronies seem to hold promise.

The House of Dust's banner company is the Graveborn, of House Sergeant. Other notable minor houses of the House of Dust include Houses Kuhnau, Sanz, and Reger. As it is a Republican house, the House of Dust has no noble population.

Color and Sign: The House of Dust's primary color is Dust Green. Its simplified canton-sigil (applied to the canton of its minor houses) is a plain, filled circle.
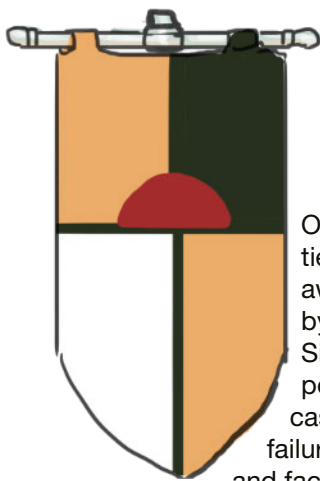
THE HOUSE OF PROMISE

On San Simeon (DS9), at the frontier's edge, the House of Promise awaits its debut. Settled long ago by Union's First Committee, San Simeon enjoyed a growing colonial population for decades before a cascading series of administrative failures, indigenous disease, famine, and factional conflict caused the settlements there to collapse. For centuries the world was left unsupported; not until the arrival of the first Karrakin survey teams in the early 3800s u did San Simeon see a significant human presence. Finding the world empty[37] and its small colonies left to overgrown ruin, the Karrakin survey teams determined the world to be theirs – wholly and uncontested – owing to its vacancy. Unlike the other worlds of the Dawnline Shore, San Simeon had no large indigenous cultures to negotiate with. In the late 3800s, the Baronies dispatched a number of colonial missions to San Simeon; upon arrival, these missions resettled the world, establishing it as the fulcrum world for the Federal Karrakin Monarchy in the Dawnline Shore.

San Simeon has grown since then into a highly developed Core status world with a population of around 6 billion and enclaves representing every major house in the concern. It is a highly multicultural, cosmopolitan world with peoples from all over calling it their home. Though still a part of the Baronies, its distance from the homeland and its traditions and politics have given the world a much more progressive cultural spin, free from the cruft of ritual, dynastic obligation, and entrenched custom. Its strong modern art and fashion culture may not be considered licentious in most of the Orion Arm but would raise eyebrows in the core of Karrakin space. Noble youth often escape to San Simeon in order to enjoy its more liberal excesses.

The direct property of the Federal Karrakin Monarchy, San Simeon is explicitly neutral ground for all major houses, though it stands to lose that designation with the FKM's move to integrate the world as the first new major house since the Dynasticlade. Negotiations between the Ignoble House and the Baronic Court are ongoing – both chambers expect to reach a resolution, but each day brings almost as many issues to be resolved as those that are settled. To the chagrin of the more conservative houses, the provisional major house, Promise, would likely be classified as a Republican house, as the world is united under a stable government with a republican charter. Despite their objections, the looming threat of a war in the Dawnline Shore is prompting the non-Republican major houses to flirt with the idea of entertaining this risk in order to firm up the Baronies' claim on the system.

San Simeon is .9 the diameter of Cradle and equal in mass, making it a dense world on the smaller side of terrestrial normal. Long the FKG's Shoreside capital, San Simeon features many state of the art miniature arcologies and orbitals, hardened defensive structures, and uplift ports; its BUC naval and terrestrial garrisons are the largest of any Baronic world in the Dawnline Shore. By consequence, San Simeon has the smallest non-Baronic population of any world in the Shore.

Color and Sign: The House of Promise's primary color is Dawn Gold. Its simplified canton-sigil (to be applied to the canton of its administrative houses) would be a sun rising over a horizon line.

37 San Simeon, of course, was not wholly empty. Unlike its sister worlds with failed colonies in the Shore, a small handful of the original colonists to San Simeon survived. Never gathering in bands larger than a few dozen, these indigenous peoples were encountered less than a decade after the Baronic resettlement; ensuing violence, disease, and assimilation saw the end of the world's indigenous population on San Simeon.

RELIGION IN THE KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

Most Karrakins – noble or ignoble – would likely demurr from claiming association with an organized faith. Though old Terran faiths do enjoy a following in the Baronies, they never took root as widely as they have outside of the Baronies. Theologians who study faith and its practices in the Baronies generally accept this schism to be the natural result of two factors: the severing of Karrakis from Cradle during the Fall, and the growth of the Passions, which spread through Karrakin culture during Karrakis' own period of turmoil.

Faith in the Baronies is a complicated affair. Though Baronic society is extremely hierarchical, ritualized, and organized overall, expressions of faith tend to be highly individualistic and personal. Although many citizens of the Baronies will state that they aren't religious, they will describe in the same breath their temple visit earlier that year, during which they sought good omens for an upcoming relationship or business decision.

The religion of the Baronies has no official name or doctrine. Instead, it is a broad collection of state and house practices that pay homage to a quasi-deific cast of spirits, gods, and muses collectively called the Passions. Dogma varies wildly between houses, families, and even individuals as to the specific nature of the Passions. Some view them as true deities, with wills, interests, and pursuits, whereas others read them more as convenient symbols for the influence of fate upon a person's life. Others still view them as animating spirits that dwell and rule over parts of the land, sky, and the void of space – beings that must be appeased to curry their favor.

All agree that the Passions have a dramatic influence on a person's life. At birth, a person is said to be "bonded" to one or more of the Passions, as though marked or chosen. Through this bond, the Passions are said to claim dominion over the strand of fate that represents that person's destiny, and will seek to manipulate it in any way that they see fit by inflicting challenges, trials, or tragedies upon them for their own amusement, purposes, or plans. By embracing or rejecting the bond, a person can choose to fight the passions or attempt to gain their divine favor, and by reading their bond (or having it read), a person can gain some insight into the fate that awaits them, or even attempt to predict their future. The priests and ordained individuals that officially read such bonds are called augurs, and almost all come from the esoteric Order Xenoglossia (p. 60). However, folk-reading of bonds and even amateur bond readings are common enough that they are frequent activities at parlors, dinners, and between friends.

The revealed nature of this bond and a person's belief in it may waver over the course of their lifetime, yet even rejection of a bond is seen as engaging with it in good faith. The Passions are not generally viewed as purely benevolent forces, but much like humans are thought to have flawed, fickle, and often petty natures. Like humans, they have rivalries and lovers, and are prone to strong outbursts of emotion. Warring with the Passions, especially one to whom one is bonded, is seen as a brave and noble calling, and it is rare that someone embraces their bond without reservations.

Though typically one Passion has the strongest sway over a person – a solar bond – they may have minor or sidereal bonds with other Passions, especially minor ones. It is rare for someone to have a second Passion with influence in their life equal to that of their solar bond. These are called lunar bonds, and are said to be especially ill omens, as the stress of being torn from the whims of one Passion to another is believed to create a tumultuous and unlucky life. When an augur reads a bond, they attempt to discern these influences in order to make predictions about a person's future or the omens around a course of action they plan to take. When read, a bond is typically defined according to celestial bodies, numbers, animals, the position of Karrakis' moon, and a particular depth of water. For example, someone might be bonded to the Wolf, with a maiden moon, and a shallow water fate.

There are hundreds of Passions, but eight major ones that are prominent across the entire Baronies: the Titan, the Wolf, the Harlequin, the Broker, the Fool, the Magus, the Builder, and the Pathfinder. These appear not only as objects of worship and augury, but in popular mythology, children's tales, and religious apocrypha. There are many tales of the clever Harlequin tricking the vicious Wolf, or the noble Titan saving the plucky Fool from the machinations of the Broker. Each Passion has their own sidereal Passions they are typically associated with, major domains (e.g., harvest, fertility, war, death, the hunt, thunder, etc.), seasons of the year, and favored offerings. Several Passions are often combined and worshipped as one entity – an amalgam Passion of sorts – or are combined with other pre-Fall beliefs such as Islam or the Church of Christ the Buddha into a dizzying array of syncretic combinations.

ORGANIZED RELIGION

Worship of the Passions is commonly practiced as a personal, family, or cultural affair. Even those Karrakins that do not believe in organized faith typically participate in the rituals, holidays, and public events of the Passions as deeply engrained parts of Baronic culture. Traditional holidays are around the new year (complete with an iconic glazed sticky bun), the highest point of midsummer, and the highest point of winter. Particular attention is paid to astrological events such as the passing of comets, solar eclipses, the discovery of supernovas, and new survey data from unknown parts of the galaxy. Three-day public holidays are sometimes called upon the discovery of significant astrological phenomena, traditionally to give state augurs the time to agree upon the portents of each discovery.

Organized religion is largely restricted to the individual temples of each Baronic house, with most major houses employing state augurs and magi and endorsing an official interpretation of the Passions. Augury is an ancient and respected practice, and one of the biggest events of the year is the new year temple visit by the sitting heads of a major house at which they have the bond of the entire house read for good or ill omens.

It is considered heretical (and highly taboo) for augurs to make readings of whoever sits the throne, no matter the intent, and even if requested by the Prime Baron themself. Other than this restriction, the diversity of religious dogma is such that aside from minor filial and purity traditions of hand washing, there are few commonalities between the house religions.

THE ORDER XENOGLOSSIA

The convergence point of Baronic faith, as much as there is one, is an ancient archival order dating back to Passacaglian times – the Order Xenoglossia. While faith is a personal affair for most people in the Baronies, for the priests, theocrats, and augurs of the order, the Passions are taken literally, and very seriously.

Housed deep in Begum's Stygos Canyon, the Xenoglossary is a house of mysteries and the proving grounds for all aspirant augurs. It is from this ancient and secretive order that all state augurs are drawn. The Glossary, as it is often called, is fully independent from and adjacent to the political orders of the Baronic houses and acts functionally like a minor house with outsize influence. Membership is for life, and aspiring augurs do not undertake the pilgrimage to join the order lightly – for upon entry into the ranks of the temple-monastery they forswear all bonds of

allegiance, claims to noble titles, inheritances, or ownership of property. The order is ruled based on seniority, and the oldest augurs act as electors for a small council that makes decisions for the maintenance and survival of the monastery and its priesthood.

All state augurs partake of the substance known as the Blue Blood of Pangloss – a medicinal liquid distilled by secretive means from local Begi flora, and named after the founder of the order, Pangloss the Eunuch. Over time, the Blood stains their lips, tongues, and extremities blue, and renders them chemically sterile. Long-term users live exceptionally long lives (up to a hundred years longer than they might otherwise be expected to live) as their metabolisms slow, until they eventually reach a state of prolonged meditation that is treated as clinical death. The meditating and partially mummified bodies of the elder priesthood are purportedly kept beneath the monastery and consulted rarely on matters of extreme import, some rumored to have been there for two or three hundred years before disintegrating.

Consuming the Blue Blood over time is said to grant mild precognitive abilities – abilities that seem much stronger in the elder priesthood, as they occasionally demonstrate publicly. It is unclear how much of these shows of precognitive skill are theatrics and how much is genuine supernatural prowess, if at all, but they are unerringly accurate and regard their apparent abilities with extreme seriousness and rigor. The Blue Blood is what, mythologically, gives augurs their skill in reading bonds and predicting the whims of the Passions, and why all state-employed augurs must pass through the Xenoglossary.

Unable to bear children, inherit titles, or continue their line, augurs of the Order are granted special access into Baronic courts and the back rooms of political halls in both traditional and Republican houses. Their unique status in society allows them to speak truth to power, act outside the normal social order, and make suggestions or offer advice some would consider heretical or defiant of norms – all under the cover of divine inspiration. Many join the Xenoglossia out of a desire for this special access and political freedom, while others join to gain deeper understanding of the divine. Noble barons, especially those in contest for claimed titles, are sometimes forced into the priesthood as a result of political machinations – these aspirants make up a minor but significant bulk of the augurs that populate the halls of the gloomy archive. In the past these exiles have prominently used the skills, influence, and forbidden knowledge from their time at the Glossary to enact revenge against their political rivals – a practice that has several monastic reforms have attempted to prevent.

The augurs trained deep in the halls of Stygos are practiced at reading the bonds and wills of the Passions and predicting the various whims of fate and minor spirits that are said to govern these things. They learn medicine, astrology, arts of cultivation, and the hidden tongue of the Passions, through which they are said to be able to communicate with them directly (and which gives the Xenoglossia[38] its name). Aside from their religious duties, the Xenoglossians are (and began as) the holy keepers and recorders of Baronic history, heraldry, and genealogy. Each house, its arms, and its membership and line is recorded in meticulous detail, and the Chamber of Arms at Stygos is the primary governing body for determining the rules and manners of heraldry in the Baronies. New houses or Free Companies seeking to establish themselves must petition the keepers for new heraldry, a process that can take scores of years of subjective time for the applicants.

The monastery itself is defended by a militant order – the Stygos Grammaton. Warrior monks of an exceptional caliber, they are highly skilled in hand-to-hand combat and display incredible discipline, reflexes, and acrobatic skill. When one of the Grammaton leaves the planet – typically for matters of pilgrimage or to escort other augurs – observers often remark on their supposedly precognitive martial arts and their seeming inability to feel pain, fear, or doubt.

Augurs rarely leave the order, only on exile or death from natural causes. Those augurs that reach a state of clinical death from prolonged use of the Blood are not considered to have exited the order, even after their bodies crumble to dust. The few augurs that have fled or tried to abuse or share the powers, secrets, and access granted to them by their training and connections at the monastery for personal means have in almost all cases been mercilessly hunted down by the Grammaton, who have an uncanny ability to show up with no possible prior knowledge of their target's movements.
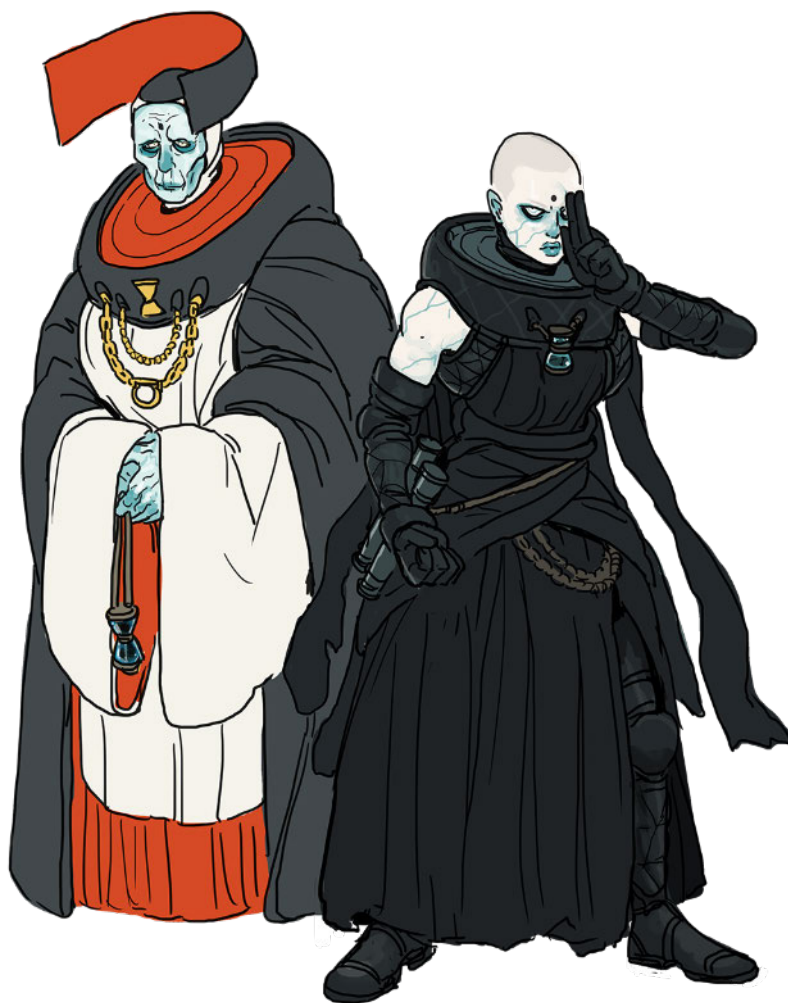
The Order remains highly influential in Baronic society but has turned inward in recent centuries, becoming extremely isolationist. While it remains a powerful political force, it staunchly refuses to intervene in the political affairs of the major houses and the galaxy at large and is more focused on its archival and religious duties. Some say this is because the senior priesthood of the Glossary have foreseen a tumultuous period coming to the galaxy and have chosen to stay isolated for the sake of their Order's own survival.

38 "Xenogloss" comes from the old-world form of "strange tongue". The original followers that settled Begum were the Cult of Pangloss but this name eventually faded into obscurity.

MECHS IN THE TRADE BARONIES

"The light of Creighton's death lingered for weeks, a scar in our sky. I was a gunner – you see, I manned an anti-orbital gun, Cannon Ogier – and spent every day staring up at our sky. Even in the hot desert day you could see the crackling white, flickering like the stars above Ispahsalar. It would have been a fantastic show to see, but for the cries.

Light, they teach you in training, carries information; it is also a weapon. Both are true.

All of our communications, you see, yes? All based on light. Laser. Point to point. This is how we knew within days what was to come, and how, for weeks following, we could hear the screams of the dead and dying. The stranded, begging for help. God above, what small relief it was for me not to have been assigned to sentry duty: those poor souls had to scan those broadcasts, listening for useful communications. I would see them at mess, the hollow-eyed, the living dead listeners.

We had to use old radio, secure but slow – any time we turned on our lightcomms, nothing but screams and static. So we cleaned the guns, ranged our apertures, and stockpiled our solidcores in case our landline went out. Our neighbor in the battery, Cannon St. John, even took to installing a little hochet, just in case.

We had only a day's warning – the dead-listeners finally heard a warning, some dying transmission from a spaced lieutenant who had drifted for days, trapped in the excised section of his ship. Fearkiller and his legionnaires, with blood on their teeth, hurtling towards us.

The battle was nothing to speak of; we gave them hell, and learned that they were its masters. Our cannons were great and terrible, yes, but they were slow: they were meant to target ships, to fire on prediction, to sustain a beam. These chassis did not move like ships. They were small targets, and maneuverable – hell, if it had been a larger caliber, Cannon St. John's hochet[39] would have been preferable to our guns!

We melted our lenses faster than I thought possible – never have I worked so hard to keep our gun firing than that miserable day, and never have my efforts been for so little. We killed two or three chassis with lucky shots: the rest danced around us.

The war was over at Creighton's World. I was lucky to survive its end."

– Recollections of Sergeant Joyeuse "Poilu" Chanson, lensmaster of Cannon Ogier, of Battery Mont, of the Glass Brigade, of the House of Glass

The federal fighting force of the Karrakin Trade Baronies falls under the purview of Baronic Unified Command (BUC). The BUC oversees the Federal Karrakin Navy and the bulk of Baronic ground forces, from infantry to armored vehicles and line chassis regiments. A slow engine of mass logistics and ordinance, the BUC can, in times of great peril or need (as determined by the Prime Baron), call the house companies together under its command.

In addition to commanding all federal ground and naval forces, the BUC administers the Royal Cavalry College on Karrakis and polices all ignoble districts, worlds, and territories. While the BUC's officer corps are drawn largely from among nobles who purchase, are awarded, are born into, or otherwise inherit their ranks, a significant plurality of officers (and a mandated minority in senior command) are of ignoble rank; indeed, service in the BUC is a common way for ignobles to rise to minor noble ranks.

For thousands of years, the BUC emphasized an attritional doctrine that relied on overwhelming numbers and ordinance to guarantee victory; the introduction of the mech changed everything.

The mechanized chassis was introduced to the Baronies during the First Interest War. The Interest War – in addition to being a land grab – was a transitional conflict, one where old ideas of orbital and ground combat met a radical and transformative doctrine of armored combat. Prior to the decisive engagement above Creighton's World, mechs had only been used in combat roles during the Hercynian Crisis of the 4500s. In conflicts after this crisis, a small number of high-ranking Baronic officials had access to high-clearance media and reports detailing the efficacy of chassis in asymmetrical combat – despite this knowledge, the BUC downplayed the threat that mechs posed.

39 In this context, "hochet" refers to a type of fast-firing squad-support machine gun commonly employed by Baronic forces. The sound it makes while firing is a sharp pitch that, at a sustained burst, sounds like a child's rattle.

The early battles of the Interest War confirmed this. The BUC took Creighton's World with little resistance; combat across the Purview and the Dawnline Shore was largely in the realm of pre-mech conventional warfare, an arena in which the Karrakins had plenty of experience. But when Harrison I returned and brought mechs with him, he did so in a way that shattered the BUC's assumptions about "conventional" armor doctrine.

The loss above Creighton's World was the most dramatic defeat of the Interest War and a pivotal moment in the history of chassis combat; like the battles of Cambrai and Coral Sea in Old Earth history, the Battle of Creighton's World proved a decisive moment in the development of a new warfighting standard.

Baronic ground and orbital commanders could not adapt fast enough to the rapid and unconventional strikes run by Harrison I and his mounted legionnaires. The Interest War was a mark of shame for the Baronies and it prompted a series of rigorous military reforms that restructured Baronic ground forces into agile, mobile companies unrestricted by traditionalist doctrine.

A tactical and strategic loss for the Baronic military, the Interest War proved a boon for post-war development – while territory and lives were lost, the Baronies gained a massive wealth of data and experience facing down mechs. Coupled with Baronic Intelligence's post-conflict portfolios and various house engineers' successful efforts to reverse-engineer captured Genghis Mk I and Saladin chassis, the Baronies established a new doctrine of chassis combat and force integration: the LeFleur Doctrine, named after the project's leader.

Beyond the development of blended-doctrine chassis, the Baronies began the development of chassis-only companies capable of operating as scaled-up infantry companies, unsupported, on long duration patrols. These were later formalized as the Great Companies – the house and Free Companies of the Baronies.

Lead by the House of Order on Karrakis, the BUC established a school for pilots and began recruiting candidates across Baronic space. This was the Karrakin Cavalry College, a sprawling campus that grew to serve as training facility, parade ground, and R&D campus. Now, the Cavalry College serves as a finishing school for many Union auxiliary pilots raised from the Baronic worlds, as well as the premier campus for noble youths to prove their skill and worth at the controls of a mech – be it of domestic or imported make.

A Baronic mech pilot typically starts training alongside a full pilot as a squire, not only as a mentee and as a member of the maintenance and pit team, but also often as a personal servant, whether of noble or ignoble heritage, as a way to learn discipline and humility. A fully licensed pilot is called a kuirasser. An accomplished pilot is called a kavaliere.

The Karrakin Cavalry College is responsible for the creation of four domestically produced Baronic frames: the Tagetes, the Calendula, the Orchis, and the Araceae. Most domestic cadets (Baronic nobles and ignobles of particular note) pilot either the base or a variant version of one of these four chassis, though some from the wealthier or more liberal families bring with them chassis of non-Baronic make; most international cadets are grouped into siloed cohorts and trained on platforms supplied by their sponsors, backers, or the institutions of which they are a part.

Composed primarily of ignoble soldiers and noble officers, the BUC's military is, at present, the only house-agnostic, pan-Baronic fighting force loyal to the federal Baronic state. The "bucks" (or "cerfs", their affectionate nickname in Noble Karrakin) that comprise the soldiery of the BUC perform the slow, all-theater work of holding ground, policing otherwise lawless territories, and protecting the interests of the Baronic state – not those of individual barons.

House companies, while they are guaranteed by the BUC and, on paper, retain ultimate loyalty to the throne and Prime Baron, tend to operate much more freely in support of their minor and major house's interest, typically in that order (the only exception being a major house's banner company). Small skirmishes between house companies are common enough, but the lack of support from the much larger BUC ground and naval forces means that spats between house companies rarely boil over into massive, power-threatening conflicts.
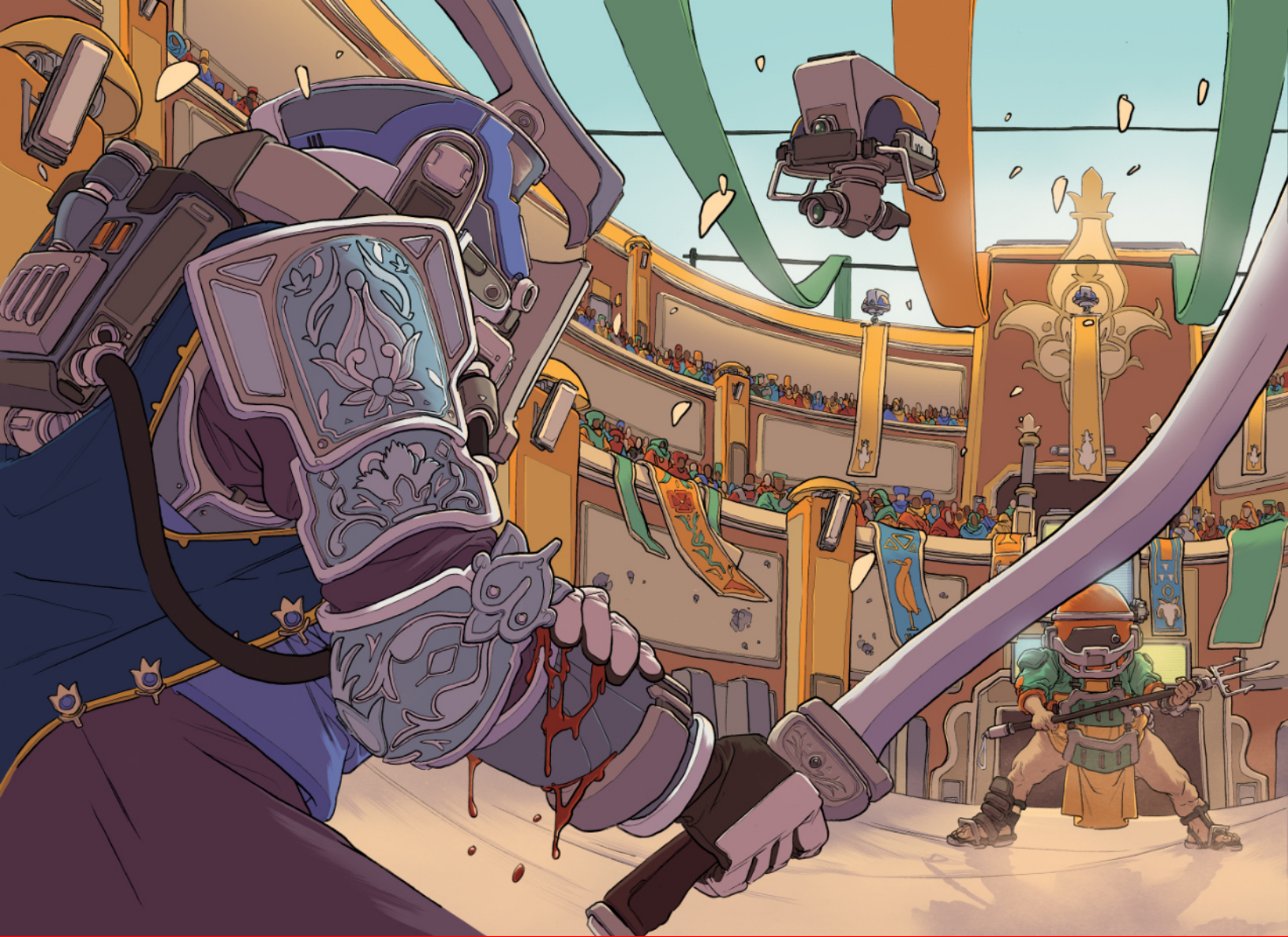
KAVALIERES

The equivalent of a lancer in Karrakin space is a kavaliere. Being a kavaliere in the Baronies is more than being a soldier – it is to hold oneself to an exceptional standard of courtesy, conduct, honor, and behavior. Not every mech pilot is a kavaliere – only those who through service, daring, experience, and personality shine bright above the rest.

Kavalieres are expected to be pious, honorable, and virtuous. They are larger than life public figures, and expected to attend public ceremonies, regularly visit temple, and sacrifice to the Passions. During major religious holidays, they will fast, sometimes for days, in hopes of plumbing deeper revelations from their bond. It is not uncommon for them to carry favors into battle – small items or gifts given to them by ardent supporters or lovers. The most famous pilots have a fervent following in the Baronies to the point that they are major icons, and there are often hotly contested battles of selection in the cavalry colleges to become their squires. Speculation about their battles, behavior, romances, and dalliances is a popular topic for gossip.

Wearing house signs or heraldry is practically a requirement among famous kavalieres, but the most flamboyant and outspoken of them also make sure they are richly dressed. They are often looked upon as fashion leaders in popular culture in the Baronies, bringing bright colors, slashed sleeves, capes, velvet, and hose to every public appearance. These public shows of ostentation often disintegrate when meeting the practical and more private reality of the battle-field. Even the most confident pilot in the Baronies balks at bringing lace cuffs into the cockpit.

The practice of these traditions varies widely between houses and individuals. Some military-oriented houses, such as the House of Stone, treat the kavaliere as a stiff, cold, and unfeeling figure, elevated and married to the military life, while others, such as the House of Glass, celebrate their kavalieres to the point that there are several long-running romance serials about them.

THE HOUSE GAMES

Established in the time of the Dynasticlade, the House Games are a massive, multi-week contest of skill and sportsmanship between major and minor houses. They evolved from more decentralized sports and arena contests that had been put on for the entertainment and profit of the noble classes for millennia. Calendula's reforms dramatically limited these forerunner games, including the elimination of most blood sports, but created the House Games in compensation.

A not-so-subtle attempt to provide a (mostly) nonviolent method for defusing inter-house tensions, the games are extremely popular. They happen every seven years, Karrakin time, and are hosted at the Annorum Palace grounds in the Kreoss, a massive interconnected superstructure of arenas, tracks, and competition rings.

All houses officially recorded and granted heraldry by the Chamber of Arms on Begum may compete in and send a team to the games. The exception to this is the House of Order, which, by writ of decree from the old throne runs, administrates, and judges the games with exacting and meticulous detail and ceremony. Timing must be exact, as the relativistic travel required to reach the games in time regularly means teams train and depart years before they are meant to compete, often completing their training en route.

There are over seventy sanctioned competitions in the House Games, including many field and ball games, sports shooting, marathon running, and horse riding. The most popular tend to be skol meya (a wrestling style originating from the Sparri), chariot racing, and football.

Some of the games are gladiator or pit fights descended from blood sports, and although they are no longer fought to the death, they are still dangerous and injuries are common. Matches include mounted matches, duels, and matches against captive animals or xenofauna, all of which are fought "to the blood", where the first sign of injury ends the match.

PANKRATION MEKANI

The most recent (and rising) addition to the House Games is pankration mekani, an arena sport involving mech duels. Only recently sanctioned by the House of Order and the Karrakin Cavalry College, the spectacularly high stakes of the duels has made the sport extremely popular inside and outside the Baronies.

Mechs used for the pankration are designed according to specific designations and weight classes, with maximum torque and power limiters carefully watched by judges and authorities. There are specific match classes, from power armor to heavy mech duels. Transgressions against these rules and limits are taken extremely seriously, to the point of official, centuries-long bans for entire Houses from the House Games as a whole.

The Smith-Shimano Atlas line of frames was originally designed for dueling and modified versions of it are often used in the most popular duel category, azzurri sang, or "blue blood", in which two combatants fight in an elevated, caged-in arena around twenty meters on each side.

Beyond the games, the pankration mekani has an independent life with seasons running year round in the arenas of each house, especially those of the House of Glass. Kavalieres and other mech pilots that participate in the sport are called pankrati, and the most popular of them are major public celebrities.

HOUSE AND FREE COMPANIES

HOUSE COMPANIES

Following the establishment of the house company system by the BUC in the middle 4500s u, House LeFleur, of the House of Order, raised the first such company: the First Chapter. They served as the model from which other house companies took their inspiration[40].

To qualify as a house company, a force must meet certain readiness and compatibility standards, must have the backing and patronage of a minor house, and cannot field more than a thousand mechs. Every minor house capable of fielding a company is required to do so; together, these house companies make up the armed forces of a given major house – that major house's Great Company. One house company from each major house has the honor of being that house's banner company. After the banner company come other, numbered companies, generally ordered by some combination of date of founding, composition, and minor house favor.

How the leaders of a major house choose their banner company varies: some hold trials of skill and wit, others pit champions against each other in first-blood combat, some have a rotational schedule or a ballot system, others lean on tradition, and so on.

In their comparatively short history, house companies – far more than the BUC's federal armed forces – have become the face of the Karrakin military. A well organized and equipped house companies is a mark of Baronic honor. They are the noble sword, shield, and mirror of the Prime Baron and their major houses. Their adherence to the call to arms is trumpeted as exemplary of their high chivalric honor and martial ability. House company guards in the noble quarters of major cities are a common sight, and merchants and noble pedestrians credit them with keeping them safe.

House company kuirassers and kavalieres are, generally speaking, of superior quality to the average pilots of most non-Karrakin states. Most house companies finish their pilot cohorts at BUC's Cavalry College or at one of the major houses's minor cavalry schools. Indeed, as many of their pilots are of noble class, they are likely to have many years of simulated and real training with private tutors and veteran house pilots prior to matriculation. Pilots of house companies are expected to provide their own kit beyond the company's base fleet models and BUC readiness standards; this leads to a wide variety of force configurations and a flexibility that can be both exciting and frustrating to other commanders. Other company personnel – line soldiers, atmospheric and stellar pilots, logistics personnel, engineers, and so on – are usually noble youths and squires or promising ignoble cadets who will go on to crew chassis of their own in the same company.

While ranks and precise force organization can differ between the companies, most pilots are of a general rank and are addressed as "lord" – a gender neutral default in the Baronies – unless a different, rank-appropriate title is offered. Typically, a house company's chief officer is a principes or count, who either personally commands the company or delegates that duty to a chosen steward – a non-inheriting offspring, a trusted noble retainer or champion, or similar.

House companies, as they are primarily warfighting organizations, do not police the territorial holdings of their houses; they do, however, participate in parades, act as honor guards, and perform other ceremonial or honorific roles as commanded outside of their training and deployment. House companies have proud histories, which creates a culture of valor hunting among pilots; most house companies participate in the Company Games portion of the House Games, a massive series of full contact (nonlethal) team and individual pankration mekani competitions used to determine the "best" house company.

House companies rarely transition to become Free Companies; however, these sorts of dramatic restructurings have occured when companies' houses have crumbled under debt or scandal, as results of internal power struggles, and so on.

40 The house company system itself was loosely based on the extant Free Company system endemic to the Baronies.

BANNER COMPANIES

THE FIRST CHAPTER
Banner company of the House of Order
House company of House LaFleur

The First Chapter was the first house company of the post–Interest War Baronic military. Founded on Karrakis, they keep their headquarters at the Karrakin Cavalry College and draw their recruits primarily from noble children of Karrakin families.

The House of Order is made up of minor houses that can trace their heritage all the way back to pre-Passacaglian Karrakis. Their bloodlines have been present for the entirety of Karrakin history, and the First Chapter reflects this. Clad in the royal colors of the Prime Baron, the First Chapter proudly pilots only Karrakin Royal Foundry chassis. Their pilots and engineers play significant roles in the design, testing, and proofing of KRF chassis – just as "proven on Ras Shamra" is the mark of quality for Armory mechs, so is the "throne plate" for KRF chassis.

The First Chapter are notable for being the Prime Baron's favored house company, and the one with the most noble *kavalieres* per unit of any house company. The First Chapter, while generally the go-to for security and station-marking at royal and noble events on Karrakis, are, unlike other banner companies, to be feared in the field – they have notable deployments throughout Karrakin space, and currently have forces present in the Union relief fleet sent to reinforce Boundary Garden.

LES FULGURITES
Banner company of the House of Glass
House company of House Montague

Formed after the First Interest War, les Fulgurites are a richly funded and highly trained house company. They are notable for their expertise with SSC's line of (relatively) delicate, high-skill variable weapons and the FADE engines of their signature Mourning Cloaks. Fulgurite battle doctrine is built around pushing pilots into fast combat in close quarters.

Outside of combat scenarios, continued exposure to the Firmament makes old guard Fulgurite *kuirassers* an odd bunch. They are rarely seen outside of their silver armor – in fact, ignobles often mistake them for Voladores, as they bear many similar markers to the mythical travellers.

BOULDER COMPANY
Banner company of the House of Stone
House company of House di Khayradi

A storied company of the House of Stone, the Boulder Company is made up primarily of the most feared fighting forces in the Baronies, the Khayradin Elites. Conditioned from a very young age to be ideal soldiers, these brutally efficient warriors are fanatically loyal and rumored to be completely fearless.

Masters of line combat, the Boulder Company has existed as a unit since the Last Argument of Kings, when the company was founded by one of Tyrannus's bannermen, Lord Anaxa di Khayradi, prior to the invasion of Throne Karrakis. During the First Interest War, the Boulder Company suffered terrible losses in the defense of Baronic command on Creighton's World and needed to be reconstituted from reserve units left behind on Khayradin.

Today, the Boulder Company are once more a proud, weighty force. The bulk of their forces are currently committed to the Dawnline Shore and stationed in personal defense of the Stone Lords.

ETAGE PRINCIPAL
Banner company of the House of Smoke
House company of House Dufort

Trained not at the Karrakin Cavalry College, but in the House of Smoke's own Inverted Tower on their home moon, Eyalet-a, the Etage Principal specialize in light and half-size chassis. They are known for their mastery of the Atlas, with the best of their pilots rivaling the finest that Sparr has to offer.

Many of their principles and promising young pilots are trained initially at the Karrakin Cavalry college, and then sent for an unofficial "finishing" course on Sparr, where they accompany Sparri warriors on Vast hunts. As a result of this close relationship, the Etage have been known to accept and ennoble particularly outstanding Sparri warriors.

COMPANY TEMPESTE
Banner company of the House of Sand
House company of House Hardy

A much-vaunted company from Tilimsan, the Company Tempeste are known for the quality of their kuirassers and their unique chassis variant, the Tagetes Fusiller, a high-volume "rifleman" chassis designed for line combat. The Company Tempeste, unusually, performs a high amount of mercenary work and is in high demand as shock troopers for house companies stationed in the Dawnline Shore, so much so that some of the House of Sand's numbered companies are currently in negotiation with the BUC to become "numbered banner" companies under the original Company Tempeste.

The Company Tempeste are infamous for their alleged involvement in several cheating scandals in the Company Games, one of which involved the deaths of several rival pilots. The fact that they have not been banned from competition is a matter of conspiracy theories and deep public resentment.

CRIMSON MEMORY
Banner company of the House of Remembrance
House company of House Alexander

The Crimson Memory are an ancient and deeply secretive house company from the moon Arrudye, largely composed of Cosmopolitan pilots seasoned through repeated proxy conflicts with Harrison Armory and its colonial forces. The *kuirassers* of the Crimson Memory are notable for their adept use of the tachyon lance and displacer weaponry.

The Crimson Memory are currently deployed to the Dawnline Shore, where they have been operating in and around New Madrassa.

1ST OCEANIC
Banner company of the House of Water
House company of Regiment Lecuyer

Experts in low-orbit and partial-grav combat, the 1st Oceanic's distinctive ultramarine-blue chassis and mottled ultramarine-blue/cerulean banner is a welcome sight in the Dawnline Shore, where they commonly operate as escorts for medical and logistical shipments. Their core company is currently on contract to provide enhanced security to IPS-N diplomats in the Dawnline Shore.

ENDLESS COMPANY
Banner company of the House of Moments
House company of House Moulin

The Endless Company are another ancient company with roots tracing back to before Passacaglia. They have survived in many different iterations, eventually becoming the banner company of the House of Moments after the implementation of the house company system.

The Endless are an oddity in the Baronies on account of their heavy reliance on their in-house facsimile program, which has been in place since the technology was perfected during the Annorum Tyrannus. All pilots – not necessarily their support personnel – are facsimiles of the Endless Company's last kavaliere, Underbaron Noel Moulin, a hero of the Last Argument. Since recontact with Union, the Endless Company have worked closely with SSC to perfect a more ideal version of their facsimile genekey.

THE GRAVEBORN
Banner company of the House of Dust
House company of House Sergeant

The Graveborn are a small company, though one of the largest in the House of Dust – as such, they are technically the banner company of the House, though a combination of numbered companies tend to do most of the frontline fighting Dust is called upon to perform.

The Graveborn are an entity of interest in the Union Intelligence Bureau's (UIB) portfolio. The bulk of the Graveborn's high command, such that they are known, are ensconced in their command facility on Bo; there, they have been advancing the study of thanatology through extensive research into paracausal phenomena, advanced homunculus construction, and exotic material manipulation.

FREE COMPANIES

Land, space, and sky!
On-ward! On-ward!
Let the lance go first!
And then, your heart!
On-ward! On-ward!
Land, space, and sky!
On-ward! On-ward!

– Onward!, battle song of the Heliolites, a Free Company of Passacaglia I

The Free Companies share a genealogy with house companies, though their current cultural importance, regulations, and legal structures are markedly different. In the modern Baronic state, house companies act as the primary agents of house interests for both major and minor houses. Prior to the introduction of the house company system, Free Companies acted as the agents of not only house interests, but also those of wealthy ignoble guilds, cartels, and other organizations.

Prior to the formal codification of the BUC's house company system, Free Companies had been the guarantors of the strength of the nobility dating back to before Passacaglia. Akin to modern private military cohorts, Free Companies were loosely regulated units of varying size, strength, and logistical capacity. The largest of them held territory and were able to outfit and deploy thousands of troopers supported by armor and ordinance; the smallest were little better than uniformed gangs, hired to protect VIPs or rough up rivals.

Before the First Interest War, Free Companies held a romantic place in Karrakin mythology and popular culture. They were the dashing, daring knights-errant of the Last Argument of Kings, the mythic bands of the Annorum Passacaglia, the wandering heroes of the distant past. The Free Companies were heroes and villains both: in their exploits across Karrakin space, they chiseled their names in legend and counted their years in the thousands – Company Centimane, who defended the weak and needy with a mere hundred riflemen during the darkest days of the Melee; the Uncrowned, a company of ignoble knights who rode with Tyran into the heart of Throne Karrakis; the list goes on.

In modern days, their popularity in the popular consciousness has waxed and waned – most notably dipping after the staggering losses of First Interest War, and resurfacing with the later rise of inter-house conflict. Free Companies, like house companies, must now follow certain provisions of the BUC's call to arms in order to be counted as lawful entities; otherwise, they are regarded as operating outside the bounds of legality.

Unlike house companies, Free Companies engage in their own commerce, both as purely military entities and as commercial ventures. They are allowed to sell their services to states and entities other than their house (indeed, most Free Companies are made up of pilots and soldiers from noble and ignoble backgrounds) – and as such, are not regulated by the Baronic Council. Instead, the Ignoble House sets the legal framework that governs the Free Companies, guaranteeing their charters, disciplining Companies that violate provisions of the call to arms, and acting as the final court for resolving disputes between Free Companies and their clients.

NOTABLE FREE COMPANIES

THE MAW
The Maw are no longer a Free Company, but instead a paracausal inorganic gestalt entity known to practice heavy decorporealization in absolute violation of the First Contact Accords. Historic and repeated contact incidents across the Dawnline Shore indicate heavy use of TBK-adjacent greywash and blackwash nanite slurry.

Prior to their current status, the Maw were a Free Company raised on Khayradin and used to suppress the Sanjak Revolution. Their only recorded field engagement during the Sanjak Revolution was against MK Kano; the Maw were presumed eliminated, but ongoing outbreaks of Balor pattern groups in the Dawnline Shore and Baronic space more broadly indicates that was a mistaken assumption.

COMPANY CENTIMANE
Company Centimane are a semi-private Free Company employed on a standing basis by the Baronic Council as a deniable ops force for Baronic Intelligence. They typically field half-size mechs, and are often present in aggressive counter-Ungrateful actions and post-engagement investigations. Company Centimane are known for their use of limited/directed greywash, and have a reputation for brutality in suppression actions.

Company Centimane can be identified by their "hundred hand" logo and bone-white markings.

THE OTHER SUNS

The Other Suns field a large number of principes – nobles that are fifth or sixth down the line of succession, facsimiles that have aged out of heir contention and been replaced, and so on – in a great motley of chassis. Dependable and good-natured, they're known across the Baronies as a reliable, loyal Free Company. The Other Suns are Cosmopolitan and spend a good amount of time outside of Baronic space: free of most any filial obligations, they attract adventurers and rogues both, and are among the more liberal Free Companies.

A detachment of Other Suns is embedded in the relief fleet headed toward Boundary Garden.

CHASSIS ERRANT

The Chassis Errant are widely known across the baronies as a "heroes' company". Fan favorites at the House Games, their pilots are expected to bring home regional trophies to promote their company's honor, win sponsorship deals from mech suppliers, and generally keep in good standing in the public eye. The Chassis Errant are consummate sword-fighters, brand ambassadors for SSC's Toledo Enclave, recruit heavily from Sparr, and prize ability and sponsor appeal over nobility.

KARRAKIN TRUNK SECURITY

Raised on Karrakis, Karrakin Trunk Security recruit largely from among wealthy ignoble populations – the children of merchants, cosmopolitan traders, and industrialists. Karrakin Trunk Security are experts on counter-Ungrateful action following exposure during the Free Sanjak Revolution. KTS are the primary guards along the border between Baronic space and the Free Sanjak Commune, as well as a premium private security force for intersystem Baronic trade.

1ST OFFWORLD

Reconstituted from shattered and disgraced house companies whose leaders had been killed in the early days of the First Interest War, the 1st Offworld has made it a project of theirs to quietly restore honor to a myriad of shattered minor houses. Since their founding, they have proved nothing but honorable, flying in the face of noble gossip. Their first victory occurred early on in the second expansion into the Dawnline Shore, where they successfully screened retreating nobles and Free Company outriders fleeing from HA-backed partisans.

CHILDREN OF TYRANNUS

The Children of Tyrannus are Hagiographers eager to make a return to the principals of the Annorum Tyrannus by proving the might and correct rule of Tyrannus's descendants. Currently led by Calendula VIII, a distant descendant of her namesake, the Children of Tyrannus have adopted Tyran's banner, sigil, and colors. They are commonly found working for the most conservative houses, performing private security for minor houses not capable of fielding their own companies.

THE BLINKWALKERS

On a similar observation priority tier as the Maw, the Blinkwalkers are a Cosmopolitan company funded and supplied by an unknown benefactor. With a small number of highly advanced, high-license chassis, they are a mobile force and spend most of their time logging missions that require blinkspace transmission.

While Union Economic Bureau records indicate that their manna and print draws are high, the Blinkwalkers rarely report realspace engagements. UIB assumes this means, per their rather on-the-nose name, that the Blinkwalkers are engaging in operations inside of the "hang time" between the essentially instantaneous transmissions from one blink gate to another. An investigation is ongoing.

HOOKS AND NPCS

The following NPCs and story hooks can be used as jumping-off points for missions. You can use the NPCs to introduce or offer the relevant story hooks, include them in the events that follow, or even just use the hooks by themselves. Each NPC and set of hooks also includes an optional twist that you might want to use or take as inspiration for a twist of your own.

LADY MALIA IGORI
House of Sand

The wife of a powerful lord of Sand, Lady Igori's composed and languid manner is disarming. On the surface, she seems content to live a slow and pampered life of social calls, tea parties, and gossip-trading. Beneath this mask, however, she is one of the most ruthless intelligence agents in the Baronies.

- **Hook 1:** A defector named Meo Noakes from House of Sand has fled with compromising intelligence that Lady Igori claims could lead to the deaths of thousands. He has been captured, but must be escorted back to House territory. Lady Igori has reliable intel suggesting that the other houses will send forces to intercept.
- **Hook 2:** The House's mining operations on a distant moon have halted after recovering a mysterious artifact. The lady wants the situation investigated.
- **Hook 3:** Lady Igori wants a deserter captured and brought to justice as a personal favor for a friend of hers who runs a mercenary company named Proxima. The merc is a lancer named Ransack Bardiche, and he is somewhat of an eccentric, having abandoned his contract due a lack of 'glory', and is now in search of what he perceives to be worthy foes.
- **Optional Twist:** The mission has been a secret test of loyalty for the players and will determine whether Lady Igori will continue to work with them or try to destroy them.

GREGORI KOLOSS
House of Water

An Umaran conservationist, Koloss is an ignoble researcher and expert in the field of xenobiology. He is erudite, thoughtful, and confident. Though liable to get lost in thought, he isn't afraid to get his hands dirty tending to his wards. His compound on Umara is a research and rehabilitation space for the xenofauna across the Orion Arm as well as the unique animal mutations found on Umara itself. It is loud, colorful, and smells strongly of animals.

- **Hook 1:** Poachers are using specially rigged mechs to hunt down rare xenofauna in one of Umara's blighted zones and Koloss wants them stopped.
- **Hook 2:** The Sparri have many legends about Ysengrin, the Greatfather, a legendary Vast, one of the titanic monsters that roam the surface of the frozen planet. It's rumored to have surfaced again, and Koloss wants the characters to track the old titan, gather data, and keep the creature safe from glory-seekers.
- **Hook 3:** One of Koloss's research teams has been captured by a rogue Free Company, the Amber Lions, who is holding them for ransom. The Free Company claims it is holding them for trespassing in territory held by the House of Glass, but it's clear to everyone that the situation is blatant extortion.
- **Optional Twist:** Midway through the mission, massive xenofauna attack out of fear, territoriality, or provocation.

LORD PARZIVAL VEBELLE
House of Glass

An old and retired but very famous pankrati, Lord Vebelle is large in body and personality, and has a jolly, avuncular manner. He takes the House Games very seriously and has dedicated his life to training kavalieres to compete and win for the honor of his house, by any means possible. He is a (mostly) honorable man in a field dominated by backstabbing.

- **Hook 1:** Lord Vebelle has discovered that the House of Smoke is cheating in the House Games by using an advanced machine mind to hack into the tournament systems and fix matches, paying off some of the judges in the process through making fixed bets. The mind is being kept in a reinforced planetside hangar that's guarded by automated defenses at night and is supposedly impregnable.
- **Hook 2:** Lord Vebelle's team for the for the upcoming off-season Games had such a poor record that they all quit, except for an overly enthusiastic rookie from the House of Stone named Flossie Powell. Lord Vebelle hires the characters to fill in as a substitute team and take Powell under their wing, in the hopes that she will learn that not all problems can be solved by swinging the biggest sword possible at them.
- **Hook 3:** Lord Vebelle's rival, Lord Chaunce Hoffrey of the House of Moments, has purportedly created the "perfect warriors", a team of volunteer super soldiers enhanced with genetic engineering. Lord Vebelle wants to hire the players to disprove this notion in a series of unofficial matches.
- **Optional Twist:** Lord Vebelle is assassinated mid-season by a rival, leaving the players to pick up the pieces and figure out the murder.
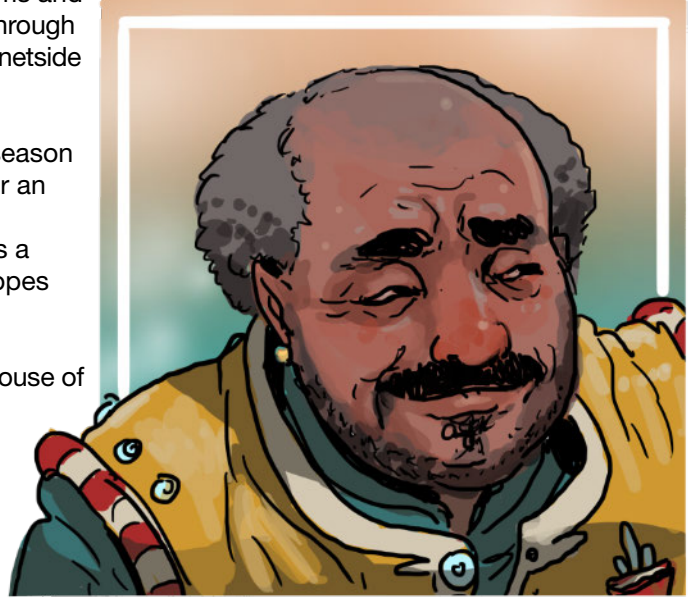
LORD KANTON GREAVE
House of Dust

Being from a Republican house, Lord Greave's title is in name only. They are a dour, almost comically humorless individual who tends to take everything a little too seriously. Lord Greave exclusively contacts the PCs through electronic systems (video screens, comms, etc.) and is hard to track down otherwise.

- **Hook 1:** A rogue mercenary group has taken over a large town near the border of the COMMENCER infestation on Bo and is purportedly harvesting the nanites to sell to hostile actors. Lord Greave wants them brought to justice.
- **Hook 2:** There are rumors of a cult starting in a distant House mining settlement near the edge of the Concern. The cult is centered around the miracles performed by the 'machine-speaker', an unmodified human who is said to be able to manipulate electronic systems with nothing but their own mind. Lord Greave hired a capable but somewhat naive lancer named Luna Aveline (callsign: BLUEMOON) to investigate, and has lost contact with her. They want the characters to investigate.
  - **Hook 3:** An old, partially intact shipyard in the COMMENCER zone has shown activity, and recently launched two vessels into orbit. When hailed, the ships give no response. Lord Greave wants these ghost ships investigated, and if necessary, their reactors recovered.
  - **Optional Twist:** The person the PCs have been dealing with is revealed to be a homunculus based on the actual Lord Greave, who died centuries before.
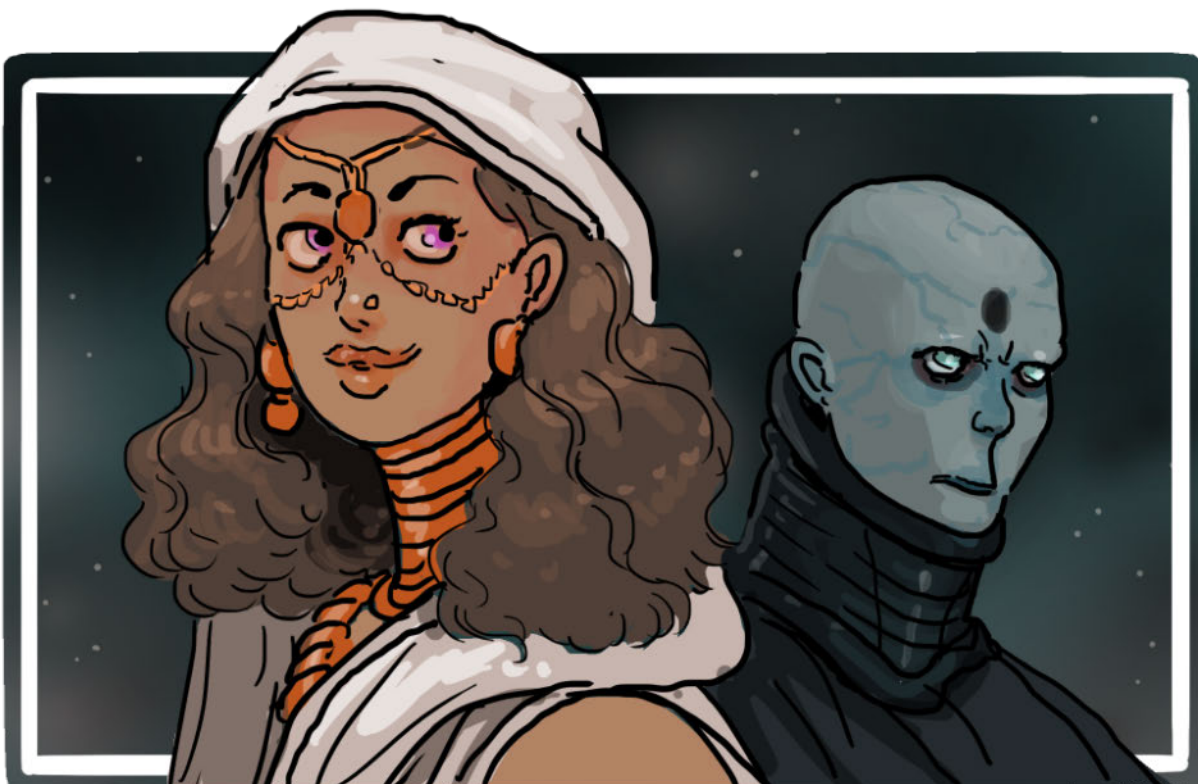
LADY LIZABETTA KILLIAN AND OUMO

House of Moments/The Xenoglossary

Lady Killian is a leader in genetic research for the House of Moments and a high fashion icon. Her penchant for self experimentation and modification means that her physical appearance is always changing whenever the PCs meet her. She has a bright, bubbly, and cheerful personality, in contrast to her companion, Oumo, who is a Stygos Grammaton, a warrior monk and mild precognitive. Oumo was tasked with a geas by the monastery to watch and protect the lady for reasons of the utmost importance, as her survival and success will drastically alter future events and (supposedly) prevent some sort of unseen cataclysm. Oumo, for their part, is constantly resentful of their task but seems to have a grudging friendship with the lady.

- **Hook 1:** Rogue elements from the House have stolen the PCs' DNA and made imperfect clones of them. Lady Killian wants them to capture the clones and bring the perpetrators to justice.
- **Hook 2:** Lady Killian accidentally cloned herself during a bout of self-experimentation. The clone became power mad and, using her ability to impersonate Lady Killian, has commandeered a significant proportion of the lady's house guard and absconded to space, where she has become a pirate. Lady Killian wants this public embarrassment dealt with.
- **Hook 3:** Oumo informs the characters that the monastery has determined that they will irreversibly alter and damage the timeline in the future and plans to have them eliminated. To prevent this, they ask the characters to travel deep into the canyons of Begum and visit an ancient and abandoned Stygos temple to undergo the trials there. Doing so will technically make them augurs, and therefore make them immune to action by the monastery and potentially change the timeline again.
- **Optional Twist:** The Lady Kilian the characters have been interacting with is a clone. Oumo realizes they have been guarding the wrong Lady Killian and must rush to prevent the real lady's death, with the PCs' aid.

FLASHPOINT:
THE SANJAK REVOLUTION

SANJAK, BEFORE COMMENCER

Ludra's World, a moon of Khayradin, was once a place divided by a sharp class binary. Nobles walked the marble yards of Ludra's executive plazas, enjoyed the rich fruits and sugar stalks of Ludra's cane fields, and spent the bulk of their time in active leisure. For the nobility of Ludra's World and Khayradin, Ludra's World was a paradise – its thick atmosphere, mild rainforests, and natural beauty made it a popular destination for vacationing nobles looking to relax from the hustle and bustle of Khayradin.

Of course, the surface of the world was an opal gem too perfect to be natural – which, indeed, it was not. Ludra's World was a successful prcoof-of-concept creation of the House of Stone's massive climate and terrain engineering project, COMMENCER. Prior to undergoing the process, Ludra's World was a spot-habitable moon named Sanjak. Rich in minerals rare on Khayradin, Sanjak had a healthy indigenous population scattered throughout the habitable craters and the wide network of subterranean environments, seeded during the height of the Last Argument.

The rights to Sanjak were sold by a consortium of the minor indigenous nobility around 2500u. The consortium families were promptly compensated and moved offworld as the House of Stone seeded COMMENCER throughout the atmosphere. Told it would not be an invasive process, the millions of ignobles and remaining minor nobles were kept supplied and told to move into their subterranean municipalities, as the terrestrial habitable zones of the world – long fissures, large craters, and ancient glacial valleys – would become the sites of significant catalytic terraforming.

Forced into the sealed subterranean passages and habitats under the barren surface and forced to survive the centuries of the COMMENCER process, the boundaries between noble and ignoble eventually broke down. First, the raw pressure of survival inside a closed system forced nobles and ignobles into proximity. Conflict followed. The survivors, depleted in number and spirit, came together in mutual aid; hostilities had significantly reduced the subterranean population – to survive, there had to be peace. Despite constant tightbeam contact with Khayradin, the population on Sanjak never received more than automated material aid – Khayradi communications were automated as well. The population on Sanjak was, essentially, left alone. Buried, but not forgotten.

COMMENCER proved far more effective than the House of Stone intended: it was a smashing success. The already habitable zones flourished as the world grew a thick, breathable atmosphere. Within decades of activation, the first recontact teams out from Khayradin settled the freshly cultivated land, marching out across the world's surface as COMMENCER converted the previously exposed areas of uninhabitable surface to livable plains, oceans, and lush forest. Sanjak, within centuries, was entirely habitable. The commander of the COMMENCER process – a descendant of the process's architect – Baron Évian Ludra, was gifted the world as his own. He renamed Sanjak after his house, resettled his family, and converted the planet to a lush, exclusive resort world. Sanjak became Ludra's World, a destination for the wealthy nobility of Khayradin, and an advertisement for the power of the COMMENCER terraforming platform.

LUDRA'S WORLD: PARADISE ABOVE

The rechristening of Sanjak to Ludra's World marked the end of the COMMENCER. Decades after initial settlement and the raising of a new generation of facsimile laborers, House Ludra commanded the subterranean municipalities be officially reopened – unofficially, trade among the ignoble classes, facsimile workforces, and subterranean populations had led to the growth of a burgeoning black market – and for reintegration and assimilation to begin.The noble classes following the COMMENCER process were deemed to have intermingled too much with the ignoble classes; Baron Ludra decreed that this breakdown of the social order implied abdication, and voided all claims of nobility with which they petitioned his court. Eager to rejoin the aboveground world, a paradise that was promised (and often spoken of by underground scouts and black-market smugglers who had secret ways to the surface), the Sanjak population welcomed the Ludrans into their home. A system of hard borders and checkpoints was set up, databases were established, and reintegration began.

The flow out of the subterranean municipalities was never more than a trickle, a far cry from the flow into the underground world. House Ludra maintained stiff limits on the number of immigrants out from Sanjak Underground. Save for a rarely utilized family reunification scheme[41] most Sanjak were forced to wait for

their numbers to be drawn at the weekly above-ground work visa lottery. Sanjak Underground quickly became a society oriented around two things: the Aboveground Lottery and breaking the Ludran containment via black market egress points. The smugglers – chasm-runners – were folk heroes: able to sneak small groups out of the Underground, outfit them with counterfeit papers secured from sympathetic Ludrans and assimilated Sanjak, and bring back all manner of aboveground goods for trade and sale, they were the focus of popular songs, media, and graffiti across the Underground.

No secret carried by people stays secret forever, though. Ludra's metrics and assimilation spot-checks began to detect discrepancies in their population databases. Accounting for some error, they determined that the well-known grey-to-black market must be the source of the "extra" people. To correct this, Ludran officials and security forces were sent into Sanjak Underground to "restore order" and "secure the border" between the underground world and Ludra's World.

Widespread unrest followed; House Ludra pointed to this unrest as reason for more security. Security operations probed deeper into Sanjak Underground, establishing checkpoints inside the subterranean territory. Smuggler tunnels were rooted out and sealed with concrete. The Ludrans declared martial law, and extended a peace offering – on their terms. The Sanjak would not be subject to the whims of the Lottery's fate, but would be able to work for House Ludra in exchange for assimilation credits, a point-type currency that they could spend for aboveground goods, or save to buy themselves a visa for aboveground work and, eventually, immigration. Accepting this deal and agreeing to stop the initial struggle cowed the Sanjak people for thousands of years; however, it also set the roots for the stronger, more militant, more unified resistance that would eventually spread across the world. The Sanjak, millions strong and contained to the warrens of Sanjak Underground, did as they and their ancestors had been forced to do for thousands of years under the Khayradi rule: they adapted, dug in, and kept the halls of Sanjak Underground alight with hope.

Meanwhile, Ludra's World – the mild tropical paradise above the ground – developed into one of the finest destination worlds in the Baronies. A common vacation spot for long-term constitutionals, the various resort-cities were frequented by Khayradi nobles looking for an escape from the bustling metro-polises of their homeworlds and members of the noble classes of other worlds looking to retire to a place of peace. They found that escape on Ludra's World, amidst its game parks and fantasy resorts, its orbital cruises and sprawling residency complexes.

Throughout the war years of the New Federation, the Interest War, the Deimos Event, and the eventual structuring of the modern Karrakin Trade Baronies, the Sanjak people labored for House Ludra. Most remained underground, a spare few managed to buy their freedom to labor aboveground at Ludra's many resort territories. Such an arrangement was common among the Baronies during the Second Committee's administration; despite its hands-on approach to galactic expansion, SecComm was not typically concerned with how states managed their own people.

With this tacit policy approval, Ludran security pushed deeper and deeper into Sanjak life. Year after year, Sanjak Underground's autonomous zones were assimilated into the security territory; year after year, more Sanjak people were assigned to work the deep mines that kept Ludra's World above rich with material wealth to sell to Khayradin. Resistance to the Ludran encroachment and exploitation of the world above was widespread, but organization was fractal and piecemeal. Records of pamphlets, minutes, and rallies indicate that hundreds of such resistance groups, from the mild to the militant, sprang up with each new announcement of the growth of the security territory. This created a feedback loop that served Ludra's interests: In response to protests against their administration, Ludra's security forces would enact harsh control measures, which would trigger widespread protests, which would prompt a strong Ludran response, which would trigger more widespread protests, an advancement of the Ludran security border, and so on.

The situation was sustainable for a time. Protests were large, but largely reactive, formed in response to provocation: the passage of an odious law, or shaky live media of security personnel beating a noncompliant citizen, and so on. There was no sustained, centralized, mass agitation in Sanjak that took proactive steps to counter Ludran aggression – yet. When it did come, it surged up from an even deeper source than Sanjak Underground: the mines of Lower Sanjak.

41 That is, if a noble from Sanjak Underground could prove relation to a Khayradi family and claim "Misplacement and/or Improper Voiding", they were moved to a priority reintegration track, their titles were reinstated, and they were given a voucher for travel back to Khayradin or resettlement on Ludra.

SECTION 4 // Karrakis Today

UP FROM BELOW

The mines of Lower Sanjak were the single most important source of raw material generation for House Ludra – while Ludra's World was known for its relaxing beaches, tropical climes, mild weather, and entertainment, the backbone of its industry (and manna generation) were the deep core mines of Lower Sanjak.

Before Ludra's World was Ludra's World, Sanjak was a resource vein for Khayradin. While a significant portion of the population lived the habitable zones aboveground and in the vast subterranean network of Sanjak Underground, the bulk of the work of mining took place in the deeper levels of the moon's crust – this was Lower Sanjak, a raw hive of mining tunnels and industry that circled the world, with a working population of millions that rotated between the municipalities of Sanjak Underground and the mines.

Worried about the further development of an organized resistance already evident in Sanjak, House Ludra began importing flash-facsimile workers to the Underground and assigning them to existing parties. Promised rewards along a different, shorter track than the indigenous Sanjak population, facsimile workers were motivated by Ludran officials to report individuals that worked to foment dissent and organize resistance. Their overt role as approved observers and privileged persons by Ludran Security ensured that Sanjak laborers would never share plans with or attempt to organize the facsimile workers into their resistance. This relationship – of exploited peoples pitted against each other, of malicious observation used as a management tool to ensure resource extraction, of material rewards used as temporary relief from longer suffering – continued for centuries. Alleviation would eventually come at the hands of an indigenous movement inspired by a pair of mythologized revolutions: the Second Committee's defeat by the Third, and the Republican conversion of the House of Water.

During the fall of the Second Committee and the rise of the Third, Anthrochauvinist SecComm elements present in Karrakin space even fought small-scale engagements against revolutionary ThirdComm agitators and their Baronic supporters across Karrakis. On Ludra's World, news of the Second Committee's fall was greeted with celebration: the Baronies never had a congenial relationship with Union, and to hear that its ruling body had fallen to violence and Cradle was in open revolt was less an ideological victory than it was simply a point to be gloated. Whatever committee would come next could would be treated much the same by the interplanetary nobility of the Baronies, but for the duration of the crisis, they could celebrate the poor fortune of their political rivals. Ludra's World, then, was a paradise of loose talk for revolutionary ears, and sympathetic aboveground laborers – those born to service in the crafted paradise, and those who had bought their freedom to work aboveground – gathered as much information as they could. No quarantine of people is perfect, and despite the hard border between Ludra's World and Sanjak Underground, news of ThirdComm's apparently successful revolution filtered to the people of Sanjak Underground and Lower.

An indigenous form of ThirdComm's anti-chauv ideology began to grow among the laborers, bedding a ripe kindling awaiting a spark. With clandestine support from the House of Water, the long-dormant culture of pamphleteering and mine-floor organizing began anew. The facsimile population, long an ally of Ludran Security, learned of ThirdComm's revolutionary prohibitions against facsimile- and flash clone exploitation: slowly, the younger generations began to drift from their parents' loyalist dogma. The Three Bars – a rough interpretation of ThirdComm's simple flag – began to appear, painted and papered onto the mineshaft walls of Lower and in the alleys of Sanjak Underground. House Ludra, in response, declared more material rewards and aboveground passes for those who reported anti-Baronic, pro-Union or Republican behavior. In a now-famous statement by the then–Baron Ludra following a particularly active protest, the population of Sanjak Underground – both the Sanjak people and their facsimiles – was decried as a "mass of lazy ungratefuls". The label took, but not in the way that House Ludra intended; the Three Bars of Union was replaced with sign: the Sanjak word for "bad guest", maltank, translated into Common as "ungrateful".

TYRANNOCLEAVE MASS FLYER #1 "TO YOU ABOVE"

TO YOU ABOVE: hello and greetings from the Pit, I address you as refuse does the one who cast it away: you created me, and I am no one's responsibility but yours (and yet, you exist inside of a system that produces this relationship — think on this!)

TO YOU ABOVE: LUDRA's maintenance of a system that REPRODUCES THIS BORDER is not a kindness: it is the same violence that has always been done to us.

TO YOU ABOVE: by stating which sky is "ours" to transit and "yours" to guard, you CREATE AND REPRODUCE THE CONDITIONS THAT CAST US DOWN and began this struggle in the first place.

TO YOU ABOVE: ask yourselves not why we throw ourselves against the guns of the crown and border: ask yourselves what you have done to make this martyr act necessary.

TO THE CROWN: we haven't forgotten what you did. god above (and us too) will be your judge.

SO TO CONCLUDE THIS LETTER, BUT NOT CLOSE THIS BOOK:

WE, THE UNGRATEFUL, SPIT ON THE HAND THAT FEEDS US BECAUSE IT IS NOT OUR OWN HAND, BUT THE HAND THAT STOLE OUR FOOD FROM US AND RETURNED WITH CRUMBS.

WE THE UNGRATEFULS WANT THE WEALTH OF OUR OWN WORLD, WHICH WE HAVE EXTRACTED BY OUR OWN HANDS.

WE THE UNGRATEFULS ASK YOU ABOVE: ARE WE NOT FREE PEOPLE TOO?

TO OTHERS JUST AS UNGRATEFUL AS WE: IT IS TIME WE STRUGGLE FOR A NEW ERA.

— TYRANNOCLEAVE, FOR A NEW ERA

FREE SANJAK

The revolution began in 4601u, at the end of a weeklong work stoppage in a single mine, which prompted a general strike throughout Sanjak Underground and sympathetic direct action aboveground on Ludra's World. It was not a planned action, but a sudden accumulation of many factors: a people hitting their limit, the drift of galactic politics under the new Third Committee, and the able preparation of militant Ungrateful cells prepared to catalyze the right situation.

The breaking point came during a work stoppage protest in Lower Sanjak. At the end of a long week of miners refusing to work and blocking access shafts to a rich vein, Ludran Security forces were brought in to break up the strike and escort work crews of flash clones past the picket; to break the strike, Ludran security forces simply opened fire, massacring the mine workers as they sat in their makeshift camp. Sanjak Underground burst into widespread protest, organized around a series of militant Ungrateful cells lead by a longtime agitator, a Sanjak-facsimile pamphleteer writing under the name Tyrannocleave.

Sanjak Underground roiled with protest, whole streets barricaded by the now-unified mix of Ungratefuls, Sanjak citizens, and facsimiles (whose people, too, had been killed in the massacre). Ludran security attempted to regain control by engaging the barricades directly

with live ammunition – they were met with return fire. Aboveground, a one-two punch hit Ludra's World: the Interest War had just concluded with the embarrassing defeat of the BUC, claiming the lives of many of House Ludra's best soldiers and its baron; as the world was mourning this loss, an aboveground Ungrateful cell attacked and held an island resort, declaring it to be under the control of "Free Sanjak."

House Ludra, leaderless, struggled to respond. Ludran Security forces underground were overwhelmed, their weapons and armor captured by the Ungratefuls, their logistics and information networks exposed for months until aboveground command shut them down. By the time they did, it was too late: the Ungratefuls had made contact with sympathetic offworld groups – various HORUS cells among them – and spread their story. The consequences were immediate: HORUS pattern groups were fabricated using Ludran Security printers and facilities, and the Kobold code, earlier used on Bo to great effect, was injected into civilian mining rigs, transforming them into weapons without the use of a printer. In response, Free Companies from Khayradin were sent to Ludra's World to evacuate the noble population and suppress the rebellion; diplomats on all sides opened channels to handle the crisis.

The revolution had begun.

EMBARGOLAND

Reinforcements arrived quickly. First was Karrakin Trunk Security (KTS), a newly formed Free Company outfitted by their investors with early GMS Everest chassis. KTS introduced themselves to Ludra's World violently, hard-landing on and around a number of resort-islands left vacant or minimally occupied during the initial evacuation scramble at the outbreak of the revolution. On paper, their task was simple: isolate the aboveground Ungrateful revolutionary groups, and establish and hold evacuation corridors for the resident and vacationing nobility.

The situation that KTS stepped into was more complex: House Ludra's security forces were scattered across hundreds of resort islands, broken into small, embattled groups surrounded by Sanjak revolutionaries. Ludra's World had been purpose-built by COMMENCER: each landmass had been shaped into a unique island, themed to various eras of Karrakin history and branded popular media franchises, utterly rewriting the geologic superstratum of the world into a fantasy playground for the nobles who wanted to vacation there. Each island had to be approached with fresh tactics, even if KTS's overall strategy remained the same.

KTS's commanders began an aggressive campaign, launching company-strength attacks against neighboring islands, laying into them at full strength regardless of Ungrateful presence. Their strategy was simple, a cold plan of blitz attacks meant to strike fear into the Sanjak peoples and reinforce Karrakin dominion through strength; peace negotiations were never on the table for Karrakin Trunk, a dictate from House Ludra, which hoped to end the revolution before it grew out of hand.

KTS's progress in the early days was fast, a consequence of good planning on the part of KTS's commanders – veterans of the Interest War who had spent time studying and adopting the Armory's rapid mech-assault tactics – and the ruthlessness of their tactics. Karrakin Trunk's conversion rate – that is, the number of hostages rescued or remains recovered versus hostages held – was an acceptable 0.7[42].

42 For every 10 hostages held, seven were recovered alive or at all. This was deemed an acceptable rate due to the general distaste for House Ludra among the Khayradi nobility and in the Baronies at large.

TYRANNOCLEAVE MASS FLYER #7 "TO YOU ABOVE"

TO YOU ABOVE: Ludra Security will show you the weapons and drugs they recover from our dead at the border. They will say "look, we had to do this, because they bring pistols and rifles and tools of violence into our Paradise Above. They bring drugs also, and poison our children. It is correct and FOR YOUR SAFETY – that we shoot these border-crossers."

Think on these questions whenever you see these stories on the news:

* Why do these Sanjak bring guns above and not use them to defend themselves?
* Why do these Sanjak bring drugs above instead of keeping them for themselves?
* Why would Ludra want us to see this?
* Why would these poor dead Sanjak do this?

Here is why:

* Because you want these guns.
* Because you want these drugs.
* Because Ludra wants you to fear us and not examine your own complicity in our immiseration.
* Because dying to bring you guns and drugs is better than living down here.

TO YOU ABOVE: Question why there needs to be a border. Question what it does to us and what it does to you. Question who is doing violence to whom: is it the poor dead boys who try to bring you the things you want, or is it the border-keepers who draw lines over our land, build their walls, deny us jobs, deny us trade, and then shoot our boys who try to cross that line.

TO YOU ABOVE: WHAT DOES THE BORDER DO FOR YOU BUT DEMAND BLOOD TO SATISFY ITS EXISTENCE. WHAT DOES THE BORDER DO FOR YOU BUT MAKE YOU AFRAID.

TO YOU ABOVE: THE BORDER IS COMING FOR YOU TOO.

— TYRANNOCLEAVE, FOR A NEW ERA
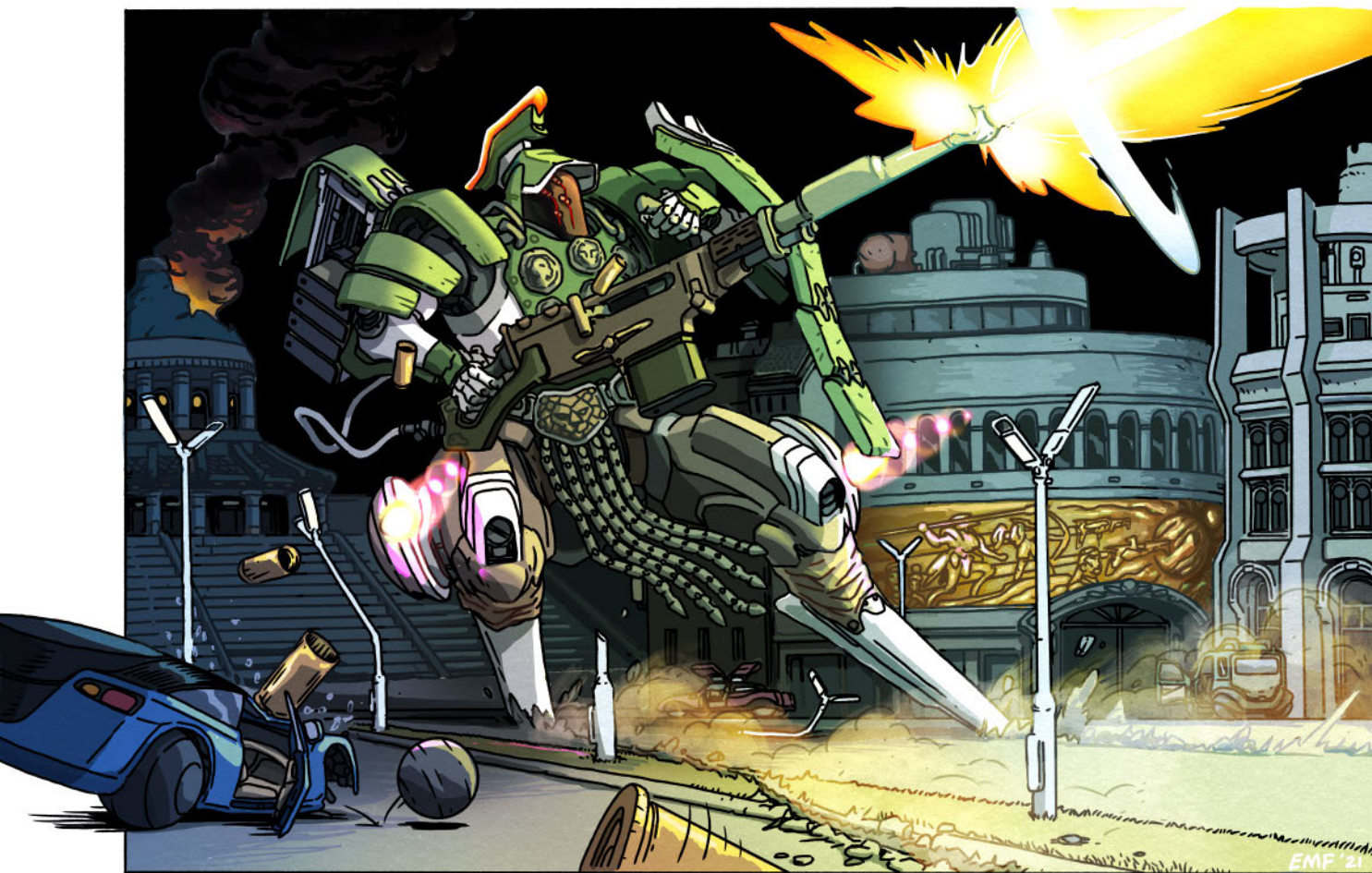
KTS's troops performed well; however, in the face of stiff guerilla resistance, they could not convert islands fast enough. Tyrannocleave's Ungratefuls held core supply islands where Ludran Security forces had, prior to the revolution, significant presence – with a steady stream of House Ludra's captured arms and armor and numbers on their side, there proved simply too many Ungratefuls for KTS to manage.

The presence of unique chassis created by HORUS liturgicode also proved far too unconventional for KTS to handle. Heavy and sometimes questionable aid from illegal or black site omninet uplinks poured into the area, unable to be stifled through official Union channels.Though occasionally unstable or ineffective, the ability of the Ungratefuls to create Kobolds by injecting nothing but raw code into most mining and heavy industry mechs gave them an insurmountable advantage as the conflict dragged on.

The conflict deepened. The BUC, leery of committing too many forces to Ludra's World on account of ongoing Union-mediated negotiations between the Baronies and Harrison Armory, hired more Free Companies to relieve the battered Karrakin Trunk Security; House Ludra was, at this point, a non-entity, having utterly failed to hold its own ground. Ludra's

World was theirs in name only: soon enough, ships from the Maw[43] Free Company burned towards Ludra's World from nearby Khayradin, and the House of Stone issued a blanket embargo and blockade of Ludra's World. The walls – communication, supply, and information – went up, isolating the once-para-disial moon behind a total-spectrum embargo.

THE WALLS

The revolution ended with the conclusion of the Baronic–Armory peace negotiations; Union's Third Committee was able to mediate a ceasefire between Sanjak and the Baronies' more conservative houses that ensured a complete withdrawal of House Ludra's forces, recognition of the revolutionaries' demands for independence, and repatriation of many of House Ludra's material goods. The Ungratefuls renamed Ludra's World the Free Sanjak Commune and assumed administration.

43 Pre-decorp.

In the current day, the embargo continues, enforced viciously by the House of Stone. The Ungratefuls hold sway over most of the world, governing with continuing, though tenuous, popular support, and making the best of the limited resources available to them. Life is anything but quiet. Shortages of food, medicine, and supplies have caused untold suffering and instability in the cities on the surface, with the powerful house companies of the House of Stone shooting down blockade-runners on sight.

Union treads with the lightest touch possible, and negotiations have stalled in core space, where communications and realtime transit of ambassadors have taken decades in subjective time. The Baronic Council and the Prime Baron, with their focus on the Dawnline Shore, seem unwilling to put any serious pressure on the situation for danger of causing the conflict to boil over into Hagiographic fervor that could splinter the Baronies into a greater internal conflict. The House of Stone, with its military might, keeps a tight grip on the situation. On Khayradin, the civilian population is forbidden from even observing the moon through telescopes – for the duration of the revolution, when Ludra's World was in Khayradi sky, the planet's officials ordered all cities to implement nightfall curfews.

Unofficial channels are, of course, hard at work. The House of Sand runs an aggressive anti-Sanjak propaganda campaign and pulls its strings in the council, suppressing any news coming off the planet and buying off ignoble and noble functionaries alike with luxuries, bribes, and access. In Union space, the UIB clandestinely runs funding, support, and supplies to groups that will help "leverage" the situation and break the impasse. Numerous other sympathetic groups, including the Houses of Water and Dust and many individual HORUS cells, run operations, sending in relief and slipping through holes in the blockade.

THE SAPPERS

The House of Stone is dominant, and growing stronger, but resistance grows on the other side of the blockade as well. The situation is ripe for PCs to intervene – either on their own, or as part of a clandestine mission. Without them, the situation will curdle, and the walls will grow stronger. With their action, the walls can be broken.

What will they do? How will they break the blockade, and finally bring the open sky back to Sanjak?

HOOKS

- A not-so-subtle UIB agent hires the PCs to run an enormous shipment of medicine down to the planet, and then to a specific island. The medicine has to be kept extremely cold and requires specialized storage.
- A hotshot freighter pilot needs the PCs' help running the blockade. It's dangerous and exhausting work.
- An Ungrateful partisan from a secretive cell called ORPHANAGE contacts the PCs. There's a situation – a group of commandos from the House of Stone has secretly landed planetside and is preparing some sort of extraction operation. Whatever they are there for, be it weapons or information, the Ungratefuls can't let it slip away.
- An Albatross makteba contacts the players via omni uplink. They have an experimental omninet node they need run down to the surface and installed that will greatly expand the access to the ominet for Free Sanjak, allowing information and supplies to make it through. The node is enormous, however, and needs to be transported via mech.
- An urgent missive finds the PCs from an Ungrateful strike team called ASYLUM. They have good information on the current location of a war hero and commander from the House of Stone, Herakus Odian, a man who is famous for public executions of blockade runners. They want the PCs to aid in capturing him in order to exchange for for the release of dozens of rebel pilots held by the House for execution. Odian, somewhat problematically, currently resides in a highly secure palatial complex on a mountainside on Kharyadin and the strike will not go unnoticed.
- An individual named '_dog' contacts the PCs via their terminals. They give them a key, which they promise will completely fry all the weapon systems in all Baronic ships in high orbit, allowing complete lifting of the blockade for a week or more. The problem is, it will need to get manually uploaded to the capital ship of the Karrakin Trunk Security fleet.
- The House of Order contacts the PCs. They've received good intelligence that disgraced former nobles of House Ludra have recovered and reactivated an enormous arsenal of SecComm-era nuclear weapons, and are building the capability to unleash them in the general vicinity of Sanjak – blockade and all – from a distant moon base. They want the PCs to intervene before this information becomes public.

TYRANNOCLEAVE MASS FLYER #???? "AND WHEN IT IS ALL DONE"

Today it is quite grey on Free Sanjak. There is a rain in the mountains, which Tyrannocleave may be able to see from their home (you all would like if I gave myself a gender or a location for your spies and killers to hunt me by, correct? Haha! Foiled again). The mist is quite fine, and the sun will not burn it away. It is like us, this mist: weak alone, but when that terrible eye is so far away, and we are together, we have hope.

Yes, for the first time in a long time, we have hope. Sanjak, she is not free just yet (not from you or Union, who is a larger and more complex beast than you, because they try to do good but what good is doing good when doing good by all means the poorest must suffer?) but she has wrapped her fists in good rags and walloped you above a bloody nose and sent your fighters and killers running. Her people are not yet free, but we can now see the rain on the mountains when before we could only see the dark of the mines.

Tyrannocleave sighs and looks up from their little desk. You know what — I think I will have a smoke. Come and walk with me among the people and let us see our new world:

Up here we don't spoil. There are children in the streets but they are laughing, and having their hair tended to, and learning from our comrades the necessaries (maths and words to be sure) but also how to paint, and how to sing. Imagine! You! Imagine! Seeing one of our children painting, or singing, or laughing as they play — we should all aspire to be so unproductive, and to make you above so mad.

The homes you left empty for real estate speculators and investors and developers are filled now, and mothers cook good meals in them. Their walls echo with laughter and song. The mines are closed — we make for use, and have no use for them.

This is the final blow we have dealt you, Lords and Kings and Barons: we broke your machines and your mines and threw off your fetters and then went for a walk, had a coffee, shared a cigarette with a friend, and then went for a nap. And the world didn't end!

Now I am going to go and watch the rain for a little while.

Some thanks, from the new era:

To the rebel fighters and those who kept them fed and hidden, our thanks.

To the propagandists and the agitators, our thanks.

To every child, our thanks.

To every space captain who ran the blockade, our thanks.

To every laborer and slave, you have our promise: one day, the new era will come for you too.

— Tyrannocleave, who may have died or may have lived or may never have lived or may live forever (if you know you know!)
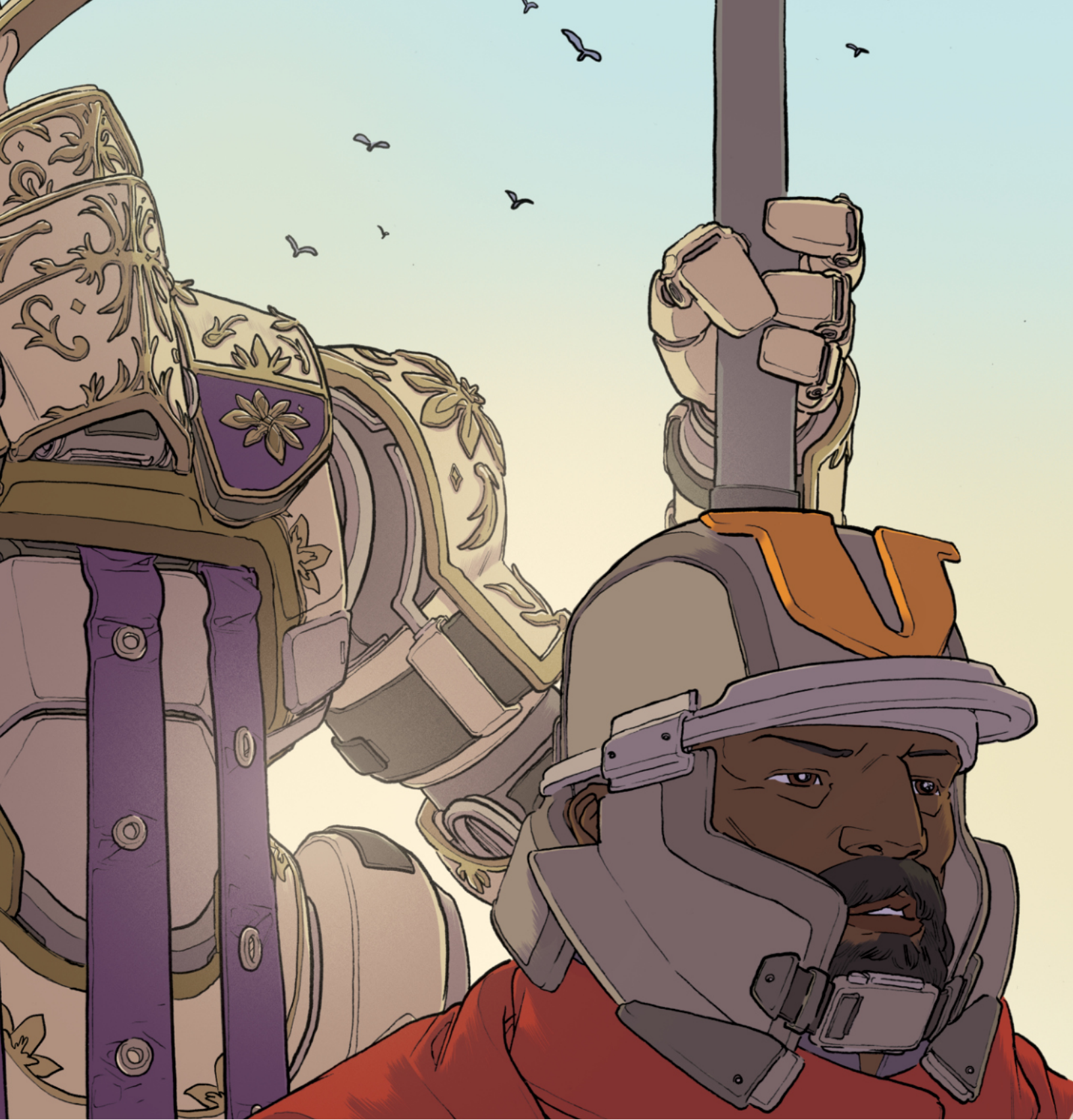
PSPS: we have talked at length with some of those young Union boys from the New Solidarity. They seem like they have their hearts in the revolution but if one were to place a rifle in their hand who knows who they would shoot first. Send the good ones to us (and have them bring some smokes!) we will train them smart and teach them who to shoot first.

NEW RULES

BONDS

The **bond** system presented here is an optional set of **narrative play** rules that layer on top of the basic *Lancer* narrative play rules, tweak some of them, and add a little more depth and nuance. *Lancer*'s default narrative rules are very light to keep the focus on mech combat and to provide a flexible and familiar framework for GMs to work with. The bond systems give players some additional progression, powers that give them more narrative agency, an easier way to track tasks and challenges, and an experience system to incentivize role-playing.

You can use this system in games where you want players to shine a little more in narrative sections and when you want to flesh out the parts of the game that take place between tactical combat. Bonds are only used in narrative play and none of their rules are applicable to mech combat.

BOUND AND SEALED

When a *Lancer* character hits **LL1**, they can gain a **bond** – a character archetype, essentially, that allows them to gain certain powers by playing to archetype. A bond represents something the character is bonded to, either literally or metaphorically. It might be an actual oath they swore, the expression of their background or who they are as a person, or a commitment to certain principles, people, or a way of life.

A bond gives characters a **bond sheet**, a narrative character sheet. Each sheet has a different bond archetype that gives them additional powers that offer them more narrative agency. There's no downside to having a bond, so they should be available to all LL1 characters if included in a game.

Using the rules for bonds, PCs still have **backgrounds** (that they can invoke for accuracy or difficulty) and **triggers**, but (along with bonds themselves) three simple concepts are added to the game: **experience**, **clocks**, and **stress**.

EXPERIENCE

Experience is very simple. In certain situations, PCs gain **experience points (XP)**, up to a maximum of **8 XP**, representing improvement in their capabilities over time. PCs mostly gain **XP** from living up to their ideals – narrative triggers associated with their bond – but they can also gain it from other sources. When a PC hits **8 XP**, they clear all of their **XP** and gain a new **bond power** during their next **downtime** period. Bond powers are special abilities that can be used in narrative play.

CLOCKS

Clocks are a simple method for abstracting the progress of challenges in *Lancer* (and other role-playing games, like Meguey and Vincent Baker's *Apocalypse World* and John Harper's *Blades in the Dark*, from which they're borrowed). They are also used in *Lancer's* narrative campaign, *No Room for a Wallflower*.

When you have a clear challenge or goal, you can set out a clock with an even number of segments (typically 4, 8, or 12). You can draw out an actual clock (a circle split into segments), use a tracker of some sort, or simply tick off check marks if you like. The longer the clock, the more complicated or challenging the task or challenge will be to complete. Give the clock a name based on the challenge or goal, not necessarily the method that's being used to complete it. For example, you might have a clock that says "negotiations", "deliver the cargo", or "escape the mercenaries".

You don't have to create clocks for every goal. Simple or straightforward tasks that can be completed in one roll don't need a clock. Set out a clock if the task is going to take more time, energy, or coordination than normal.

When a PC takes an action that relates to a clock and their action is successful or effective (usually a result of **10–19**), fill in two segments. If the action was very effective (usually a result of **20+**), fill in three segments. If they fail or the action was ineffective (usually a result of **0–9**), fill in either one segment or none. A good way to ensure that a situation stays dynamic is to tick one segment even on a failure, but you don't necessarily have to do so. When the clock fills up, the goal, outcome, or challenge it represents is achieved, comes true, or is overcome.

Clocks abstract out whole tasks, scenes, or series of events, even those that involve armed conflict. If the PCs get into fight a bunch of mercenaries, don't play it out like a turn-based combat. Instead, decide what the goal is for the scene (e.g., defeat the mercenaries, get them to stand down, or flee from them), decide how tough of a goal that is going to be, then set out a clock, filling in segments with each roll.

PILOT GEAR AND BONDS

Using the bond rules (along with clocks, etc.) replaces the concept of pilot hit points, speed, defense damage, and gear in narrative play as described in *Lancer*, except when determining the effect of actions. You don't need to track pilot stats using this system at all, unless you're in mech combat.

Any action can contribute to the clock, but the GM gets to decide how effective actions are. For example, trying to intimidate the hard-bitten mayor of a frontier town might be ineffective (ticking one or no segments on a success), no matter how high the player rolls.

By default, actions are **effective** (two segments) on a **10–19**, **ineffective** (one or zero segments) on a **0–9**, and **very effective** (three segments) on a **20+**. The GM can adjust this up or down based on the situation, based on the PC's approach, the trigger they're using, their background, or their gear and reserves. For example, the PCs are rolling to survive a grueling wilderness trek through a frozen tundra. The GM might decide their attempts to find a safe trail are more effective if one of them has survival gear, warm clothing, supplies, a map of the area, or a relevant background (e.g., they were a hunter or survivalist).

If an action has **increased effect** (usually because of a bond power), tick one more segment than usual. An action can only gain increased effect once. Similarly, if an action has less effect, tick one less segment than normal.

The GM might rule that an action has **no effect**. This is usually pretty self-explanatory. For example, trying to talk down one of the Vast, the colossal predatory megafauna native to Sparr, is probably not going to have any effect, no matter how good your character is at talking. That said, GMs can adjudicate this based on the tone of the campaign. Perhaps someone can talk down a giant monster in your campaign – it's up to you.

Using clocks to represent complicated tasks ensures you're only rolling when there's persistent narrative tension, constrains the number of rolls made for any given task, and creates clear parameters for success. It allows the story to progress and means you don't have to waste time lingering on tasks that would otherwise require a lot of rolls, speeding up play dramatically. You can use clocks and **skill challenges** (*Lancer*, p. 47) to move quickly through narrative scenes.

PILOT GEAR AND CLOCKS
When using clocks, pilot weapons, gear, or armor can help decide how effective an action is going to be. Trying to take down a distant target with a weapon that's meant for close range combat probably won't be very effective. Similarly, there are many situations in which trying to take someone down bare-handed might not be the wisest course of action (unless you have powered armor or a background in martial arts, of course).

PROJECT CLOCKS
Clocks can also be used to track progress on long-term projects, especially the kind that characters might try to work on during downtime with actions like **Get Organized** or **Get Creative**.

PROGRESS CLOCKS
You can also use clocks to track the status or time pressure of larger, ongoing situations in the world or your campaign, such as a war, the political influence of factions, or an assassination plot. These progress clocks tend to move independent of PC action. Fill in segments of these clocks when the story or campaign moves forward. A good time to do this is after a period of downtime. When ticking these clocks, tick one segment if the situation progressed a little, two if it progressed as normal, and three if there was great progress. For example, if you have a clock tracking the progress of a war and it's drawing to a close, you might tick three segments on that clock at the end of downtime.

FAILURE STATES
You can also create clocks that fill up as a result of failures, rather than successes, establishing fail states for situations. These clocks get filled in as consequences of failed rolls or complications of **RISKY** or **HEROIC** rolls. For example, if a group of PCs were trying to flee from a band of mercenaries, you might set out two clocks: one that represents the PCs' safe escape and one that represents the mercenaries catching up to them and forcing a fight. The **Escape** clock fills up when PCs successfully put some distance between them and their pursuers, while the **Capture** clock fills up when they either fail those actions or have to make trade-offs. You might fill in two segments whenever a PC fails a roll and fill in a single segment if they succeed on a **RISKY** roll. Failing a **HEROIC** roll might fill in three segments.

STRESS

The final concept added to narrative play when using bonds is **Stress**. **Stress** represents wear and tear experienced by pilots, both physical and mental. It is tracked using an eight-segment clock. Each time a PC takes **Stress**, their player fills in a number of segments equal to the amount of **Stress** taken. When the clock fills up and a character would take **Stress** again, that character is overwhelmed or hurt and become **broken**. A character that becomes **broken** takes some long term harm, called a **burden**, and is out of the scene for a short while.

In narrative play, **Stress** replaces the concept of **damage** completely. The stress clock replaces pilots' **HP** and **Armor** statistics when not in mech combat.

Stress represents not only physical harm, but also exhaustion, fatigue, mental or emotional suffering, and so on. As such, PCs can take stress in a range of situations, including ones that aren't violent or physically dangerous (e.g., social situations, gathering information, etc).

TAKING STRESS

When a PC takes an action that could have harmful consequences, the GM tells their player how much **Stress** they could take on a failed or **Risky** roll (in *Lancer*, PCs take consequences on **Risky** and **Heroic** rolls even when they succeed): they take **1 Stress** for minor consequences, **2 Stress** for typical consequences, and **4 Stress** for major consequences.

Typical consequences are the sort of injuries, exhaustion, and harm that you might expect from dangerous, charged, or stressful situations. Examples include flesh wounds, being beaten up, going a night without sleep, going hungry, or being overworked. **Minor consequences** are less dramatic versions of these, like tiredness, minor injuries and bruises, etc.

Major consequences are more severe sorts of harm – direct hits from enemy guns without armor on, hits from heavy weapons, serious deprivation, days without rest, exposure to the elements, and brutal beatings.

PCs shouldn't take **Stress** on every failed or complicated roll, just the ones where harm has been established as a consequence (i.e., dangerous, violent, or stressful situations). **Stress** should never be inflicted for rolls that don't have any direct consequences, such as downtime actions or gathering information.

Much like **HP**, **Stress** doesn't always represent direct bodily harm, but usually the energy and exhaustion inflicted for avoiding it. For example, Ignacio rolls to sneak past some guards. The GM tells Ignacio that if the guards spot him, they'll shoot on sight. Ignacio fails the roll, and they shoot at him, dealing him **2 Stress**. It doesn't matter (in narrative terms) whether they actually hit him or not, just that he takes **Stress**.

Characters can take **Stress** in situations where direct physical harm might not even be possible, such as charged social situations and during intense physical exertion. For example:

*A PC is tracking an assassin through the wilderness. They roll a mixed success on a **Risky** roll and are able to follow the assassin's trail, but push themself hard to keep up, tiring them out and taking **1 Stress**.*

*Some PCs are trying to get the local trade representative to lift a harmful trade embargo that's leaving thousands starving. They fail and take **2 Stress** from the mentally and emotionally taxing effort.*

PUSH

In narrative play, PCs can **push themselves** on any skill check by taking **1 Stress**, gaining **+1 Accuracy** to the check. They can also push themselves to help an allied character the same way, taking **1 Stress** and adding **+1 Accuracy** to that person's roll, as long as it makes sense within the fiction. Anyone helping on a roll also takes consequences or complications as a result of that roll. This replaces the rules for helping other characters on skill checks in *Lancer*.

PCs can also push failed non-risky rolls into **Risky** rolls (see *Lancer*, p. 45) at the cost of **1 Stress**.

HEALING STRESS

At the start of downtime, each PC clears **5 Stress**, but clears **1** less **Stress** for each **burden** they have (so a PC with **2 burdens** only clears **3 Stress**). **Breaking** also causes a PC to clear all **Stress**.

BREAKING

If a PC is at their maximum STRESS (typically **8 STRESS**) and they take STRESS again, they break. They are too hurt, too overwhelmed, or too consumed by their emotions to continue. They clear all STRESS, but are narratively removed from the scene, either incapacitated, unconscious, or out of control. They return at the start of the next scene and gain a **burden**.

In narrative play, breaking replaces the concept of DOWN AND OUT from *Lancer* (p. 49). Characters can still go DOWN AND OUT in mech combat.

EVERYONE IS BROKEN

If, in the rare case, all PCs break during a scene, they are **defeated** (as if they had all gone DOWN AND OUT). The GM moves the narrative to a new scene and determines what happens to them, depending on the tone of the campaign. Heroic characters in fiction rarely die ignominiously, but often barely escape. If you're out of ideas, consider ways the PCs might be captured or badly injured but still escape with their lives.

BURDENS

A **burden** represents long-term harm to a PC, either physical or mental. They can only be received by breaking. The nature of the burden depends, narratively, on what happened that made the PC break. It could be a lasting injury, persistent stress, or even harmful emotions that need to get sorted out. Whatever it is, the player writes it down under one of the three **burden clocks** on their **bond sheet**.

Sleep Deprived   Broken arm   _____
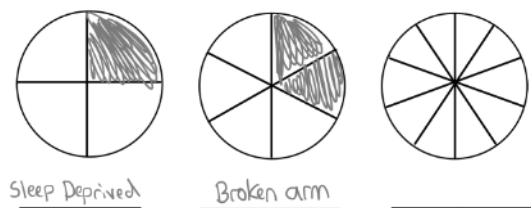
The bond sheet has spaces for three burdens: **two minor burdens** and **one major burden**. **Minor burdens** have 4 and 6 segments, the **major burden** has 10. When gaining a new burden, the player can pick any of these.

When a PC makes a skill check, their player can invoke a relevant burden to gain **+1 DIFFICULTY** on the roll. For example, a player whose character has a "broken leg" burden can invoke it when they are attempting a difficult climb. Players who do this at least once during a session gain **+1 XP** at the end.

MAXIMUM BURDENS

PCs with three burdens can still break, but they don't gain any new burdens. These breaks are especially bad. Not only is the PC taken out of the scene, but instead of clearing all STRESS, they only clear **2 STRESS**. On top of this, the break is harmful to everyone else present, inflicting **1 STRESS** on each PC present, potentially causing them to break, too.

HEALING BURDENS

At the start of downtime, every character (simultaneously) gets a special free **downtime action**: **Heal Burdens**. Each player chooses a method for healing, then rolls a skill check, filling in 1–3 segments on a burden of their choice (depending on the result). A result of 1–9 fills in one segment, 10–19 fills in two, and 20+ fills in three.

If you like, you can play out a scene showing how the characters are working on lifting their burdens. A method for healing could be anything that helps your character relieve stress, unwind, or (literally) heal their wounds. It could be spending time at the ship clinic, or at the bar. It could be journalling alone, sparring in the gym, tuning up your mech to blow off steam, or barbecuing with the base crew.

When a burden's clock is filled up, it's lifted and the PC is free from it, gaining **1–2 XP**, depending on the length of the clock.

PCs can forgo their own healing to help someone else with theirs. If they do so, they don't get the free action to heal burdens, but the character they are helping fills in an additional segment of their burden clock. A PC can only benefit from the assistance of one other character at a time.

CHOOSING BONDS

Characters can only pick one bond at a time. Doing so grants them all of that bond's **major ideals**, one of its **bond powers** and allows them to choose one of its **minor ideals** each session.

IDEALS

Major and minor ideals are triggers that reward players for roleplaying. At the end of each session, go round the table, with each player checking off **1 XP** for each major or minor ideal condition they fulfilled at least once. PCs only tick **1 XP** for each bond condition fulfilled, even if it was fulfilled multiple times.

Major ideals are easier to fulfill, and are similar for all characters. All bonds have the major ideal, "Struggled with issues from my burdens or back-ground", which can be fulfilled easily by PCs invoking their burdens or backgrounds to give them **Difficulty** on their rolls. Characters may change their **minor ideals around at the start of any session**, allowing them to set their own goals.

BOND POWERS

When a PC first gains a bond, they can choose one bond power from their archetype. Thereafter, once they reach **8 XP**, they clear all **XP** and gain a new **bond power** at any point during the next downtime.

Bond powers can only be used in narrative play, not in mech combat, and are unique to each archetype. They give PCs powerful narrative abilities. Unless specified, the effects of all bond powers end at the end of the scene in which they are used.

SWAPPING OUT POWERS

When a PC increases their **LL**, they can swap one bond power out for another for which they qualify.

SWAPPING BONDS

PCs can also choose to swap bonds entirely any time they increase their LL. Each time they do so, however, they lose all bond powers except for one of their choice, which they can keep and carry over to their next bond.

BOND POWERS AT DIFFERENT LICENSE LEVELS

If your GM is starting a game at a different license level from **LL1**, PCs start with **one** bond power at **LL2–4**, **three** at **LL 5–9**, and **five** at **LL 10+**.

FLAVORING BOND POWERS

You can flavor powers in whatever way works best for the tone of your campaign. For example, it might make more sense for them to be the effects of unique gear, special technology, training, or supernatural ability. Some bond powers verge on the weird but can easily be fluffed as technological advantages.

BOND QUESTIONS

Each bond includes some questions to answer about PCs who take them. Players can either choose answers from the list or write their own.

THE HARLEQUIN

MAJOR IDEALS

I addressed challenges with cunning, subterfuge, or deceit.

I expressed my heritage, background, or beliefs through my actions.

I struggled with issues from my burdens or background.

MINOR IDEALS
(PICK ONE EACH SESSION)

I struggled against or humiliated the powerful.

I pretended to be someone else for a time.

I charmed my way out of a charged situation.

I obtained a guarded, hidden, or secret object or piece of information.

What gives you your powers?
A high-tech stealth rig, a tattered patchwork of a cape stuffed with magician's trinkets, years of streetwise swindling, a deal you once made in a dream

What weird quirks do you have?
(Choose one and swap during downtime if you wish)

- You can change your eye color, your hair color, and your height by up to 3 inches in either direction.
- You weigh almost nothing if you choose not to. You sometimes float an inch off the ground.
- You can swap your clothing's coloration, material, fit, cut, and type completely when you enter any scene.

BOND POWERS (8 XP)

MASQUERADE
You can always tell if someone is lying, though you don't know the exact nature or extent of their lie.

RIDI PAGLIACCI
Every session, you can invoke your burdens once each for **+1 Accuracy** to any roll.

GALLOWS HUMOR
If you **break** during a session, all other characters clear **2 Stress**.

MOCKINGBIRD
You can mimic voices and sounds you've heard in the last day or so almost perfectly, granting your actions **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect where this is relevant.

SLIP (2/SESSION)
You can instantly disappear from sight and reappear somewhere within ten meters or so. You don't have to be able to see where you are going.

FAST FRIENDS
When someone can hear and understand you, you can make them friendly to you for a minute. They'll let you into areas, vouch for you, do small favors for you, and so on. Social rolls against them gain **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect. After a minute, they realize they were manipulated and it won't work on them again in the same session. This power only works on one person at a time.

SPECTACULAR FLOURISH
When you roll **20+** on any skill check, you amaze everyone present with your skill and daring. Anyone watching is stunned momentarily, granting **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect to the next action you or another PC takes in the same scene.

MERCURIAL (1/SESSION)
If nobody else is looking, you can completely change your physical appearance, looking and sounding like an entirely new person (height, weight, build, hair/clothes, and gender). Whether this physically changes you or is an illusory effect created by visual trickery is up to you. If you're trying to impersonate someone else, your disguise holds up perfectly unless someone knows that person intimately, and even then you get **+1 Accuracy** on all skill checks to keep the disguise up. You're stuck in this form until you next eat or drink.

EXEUNT
When you and your allies need to escape a bad situation right away, name your escape route and what you're taking with you. There's no roll required, and you always escape, but the GM chooses one:

- You leave something behind (a weapon, a friend, evidence).
- You end up somewhere perilous or uncomfortable (a garbage chute, a cliff side, a seedy bar).
- You pick something up on your way out (a hanger-on, pursuers, **Stress**).
- You can back out when you learn the cost and name another escape route (the GM might answer differently depending on how you phrase things).

QUICKFINGERS (1/SESSION)
Name a visible nearby object that you could fit or carry in one or both hands. By the start of the next scene, you have possession of it. If you stole it, the person you stole it from will find out within the hour.

VETERAN POWER

If you have two or more powers from this bond, you can choose a power from any other bond instead of one from this bond when you would gain a power. You can do this twice.

If you have at least one veteran power, gain the **Boon of Chaos:** At the end of the session, if there was a particularly funny or chaotic moment or scene, describe it. Give someone who was part of the fun or chaos **1 XP**.

MASTER POWER

You may only gain this power If you've taken four powers from this bond, including the **Veteran Power**.

Silvertongue (1/session): Tell a lie to someone. If it's wild and outlandish, anyone who listens wholeheartedly believes it for a minute. If it's merely unbelievable, an hour. If it's plausible, a day. If they want to believe it, a week. They realize it was a lie after the effect wears off.

THE TITAN

MAJOR IDEALS

I addressed challenges with strength, leadership, or force.

I expressed my heritage, background, or beliefs through my actions.

I struggled with issues from my burdens or background.

MINOR IDEALS
(PICK ONE EACH SESSION)

I protected someone weaker than myself.

I led from the front.

I won a competition, friendly or otherwise.

I took harm, blame, penance, or burden for someone else.

What gives you your powers?
A voice and heart of iron, passed down from your mentor; cybernetic augmentation, laced through your limbs; years of training, sweat, blood, and discipline.

What weapons do you wield?
My own flesh and sinews, a hereditary blade, a carefully curated arsenal, a thick and heavy shield, a battered old rifle.

BOND POWERS (8 XP)

TRUE GRIT
The first time in a session you break due to **Stress**, you don't lose control and can still act for the rest of the scene without hindrance.

NOTHING TO FUCK WITH
If anyone causes one of your allies to take **Stress** in your presence, take **+1 Accuracy** on all actions against that person for the rest of the session.

NERVE
The first time you take any amount of **Stress** in a session, ignore it.

IRONJAW
Increase your maximum **Stress** by 1.

HAMMERHAND
When you use your fists to solve a problem, you roll with **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect.

THE WALL
If you stand in defense of another person, they cannot take **Stress** while you are still conscious and you remain within arm's reach. Instead, you take **Stress** each time they would take stress. You can't take any action or concentrate on anything else while defending someone.

FORCE OF WILL (1/SESSION)
Command someone to flee, stop and drop what they're holding, or come to you. They must do so. If the GM decides they are too strong-willed for this to work on them, regain your use of this ability and clear **1 Stress**.

ABSOLUTE MEAT
If you concentrate and grit your teeth, your personal strength verges on superhuman. You can take **2 Stress** and roll a skill check to do one of the following:

- bust through a wall, door, or floor, even reinforced, with nothing but your body
- lift, push, or drag a vehicle, mech, or other tremendous weight a short distance
- withstand forces far beyond the human body such as gale force winds, a mech's strength, or the pull of the void.

Your action has increased effect if successful.

HALF LIGHT
When you enter a charged or tense scene, you may ask the GM one of both of the following and receive a truthful answer:

- Who's really in charge here?
- What's the biggest danger here?

You or an ally of your choice gets **+1 Accuracy** on their next skill check acting on the answer.

STRENGTH BEYOND STRENGTH (1/SESSION)
You can call on your inner reserves of willpower to act with incredible athleticism, speed, or strength. For the rest of the scene, you can't roll less than a 10 on any checks involving physical activity (e.g., running, jumping, climbing, hand-to-hand combat, etc). Treat any roll of 9 or lower as if you rolled a 10.

VETERAN POWER

If you have two or more powers from this bond, you can choose a power from any other bond instead of one from this bond when you would gain a power. You can do this twice.

If you have at least one veteran power, gain the **Boon of Iron:** At the end of the session, if anyone (yourself included) performed an extraordinary or inspiring feat of athleticism, acrobatics, or physical force, describe it. Give someone who witnessed or participated in it **1 XP**.

MASTER POWER

You may only gain this power If you've taken four powers from this bond, including the **Veteran Power**.

Unbreakable (1/session): For the rest of this scene, nobody you extend your protection over, can take **Stress**. Instead, you take **1 Stress** when they would take **Stress**. If this causes you to break, you gain a burden as normal but stay in the scene and don't lose control. For you to extend your protection over someone, they must remain within speaking distance of you.

THE PATHFINDER

MAJOR IDEALS

I addressed challenges with curiosity, exploration, or understanding.

I expressed my heritage, background, or beliefs through my actions.

I struggled with issues from my burdens or background.

MINOR IDEALS
(PICK ONE EACH SESSION)

I smelled, heard, or tasted something new.

I learned a new skill or trade, or gained a new level of mastery in one I already knew.

I met and conversed with an expert.

I beheld a unique, interesting, or beautiful sight.

What gives you your power?
A star map given to you long ago by an old friend; years spent out in the wilderness, mapping the mountains; many years on a freighter, and many worlds passed by.

Where have you traveled in your dreams?
The edge of the world; deep into the molten core of a supernova; a still, black pool in the deep forest; an endless expanse of desert.

BOND POWERS (8 XP)

MOMENTUM (2/SESSION)

When you survey a situation, ask one of the following questions and get a truthful answer from the GM:

- How do I think I can get around this obstacle?
- What's the most direct way forward?
- Which way do I feel I should be moving?

You or an ally of your choice gets **+1 Accuracy** on their next skill check acting on the answer.

SADDLEBORN

Gain **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect to all skill checks related to the use, driving, piloting, and upkeep of vehicles or mounts of any kind. This includes animals like horses.

FEET UP

You can forgo any downtime action, including your free **Heal Burdens** action, to clear **3 Stress**.

FREESOUL

You can escape from any restraint, shackle, hold, or prison cell without rolling. Nobody can hold, grab, or restrain you unless you let them. You can choose to conceal this ability if you wish.

BEGINNER'S LUCK

When you try an activity or skill you've never tried before, you get **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect to checks related to that skill for the rest of the session. This only ever works once for each activity or skill.

LAY BURDENS

Fill in a segment of all burdens when using **Heal Burdens** for free. If you are healing in a different location than your last downtime, tick another segment on any one burden.

VETERAN POWER

If you have two or more powers from this bond, you can choose a power from any other bond instead of one from this bond when you would gain a power. You can do this twice.

If you have at least one veteran power, gain the **Boon of the Traveler:** At the end of each session, if you were inspired by the sights, smells, sounds, or sensations of a particular place, describe them. Give someone you shared them with **1 XP**.

LIGHTSPEED

When you need to go really, really fast, name your method, your destination, and tell the GM you're pulling out all the stops. You and any of your allies nearby can get there faster than anyone else has before, and can easily outrun anyone you're running from or trying to pursue. Don't roll – you do it – but the GM chooses two:

- You and your allies are exhausted and take **1 Stress**.
- You go off course and end up close to your destination, but not quite there.
- Your vehicle, mount, or method of travel is completely busted and will need repair.

DABBLER

Gain **+2** to a trigger of your choice, up to a max of **+6**. You can change this bonus around at the end of each downtime.

RENAISSANCE

At the start of any session, pick one of your triggers. You become an expert at that skill. When you roll it, roll two d20s and pick the highest for the final result. You must pick a new trigger each session, and can't pick the same one twice in a row.

FEEL THE AIR (1/SESSION)

You can ask the GM up to three of the following about any location you arrive at and receive truthful answers:

- Who lives here or has passed through recently, and where can I find them?
- Who owns this place, or wants to, and where can I talk to them?
- What part of this place do people avoid, and why?

Gain **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect on your next check acting on the answers. If you ask only one question, heal **1 Stress**.

MASTER POWER

You may only gain this power If you've taken four powers from this bond, including the **Veteran Power**.

Long Road Home (1/session): Name a location you've been in the last three days. You can make your way back there without rolling. The GM will determine the following about the journey there:

- Was it a long or arduous journey?
- Was the location dangerous, defended, or contested?
- Were you being pursued, tracked, or hunted?

For every "yes" answer, take **2 Stress**; however, at the beginning of the next scene, you and up to ten other willing people arrive safely there. Don't worry about playing out the journey; just 'cut' to the next scene as you are arriving and work backwards to figure out how you got there.

THE BUILDER

MAJOR IDEALS

I addressed challenges with diplomacy, creativity, or empathy.

I expressed my heritage, background, or beliefs through my actions.

I struggled with issues from my burdens or background.

MINOR IDEALS
(PICK ONE EACH SESSION)

I made a new friend or ally.

I defused a potentially violent or charged situation.

I helped to soothe or heal someone's pain.

I created a new object, organization, or alliance, or mended one that was broken.

What gives you your power?
A strong sense of community from years spent station-side; a love of engineering passed down from your parents; part of your body that you built yourself, lovingly tinkered with.

What do you speak with?
Your voice, your hands, your eyes, your heart, your gut.

BOND POWERS (8 XP)

INSPIRATION (2/SESSION)
When an ally takes can see or hear you while making a skill check, you can encourage them to give them **+1 Accuracy** or increased effect.

SECRET HISTORY (2/SESSION)
When you examine an object or vehicle close enough to touch, you can ask any of the following to the GM and get an honest answer:
- Is this thing broken? If so, how can it be fixed?
- Who touched or used this recently?
- Where has this thing been in the past day or so?

Gain **+1 Accuracy** on your next skill check acting on the answers.

UNTANGLE
When you help someone else **Heal Burdens**, they clear two extra segments instead of one, and you clear one segment.

THE CLOCKMAKER
Gain increased effect on all project clocks and **+1 Accuracy** on all skill checks to progress them.

RIGGER (2/SESSION)
You can create an improvised tool or device. Name its intended purpose and what you built it from (you always have the parts on your person). It provides **+1 Accuracy** on any skill checks for that purpose, but the first time you use it, roll a d6 and check for the following effects:
1. It explodes immediately unless you take **1 Stress**.
2. It melts something nearby into slag with a loose bolt of energy unless you take **1 Stress**.
3. It makes a loud noise straight away and every time it is used.
4. It seems to have a mind of its own and sometimes activates without you.
5. For the rest of the session, you have to remain perfectly still to use it.
6. For the rest of the session, you have to feed it extra parts, raw material, or input from your gear or the environment if you want to use it.
This item stops working at the end of the session.

COMFORT (1/SESSION)
When you sit down and listen to a character for a short time, you may ask one of the following questions of the GM (if they're an NPC) or their player (if they are a PC) and receive an honest answer:
- What does this character really want?
- How can I help?

The GM or player in question can pass this information to you secretly if desired. You gain **+1 Accuracy** on your next skill check acting on the answer. If the character was a PC, you both clear **1 Stress**.

MENDER
When you wish to fix something broken (a relationship, an object, an alliance), name your approach. You can do it, but the GM chooses one or two things you'll need:
- To bring the disparate parts together in one place.
- To gather specific materials or find more time
- To find out what's missing.
- To be comfortable with not fully fixing it.

When you have what you need, you can use a downtime action and play a scene out to fix it and gain **1 XP**.

SANCTUARY
Until you take violent action in a scene, you cannot take more than **1 Stress** at a time from physical harm at the hands of other people.

BILINGUAL (1/SESSION)
For the entirety of a scene, you can talk to objects as if they were people, treating your work on them like a conversation, using social triggers, and so on. Talking to them has the same effect as working on them. Alternatively, you can do the opposite (work on someone like you would a project, using mechanical triggers). You can decide how metaphorical or literal this is. Gain increased effect when you use this ability.

METALBLOOM (1/SESSION)
For the rest of this scene, you cannot roll less than a **10** on any skill checks involving the use or understanding of technology. Treat any **d20** result of a **9** or lower as a **10**.

VETERAN POWER

If you have two or more powers from this bond, you can choose a power from any other bond instead of one from this bond when you would gain a power. You can do this twice.

If you have at least one veteran power, gain the **Boon of the Forge:** At the end of each session, if you completed a project, show it off to everyone. Give someone who admires it **1 XP**.

MASTER POWER

You may only gain this power If you've taken four powers from this bond, including the **Veteran Power**.
Web of Creation (1/session): By touching a willing person, an object, or a structure, you can visualize the connections between them or it and other objects, people, or things. You get excellent (but incomplete) information on these people, objects, or similar and how they relate. This information is factual and detailed. You can view up to three points of connection before this power fades. For example, you could visualize something three times removed or three separate things.

THE MAGUS

MAJOR IDEALS

I addressed challenges with passion, faith, or intuition.

I expressed my heritage, background, or beliefs through my actions.

I struggled with issues from my burdens or background.

MINOR IDEALS
(PICK ONE EACH SESSION)

I witnessed something terrifying, mind-bending, or glorious.

I acted on my first impulse.

I questioned my own senses, beliefs, or sense of self.

My stated intuition or gut feeling about something turned out to be right.

What gives you your powers?
Esoteric technology, implanted in your cortex; a gut feeling too real for comfort; a conversation you once had with a long-dead monolith.

What are your nightmares about?
Sinking through an endless blackness; fleeing from teeth, muscle, and bone; hollow faces, staring at you; my own blood and body, revolting against me.

BOND POWERS (8 XP)

HEARTSIGHT (2/SESSION)

By concentrating momentarily you can sense the ambient emotional state of those close to you. You don't have to be able to see them, but the effect becomes muddled if there are more than a few people close by. Get **+1 ACCURACY** and increased effect on your next check acting on any insight you glean from this.

TO THE BRINK

If you would take enough **STRESS** to break, roll **1d6**. On **4+**, ignore all the **STRESS** you'd take. On **6**, additionally clear **1 STRESS**.

EYES OF THE VOID

You can see perfectly well in even pitch darkness, fog, or poor weather conditions. Gain **+1 ACCURACY** and increased effect on checks that rely on surveying or observing your surroundings. You can see even fine detail up to a mile away unaided.

POSSESSION (2/SESSION)

Ask a dark presence deep inside of you for advice on a course of action. The GM answers and you get either **+1 ACCURACY** or increased effect on your next action following this advice (GM choice).

BLACKBLOOD

You may clear two segments from any of your burdens for **+1 ACCURACY** on any skill check.

INSTINCTIVE (2/SESSION)

Describe a course of action to the GM that you plan to take in the same scene. You will receive guidance from the GM in the form of a feeling that is truthful, if unclear. The GM can choose boon (good outcomes), bane (bad outcomes), or chaos (a mix of good and bad outcomes).

GEIST

When you touch someone skin to skin and take **1 STRESS**, you can see through their eyes and experience their sensations and ambient emotional state, even after breaking contact, although you can do little but observe. They are unaware of and unharmed by your presence. This lasts until the end of the scene, or until you use this ability again, and while you're concentrating on it, you cannot do anything yourself except sit in quiet focus, otherwise the effect ends. PCs must be willing.

PLUNDER THE VOID (1/SESSION)

When you strike out alone and enter a dark and distant place, nobody – PC or NPC – can find you and you may ask the GM one question about a situation at hand. They must answer truthfully with "yes", "no", or "unclear". Whether this is merely a mental space or a different realm entirely is up to you and your GM. You return to reality where you left it at the start of the next scene.

SKINCRAWL

If there's any question about who acts first in a scene, it's you. You get an itch, tic, or bad feeling when you or someone you consider close to you is in immediate danger.

UNVEIL (2/SESSION)

Choose someone present. If you stare straight at them you can ask "what does this person fear right now?" of the GM (if they're an NPC) or their player (if they're a PC) and receive an honest answer.

You get **+1 ACCURACY** on your next skill check acting on the answer. If a PC answers, they may clear **1 STRESS**.

VETERAN POWER

If you have two or more powers from this bond, you can choose a power from any other bond instead of one from this bond when you would gain a power. You can do this twice.

If you have at least one veteran power, gain the **Boon of Revelation:** At the end of the session, if you found a scene troubling, exciting, or terrifying, describe why. Give someone who felt similarly **1 XP**.

MASTER POWER

You may only gain this power If you've taken four powers from this bond, including the **Veteran Power**.

Pierce the Gate (1/session): By concentrating and remaining still, you can witness a scene, place, or person you have seen before as if you were physically present. You can't interact with anything there, nobody is aware of you, and you can do nothing but observe as a detached mind for the duration. You have all your normal senses, and the effect lasts for the rest of the scene. To view a place, you have to have been there. To view a person, you have to have seen their face. The scene does not need to take place at the same time (it could be in the near past or future), though if it's not at the present, it becomes blurry and indistinct and is reduced to impressions.

THE WOLF

MAJOR IDEALS

I addressed challenges with precision, coldness, or intimidation.

I expressed my heritage, background, or beliefs through my actions.

I struggled with issues from my burdens or background.

MINOR IDEALS
(PICK ONE EACH SESSION)

I showed someone how it's done.

I revealed an ugly truth about the world.

My pain or weakness became apparent despite my efforts to hide it.

I got someone to back down or back off.

What gives you your power?
A long time spent alone in the cold, a time you'd rather forget; a hardened, bitter upbringing; a collection of blades, polished and well used.

What must you keep hidden at all costs?
The wounds and scars that deform you, the people you most care about, the person you truly are at your core, the blood in your past that's catching up to you.

BOND POWERS (8 XP)

GO FOR A WALK
If you go off by yourself to accomplish a task, name your goal. You'll return to the group next scene successful, having accomplished it off-screen, but the GM chooses one:

- You have to hurt someone innocent.
- You raise an alarm, come back with pursuers, or start a ticking clock.
- You come back hurt, taking **2 Stress**.

If the task was too dangerous, difficult, or complicated to accomplish alone, the GM will tell you that when you return, but will also tell you exactly what needs to be done to finish it. Gain increased effect when you take action to finish the task.

CORNERED
When you break, gain **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect on all skill checks for the next scene.

SCARCOAT
Your maximum **Stress** increases by **1** for each burden you currently have.

DISCIPLINE
If an ally fails a skill check, you can both take **1 Stress** for them to immediately reroll it. They must keep the new result.

BLOOD SCENT
If someone or something is bleeding, gain **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect on any action made to intimidate, track, or harm them.

POUNCE (1/SESSION)
You take an action before any NPCs have the chance to act, giving you a free roll. Hostile NPCs can't deal harm or consequences to you as a part of this roll (they're too slow), although you can still fail or suffer other consequences normally.

TEAR THROAT
You can instantly kill any NPC in arm's reach of you without rolling, but must first pay the cost. The GM chooses one:

- You are wracked by guilt and unable to use this ability again until the next session.
- You take a burden.

ULTIMATUM (2/SESSION)
You look someone in the face, lock eyes with them, and name what you need. They either give you what you want, right now, or they choose one:

- They flee the scene (they always get away).
- They escalate the situation (resorting to physical violence, calling in backup, raising the stakes, etc).

IT'S NOTHING
At the end of each session, clear **3 Stress** if you didn't let anyone tend to you, help you, heal you, or comfort you (even if they tried).

DON'T TELL ME THE ODDS
Gain **+1 Accuracy** on all actions in a scene where you are clearly outnumbered, outgunned, or backed into a corner.

VETERAN POWER

If you have two or more powers from this bond, you can choose a power from any other bond instead of one from this bond when you would gain a power. You can do this twice.

If you have at least one veteran power, gain the **Boon of the Fang:** At the end of the session, if you think the party fought their way out of a bad situation, describe it, and give someone who you thought fought as hard as you **1 XP**.

MASTER POWER

You may only gain this power If you've taken four powers from this bond, including the **Veteran Power**.

Wick (1/session): This scene, ignore all **Stress** from anyone not important enough to merit a name, and take increased effect on all actions to evade, fight, subdue, or intimidate them.

THE FOOL

MAJOR IDEALS

I addressed challenges with perseverance, learning, or sheer dumb luck.

I expressed my heritage, background, or beliefs through my actions.

I struggled with issues from my burdens or background.

MINOR IDEALS
(PICK ONE EACH SESSION)

Someone else helped me out of a bad situation.

I learned from my own vulnerability or weakness.

I threw myself into a situation without planning or preparation.

Someone taught me something useful, comforting, or painful.

What gives you your power?
A strong sense of adventure, always being in the right place at the right time or the wrong place at the right time, a stubborn refusal to give up.

Who's rooting for you back home?
My family; my partner; my grandparent; my community; nobody in particular, but that's okay.

BOND POWERS (8 XP)

RESCUE (1/SESSION)
When you fail a skill check, you can let a nearby character step in and bail you out. That character gets **1 XP** and can immediately reroll the check as if they were making it, with **+1 Accuracy**. They take any consequences (including **Stress**) instead of you.

PUNCHING BAG
When someone causes you **Stress**, your allies gain **+1 Accuracy** on actions against them for the rest of the scene.

THE SUN (1/SESSION)
Gain increased effect on all actions for the rest of the scene.

THE MOON (1/SESSION)
Reduce all **Stress** suffered by 1, to a minimum of 1, for the rest of the scene.

JOYLUCK WIND THROWER (1/SESSION)
When you roll an unmodified **20** on the dice for a skill check, you may succeed in your task is and describe how you totally blow past everyone's expectations (even your own). Your action ticks 5 segments on any relevant clocks, and you may give someone else present **1 XP**.

INSPIRED HEROISM (1/SESSION)
Once a session, when you succeed on a **Heroic** skill check, all allies present gain **1 XP** and heal **1 Stress**.

ALL-IN
When you push yourself to help another character on a **Risky** or **Heroic** skill check, it costs you **0 Stress**. You still share in any consequences by helping.

HEART OF HEARTS (1/SESSION)
When you and your group are in a tough spot, you can flash back to a scene from your past or hometown and describe how your memory of that time inspires you in the current moment. You can treat your next roll as though you rolled an unmodified **20**. You can only ever use this ability three times; after that, replace it with a new power from this bond.

STROKE OF LUCK
When you fail a skill check and take **Stress**, put yourself into danger, or seriously mess up, tell the GM you stumble onto something lucky of their choice: a way forward, an opportunity, or a lucky break. You or another character gain **+1 Accuracy** on the next check acting on this stroke of luck.

LEARN BY EXAMPLE (2/SESSION)
At the start of any session, choose another character to be your mentor (whether they are willing or unwilling is up to them). Twice in that session, you may ask them for advice before making a skill check. If you follow their advice, gain **+1 Accuracy** on that check. If they spurn your request or give you obviously harmful advice, take **+1 Accuracy** on a check for actions that ignore them.

VETERAN POWER

If you have two or more powers from this bond, you can choose a power from any other bond instead of one from this bond when you would gain a power. You can do this twice.

If you have at least one veteran power, gain the **Boon of the Star:** if you or anyone else succeeded on at least one **Heroic** skill check, describe what happened. Give someone else who witnessed it **1 XP**.

MASTER POWER

You may only gain this power If you've taken four powers from this bond, including the **Veteran Power**.

The World (1/session): For the rest of the scene, treat any final result of 9 or lower on one of your skill checks as 10+. This means you cannot fail skill checks (you might still take consequences for rolling a 10–19 on **Risky** or **Heroic** checks).

THE BROKER

MAJOR IDEALS

I addressed challenges with manipulation, influence, or elegance.

I expressed my heritage, background, or beliefs through my actions.

I struggled with issues from my burdens or background.

MINOR IDEALS
(PICK ONE EACH SESSION)

I kept my hands clean of the dirty work.

I proved that I was the most qualified to handle a situation.

Someone found me attractive, intriguing, or frightening.

Despite my best efforts, we went wildly off the plan.

What gives you your power?
A honeyed voice; a filed and organized list of debts owed; a favored upbringing, used to your advantage.

What do you value?
Good business and a sense of professionalism; loyalty above all; secrets, the dirtier the better; the respect of others, no matter how it's won.

BOND POWERS (8 XP)

COSMOCEPHALOS (2/SESSION)
When someone else makes a skill check, give them **+1 Accuracy** by telling the GM how you planned, prepared, or accounted for this situation.

IMMACULATE
You are always the best dressed in any given situation. You are never unprepared for any situation involving clothing and have access to all manner of uniforms, disguises, costumes, formalwear, and so on. In situations where this helps, gain **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect.

LITTLE CONSEQUENCE (1/SESSION)
When you would take blame, personal fallout, or physical harm as a result of your actions, you may have another willing character nearby take the consequences instead of you after you learn what they are. If they do, they take **1 XP**.

THE LEDGER
Any time, you may ask any character what they want from you right now (service, time, attention, apologies, aid, information, a favor). If you give it to them as described, you can write their name in your ledger. Once their name is in there, you can invoke the ledger any time. When you invoke someone's name in the ledger, any roll you make against them with a result of 9 or lower is treated as a 10 for the rest of the session, then it loses its power over them.

FAVORS OWED
If a nearby character will take consequences from their actions, you can offer to take those consequences instead. If they accept, you get a favor with them. You can cash this favor in any time to force them to help you with any skill check without spending **Stress** and share in the consequences, or defer to you on a decision. You can only hold one favor from each character at a time.

PERFECT LITTLE UNIVERSE
Each downtime, you or another PC gain an extra downtime action.

CONTINGENCY PLANS (2/SESSION)
When you or someone else takes consequences as a result of their actions, you can reduce their severity by describing how you intervene, manipulate, or otherwise change the outcome. This cannot eliminate the consequences entirely, just reduce them. Any **Stress** suffered is reduced by **1**, which can reduce it to **0 Stress**.

BEG, BORROW, OR STEAL (1/SESSION)
When you need the right tool for the job (a disguise, a power tool, a weapon, loose currency, identity papers) you can choose to have it right now. The tool gives you **+1 Accuracy** and increased effect on actions but it was stolen or "borrowed" from someone, and they will track you down by next downtime. The tool stops working at the end of the session or if you use this ability again to get a new tool.

SPIDER (1/SESSION)
When you need something done without involving yourself or your group, you can call one of your many contacts. Pick up to three of the following words to describe how they get it done for you: **quiet**, **clean**, **quick**. For each word you pick, the GM chooses one thing you will need to get your contact, or else owe them after the job is done:
- collateral
- proof, payment, or assurances
- extraction

For each word you don't pick, they don't do it that way at all; however, they will always get the job done. The scale of what they need is concurrent with the scale of the request you make of them, which might make the request impossible unless you rephrase it.

VETERAN POWER

If you have two or more powers from this bond, you can choose a power from any other bond instead of one from this bond when you would gain a power. You can do this twice.

If you have at least one veteran power, gain the **Boon of Order:** At the end of each session, if you can describe how everything went to plan, do so. Give someone you think followed the plan **1 XP**.

MASTER POWER

You may only gain this power If you've taken four or more powers from this bond, including the **Veteran Power**.

Seal in Blood (1/session): When you make a deal with a willing person, name the terms of the deal (parties, duration, and services rendered), then shake hands. If you do, any person (including you) that breaks the deal suffers a baleful curse. They rapidly become deathly ill. If they're an NPC, they are too sick to do anything for the duration of one mission and are essentially helpless. If they are a PC, they gain a "deathly ill" burden.

If the deal is broken by one party, the other suffers no consequences and the seal is lifted, ending this effect. Otherwise the seal lasts indefinitely or until the deal's terms deal are fulfilled.

FACTIONS

Lancer is a game designed to be played at the personal level – on the ground, with the focus on the PCs. Despite this, in the kinds of stories *Lancer* evokes – stories about war, political conflict, and operatic battles across the stars – there are often larger groups, forces, and interests at play. Even in games with a smaller scope, PCs are still likely to interact with patrons, clients, foes, and suppliers.

The groups and organizations these people belong to are factions and these rules provide a framework for fleshing them out, giving them relationships with the players, and giving you as the GM tools should you decide to make them independent players on the game stage. These are narrative rules. Like the other narrative rules in this book and *Lancer*, they are flexible in scope. While they outline specific processes, it is largely up to the GM and the players to figure out the details. Used together, these rules can help you create and run a living, interlocking, and political world that moves and changes around the PCs.

THE FACTION GAME

Some GMs enjoy running a "faction game" outside and in support of the main narrative. Mechanisms like faction ratings and faction checks are intended to support this sort of play. Players can be included in the faction game by putting them (but not necessarily their characters) in charge of certain factions' actions, or it can be run solo as a GM, with factions acting according to their desires. It is not intended to be competitive or to have a "winner", but to produce an interesting narrative that develops on its own, with twists and turns that are surprising even for the GM.

If you do decide to run a faction game, make sure the kind of campaign you're planning can accommodate it. Carefully planned and plotted campaigns, for example, might not deal well with the twists a faction game can throw into the narrative. When you do include a faction game in your campaign, run it between sessions. You can find some simple rules for running a faction game on page 122.

USING THIS SECTION

This part of the book is organized in terms of increasing specificity. Each section provides more of a structure for you to use. **Generating Factions** lets you randomly generate factions with history, motivations, and details. The **Faction Status** tool lets you track a faction's opinion of the player characters and whether they will interfere with their mission or aid them. Finally, the **Faction Ratings** and **Faction Game** rules let you run a game where factions act independent of players.

You don't necessarily need to use everything here if you want to add factions to your game; instead, mix and match as you please. If all you want is some fun tools for generating interesting factions, you can jump to the first section below, **Generating Factions**. If you want to add ways for players to interact and develop relationships with, add the faction status tool.

You'll need some **d6s**, **d20s** and a deck of cards to properly use this section.

PLAYER-LED PLAY

As always, check your players' (and your own) expectations for your campaign before using these rules, as they do make for a more political and involved narrative. If you do include factions in your campaign, it's important that they are there for the players to interact with and not the other way around. Keep it simple and make sure any intrusions of the faction game into the main campaign are prompted by player action and player interest.

GENERATING FACTIONS

You can roll on the tables below, choose from them, or write your own.

First, generate a faction's type, then subtype. You can add some details if your faction is a Baronic house. Then add some details, such as desires and fears, significant people or objects, etc.

FACTION POWER

If you're using this tool, take and shuffle one suit from a standard 52-card deck, then pull a random card when you generate a faction (don't replace the card). The higher the number on the card, the more relative power that faction has. 2–5 is low power, 6–10 is medium power. A face card indicates a high-power faction and an ace is an uncontested faction or superpower.

You can add more face cards, number cards, or aces from different suits to a deck to produce different potential starting situations.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

If you're using a map, figure out where the faction is based. Most factions are based in one significant location but especially powerful ones might have control over two or three. In general, when you fill in details about a faction, place those details on a map and figure out where they are.

Make a note of whether the faction has any friends or foes. An easy way to choose these is to look at each faction's desires and fears and see which ones line up or oppose. This can have effects on roleplaying, decisions about what actions a faction undertakes, and also the faction status tool below.

EXAMPLE FACTION

Let's make a faction using the tools below with all the options. We begin by rolling to see what sort of faction we get, and roll a 3 for its type (military) and a 4 for its subtype (rogue fleet). We draw a card to determine its power and get a King, indicating a powerful faction. Next, we roll to find out some descriptors and get 14 and 19 (making it ancient and jealous). Rolling for desires and fears we get 15 and 13 (this faction desires technology and fears chaos). It's easy to imagine this faction as a mercenary fleet of aging warships, searching, raiding, and bartering for technology to upgrade their impressive but outdated armaments and enforcing their will through intimidation.

FACTION TYPE — ROLL 1D6

1	Core Polity
2	Peripheral Polity
3	Military
4	Scientific
5	Economic
6	Insurgent

FACTION SUBTYPE

CORE POLITY

1	Technocracy
2	Corpro-State
3	Theocracy
4	Oligarchy
5	Democracy
6	Autocracy

PERIPHERAL POLITY

1	City-state
2	Port
3	Nomad society
4	Church or temple
5	Isolated society
6	Commune

MILITARY

1	Militia
2	Sparri jäger guild
3	Albatross wing
4	Rogue fleet
5	Baronic Company
6	Mercenary company

SCIENTIFIC

1	Archaeologists
2	Scientific mission
3	Cloners
4	Xenobiologists
5	Esoteric
6	Research Institute

ECONOMIC

1	Trade union or guild
2	Ship manufacturer or salvager
3	Mech or weapons manufacturer
4	Orbital farming conglomerate
5	Heavy industry or mining
6	Volador trade ship

INSURGENT

1	Revolutionaries
2	Cult
3	Secret society
4	Pirate fleet
5	Organized crime
6	Pariahs

BARONIC HOUSES

If you'd like to cast your faction as a Baronic minor house, you can use the tables below to add more detail.

HOUSE NAME
Roll once.

HOUSE OF…	ROLL 1D20
1 Axes	
2 Pelts	
3 Tunics	
4 Storms	
5 Swords	
6 Chalk	
7 Hilts	
8 Grass	
9 Horns	
10 Petals	
11 Sails	
12 Leaves	
13 Lanterns	
14 Coals	
15 Currents	
16 Cups	
17 Iron	
18 Sparks	
19 Shields	
20 Gauntlets	

HERALDIC FEATURES
Roll once or twice for heraldic features.

HERALDRY	ROLL 1D20
1 A coiled snake	
2 A lion, bearing its teeth	
3 Dueling warriors	
4 A trident, rising from gushing water	
5 Crossed swords with curved hilts	
6 A mermaid lifting a golden cup	
7 A space freighter, in front of the sun disc	
8 An eagle gripping a sheaf of wheat	
9 A war helm, with trailing crest	
10 A twisting ermine	
11 A rearing horse	
12 A gilt ship engine schematic	
13 A shield, divided into fields	
14 A dragon with its teeth clasped over a branch	
15 An axe over a pheasant	
16 An assault rifle crossed over a lance	
17 Intricate vines	
18 Stylized, power-armored fist	
19 Stylized horns lifting the moon	
20 A spear piercing stylized clouds	

PRIMARY HERALDRIC COLOR		ROLL 1D6
1 Or (gold/yellow)	**4** Azure (blue)	
2 Gules (red)	**5** Argent (white/silver)	
3 Sable (black)	**6** Vert (green)	

MOTTO
Roll once on each.

FIRST PART	ROLL 1D20
1 "The guiding star …"	
2 "The oldest steel …"	
3 "Only a fool …"	
4 "Learning of the heart …"	
5 "The evening's last cloud …"	
6 "A secret held close …"	
7 "Blood spilled but once,"	
8 "A loyal dog …"	
9 "The wisdom of stone …"	
10 "A debt long owed,"	
11 "A tiger backed against a wall …"	
12 "The well-used brush …"	
13 "An open path,"	
14 "A single spark …"	
15 "A leaf that never touches the ground …"	
16 " The toll of war …"	
17 "The silent warrior …"	
18 "The tempered edge …"	
19 "The lightest bird …"	
20 "A blade raised in anger …"	

SECOND PART	ROLL 1D20
1 "… must be guarded with iron."	
2 "… will always find company."	
3 "… will never prove false."	
4 "… will be followed to the end."	
5 "… will ignite the very stars."	
6 "… must be swiftly followed."	
7 "… wounds the sharpest."	
8 "… is never forgotten"	
9 "… is more precious than gold."	
10 "… must be blessed with fire."	
11 "… gathers a storm."	
12 "… leads all fools astray."	
13 "… must be cast in stone."	
14 "… can only be bound in silk."	
15 "… reveals the only path home."	
16 "… will slaughter the lamb alone."	
17 "… has the weight of an ox."	
18 "… must be honored with gold."	
19 "… will smite the hand of the master."	
20 "… can shatter any fortress."	

DETAILS

Roll or choose some descriptors and use them to flesh out your factions.

DESCRIPTORS

Roll twice, using either table.

DESCRIPTORS	ROLL 1D20 TWICE
1 Ignorant	Pacifistic
2 Filthy	Energized
3 Industrious	Traditional
4 Progressive	Scheming
5 Struggling	Virtuous
6 Expert	Vengeful
7 Erudite	Corrupt
8 Thriving	Faithful
9 Disorganized	Warlike
10 Oppressive	Optimistic
11 Sprawling	Fanatical
12 Upstart	Ambitious
13 Martial	Humanitarian
14 Ancient	Slow
15 Wasteful	Bitter
16 Greedy	Exhausted
17 Isolated	Honorable
18 Spartan	Distrusting
19 Established	Jealous
20 Enlightened	Communal

DESIRES AND FEARS

Roll once for a desire, and once for a fear (discarding repeat results).

DESIRES/FEARS	ROLL 1D20 TWICE
1 Control	
2 Peace	
3 Conquest	
4 Exploration	
5 Knowledge	
6 Prosperity	
7 Secrecy	
8 Stability	
9 Isolation	
10 Destruction	
11 Understanding	
12 Retribution	
13 Chaos	
14 Expansion	
15 Technology	
16 Conversion	
17 Migration	
18 Recognition	
19 Abolition	
20 Integration	

OBJECTS, EVENTS, LOCATIONS, AND PEOPLE

Use these tables as inspiration to flesh out some history, beliefs, or potential mission hooks for factions. Roll once (or choose one) from each table.

SIGNIFICANT OBJECT ROLL 1D20

1 A legendary mech

2 A flute, played only once

3 A battered NHP casket

4 60 tons of smuggled cargo

5 A shield engraved with Sparri saga runes

6 A colorful mantle, patched together from many kinds of cloth

7 Bones of an Aunic saint, cast in gold

8 A pact on analogue paper, signed by many different hands

9 A golden orb that glows with a soft light

10 A heavy stone disc, etched with hieroglyphs

11 The fastest ship in the sector

12 A compass, wrought in gold. Doesn't point to cardinal directions but reads something more strange.

13 A specimen of alien fauna, preserved in crystal

14 A scratched omnihook, constantly pinging one location

15 A captain's hat, marred by a bullet hole

16 A ragged banner, treasured and scarred from many battles

17 An ancestral sword, wrapped in silk

18 The old mask and suit of a volador

19 A dusty computer terminal, old model and make

20 A pendant, delicate and silver

SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT ROLL 1D20

1 A hopeful pilgrimage

2 A poor omen or reading

3 A massacre, fresh in memory

4 A new and unpopular law, recently minted

5 A duel, barely lost

6 A huge technological leap

7 A routine tour or inspection

8 A diplomatic summit, tense and fateful

9 An unexpected arrival

10 A drawn out and fruitless war

11 A popular musical performance

12 A migration of many families

13 An unfortunate discovery

14 A riotous festival

15 A great hunt

16 A revolution, quick and bloody

17 An assassination

18 A missed opportunity, deeply regretted

19 A competition of sports, games, and prowess

20 A missing group of people, recently lost

SIGNIFICANT LOCATION ROLL 1D20

1 An underground cavern filled with long-dead structures and deep, black lakes of icy water

2 A debris field from an old space battle, ripe for the picking

3 A factory complex, billowing fumes

4 An abandoned freighter, lost many years ago

5 A station in an icy planetary ring, crystalline and reflective

6 A sprawling city built into the walls of a deep crevasse, overgrown with the jungle and lit by bioluminescence

7 An old shrine perched at the fork of two swift rivers

8 A hollowed-out asteroid that holds many secrets

9 An old and long-abandoned cloning facility

10 A looming tower rising up from a valley of boiling, molten rock

11 A monument of slick black stone, graven with many names

12 A bustling and vibrant forest of enormous trees, populated by megafauna

13 A great sea of waving grass, dotted with old wreckage

14 An old city of stone and salt, the site of a pilgrimage

15 A secret base, hidden on the dark side of a dead moon

16 A great and impenetrable fortress

17 A battlefield, relatively fresh and raw from the wounds of war

18 A great bridge many miles long, built before memory

19 A platform sea-city, washed by storms and rocked gently by waves

20 An idyllic countryside town, warm and green

INTERESTING PEOPLE ROLL 1D20

1 A builder who knows too much

2 An old freighter captain, past their prime years

3 A naive explorer

4 An inquisitive and spirited priest

5 A legendary lancer

6 A traumatized traveler

7 A foppish but sympathetic noble

8 A parochial engineer

9 A foolish and wealthy trader

10 A fated child

11 An idealistic diplomat

12 A likable warlord

13 A corporate executive, clean-cut and cold eyed

14 A fanatical writer

15 An impulsive and domineering general

16 A young and inexperienced revolutionary

17 A drunk scientist

18 A wounded farmer, bitter and hardened

19 A sloppy spy

20 A daredevil pilot without a ship
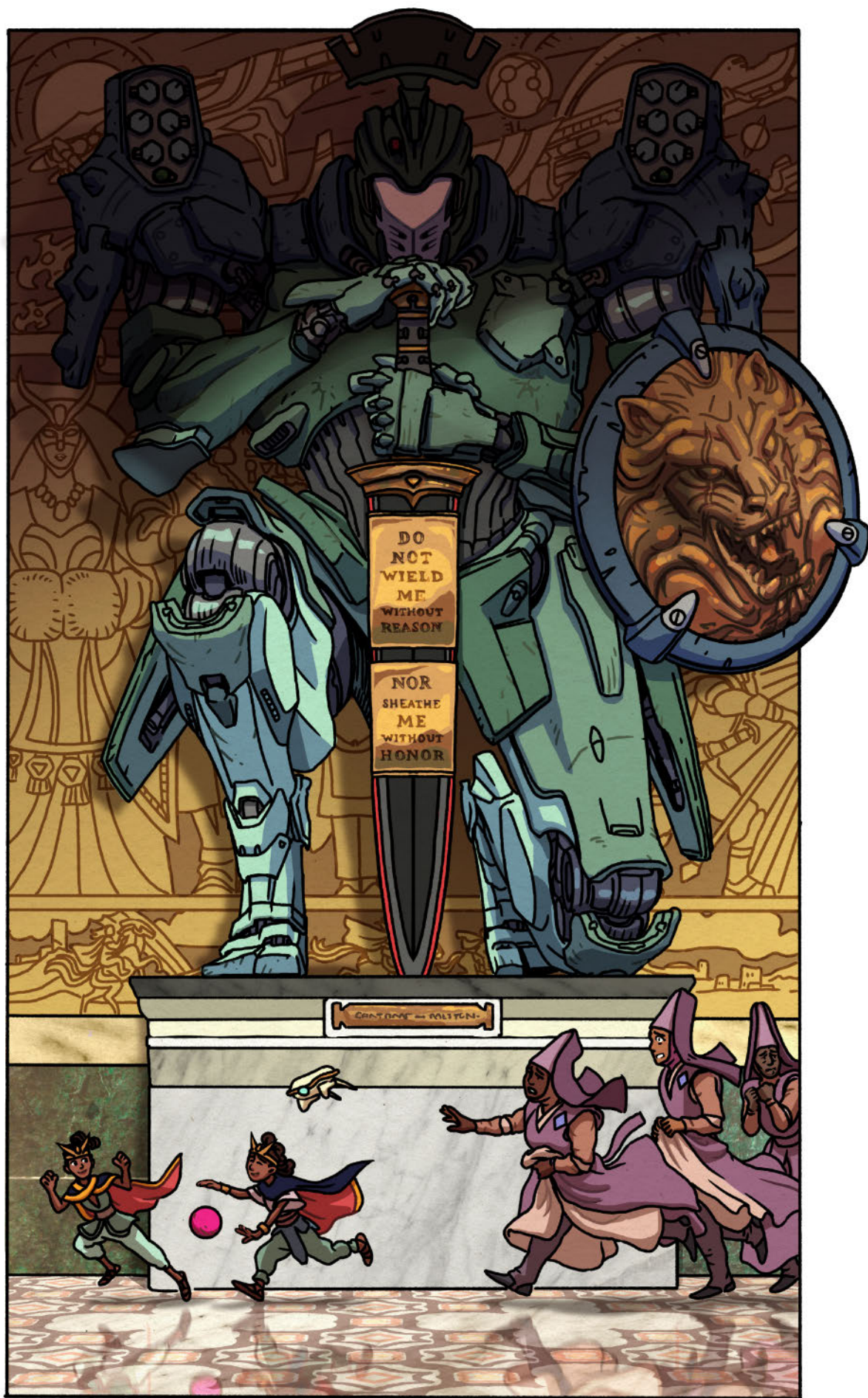
FACTION STATUS

For many factions, the most important detail will be how they relate to the PCs. You can track this using **faction status**, which approximates your factions' opinion of with the PCs and how willing they are to help or hinder them. Status has nothing to do with what the PCs think of a faction, but what the faction thinks of the PCs.

Status is represented by a value from –4 to +4. A more strongly positive status indicates a better relationship, a more strongly negative status indicates a worse relationship.

FACTION AID

If the PCs have between **0 and 4 status** with a faction, they can ask for faction aid, information, or resources from a faction. The likelihood of them getting it depends on their status. They might ask for concessions, promises of help on the battlefield, reserves, information, or for a faction to undertake some action on their behalf. To decide, roll **1d6 per point of positive status** – or two dice and pick the lowest for **0 status** – and take the highest result:

- On a **1–3**, the faction won't or can't help for now.
- One a **4–5**, the faction will help with strings attached. The PCs must offer some assurance, mutual aid, or collateral to receive help.
- On a **6**, the faction offers aid with no strings attached.

PCs can only request aid once per mission from a faction, regardless of the result. If that faction won't help them for now, they're out of luck.

You can also roll faction status if you want to figure out how a faction feels about the characters at any time. This process is intentionally fairly loose here so the GM can use this tool as needed for the narrative. If you need more specific examples or inspiration for faction aid, you can look at the reserves tables in *Lancer* (p. 51), or the **Faction Aid** tables below.

FACTION STRINGS — ROLL 1D6

If "strings" or leverage are needed before a faction will provide aid (on a mixed aid roll), you can use the following for inspiration.

1	**COLLATERAL**	The PCs must offer up or leave something valuable with the faction.
2	**MUTUAL AID**	The PCs must do a minor task for the faction first.
3	**PROMISE**	The PCs must promise to undertake a specific task for the faction in the future. They receive **–1 status** if they fail to follow through.
4	**DEBT**	The PCs gain a debt to the faction, which the faction can call in any time. If the PCs can't make good on the debt when they're called, they receive **–1 status**.
5	**DEMONSTRATION**	The PCs must demonstration skill, proficiency, or competency before they can get aid.
6	**REPUTATION**	Another faction must vouch for the PCs before they can get aid.

TACTICAL FACTION AID (MECH COMBAT)

ROLL 1D6

These examples are Reserves that can be used during mech combat.
The Reserves found on p. 52 of *Lancer* can also provide inspiration.

1	**SUPPLY DROP**	Once, while resting, the PCs receive a supply drop from the faction, allowing them to restore their mechs to full **HP** and restore **1 charge** to all **LIMITED** weapons and systems.
2	**SCOUTING**	Before beginning every mech combat during this mission, the players can look at the map and place two **SIZE 1** pieces of **hard cover** anywhere on the map before placing their mechs.
3	**RAPID INSERTION**	In all combats this mission, the PCs can deploy anywhere on the map, from either stealth, a ship, or an orbital drop. This may not possible in all situations, and cannot be used when using sitreps with defined deployment zones (e.g., **GAUNTLET** and **EXTRACTION**).
4	**INFILTRATION FIELD**	The PCs and all allied characters start the first turn of any combat **INVISIBLE**.
5	**TAKE THE SHOT**	Once, as a quick action during combat, a PC may nominate a hostile character in line of sight. The nominated character is targeted by long-range weapons fire (a sniper, an orbital satellite, artillery) and must succeed on an **AGILITY** check or take **4d6 AP kinetic damage** and are knocked **PRONE**. On a success, they take **half damage** and aren't knocked down.
6	**NPC ALLY**	For the duration of this mission, the PCs gain an NPC ally of the appropriate **TIER** and archetype (**ASSAULT**, **BERSERKER**, **BASTION**, and **HIVE** are good choices). This NPC follows the turn order as though they were a PC (alternating turns with hostile and allied characters). Nominate one player to decide the NPC's actions.

NARRATIVE FACTION AID (NARRATIVE PLAY)

ROLL 1D6

1	**PASSAGE**	The faction will help you get inside one location uncontested, as long as it is within their power to do so. Start any scene at that location, past any obstacles.
2	**TRACKING**	The faction tracks down someone you're looking for and tells you where exactly they will be in the next couple of days.
3	**INTERFERENCE**	Name a hostile faction you think might interfere with you. For the duration of the mission, it cannot interfere with you in any way.
4	**SAFETY**	For the duration of the mission, you can't be followed without your knowledge, your comms can't be listened to, and your activities cannot be reliably tracked.
5	**TOOLS**	Name some pilot-scale equipment (hacking tools, climbing gear, documents, etc.) that you need. You can get this delivered to you at any point you like during the mission. It lasts for the rest of the mission and grants **+1 ACCURACY** when used for its intended purpose.
6	**EXTRACTION**	For the duration of this mission, when you're in trouble, you can make a call to a faction and it will show up to safely extract you from the scene.

FACTION INTERFERENCE

If the PCs have between **0 and -4 status** with a faction, that faction might attempt to interfere with them. When PCs attempt something during a mission and a faction with 0 or lower status could interfere, the GM may check status with that faction. The faction must generally be aware of the PCs' actions and able to interfere (usually because the action is taking place in the faction's territory). Roll **1d6 per negative point of status** – or two dice and pick the lowest for 0 status – and take the highest result:

- On a **1–3**, the faction refrains from interfering for now.
- On a **4–5**, the faction attempts to interfere, but the PCs get a chance to avoid this: they can offer some collateral, aid, action, or payment to mollify the faction and prevent it from interfering, though the nature of the interference might not be clear.
- On a **6**, the faction interferes with no warning.

Only check once for interference for each faction for each mission, if they interfere at all. Interference can also take place during downtime before a mission instead of on the mission proper. Factions can't interfere with actions the PCs take directly against them.

When interfering, factions will generally make things difficult for the PCs by aiding enemy forces, spying on them, sabotaging them, and even attacking them directly. The details are mostly up to the GM but specific examples and inspiration can be found in the faction interference tables below.

PAYMENT · ROLL 1D6

If you need payment to deter faction interference (on a mixed interference roll), you can use the following for inspiration.

1 FAVOR	The PCs must do a favor for the faction right away.
2 DEFERENCE	The PCs must pay proper deference to the faction by verbally acknowledging its status, paying homage, or performing some service.
3 COLLATERAL OR PAYMENT	The PCs must leave something valuable with the faction until the mission is over. If it's payment, they don't get it back.
4 DUEL	Someone must fight a one-on-one duel with a representative of the faction. The faction will defer to the PCs or leave them alone if the PCs win.
5 DEMONSTRATION	The PCs must demonstrate skill, proficiency, or competency.
6 PROMISE	The PCs must make a promise to the faction. They take –1 status if the promise is broken or deferred.

TACTICAL FACTION INTERFERENCE (MECH COMBAT) · ROLL 1D6

1 BOMBARDMENT	In the first turn of one combat this mission, all PCs and their allies must succeed on **Agility** checks or take **1d6 kinetic damage**. On a success, they take half damage.
2 BOUNTY	The GM picks a PC at the start of any one combat this mission. For the rest of this combat, all hostile characters gain **+1 Accuracy** on attacks against that character.
3 HOSTILE RAPID DEPLOYMENT	In any one combat this mission, after the PCs have deployed, the GM may deploy hostile forces anywhere on the map and place two 3 x 3 zones of **difficult terrain** anywhere in free space on the map.
4 JAMMING WAVE	On the first turn of one combat this mission, all PCs and their allies must succeed on **Systems** checks or become **Jammed** until the start of their next turn.
5 UPGRADES	The faction upgrades a mech in one combat this mission, making it **Elite**.
6 REINFORCEMENTS	At the start of the second round of one combat this mission, the faction sends 4 hostile **Grunt** NPCs to the battlefield to interfere.

NARRATIVE FACTION INTERFERENCE (NARRATIVE PLAY)

1 EXCLUSION	Once this mission, when the PCs gain an object or asset using a downtime action (including **Power at a Cost**), they can't have it until they've taken it from this faction. It's accessible, just defended in some way (put in a vault, guarded, placed in a hard to reach location, etc).
2 POISON	The GM picks a PC that ate, drank, or touched something suspect in a scene this mission. Until the next downtime, that PC receives **+1 Difficulty** to all narrative actions. They can end this by tracking down an antidote (in the wild, from a seller, from the faction that caused the poison, etc).
3 SIGNAL JAMMING	For this mission only, the PCs can't track anyone down or navigate properly, and they get lost if they try to travel. They can fix this by finding the source of the signal jammer and destroying it.
4 VIRUS	The PCs can't fix, hack, or modify any gear or electronics this mission. They can purge the virus by tracing it to its source on the omninet.
5 TRACKING BUG	All the PCs' enemies always know where they are. They can fix this by finding where the tracking bugs are on their persons and destroying them.
6 SABOTAGE	The GM picks a scene where the characters need something to work (a weapon, a vehicle, etc). Instead, it's broken, and it will take some time to repair it.

STARTING STATUS AND CHANGING STATUS

To begin with, most factions should start at neutral (**0**), slightly positive (**1**), or slightly hostile (**–1**) status. If a group is allied to the PCs, it might start at **+2** or **+3** status; if they are historic rivals or enemies, it might start at **–2** or **–3**.

Faction status changes whenever the PCs undertake actions during a mission or downtime that would help or hurt a faction.

Status **increases by +1** when the PCs do something that directly helps a faction, helps that faction's close allies, or works against that faction's enemies. It might also rise if PCs act in a way the faction approves of (e.g., demonstrating a talent for espionage, helping the common people, or putting on a show of physical strength).

Status **decreases by –1** when the PCs take action to directly hurt a faction or its allies, aid that faction's enemies, break a promise, or default on a debt. Causing trouble in a faction's territory might also result in a penalty of **–1** status. Asking for something from a faction that is odious, hard to obtain, or treasured by that faction, it might also decrease that faction's status by **–1**, but no lower than **0**.

STOCK

Some factions might be close allies of the PCs. These include patrons, families, mercenary groups, and so on. You might decide that the PCs have **stock** with these factions. Stock is binary – the PCs either have it with a faction or they don't – and it refreshes at the start of each downtime period.

When the PCs would **lose status** with a faction they have stock with, or would have to **pay something** (offer up some aid, assurances, or help), they can instead use up their stock. This gives them much more leeway with that faction.

You might offer the PCs opportunities to gain stock through missions, but they can't ever have more than one use of stock per faction. Note that it is possible for PCs to have stock with hostile factions, as long as those factions respect them enough.

Stock can be lost but only if the PCs do something odious enough for a faction to lose faith in them.

FACTION RATINGS

Ratings are used to represent factions when you want to include a faction game in your campaign or otherwise want them to take independent actions. Each faction has three ratings – Might, Influence, and Subterfuge:

- **Might** is a faction's "hard power" – its ability to undertake and sustain direct, large, loud, and confrontational projects. When a faction wants to use its military power to siege a planet, undertake a massive construction project, or deploy a new fleet of ships to defend a shipping lane, it uses **Might**.
- **Influence** is a faction's ability to exert indirect pressure or force others to take action. It can represent political acumen, economic pressure, or cultural influence. When a faction wants to mediate through diplomacy and prevent a war, force a government to make a policy change, or change cultural norms, it does so through **Influence**.
- **Subterfuge** is a faction's ability to conduct small-scale, subtle, secretive, and highly effective projects. When a faction wants to gather blackmail material, steal trade secrets, assassinate a VIP, or blow up a shipyard, it does so using **Subterfuge**.

Each rating is between **0 and 4**. An average rating is **1**. Factions that are poor at something have a rating of **0**, whereas factions that are good at something have a rating of **2**. A rating of **3** or **4** indicates a strong expertise in an area.

What each rating represents depends on the relative scale of your game. Ratings indicate not only a faction's competency, but also its size. For example, a group with **0 Might** could be exceptionally small, even if it is made up of competent fighters or builders.

ASSIGNING RATINGS AND DETERMINING SCALE

To assign ratings, distribute points between a faction's ratings, depending on whether they are lower power (a 2-5 card), medium power (a 6-10 card), high power

(a face card) or a superpower (an ace):

- **Low Power:** 1 point
- **Medium Power:** 3 points
- **High Power:** 5 points
- **Uncontested/Superpower:** 8 points

The actual ratings and what they represent will vary based on the scale of your campaign. For example, a faction with an average rating of 1 will look very different in a campaign in which the PCs mostly deal with local forces, mercenary warbands, and pirate groups to one in which the factions are entire Baronic houses, corpro-states, and military companies.

You might want to have several "scales" when it comes to rating factions. For instance, the factions operating on a planet might functionally have ratings of 0 when it comes to interplanetary activities. At certain scales, some factions might not have enough size, influence, or power to affect things, at which point they might become irrelevant or you might roll them into another faction depending on the tone of your campaign. Keep in mind, though, that it can be interesting when a tiny faction has a chance of unseating even a large faction's plans.

STOCK

If a faction is especially entrenched or powerful, it might have **Stock**. Powerful organizations have **1–2 Stock** while exceptionally powerful organizations have **3 Stock**. No faction can have more than **3 Stock**. It refreshes at the start of each downtime period. If an organization with **Stock** doesn't like the result of one of its faction checks, it can spend **1 Stock** to roll an extra **d6** and add it to total dice pool. Factions with additional Stock can do this again after spending the first if they like.

Stock represents entrenched power, like a military base or special political access.

ASSETS

If you want to offer concrete objectives for players and other factions, you can use **assets**.

When you make a faction and place it on the map, you can also place a number of assets equal to the total of its three ratings plus one for each **Stock** it has. Name the asset, state where it's found, and state what rating it represents (or if it represents **Stock**). Assets are usually better when they are concrete. For example:

Might Assets: A mercenary company, an armed space station, a capital ship, a competent commander, a huge factory complex, a shield generator, an industrial mining base

Influence Assets: A charismatic diplomat, a business operation, a propaganda center, a political treaty, a news network, a lucrative trade deal

Subterfuge Assets: A trained assassin, a spying operation, a smuggling ring, a powerful hacker

Stock Assets: A massive base complex, unique technology (a special ship engine, a high-tech cloaking device), special political access (the prime baron is family, the local Union Admin is corrupt)

Let's make a faction called the **Golden Sun Mining Company**, a Baronic asteroid-breaking concern. The Golden Sun is a fairly powerful organization with 3 **Might**, 2 **Influence**, 0 **Subterfuge**, and 1 **Stock**:

The company's **Might** is represented by its fleet of mining ships (two assets, each worth 1 **Might**), which is docked in its core space station. It also has a private military force, stationed on a local moon (1 **Might**).

The company's **Influence** is represented by its star diplomat, Kessen Beati (1 **Influence**), who resides at the capital, and its friendship with the local Union administrator, who also resides there (1 **Influence**).

The company has 0 **Subterfuge**, so it has no assets there.

The company's **Stock** is its company headquarters, a base built into a huge asteroid in the Tau Gamma system (1 **Stock**).

If one of a faction's ratings increases or it gains **Stock** for any reason, make a new asset to represent this. Factions can also attempt to acquire new assets to increase their ratings (see the faction operations on p. 122) or, alternatively, PCs can undertake missions to obtain assets on behalf of factions. These can be very fun mission hooks! Gaining **Stock** is typically a lot harder and represents the acquisition of new bases of influence, major footholds, or huge windfalls.

USING RATINGS

When a faction undertakes any course of action that is complex or has an unclear outcome, you can make a faction check using its **Might**, **Influence**, or **Subterfuge**. To do this, choose the relevant rating, state what the faction is trying to do, then roll a number of d6s equal to that rating, picking the highest total result. If the relevant rating is 0, roll two dice and pick the lowest:

- **1–3:** A poor outcome – the faction is unsuccessful. It must pull back, its progress stalls, or it needs resources it doesn't have.
- **4–5:** A good outcome – the faction is generally successful at its project, but must make tradeoffs or sacrifices, spend or reallocate resources, or slow progress on its other work. If it gets this result a second time for the same action, it is successful.
- **6:** An unmitigated success.

CONTESTED ACTIONS

If an action is contested by another faction, state what each faction wants out of the situation, then roll faction checks for both. You can use whichever rating you want as long as it fits the narrative. For example, a faction trying to take control of a rebelling shipyard using **Might** could find its forces stalled or defeated by a faction using **Influence** to run a propaganda campaign painting the first faction as a bloodthirsty aggressor.

The faction with the highest result wins and gets what it wants. On a tie, check the next highest result. For example, if one faction rolls **6, 5, and 3** and another rolls **6, 2, and 2**, the first faction would win the exchange. If all the results are the same, the outcome is an impasse.

RUNNING A FACTION GAME

When the PCs have downtime and you have time between sessions, you can run a very simple faction game to show the world moving in the background. Do this between sessions and tell the PCs the results when you start the next session, finishing downtime afterwards (and preferably launching into the next mission).

To run the faction game, begin by laying out all the factions in your game. Then, during downtime, each faction can take up to one action, acting in order of their faction power card. If there's a tie, or you're not using faction power cards, factions with higher **Subterfuge** act first.

There are three actions available to factions:

Build Asset

Decide what asset the faction is building, and what it represents (Might, Influence, Subterfuge, or Stock). For example, a faction focused on raising an army might build a Might asset. A faction building a Stock asset is usually building a base of power. To complete the asset, the faction must fill out a short clock – **Might**, **Influence**, and **Subterfuge** assets take a **2-segment** clock and **Stock** assets take a **4-segment clock**. Roll a faction check with the rating that best represents what the faction is doing to acquire the asset:

- On a **1–3**, tick no segments.
- On a **4–5**, tick **1 segment**.
- On a **6**, tick **2 segments**.

When it has enough points, the faction gains the asset after the downtime in which it's completed.

Seize Asset

When a faction attempts to seize an asset from another, they roll faction checks against each other using ratings of their choice. The defending faction gains **+1ᴅ** on the roll, or **+2ᴅ** if it's a **Stock** asset. The highest rolling faction wins. If the defender wins, it keeps control of the asset. If the attacker wins, it takes control of the asset. A faction can't take this action twice in a row. Taking or losing an asset adjusts the factions' ratings accordingly.

Form Pact

A faction approaches another faction with a diplomatic offer. If both factions agree, they can invoke the pact next time either of them attack or defend an asset, and can add their ratings together, up to a maximum of **4**. This effect lasts until one of the factions attacks or is attacked, regardless of the results of the attack. Each faction can only have a pact with one other faction at a time.

If a faction loses its assets and is reduced to 0 in all ratings, it is either destroyed or becomes insurgent. While insurgent, it can't attack or be attacked, and can only take the **Build Asset** action. When it has at least 1 in a rating again, it becomes a regular faction again.

USING THE FACTION GAME

The tools outlined here are intended to inspire GMs to run fun and creative games. The faction game is not necessarily something the players will interact with directly, but you can use it for some very effective storytelling:

- You can update the players on what's happened in the faction game after each downtime, especially in terms of how their allies and enemies are doing.
- The faction game can be used to generate exciting mission hooks related to helping or hindering different factions, allowing players to influence the faction game directly. Players can take missions to **seize assets** or **build assets** for their faction of choice, defend factions that are the targets of Seize Asset actions (in which case you can just play the mission out, don't roll for it!), or run a mission to influence the game (for example, getting two factions to form a pact or break a pact).
- Attaching important NPCs to factions gives players some exposure to the politics of the setting.
- Factions make great vehicles for offers of work, alliances, or threats of reprisals.

Using these tools together can create a "living" game where the sense of the world existing and moving outside of the players produces a strong sense of verisimilitude.

THE MAP FORGE

The **map forge** is a simple tool for randomly creating maps you can use in your *Lancer* campaigns. These maps can be used to generate the setup for a story or campaign if you don't already have one in mind, to flesh out existing areas and locations you already have in mind, or merely as a creative exercise. All you need is a standard 52-card deck without the Jokers and a piece of paper or other way to record the details

To use the map forge, take the following steps:

1. First, pick a scale for your map: **urban**, **regional**, or **system**. Urban maps are maps of cities, including some of the surrounding environment. Regional maps are maps of larger regions or entire planetary areas, including terrain features and similar. System maps are maps of entire star systems or groups of star systems. If you're feeling ambitious, you can even theoretically nest one map inside another to create a comprehensive map of a space.

2. Draw cards equal to the number of significant locations you want on your map. We usually recommend an odd number, like 5, 7, 9, 13. The actual numbers or values of the cards drawn will determine the kinds of locations on your map. You then place them to begin generating your map, using one of three approaches:

   - **Method 1:** Place each card face up as you draw them, with each representing an area. Then decide how each new area connects or relates to the others as you draw. Place the cards in any pattern you like, as long as every card connects to at least one other card.
   - **Method 2:** Fill a 4 x 4 or 5 x 5 grid with face-down cards instead of drawing them. Then, flip cards equal to the number of significant locations you want to include. Face-down cards indicate there is either nothing significant there (wilderness, space, etc) or that there is something undiscovered for the PCs to find later. When such a location is discovered, put it on the map.
   - **Method 3:** Throw the cards in the air and record where they land, flipping up any face-down cards. Draw the map and connect the cards as they landed.

3. Fill in the details for every map location.

FACTIONS (OPTIONAL)

If you generated factions using the rules in this book, you can also get together the cards you drew when generating those factions, then shuffle them and place them face down and randomly on the map locations. If you're doing this, make sure there are map locations roughly equal to the number of factions (there can be fewer locations and factions sharing locations, of course, especially at the regional or system level).

LOCATIONS

Each card you draw equates to a different sort of location depending on the scale of your map (urban, regional, or system). Read through the relevant table. If you want to exclude certain types of locations from the pool, you can cut entire suits if you like. For example, you can generate a regional map with no water features by eliminating diamonds from the deck.

URBAN

Once you've placed the cards, connect them together by drawing lines. These lines represent major roads between features, and give an idea of how the city connects together.

SPADES (CORE)

2	Aging residential area
3	Public square or park
4	Hab blocks
5	Underground district
6	Government district
7	Open-air market
8	Transportation hub
9	Floating district (air or water)
10	Commercial mega-complex
Jack	Suburban area
Queen	Major commercial district
King	Entertainment or red-light district
Ace	Residential megastructure

HEARTS (PERIPHERAL)

2	Garbage dump
3	Trainyard
4	Slum or shantytown
5	Prison
6	Dying residential district
7	Military base
8	Toxic area
9	Underground bunker
10	Abandoned district
Jack	Ship or mech graveyard
Queen	Hollowed-out megastructure
King	Inactive industrial plant
Ace	Fortress

DIAMONDS (NOTABLE LOCATIONS)

Attach these to a nearby location and overlap them if drawn, then draw and place another card.

2	Library or public records
3	Public building
4	Notable restaurant
5	Sports stadium
6	Zoo or reservation
7	Orbital elevator
8	Theater
9	Church, cathedral, or temple
10	Communications complex
Jack	University or research institute
Queen	Monument or public art project
King	Museum
Ace	Megabuilding

CLUBS (INDUSTRIAL)

2	Mech manufacturer
3	Chemical plant
4	Industrial headquarters
5	Fuel refinery
6	Drone nexus
7	Industrial farm
8	Printing facility
9	Warehousing
10	Mine
Jack	Spaceport or dock
Queen	Heavy industry
King	Shipyard
Ace	Construction yard

REGIONAL

SPADES (TEMPERATE)

2	Temperate forest
3	Rainforest
4	Woodland
5	Grassland
6	Savanna
7	Spore forest
8	Moor
9	Wildlands
10	Migratory forest
Jack	Megaforest
Queen	Coral forest
King	Boreal forest
Ace	Grass Sea

CLUBS (ELEVATION)

2	Canyon
3	Spires
4	Caves
5	Colossal geode
6	Impact crater
7	Volcano
8	Steppes
9	Plateau
10	Cliff
Jack	Geothermal area
Queen	Mountain
King	Hills
Ace	Large mountain

HEARTS (EXTREME FEATURES)

2	Boiling mud
3	Glass desert
4	Sand dunes
5	High desert
6	Salt flats
7	Solar waste
8	Scrub
9	Badland
10	Pelagic waste
Jack	Tundra
Queen	Ice spires
King	Polar Ice
Ace	Snowy wasteland

DIAMONDS (WATER FEATURES)

Connect all cards drawn from this feature by drawing a line to draw rivers between these features when placed, then connect the features to either a mountain or the edge of the map.

2	River
3	Caustic pools
4	Geysers
5	Flooded caves
6	Fjord
7	Hot springs
8	Lagoon
9	Lake
10	Swamp
Jack	Creek
Queen	Reservoir
King	Waterfall
Ace	Wetland

INHABITED AREAS

If there are inhabited areas on your regional map, decide how many or roll **1d6**. After you generate the map, but before you flip the location cards face up, draw cards equal to the result of your roll and place them sideways and face down under the cards of each generated location (to help distinguish them), then flip them face up as you flip the location cards face up. A 2–10 indicates a town, a face card a city, and an Ace a large or highly populated city. Look at where the city is located to decide its characteristics (i.e., a city on a wetland might look different to a city on a plateau). If your map is using water features, draw a river to each location if there isn't one already.

SYSTEM

SPADES (POPULATED WORLDS)

2	Cloud world
3	Monument station
4	Hollow world
5	Holy world
6	Industrial world
7	Metroswathe
8	Pre-industrial world
9	Terran world
10	Icy world
Jack	Orbital city
Queen	Ocean world
King	Agrarian world
Ace	Blink gate

HEARTS (PERIPHERAL WORLDS)

2	Inhabited moon
3	Nomad fleet
4	Pre-industrial world
5	Fueling station ring
6	Pirate station
7	Refugee fleet
8	Research fleet
9	Ship graveyard
10	String station
Jack	Orbital eco-preserve
Queen	Space Fortress
King	Megaship
Ace	Metavault

DIAMONDS (CELESTIAL FEATURES)

Draw a line connecting these features to each other or to the edge of the map, indicating barriers of space that people have to travel across, then draw and place a new card (or flip a new one up).

2	Space battlefield
3	Ice field
4	Migratory tear
5	Mega asteroid
6	Nebula
7	Solar storm
8	Shipping lane
9	Void
10	Stopover station
Jack	White hole
Queen	Asteroid belt
King	Decaying hulk
Ace	Black hole

CLUBS (UNINHABITED WORLDS)

2	Tomb world
3	Unstable world
4	Overgrown world
5	Molten world
6	Pre-fall ruin
7	Preserve
8	Gaia world
9	Toxic world
10	Failed colony
Jack	Storm world
Queen	Crumbling world
King	Graviton world
Ace	Twinned world

NEW MECHS AND TALENTS

This section has additional talents and mechs that can be used in any game of *Lancer*.

NEW TALENTS

HOUSE GUARD

You fight at the side of your allies, your mech a bulwark that grants them unbreakable resolve and bolsters them up to greater glory.

⬡ FRONT RANK

You count as adjacent when you are within **Range 2** for the purposes of your effects on allied characters (from your traits, talents, systems, or weapons) that require adjacency to your mech.

⬇ GREATER GUARDIAN

Your mech gains the **Guardian** trait if it doesn't already have it (adjacent allies can use your mech as hard cover). **Guardian** now additionally grants **soft cover** to all adjacent allies from all directions.

⬇ SHIELD OF THE LEGION

1/round, when you reduce damage to an allied character, cancel an attack against them, or cause one to miss, you may deal **2 energy damage** to the attacker and knock them **Prone**.

PANKRATI

Your fighting is as flashy as the greatest fighters of the Kreoss, and your mech leaps into battle with great aplomb.

⬡ VENI

You gain **+1 Accuracy** to melee attacks against **Immobilized** or **Slowed** targets.

⬇ VIDI

1/scene, you can make a **Valiant Charge** as a **free action** on your turn, moving up to twice your **Speed** and ignoring terrain penalties. You must move in a straight line and end your charge adjacent to a hostile character, and you cannot start your charge adjacent to any hostile characters. When you end your charge, any adjacent hostile characters are **Slowed** until the end of their next turn.

⬇ VICI

If you start your **Valiant Charge** adjacent to any allied characters, they may immediately **Boost** as a reaction after your charge resolves.
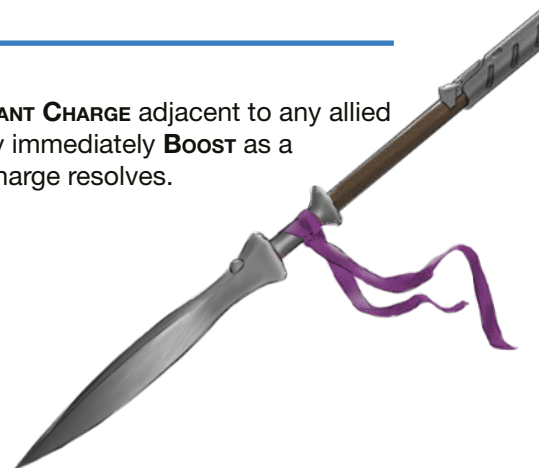
SSC
WHITE WITCH
Defender

A proof of concept more than a line-production chassis, there have been select releases of White Witch licenses by Smith-Shimano's LUX-Exotic group to elite military enclaves, most notably to the upper cadres of the House of Moments.

The White Witch builds on the platform established by the Black Witch; utilizing SSC's signature magtech weapons and equipment, it takes Black Witch and tunes it for hyper-solipsistic focus, narrowing the effect cone to encompass only the White Witch and its pilot.

The White Witch marks SSC's first foray into null-ordnance/environmental-manipulation chassis. When active, its entire chassis becomes a conduit for onboard base-compound magtech agitators to exploit its immediate environment, drawing atomic components out of organic and inorganic objects and surfaces to enhance its built-in defensive systems. The White Witch reorganizes these molecular draws using its chassis as substrate, quickly forming substantive defenses and weapons from "thin air".

This process has understandably traumatic effects on organic and inorganic materials inside the immediate effect cone.

CORE STATS
Size: 2
Armor: 0
HULL
   HP: 7
   Repair Cap: 5
AGILITY
   Evasion: 10
   Speed: 6

Save Target: 11
Sensors: 5
SYSTEMS
   E-Defense: 6
   Tech Attack: +0
   SP: 6
ENGINEERING
   Heat Cap: 4

TRAITS

ROOTED
While the **White Witch** is **Immobilized**, it has **Resistance** to **kinetic damage** and cannot be knocked back or knocked **Prone**. It can choose to become **Immobilized** until the end of its next turn as a **protocol**.

HARDEN
When the **White Witch Braces**, it gains **Overshield** equal to **4+Grit** before taking damage.

FLUID BURST
When an allied character in **Range 2** of the **White Witch** takes damage from a hostile source, the **White Witch** can reduce the damage by **1** and deal **1 AP kinetic damage** to itself.

GUARDIAN
Adjacent allied characters can use the **White Witch** as **hard cover**.

MOUNTS

FLEX MOUNT   **HEAVY MOUNT**

CORE SYSTEM
FERROREACTIVE SHELL
"The first test nearly ended the program. Exotic Materials is a … liberal department within the Constellation, but even our executives were hesitant to approve a second run. The data generated by WW_01 was invaluable, and we were sure we could get it right with a second test – all we needed was the sigma on its rewrite cone! Suits just get leery when systems fail. They forget that progress takes blood – sometimes literally – as payment for a breakthrough."
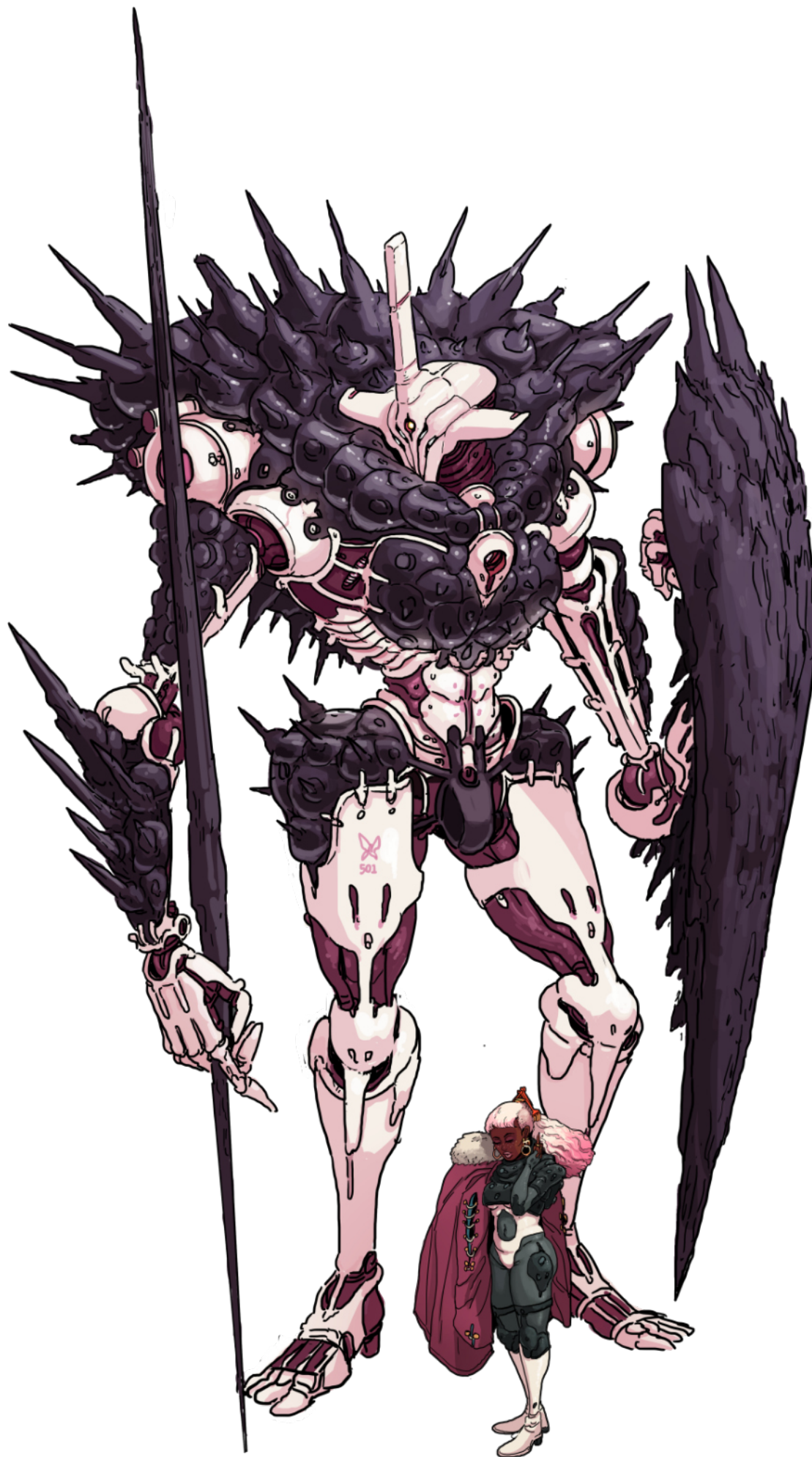
Ferroreactive Armor
Each time you take damage from yourself or a hostile source (even if that damage is reduced or ignored), gain **+1 Armor** for the rest of this scene after taking damage, up to a maximum of **+6** (you can use a die to track this).

Hyperactive Mode
Active (1CP), Protocol
For the rest of the scene, **Ferroreactive Armor** gives **+2 Armor** each time instead of **+1**, to a max of **+12**. Each time your armor increases in this way, your mech deals **1 AP kinetic damage** to all characters in a **Burst 1** area as it draws raw material from the environment. If your benefit from **Ferroreactive Armor** would increase past **+12**, it explodes instead, dealing **1 AP kinetic damage** in a **Burst 2** area around you. All characters within the affected area must succeed on a **Hull** save or be knocked **Prone**, then **Immobilized** and **Shredded** until the end of their next turns. The benefit from **Ferroreactive Armor** resets to **0**, although it continues to be active and this effect can occur multiple times in a scene.

Ferrofluid Lance
Main Melee
[Threat 2][1d6 kinetic]

1/round, you may force a character hit by this weapon to make a **HULL** save. **On a failure**, both you and your target are **IMMOBILIZED** and cannot be moved in any way. For the duration, the target always considers you within range for **melee attacks**. On any subsequent turn, you can end this effect as a **protocol**, knocking your target **4 spaces** in any direction, or your target can end it by successfully hitting you with a **ranged or melee attack**. This condition can't be removed any other way.

. . . .

"To say we can pull this needle from 'thin air' is the best-fit phrase, but it's not accurate. Not entirely. There's no such thing as thin air, not in the way one means it when they use that phrase. 'Agreeable atomic space' – that's what 'thin air' really is. A place where one could – if one could – coalesce utility from useless particulate mass with a thought. With a snap of our finger. Here, watch this –"

Pinning Spire
1 SP, Quick Action

You and one character within **RANGE 3** and line of sight become **IMMOBILIZED** and cannot be moved in any way. For the duration, the target always considers you within range for **melee attacks**. On any subsequent turn, you can end this effect as a **protocol**, or your target can end it by successfully hitting you with a **ranged or melee attack**. This condition can't be removed any other way.

. . . .

"We call it 'demand-compliance tethering'. Though, that makes it sound as if they have a choice to resist."

Sympathetic Shield
1 SP, Limited 3, Overshield, Shield,
Quick Action

You project a shield of resonant ferrofluid over an allied character within **RANGE 5**. They gain **OVERSHIELD equal to 4+GRIT**, but any damage dealt to this **OVERSHIELD** before reductions of any kind also deals equivalent **kinetic damage** to you as if the attacker had also damaged you, no matter how far away you are. This damage does not inherit tags or effects.

. . . .

"Soon enough we realized that shaping weapons from molecules and particles wasn't enough to justify the conical mag as a system worth platforming. We needed to find a way to make it … more. More visual, tactile, concrete, imposing, thrilling – we needed to sell the next step in realspace control! So with some tuning and, regrettably, input from Visual, we figured out how to define the White Witch: as the most terrifying, alien thing you've ever fucking seen."

Camus's Razor
2 SP, Unique, Shield, Quick Action, Reaction

Your mech is capable of projecting a spot-magnetic force of incredible power. You can prime this system as a **quick action**. Once primed, you gain one use of the **INTERVENTION** reaction for the rest of the scene.

. . . .

"Manipulating the world around the platform doesn't end at rearranging the natural/built environment. This was the line that many on the team were afraid to cross, the question we had all asked ourselves once we bracketed the platform: what happens when we apply it to a person? What does existence mean when it can be ended with a thought?"

Intervention
Reaction, 1/round

Trigger: An allied character within **RANGE 5** and line of sight is targeted by an action that deals **kinetic or explosive damage**.
Effect: You become the target of the action instead. If the action was an area of effect, such as a **LINE**, **CONE**, **BLAST**, etc, the attacker must now position it so it targets you, or as close as possible, which could change its targets. This transfer takes place even if the original could not have hit you (i.e., it was a melee attack).

Ferrospike Barrier
3 SP, Deployable, Quick Action

You spray a Size 2 surge of liquid metal in a free adjacent space, where it rapidly hardens into wicked spines. It doesn't provide obstruction initially, but at the beginning of your next turn, it becomes a solid object (20 HP) that can be used for hard cover. The first time in a round any character would move into its space after the barrier hardens, that character takes 1d6 AP kinetic damage. You can only have one barrier deployed at a time; if a new one is deployed, the first one dissolves.

. . . .

"Again and again the meatheads over at Visual asked us to 'help them sell' the platform. What else could we do? We handed them a power that gods of death and war had coveted since Cain cracked a rock over Abel's head, and they told us, 'if we can't see it, we can't sell it.' So we mucked around and made another diadematic little wonder for them, the F-Barrier. It's brilliant. Of course it is. We're Exotic Materials, brilliance is easy."

Retort Loop
Heavy Cannon, Reliable (2/charge), Knockback (1/charge)
[Range 10][3 + (1d6/charge) kinetic]

Any time you take damage from a hostile source you may choose to store a charge in this weapon. It fires with an additional +1d6 kinetic damage, Reliable 2, and Knockback 1 for each charge stored, to a maximum of 3 charges. Once fired, it clears all charges, hit or miss.

. . . .

"Ultimately, I have to return to the core of what we made, the code we cracked when we finally figured out NO/EM. From a simple prompt, we created a terrible engine. I am more proud of what we did than anything I've ever worked on before, but it should never see the light of day. Working with Visual convinced me of this: it's their job to translate our work to sales, and they could not. If the translator cannot understand the text … then who are they to rewrite it? Who is the reader to attempt to access it? I conclude my summary with this: mothball the platform. There are less terrible paths we can walk.

SSC
EMPEROR
Support/Artillery

"In Exotic Materials we don't have problems: we have doors that are not yet open to us. A 'problem' presents endless branching paths. Doors are binary. Open and shut. 'The tyranny of the problem lies in the impossible breadth of possibility.' Smith said that. He went on to say that this is a useless framing for tinkerers and hobbyists whose ethics are defined by calcified, hand-wringing institutions. So! EXMAT is solutions-focused: there is no such thing as a problem, only a door, and the question: can we open it, or do we have to bash it down?

Progress. Smith Shimano has always been about progress. Humanity has always been about progress. In service of progress, one must accept the necessity of teleological suspension.

For the Emperor, after Hercynia, we had to bash the door down. Ugly process, but the riches beyond the door were more than worth it. Syncretic subjectivities, induced gestalt manifestation, H-NHP ontologic bridging, superpositional defensive lensing – look at what the battering ram gave us and tell me you'd rather puzzle out a problem then bash down the door and grab all the gold.

What else is there to say? Long live the Emperor, for in its creation did we find the method by which to fling open every locked door. Wondrous things are coming. I'm glad that they'll be under our control."

– Memo to personal records, Bala Shimano, CEO-1, Exotic Materials Group

CORE STATS

Size: 1
Armor: 0
HULL
  HP: 2
  Repair Cap: 2
AGILITY
  Evasion: 10
  Speed: 5

Save Target: 11
Sensors: 15
SYSTEMS
  E-Defense: 8
  Tech Attack: +1
  SP: 7
ENGINEERING
  Heat Cap: 5

TRAITS

STORM SHIELD
The **Emperor's HP** is not increased by its pilots **GRIT**. Instead, at the start of any scene, the **Emperor** gains **OVERSHIELD** equal to **6+GRIT**. This **OVERSHIELD** refreshes any time the **Emperor** takes **structure damage**.

IMPERIAL VESTMENT
Whenever the **Emperor** grants **OVERSHIELD** to another character, it gains the same amount of **OVERSHIELD**. If the **Emperor** gains **OVERSHIELD** from any source, including this trait, it increases its current **OVERSHIELD** by that amount instead of replacing it. Its **OVERSHIELD** cannot exceed the amount granted by **Storm Shield**.

SOVEREIGN PRESENCE
1/round, when the **Emperor** targets a character with an attack, it can condemn that character, forcing them to make an **ENGINEERING** save. On a failure, the target takes **+1 damage** any time they take damage until the start of the **Emperor's** next turn.

MOUNTS

MAIN MOUNT

CORE SYSTEM
DARIAN REGALIA
"Directed Subjective Convergence Weapon, Pattern 3. Or as Visual calls it, the 'Marathon Arc'. I suppose it is a better name. Imposing. Inaccurate, but Visual has never been accurate. The Arc forces realignment along a superpositional plane, destabilizing targets without the correct pineal hash while imparting sympathetic lensing on those with the correct hash; a simple 'weapon' that emulates an Overmind's corrective/imperative push."

Integrated Mount: Marathon Arc Bow
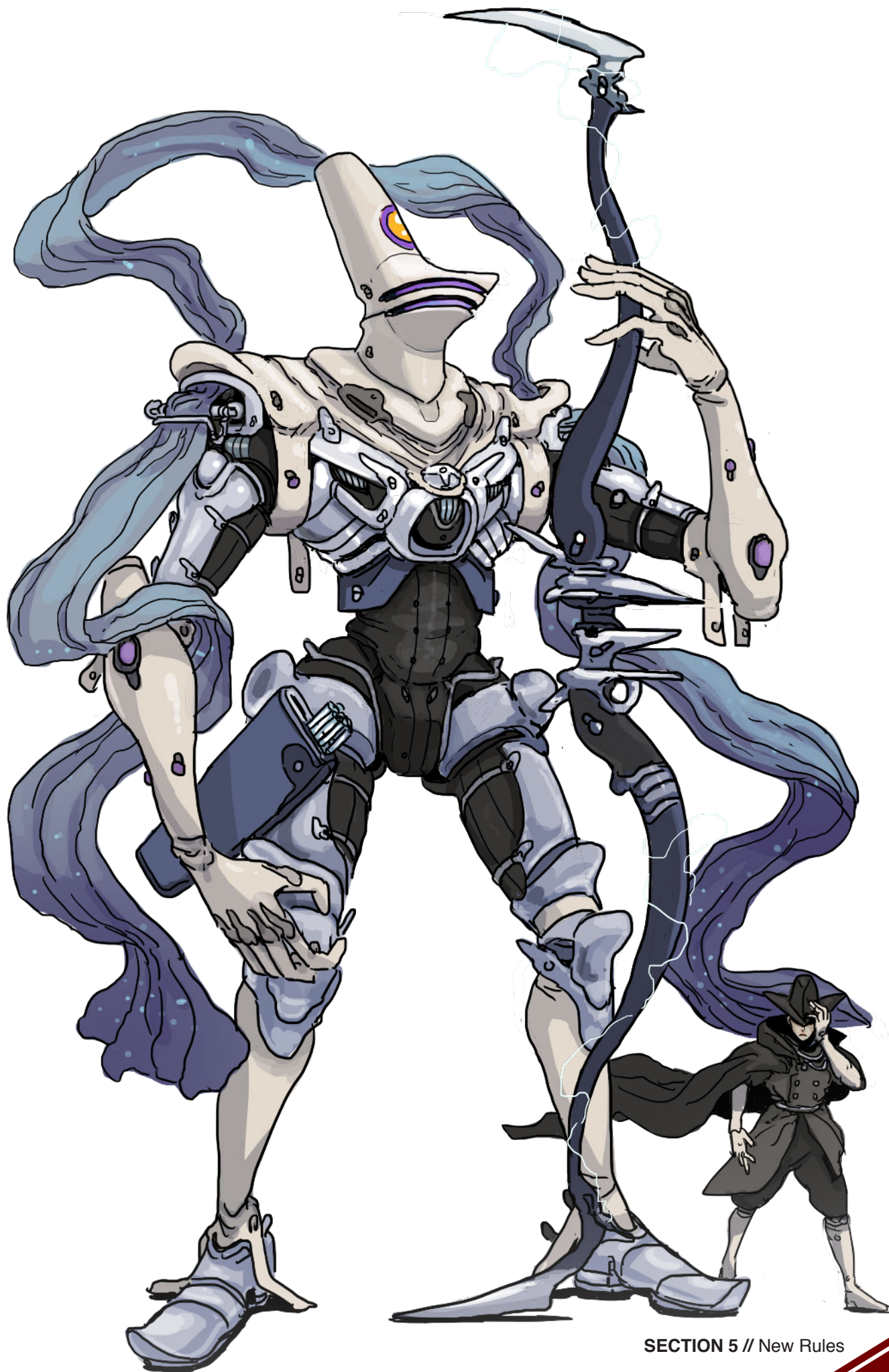
Marathon Arc Bow
Main Launcher, AP
[Line 15][1d6 energy]

Allied characters in the affected area are not attacked, but instead have any **OVERSHIELD** supercharged, increasing it by **+4**, but clearing and ending all **OVERSHIELD** at the end of their next turn. If they have no **OVERSHIELD**, they instead receive **OVERSHIELD 2**.

Xerxes Apex
Active (1CP), Protocol

For the rest of this scene, any mech targeted by an attack using the **Marathon Arc Bow** releases a bolt of lightning after the attack resolves, striking a character of your choice within **RANGE 3**, which can be the character it originated from. This lightning bolt either deals **2 AP energy damage** (no attack or save) or increases the target's **OVERSHIELD** by **+2**. The same character can be struck by multiple bolts.

Dominion's Breadth
2 SP, Overshield, Shield, Unique, Quick Tech

A mech character within **Sensors** and line of sight gains **Overshield 1**. When this **Overshield** is lost for any reason, that character releases a **Burst 2** electric pulse. All hostile characters in the affected area (including the original character, if hostile), take **2 AP energy damage** and must succeed on an **Engineering** save or become **Impaired** until the end of their next turn.

. . . .

"Our first door in was not, as we thought, from the subject's neural mapping, but from an image of one of the igneomemetic samples returned by Perfect Execution during their deployment – Darius 1.11: The Golden Fulcrum. With it, we were able to crack the gestalt and begin to translate [Witness]; finding our way into the subject followed shortly thereafter."

Bolt Nexus
Main Nexus, Smart
[Range 10][1 energy]

On hit: This weapon gains **Seeking**, **Reliable 4**, **Range 20**, and it deals **4 energy damage** until you attack a new character with this weapon.

. . . .

"But they denied Him. So their Lord brought down upon them destruction for their sin, and did not fear retribution, for He was the LORD, and above reproach. Put out your eye if you think otherwise."

– Witnessed from the Cyrus 2.14 ferromemetic

The Imperial Eye
2 SP, Shield, Quick Tech

An allied mech character within **Sensors** gains a **Disruptive Charge** until the start of your next turn. When a hostile character enters a space within **Range 3** of the target, the **Disruptive Charge** sparks to that character and then dissipates. The character struck by the spark takes **2 AP energy damage** and must succeed on an **Engineering** save or be knocked back **2 spaces**, knocked **Prone**, and **Shredded** until the end of their next turn.

Characters that start their turns within **Range 3** of the target are unaffected until they move outside of that area and re-enter it.

. . . .

Darius was the door in; Cyrus was the map. Navigation through the subject's parasubjective topography was proven on paper. Using a particularized human-nonhuman ontologic bridge, EXMAT was able to demonstrate gestalt manifestation in test pilots; with help, we can do what they do – and do it better.

The walls between us and what comes next fall down. The work continues.

Shahnameh
3 SP, Limited 3, Overshield, Shield, Unique, Quick Tech

An allied mech character within **Sensors** and line of sight gains **Overshield** equal to **4+Grit**. While they have this **Overshield**, they have **Resistance** to heat inflicted by other characters.
If they lose this **Overshield** for any reason, they clear all heat.

. . . .

"Be recorded in my book of Kings; live into forever and beyond."

– translated gestalt from the Cyrus Omega ferromemetic, no pre-contact text associated; likely a subject-original imperative/corrective impulse.

Āyah of the Syzygy

`2 SP, System, Unique, Quick Action`

You create a **BLAST 2** energy field in a space within **SENSORS** and line of sight. The first time each turn any hostile character in this area is hit by a ranged or melee attack, they release a discharge of energy and all hostile characters at least partly in the area – including the original character – take **2 AP energy damage**. This effect lasts for the rest of the scene or until you take this action again.

. . . .

"So where are you going? Is your travel not just a reminder to the heavens? Go where thou wilt."

– Witnessed from the Darius 4.8 ferromemetic

The Walk of Kings

`3 SP, Limited 3, Overshield, Shield, Unique, Quick Tech`

An allied character within **SENSORS** and line of sight gains **OVERSHIELD** equal to **4+GRIT**. While they have this **OVERSHIELD**, all their melee attacks gain **AP**, and the first time each turn that they either hit with a melee attack or take damage from a hostile character, they release a **BURST 1** energy blast centered on them. All hostile characters in the affected area take **1 AP energy damage**.

. . . .

"AND IT WAS SO, that we saw His power, and burned under His glory, and wept, and no fortress could withstand our might."

– Witnessed from the Darius 5.10 ferromemetic*

VARIANT FRAMES

These **Frames** are available to PCs and can be taken as alternatives to the original **Frames** when a pilot reaches **rank II** in the license for that mech, functioning as usual but with slightly different traits and **Core Systems**.

When a character reaches **rank II** in the relevant license, they can choose to either retain the standard **Frame** or take the variant version. The two are mutually exclusive. This means that someone who takes the Calendula instead of the standard Minotaur cannot use the standard Minotaur. Only the **Frame** changes, all other gear for the license remains the same, including the gear for **rank II**.

Whenever a character increases their **LL**, they can swap out one variant **Frame** for the base version, or vice versa. They can do this multiple times for the same license if their **LL** keeps increasing.

The **RKF Orchis** can be taken at **rank II** of the **Black Witch** license instead of the base **Frame**.

The **RKF Calendula** can be taken at **rank II** of the **Minotaur** license instead of the base **Frame**.

NEW TAG: EFFICIENT
Efficient: At the end of any scene in which this system is used, you regain **1 CP**.

NEW STATUS: INTANGIBLE
Intangible characters can move through obstructions such as characters or terrain but not end their turns in them. They, their actions, and any effects they own or control can only affect other Intangible characters and objects. Tangible characters can move through **Intangible** characters and objects but not end their turns inside their spaces and can't affect them in any way. **Intangible** characters cannot capture points or count for zones (for **sitreps**) and don't count as adjacent to tangible characters.

Effects that are already active on a character when they become **Intangible**, such as statuses, remain active, but effects that require an ongoing interaction between two characters or objects (like traps or force fields) end. If a mech becomes **Intangible**, its pilot remains **Intangible** for the same duration.

Royal Karrakin Foundries
ORCHIS
Controller/Defender

The Orchis is the spear and shield of the house companies and makes up the bulk of the fighting forces in Baronic space. Its ubiquity does not bely its reliability and durability, nor its iconic status as the line mech of the baronies. Due to a trade negotiation with Smith-Shimano corpro, the Orchis is compatible with the Black Witch licensing scheme and can appropriate the majority of its gear and weaponry.

Utilizing ancient and sturdy mag-lock technology, the Orchis wields a heavy Scuta shield, reinforced to deflect incoming fire. This shield can be locked in place and braced against another shield of its own kind, creating a tessellated wall of impenetrable strength. The half-mile long shield walls of the throne guard, blazoned with their house emblems, are an iconic and terrifying sight in Baronic history.

The kuirassers of the Baronies decorate their Orchii with house heraldry, war banners, and trophies of past conflicts, each one the avatar resplendent with the regalia of a decorated warrior.

CORE STATS

Size: 1
Armor: 1
HULL
   HP: 8
   Repair Cap: 4
AGILITY
   Evasion: 10
   Speed: 5

Save Target: 12
Sensors: 10
SYSTEMS
   E-Defense: 10
   Tech Attack: -1
   SP: 8
ENGINEERING
   Heat Cap: 6

TRAITS

PERFECT PARRY
The **Orchis** and all adjacent allied characters have IMMUNITY **to all damage and effects from missed attacks**.

GUARDIAN
Adjacent allied characters can use the **Orchis** for **hard cover**.

ROYAL GUARD
When an allied mech adjacent to the **Orchis** moves, the **Orchis** can also move with that character as long as it doesn't break adjacency, mirroring that character's movement. The **Orchis** is still affected by obstructions and, between its turns, can only move a total number of spaces with this ability equal to its SPEED+1. This effect doesn't take a **reaction**, and doesn't provoke **reactions** or obey **engagement**.

MOUNTS

MAIN/AUX MOUNT

CORE SYSTEM

HELION

"The man who took the reins of steel and became greater than man. The lowly one, the first, the greatest, the one who threw the sun at the face of his foes. IA! IA! Helion!"

Hunting Eagle
Passive

1/round, when you cause a character to collide with another obstacle or character, you can – in addition to any other effects – throw your mech's scuta shield at that character, dealing **3 kinetic damage** and rendering them unable to take **reactions** until the end of their next turn. The shield then returns to you. This effect doesn't take an **action** or **reaction** to activate.

Helion
Active (1CP), Quick Action, Efficient
You hurl your shield with a mighty throw at a mech (allied or hostile) within RANGE 6, making a special RAM attack that cannot miss and knocks the target **3 spaces back**, instead of **1**. This can cause characters to collide with obstructions as normal.
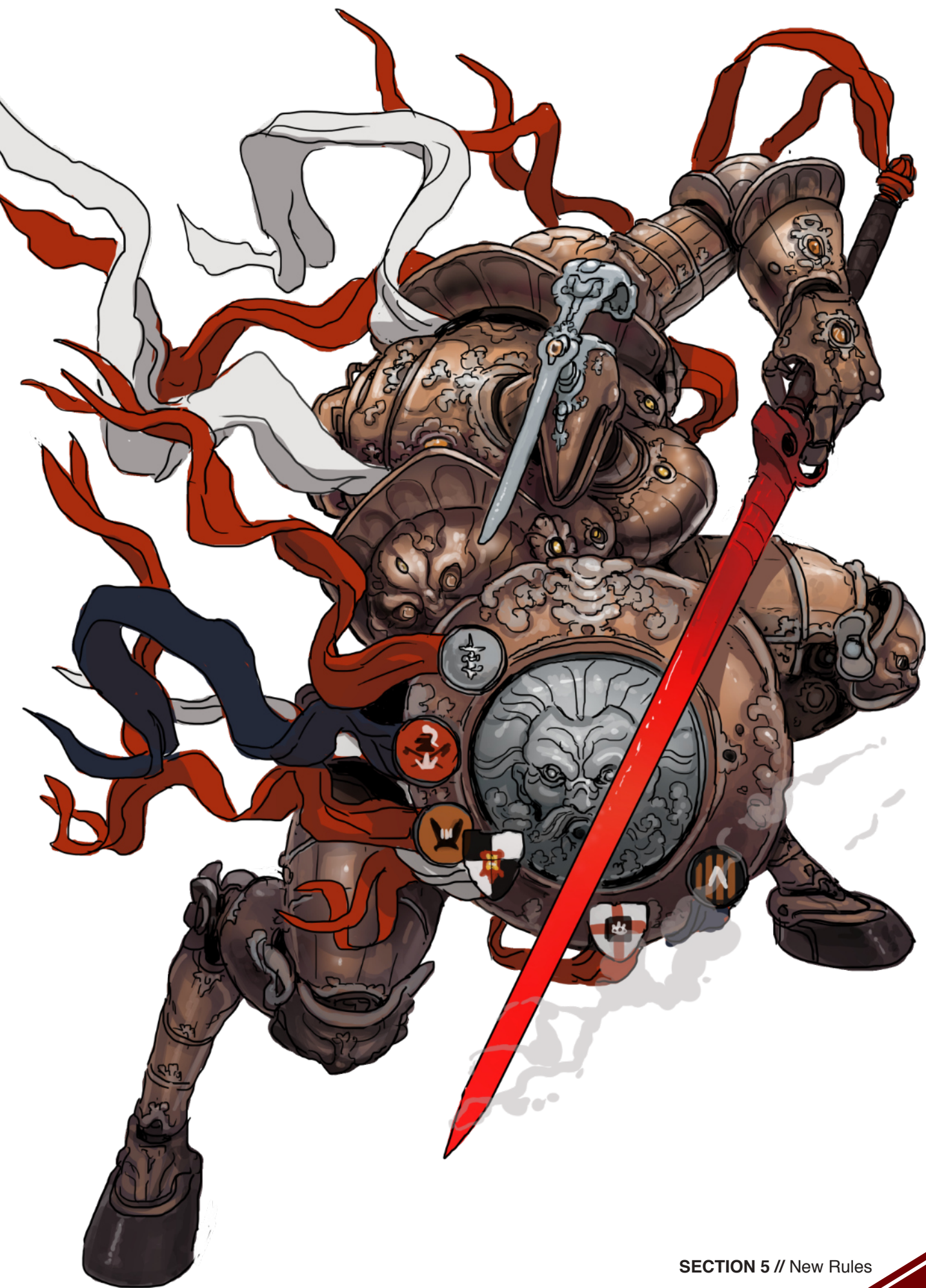
Royal Karrakin Foundries
CALENDULA
Controller

A signature of the Order Xenoglossia's Stygos Grammaton, the Royal Karrakin Foundries Calendula is derived from the Minotaur pattern group first released by HORUS. Oddly, it is unclear from temporal markers whether the codebase used to create the Calendula was created separately, before contact with Union, despite being nearly identical to the Minotaur codebase.

The Calendula uses the internal spatial manipulation abilities of the Minotaur and inverts them, allowing experienced pilots of the mech to cut into a 'non-space' widely regarded by Union theorists to be the Aunic Firmament. In this grey and bleak interstitial zone, matter appears as a flowing fog, and is just as easily parted.

CORE STATS

Size: 1
Armor: 2
HULL
  HP: 7
  Repair Cap: 3
AGILITY
  Evasion: 7
  Speed: 4

Save Target: 11
Sensors: 8
SYSTEMS
  E-Defense: 10
  Tech Attack: +1
  SP: 8
ENGINEERING
  Heat Cap: 6

TRAITS

SCULPTOR OF FATE
1/round, when the **Calendula** hits a character with a **tech attack**, it can create a void husk in a free space within **RANGE 3** of its target. Void husks are **INTANGIBLE** objects that don't cause obstruction. The husk is the same **SIZE** as its target, has **IMMUNITY to all damage and effects**, and emits a **BURST 2** aura while active that affects both Intangible and tangible characters. Hostile characters are **SLOWED** while they are at least partly in the area. The **Calendula** can create any number of husks, all of which disintegrate at the end of the scene.

GRAMMATON LAW
SLOWED hostile characters are also **SHREDDED** while within **RANGE 3** of the **Calendula**.

GRAMMATON MANTLE
As a **protocol**, the **Calendula** can become **INTANGIBLE** until the start of its next turn.

MOUNTS
MAIN/AUX MOUNT

CORE SYSTEM
EXECRATION OF THE NAMES OF THE UNWORTHY DEAD
"I inscribe thy name, I threaten thee with the second death. I kill thy name, and thus I kill thee again in the afterlife."

Execrate
Quick Tech
1/round, you may target another character within line of sight and **RANGE 3** of a void husk, banishing them to an interstitial space. Allied characters can choose whether or not to be affected, and hostile characters can avoid the effect by succeeding on a **SYSTEMS** save. Banished characters exist within a shadowy gray realm, making them **INTANGIBLE**.

This effect lasts until the banished character moves adjacent or starts their turn adjacent to a void husk, either of which returns them to physical space and clears **INTANGIBLE**.

Weighing of Inequitable Hearts
Active (1CP), Quick Action, Efficient
One hostile character and one allied character, both within **RANGE 5** and line of sight of you or a void husk, become **INTANGIBLE** until the end of your next turn. Two characters must be chosen for this effect to occur.