



HOUSE



MARIK



The Free Worlds League

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HISTORICAL ARCHIVE TEAM FOR THE REPRODUCTION OF THE HISTORY OF THE HOUSES OF THE INNER SPHERE AND STAR LEAGUE

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Redid layout in Indesign 2.0; headers are now 150dpi images (better rendering on screen); both covers are now present at 150dpi; Marik family tree added; index added; bookmarks added; document now works 100%.

-- Remy van Vliet

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INTRODUCTION



The study of the Free Worlds League is a study of paradox: Although divided internally, the League presents a united front to the other four Successor States. The League is essentially mercantile-oriented, but is eminent in many fields of scientific and technological investigation. In addition, in what is possibly the most democratic state in the Inner Sphere, there have been more civil uprisings than in any other Successor State.

The Free Worlds League is the oldest Successor State, being established by treaty in 2271. It consists of 333 planets, each with its own government, culture, economy, and political system. The overall leader is Captain-General Janos Marik, the 68-year-old scion of House Marik, whose members have ruled the Free Worlds League for nearly eight hundred years.

The recent Steiner-Davion alliance, the most significant realignment of power within the Inner Sphere since the Succession Wars began, has forced House Marik to ally with House Kurita's Draconis Combine (a militaristic police state) and Marik's traditional enemy, House Liao's Capellan Confederation. How long such strange bedfellows might remain allied is unknown, but forming a united front against the military power of House Davion and the economic power of House Steiner is a strong incentive to do so.

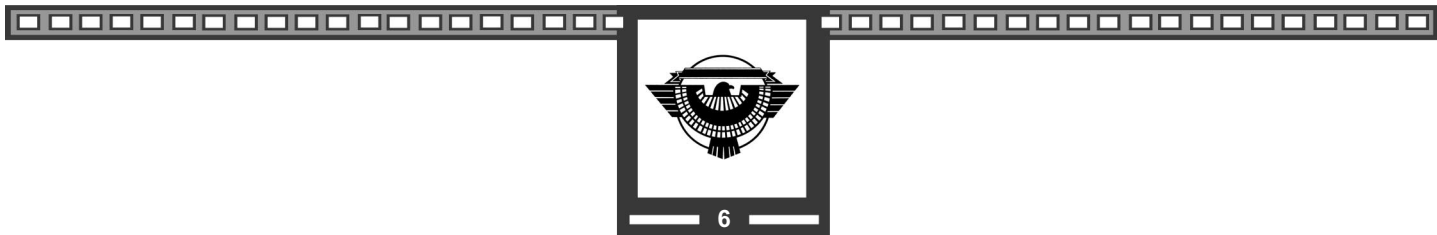
Our Blessed Order is charged with maintaining communica-

tions throughout the Inner Sphere. Despite our personal feelings about a particular economic or political system, our duty is simply to relay messages between star systems. Nevertheless, we must understand the societies and thought processes of the people as well as we understand our communications equipment. It is in that spirit of understanding that we present this series of books to ComStar acolytes.

In addition to the extensive history chapter, this book includes vital information on the economic, political, military, social, and cultural aspects of life in the realm of House Marik. There is also an atlas of key League worlds and a briefing on leading personalities.. Altogether, this book should give an understanding of life for the average Free Worlds citizen as well as insight into how its rulers think and behave.

I would like to offer personal thanks to Gillian Sorensen-Hague, Gerald Steiner-Nelson, and Adal Corvin for providing me with their notes on Houses Kurita, Steiner, and Liao for cross-referencing. I look forward to doing the same for the chief of the Davion research project.

—George Ninetrees, *House Marik Project Leader ComStar Archives, Terra*



HISTORY



INTRODUCTION

The Free Worlds League is a collection of peoples separated by common interest.

—Grant Arbuthnot, Speaker of the Free Worlds League Parliament, 2883.

The difficulty of documenting the history and culture of the Free Worlds League is, paradoxically, rooted in the very openness of the society. The Capellan Confederation, for example, is by contrast a police state that offers us few sources of information. Consequently, any leak that can be found will be a fountain of information. In a diverse, loosely knit confederation such as the Free Worlds League, although the numbers of sources are legion, only a trickle of information is available from any one source. Nevertheless, we believe that this volume will be a valuable addition to ComStar's archives on the Successor States.

Founded in 2271, The Free Worlds League is the oldest of the five Successor Houses. The attitude that brought about this loose alliance was summed up by one of the original members of the League Parliament, Sir Brian Blake more, who said that the foundation of the League “seemed like a good idea at the time.” In fact, it was an idea whose time was long overdue.

Like each of the other four Successor Houses, the Free Worlds League has been dominated by a single ruling family since its inception. The Marik family has always been interested in trade, like House Steiner (which could explain these two states' intense rivalry). One of the major paradoxes of the current political alignment of the Human Sphere is that the mercantile Mariks (who have produced their share of great leaders and monsters) have entered into an alliance with the militaristic House Kurita's Draconis Combine and House Liao's Capellan Confederation. It is evident that the combined power of the Lyran Commonwealth and House Davion's Federated Suns could overwhelm the remaining Houses if not for the Kurita-Marik-Liao alliance. As always in power politics, maintaining the balance of power is the essence in maintaining peace—something the Successor States have been spectacularly unsuccessful at doing for centuries.

EARLY SPACE EXPLORATION

The development of the Kearny-Fuchida stardrive in 2107 led to the first attempt to colonize a new world in 2116. The landing on New Earth truly began an epoch; it is difficult to grasp that prior to that time, the entire human race was confined to a single, overcrowded, polluted planet, and even more difficult to grasp just how much this world has improved since most of its population left it centuries ago. Many historians cite the year 2116 as the end of the Dark Ages.

Along with the development of space travel came a fundamental change of attitude among the world's peoples. Just as people had always dreamed of being able to fly, they had also always dreamed of being able to travel among the stars. With the coming of the Space Age in the early 22nd century, everyone on Terra wanted to leave, believing that the stars offered them a second chance. Never in history had new worlds been so romanticized, or had the term “new worlds” ever been used so literally. On several occasions, the cancellation of interstellar flights caused riots among people camped out overnight outside ticket offices.

The area of space that became the Free Worlds League was little different from other regions near Terra. Most stars in its immediate vicinity were of the late spectral classes, particularly K and M. Therefore, worlds ecologically similar to Terra were few and far between, and thus highly prized. Serving as jump-off points to explore systems containing resources that were harder to exploit, these worlds became the centers of provincial government and the foundation for local economies.

THE COLLAPSE OF ILLUSION

Democracy and imperialism are a bad mix at best. Without the full cooperation of the governed, an imperialist government must ultimately become either venal or authoritarian in order to enforce its will. The Terran Alliance has cleverly avoided the pitfall of indecision and undertaken to become both.

While poor but visionary colonists carved civilization from mankind's last and greatest frontier, the bureaucracy grew even fatter and richer than it had been; when the frontiersmen complained about the situation the Navy was dispatched to coerce them into subservience. This response destroyed any illusions the rebellious colonies might have had about mother Terra's concerns for their welfare.

Nevertheless, the military forces of Terra were about to be disillusioned as well, discovering that invading a planet was not a simple matter of storming the beaches and seizing the airfields. If the millions of indigenous rebels wished to resist, only substantial firepower could cow them.

And even that might not be enough.

—Sir George Humphreys, from the preface to *The Collapse of Illusion*, Globe Press, 2251

Since 2086 a united homeworld had been ruled by the Terran Alliance, which by extension ruled all the colony worlds. By the early 23rd century, with messages from the stars (transmitted by primitive, pre-hyperpulse technology) taking months to arrive back on Terra, colonists in all directions demanded greater autonomy in their planetary affairs, including those on the worlds that would become the Free Worlds.

The earliest world to secede in this sector of space, Denebola, declared its independence in 2234 by plebiscite, and defied the threats of the Alliance military. The military forces of the Alliance were unable, or unwilling, to undertake a campaign of reconquest, an effort that would surely have heightened the animosity between Terra and the colonies, regardless of its outcome. Perhaps the increasingly isolationist General Secretariat of the Terran Alliance simply believed reconquest to be impossible. In any case, the Alliance's reaction to its colonies' disaffection was to withdraw the Alliance Fleet, leaving its wayward colonies to their own devices.

As the bureaucratic system dissolved, formerly independent colonies began to suffer massive economic dislocation, exacerbated by widespread piracy. The ways between worlds became very dangerous, and soon only warships and armed merchantmen plied the space routes. With the absence of the Alliance, leagues formed to protect planets and to pool resources to repel a common threat or achieve a common goal. Of the more than a dozen such leagues formed between 2240 and 2270, three are of interest to this chronicle: the Marik Commonwealth, the Federation of Oriente, and the Principality of Regulus. These three, the largest and ultimately most powerful of the pre-Free Worlds League coalitions, were markedly different in their origins and attitudes.



MARIK ORIGINS

It may be unfair to point out that while the Marik family has a history that goes back to Eastern Europe's Middle Ages, so does the family of Vlad Dracul.

—From *Revolution, Mariks, and You*, a dissident pamphlet, circa 2605

Aristocracy is a state of mind.

—Ward Marik, at a banquet honoring his brother, June 2608.

The ruling families of the five Successor Houses are, of course, old families, but House Marik has an unbroken family tree that reaches back as far as Terra's 13th century. For nearly six hundred years, spanning the European Middle Ages to World War I, the Mariks ruled over a mountainous kingdom located at the junction of three (sometimes four) countries. As a result, House Marik early learned the politics of the buffer state. The kingdom's population had various cultures, languages, and customs, and tended to swear allegiance to the Mariks mainly in the interest of mutual defense, rather than any real fellow-feeling.

ON THE SENATE FLOOR

It seems more than a trifle foolish for us to be stunned that there is unrest in the colonies. Our forebears suffered this, and for much the same reasons: they were unwilling to share the government, and even violence did not change their minds. The society of mankind, my fellow Senators, is not monolithic, like some great arch of triumph. It is like a great tree, with boughs extending in all directions. It must be willing to bend to the coursing of the winds, or else the fury of those winds will surely break it.

—Speech to the Alliance Senate by Charles Marik, April 14, 2231

After the dissolution of the Marik kingdom in the early 20th century, the family dropped into obscurity, from which they emerged during the Exodus period. The Marik to distinguish himself at this time was Charles, who used his success in business as a springboard to a political career.

The wealthy Marik clan had been granted a world in the late 21st century on which to conduct mining operations. The family-controlled interstellar conglomerate was a dominant force in interstellar commerce. Charles Marik was Alliance Senator from the planet Marik until the world declared its independence in 2238. Propelled into the role of head of state, Charles proclaimed the birth of the Republic of Marik.

Like any power politician working in a democratic system, Charles Marik was a master vote-counter. There were three different versions of a planetary Constitution for the Republic of Marik proposed in the Constitutional Convention of 2241. The Klondyke Constitution, which called for a strong central government, had little support, but the Karsegian Constitution presented a strong challenge to the Marik Constitution. Charles knew he had an important fight for ratification on his hands. His first step was to convince several delegates supporting the unpopular Klondyke Constitution that they had no chance of winning on their own terms, but that the Marik Constitution more nearly resembled their political desires than the Karsegian.

Even with most of the Klondyke party in the Marik camp, the vote looked too close to call. As a businessman, however, Charles had never hesitated to resort to espionage to gain advantages over his competitors, and his practice in this area served him well during the Constitutional vote. One of Charles's spies discovered that Senator Adam Marczynski, leader of a group of delegates in the Karsegian camp, had been involved in questionable land dealings. The information came to Charles's attention on the eve of the final vote.

Charles and Marczynski, along with selected members of their staffs, went to dinner a scant 14 hours before the vote was scheduled. Under the cover of routine lobbying, the two opponents debated the relative merits of their positions, then, as Marczynski excused himself to visit the gentlemen's room, Charles Marik did the same. Standing beside Marczynski and speaking very softly, Charles told him that the illicit land deals might still prove profitable if Marczynski's group supported the Marik Constitution on the following day.

It is said that Senator Allard Karsegian never forgave Adam Marczynski for what he perceived as a betrayal of principal. (This did not stop him from entering into an industrial development trust with him after they had both retired from the Marik Senate, however.) Eight of Marczynski's loyalists switched sides minutes before the final vote, and the Marik Constitution defeated the Karsegian proposal by five votes.

Charles Marik was a mild, unassuming, and reticent individual, who was, however, assured of his own aristocratic superiority. It is clear that he felt strongly about the changes taking place during the era, and he was ready to take the lead in forming the future. With the massive Marik fortune behind him, and with the alliance of three neighboring worlds in hand, he plotted out and executed the conquest of a swath of worlds from the boundary of the Terran Alliance outward nearly 60 lightyears. Under the eagle banner of the Marik Commonwealth, Charles Marik and his two sons, Alonzo and Detlev, had united nearly 20 worlds by 2271.

ORIENTE ORIGINS

The Federation of Oriente was the brainchild of Tomás Allison, the foremost statesman of the Terran Alliance before his world's independence in 2241. Allison had given a memorable withdrawal speech when he resigned from the Alliance Senate and, like Charles Marik, sensed the winds of change. Drawing on his immense diplomatic skills, and cashing in every political debt he had acquired during three decades of Terran politics, he forged a new alliance centered on his motherworld of Oriente that, like the Marik Commonwealth, would eventually span more than 20 worlds.



REGULUS ORIGINS

The Selaj family was among the earliest émigrés to this rimward area of space. Over time, the family had bargained or clawed its way to a position of authority in the mercantile community. In contrast to the military conquests of Marik or the diplomatic combinations of Oriente, the Principality of Regulus was based on the Selaj's mercantile domination of five worlds. Drawing on their vast power and wealth, they were able to appeal to their clients' self-interest, leading quickly to a mercantile-based alliance that was the rival of both of its neighbors. Unlike the other two, the Regular Principality had no strong central figure, though the self-styled "Prince" of Regulus did marry the granddaughter of Charles Marik in 2252, thus cementing the leadership of the corporate state firmly in the heirs of House Selaj.

The history of mankind would suggest that war between two or more of these confederations might have been in the offing. However, the efforts of a single individual helped to forestall that. As at many historical junctions in the past, fate had produced a unique individual, whose effect on his generation is impossible to overlook. That man was Sir George Humphreys of New Delos.

DEAD LANGUAGES

The benefits of having a single universal language are well-known. It is unfortunate, however, that the adoption of English has led to the disregard of so many other languages, each of which was an important contribution to the inventiveness of human consciousness. It was less than a century after the accords establishing English as the Free Worlds League's official language that Romanian, Bengali, and Hindi became counted as dead languages. Although they are still studied by scholars, their loss as living tongues can only be mourned as an irreplaceable loss to human culture.

—From *Expanding Galaxies, Shrinking Thought*, by Lakshmi Davis-Samsarananda, University Press, 2988

HUMPHREYS' INITIATIVE

Humphreys was a man of his lime. Scion of a wealthy family with a centuries-long tradition of public service (a Humphreys had served aboard the TAS Pathfinder, yet another had been a Prime Minister in the earliest era of interstellar travel), Sir George had argued vehemently for support of a decentralized federation of ex-colonies under the aegis of Terra. In addition, he had pointed out the potentially disastrous consequences of total withdrawal of the Alliance Fleet. Regrettably for Terra, his position was the minority one.

Following the withdrawal of the Terran fleet from New Delos in 2242, he retired to his family's estate to compose a long and erudite argument against the Alliance governments of the past 15 years (which was published as *The Collapse of Illusion* and widely circulated among dilettantes at the Terran court). At age 64, he emerged from his retirement, entering the service of the Prince of Oriente, Tomás Allison, as a special envoy. At the urging of Allison, he conducted extensive negotiations with the other two princes, Detlev Marik and Raju Selaj, and brought them together at the conference table five years later, in 2271. The end result was the Treaty of Marik, and the foundation of the Free Worlds League.

Of course, Sir George Humphreys anticipated difficulties in getting Raju Selaj and Detlev Marik to the conference table. Not only was there the natural reluctance of princes to compromise any power (not to mention sharing secrets) but there was even the problem of the language barrier. Although Marik and Selaj were both fluent in English, they represented worlds with large numbers of people conversant only in Slovak, Hindi, Mongolian, and Romanian. Presenting any major political initiative to their people required extensive efforts in translation, leading to unexpected delays, such as when it was discovered that there was not a single Mongolian-Romanian translator in the entire Regulus principality. Ultimately, the diplomats fell back on translating their peoples' opinions into English before translating them into other languages. This gave impetus to the movement to make English the official language of the Free Worlds League, which ultimately became the norm in all the rest of the Inner Sphere (a practice interrupted only briefly when House Kurita attempted to make Japanese the only acceptable language in the Draconis Combine).



THE RULE OF 75

The delicacy of the negotiations between Marik, Allison, and Selaj led to another sidelight of history: The Rule of 75. Negotiations broke off a scant three weeks after they began when it leaked out that Selaj intended to exchange one of his planets for one of Allison's as a token of good faith. The exchange would not have been

fair from Allison's point of view, but Selaj's intention was apparently to breach the subject of planetary exchange as a bargaining chip, so that a better deal might be worked out if either Allison or Marik chose to pursue the point. Oriente public opinion, however, interpreted the deal as a mark of bad faith on the part of Regulus. It took Allison and Humphreys a full three months of public relations work to smooth over the gaffe.

Citing not only the public embarrassment of the Oriente Leak, as it had come to be known, but an incident when Charles Marik's published diary disclosed a bribery attempt (the publication led to the public disgrace and suicide of the malefactor), Humphreys proposed that the new Articles of Unification should include a clause stipulating that all personal documents of Free Worlds leaders should be published, but not until 75 years after their deaths. In this way, the integrity of historical perspectives could be retained, but no one living be hurt by premature exposure of their mistakes or personal failings. In 2271, the chief delegates all signed the pact, and the Free Worlds League was born.

A FOOL AND HIS KINGDOM

... An excellent example of such shortsightedness is a fellow called David Genovese, the dictator of Stewart. Genovese had had a brilliant career suppressing freedom. When he took over the leadership of the Stewart Confederacy, it was a ragtag, impoverished group of planets that had trouble ordering spare parts for even the simplest of their factory machinery. Genovese "made the trains run on time" (to use a phrase describing another dictator of a couple of centuries earlier), and he was proud of his accomplishments. Agricultural production on Bedeque, the most fertile of the Stewart planets, had increased 80 percent in five years. Interplanetary communications systems had been streamlined. This was one of the few cases in Free Worlds history where dictatorship worked; so, naturally, he was convinced that nothing else ever would.

Juliano Marik's invasionary forces, actually met with little resistance from Genovese's military. This was because Genovese insisted on commanding his troops himself, and he was not a master strategist. His rigid insistence on troops following his plans to the letter led to disaster when, ironically, a communiqué from the front was garbled due to bad weather. Not realizing that his troops were defending a swamp created by three days of monsoon rains, he ordered the troops to hold the position rather than abandoning it. Descending on the planet when the weather cleared, the invasionary force pummeled the Stewart troops mired in the ground. After this debacle, the Stewart forces were demoralized, and their faith in the dictator—and in dictatorship—was severely damaged.

The subsequent conquest of the Stewart worlds took a mere four months. Captured in his palace, David Genovese was forced to apologize to Marik publicly for inconveniencing his troops, after which Genovese was publicly beheaded.

—David Oglonsky, *Collected Lectures*, Andurien University Press, 3012.

THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY

It was Humphreys' Regulus Land-Grant program that really won me over. We had a world called Ngake, where we had encouraged offworld investment by giving tax breaks and seed money to investors on the condition that they develop the planet economically, providing schools, roads, and medical care for the natives. We did this not out of altruism, or out of greed (although the investors certainly improved the tax base on Ngake), but in order to unify our realm. By that I mean, the more investment from one group of our people in another, the more interrelated their interests would be, and the less chance there would be of the Principality of Regulus breaking down into separate states. When Humphreys cited this precedent, I realized that he was adapting what we did to a much larger scale, founding a state that could defend itself more efficiently than any of its component parts. And I won't deny that I was flattered that he was using my own work as a parallel to what he intended to do.

—From *Memoirs of Raju Selaj*, Regulus Unity Press, 2293



THE TURNING POINT

The breakthrough came in 2269. Humphreys had been pleading—with dignity—with Marik and Selaj for three long years. (I suspect that the biggest factor working against him was that all his arguments made such perfect sense.) Detlev Marik told me afterwards that he'd liked the idea of a Free Worlds League from the first, but had his doubts as to whether it would ever get off the ground due to the diplomatic difficulties involved. By autumn of 2269, he had just about given up, thinking that if he hadn't met with Allison and Selaj by then he probably never would.

The turning point came because of a historical serendipity that no one could have predicted. Leaders or anybody else with a lot of responsibility need hobbies, probably more than most people do. They try their best never to show it—the last thing any political leader needs is for news to get out that they're a little bit eccentric, and anybody's hobby looks eccentric to people who don't share an interest in it. All the same, show me a leader who doesn't have a hobby and I'll show you a person near the breaking point.

Anyway, Raju Selaj collected miniatures: toy soldiers, doll houses, oil paintings, first edition books of poems in four-point print. (This fact was never published in his lifetime.) During a state visit, on an impulse, Selaj invited Humphreys to examine his collection. Delighted with finally getting to see the human side of the cold, intense prince, Humphreys mentioned the collection to Detlev Marik the next time they met. What Marik collected was trophies—not his own, but samples of awards given out in different times and places. Marik appreciated excellence and liked both the form and the spirit of awards people had devised to honor one another. I'm convinced that each man's curiosity about each other's collections had a lot to do with getting them into the same room to negotiate a formal alliance.

Even so, it took two more years before the conference actually occurred. By that time, Selaj and Marik had corresponded several times and were thoroughly prepared to regard one another as friends when they finally met.

—From *Origins of the Free Worlds League: Memoirs of Anthony Franchicka*, Danais Press, 2310

To assuage each of the three participant states, the Treaty of Marik assigned each of the heads of state a role in the new government. The President of Oriente (the title "Duke" was not in common use for another 50 years) was made Minister of Defense, and the Prince of Regulus was given the office of Minister of Trade. In addition, the constitution of the League provided for the establishment

of a military leader in times of crisis; this Captain-General would be proposed by the Ministry of Defense and approved by Parliament. Furthermore, the elective executive, the League Council, had to agree to the choice by majority vote and the unanimous approval of all three great powers.

From the very start, the League Parliament was based on the economic strength of the provinces which were allotted representation in direct proportion to their reported industrial and commercial output. Thus, in theory, sound financial policy would result. Though this was not always true, the strength and wealth of the league, compared to the relative poverty in other areas of space, allowed incredible fortunes to be gained, making the League yet more powerful. With greater profit as an impetus, Parliament allocated substantial funds to the construction and improvement of its fleet and the creation of a strong military force. However, the mettle of the League was not tested for some time.

During the first 20 years of its existence, the League grew gradually, as neighboring states joined to gain protection from pirates and hostile neighbors. The League itself was not above the granting of letters of marque to its free traders; this tactic alone permitted it to extend protection over states that might not normally be as willing to join. In 2293, however, the League ran into opposition from the six-world Stewart Commonality, which had refused to join the League. The Stewart dictator was convinced that a democratically ruled alliance could not agree long enough to overthrow him, but was rudely surprised when Juliano Marik led a naval force into the Stewart system and reduced its defenses in short order. The Stewart War was the first time the Parliament had designated a Captain-General, and it was a total victory for the League.

The Captain-Generalship became a hereditary Marik sinecure late in the 24th century, when that House was granted right of first refusal. In 2306 however, after Parliament signed the Ryerson Accords, a member of the Selaj family was elected Captain-General in order to help the Capellan Hegemony fight the Sarna Supremacy. Although the results were unpleasant, Parliament would make the same mistake a century later.

MILITARY CRISIS ON TERRA

Between 2312 and 2314, political tension within the shrunken Terran Alliance erupted into open war. At first, skirmishes between rival political factions were restricted to the few remaining colony worlds, but a full-scale armed conflict on Terra itself broke out in the summer of 2314. Fleet Admiral Thomas McKenna brought an abrupt end to the conflict and immediately dissolved the Alliance, replacing it with a new government, the Terran Hegemony. Although League trade missions had forewarned just such an occurrence, its suddenness caused the League Parliament to declare a crisis and appoint a Captain-General, who placed the League military on alert. While the tide of bellicosity rose by leaps and bounds in Parliament, Juliano Marik sent a special envoy, James Humphreys (grandson of Sir George), to conduct secret negotiations with McKenna. After receiving McKenna's assurances that the new state would not violate Free Worlds space, Humphreys signed the secret Treaty of Terra with the Hegemony. McKenna would "liberate" worlds in the neighboring Dieron Federation, while his merchant vessels peacefully plied trade routes within the League from Atreus to Oriente.

THE AGE OF GROWTH

The era between the Terran crisis and the outbreak of the Andurien War was one of enormous expansion for the Free Worlds League. Formed early, the Free Worlds had a great advantage over its neighbors, and its essentially mercantile outlook boosted its growth. In the mid-24th century, the League experienced an economic boom, and a number of fortunes were won and lost, with whole planets at stake. Despite dynastic difficulties in the late 2360s, the League was more than ready for the Andurien crisis near the turn of the century.



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FORMATION OF OTHER STATES

Subsequent to the Treaty of Terra in 2316, several regions within the former Alliance responded to the resurgence of Terra by concluding mutual defense pacts similar to the treaty of Marik. In most cases, the impetus for this action was the presence of a powerful, personally charismatic leader. The best examples of such a figure are Lucien Davion and Shiro Kurita.

Davion was the most eloquent diplomat of his time; Kurita was the most brilliant tactician. Each had a profound effect upon the Inner Sphere during the first half of the 24th century and on the history of the next several centuries. In less than 50 years, Davion built a coalition of worlds (the Federated Suns) with ties closer than any enjoyed by member states in the Free Worlds League. In the meanwhile, Kurita's military skill and draconian perseverance allowed him to forge order from chaos between the edge of Terran dominion and the Draconis Rift—by treaty, if possible, but most often by fire and sword. He commanded loyalty much as did his rival Davion, by instilling a sense of honor and purpose in his people, replacing the lethargy and malaise that had existed before.

Beyond the fringes of the four organized states, the Free Worlds, the Federated Suns, Terran Hegemony, and Kurita's Alliance of Galedon (soon renamed the Draconis Combine), principalities were somewhat isolated. Their commerce was insular, and their attitudes were provincial. Within these areas, new states evolved, notably the Lyran Commonwealth (flanked by the Free Worlds and the Draconis Combine), the Capellan Confederation (between the Free Worlds and the Federated Suns) and the Taurian Concordat (in the Periphery beyond the Federated Suns). By 2389, when the Terran Hegemony conducted the Grand Survey, there were ten separate states and a host of clients surrounding them.

NO HOLDS BARRED

Taylor turned away to look out across the great factory/city that spread out to the horizon. DeShong was silent, knowing that the great industrialist was about to wax poetic again. He'd heard the speech before, but waited patiently while the engines of hyperbole were stoked in

Taylor's brain.

He could almost read the platitudes as they crossed Taylor's furrowed skull; it was like he was watching some sort of electronic tickertape, sending him reports of stock prices rising.

"You know, Ken," Taylor finally said, "this is the time to live in."

Standard speech #47, DeShong thought. Here we go again. But he nodded, putting on what he hoped to be his best "bright young man" smile. "Yes, sir."

"I got everything I have everything you see—by working for it, clawing and fighting for it. No government handed it over to me, like some sort of birthday present. My dad, rest his soul, was a third-watch engineer on an oreship." Taylor gestured to the 3D portrait of the Old Man, hanging on the far wall like some sort of icon. "When he died of iridium poisoning at 36, he left scarcely a thousand M-Bills to bury him with and to keep my family alive. I had no choice but to leave home, finding whatever work I could—"

Doing anything I could set my hands to, DeShong thought, working two, three jobs—

"—doing anything I could set my hands to, working two, three jobs, until finally I had my chance. And I made the most of it." He slammed his fist onto the desk. "And I did it without the help of goddam government. We didn't need 'em then, and we don't need 'em now.

"I don't need stinking government safety inspectors sneaking around my factories, prying into my secrets. And I'm not going to let that bastard Noren get away with it, Senator or no."

Now, DeShong thought, he'll start lapsing into the bit about how he'll throw them off the property with his bare hands if he has to.

To the younger man's surprise, however, Taylor's anger subsided, and a wry smile crossed his face. "Yes indeed, Ken," he said. "Anyone who tries to tell you 'bout the good old days, they're talking out the wrong end. These are the good old days." He picked something off his desk and tossed it into DeShong's lap: a vid cassette, labeled with the familiar emblem of Taylor and Cie and the top secret emblem.

"What—"

"Bring that over to Sherry in Liaison. Tell her to send a copy of it, with my compliments, to our crusading friend Senator Noren. I'll bet you a bottle of my finest Chateau Rothschild that we won't see any more of those scheming investigators. You see, Ken, my boy," and he placed a fatherly hand on DeShong's shoulder, "we've got the goods on Noren."

—from the historical novel *Big Time*, 2371

DYNASTIC ASSOCIATIONS

The first families of the League intermarried extensively during this period. In 2301, Damien, youngest son of Juliano Marik, married Antonia Allison, Duchess of Oriente, securing the Oriente line; Laine, Juliano's granddaughter, married David Graham (the descendants of this marriage formed House Graham). A generation earlier, Brian Orloff had married Micaela Marik, Juliano's first cousin, forming House Orloff.

By far the most important dynastic marriage, however, was that of Christopher Marik, eldest grandson of Juliano, to Madelyne Sian, the daughter of a prominent Sian Commonality family. This marriage occurred in 2305, and by decision of the League Parliament, offspring of the union would be specifically excluded from the Captain-Generalship. Once it reached its primacy, the Sian-Marik branch of the family greatly resented this arrangement, and the sudden death of their father in 2319 heightened their resentment. The two sons, Kyle and Dorian, reached adulthood in the 2330s, only to see the direct descendants of Juliano Marik being accorded authority and status. They ultimately turned to violence, becoming deeply involved in various subterfuges and plots to overthrow the Free Worlds League. Kyle and Dorian were involved in the assassination of Geraldine Marik in 2364, for which they, and Kyle's sons Conal and Brion, were caught and executed. Roger Sian-Marik, Dorian's grandson, was also involved in the assassination, but escaped capture. He and his daughter Clorinda (known as "the Angel") became well-known terrorists for the balance of the century, and were immortalized in a contemporary underground film.



THE CONSPIRACY BEARS FRUIT

As the Houses that would ultimately become the Star League expanded farther and farther outward from Terra and leadership became a more and more fragmented endeavor, many of the trappings of medieval Terran feudalism returned. One of these trappings was that House Marik, beginning around 2350, kept an official food taster to sample all of the Captain-General's food to prevent poisoning. The Mariks always used a dwarf for this job because his system would register the effects of small doses more readily.

In 2363, the Marik's taster, a dwarf named Hadji-Mohammed Kimbrough, began to sicken as if he had been ingesting small doses of poison. After undergoing extensive medical tests, Kimbrough was found to have been fed arsenic, portions of which were subsequently found in Geraldine Marik's system also. Pleased that Kimbrough had saved her life, Geraldine awarded him the Marik Eagle of Honor, the highest civilian award issued by the Free Worlds League. The following year, in what was regarded as loyalty far beyond the call of duty, Kimbrough returned to his job as the Marik's food taster. Three weeks later, Geraldine was dead, and Kimbrough had disappeared. He had sprinkled liberal amounts of ground glass into Geraldine's last meal; he had poisoned himself with arsenic to disguise the fact that he was an agent for Kyle Sian-Marik. Despite the difficulties a dwarf must have in disguising himself, Hadji-Mohammed Kimbrough was never captured.

Allan Marik succeeded his mother as the Marik following her death in 2364. He had been slightly wounded in an attack on his mother, but because of the maneuverings of his mother's brother, Mikhail Marik, he was confined to a hospital under heavy sedation. Though he recovered, Allan Marik found himself a prisoner while his uncle ruled the Marik Commonwealth and uncovered (or manufactured) plots involving the Sian-Marik branch of the family, which mysteriously spread to many of the enemies of House Marik within the Free Worlds League. Ultimately Allan was freed, but before he could capture his vengeful uncle, Mikhail had taken his own life.

ATTACK ON GERALDINE MARIK

Two months before her assassination, there was a less subtle attempt on Geraldine's life. She and her retinue were on the reviewing stand during a Marik Day parade (celebrating the anniversary of Charles Marik's announcement of the Free Worlds League). Dorian Marik, who allayed suspicion by standing on the reviewing stand with her, had arranged for low-power explosives to blast the supports out from under the stand. He had also hired several members of a local street gang to attack the Marik when the stand collapsed.

Geraldine, who was fifty years old at the time, escaped the seven-meter fall with barely a scratch, and her bodyguards, though disoriented at first, recovered in time to kill the gang members before they did anything worse than wound Allan Marik's arm. At the time, it was regarded as the most chuckleheaded assassination attempt in history, and the gang, the Satan Slashers, became a laughingstock for Marik comedians.

—From *The Calamitous 24th Century*, by Ian Barduk, Globe Press, 2732

THUMBS DOWN

It is amazing to think how many of the "heroes" of classic fiction are rogues. Think of Raskolnikov, that ax-murdering madman; Charles Foster Kane, who starts a war just to sell newspapers; or Macbeth, who kills his patron and usurps his throne. These rogues, however, either repent or get their comeuppance, while the terrorists in Angel Run are not only brutes, but brutes glorified.

From the opening shot of the wilderness where the Sian-Mariks land, to Clorinda's apotheosis as a symbol of rebellion, this film is atrocious. That killers capable of dynamiting a nursery (as the real Roger Sian-Marik did) should be treated as heroes is bad enough, but the obsessive closeups of carnage are really sick.

In my opinion, there is no worse crime in film than to make the gunning down of shoppers in a supermarket exhilarating. Jettisoning a busload of intergalactic tourists into deep space is definitely not amusing; watching a laundromat full of diplomats split open in a decompression chamber is far from entertaining.

The only comfort I can take is that this film will soon be cut up into ukulele picks and will not immortalize these creeps.

—From a review in *Film Orgy* magazine, July 2394

THE ENIGMA OF “UNCLE MIKHAIL”

One of the most intriguing case histories for psychohistorians is that of Mikhail Marik the Avenger. Here was a man whose life was full of contradictions. Everyone who knew him agreed that he was very consistent and methodical. Why then did this archetypal tough guy kill himself?

Some people believe that he committed suicide because he was more afraid of pain than of death, and that Allan Marik intended to put him to death in an especially grisly manner. This reasoning is highly unlikely for a couple of reasons. In his youth, Mikhail had been in a gyrocopter crash and had walked six miles through a desert without water and with a fractured ankle and a broken arm, carrying an unconscious comrade. A person capable of that kind of heroism is not easily intimidated, not even by Allan Marik. In addition, Allan himself was not a cruel man. He might have intended to have his uncle killed, but he certainly would not have tortured him.

A more likely explanation is that Mikhail was suffering from a degenerative disease called Knight-Grasse's Syndrome, which had started showing up in the late 21st century. In 2367, people were dying slowly and painfully from it. The autopsy on Mikhail Marik revealed that he had been in the intermediate stages of this disease.

Another possibility, which came to light after Geraldine, Allan, and Mikhail Marik's personal papers were published, was that Mikhail was depressed about the fate of another family member. Mikhail had an illegitimate daughter—this was never known outside the family during his life—named Hideyo Makayoshi. Her mother was a minor member of a Kurita trade mission that met with Mikhail in 2344. Apparently, the two fell madly in love, but nothing could come of it because of the ticklish political situation between the Free Worlds and the Draconis Combine. When the mother became pregnant, she realized that she faced dishonor in her Kurita home-land. Staying behind on Atreus, she and Hideyo lived in obscurity; Mikhail visited them incognito whenever he could.

In 2369, both mother and daughter were killed in an accident in a damaged high-rise elevator. The elevator may have been tampered with, and they may have been mistaken for Kurita spies. Hideyo had shown enormous promise as an urbanologist; her professors in graduate school and the Atreus City Public Worlds Committee had received her theories on city planning enthusiastically. Of Mikhail Marik's children, Hideyo was clearly the most gifted and the one he loved the most.

Ultimately, we really do not know what killed Mikhail Marik. The main drawback to psychohistory, as we all know, is that we really did not know these people. If they lived in our own time, we could just ask them why they did what they did. In the case of Mikhail Marik, however, who knows if he would have given us a straight answer?

—From *Readings in Psychohistory*, by Professor Bob Kieffer, Atreus University Press, 3021



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THE AGE OF WAR

The Age of War was the first period of extended conflict between the states of human space. Despite the animosities of the era, however, the conflicts never erupted into total conflagration due to the adoption of the Ares Conventions in 2412. The “laws of war” provided for a reasonable way for combatants to address such areas as civilians and non-combatants, reduction of non-military targets, exchange of prisoners, and armistices. In this way, the always—violent nature of war was concealed. Furthermore, by placing bounds and constraints on it, war became both legitimate and predictable enough to satisfy the dynastic aspirations of the Draconis Combine and the interests of the merchants of the Free Worlds League. Maneuver, rather than decisive battle, decided campaigns.

ANDURIEN CRISIS

The systems around Andurien had had a long history of being traded back and forth between the Capellan Confederation and the Free Worlds League. Between 2366 and 2369, while the Confederation was forming under the leadership of Franco Liao, the League had captured the Liao systems Berenson, Zion, Shiro, Hassad, and Andurien. Over the next decade, these systems changed hands frequently, but by 2395, an unofficial armistice existed between the League and the Confederation. Chancellor Franco's successor, Kurnath, was determined to win back his Marik-controlled worlds, however.

In the summer of 2398, Chancellor Kurnath declared war on the Free Worlds League to win back the Andurien system. This war was more violent than those fought during the 50 years preceding it, and has since become known as the first war in the Age of War. Soon, war erupted among all the Houses of the Inner Sphere. Tensions had been increasing for years along the borders of the interstellar powers, and House leaders saw the Andurien War as the green light to redress wrongs. The Andurien War involved huge armed forces on both sides, which frightened the leaders of the League's member-states. Mercantile in vocation and outlook, most were more than happy to leave the military aspects to the Marik and to assure him power for the duration of the crisis.

In fact, Parliamentary members had had the foresight to ask for a Captain-General two years earlier, in 2396. The leader of House Marik, Peter Marik, was 48 years old and a member of Parliament himself. Vowing never to rejoin Parliament until he had resolved the Andurien question once and for all, Peter stormed out of the Parliamentary chambers.

As war spread to the other realms of the Inner Sphere, the people of the Free Worlds League began to fear that the entire galaxy would become a gigantic free-for-all. Popular sentiment called for a cease-fire with the Capellan Confederation. Jealous of House Marik's sinecure as Captain-General, the MP from Regulus, Hered Selaj, seized the opportunity to push forward a proposal for the Captain-Generalcy to pass to House Selaj. After Peter Marik lost the battle of Kwamashu in 2401, Hered gained numerous supporters in Parliament. On the planet Marik itself, Selaj agents had incited citizens with the news that Peter Marik was a power-hungry madman who would not stop until he had become dictator of the Free Worlds League.

Since the Battle of Kwamashu, however, Peter Marik had proved himself an able commander. Instead of attacking many planets or engaging the bulk of Liao forces, Peter drove into the Confederation, intending to sack Sian, Cordiagr, and then finally, Capella. The ruse worked. Liao forces retreated off Mosiro and Lopez, as the Marik armada pushed toward Sian. In the Sian system, the Marik dealt the Capellans a decisive defeat.

By 2404, Chancellor Aleisha Liao negotiated a treaty with Peter Marik, ending the Andurien War. Exhausted by the war, the Capellans gave the Andurien worlds to the League for a period of ten years, after which the populace itself would decide its fate.



STRUGGLE BETWEEN MARIK AND PARLIAMENT

Peter was a headstrong, arrogant man with great ambitions for his dominion. Despite his distrust of Parliament, he realized that he needed its cooperation to proceed in the best interests of the League.

As a result of his successful campaign against the Capellans, Peter Marik acquired a heroic reputation and wide popular support. In the course of the next dozen years, he extended the Free Worlds boundaries substantially, at the expense of both the Capellans and the Lyrans, who were repulsed after some early gains. Unfortunately, Peter Marik's support was not as great in the Parliament. The "oily merchants" of the Parliament, whom he had always mistrusted, sought to control his activities and campaigns, not merely through the granting or withholding of funds or troops, but also through a special advisory committee established in 2413 to oversee the conduct of the Marik's campaigns. This act of Parliamentary arrogance soon led to crisis.

Not only the Free Worlds League was concerned about the massive destruction caused during the Age of War. Chancellor Aleisha Liao of the Capellan Confederation dispatched a message to the Free Worlds Parliament asking for their help to forge conventions to limit the destructiveness of war. In 2412, a Parliamentary delegation arrived on the Capellan planet Ares (along with representatives from the other territories of the Inner Sphere) to hammer out some rules of warfare. Christened the Ares Conventions, these rules demanded that maneuver—not destruction would decide campaigns.

In 2416, the Lyran Commonwealth attempted to take the planet Dieudonne from the League. Again, Peter Marik was called into service as Captain-General. The Marik's campaign was short and successful—several Lyran worlds fell into League hands, including the semi-independent border world of Amity. The Parliamentary committee, concerned with the escalating costs of the campaign, ordered that Marik negotiate an armistice. However, Peter Marik also seized the Lyran world Rochelle, which was not well defended. He was aware that the Lyrans might be less willing to agree to peace if this planet were in his hands, but he felt that the vast mining resources of Rochelle were sufficient to warrant the attack. In 2418, after an armistice was finally concluded with the Lyrans, Parliament passed the War Powers Act, severely constraining the authority of the Captain-General to make policy. Under the Act, the activities of the former Marik were censured.

The crisis of 2420, leading to a renewal of the war with the Lyrans, brought Peter Marik's name before Parliament as choice for the Captain-Generalcy. In a famous speech recounted in his biography (*The Legacy of Peter Marik*, Gryphon Press, 2426), he refused to serve as Captain-General with the War Powers Act in force and the Parliamentary Committee as overseer. The Parliament turned to Joseph Stewart, a well-known general who had served under Marik in the previous war. While competent, Stewart could not grasp the breadth of strategy required to conduct interstellar war and failed miserably.

Amity and Danais fell to the Lyrans, as the Free Worlds forces were routed outside the Concord system. Luckily for the League, the main body of the Steiner army was occupied against the Draconis Combine, and the Lyrans, evidently satisfied with their successes, left the League alone. If they had not, they could easily have taken a dozen more worlds. With the failure of Stewart to win the war, many MPs defected from the ranks of House Selaj, as they believed that only a Marik was capable of conducting interstellar warfare.

MARIK EDUCATION

Many wonder why House Marik has had the sole privilege of the Captain-Generalcy. Because this House has had an incredibly illustrious string of military successes, most representatives in Parliament reason that they should not monkey with success. Since 2412, the Mariks developed many of the tactics necessary for the war of maneuver called for by the Ares Conventions. Although they never published their tactics, enemy generals soon learned their strategies.

Mariks are successful generals due to their upbringing. Every member of the House is taught military history from the age of four. A Weapons Master coaches the scions from the age of seven in numerous types of weapons. Later, Mariks learn battle tactics, on the gameboard and in the field. The scale of engagements gradually increases, until, by the age of 15, a Marik can handle the complexities of interstellar warfare.

All Mariks must serve in the military upon reaching the age of 18. Here, they begin to lead troops in earnest. It is unusual for a Marik to leave the military, and those that do are looked upon with distaste by their relations (though few are actually disowned).

—From *The Eagle House*, by Guardino Harlough, Dragon Tooth Publishing, 3002

In 2422, Peter Marik was shot while leaving the House of Parliament. The assassin was never discovered, though some whispered that House Selaj had ordered the murder.

Five years later, the Lyran Commonwealth high command decided to renew its struggle against the Free Worlds by landing on the Marik planet Bolan. Parliament offered the Captain-Generalcy to Peter Marik's second son Terrence. (Peter's first son, Bruce, had died in 2405 during a raid on the Steiner planet Rahne.) Terrence, like his father before him, refused the Captain-Generalcy.

Dixie and Kamenz soon fell to the Lyrans, and the Parliament was left with the choice of choosing another Captain-General (a choice that twice before had spelled ruin for the League) and disbanding the War Powers Act and the Parliamentary Committee. The representatives overwhelmingly chose the latter. The Speaker of the House herself traveled to the Marik's estate to tell him the news.

Although Terrence Marik was an intelligent tactician, he failed to retake Bolan and Kamenz. In 2427 and 2432, he destroyed many Lyran units, but could not drive the stubborn defenders off the two planets. The task would fall to his brother Peter in 2441, when Terrence stepped down from the Captain-Generalcy to let "a winning Marik" restore glory to the Free Worlds banner.

Peter Marik II was a quiet, thoughtful man. Upon the retirement of his brother, he gathered the members of House Marik together to decide who would be the next Captain-General. Personally, he felt that Micaela Marik, the beautiful, outspoken daughter of Terrence, would make a better Captain-General than he. Micaela herself expounded vigorously for the position. Peter would not speak on his own behalf, and his son George had to refute Micaela's charges of cowardice directed against his father. As George and Micaela cursed each other across the table, Terrence Marik held up his hand for silence. As the old, gray-bearded man rose to his feet, all ears turned to hear his remarks. For pronouncing another Marik a coward, he declared, Micaela had dishonored an elder. The only remedy for this had to be a duel.

The swordfight took place immediately, and the two fenced for hours within the great chamber. Peter's advanced years slowed him not a whit; rather, he had learned many maneuvers not taught by Marik Weapons Masters. Eventually, Peter's blade found Micaela's abdomen, and the issue of the next Captain-General was solved.

Kamenz and Bolan both fell to the Marik in 2441, and in 2446, he took Halfway and Smolnik. Beyond the new Marik border lay a dearth of star systems and then Tharkad, the seat of the Lyran Commonwealth. Expecting incredible resistance on Tharkad, Peter called a halt to the campaign. In the next few years, he defended the Marik border against Liao raiders.

Like many Mariks, Peter served as both Captain-General and representative from the Marik Commonwealth. In fact, he was so well-liked by his fellow MPs that he was elected Speaker of the House in 2446. In this position, he pushed through legislation allowing civilian populations on worlds captured by the Free Worlds to become citizens of the League. Thus, there was no great exodus of civilians off captured worlds, and the world could continue to be productive in service to the League. Peter's recent conquests soon added to the League's economic might.



TENURE OF GERALK MARIK

In 2452, Peter Marik surrendered the Captain-Generalcy to his grandson, Geralk Marik. During his brief reign, Geralk spent less than 20 percent of his time on Atreus, and so had little political impact. The vast majority of his time as Captain-General he spent in Lyran space taking the worlds Bella I and Alula Australis. His tactics and his fierceness in battle soon earned him such nicknames as "The Bloodthirsty Giant" and "Geralk the Bloodthirsty."

Geralk's downfall came in 2459, when, in an attempt to broaden the scope of the war, he invaded Loric. Although he had a workable battle plan for the invasion, he was surprised by the new technological innovation called the BattleMech. The Lyran Commonwealth's use of 'Mechs in crushing Geralk Marik—literally—was the first occasion these machines were used in battle. For centuries to come, Lyran patriots celebrated the day that the first BattleMechs drove the Free Worlds army off Loric.

The League itself received the technology to produce BattleMechs in 2462, when technicians formerly employed on the Steiner planet Alarion defected to the Free Worlds League. They had been, they felt, unfairly disciplined in an incident involving plant security. With complete blueprints for BattleMech prototypes, Captain-General Simone Marik, Geralk's daughter, was able to reach military parity with the Lyran Commonwealth, preventing House Steiner from avenging the destruction caused by Geralk Marik.

The Free Worlds first used BattleMechs in combat in 2470. In 2468, the Lyran Commonwealth had used its own 'Mechs to retake Cavanaugh and Bella 1, although its failure to capture Alula Australis blunted the Lyran drive. In the ongoing battle for that planet, the introduction of the first Free Worlds 'Mechs turned the tide in favor of the Marik's troops. The independence celebration on that world lasted over five weeks, during which more people were arrested for disorderly conduct than had been detained by the military police in the entire seven years of fighting.

TRIBUTE

Historians have unfairly treated Simone Marik, who succeeded her father as Captain-General at the age of 19. Being listed among Captain-Generals as colorful as Geralk and Albert indeed makes her seem lackluster, but that in no way reflects on her abilities. Her famous remark in her investiture speech, "My first ambition is to avoid making history," caused historians to refer to her as "The Millard Fillmore of House Marik." Nevertheless, that she achieved her ambition is quite remarkable, as she ruled in such troubled times. Not everybody can conduct war, make far-reaching policy decisions, or promote economic expansion and technological growth and still resist the urge of self-aggrandizement. For that, she deserves our admiration. I think she would be pleased that she takes up minimal space in history books.

—From *Character and Destiny: The Mariks During the Age of War*, by Frederick Nigel Press, Atreus University Press, 2998

THE FREE WORLDS AND TERRA

As the economic power of the League grew, its wealth began to rival that of the Terran Hegemony. The League people had disdain for the Hegemony, believing that the supposedly well-meaning Cameron family aspired to re-establish the primacy of Terra over all of humanity.

This deterioration of relations fostered paranoia in the highest councils of the Free Worlds League, especially among the members of House Marik. League spies reinforced this paranoia, describing tendrils of influence and technological innovation extending outward from humanity's homeworld.

In 2475, Capellan Chancellor Jasmine Liao began making diplomatic overtures to the Free Worlds, which, for one reason or another, Simone decided to reject. As a show of good faith, Simone offered several systems to the Capellan Confederation in return for its help in a projected invasion of the Terran Hegemony, an offer the Chancellor rejected without even taking it seriously. The Parliament voted against further allegiance to Simone during this crisis, largely because of her lack of charisma, and ostensibly because of her youth. Meanwhile, a substantial naval force had been readied at Oriente, with units (including a few prize regiments of BattleMechs) aimed at Capellan space. In the summer of that year, their target destination was suddenly changed; the force was to be used against the very heart of the Terran Hegemony, with its ultimate objective the conquest of Terra itself.

Carlos Marik was far from the most stable Captain-General. His patriotism for the Free Worlds and his sociopathic fear of Terran motives led him to conclude that only he had the power to prevent a Terran war of conquest. For the second time in two decades, a Marik decided to flout the Ares Conventions.

While the force rode at anchor in the Oriente system, a highly placed League aide leaked the plan to a SPY of the Terran Hegemony. The Hegemony took advantage of the turbulence in Parliament to launch an attack against the navy at Oriente. In a lightning attack, the Terran fleet crushed the Free Worlds Navy. Carlos's younger brother Brion, Commander of the Marik Guard, staged a bloodless coup on Atrous, backed by House Marik, which was embarrassed by the debacle at Oriente, and by the majority of the Free Worlds Parliament, which confirmed him as Captain-General less than a week later.

Carlos, who remained with the remnants of the fleet at Oriente, vowed to retake the Captain-Generalcy from Brion. As he had most of the Free Worlds Navy at his command, it seemed that he would make good on his promise. Before he could launch his raid on Atrous, however, an emissary from Parliament came to



Carlos, offering him the post of Speaker of the House in exchange for stepping down from the Captain-Generalcy. Carlos, whose paranoia was raging unchecked ever since receiving word of the coup, was deeply insulted by the offer. Proclaiming that only he was worthy to be Captain-General, he began screaming imprecations at the emissary in front of his troops. After this scene, the officers of

the Free Worlds Navy realized that Carlos had lost all touch with reality, and so they gave orders to return to Atrous—not as a conquering force, but as loyal subjects going to pledge their allegiance to their new leader. Carlos managed to commandeer one ship and escape to the Magistracy of Canopus, swearing to conquer the Free Worlds League from his brother, not because of the coup but for the insult of offering him an inferior position. Carlos was never heard from again.

As the Free Worlds braced for invasion by the Terrans, however, the Director-General of the Hegemony, Theodore Cameron, performed an about-face, offering to negotiate peace with the new Captain-General. Brion Marik agreed, and the two signed a peace treaty in March of 2478 without a single shot being fired.

Brion was much unlike his brother, though he was less extraordinary than many before or since. His greatest asset was his recognition of the changing times, and of the restraint exercised by his Terran counterpart. While Carlos Marik and many Parliament members believed that Terra was a significant and dangerous rival, Brion placed relations with Terra as a high priority. He was neither a liability nor an asset as a diplomat. Still, he was the correct man for the time, when war with the Hegemony would have doomed the Free Worlds League.

His son, by comparison, was in many respects a comic figure. Where Brion had been tall and charismatic, Albert was a dwarf, standing under one and a half meters tall. Unfit for battlefield leadership (though he had a special Griffin 'Mech built for his diminutive frame), he was still a brilliant tactician, having learned all

he could from his father. His size and mellifluous voice were disarming to rivals and allies, making him well-liked and respected in Parliament as well by other interstellar governments. He spent a dozen years in the Rising Star conglomerate, a wealthy trading firm based at Calloway Vi, and had demonstrated remarkable business acumen. He was an avid painter and devoted to the ancient strategy game Go. When he returned to Atrous in 2508, he became a patron of the arts. Three years later, Brion Marik died, and House Marik and Parliament confirmed Albert as the next Captain-General.

The struggle for control of the Andurien systems heated up again in 2528, when Capellan Chancellor Kai-
vin Liao dispatched ground and naval units to Andurien. Albert's attempt to outflank the invaders engulfed the entire region in the fighting. Soon, the League was fighting Capellans from Fujiidera to Meadowvale. Forced to break up regiments in order to garrison the ever-changing border, Albert spread his troops thinly throughout the war zone. Nevertheless, his battalion commanders performed well, defeating Capellan Forces even when outnumbered three-to-one.



THE STAR LEAGUE

First and always, the movers and shakers in the Free Worlds League were mercantile in outlook. In the course of its history, diplomats, generals and just plain adventurers had led the League, but their objectives were always the same: to open new markets and to extend economic influence. Although these motivations were sometimes forgotten (the desire to crush the Lyran Commonwealth or thwart Terran Imperialism), an event or a leader always brought the League back to its true path.

FORGING THE NEW ALLIANCE

As Ian Cameron advanced in age, he realized that reunion of even the Inner Sphere—much less the entirety of human space—was an incredibly formidable task, even for a statesman whose ability to mediate was recognized and respected. The feuding states of the Inner Sphere refused to sit at the same conference table (or, indeed, anchor in the same system). Most historians credit Ian Cameron's golden tongue and parleying skill with carrying out this incredible diplomatic feat. The unification that would lead to the Star League Concord in 2571, however, was not entirely the work of Ian Cameron.

Cameron found an able and tenacious ally in Albert Marik. Appalled by the carnage of the Second Andurien War, Albert devoted the rest of his long life to forging a lasting peace, a work he realized might require more courage than waging war. When the Third Andurien War broke out in 2551, the 73-year-old Albert was reinstated as Captain-General. Tens of thousands of people mobbed the streets to cheer the Marik on his way to Atreus' spaceport. From there, he joined the rest of the League fleet in the Mansu-ri system.

The Capellans fared no better in the third war than they did in the previous two. Negotiations between the two governments began five years later, aided by Ian Cameron. During these talks, Cameron unveiled to Chancellor Terrence Liao his proposal for a unified Star League. Although, at first, Terrence showed reluctance to join the alliance, he readily committed to joining when Albert gave him suzerainty over the Andurien systems. In exchange, Albert received the assurance that only the Marik Captain-General would act as the Free Worlds League's Council Lord.

Cameron found the maneuverings of the Lyran Estates-General somewhat difficult to fathom. The intrigues at Tharkad, the Lyran Court, were labyrinthine at best; alliances shifted at the slightest rumor. As Free Worlds merchants spread rumors according to the designs of the Marik and the Terran Director, Free Worlds money supported pro-unification factions in the Estates, while isolating those opposing such an action. The Steiner clan ruled over a discontented realm; its inefficient, corrupt bureaucracy made it nearly impossible to properly exploit its vast natural and industrial resources. Intrigues, assassination plots, and coup attempts had made House Steiner even more paranoid than House Marik, and in the mid-26th century, it had had a series of inefficient, ineffectual leaders with little skill at controlling the political situation. Thus, it was easy for the Free Worlds to infiltrate, bribe, and manipulate the Archon Tracial Steiner's advisors to convince the Archon to join the Star League in 2558.

ALBERT MARIK THE GREAT

The thing that surprised me most about Albert Marik was that, at his age, his voice still had the vigor of a young man's voice. We all made speeches on the occasion of signing the treaty, but Marik held us spellbound. The text alone, as beautifully written as it was, does not give a clear idea of the presence of this tiny man or of the force of his personality.

Afterward I congratulated him on his speech, and he politely returned the compliment. Then he said, "You know, giving speeches is easy. I simply had my ghostwriters knock out something overnight, and they did an exceptionally good job this time. All I could think as I stood there behind the podium, with all those hundreds of eyes on me, was that for every word there might be a thousand lives saved. It made me want to talk forever."

—From *Memoirs of Lawrence Davion*, Federation Press, 2582

The Second Andurien War had lasted for three years when Ian Cameron, Director of the Terran Hegemony, invited both sides to a summit conference on New Delos in 2531. For two weeks, the tension mounted, with no word from the conferees. Then from the blue, the two powers announced a settlement, demarcating borders that had been disputed for dozens of years, and settling a number of long-held gripes between the two belligerents. Andurien and Hassad both became the property of the Free Worlds League, and the Capellan Chancellor, Mica Liao, agreed to pay a heavy indemnity for Liao aggression.

Like the Free Worlds League, the Federated Suns had a mercantile, independent tradition. However, after the Suns' civil war of 2540, House Davion emerged as the absolute monarchy of the realm. Although this system suited those in power just fine, it caused considerable unrest among the rising class of small merchants, who had to suffer excess taxes and duties during the industrial reconstruction following the war. This strife proved to be a valuable coin for the Director of the Terran Hegemony and the growing Star League.

The system causing such dissension in the Federated Suns was little different from that of the Free Worlds; indeed, the "old rich" of the latter were nearly as entrenched and impenetrable as those of the former. Free Worlds agents, in the guise of merchants, infiltrated the trade routes of the Federated Suns. Short of military action, there was little that could be done to disenfranchise House Davion, but Marik's agents did the next best thing. They isolated the provinces, placing them at odds with the mercantile society that plied the courses between their worlds, and used their provincial attitudes and outlook to turn them against each other. The economic crisis of 2566 (the result of a decade of Marik meddling in the political and economic affairs of the Suns) seemed to convince House Davion to join the Star League in 2567.

Of all the states, the Draconis Combine was perhaps the easiest to succor. The vanity and adherence to military tradition followed by House Kurita was almost trivial to manipulate. Cameron had merely to hold out the plum of conquest to Hehiro Kurita, a diabolically clever tactician but also a fatuous boor. After all, it would take the military skill of a Kurita to convince the states and alliances beyond the Inner Sphere to surrender their three-century-old traditions of independence and separate jurisdiction. Though Hehiro Kurita remained aloof from Cameron's entreaties for many years, the two men concluded the Treaty of Vega in 2569, making the Draconis Combine a member in the Star League.

THE PERIPHERY

Over the course of the Age of War, the rivalries of the states of the Inner Sphere isolated the states beyond. These vast areas were never developed extensively, and worlds were settled only along certain routes, connecting the few key worlds. Like settlers of many frontiers, however, the inhabitants of the Periphery were fiercely loyal to their realm and highly independent. The notion of a pan-human federation extending to the states of the Periphery was something abhorrent to these frontiersmen. The Articles of the Star League, dispatched to the Periphery states within weeks of its signing, was summarily rejected by each of the states within the year.



It was not an unexpected result, and the response was already prepared. At the direction of the Terrans, the military forces of the Star League were mobilized for a series of thrusts against the Rim Worlds Republic, the outworlds Alliance, the Taurian Concordat, and the Magistracy of Canopus. Free Worlds units fought by the side of Lyran Commonwealth units against the Rim Worlds Republic.

Albert's daughter and successor, Marion Marik, led the assault on the Magistracy of Canopus.

Though the military capabilities of the Magistracy of Canopus was nowhere near as great as those of the Star League, its fierce troops surrendered territory only after protracted fights. The Marik's forces operated from an ever-growing supply line, forcing her to construct bases of operation at regular intervals to support the offensive. Meanwhile, Canopus admirals adopted the tactic of avoiding confrontation with the Marik's main force, withdrawing from planets after they became indefensible. By 2580, most of the enemy navies were operating from uncharted systems. The logistics of the Marik's campaign were further complicated by the fact that some of her units were equipped with charts drafted as long ago as the Grand Survey (2389).

Marion Marik, however, was a determined fighter. Leaving the political aspects of the war largely to her supporters in Parliament, she doggedly took world after world and adopted her own tactics to counteract the guerrillas. In the summer of 2584, her 'Mechs landed on Canopus itself. Here the fighting intensified; the Canopus troops refused to give ground. Only after a month of fighting and heavy casualties on both sides did the Magistracy surrender.

By 2588, Marion Marik had succeeded in capturing the remaining worlds of the Magistracy. The campaign had lasted 22 years, and the death toll had been substantial on both sides. The conductor the Free Worlds forces had been exemplary, as Marion had demanded complete adherence to the Ares Conventions. This measure went far in alleviating the animosity between the Star League and the conquered Magistracy of Canopus.

TEN REASONS TO RESIST THE BOURGEOIS BLOATPIG OPPRESSOR HUMPHRIES (SIC)

1. She is the representative of the oppressive Star League bourgeois bloatpigs.
2. She is in league with the murdering bandit Marion Marik.
3. We don't want no offworlorder over us,
4. Smash the bourgeois bloatpigs.
5. The economic (sic) system needs to be revamped to support a Terenteyevian approach to agricultural reform to answer the needs of the peopl (sic).
6. Melissa Humphries has the blood of the people on her hands.
7. Only by a systematic approach to revolt can the people overcome the poverty and injustice that plagues them.
8. She is the daughter of the infamous Humphreys line, that has made war upon the people for nearly two decades and has caused innumerable deaths.
9. We don't want no woman over us.
10. Off the bourgeois bloatpigs.

—Anonymous handbill circulated among Canopus protesters, circa 2598, reprinted in *Writings from the Front: Documenting the Canopus Resistance*, edited by Larry Baxter, Windbreaker Press, 2611

MILITARY OCCUPATION

After the surrender, the Star League Council Lords appointed Melissa Humphreys as military governor of the Magistracy of Canopus. Though she met with initial hostility, she proved to be an able administrator and related well to the indigenous population. At her urging, the Free Worlds League poured massive investments into the shattered Canopus economy, which helped the Star League's public relations campaign to dissipate the hostility between the conqueror and the conquered. The results were so successful that the Star League was able to end its military occupation of Canopus and restore civil government in 2604, at least a full year before any of the other Periphery states regained their self-government.

ECONOMIC CRISIS

The hard-working Canopians profited greatly from the influx of capital. Furthermore, while the industry of the Free Worlds continued to operate in facilities with decades-old equipment, the investment campaign in Canopus built new facilities with state-of-the-art equipment. Within 20 years, Canopus was beginning to enter markets in which the Free Worlds had long gone unchallenged. The economic backlash led to a deep recession in the Free Worlds, beginning in the early 2620s and lasting for nearly ten years.

The economy was the most divisive issue in the Parliament during this period. The competition between the Free Worlds and its competitors, the Lyran Commonwealth and the Magistracy of Canopus, drove a substantial portion of MPs into the Protectionist camp. This position was in direct opposition to the tenets and stated position of the Treaty of Marik. Thus, though it was merely a political stance, it smacked of sedition from the first. The chief exponents of this isolationist coalition were the Princes of Regulus. The supporters of this view varied from session to session, but many states, including Oriente and Stewart, comprised part of this Parliamentary alliance.

In contrast to the long tradition of free trade in the Free Worlds League, the Protectionists were in favor of government regulation of trade and industry, aid to businesses harmed by the deep recession, and tariffs to protect local industry and commerce. Beginning with the breakthrough in HPG technology achieved by Rhylene HyperTech of Oriente in the 2620s, the Protectionists had yet another target for their anger: distribution of Free Worlds technology. In contrast to the era before the Star League, when private scientific discoveries had helped to keep the Free Worlds on the cutting edge of new technology, the requirement to share such discoveries with other Member-States removed that economic advantage. This, too, angered the Protectionists, who began to denigrate not only other Member-States, but also the Star League itself.



20

With an unsteady economy and the widespread distribution of technological breakthroughs, the Protectionist coalition in Parliament perceived that economic servitude would not be far behind. The merchant princes of the Free Worlds, still ardently in favor of free trade in politics and in practice, found themselves placed in opposition to the trade unions, and the Free Worlds was beset with labor disputes throughout the 2620s, 2630s and 2640s.

Ultimately, however, the widespread employment of cheap water purification (the Laranth process) created enough new markets to rouse the Member-State from its financial doldrums and stabilize its foreign relations. Ward Marik, Captain-General and Council Lord from 2635 to 2655, was sufficiently popular as a result of this return to stability. Nonetheless, the problems hiding beneath the surface during his term would rise to haunt his successors.

THE SCOURGE OF DEATH

With little leverage due to the economic resurgence, opponents of the free trade position (and opponents of the Star League) devised other means to propagate their message. At first, the more radical element used legitimate means to protest, restricting itself to agitation and incitement. By the early 2660s, however, these methods had given way to violence. A network of dummy corporations and phantom political action committees, with powerful but anonymous patrons, provided much of the support for these groups.

The most infamous terrorist group opposed to the Star League and the Free Worlds government was the Scourge of Death. The Scourge made its first appearance in 2667, by planting a bomb at Atreus' public starport during the arrival of several pro-Free Trade industrialists. Over the next decade, the group engaged in a number of such attacks, as well as hijackings, assassination attempts, and robberies aimed at supporters of the Star League. While neither the Star League nor the government of the Free Worlds were happy with the activities of the Scourge, there was no concerted effort to uncover the group and terminate its activities. At last, however, it committed an act too violent and too significant to ignore: the murder of several members of the Marik family at its family estate. That act would usher in a new era in the League's history, with consequences that would ripple through three generations of its citizens.

PROSPERITY IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER

MP VAN RAUEN: There is a growing despair in the Free Worlds; things are not as they were in our fathers' time. Once, the spirit of free enterprise reigned, and now there are shanties in sight of our proud capital. In years past, the spaceways were full of ships, carrying goods from world to world. Now, the financial news is striped with foreclosures and public auctions. The products of the Free Worlds, in those bygone days, were in demand across the Inner Sphere—across all of human space. Now, they are shunted aside in favor of other states' goods—cheaper, less well-made goods.

MP GERHARDT, MINISTER FOR TRADE: If the Honorable Member would yield for a moment. Can the Honorable Member provide any evidence for his claims?

MP VAN RAUEN: The evidence is surely all around the Minister. How many times was the Minister approached by beggars on his way home from the Parliament last night? Or does the Minister not deal with common citizens? The government must address these issues, and not ignore them. The government must take responsibility for the plight of the common person, if for no other reason than because it has caused that plight in the first place.

—Excerpt from Parliament, 2628



THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT

At first we suspected an inside job. Lord Terrence often gathered the family in the upstairs library at the back of the mansion, sometimes to confer with the other government officials in the family, sometimes to exchange Christmas gifts, and sometimes to spend quality time with the youngsters. It was an unusual place to have a family meeting, and it seemed pretty suspicious that the assassins knew to plant the bomb there.

The breakthrough in the case came quite by accident. The estate on planet Marik is huge—it would take an army to patrol it—which was how terrorists could infiltrate the estate without being noticed. In fact, there are no fences around the Marik holdings; the neighbors know not to cross the boundaries without being invited.

Quite by chance, Gavin Murphy, my adjutant, decided to take a long walk to think over the evidence we had uncovered. As luck would have it, his walk took him just where we needed to be looking.

As he got to the end of the expansive lawn in front of the Marik house, Gavin noticed that the soil had been disturbed around one of the trees in the woods ringing the estate. At first, he figured that some of the children had been digging around the tree. As he walked past, however, he noticed a peach pit. There were no peach trees on the estate, and he remembered a chance remark by one of the household staff that no one ever took food out of the house.

After rummaging through the ground cover, Gavin found a small, stale chunk of meat, such as might fall from a sandwich. Someone had been eating there, and Murphy realized that the disturbance in the dirt was not from children digging, but from someone climbing the tree, staying an indeterminate amount of time, and covering his tracks after leaving.

Gavin got back to me at a dead run. We got a ladder out of the gardener's shed and took a good look in that tree. Concealed in the branches was a sort of improvised treehouse that contained a cache of food, a portable chemical toilet, and an infrared scanning device. The Scourge of Death agent had trained the scanner on the house to trace patterns of body heat, maintaining surveillance on where people congregated during family gatherings, thus finding the perfect way to maximize the bomb's effectiveness. Once he had that information, he could abandon the rest of his materiel.

—From *Political Investigations: Memoirs of a Terrorist Tracker*, by Inspector Jonas Chiplinski, Police Procedure Press, 2698

The Scourge of Death's cleverly engineered well-timed attack on the Marik family estate came within inches of eradicating the entire Marik line. Captain-General Terrence Marik, his wife and daughter, his brother Theodore (the fiery head of SAFE, the Free Worlds' intelligence organization), and his second cousin Andrew all died instantly in the explosion, along with 34 other relatives, government officials, and household staff. Only General Gerald Marik, Andrew's father and the veteran commander of the 3rd Marik Militia, clung to life through the night.

In the emergency treatment dome at Dormuth, Gerald lay with a shattered right arm and leg, several broken ribs, damaged optic nerves in both eyes, and massive internal injuries. Just before dawn, the twelve-man surgical team summoned a priest to administer the last rites to the General. Astoundingly, however, Gerald refused to roll over and die. By nightfall the following day, the medical prognosis was cautiously optimistic. Five weeks later, with the aid of extensive bionic transplants, Gerald left the MediCenter under heavy armed guard to travel to the remains of the family estate, where a special subcommittee of Parliament administered him the oath of office for the Captain-Generalcy. In his terse acceptance speech, Gerald swore to avenge his family's honor and to eradicate the entire Scourge of Death.

Before the bombing at the summer palace, Gerald Marik was regarded as a competent but unspectacular military commander—a gruff, unobtrusive sort of man who understood the massive machines of the Star League's defense forces better than the intricacies of human behavior. In the two years following his ascendancy, the Captain-General's attentions were almost exclusively turned toward the terrorist organization that had decimated his family. It was a quest that might easily have roused the passions of an empire and made its leader a galactic hero. In Gerald's hands, however, the pursuit became an exercise of relentless, mechanical efficiency, as the twin engines of the Marik Militia and SAFE were set in motion and the niceties of civil liberties were sacrificed to state security. Slowly and surely, the Marik forces ferreted out and destroyed the Scourge's bases of operations. In March and July of 2679, blitzkrieg raids on bases in the Periphery brought squeals of protest from the affected worlds to the Star League Council. Gerald's twin juggernauts also imprisoned or appropriated the properties of many other suspected subversives and traitors, many of whom had only exercised their right of political opposition. Public and parliamentary opinion had begun to swing sharply against Gerald when a SAFE team cleaning up the vestiges of a Scourge cadre on Westover discovered a shocking revelation. A computer tape linked the purchases of fliers and hovercraft used by Scourge agents to the personal account of two high-ranking members of the Selaj family.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE SCOURGE

Following this lead, other SAFE agents soon uncovered a wide trail of deceit. Equipment, transportation, and training supplied to Scourge assault units were traced back to the Selaj, their political cohorts in the Regular Diet, or one of the many subsidiaries of the Selaj trading cartel. Several of the captive terrorists publicly declared Selaj involvement just before their executions. As these revelations spread across the HPG-net and the planetary videotapes, the Free Worlds populace erupted into a lynch-mob furor. Though the Selaj family and the Regular representatives to Parliament stoutly denied all charges, Gerald convened a military tribunal on Atreus to consider a charge of high treason against Puraj, D'mir, and Rajneesh Selaj. Two days later, on October 1, 2679, the tribunal convicted the trio in absentia and sentenced them to death.



Following the mock trial, both the Marik Militia and the Regular Hussars girded for battle. The Star League Council, fearful that the conflict might erupt into full-scale war, placed its forces in the Free Worlds League area on alert. At this juncture, however, Gerald journeyed to the Star League naval base at Oriente and made a powerful appeal for non-intervention.

A FATHER'S PLEA

The Marik, who, since the incident at Hartsdale, had seldom raised his voice above a near-whisper, turned to face the five of us seated around the Regular sector star map. His eyes, hooded behind the thick, dark lenses that protected his medically restored eyesight, remained shrouded in mystery, but there was no mistaking the tension in his neck muscles as he wrenched the words from his throat.

"Surely you understand that this is—and must remain—a family affair. These men and their paid thugs have killed a Council Lord, and butchered my son—a good and honorable man who would have made a mark in League politics that would not soon have been forgotten. I cannot allow their crime to go unavenged. Surely, they have forfeited any right to your protection. I ask you as a sovereign—as a father—for you to stay your hand, to allow me to do what must be done. If I die in my efforts, there will then be more than enough need for your troops."

—From *Solar Flare: The Regular Crisis*, by Admiral Millard Crichton, Stark Press, 2692

Gerald's rare show of persuasiveness carried the day, and the League navy remained poised but anchored outside the Principality of Regulus as the Marik forces attacked Hellos Minor, the homeworld of D'mir Selaj. Though neither side could gain ground for almost four weeks, the Regular Hussars were gradually driven back, as many soldiers began to defect, questioning their loyalties to the imperious merchant princes of House Selaj. When the Marik fleet drove Regular reinforcements out of the system, the slow advance quickly became a rout. D'mir committed suicide in his country estate as enemy soldiers forced their way onto its grounds. When Harmony fell in similar fashion two weeks later, the surviving members of the family had little trouble reading the handwriting on the wall. In late January of 2680, they fled with their personal guard deep into the Magistracy of Canopus, taking trillions of credits worth of assets.

The relatives, political and business associates, and retainers unfortunate enough to be left in the wake of this exodus felt the brunt of Gerald's vengeance. Hundreds were tried and imprisoned or executed. Two of the General's primary targets had escaped, however, and were still capable of causing mischief to the Free Worlds League and the Marik family. This thought never strayed far from Gerald's consciousness for the remainder of his quarter-century as Council Lord. Even when he served on the Star League Business Council on Terra, Gerald saw conspiracies behind every door and sensed the hand of the Selaj in any ill fortune that affected the Free Worlds. He doubled and then later trebled security around the new family estate on Marik and allowed no members of his immediate family to travel without bodyguards. At his urging, the Parliament increased the budget of SAFE and widened the latitude to conduct surveillance of Free Worlds citizens involved in suspicious activities.



As Gerald's paranoia increased, he began to withdraw from the company of his old friends and advisors. There was considerable speculation that his reactions were due to the extensive physiological changes his body had undergone. In the 70 years since the first use of myomer technology, doctors, psychologists, and scientists had argued strenuously back and forth that bionic limbs and organs somehow "dehumanized" their owners. Gerald, whose surgery was one of the most extensive reconstructions ever performed, was a natural target for proponents of this theory. Tomas Menke, a professor at the Western Merak Medical College, presented a paper suggesting that Gerald should resign his Council post on the grounds that he was not classified as "legally alive" under the sentience laws passed by the Terran Alliance during the Great Exodus. Menke enjoyed a period of notoriety on the media circuit, until he had to abandon his post after a SAFE investigation of his research program revealed a number of grants from Canopus-based conglomerates.

COUNTERPOINT

It is ludicrous to cite the sentience laws in reference to Gerald Marik. They were enacted during the Exodus to clarify guidelines regarding native lifeforms with rudimentary intelligence, as in some Terran lifeforms. The basis for the sentience laws was to provide for the possibility that space explorers could run into an intelligent—or even civilized—lifeform.

The gist of the sentience laws is that anything that does not fall under their protection is fair game to be used for food, medicine, shelter, or any other purpose colonists might have. Sentience was defined as the ability to do complex mathematical functions (counting horses did not count), the ability to formulate original sentences expressing emotions, abstract thought, or specific information (talking parrots did not count), or the ability to originate observations about the nature of reality from one's own biological interaction with the world (computers did not count, but mentally retarded people did). To say that Gerald Marik does not interact through his own biology because he has bionic limbs is not only absurd, but is also an insult to every person who ever had a prosthetic limb or implant since such medical devices were first invented centuries ago.

Having said this, I must also say that I would not mind if Dr. Menke had his arms ripped off, his nostrils slashed, and his throat sandpapered from the inside for his offenses against common sense and good taste.

—From *A Rationalist's Approach to the Issues*, by Dennis de Soto Aristides, Logic Press, 2702

Most of the comment and criticism about Gerald in both public and political circles, however, remained fairly muted. The Free Worlds economy remained prosperous, and few of its citizens felt the impact of SAFE's increased activities. Moreover, many of the members of the Parliament pitied the Marik family for the suffering it had endured. As a result, when Gerald came to the Parliament in 2695 asserting that a series of trade union strikes in the Principality of Regulus were inspired by Selaj-backed separatists, MPs granted him the right to break the strike with little debate. The suppression of the dissident workers was bloody but brief—little proof of Selaj involvement in their activities, however, was uncovered.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

When Gerald died in January of 2703, his daughter and designated heir Elise succeeded him as Council Lord. Elise was a tall, uncomely woman whose political experience had been limited to managing the affairs of the family land and business holdings on Marik. Unlike most people, however (including her brother Oliver), Elise deeply loved her stern, demanding father, and took his increasingly paranoid musings about conspiracies as gospel. During the last five years of Gerald's life, Elise and her young son Bertram became his constant traveling companions, journeying to Terra and even into the Draconis Combine. Upon arriving in Atreus for her ratification as Council Lord, Elise shocked the Parliament by alleging that Gerald's death had occurred under "suspicious circumstances" and demanded a full investigation of the situation.

AN OMINOUS PORTENT

There is a cancer in the Free Worlds League, a sickness that runs through our marrow and threatens to make us weak. We must excise this disease from our flesh before it is too late, and cleanse ourselves in the pure fire of the truth. I am the vessel of my father's will, the hot knife of his loyalty that will cauterize our wounds and make us whole. I will not rest until the work he began is finished.

—From Elise Marik's inaugural address, printed in *Seeds of Crisis, Times of Trouble*, by Archibald Nelson, Termak Press, 2738

Elise's investigation proclaimed that Gerald had been a victim of "poisoning introduced by person(s) unknown." In the wake of the report, Elise sent SAFE to search for subversive elements in the military units stationed along the Capellan border. Over 100 individuals, including several decorated veteran MechWarriors, were identified as security risks and summarily expelled, despite the strenuous objections of the principalities. One of the most vociferous Parliamentary opponents of Elise's actions was her own brother Oliver, the representative from New Delos and a passionate defender of judicial due process and civil liberties. Soon, however, Oliver realized that he was fighting against a tide of panic that had no room for reason. In 2704, Elise obtained parliamentary authorization (by a vote of 329-71) to expropriate the holdings of Kazana Thermotronics for their alleged involvement in a scheme to steal Free Worlds technological secrets. The allegation was based solely on the testimony of a single paid informant. Afterward, Oliver resigned his seat and fled with his son Boris to Procyon in the Terran Hegemony.

Over the next 25 years, Elise's efforts to "cleanse" the Free Worlds became more wide-reaching and extreme. The number of traitors uncovered by her efforts increased from hundreds to thousands to tens of thousands. Businesses and vidtapes were shut down on the flimsiest of evidence, high-ranking local government officials and Parliamentary support staff found themselves the subject of constant surveillance. During the height of the purge in 2724, a number of influential opposition leaders fled to Procyon and tried unsuccessfully to get Oliver Marik to proclaim himself Council Lord.

OLIVER THE USURPER

By 2728, the majority of Parliament was convinced that Elise had lost her sanity, and declared the crisis over, ending Elise's tenure as Captain-General. In Elise's eyes, however, this merely meant that Parliament itself had become an unacceptable threat to state security. In February of 2729, at the head of a column of crack troops, Elise dissolved the Parliament and arrested one-third of its members as subversives. The streets of Atreus dissolved into rebellion and chaos. For the aging statesman Oliver, this blatant misuse of the Marik's traditional power erased his last vestiges of loyalty toward his sister. Six weeks later, Oliver led his fellow exiles to the Duke of Oriente's palace on Calloway VI, where he summoned the remains of the Parliament. Using "proxies" for the imprisoned membership, Parliament confirmed Oliver as the new Marik Council Lord and his son Boris as the new Captain-General.

Though Elise had the considerable resources of SAFE and ten of the twelve regiments of Marik Militia at her disposal (the units stationed at New Delos and McKenna defected to the rebel cause within a few days of Oliver's return), the forces on each side of the civil conflict were surprisingly even in strength. The Dukes of Oriente, Andurien, Carbonis, and Kalidasa all stood behind the usurper Oliver, while House Stewart (led by Aldrich Stewart, Director of SAFE) and House Schenk (appointed by Gerald Marik as rulers of the Principality of Regulus) remained solidly committed to Elise. On many other worlds, segments of the local defense forces faced off against one another in bloody fighting.

Elise made the initial move by dispatching an expeditionary force to Oriente, hoping to break the will of her opposition by striking it down at its source. She had seriously miscalculated the determination of her opposition, however, and the attack was almost immediately repulsed. The rebels responded with a two-pronged assault, led by Boris Marik and Martin Humphreys (the Duke of Andurien), which made substantial advances along the outmanned Regular front. In March of 2730, a large portion of Elise's forces was lured to Hellos Minor to suppress an uprising of the native inhabitants, and Humphreys' forces seized Atreus spaceport, capturing Elise and her personal guard after 36 hours of bitter street fighting. However, Elise's son Bertram, a heady and experienced military commander in his own right, rallied the loyalist forces, driving back a rebel invasion force on Ariel in a pitched desert battle. The war soon bogged down to a stalemate, with violent fighting but little progress by either side.

During the five years of the Free Worlds rebellion, the remainder of the Star League remained strictly neutral due to the efforts of First Lord Simon Cameron. Although both the Lyran Commonwealth and Capellan Confederation called for Star League intervention to end the crisis, Simon was wise enough to see that both states were hoping to pick up the rich League worlds along their borders. He realized that using Star League regular troops might encourage the states to send their own household troops into the breach, undoing a century and a half of peace. Consequently, the Free Worlds' Council seat was classified as "in dispute" and left vacant, while the Star League tried to maintain business as usual until the conflict was resolved.

In the fall of 2733, the fortunes of the war began to shift in favor of the Loyalists. By February of 2734, a force led by Bertram Marik reached Atreus and succeeded in releasing his mother Elise. Although her frail, emaciated body soon recovered, her mind was another matter. It soon became apparent that Elise was incapable of resuming any sort of leadership role.



Thus did Bertram realize that the future of the Loyalist cause lay in his own hands. Despite the recent success of his troops in the field, the young commander was aware that a military victory would be slow and costly. Seeking a better answer, Bertram dispatched envoys to Oriente requesting a parley.

Oliver Marik, too, was sick of war. Seventy years old and in failing health himself, he had little wish to be remembered as the man who had torn apart his beloved starfaring empire. He responded quickly to Bertram's offer, and in May, the two men traveled to the planet Tiber to negotiate an end to their conflict.

Both sides came to the negotiating table with grievances that could not easily be bargained away. The Parliamentarians required the restoration of the traditional political structure and a reaffirmation of the individual's right of dissent. The Loyalists were equally insistent on their demands for recognition of their leader as the rightful holder of the Council seat and retribution against the instigators of the rebellion. In the end, both Bertram and Oliver had to make hard decisions and personal sacrifices to hammer out an acceptable compromise. Bertram agreed to reinstate Parliament, to grant a general amnesty to all military forces and Parliamentary representatives who had joined the rebellion, and to issue a public pronouncement that his mother had made mistakes and over-stepped her legal authority. Oliver agreed that the reconstituted Parliament would confirm Bertram as both the Star League Council Lord and Captain-General. He also agreed to surrender himself for trial in exchange for promises of limited sentences for Boris and the other leaders of the Procyon conspiracy. On May 20th, the two men signed the Treaty of Verona and put an official end to the Parliamentary rebellion.

Though neither Oliver (executed in July) nor Boris (killed in an escape attempt in 2736) would live to see the results, Bertram proved to be a man of his word. Parliament was reconvened on Atreus in October of 2734, and restored to most of its historical decision-making prerogatives. The budget and manpower of SAFE were cut back, and the attentions of that agency were once more turned toward the gathering of intelligence about the activities of the Free Worlds' foes—the Capellan Confederation and the Lyran Commonwealth. It was an era of healing, in which Bertram's most remarkable achievement may have been maintaining a political environment in which little remarkable occurred—either at home or abroad. Unfortunately, the respite would be all too brief. After only a dozen years as Council Lord, Bertram died and was buried on Atreus with a hero's honors.



BORIS MARIK, MAN OF DESTINY

Boris had more than his share of accomplishments. A champion swordsman, he won a platinum medal at the Procyon Olympics in 2712. Two years later, he wrote a paper on progressive calculus that was published by the Procyon University Mathematical Review. He founded a publishing house of his own at the age of 24, and within twelve years, it was the third largest book publishing house on Procyon.

During his imprisonment, out of respect for his distinguished contributions to publishing, he was allowed all the books, videotapes, and other informational resources he wanted. Often, he spent as many as 18 hours a day in study. Indeed, his personal library in prison covered some six cells and was rumored to be the third largest private library in Atreus City. His writings from this period on history and philosophy are well-known.

In February of 2736, Boris noticed a strange mold on his papers in one corner of his cell. At first disgusted by the damage to his books, he moved them to the other end of the cell, only to find that the mold died, leaving the books none the worse for the attack. He spent the next month experimenting with the mold and the paper in this cell, collecting samples and having them analyzed. The mold grew only in light of a particular frequency, from which it produced its own food in a close variant of photosynthesis. Boris Marik had discovered a whole new form of protozoa that grew only on planet Atreus.

Unfortunately, he discovered something else as well. Through the prison grapevine, Boris heard vague rumors of assassination plans (which later turned out to be false). Although he believed in Bertram's good faith, the Atreus City prison was no less violent than any other prison, and convicts had every reason to fear for their lives every day. Smuggled in with documents that Boris requested were messages written in pencil warning him of convicts sent to kill him. Boris was faced with a choice. Assuming the threat was real, he could not go to the prison authorities for help because they might be involved in the plot. He could not, on the other hand, wait for an attack that might come at any time and from any quarter. The only course of action appeared to be escape.

Boris made his ill-considered attempt on a moonless night in 2736. He got as far as a drainage pipe outside the prison complex before he was spotted from one of the watchtowers. After that, it was a simple matter for the authorities to station themselves by the river where the pipe emptied. As Boris emerged he began to run, unaware that he had been followed. The prison sharpshooters killed him without warning.

The final irony is that this gifted man never got to see the supplementary lab report on that stuff growing in the cell. The mold was found to have certain medicinal properties; during the Eleusis crisis of 2938, the mold was used to battle an epidemic on a newly settled planet in the outer reaches of Marik space. For all his accomplishments, Boris Marik's greatest contribution turned out to be a discovery that would save the lives of people who lived two centuries after his death, on a planet he never heard of.

—From *The Mariks: House of Steel, House of Dreams*, by Genevieve Dalton, Nonesuch Press, 3022

REARMAMENT AND SUCCESSION CRISIS

Upon Bertam's death, his only child Ewan succeeded him as Council Lord. Ewan, 32 at the time of his appointment, was a hard-drinking, quick-tempered man, whose prior career as an officer in the Marik Militia had been distinguished primarily by his propensity for brawling with both superiors and subordinates. It did not take him long to get into conflict with his peers on the Council. Ewan's almost total absence of tact and his willingness to volunteer an opinion on any subject (regardless of how poorly informed he was) gave him ample opportunity to offend each of his colleagues. None, however, felt the barb of his acid tongue more frequently than Michael Steiner, the Archon of the Lyran Commonwealth. Ewan took endless delight in mocking Michael's dandified style of dress and cultured academic airs, calling him "Lady Steiner" and "Clean-Hands Michael." He also roused the Archon's ire on more important matters, demanding reparations and a public apology in March 2749 when Lyran ships off Phecda III attacked and damaged the Timothy Leary, a Free Worlds-registered free trader suspected (wrongly) of smuggling off-list recreational pharmaceuticals. The incident rapidly became a cause celebre for both sides, and nearly escalated into a border war before a Star League fleet was dispatched to the sector to quiet matters down.

Ewan's conduct during the Phecda crisis disturbed many Free Worlders, especially those along the Lyran border. In another time, he might well have been recalled from Council, even in the absence of a suitable Marik family replacement (Ewan's eldest child, Kenyon, was only 15 at the time). The wounds of the civil war were still fresh, however, and Parliament—especially those members from the smaller, newer states—were unwilling to risk another. Thus, Ewan remained at court on Terra, where he would play a small but fateful role in the events of the next decade.

REGENCY AND CONFLICT

The sudden, accidental death of Simon Cameron and the subsequent placement of the Star League's rule in the hands of his eight-year-old son Richard and his Regent and Protector, General Aleksandr Kerensky, could hardly have come at a more inappropriate time. The Phecda crisis and the recent Steiner-Kurita conflict over Kurita support of a band of Periphery bandits had provided powerful testimony that the tensions between the five non-Terran member states still ran deep despite 180 years of unity. These petty conflicts had erupted before, but had always been kept in check by the ceaseless diplomatic ministrations of the Camerons. Now the voice of reason had been removed, and the Council Lords had little intention of allowing a mere General—even a man of obvious character and wisdom like Aleksandr Kerensky—wield the same kind of influence over them.

Ewan Marik, in particular, wanted to keep a tight rein on the power of the Regent. Kerensky had attended the University at Tharkad at the same time as Michael Steiner, and the two men had a strong mutual respect. Though there was little evidence to substantiate it, Ewan soon began to fear that the two men were conspiring against the Free Worlds. Consequently, in 2755, when Minoru Kurita proposed doubling the size of House forces, Ewan wholeheartedly supported the measure and added his own distinctive kicker—a rider calling for the funds to support this buildup to be provided by a new defense tax levied against the Territorial States. Though Kerensky succeeded in having the two measures considered as separate ballots, he could not convince any of the Council Lords (including Michael Steiner) to vote against either measure.



EWAN'S DIPLOMACY

One incident I'll never forget occurred when Marik, unable to arrive at a Star League meeting due to a mechanical malfunction, accepted a lift in a Davion JumpShip. Richard Cameron, the four other House leaders, and I were there to greet him. I remember his remarks on his arrival.

"Well, 'First Lord,' you and your puppet Kerensky will be pleased that I had a miserable time on that Davion tub coming here. They're as badly serviced as a Kurita brothel and as ugly as a Capellan whore, eh, gentlemen? Oh, but of course Lady Steiner wouldn't know about such things."

In three sentences, Ewan Marik managed to insult each of the other four House leaders, plus the First Lord and myself, without even having removed his jacket.

—From *Twilight of Courage: The Memoirs of General Aleksandr Kerensky*, ComStar Archives

The passage of the defense tax aroused angry outcries from each of the Territorial States. Violent protests and pro-secession uprisings occurred on a number of worlds in the Outworlds Alliance and the Taurian Concordat. Though both Michael Steiner and Warex Liao would later claim to have had second thoughts about the wisdom of their actions during this period, Ewan Marik publicly professed nothing but happiness over the course of events. "These little brushfire wars will keep our fine General busy doing what he does best, instead of passing himself off as a Credit-Mart king," Ewan declared on the planet Stewart in 2757. However, League merchants were already feeling the strain of the increased tensions on their Territorial trade, even as the Marik military buildup stoked the local economies of worlds like Irian, Regulus, and Bolan.

BACKCHANNEL COMMUNICATION

I appreciate your solicitousness on the subject of my health. I regret to say that it is not good and probably will not be again. Unlike many of our colleagues, I do not hold with the idea of placing artificial limbs and organs in my body. It is my firm belief that, given enough of them, they will surely seize control of a person and make him something less than human. I think, however, that if I am forced to withdraw, you will find my son Kenyon as faithful to the cause of freedom as I have been.

It seems likely that there will be enough support to defeat this evil measure [Executive Order 156], though that pig of a Steiner will waver on the matter, as he always does. Nonetheless, I do not trust the actions of our tin tyrant, general Kerensky. We have continued to perceive young Cameron as the enemy of the liberties we have justly won, but I fear that our suspicions should have been better directed at Kerensky himself. The loyalty of the Regular Army is nothing to be taken lightly, and should a war break out, his power would be unbounded.

—From dispatch sent by Captain-General Ewan Marik to Coordinator Minoru Kurita, March 8, 2762

After 2759, Ewan's alcoholism led to a variety of debilitating internal ailments that kept him frequently absent from Council meetings. Still, he stubbornly re-fused to allow the Terran doctors to operate and replace his ailing organs with bionics. His last major act as Council Lord was a dramatic one. Appearing in chambers, propped up by powerful painkilling drugs, he cast his vote for striking down Richard Cameron's controversial Executive Order 156, which demanded the immediate decrease of all Member-State House forces. Nine months later, he was dead, leaving the Free Worlds' fortunes in the hands of his son Kenyon.

The hostility between Kenyon Marik and Aleksandr Kerensky dated back more than 30 years. Kenyon had been posted as a staff officer with Kerensky and had acted without direct orders to suppress a violent uprising within the Terran Member-State in 2756. In addition to rousing public ire for his actions, he was publicly cashiered by Kerensky, who refused to overlook the incident despite the high station of the perpetrator. The insulting high-handedness of Kerensky was something that Kenyon never forgot. When he became Captain-General in 2763, the young Marik immediately began to pursue a course of non-cooperation with the Regent, obstructing Star League military activities, publicly questioning the validity of Kerensky's public acts, and even using SAFE to infiltrate the General Staff, in hopes of finding evidence of impropriety or treason.



27

CIVIL WAR

Suppose there are five piranhas in a tank, and two of them attack each other. Is either one the friend of the other three?

—Ewan Marik, in a Star League Council meeting

In 2765, New Vandenberg and several other Periphery worlds seceded from the Star League. Kerensky and his Regular Army immediately went to war against those worlds, and by 2766, three-quarters of the army was involved in the fighting. Cameron's trusted advisor, Stefan Amaris, eagerly dispatched his Rim Worlds troops to bolster Terra's defenses. Later that year, Amaris executed a bloody coup on Terra, slaughtering House Cameron to the last member, and declared himself First Lord.

Not only Kerensky, but also the five Council Lords refused to acknowledge Amaris's claim. Only Kerensky, however, went to war against him. Although some of the Council Lords permitted the Protector to use bases within their states, Kenyon Marik refused to allow any military force to enter the Free Worlds. Nevertheless, in 2774, Kerensky arrived in the Oriente system, commandeering its facilities for use as a base from which to strike at Amaris's garrisoned planets. Outraged, the Marik readied his own army, preparing to squash the Regular Army fleet. When he finally jumped into the system, however, the Star League fleet had forged on to Carver V. Kenyon disbanded his army, but never forgot the insult.

THE EAGLE EMBARRASSED

During his days at the military academy, Kenyon experienced more than his share of embarrassments. The worst of these occurred during his third year, at the age of 15, when he was directed to lead a battalion of underclassmen in mock maneuvers. These "war games" have always been a basic part of training for military commanders, not to mention invaluable training for combat troops.

In the battle scenario, Kenyon's troops were required to attack a fortified building, an assignment he fulfilled competently. Unfortunately, the lad had just seen the film classic *Napoleon*, about the life of the flamboyant Terran military ruler, and he identified with the young Napoleon at military school. Like the Marik family, Napoleon also used the eagle as his symbol. The young Marik resolved to handle himself in battle the way the young Napoleon does in the film.

Prior to the battle, Kenyon sent for a family banner, one that he would raise over the defeated position in token of his first conquest. Swept up in the heat of battle, Kenyon failed to notice how easily his victory came. Raising the Marik standard over the fortress, Kenyon began to make a speech about courage, triumph, and destiny, when the opposing forces counterattacked. They had finessed Kenyon's troops in a simple, strategic retreat, and now had them surrounded. In the crossfire that resulted, all of Kenyon's troops were declared wiped out, and Kenyon's opponents achieved total victory.

The worst part of the debacle for Kenyon was that the opposition leader, having heard about Kenyon's plans to raise his eagle standard, had made a standard of his own. It depicted a schrack, a bird native to Sorunda that had eaten the few eagles the Marik family had tried to stock on their hunting estate there.

—From *Heraldic Symbols and the People Who Bore Them*, by Claudia Masakela, New World Press, 3018

Terra was liberated in 2779, and Stefan and his family were executed three months later. The civil war had killed a hundred million people and destroyed communications to the Territorial states and the League's administrative machinery. Worse, all unity among the five Council Lords had dissipated. Kenyon Marik's desire for revenge against Kerensky blinded him to the need for reconciliation. He accused Kerensky of planning an invasion of the Free Worlds to eliminate his now bitter rival. Fearing a two-pronged invasion, the Lyrans viewed the consequent militarization of the Free Worlds as hostile (a Liao agent provocateur had planted the suspicion at the Archon's court).

From October of 2780 on, the Council agreed on only two issues: the removal of Aleksandr Kerensky as Protector and the appointment of Jerome Blake, the Blessed One, as Minister of Communications. While the five lords struggled vainly to assert their claims to the First Lordship, the Blessed Blake laid the foundation for what would come to be known as ComStar.

In defiance of the Council's proclamation, Kerensky summoned all the Regular Army regiments to New Samarkand in the Draconis Combine. Then, in November of 2784, the entire armada jumped into the Periphery, never to be seen again. The last check against the Council Lords' belligerence had disappeared.

RESOLUTION 288

While the Inner Sphere girded for war, Kenyon Marik presented a *fait accompli* to his Parliament: Resolution 288, granting the Marik discretionary authority over the Free Worlds League, even including the summoning and disbanding of Parliament, for "The duration of the crisis." This resolution, without past precedent in the history of the Free Worlds, was nothing less than a Parliamentary resignation of authority, but its rapid acceptance was not surprising; Parliament was dominated by delegates representing smaller states, relatively inexperienced in the machinations of the parliamentary machine and all too easily panicked in the face of a military crisis.

Kenyon also brought about the repeal of the now 500-year old Rule of 75. In his arguments before Parliament, Kenyon cited research into the papers of Captain-General Terrence Marik IV, who had been assassinated by the Scourge of Death in 2678. In the family library, there were plans for heavy tank factories to be constructed on Payvand. Because of the secrecy rule, these plans were sealed and forgotten until the publication date toiled. The Payvand representatives ultimately submitted new plans, but the four-years delay had weakened the Free Worlds military. Shrewd politician that he was, Kenyon sought the repeal for an entirely different reason from that stated. He wanted to leak secret documents of his own that he believed would make Resolution 288 not only palatable to the peoples of the Free Worlds, but actually popular.



THE FIRST SUCCESSION WAR

It is impossible to determine with any accuracy where the first battle of the Succession Wars occurred. Kenyon Marik's biographer, Anson Deteila (*The Eagle Triumphant*: Globe Press, Atreus, 2806) claims that forces of the Lyrans Commonwealth launched a surprise attack on the industrial world of Bolan six months after Kerensky's departure, following a proclamation by Archon Jennifer Steiner designating herself First Lord of the Star League. In January of 2787, the Marik issued a proclamation quite similar to the Archon's. Additionally, he announced that the Lyrans had abrogated the four-hundred-year-old Ares Conventions, leaving him free to do so as well. Within a few months, every state had cast aside these conventions, beginning an era of unparalleled destruction.

THE COLLAPSE OF TERRA

Taking advantage of the collapse of Terran authority, Kenyon's first military initiative was a thrust toward Sol. A substantial portion of the League's best military forces began a wild free-for-all with the five Inner Sphere states for control of Star League storehouses, supply depots, and jump point refueling facilities. Early successes in the war earned Kenyon Marik rich rewards in Parliament, as the "liberation" of worlds once held by the proud Terrans met with general approval. What was kept secret, of course, was the extent to which these worlds had suffered due to the struggles between the contending states. Spearheaded by SAFE, an extensive campaign of disinformation counteracted rumors of the destruction wrought by the war, though the soldiers that had been there, of course, knew better.

The First Succession War revealed, for the first time, the perils of all-out interstellar war. With many worlds just a single jump apart, and no real front line, the conflict escalated to a sort of horrific multiple shell game. With most of the HPG network still in ruins, it was easy to pit an overwhelming force against a target; conversely, it was next to impossible to defend against such an attack. Furthermore, as the contending states gained footholds in the sad ruins of the Terran Hegemony, more and more worlds came into jump range of hostile warships.

Once Free World troops had secured a portion of the Terran state, the Marik turned his attention toward the Capellan Confederation. In November of 2787, Kenyon ordered ten regiments of Marik Militia to "clear a route ten parsecs wide to Sarna," the capital of the Sarna Commonality of the Capellan Confederation. Trusting his proficiency in military strategy, the Captain-General had little doubt that he could force the Confederation to surrender in a few years. House Steiner forces were occupied with a Kurita thrust, and so Kenyan feared Lyrans aggression not a whit.

The initial battles against the Capellans fared well for the Free Worlds. The planets Corey and Wazan fell to the Marik Militia, with only a few Capellan garrisons providing any resistance. Chancellor Barbara Liao, however, counterattacked the Marik's staging base on New Delos. Although military casualties were light, the attack killed 20,000 civilians and disrupted communications, supply lines, and repair facilities needed for the war effort.

Partly to disrupt the flow of reinforcements to Wazan and Corey and partly to avenge the destruction on New Delos, Kenyon ordered bombing attacks on several Liao planets. Ingersoll, New Canton, Outreach, and Hall were firebombed throughout 2789, but Barbara Liao still effected a blockade of the Corey and Wazan systems. In addition, she ordered an attack on Calloway VI.

This time, the Marik was ready for them. Several regiments of the Stewart Dragoons and the Fusiliers of Oriente were deployed on patrol duty, assigned to react to any Liao incursion. The patrol in the Calloway system surprised the Capellans, wreaking havoc on the enemy JumpShips and, more importantly, delaying the invaders long enough for the rest of the patrol to arrive—in fact, the invaders retreated right into the brunt of the Free Worlds reinforcements. Capellan AeroSpace Fighter, DropShip, and JumpShip losses were staggering.

Forced on the defensive, the Capellans could not stem the Marik advance. With the blockade of Corey and Wazan lifted, Marik forces romped through Capellan space. Rumor has it that the Marik, supremely confident that he could take any Liao planet, resorted to throwing darts at a wall map of the Inner Sphere to choose his army's next objective. However, he gave first priority to taking the Andurien systems. Capellans thought the attack was so obvious (Kenyon had even sent a personal letter to Barbara Liao stating that he intended to take the region), that they assumed it was a trick and diverted forces to protect worlds close to Sarna and Capella. Andurien itself fell first, followed by Ingonish and Ryerson.

For four years, it seemed that Kenyon would indeed force the Confederation to its knees. Then, 2783, the Marik's momentum ground to a halt when Liao's 21st Centauri Lancers attacked Anegasaki, totally destroying the 4th Marik Militia. Suddenly realizing that the Capellans could still mount effective attacks of their own, the Marik scrambled to hold the line that he had spent years attaining. The drive had succeeded beyond the high command's expectations, and they spent months reassigning Battalions to new locations and restructuring logistics.

Meanwhile, the Marik had not forgotten the Lyran Commonwealth. Regiments of the Free Worlds Guards and the Regular Hussars conducted numerous raids against Commonwealth facilities, including the destruction of the Bolson Shipyards on Kyoto. Hesperus II possessed vast BattleMech facilities that both Houses Davion and Kurita had tried to destroy. The Marik knew that, once Kurita turned its attention away from Steiner, he would have to deal with the Lyran armed Forces. Unfortunately, the Free Worlds attack on Hesperus II never penetrated the planet's atmosphere. Costing the League many of its best battlecruisers, the attack proved to be a dismal failure.

THE MARIK AND THE PARLIAMENT

Kenyon's diplomatic skill and charisma kept his Parliamentary critics at bay for much of the earlier part of the crisis, but as months lengthened into years, he came under increasing criticism for not resolving the conflict. Construing the war against the Lyrans and the Capellans as a moral obligation, and his mission to reestablish the primacy of the Free Worlds League (and himself as First Lord) as an almost holy quest, he perceived the tactics of the "mere merchants" of Parliament as outright betrayal. It was not difficult for him to justify (at least in his old mind) the exclusion of the Parliament from the decision-making process. When Kenyon died in 2804, after 41 years as Captain-General, he had still not surrendered the authority granted him by the terms of Resolution 288.



FATHER AND SON

Kenyon's successor at Captain-General was his second son, Thaddeus Marik, who had served for 15 years as Fleet Admiral along the Lyran border. He was informed of his father's death during the reduction of a Steiner stronghold, and remained long enough to complete the operation. Then, he returned to Atreus with a battalion of MechWarriors personally loyal to him to find Parliament gathered on its own initiative. Interrupting its deliberations, Thaddeus presented the terms and provisions of Resolution 288. Angry debate ensued, as the Marik stood, waiting for it to subside. Two-thirds of the Parliament abruptly departed the building, when they saw a company of BattleMaster 'Mechs with their engines powered and their weapons trained at them. The Parliamentary members soon had a change of heart. For Thaddeus Marik, it was an exercise in pragmatic politics, and the affirmation of the state of emergency was a necessary legalism, even if it turned out to be a fait accompli.

The powerful Duke of Oriente, Carter Allison, who (in addition to ruling his own extensive province) was the coadjutant administrator of a dozen other provinces on the Capellan border, challenged the affirmation of Resolution 288 by the full assembly. The Marik was willing to call his bluff, however, withdrawing units from Oriente for 14 months in the face of a belligerent Capellan Confederation. The Oriente system itself was invaded twice and only scarcely escaped conquest before Allison came personally to Atreus to add his name to the document affirming the terms of the Resolution. The new Marik, a brilliant strategist as well as politician, surprised a third Capellan invasion of Oriente with a fierce defense and counterattack.

Thaddeus Marik's 17 years as Captain-General of the Free Worlds were extremely violent, marked by the frequent enemy incursions into Free Worlds space and a vast commitment of military and economic resources to counterattacks. The bitter rivalry between the League and the Lyran Commonwealth caused vast destruction along the border, taking an especially heavy toll on the two states' jump capable fleets. While the success along the Capellan front was markedly better, all the victors had to show for their efforts was shattered factories, bombed-out cities, and depressurized orbital facilities. The same was true of the other states in the Inner Sphere. In 2811, Thaddeus drafted plans for a major offensive against the Lyran Commonwealth to retake several worlds near the Periphery that had fallen to the Lyrans. Acrux, which contained important industrial facilities, was in danger of failing to a two-pincer attack that had taken many Marik worlds, including Valloire, Binyang, Radostov, and Danxian. As luck would have it, the Stealths, the Lyrans' crack assault unit, was stationed on the first planet on the agenda, Poulso. The Free Worlds' chance to exterminate this troublesome unit slipped through its fingers. As Marik forces tried to destroy the stealth's DropShips before they could reach their JumpShips, stealth fighters downed many League fighters. Though the Marik forces accounted for many fighter kills, they could not hit one DropShip or JumpShip. The unexpected loss of men and materiel (Thaddeus had expected to take three planets before meeting any enemy resistance) forced the Marik to call the offensive to a halt.

THE SECOND SUCCESSION WAR

By 2820, 35 years of continuous, destructive war with no Ares Conventions to limit targets or activities had exhausted the contending states. However, the recalcitrance of merchants to accept the worthless scrip of governments was no longer the issue; rather, it was the inability of industry to supply the war effort, due to the widespread destruction of the industrial base. Military operations tailed off until they simply ceased altogether. During the period between 2815-2821, the exhausted Successor States negotiated armistices, hoping to gain time to rearm and rebuild.



In September of that year, communications from ComStar indicated that the Federated Suns and the Capellan Confederation had concluded a truce and ceased all fighting along the Capellan March. Though Thaddeus's successor Charles had no wish to cease the League's efforts to reunite the Star League, he was well aware of the depleted state of his military resources. Charles dispatched Jonathan Humphreys, Lord of Andurien, to the Court of Capella, where he found a most hospitable reception to his peace proposals. By the end of November, Humphreys and Chancellor Ilsa Liao had worked out a comprehensive armistice agreement that ratified existing boundaries (representing a significant territorial advance for the Free Worlds League) and provided for the exchange of thousands of prisoners.

JUSTICE

By 2820, the protracted fighting on Chertan had devastated the planet's food distribution system. As the cities received less and less produce, food riots broke out. The irony that civilians who had survived the military action were now being killed in riots did not escape Viscount Ronald Marley, interim Director-General of the city of New Pittsburgh. A man of principle passionately devoted to justice, Viscount Marley was the right man in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Marley himself reviewed the proceedings of the trial during which several rioters were sentenced to death for killing security guards at a meatpacking house. Marley discovered several judicial irregularities in the trial, including the fact that the judge had disallowed testimony that the accused had not been present at the crime. Despite public opinion that strongly favored execution of the guilty parties, Marley, insisting on these three individuals' innocence, ordered them released.

Thaddeus Marik was enraged when he heard of Marley's action. He ordered the Viscount stripped of all titles, lands, and property, and ordered that no one on the planet Chertan ever give him another job. (The story that Thaddeus sent Marley a personal message saying that he would have had him shot if he had been a military man is probably apocryphal.) Reduced in a day to destitution, Marley was seen for weeks afterwards begging in the streets of New Pittsburgh for money to book passage to another world.

The final irony is that Thaddeus, once his initial anger had passed, might have been willing to reconsider his pronouncement, but the Captain-General was killed soon thereafter. His successor, Charles Marik, never heard about Ronald Marley, whose subsequent life history is lost in obscurity.

—From *The First Tide of Resistance*, by Caroline Drury-Tunis, Britannica Historian Perspectives Series, 3025

Thaddeus's death came in one of the last engagements of the First Succession War. The Lyrans and the Free Worlds were the first of the Inner Sphere combatants to agree to a cease-fire (in May, 2821), though key strategic targets on both sides of the border remained heavily garrisoned throughout the peacetime period. Worlds that remained in enemy hands at the time of the cease-fire were mercilessly pillaged of all resources that could be used to fuel the war machine. These depredations rendered a few of these worlds uninhabitable, while once-great industrial centers like Uhuru and Chertan saw their standard of living reduced to bare subsistence.



Charles Marik ascended to the Captain-Generalcy as the second choice of the Parliament, when his elder sister Jeannette, the first in the line of succession, refused the title of First Lord and entered the service of ComStar. Charles had served with some distinction along the Lyran front during the First Succession War, participating in the 2817 offensive that had crippled the Star League base on the Steiner world Rahne. Considered by his peers in the regular army to be a savvy tactician, he had an excellent talent for exploiting the slightest edge provided by logistics or military intelligence. Outside his 'Mech, however, he was an unprepossessing, rather plain man who lacked personal charisma and who had inherited his great-grandfather Ewan's knack for saying the wrong thing at precisely the wrong time.

Despite these weaknesses (or perhaps because of them), Charles had no intention of giving up the Captain-Generalcy, and moved rapidly to consolidate his position. Perceiving his younger and more gregarious brother, Oskar, to be a potential threat to his rule, he sent Oskar on an "undercover" mission into Steiner space, then secretly leaked news of his presence abroad as evidence of treason. Returning to Solaris to find himself officially exiled and subject to arrest, Oskar fled to the Periphery, where he was reported to have taken service in the Magistracy of Canopus. He was never seen in the Free Worlds League again, and was rumored to have died in battle in 2839. It is said that descendants of his family still reside in the Federation and claim the Marik name.

During the years of peace, Charles never allowed his attentions to stray far from the next war. Though some members of Parliament-vociferously led by Oriente and the hard-hit worlds of the Sirian Concordat-pushed for funding of a large-scale reconstruction program aimed at rebuilding general industrial capacity, Charles had enough support to ensure that his own priorities-the resupply and repair of his front-line military units and the stockpiling of essential materials-were satisfied first. He engineered passage of a program allowing the government to "borrow" scientific staff from private Free Worlds research and development concerns for six months to two years. With these scientists, he assembled technical teams charged with redesigning Marik JumpShips, AeroSpace Fighters, and 'Mechs to replace technologies not locally produced. In 2825, he issued an Executive Order (later remanded in 2948) authorizing the Captain-General to receive all fines collected from the prosecution of individuals engaged in illegal trade of "restricted items."

Above all, Charles attempted to rebuild the Free Worlds League's shattered intelligence network abroad, seeking to keep a watchful eye on his enemies. After three years of intense effort in this area, however, Charles was forced to admit defeat. Only a handful of SAFE agents remained on most Lyran and Capellan worlds, and it proved much more difficult for agents to infiltrate governments than it ever had in the pre-war era. Desperate for an improvement, Charles turned to the only organization whose access throughout the Inner Sphere was virtually unrestricted-ComStar. He contacted his sister Jeannette, now an Adept in the Order, and asked her to keep an eye out for any communications that indicated threats to Free Worlds security. Years later, he would realize how his efforts had played directly into the hands of Conrad Toyama, ComStar's Director.

REVENGE IS SWEET

In 2830, on the eve of House Marik's entry into the Second Succession War, a man named Jermyn LeStat arrived on Dieudonne from the remote Steiner world A Place, and requested diplomatic asylum. Ostensibly a member of a diplomatic delegation convened to discuss mining and ore processing conventions, LeStat wasted no time in approaching the Marik authorities about defecting. He was a man of exceptional ability and was regarded as one of the rising stars of A Place's planetary government.

It was LeStat's original intention simply to leave Steiner space and take as much governmental information with him as possible. The Marik officials on Dieudonne, however, immediately recognized the implications of having a Steiner planetary official on their side, even one from a world as far from the Marik border as A Place. LeStat was extensively debriefed and then offered a deal. If he returned to A Place to act as a Marik agent, he would be smuggled back to Marik space whenever he wished, and he would be paid 50,000 M-Bills in a numbered bank account on Dieudonne for every month that he supplied useful information on Steiner military movements during the impending war, with an extra bonus of half a million credits if he remained in service on A Place for the duration of the war. LeStat gratefully accepted the offer.

LeStat returned to A Place and was shortly afterward promoted. During the two years that he remained on his homeworld, he became coordinator of troop movements through that sector of space. The information he supplied House Marik was invaluable in their plans for engaging House Steiner militarily, and when he began to suspect that the Steiner secret service suspected him, he requested relocation from his Marik contact. True to its word, SAFE rescued him from the barren, depressing world of his birth.

Years later, after he had taken a job in Dieudonne's government, officials noticed that he had not touched the money in his numbered account. The SAFE officer who had originally arranged payment to LeStat was asked to interview him one more time. LeStat told him that all he really cared about was bringing down House Steiner, whom he blamed for the famine that had devastated A Place during the First Succession War. He had been the only one of his family to survive that famine, which could have been prevented if Richard Steiner had not ordered the commercial freighters conscripted for military service. The money on account he was leaving to bequeath as his legacy if he ever produced an heir, although he was nearing 50 and remained unmarried.

Jermyn LeStat lived out his life peacefully and died of natural causes, without issue, in 2868. The money reverted to the Marik government.

—From *Defectors Past and Present*, by Erica Brandeis, Atreus University Press, 3022

THE FIGHTING RESUMES

One of the reasons I didn't want to be Captain-General was that I would have had to deal with people like Marcus Steiner. He's the kind of jerk that likes to say things like, 'I'm not here to win any popularity contests.'

—Jeannette Marik

In June of 2830, a priority communication from Jeannette Marik was delivered to the palace at Atreus in the early hours of the morning. The message-reported to contain an intercepted communication from the Royal Court of Tharkad to the commander of the Skye Rangers-outlined the plans for a major Steiner offensive against Graham IV, Castor, and Callison. Charles rushed five regiments of Marik Militia to reinforce the sector, and sent messages across the Inner Sphere denouncing the Lyrans for their provocative acts. Although House Steiner immediately issued a terse statement completely denying Charles's charges, they too began to mass troops along the Marik border. After two months of verbal sparring and minor skirmishes at border jump points, Charles decided to seize the initiative himself, and sent a four-regiment force of 'Mechs and LAMs to attack the Steiner worlds of Zwenkau and Senftenberg. The assault would prove a magnificent short-term success, yielding a rich booty of over 30 Zeus and Cyclops 'Mechs and control of the still-functioning armament factories in the Cavez Valley region. Lyran retaliation was swift, however, and within weeks the fighting had spread to virtually every world along the Marik-Steiner front. By a year later, all five Successor States were at each other's throats once more, girded for a Second Succession War that would prove as destructive, long, and ultimately indecisive as its predecessor.



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AT WAR WITH COMSTAR

I can't stand tough guys. They always seem to have missed out on everything in life that makes a person human.

—Jeannette Marik

During the years from 2831-2836, the palace at Atreus periodically received messages from Jeannette Marik and her ComStar colleagues providing intelligence about both House Steiner and House Liao force dispositions and troop movements. These communications proved to be extraordinarily accurate and contributed greatly to a number of the Free Worlds' biggest military successes in those years, including the still renowned 2832 offensive in which troops spearheaded by the Fusiliers of Oriente swept through the Commonality of Sarna, seizing the worlds of Berenson, Zion, and Kyrkbacken, and doing extensive damage to the defenders at Ventabren and Elnath before being repulsed by a desperate counterattack.

Nonetheless, Charles grew increasingly uneasy about his relationship with the communications network. Though his campaigns had produced some impressive gains, Free Worlds forces had suffered their share of setbacks as well, often under circumstances suggesting that the enemy forces must have had foreknowledge of Marik movements. After a time, Charles began to perceive a pattern in these events, and became convinced that the source of these intelligence leaks was none other than ComStar itself. For over two years, in an operation known only to the Captain-General and a handful of SAFE agents, Charles tried to obtain proof of ComStar's duplicity. Finally, in March 2837, he received the "conclusive evidence" he sought, when a Liao expeditionary force landed on the abandoned world of Cursa, after the Marshal of Oriente communicated to Atreus the discovery of a major Star League storehouse there (a false communication that had been mandated months earlier). Outraged, Charles ordered the Oriente fleet into action, killing the Adepts of the Oriente A station (including his sister) as the station itself was reduced to floating space debris.

Charles's accusations, of course, were totally untrue. A number of mid-level officers at Oriente command probably gained access to the Cursa memorandum without learning its true origin. Nevertheless, the Captain-General had greatly underestimated the power and influence of ComStar and had given insufficient thought to our reaction. Primus Toyama responded quickly and firmly to the crisis. Within hours of the Oriente attack, ComStar sent a simple message to every station in the Inner Sphere.

The Free Worlds League has been placed under Communications Interdict for violating the terms of the Communications Protocol of 2787. Until the League admits its violation and makes proper reparation to ComStar, in an amount equal to treble the cost of rebuilding the Oriente relay station, all communications into or out of Free Worlds territories or protectorates is hereby suspended.

The message was the last any Free Worlds-based HPG receiver would hear for almost two years.

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

In the immediate aftermath of Charles Marik's charges against ComStar, there was considerable speculation both in Parliament and the Atreus vidtapes as to the actual identity of the ComStar double agent. Almost inevitably, the focus of speculation fell on Charles's sister Jeannette. Jeannette had been the bearer of ComStar's first intelligence leak to the Captain-General, and was assigned, on several later occasions, to the relay stations that transmitted other such messages. In addition, she was present at the Oriente station when it transmitted the planet message that precipitated the Liao attack on Cursa. Even though SAFE strongly indicated that the leak had originated in the highest levels of ROM, some journalists—most notably Anders Metcalf of the New Atreus Sun—still persisted in naming Jeannette as the traitor. Metcalf wrote an inflammatory holoplay called *Lies and Whispers* that ran for four performances before it was closed by the Ministry of Justice as "libelous and seditious." In it, Metcalf claimed to have incontrovertible proof that Charles and Jeannette were both part of a conspiracy to bring the Free Worlds League under the dominion of ComStar. These "proofs" never saw the light of day, however, as his personal papers were destroyed in a house fire that also claimed Metcalf's life in September of 2838.

—Alien Artois, *The ComStar Crisis*, Globe Press, 2872

It would not take long for the impact of this loss to be felt throughout the League. Without any means of rapid communications, Charles could communicate with his forces only through the use of messenger ships. Messages delivered in this manner were often obsolete on arrival, leaving local garrisons on their own initiative. Planning troop movements became a shambles, as sector commanders could do little more than strike blindly and hope for the best. The Marik's foes, however, had the full benefit of logistics and intelligence, and had little difficulty locating easy prey. Over a dozen League-held worlds fell within six months, and several others hung on by the slenderest of threads. Over twice as many other planets, including virtually all the Liao worlds gained during the last seven years of fighting, were abandoned without a fight as the Free Worlds forces pulled back their perimeters to form a unified line of defense. Indeed, the carnage might have proved much worse had it not been for the sudden appearance of Davion and Kurita forces, lured like sharks to the bleeding carcass of the Free Worlds League. The four rampaging armies inevitably collided with one another, and quickly began fighting over the spoils left by the retreats.

Though the Marik forces had consolidated, each unit was still vulnerable to a quick strike or to any enemy recon raid that could estimate its strength and summon an invasion force large enough to defeat it. Still, Charles remained certain of ComStar's betrayal, and stubbornly refused to consider



surrendering to the terms of the Interdict. The growing ranks of his Parliamentary critics, however, soon decided to take matters into their own hands. Behind Hector Lombard, the fiery Free Worlds League Minister of Finance, the dissenters led a successful floor battle on June 24, 2838 (an occasion still celebrated by some Parliamentary families as a holiday) to table Charles's re-quest for appropriations to outfit five reinforcement regiments. Five weeks later, the Parliament struck again, denying the Captain-General's

re-quest to conscript a number of pilots and explorer vessels from the Vanguard and Midas-Tech mining companies into "temporary" military service. If the legislature had no official power to force the Marik to end his private war, it was learning quickly that it could deny him the resources to prosecute the war effectively.

Without reinforcements or critical spare parts, the losses continued to mount. Shiloh fell to Steiner forces in August, and Van Diemen IV succumbed to Liao forces in September, after a protracted struggle that destroyed five house battalions and a full regiment of the Fusiliers of Oriente. Faced with these disasters, Charles finally admitted defeat and dispatched a JumpShip bearing the white flag and his youngest son Garth to Terra to accede to the terms set out in the Interdict. On November 9, 2838, HPG communication services were restored throughout

the Free Worlds League (though the Oriente station itself was not completely rebuilt until 2841).

DRIVEN TO THE BRINK

Though Charles's capitulation had returned communications contact to the Marik forces in the field, the crisis was far from over. The news from the front through the fall and winter remained the same. The Steiner and Liao forces, flushed with the confidence of their previous successes, were continuing to push forward aggressively.

Every time Marik commanders would shift troops to plug one hole in the defensive perimeter, an even larger one would emerge somewhere farther along the line. Worse yet, the flow of reinforcements, parts, and supplies to the front still amounted to little more than a trickle, as the Parliament continued to block Charles's requests for funding. Hector Lombard now openly declaimed in public that the "imperial airs of the Marik family" were to blame for the current state of affairs, and that nothing short of the overturn of Resolution 288 and the complete restructuring of the government would end the worsening spiral of war and destruction. Charles, as diplomatic as ever, fanned the fires by calling Lombard a traitor and dispatching his personal household guard in August of 2839 to place the Finance Minister under arrest. When Lombard escaped his would-be captors and left Atreus for Hellos Minor (where his views became an almost daily vidtape subject), the stage was set for a protracted political stalemate.

Unfortunately, the Free Worlds League's outlook made even stalemate look appealing. The outmanned and increasingly demoralized Marik regulars were on the run, and a number of mercenary units defected outright to the enemy. Asuncion, long a bastion of the Capellan border defense, fell in the summer of 2840, and Danais met a similar fate in February of 2841. As both Steiner and Liao edged closer to the main 'Mech production facilities on Irian, fear ran rampant that the two Successor States would deal the League a final, crippling blow. Strangely, however, as the specter of defeat loomed closer, Charles Marik seemed to accept his fate with increasing equanimity. He departed Atreus for Irian to marshal his remaining forces for one last stand. The beleaguered Captain-General, who for five years had provided an easy focus for his foes' ire, ironically provided the impetus for the Free Worlds' salvation by doing nothing at all, leaving the Parliament to its own devices.

Lombard's bloc of support began to crumble, as the representatives had an opportunity to reflect on the very real possibility that their actions—or lack of them—could result in the total destruction of the League. Maren Ladislaw, representative from the tiny world Thirty Weight, declared on the floor, "Though surely we have just reasons to seek changes in the Captain-General's conduct, what profit will we gain if we press for these changes now, and wake up tomorrow as a Commonality in the Capellan Confederation? Who will listen to our complaints then?" In Charles's absence, two of his staunchest supporters in Parliament, Kendall Allison and Jonathan Humphreys, worked at widening this breach. Finally on January 5, 2842, as a Steiner invasion force landed on Irian, the Parliament voted 213-185 to resume military funding.

The deadlock broken, the military command could finally marshal the stockpiled forces and supplies for a counterattack on Irian. All their efforts might well have gone for naught, however, had it not been for the holding action fought by Charles Marik and Harlan Allison, the inspired commander of the 1st Brigade of the Fusiliers of Oriente, against a force that outnumbered them over three to one. In late March, the Marik reinforcements arrived on the scene, taking the Steiner invaders completely by surprise and turning the momentum of the battle to the League's favor. After another month of hard fighting, the invasion was repulsed without serious damage to the Mech factories.



Li Weaver, Earl of LeFarge and MP from the planet Bowang, is wearing clothes typical of a Marik noble. The full-length leather tunic is favored by MechWarrior clans, which tend to boast about their military accomplishments whenever possible. His silver cane is similar to the Captain-General's baton and demonstrates his support for the Marik's policies.

The level of fighting would remain high for the next three years, as the Marik forces began to receive the support they needed to halt the Steiner-Liao advances. Charles and his son Gerald Marik were actively engaged in many of the key battles of this period, as were the Fusiliers of Oriente and the Defenders of Andurien. Gerald's younger brother William died when the shielding on his Marauder's reactor failed during the retaking of Danais in 2843, and Harlan Allison fell during the sixth battle of New Delos in 2845, the last of his family's line. As the fighting continued to rage, the Free Worlds Parliament appointed Blair Halas as the new Duke of Oriente. A proud and independent line beholden to the Mariks, the Halases were a longtime MechWarrior family whose ancestors had gained renown as both Star League regulars and as members of the Ducal Guard of the Fusiliers, and were perceived as a strong potential rival to the ruling line. In the decades to come, however, the Halas family would come to forge strong ties to the Captain-General, and become one of the First Lord's staunchest advocates in Parliament-to the consternation of many of the families who instigated the initial appointment.



Philippa Marik, Charles's second child and the last surviving Marik of her generation, was 58 years old upon her confirmation as Captain-General. Though also confirmed as First Lord at the same time (according to the Succession War tradition), she refused to use the title publicly during her reign. Unlike her father and brothers,

Philippa had long been an advocate of peace-within two years of her confirmation, she would receive a golden opportunity to achieve her desires. In Elizabeth Steiner, the young but aggressive new Archon of the Lyran Commonwealth, Philippa found a woman of like mind to herself, a leader whose point of view was not inextricably linked to the war's continuation. Though the Steiner peace overtures toward the Draconis Combine had failed to produce a formal peace treaty, the two bitter enemies had nonetheless managed to coexist for several months without a major military action, giving both sides a much needed chance to regroup. Consequently, when ambassadors from the Archon arrived at Atreus under the white flag, Philippa welcomed their armistice proposal with open arms. Within eight months, fighting along the other Successor State borders had ground to an apparent halt as well.

RECOVERY AND STALEMATE

By 2847, the Free Worlds counterattack had ground to a halt on both fronts, and Charles Marik finally returned to Atreus. Though the Marik forces had retaken several key League worlds, including Asuncion, substantial territory would remain in enemy hands for years to come. The last few years of Charles's reign would be largely uneventful, save for a series of earthquakes and tidal waves on Hassad in 2851 that produced hundreds of thousands of casualties and reduced the spaceport city of Ajnanabal to rubble. In his final year, the Eridani Light Horse, under contract to the Free Worlds, captured Irian and Megrez, and even subdued the Circinus Federation for a time. As the war moved into its third decade, however, none of the five Warlords appeared to be closer to their objective of reuniting the Inner Sphere than they had been at the war's outbreak.

Gerald Marik succeeded his father in 2854, at the age of 53. An accomplished veteran campaigner, he spent little time at the Court at Atreus, leaving his supporters in charge of keeping the army supplied. Gerald vigorously pursued the fight against both Steiner and Liao during his seven-year term-though he would prove to have little success against the Lyrans, who continued to hold League worlds such as Shiloh and Dieudonne, he would make substantial progress on the Capellan front, recovering most of the territories lost during 2837-42. In December of 2861, as rumors of a pending armistice between Steiner and Kurita began to swirl across the Inner Sphere, Gerald died suddenly. The circumstances of his death became the subject of speculation in the years following the peace of 2863, as Gerald had resisted any sort of armistice until all the territories lost in the ComStar War had been reclaimed.

GOOD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES

Harlan Allison, the last and perhaps greatest leader of the Allison clan, stood barely one and two-thirds meters tall and weighed about 55 kilos. According to the official code of regulations for the Fusiliers of Oriente, Harlan (had his name been different) would have been automatically disqualified from piloting a 'Mech and forced to enter a noncombatant branch of the service. At the time of his death in 2845, he had registered 127 confirmed enemy kills.

—Karen Allemagne, *Dynasties of the Free Worlds*, Globe Press, 2931

ON THE HOT SEAT

MODERATOR: If we can put through the editorial writers' prognostications, your Highness, the question I think most of the Lyran peoples would like answered is, just how good a chance at peace is there, either with the Free Worlds League or with the rest of the Inner Sphere?

ELIZABETH STEINER: Well, frankly, Mr. Tracewski, that's the question I'd most like answered. There is no question that the sentiment of peoples throughout the Inner Sphere has turned increasingly in favor of peace.

MODERATOR: Well, there's no question of that, but, with all due respect, I don't think that quite answers my question. **ELIZABETH STEINER:** Unfortunately, Mr. Tracewski, the situation remains fluid. There are some hopeful signs, but whether they are going to come to any real settlement of the issues involved in the war remains to be seen.

DELBERT ANDREWS: Would you say, your Highness, that the recent peace initiatives from Philippa Marik is one of these signs?

ELIZABETH STEINER: Most definitely.

FIONA BARAKA-CHEE: Would you also say, Highness, that the possibility exists for a separate peace between our Commonwealth and the Free Worlds League?

ELIZABETH STEINER: I would certainly hope for far more than that, but if a separate peace with the Mariks is all that can be accomplished at this time, I'll certainly take what I can get. **MODERATOR:** Forgive me if this seems impertinent, Highness, but I wonder why, if the peoples of the war-torn worlds want peace, why can't their leaders get together and make peace?

ELIZABETH STEINER (SMILING): I've always found the questions people call impertinent to be the ones that contain the most pertinence, Mr. Tracewski. It seems that in time of war, the leaders are precisely the ones who lag the farthest behind the rest of the people.

—From *Meet the Press*, Lyran Broadcasting System, August 28, 2865

LAST CHANCE FOR PEACE

As the unofficial peace with the Lyrans continued, a small but vocal minority in the Parliament began to press Philippa to deactivate a portion of the military and to direct the much-depleted resources of the League economy toward the reconstruction of industry. Others called for the immediate revocation of Resolution 288 and the return of governmental authority to the Executive Council of Parliament. Philippa, however, surprised many by holding firm against these demands, realizing that the threads of peace were tenuous at best. In one compensatory action, however, the Marik did dispatch several of her surviving enclaves of scientists to the devastated worlds of Danais, Rochelle, Andurien, and Ryerson to repair those planets' industrial base. The level of recovery achieved by these teams on three of the four worlds (Rochelle was found to be virtually unsalvageable, and the planet was soon evacuated) was remarkable, and is largely responsible for the economic viability of those worlds today.

In 2864, Elizabeth Steiner sent peace envoys to Atrous seeking a more permanent peace treaty. Philippa replied favorably to the proposals, but pressed for an expansion of the negotiations to include the other Successor States. On November 9, representatives from all five parties converged on New Earth, the appointed site of the talks.



The Marik delegation arrived at New Earth with high hopes of achieving a rapid peace settlement that would allow the League to finally get back to what it did best—making money. Those hopes were soon dashed, however, as the first few days of discussions showed how far apart the five States remained. The Draconis Combine representative cast an immediate pall on the proceedings by declaring that he was empowered to act only as an observer, and that any agreements reached by the group would have to be fully reviewed in Luthien before they could be accepted. The Capellan Confederation, whose borders had shrunk the most through the conduct of the war, asserted bluntly that any peace treaty would have to make provision for the return of its captured territories—a provision that James Marik (Philippa's son) and Luther Davion, head of the Federated Suns delegation, vociferously opposed. Davion himself quickly alienated his colleagues by unabashedly pressing his own claim as First Lord, a matter clearly beyond the scope of the present talks. After seven weeks of rancorous deadlock, the talks collapsed completely. As the four delegations departed for home (the Kurita representative was seized, tried, and executed as a spy by the Lyran government), the last chance for peace—however slim it had been—had passed.

THE THIRD SUCCESSION WAR

With the disastrous end of her initiative, Philippa was forced to turn her attentions toward mustering for war. Lacking military experience of her own, she relied heavily on the advice of her commanders, especially Duke Robin Halas, the charming and much-decorated gentleman leader of the Fusiliers of Oriente.



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As the Lyrans reeled from the initial Kurita assault, Philippa succumbed to Halas's pressure for an advance against the Commonwealth despite her deep personal misgivings. The offensive of 2869 cut a deep swath into the Federation of Skye, and produced substantial gains in both territory and materiel. In the process, however, the Free Worlds League turned Elizabeth Steiner from

a potential ally into a vengeful, implacable foe—one who would haunt them for more than 30 years.

The rancor between the Archon and the Captain-General became so severe that in 2867, Philippa ordered an assassination attempt on the Archon. (Philippa also believed that Elizabeth Steiner's death would stand her in good stead with Miyogi Kurita, Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, and cement an alliance between their two Houses.) Three centuries earlier, when Archon Tracial Steiner had ordered the entire Government House rebuilt, one of the architects had sold the floor plans of the new House, complete with maps of secret passage ways and trick doorways, to Marik agents. Now, this act of treason came back to haunt Tracial's descendant. The Marik assassins easily made their way to Elizabeth's throne room. When they got there, though, their way to the Archon's throne was guarded by BattleMechs. The would-be assassins were killed in the attempt, but it clarified the political situation. Miyogi Kurita looked more favorably on House Marik after this incident, just as there clearly could be no further attempts at reconciliation between Houses Marik and Steiner.

Philippa died in 2873, and the Captain-Generalcy passed to her daughter Marie. In her brief seven-year tenure, Marie made enemies among the leadership of Andurien and Orloff by ordering a large portion of their forces to defend the worlds won in the recent offensive against Steiner—a move that became even more unpopular as the worlds fell to the Lyrans anyway.

TO CATCH A SPY

The execution of the Kurita delegate on New Earth was an act of spite. It had nothing to do with Steiner spite for House Kurita, though heaven knows nobody liked the Kuritas much. It had everything to do with a personal slight on the first day of the conference.

When Ken Takamura, the Kurita delegate, arrived on New Earth, all the usual diplomatic protocol was observed. Takamura, who had requested hotel accommodations with an eastern expo-sure in advance, was insulted when he did not receive what he considered a reasonable prerequisite of his rank. Takamura complained bitterly to the host delegation, who politely asked the Marik delegate, James Marik, to switch with him.

Although Marik, whose entire delegation was tired and irritable due to a turbulent space jump, agreed to the switch, Cyril Lewis, an unstable, low-ranking functionary in Marik's entourage, took an intense dislike to the Draconis delegate.

As the seven long weeks of acrimonious bickering wore one, personality clashes were less and less disguised. Lewis remained superficially polite to Takamura (as he did to all the delegates) but everything the Kuritan said, or didn't say, bothered Lewis.

On the final day of the conference, as the group was breaking up, David Morgan, the Steiner delegate, announced the arrest of Takamura on charges of espionage. At his trial, no one believed Takamura's claims that the Steiner documents found in his room were forgeries planted by a party or parties unknown, nor did they take much stock in his observation that the signatures on the documents looked like Lewis's handwriting. Takamura was put to death immediately.

Although the Kurita government demanded an apology from the Lyran Commonwealth, no further mention of the incident was forthcoming from the Steiner government. The Free Worlds delegation refused to acknowledge the incident from then on, also.

—From *Philippa Marik and the Peace Initiative*, by Cynthia Vitali, Popular Press, 3021

Councilor Millicent Alvarez is one of the Principality of Andurien's most celebrated prosecuting attorneys, specializing in natural resource and estate law. Her jacket bears the Andurien insignia on its right breast pocket. In her right hand she holds a copy of Baldwin's *Legis MechGladiatorum*, the seminal work in the field of MechWarrior inheritance law. The small blue-black stone that adorns her ring is a Leydan onyx, a popular staple in League jewelry.



TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

When James Marik was dispatched to the court at Tharkad in 2865 to deliver the Free Worlds' proposal for a permanent treaty with the Lyran Commonwealth, he brought with him a gift of two rare Kakadan songbirds for Archon Elizabeth. Thirty months later, when the news of the Marik assault on the Federation of Skye reached the Estates General, the birds were caught and killed.

Fate would smile only slightly more kindly on James's new wife Theodora Felton, daughter of an Estates-General representative, whom he met and fell in love with during the months prior to the ultimate failure of the peace talks. Though James and Theodora would have three children together, none would survive past the age of ten—indirectly creating a succession crisis upon James's death that would nearly hurl the Free Worlds League into civil war.

—From *Impetus of Change*, by James Burke, Globe Press, 2912

Although the war intensified on both fronts, the battles fought were conducted on a smaller scale and with a lower level of destructiveness than those of preceding years. The armies of all five Successor Lords remained much depleted, making commanders at every level of organization more willing to withdraw from a risky engagement than to fight to gain a costly victory. Even more important, the Warlords realized that they could ill afford to lay waste the worlds they were assaulting, as the enemy's functioning factories and mines might easily be captured tomorrow, or five years hence. Thus, even though the leaders of the Inner Sphere were farther than ever from solving their differences, they were gradually and informally working out a code of military ethics that could accommodate the exigencies of endless war. In addition, the new code allowed all parties a chance to survive, albeit at an increasingly reduced technological standard of living.

When Marie's younger brother James succeeded her in 2880, he was 54 and in weakened health from the lingering effects of an outbreak of Branthian fever, which had hit Atreus in the previous autumn and claimed the lives of several Parliamentary representatives. His war efforts bore little more success than those of his sister, save for the successful repulsion of a Liao invasion force

attempting to retake the world of Les Halles. As a reward for his outstanding service during this campaign, James re-warded Robin Halas with a substantial land grant on Les Halles's southern continent, which the family retains to this day.

THE GREAT COMPROMISER

James died suddenly in 2882, leaving 13-year-old Samuel Marik, the great-grandson of Philippa's brother William, as the only heir to the Captain-Generalcy. The Parliament debated holly, as those who favored confirming Samuel and appointing a regent for him faced off against those who sought an end to the Marik supremacy. Neither side could win an absolute majority. In February 2883, Admiral Lloyd Marik-Stanley, the crusty but well-regarded commander of the Marik Guard, stepped forward to assert his claim to the Captain-Generalcy, vowing to hold the title "in trust" for Samuel until his majority. When this compromise, backed strongly by the Duchies of Orloff and Andurien, swayed the Parliament, the matter appeared settled. Marik-Stanley moved into the palace at Atreus and began organizing plans for a major strengthening of the forces along the Capellan border.

On June 21st, however, a 39-year-old woman wearing Marik robes and the distinctive hairstyle of a Com-Star Precen-tor presented herself on the floor of Parliament as the rightful claimant to the Captain-Generalcy. The grand-daughter of William Marik, Elisabeth Marik had entered the ser-vice of ComStar at the age of 18 and had spent the last four years as the Precen-tor of several ComStar stations. She bore notarized papers from James signed four months before his death appointing her as his heir, and had spent the entire nine months since receiving word of his death in transit. The threat of civil war once again appeared over the Free Worlds League, as Marik-Stanley, issuing an incendiary, anti-ComStar address from his flagship anchored off Hassad, prepared to defend his hard-bargained title with force.

Elisabeth, however, quickly defused the crisis, displaying a talent for negotiation that would soon become her trademark. Declaring that her long years of ComStar service had left her unprepared for the task of leading the Free Worlds League armies into war, she asked Marik-Stanley to share power with her, serving as commander-in-chief of the military while she assumed the home-front administrative and political duties. Under the strong urging of Arthur Humphreys, the Admiral accepted Elisabeth's bargain. For six years, he served her effectively, capturing several Capellan Confederation worlds with minimal losses, until his death on a battlefield at Aldebaran in 2889.

During that time, Elisabeth was cementing relationships with key figures in Parliament and the government bureaucracy, and consolidating her power. An excellent judge of character, Elisabeth possessed an innate talent for identifying the “buttons” that would make her political rivals respond favorably, and the wiles of a Tabiranth trader when it came to exploiting that knowledge. Although she would never take the field of battle, delegating military authority to her generals and loyal nobles, she quickly developed an understanding of her army’s capabilities and talents that surpassed many of her more decorated predecessors. This knowledge enabled her to influence the scope and objectives of its campaigns.

From 2901 through 2910, elements of an elite strike force (code named “Red Rover”) containing units of the Defenders of Andurien and the Orloff Grenadiers, conducted a series of deep penetration raids against key Liao supply depots at Aldebaran, Shensi and Nanking. The raid culminated in the daring capture of a fully laden iceship, the “Silver Frost,” as it prepared to depart the Buenos Aires system. With the “Silver Frost” in tow, the Red Rovers launched a multi-pronged assault on the Liao desert world of Zion, routing the defending garrison from its fortifications in



the Gapston mountain range. This engagement marked the successful introduction of the Galleon tank from the recently rebuilt armament factories on Holt, and presaged the rise of that design as a mainstay of the Free Worlds League’s light armor support.

Chancellor Otto Liao’s strong reserve units prevented League units from remaining on Capellan worlds, and so Elisabeth turned her attention to the Lyran Commonwealth. Along the Lyran border, victories were difficult to attain. Though the raging Draconis-Lyran conflagration had drawn off many Lyran regular regiments, the remaining Steiner forces were well supplied with replacement ‘Mechs from the still-functioning factories at Hesperus and Coventry and endowed with some of the brightest young unit commanders in the Successor States. The high water mark of Elisabeth’s campaigns on this front came in 2913, when three regiments of the Marik Militia, supported by a large complement of DropShips and AeroSpace Fighters, landed on the Steiner world of Loric (long a major Free Worlds League target), and inflicted severe damage to the defending aerospace and ground units stationed there before finally being repulsed by the arrival of reinforcements from the Donegal Guards.

Elisabeth Marik’s father, Michael Marik, had been killed in battle when she was only five. He had been away from home most of her childhood, and so she had little memory of him. Her mother, Oriente Marik, resolved that the little girl, having already lost her father, should never have to experience any further privation or even see any human suffering; all of Michael and Oriente’s family wealth would be devoted to this end. In this, Elisabeth’s early childhood resembled that of the Buddha, whose father, a king, decided to shield his son from viewing misery.

The result was similar. Like the young Buddha, Elisabeth got wise to the situation, and in a very similar way. Having the natural curiosity of children, Elisabeth asked one of the household staff to take her to the vast merchandising bazaar (or “mall”) in the town near Oriente Marik’s estate. The widow Marik gave her approval, as the bazaar was in the high rent district. Elisabeth was supposedly about eight or nine at the time.

The little girl knew the goods on display at the bazaar well

enough, but she wanted to see what was beyond it. She gave the servant the slip outside a whipped cream sculptor’s stand and wandered into the town.

Not surprisingly, she found things there that she never expected. All her life, whenever something terrible happened on a vidscreen, her mother or one of the servants would remind her that it was “just a story,” and that things like that did not happen anymore. On this day, she found that those things still were happening, and that people were still poor and still got sick. It was from this experience, that she began to develop the compassion that marked both her rule and her life.

Unlike Buddha, she never confronted her mother about the deceit, but let her go on believing that Elisabeth’s life was unspoiled by thoughts of suffering.

—From *Stories of Young People for Young People*, by Alice Seville, Conestoga Press, 3024

At home, Elisabeth's relations with Parliament were uncommonly harmonious, a fact that certainly contributed to the success of her military ventures abroad. Throughout her tenure, the Captain-General made a concerted effort to keep the representatives informed of her plans, setting up official oversight committees to review the military budget process and the activities of SAFE, and inviting their comments on all matters of state. This open, conciliatory style soon brought all but the most stubborn opponents of Resolution 288 firmly into her corner, giving her virtual carte blanche on the use of Provincial troops in her campaigns. The concessions she would make to obtain this co-operation, however, carried a heavy price—one would that would not be fully felt until subsequent generations.



During the period of Elisabeth's extensive raids against the Capellans, the Marik general command was employing well over half of the 'Mech units owned by House Humphreys, House Orloff, and the Border Protectorate with the tacit blessing of the three principalities involved. Other representatives, however, led by Grace Sun-Lee, the Minister of Intelligence from the planet Amity III, felt that these conscriptions left the homeworlds of those units dangerously exposed to attack, and sought some sort of official protection against being stripped in this manner. The mechanism they chose was a brief, vaguely worded, two-page proclamation asserting that a province designated by Parliament as "immediately threatened by military attack" could keep up to 75 percent of its forces and deny any troop request by the Captain-General that would require the commitment of those garrison forces. Elisabeth, who viewed the Act as the merest window dressing, actively pushed for its passage as one more way to increase the ranks of her loyal supporters—little realizing the havoc that the gesture would cause her successors to the Atreus throne.

DISSENT OR DUTY

The Home Defense Act is nothing but a confirmation of the basic rights that each member state in the Free Worlds League has always held: the rights of self-defense and self-determination, balanced against the needs of the whole. The League was created as a community of equals, a means by which worlds could expand their economic and political horizons without sacrificing their freedom. For centuries, the system of government has fostered this balance.

It did not, however, take into account the consequences of a Captain-General becoming a semi-permanent head of state. Though the maintenance of this position through the current crisis may be necessary (perhaps even vital) to assure military continuity, it cannot be denied that the placement of this power into the hands of a single family has tended to promote the interests of the few over the needs of the many. When we invoke the Home Defense Act, we are simply carrying out our duties both as good citizens of the League and good citizens of Andurien.

—From an Andurien secondary school history book, 2944

This is a member of House Marik's CopSec Force (police). The body armor protects the agent from rioters and criminals. Oriente security agents wear all-white uniforms, and Andurien agents wear buff-colored jumpsuits under heavy padding.

REIGN OF SAMUEL MARIK

During the last ten years of Elisabeth's reign, her nephew Samuel was given the lion's share of authority over Free Worlds League military operations. Small of build and nondescript in appearance, Samuel lacked the clear sense of vision and sweeping diplomatic skills of his aunt. Nonetheless, he was himself a politically and tactically savvy individual, whose personal war record (17 clean "kills" from the cockpit of his Warhammer) was the equal of any he commanded. Beginning in 2917, his reign largely continued the successes of Elisabeth, combining political popularity with limited but steady military advances along the Lyran front. The Free Worlds seized Wing, Callison, and Shiloh, repulsed a Steiner invasion of Stewart, and conducted a damaging raid against the Steiner 'Mech repair facility on Solaris. The Fusiliers of Oriente were particularly prominent in the campaigns conducted during these years, as the assault lances of the 5th Brigade spearheaded the Solaris raid. The 4th Brigade of the Fusiliers earned great distinction for its role in attacking Liao-held Hassad and its reconnaissance efforts in the Shiloh invasion. Several officers of the Fusiliers were rewarded with land grants on Chilung, and their families (especially the Gibson and Boston clans) would later rise to prominence in the planetary government there.



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The most lasting contribution to the Free Worlds during Samuel's reign, however, came not from the Captain-General but from Erin Marden-Smythe, an Assistant Deputy Director of SAFE. Erin was a member of a Dispossessed MechWarrior family who had married into the Smythe clan after a short but distinguished career as a Scout. From bitter experience, she knew that the ranks of the Dispossessed were a hotbed of discontent and realized that Dispossessed clans in Steiner and Liao territory could be recruited as Marik agents. Erin received limited funding to assemble two cadres of such individuals on Callison and Shiloh. Initially comprising no more than 50-100 men and women, these Liberation Units were supplied with arms and encouraged to wreak general havoc, spurred on by the promise of a fair share of the booty if the world was liberated by the Free Worlds League. The program succeeded beyond even Erin's wildest expectations, as both units conducted acts of sabotage and terrorism that greatly aided the progress of the Marik invasion forces. The Callison unit's propaganda efforts fomented the rise of independent rebellions in the cities of Harzburg and Mountainside, severely hampering the mobility of the Steiner defense forces. Within five years, six more LU's had been created and were being transported via a network of "neutral" freighters that regularly plied the Marik-

INTIMATIONS OF MORTALITY

The succession of three Captains-General within a year more than tripled the difficulties of transition of power. Consequently, none of the three successors of Samuel Marik were able to accomplish much, even considering their brief terms of office.

It is irresistible to speculate, however, what might have been. For example, would Paul Marik, a highly respected soldier, have failed to get funding for a grandiose military adventure like Operation Killing Stroke? Would he even have tried? There is no question that a bellicose man like Brock Marik would have wanted to pursue such a course of action, but would he have had the imagination to conceive of a plan of such scope?

On the home front, would Iris Marik have achieved her goal of recreating the technological accomplishments of the preceding centuries? If she did, would it have been to the detriment of the war effort, which had to take top priority for all Marik citizens? Or would the pursuit of technology for its own sake have aided the war effort by advancing both the Free Worlds economy and our military technology?

Or, is it possible that Paul's sober judgment, Iris's progressiveness, and Brock's will would have added up to one great leader? Any one of them might have been adequate, or more than adequate. Brock had intended for his mother Iris to be one of his chief advisors, and so his rule might have incorporated two of the three Captains-General's minds in one administration.

In any event, Iris was disabled, and Paul and Brock were both killed, leaving us with Thaddeus II for our new leader. It is the sort of thing I call one of God's little practical jokes.

—Senator Davion Roback, in an interview printed in the *Oriente Gazette-Herald*, August 12, 2986

Samuel also achieved two striking strategic successes using more subtle (some would say treacherous) means. In 2929, one of the MechWarrior officers captured during the abortive Steiner invasion on Stewart, a minor nobleman named Hauptmann Tertren, was recruited as a spy. Tertren provided the Free Worlds with several pieces of valuable intelligence before his exposure and escape into the Periphery in 2938 (from which he would return in 2952 to lead the 3rd Marik Militia regiment for five effective years). On the Liao front, the Marik scored a clever diplomatic coup when his agents convinced Vincente Sian-Marik, a distant cousin of the Marik line and Administrator of five worlds in the Commonality of Sarna (Ohrensen, Ventabren, Suzano, Zion, and Kyrkbacken) to sign a treaty transferring his allegiance to the Free Worlds. Marik forces occupied these worlds in 2941, but not before the departing Liao garrisons made the Free Worlds League pay dearly for its cleverness. Capellans conducted a brutal "scorched earth" operation that caused widespread destruction and saddled the Free Worlds economy with a major—and costly—rebuilding effort.

The leaders of these units were given special training in explosives and assassination techniques, and, as their successes and rewards mounted, the LU's were able to add small-scale 'Mech operations to their repertoire as well. Their activities would prove to be a scourge to the Lyran Commonwealth (and occasionally to the Free Worlds League itself) to the present day.

The four years following Samuel's death in 2944 were ones of unexpected turmoil, as three Captains-General had to be appointed in quick succession. First, Samuel's son Paul, a much-decorated fighter pilot, was killed in battle over the Liao world of Ingersoll in March of 2947. Then his sister Iris, a scant four months after her own confirmation, was seriously injured in a speeder accident, leaving her unable to walk (the tissue damage she sustained was found to be irreparable even with bionics), and she elected to step aside in favor of her 36-year old son Brock. Finally, Brock was killed during a bombing raid on Van Diemen IV. The fortunes of the Free Worlds League foundered during this period of unrest, and would not improve during the stormy Captain-Generalcy of Brock's younger brother, Thaddeus II.

OPERATION KILLING STROKE

I'm not here to win any popularity contests.
—Thaddeus Marik II



Ascending to the Captain-Generalcy in 2948, Thaddeus Marik II had little in common with Elisabeth and Samuel save a physical resemblance. Instead, he was a throwback to the days of his namesake, a contentious and imperious man with grandiose visions and little patience for those who sought to temper them with reason. Within twelve months after taking office, he ordered his generals to begin plans for an elaborate, three-pronged invasion of Steiner space (code named Operation Killing Stroke) aimed at subduing the well-defended worlds of Denebola V, Solaris, and Wyatt. Three months later, in January of 2950, he stood on the floor of Parliament, demanding the commitment of 30 regiments of troops and over three billion credits of funding. Thaddeus was stunned when the leaders of the Executive Committee not only opposed his request for financing, but also voted that such an invasion would place every world within two jumps

distance of either the Steiner or Liao border under “threat of invasion,” thereby placing the troops of those worlds under the protection of the Home Defense Act. In all, twelve principalities, including Andurien, Ste-wart, Amity, Shiloh, and the Sirian Concordat would invoke the act, withdrawing over 18 ‘Mech regiments from the invasion plan. Operation Killing Stroke appeared to be stillborn.

Thaddeus, however, was stubborn as well as rash and did not intend to abandon his great venture without a fight. Under the pretext of quelling domestic insurgencies, the Captain-General ordered Marik Militia units into the small principalities of Nestor and Talitha, replacing the local government leaders (who were preparing to invoke the Home Defense Act) with individuals more disposed toward his wishes. Still, his Parliamentary foes would not yield. Some of the smaller states made informal mutual defense pacts with one other. The agreements made between Callison, Amity, Shiloh, Kalidasa, and Danais later become the basis for the Concord of Danais ratified in 2966 and forming the Silver Hawks.

MERCENARY CHIC

The new fall fashion lines introduced by Barroni Dionne, Ketch River Menswear, and Flash Jeans all reflect our current fascination with the mercenaries that have flocked to the Marik banner. Dionne’s latest collection of women’s eveningwear has many military flourishes, such as button-down jackets with broad shoulder epaulets, sashes and caps as accessories, and natural colors (greens, browns, and so on). Ketch River is marketing lines of pants, workshirts, and jackets in the regimental colors of several mercenary units. Flash Jeans has taken the boldest step of all—paying a licensing fee estimated at high six figures to become the official out-fitter of clothing modeled after that of the 21st Centauri Lancers, right down to the Lancers’ traditional blue and red bandanna.

—From the vidtape
Marik Prairie Companion,
2957

Finally, Thaddeus decided to carry on with a truncated version of his plan despite the continuing opposition. He made up a portion of the shortfall in troops by hiring ten regiments of mercenary units—including Carson's Renegades, the Langendorf Lancers, and the now-defunct Redmond's Broadwords—out of the Marik family's personal funds. In a vitriolic vidtape address, he declared that no world that refused to contribute troops to the assault would share in the booty from the expedition. Though this final threat lured a few wavering worlds into the fold, most of the Captain-General's opponents held firm. After three years of costly and only slightly successful campaigning, few of the dissenters had any reason to regret their decision.

The last decade of Thaddeus's reign differed little from these early struggles. Between 2953 and 2990 the Marik continued to use the Marik Militia, the Free Worlds Regulars, Marik Commonwealth troops, regiments of his few staunch allies, and a mixed bag of mercenary units to conduct limited wars along both fronts, while the dissenters continued to invoke the Home Defense Act and used their voting majority in Parliament to deny funding any major new unit buildup. On several occasions, the public pronouncements of the Captain-General and his opponents suggested that another full-scale civil war was imminent, but the actual event did not occur.

In 2963, Thaddeus died suddenly. He felt the responsibilities of the Captain-Generalcy very deeply, and his way of coping was to get away to the remote world of Conakry, where miles of virgin beaches offered him solitude. On one such holiday, while swimming, an ocean current swept him away. Although his personal guards heard his cries for help and immediately went to his rescue, Thaddeus drowned. His son, Stephan, who was quickly confirmed as the new Captain-General, declared a full month of official mourning. During that time, he pretended to go into seclusion, but in fact was examining the Free Worlds' military options.

The League's fortunes appeared to be in stasis. Every small success (a raid on a myomer production facility on the Liao world Bryant, the repulsion of a Liao invasion at Holt) seemed to be followed by a failure on equivalent proportion (such as the disastrous attack on the Steiner world Dixie).



Gregory Halas, son of the reigning Duke of Oriente, Christopher Halas, is shown wearing the dark blue topcoat worn by Oriente nobles.

In 2971, Stephan Marik sent the 3rd Regular Hussars (Regulus fell outside the stated boundaries of the Parliamentary crisis and thus was not eligible to invoke the Home Defense Act), Redmond's Broadwords, and eleven armor and infantry regiments to invade the Steiner world Loric, a planet much prized for its natural beauty. The initial fighting favored the Free Worlds, as the Hussars soon controlled the majority of Sorania, Loric's largest and wealthiest continent looting the Donnelly MetWorks foundries in the process. In December, however, units from the 12th Star Guards and the Eridani Light Horse arrived and began to turn the tide. Instead of being satisfied with his booty and withdrawing, Stephan ordered the Free Worlds forces to remain on-world. Forced to retreat to the rugged terrain of the planet's northern continent, the League forces were harried for months by enemy fighters and recon lances. When they finally received orders to withdraw, the 3rd Regular Hussars had lost a third of their 'Mechs and a Union Class DropShip, and the Broadwords had been so decimated that they would never constitute an effective fighting force again. Before the Hussars' JumpShips even returned to League space, Regulus had applied to Parliament and been granted designation as a threatened state, further weakening Stephan's forces.

In 2976, Stephan suffered an even more crippling setback as the mercenary units Richard's Panzer Brigade and Lockhardt's Ironsides voided their contracts in a dispute regarding overdue shipments of spare parts. Within six months, the Ironsides' standard was seen flying at the head of a Liao raiding party on Cursa, while the Panzer Brigade just as quickly found new employment with the Lyran Commonwealth. In 2978, the Marik suffered a final, bitter ignominy when a Liberation Unit under the command of Jasbinder Shafir went renegade after the high command ignored its frequent complaints about back pay. Chancellor Ingrid Liao used Shafir's unit (for a reported fee of 3,000,000 C-Bills) in its successful bid to conquer Wasat.



CONCESSION TO PARLIAMENT

I'm not an admirer of anything that comes from Marik space. I will give their leader this, though. Stephen Marik is a tough guy.

—Hohiro Kurita, in an interview on Draconis Broadcasting System, 2983

Wounded by this string of setbacks and unwilling to make any conciliatory gestures to make peace with Parliament, Stephan could no longer mount any real offensive, and had barely enough troops left to garrison key worlds. In 2980, when Steiner forces attacked Zosma and Callison in a well-coordinated strike, Stephan delayed sending in regular units for six weeks, barely concealing his glee as the troops of the Silver Hawks struggled to hold on in muddy, bloody fighting. "My enemies in Parliament have spent hours whining about their terrible plight," he said before the audience at a small state dinner. "Now that they're in the wringer, we'll really hear them squeal." The Free Worlds reinforcements, consisting primarily of two companies of Assassins, arrived in time to turn the tide of battle at Rochelle, but Callison fell to the enemy on May 7th.

For months, the Parliament and the Captain-General exchanged barbs and threats. Meanwhile, a large Liao force, spurred by news of the Lyran success at Callison, had come across the border to attack Hassad and Vanra. Again, the enemy thrust was turned back, but not before the planetary defenders sustained heavy damage.

Finally, events forced a break in the stalemate. In 2987, a Steiner task force of several DropShips escorted by Chippewa AeroSpace Fighters moved deep within the Free Worlds League's borders, and made a landing on Ling. Unprepared for the surprise assault (a fact that Stephan's staff claimed was a direct result of Parliament's cutbacks to the SAFE budget), the planetary air defenses fell quickly to the well-organized attackers. At the same time, two 'Mech regiments dropped on the planet's surface and drove through the defending garrison, reaching and crippling the "secret" light 'Mech production facility that was under construction there. Although the task force suffered major losses during subsequent raids on Nathan, Ryerson, Irian, Park Place, and Bordon, the destruction of the much-prized new factory could not be erased.

A CONTRACT IS A CONTRACT

Although mercenaries are often considered treacherous, the politicians who hire them are not always honorable either. Examples abound of contracts being voided because of the employer's negligence or dishonest dealing with mercenary units.

One such tragic, if not comic, example was the case of the Van Diemen Demons and Srec's Wrecks. (This was the same Srec's Wrecks that had served House Kurita with distinction until their commander, Sylvia Srec, was killed in a barroom brawl by an off-duty Kurita Otomo member in 2941.) Both mercenary units were in the employ of House Marik during 2976, but Thaddeus Marik's practice of renegeing on merc contracts had alerted them both that they might need to seek other employment. When the Marik refused to drop fresh water onto the planet Ford, where they had been fighting for weeks, Colonel Brigham Stanley, commander of the Demons, met with Colonel Simon Chiu, commander of the Wrecks, to talk things over.

No one knows how many drinks either one had had, but both agreed that they did not want to face each other in battle if they found contracts with opposing Houses. Sick of fighting for other people's worlds, they decided that the two of them had enough firepower to take at least one world of their own. Before the night was through, they had decided to invade one of the Periphery worlds (no one is quite sure which one).

Chiu and Stanley resolved to send their resignations to the Marik government next morning. Meanwhile, they woke their troops and announced their plans, including an immediate BattleMech duel to determine command of the new unit. There were a few protests against the pointless danger and expense of a drunken 'Mech duel, but everyone went out to watch it.

Hours before dawn, Stanley's Crusader squared off against Chiu's Archer. They fought in a vast, rolling wheat field. The only sign of the nearby civilian population was a glimpse of a farmer shaking his fist at them as he and his family fled the area on foot. Slowly, the two 'Mechs marched toward one another, matching each other step for step, like cowboys in an ancient video showdown.



Stanley "drew" first. Laying down a barrage of machine gun fire (which only ricocheted off the other 'Mech's armor), he moved to deliver a missile attack on the Archer's left hip.

Chiu, an excellent 'Mech pilot, sidestepped the blast. He responded with a missile of his own, which blasted the left arm of Stanley's Crusader. Nevertheless, the Crusader remained able to blast the Archer's right leg.

The onlookers, who had been silent in apprehension at first, began cheering wildly now, as each unit urged on their commander. In the fight of acetylene flares, the onlookers could not believe their eyes when Chiu, closing in for 'Mech-to-'Mech fighting, drew Stanley off-guard and delivered a judo kick to the back of the Crusader's right knee joint.

Stanley's 'Mech went down, but Stanley was made of sterner stuff. He brought the Crusader up to its knees and blasted the torso of the Archer with a half-dozen rockets. The bombardment knocked the 'Mech backward and shattered most of its torso armor, leaving it practically defenseless.

As Stanley brought his Crusader to its feet to deliver the coup de grace, Chiu brought his sights to bear on one leg of Stanley's 'Mech. The Archer blasted the right hip joint of the Crusader, and as his 'Mech was crumbling from under him, Stanley loosed a barrage of missiles. The missiles crashed into the midst of Chiu's troops, killing most of them and wounding the rest. Van Diemen's Demons were no more.

Stanley himself was killed in the crash. Although Chiu's 'Mech was easily repaired and he himself was unhurt, he was left without a command, just as Srec's Wrecks were without a commander. They elected Major Egon Barkewicz, who had protested the ill-conceived foray, to be their new leader, and were soon employed by the Capellan Confederation. Chiu joined McCarron's Armored Cavalry, another mercenary unit, with a demotion to Major.

—From *Worlds Apart: Mercenary Units and the Successor Houses*, by Carroll Bodnasian, Marik Military Press, 3018

Spokesmen on both sides of the Parliament hurled bitter recriminations at each other. To take any kind of significant retaliatory action against the Lyrans, however, Stephan needed the cooperation of the dissident Houses, and the only way to obtain that cooperation was to swallow his pride and accept additional conditions on the Captain-General's power. Parliament demanded and received the right to participate in the division of spoils from captured territories (officially recorded in the Replevin Doctrine document) and a greater voice in the approval of military dispositions (Special Resolution 523).

The political battle won, the League's forces were finally restored to full strength. In 2990, the 6th Regiment of the Defenders of Andurien delivered a devastating defeat upon Liao forces stationed on the planet Teng. Less than a year later, in March of 2991, the League avenged its humiliation by the Lyrans when a Liberation Unit dropped on the Steiner world Wyatt, infiltrated the Bowie Industries plant, and stole four of the newest Chippewa fighters from their production silos. Despite these successes, however, Stephan Marik died in August 2991 a bitter, unhappy man. His death left the task of negotiating the increasingly difficult shoals of government to his two sons, Janos (who was confirmed as Captain-General after delivering a pointed eulogy on honor and duty at his father's funeral) and Anton (Commander of the 3rd Marik Militia). Their responses to the challenges of the time would reshape the face of Free Worlds politics yet again.



ASCENSION OF JANOS MARIK

The violence of this struggle between Successor lords is so great, and so all-encompassing, that the destruction and death have become no more than statistics, vidtape reports, the custom of the age dealt out in the coin of the day. It seems that it has ever been thus ... worse, it has begun to seem as if it will ever be thus. And yet matters seem to be moving toward some ineluctable conclusion, and that, for good or evil, it will come, no matter where we run or how far. This is not the work of our age: it is our inheritance, and if we survive it, it may be our patrimony as well.

—From the vidnovel *Ghost War*, by Colonel Dwight Short, Charybdis Publishing, New Olympia, 3024

Janos Ricard Thaddeus Marik, eldest son of Stephan Marik, attended Princefield Academy in Oriente, where he graduated first in his class. It had been several decades since any scion of House Marik had attended any military academy other than the two subsidized ones on New Olympia, but both the young heir to the Captain-Generalcy and his younger brother Anton broke the tradition, against Stephan Marik's wishes.

Janos was coming of age at a difficult time. The Free Worlds was rent by internal dissension, due to the long and bitter conflict between the Captain-General and the Free Worlds Parliament.

Whereas, we, the Parliament of the Free Worlds League, being the properly deputized legislature of the realm, require funding above and beyond that provided by the individual provinces we represent;

Whereas, we, the Parliament, have appropriated funds for the military of the Free Worlds League in order to provide for the common defense of our respective provinces;

Whereas, the appropriation of such funds has taken funding away from public works projects such as industrial development, agricultural support, and provisions for transportation, roads, housing, medical facilities, education for our young, and other concerns of public welfare; and

Whereas, the aforementioned military of the Free Worlds League has accomplished successful ventures into rival space, capturing profitable territories and claiming the spoils for the economy of the Free Worlds League,

Now therefore, we, the Parliament, demand restitution upon the executive branch, in the person of First Lord and Captain-General Stephan Marik, under the legal precedent and principle of Replevin, to be offered in the form of proportionate portions of the spoils of war, to be returned to our respective commonalities.

—From Special Resolution 512 (the Replevin Doctrine), Free Worlds Parliamentary Record, September 12, 2989

During the tenures of both Thaddeus and Stephan Marik, the conflict over Resolution 288 had been polarizing the provinces of the League and interfering with the war effort against the League's longtime enemies, Steiner and Liao. In the young man's view, the bitterness of the Marik's enemies in Parliament had contributed greatly to this impasse, but he had realized that the stubbornness of the Captains-General had been a major factor. From early on in his life, he seemed determined to do something about this. (Later, he would recount this to friends, referring to it as 'The foolishness of youth.')

Janos's choice of Princefield, though unusual, was taken in stride by its trustees, who accepted him immediately. Despite some initial conflicts with schoolmates, he emerged as the top cadet in his class, and thus qualified for the two-year advanced program. During his last two years there, Janos was enthralled by the tradition and ceremony of the Academy, and took it upon himself to defend the Academy's name whenever it was sullied. This attitude and his constant intervention on behalf of his younger brother Anton, who entered Princefield two years behind Anton, led to numerous extracurricular incidents and six duels of honor, conducted under the eye of the school's Provost Marshal. Outspoken and easily offended but honorable and honest to a fault, Janos Marik made many friends among his fellow cadets. He would value those friendships in the years to come.

Janos graduated in the Princefield class of 2979, three months past his 21st birthday. His return to Atreus was cause for celebration, and Captain-General Stephan Marik commissioned him as a first lieutenant and presented him with a brand-new Rifleman 'Mech. During his first years in the field, during which he served in the Free Worlds Guards, the young Marik heir had an opportunity to see firsthand the effect of the schism between Captain-General and Parliament. The Guards were assigned to the Lyran front, and shortly after joining, Janos was assigned as liaison officer to other regiments serving on the same front. He found that the shortfalls suffered by the Guards—spare parts, technical support, medical supplies, even ammunition—were insignificant compared to the status of other, less well-provisioned regiments, making their ability to fight the war dubious at best. Entries in his diary suggest that he was troubled, and at times frightened, by this condition.

Ultimately, Stephan Marik was forced to accept the Replevin Doctrine to obtain sufficient funding for continued efforts against the Lyrans and the Capellans. The weakness of the Free Worlds military had been made evident by the Lyran Deep Raid of 2987, which not only destroyed Free Worlds industries (including the 'Mech facility at Ling), but also seriously damaged confidence in the Captain-General.

In the fall of 2988, less than a year after the Deep Raid, Janos Marik was approached by a fellow Princefield graduate, a young officer in the 1st Orloff Grenadiers. Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that he was the Marik heir, the other attempted to involve him in a plot to overthrow the Parliament and install a military government to rule the united provinces. Janos denounced the officer and his co-conspirators; unfortunately, neither he nor the SAFE investigative team that probed the plot were ever able to uncover the ringleaders. This incident demonstrated, however, the significant unrest in the military. This tension was not restricted to the Regulars; the following year, the Duchess Morgaine Humphreys of Andurien was assassinated by provincial military officers in a coup attempt that nearly succeeded.

During 2989 and 2990, civilian unrest reached levels unseen since the Protectionist era more than three hundred years earlier. The conflict between Marik and Parliament was over but the Parliamentary alliance that had forced the Replevin Doctrine on Stephan Marik had shattered. Stephan had withdrawn from public life after the failure of his recent offensives against the Lyrans, and refused at times to speak to his two sons. Janos had left the Guards to take command of the 1st Atrean Hussars, and Anton had assumed command of the 3rd Marik Militia (at 29, he was the youngest regimental commander in the long history of the Militia). Both of them were ordered, with their units, to combat general strikes, terrorism, rioting, and anti-government violence during those years.



THE NEW CAPTAIN-GENERAL

In 2991, Stephan Marik died from cancer, and on September 2, Janos Marik was confirmed as Captain-General of the Free Worlds. He was 33 years old, married with seven strong children. At his side was his brother Anton, two years younger and sharing many of the same qualities as the new Marik. As a military hero, and as the son of the late Marik, Janos's face and voice were well-known to the people of the Free Worlds League. In his first official address as Captain-General, he spoke stirringly, exhorting them to unite and resolve their differences. 'We have too many enemies beyond our borders,' he said, 'to be enemies of ourselves.' Following the tradition established by Kenyon Marik, he affirmed the continuation of Resolution 288. Unlike his immediate predecessors, however, he announced a general amnesty for all political prisoners, including a large number of "suspects" and "sympathizers" SAFE had uncovered in their investigations of the 2988 military plot. This, along with legislation granting humanitarian aid for the worlds most affected by the Steiner Deep Raid, helped quell some of the civilian unrest that had grown so great in the last years of his father's tenure.

LETTER FROM THE FRONT

Janos's letter arrived during one of the Marik's periods of lethargy. It was summer in Ryal, and swelteringly hot and humid, but the Marik refused to take leave of the capital and go to the mountain estate, even when his wife entreated him to do so...

Often, when a letter would arrive from Janos, the Marik would command me to destroy it, or would take it and place it on his desk where it would remain unopened for days. He was weary this day, however, and commanded me to open the letter and read it to him.

He sat with his back to me in his great overstuffed armchair facing the holoportrait of Kenyon Marik. I read the letter aloud to him. It began with the usual greetings and polite inquiries concerning Stephan's health and included a formal report on his unit's state of readiness. The Marik remained silent throughout this, though I could see him shift uncomfortably in his chair from time to time. Later, the letter lodged, in clipped phrases, a complaint about the assignments that his unit had received, how it was being ordered to suppress rebellions and crush revolts, oppressing its fellow citizens.

Quite suddenly, the Marik rose from his chair and strode to where I sat. He took the message from my hand and thumbed through the rest of the letter, his face darkening with anger. I was quite surprised, as he had not been this animated in several weeks. After a moment, he threw the pad down. "Any other commander I would cashier for questioning my authority, Elias," he said to me. "My son is a military officer and will do as he is ordered—nothing less and nothing more."

"I am sure he understands that, Your Grace," I replied. "He feels quite strongly on this subject, however—"

"He's waiting for me to die, like all the other vultures," the Marik shot back. "He wants to be Marik so soon, not realizing what that will mean." Just as suddenly as it had come, the anger drained out of him. I reached out a hand to steady him, but he stepped back. "There is a malaise in our country, Elias. Posterity has not yet had a chance to record what is happening in the Free Worlds League, but it is clear to me that things are not even what they were when my father was alive. Vultures within our own country—within our own palace—wait for me to die, so that they can revoke Resolution 288, so that we can have a civil war. Steiner and Liao will be glad to pick over the corpse when that is done. They do not see what is happening. Even my own sons do not see. I am the last person alive with clear vision."

—From *The Distant Shore: The Life of Stephan Marik*
by Elias Chu, Globe Press, Atreus, 2994



The League that Janos had inherited was in a shambles. Recent military activity had shattered the economy and society in the border provinces, not only along the Lyran frontier, but also along the Capellan border. There, the Free Worlds forces had found that the Liao enemy was now engaging in a "scorched earth" policy, destroying anything they had to leave behind. Years of strife over budget issues had forced the Captain-General to rely on private contractors and mercenary regiments to conduct his wars; consequently, a great deal of money had been channeled into a small number of pockets.

Before undertaking any sweeping changes, Janos determined that he should survey the League himself. He decided to make a tour of the borders, to evaluate what had to be done. From December 2991 until April 2992, Janos was on the move, his itinerary a closely guarded secret (mostly to avoid raids from the League's enemies). He saw what generations of violent, destructive war had done, and, though this was not new to him after a dozen years in the military, the perspective from ground level was far different than from the cockpit of a BattleMech. By the time he returned to Atreus, he had developed an agenda for addressing the problems of the devastated provinces.

To unite the Free Worlds behind him, Janos Marik announced preparations to celebrate mankind's Fourth Millennium. Lasting over twelve months, from New Year's Eve, 2999, through New Year's Day, 3001, the festivities were to commemorate all the achievements of mankind, and especially the accomplishments of the Free Worlds League. It met with some opposition in Parliament, notably from the young Duchess of Andurien, Dame Catherine Humphreys (who balked at the expected expense), and the Blessed Leader of the Exituri of Shiloh, Enrique Kim (who proclaimed such a celebration an abomination). In general, however, the idea was welcomed across the League.

Janos Marik's attention to the civilian problems of the Free Worlds seemed to take precedence over the military matters that had concerned him for most of his life. In view of the military nature of the office, this was rather surprising. As he informed the ComStar liaison on Atreus at a state dinner in mid-2993, however, he did not feel comfortable pursuing military initiatives without the full support of the people of the Free Worlds. Though it was difficult to heal the wounds left by the conflicts of the last century, the young Captain-General had high ideals and noble objectives. In just a few short years, he had accomplished what had seemingly eluded his predecessors for decades: he had united the Free Worlds behind a Captain-General. His nation rejoiced in his peace-making gestures, and mourned with him when his wife Hilda died suddenly in March 2994. Even the contentious Duchess of Andurien, Catherine Humphreys, set aside her quarrels long enough to attend Hilda Marik's funeral, and the holo of her and Janos Marik shaking hands at the grave was famous over-night. She stood quietly by while the grieving Captain-General vowed to make the Millennium Celebration a memorial tribute to his late wife.



THE "COUNCIL OF FRIENDS"

Janos had inherited many advisors and appointees from his father, and during the first years of his tenure, he set about replacing the ones he disliked or did not trust. Chief among his own advisors was his younger brother Anton, whom he promoted to General in 2991, despite some strident resentment from older officers. In addition, a number of young military officers, members of Parliament, and provincial figures conferred and dined with the Captain-General, persons who would profoundly affect the course of the Free Worlds in the years to come. They included Saj Rahal, the commander of the 6th Marik Militia; Falstaff McHenry, a battalion commander in the Silver Hawk Irregulars; Stephanie Alvarez, MP from New Olympia; Alain Maurer, governor of Ryal province on Atreus; and Vicente Orloff, son of the Earl and a decorated officer in the Orloff Grenadiers. These, and others more transient, comprised the Council of Friends, an unofficial advisory group that Janos consulted on policy as well as private matters. While the real League Council attempted to implement the Captain-General's policy in Parliament, the Council of Friends was helping to shape the policy in the drawing-room of the Captain-General and the mountain lodge of the Marik family estate. In fact, the destruction of a secret staging area in the Capellans' Hall system was planned during a ksé'e-hunting trip in the McKenna Mountains on Atreus's north continent.

The first ten years of Janos's tenure were by far the most peaceful. The wars with the Capellans and the Lyrans went on, but there was a lull in the action as the 30th century drew toward its close. Except for the tenth and eleventh battles for Hesperus, the League armed forces had undertaken no major actions since Janos took office, and it had been a welcome opportunity to recover and regroup.

NO CHANCE

January 29, 2992

On Second Chance, the situation was even worse. We had perhaps been counting too heavily on the likelihood that Harsefeld, which lay closer to the Capellan border, would be attacked first, and so the Second Chance garrison had been almost completely neglected. The Oriente Hussars were in a state of total combat unreadiness due to a lack of spare parts, and the officers of the 3rd Ranger Division complained that they had difficulty requisitioning sufficient food for their troops. The 3rd Light Infantry hadn't been on maneuvers in three months due to a lack of motor fuel for the transport vehicles. If an attack had come first on Second Chance, the entire planet would have fallen immediately. If an attack on Harsefeld had succeeded, nothing would have stopped Second Chance from failing as well.

It seems that in the military, there is no such thing as benign neglect.

—From *The Diary of Janos Marik*, unpublished, ComStar Archives

During Thaddeus's and Stephan's tenures as Captain-General, the bureaucracy supporting the military high command had become cumbersome and impossibly corrupt. Even though the level of military action had been low for several years, overhead for support of the regular forces had increased every year of Janos's tenure. In late 2996, he issued the Accountability Edict, which required, in part, that every level of the hierarchy submit its budget and spending accounts for the past ten years. In fact, SAFE had already been investigating the military bureaucracy for nearly a year. The corruption uncovered by SAFE and Parliamentary investigations was so broad that both Marik supporters and opponents signed the Logistics Act, which demanded a thorough revamping of the military bureaucracy. Though the investigations and the Act left the benefactors of the graft and bribery—the war profiteers and the military contractors—largely untouched, Janos's image of honesty and action made him the most popular Captain-General in nearly a century, allaying much of the com-plaint about the continuance of the "crisis" that had given the Captain-General its authority to rule since 2779. The domestic unrest that prevailed before Janos's inauguration diminished steadily as the Millennium Celebration approached. When the Captain-General married Ana Stewart in 2998, the occasion was celebrated on every world in the Free Worlds League.



THE GREAT CELEBRATION

Like so many times in history, the opportunity for a celebration made even the most impoverished peoples dress up and make preparations. Museums and libraries placed their most remarkable collections on display; cities cleaned up their statues and parks; military units spruced up their uniforms and patched their equipment and flags.

Local governments proclaimed holidays for entire worlds, and the Captain-General planned to visit every world in the League during the year-long festivities.

Commencing on December 31, 2999, with a great parade in Ryal City on Atreus, the Captain-General and representatives from every military unit in the Free Worlds progressed around the League. The remarkable receptions impressed the young Captain-General very much; it was the time, he later remarked, that he felt closest to his countrymen. He spoke earnestly to huge crowds wherever he went, affirming his desire to defeat the enemies of the League and bring peace during his tenure, after which he could lay down the "awful burden" of his duties. Even in the provinces of Andurien and Regulus, where House Marik had never been especially welcome, he was well received and spoke at ease. Only on the near-barren world of Shiloh, where the Exituri held the Captain-General responsible for the destruction of humanity, did Janos Marik stand before a silent, sullen crowd, only to hear his words echo in the silence.

WEDDING PLANS

The Captain-General's first wife was a Lauber, a minor noble family from the planet Dalton. This one-planet principality never had any ambition or inclination to band with any of its neighbors. Hilda Lauber came, as it were, with no strings attached.

Ana Stewart was another story. While no one doubted the sincerity of Janos's and Ana's feelings for each other, Ana's father, Androcles Stewart, the Earl of Stewart Commonality, made himself a royal pain in the neck. He pointed out to the Marik that Regulus, Marik, and Oriente dwarfed the Stewart Commonality. He insisted, in all seriousness, that he be ceded the planets Gallatin, Bainsville, and Tania Australis so that Stewart could achieve "parity" with the three larger regions.

As both First Lord and bridegroom-to-be, Janos felt he had more important things to worry about. The representatives of the three worlds in question, however, felt differently about the matter. On the floor of the Free Worlds Parliament, the chief delegate from Tania Australis promised armed resistance to Stewart intervention. The chief delegate from Gallatin more tactfully requested of the Captain-General that there be no interference from the Free Worlds military, so that he could see if Stewart had the ability to take his planet in a fair fight. Janos quickly abandoned the Earl's position.

Androcles Stewart did not give up so easily, however. He carried his demands directly to the Parliament. During his speech, in which he presented why joining Stewart would be to the three worlds' advantage, the delegates from Bainsville, Gallatin, and Tania Australis stepped forward to stand directly in front the Earl's podium. The three leaders raised their hands to show that they had manacled themselves together, and then the two on either end took laser pistols from their vests and held them overhead in silence. Completely flustered by the demonstration, the Earl apologized and withdrew, admitting defeat.

—From *The Last Thirty Years*, by Jennifer Jane Hammoud, Atreus University Press, 3016

Only one incident marred the year of celebration. During April of 3000, a 'Mech production facility on Kalidasa was raided, and the attackers made off with a number of partially built 'Mechs. The vessels and the attacking 'Mechs had an unusual design and did not match either the units of the Capellan Confederation or the Lyran Commonwealth. After a swift mobilization, the League armed forces conducted a thorough investigation of the raid. Its conclusion was irregular, but not unsurprising—the vessels and the 'Mechs bore emblems tracing them to the Federated Suns.



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Word of this attack reached Janos Marik while he was attending a dedication ceremony at the Hall of Heroes on Orloff. Discarding his planned speech, the Captain-General vilified the government of the Federated Suns for violating more than three decades of peace between the two Successor States, and demanded reparations for the “base thievery.” A diplomatic mission was dispatched

immediately to New Avalon, but it was attacked somewhere in the Federated Suns and was never heard from again. While the more bellicose factions in Parliament howled for a campaign against House Davion, Janos Marik remained calm, realizing that the Free Worlds hardly needed a third mortal enemy. Nonetheless, Davion's attack was not readily forgotten, and the Captain-General privately instructed SAFE to prepare a covert raiding operation against key targets in the Federated Suns. Disguised with emblems captured from the Capellans, SAFE-directed forces conducted a fierce raiding campaign for more than six years before their manpower and equipment were needed else-where.

SECRET SOCIETY

The Exituri were among the first groups to leave Terra during the Exodus and the first to do so for purely ideological reasons. Shiloh was chosen to be their homeworld because, in 2138, it represented the farthest reaches of space to which the Human Sphere had ex-tended.

Shiloh was, in fact, perfect for Exituri purposes. Dry, marginally fertile, cold during the day from raging winds, hot at night from the heat stored in the rocky ground, Shiloh is a physical anomaly best suited for religious ascetics.

One of the basic tenets of the Exituri religion is taken from the Bhagavad-Gita, which says that one's faith should not be presented to foolish strangers who might make fun of it. (This is a rough paraphrase of a language centuries dead.) Consequently, the Exituri, who appear so fanatically devoted to the doctrines of their religion, would not actually tell anybody their beliefs. For one to find out enough to decide whether or not to join the order, therefore, one must have already joined.

Members pray periodically throughout the day, and face Terra as they do so, indicating Moslem influence. There appears to be a strong messianic strain in Exituri that is inconsistent with Hinduism. Various members of the tribe carry religious medallions in the forms of crucifix, Star of David, and pentagram, indicating possible Christian, Jewish, or Pagan roots. They have seasonal festivals reminiscent of paganism, and they greet friends and strangers alike with the greetings “Sholom Aleichem” or “Salaam Alaikem,” which trans-late as “Peace be with you” in Hebrew and Arabic, respectively.

The original Exituri pilgrims were quite clear about their intentions to getaway from Terra and its “corrupting influences,” so that they could raise their children in accordance with their extremely strict moral code. Generation after generation, Exituri children have re-belled against the strictness of their upbringing. Shiloh society undergoes periodic reforms, when the moral strictures are eased somewhat for a few years, followed by an inevitable, severe crackdown by the religious authorities, who insist on literal interpretations of their spiritual tenets. A larger proportion of people emigrate from Shiloh than any other world in Marik space. Even so, those who leave the Exituri faith never tell outsiders what the doctrines of the religion are.

—From *Faith in the Inner Sphere*, by Rev. Dr. Horace DuShane, Atreus University Press, 3021

SEIZING THE OFFENSIVE

Though Janos Marik had foregone extensive campaigning in the first years of his tenure, the recovery that he had engineered was a preparation for a two-pronged offensive beginning in mid-3001, aimed at extending the borders of the Free Worlds League. The main target of attack against the Lyrans was the Federation of Skye, with the ultimate target being the 'Mech production facility at Hesperus. The high command reasoned that, by seizing that world and its resources, the warmaking ability of the Lyran Commonwealth would be severely reduced, perhaps even making it vulnerable to its other age-old enemy, the Draconis Combine. In the meanwhile, the campaign against the Capellans would be aimed at the Solward end of the Confederation, seeking to carve off another chunk of Liao space, just as his father had done before him.

The war against the Lyrans, undertaken first, was fierce from the outset. The Captain-Generalcy had selected the world of Loric as the first target for attack in March of 3002, and committed two regiments of Marik Militia, along with the recently hired mercenary unit, Cady's Regiment, which had served in the Draconis Combine before running afoul of the insidious Kurita secret police, the ISF. Cady's was chosen specifically for its experience facing Steiner 'Mechs, and defense intelligence paid a substantial bonus to the unit to provide additional advance information. However, word of the attack had somehow reached the Lyran high command. By the time the DropShips fought their way past the static defenses in the system and made planetfall, they found the industrial targets reinforced. This was especially true near the coastal cities of Garth and Tromoth, where the Steiner defenders had improved the cities' artillery defenses, making the landward approaches a fiery nightmare.

While the attack on Loric bogged down, an attack just over six months later on the world of Solaris turned out to be a logistical nightmare. The plan had originally been simple: an advance force with a substantial contingent of AeroSpace Fighters (mostly captured Lucifers) would conduct a hit-and-run raid against the world, and before the defenses recovered, a slower but more powerful force would seize the world, preparing the way for a general invasion of Lyran space. Like most simple plans placed in the hands of an anxious military, it was immediately made more complicated. The DropShips carrying the fighters were disguised as bulky trading vessels.. To thwart spies from the Lyran Commonwealth, the follow-up force was divided into three parts, which would converge on Solaris from separate directions. An agent provocateur was planted on Bella I to spread disinformation.



CAPTAIN-GENERAL'S PROMISE

For too many years, we have done little but react to the actions and the campaigns of our enemies. When they seize the offensive, we have reeled backward, our general staff hoping to find a pattern in the attacks, scarcely daring to set aside resources for attacks of our own. We welcome a respite, but we merely lick our wounds and wait for the enemy to choose the moment once again.

The Free Worlds League has a long and noble martial tradition. We have skillful officers and brave soldiers. Our economy is strong, our people are proud. They have waited too long for this terrible war to end. They have suffered while tyrants defy the cause of freedom scarcely a jump away from their homes. They have watched while barbarians destroy humanity.

They will watch no longer.

They will suffer no longer.

They will wait no longer. We will be victorious, I promise you that, upon my word and upon my name.

—Janos Marik, addressing the Free Worlds Parliament, February 3004

The Captain-General's rage at the incompetence and insubordination of his field commander seemed unbounded. In a closed staff meeting on April 16, 3003, 13 months after the beginning of the Loric campaign, Janos Marik berated the members of his high command and the general officers in command of the Lyran operation. A SAFE informant in the Free Worlds Guard had provided

him with a thorough accounting of General Crawford's conduct, and Janos had the General immediately arrested and detained in the Atreus military prison on Caulfield Island.

Angry beyond all measure, Janos came close to arresting every military leader on the Lyran front. Anton Marik entered into a fierce shouting match with his brother over the actions of General Crawford, and stalked out of the office without being dismissed. Ultimately, the Captain-General focused his resentment on Crawford only, and, over the objections of his brother, ordered a summary court-martial for the General. On June 23, 3003, the Judge Advocate-General asked for a sentence of death for Crawford's part in the death of Free Worlds officers and men. Two days later, Janos granted the request, and at dawn on July 1, the sentence was carried out—the first military execution in the Free Worlds League in more than a hundred years. The ominous after-effects of this act would come back to haunt the vengeful Captain-General in the years to come.

In the long centuries of conflict between the Free Worlds and the Capellan Commonwealth, the minions of House Liao had shown themselves to be extremely tenacious fighters, with a strong martial ethic. Only because of these attributes could they withstand the predations of two such powerful enemies on its borders. The battle plan that Janos Marik had sketched with such optimism in early 3001, cutting off a portion of Liao territory from the edge of Zion Province to the Federated Suns border near Fletcher, had been optimistic. Even with several years of experience, he underestimated the stubbornness of his Capellan opponent. He had ridden the wave of emotion brought about by the Millennium Celebration, and had sought to do in a few years what his predecessors had not been able to accomplish in several centuries.

In January 3002, Janos Marik elevated his brother Anton to command of the entire Capellan front, granting him (with permission of Parliament) the title "Duke of Procyon." The lull of the previous decade dissolved into a series of short, nasty campaigns between forces of the Free Worlds and the Capellan Commonwealth. Although Anton did his best to carry out the mandate given him by his brother, his initial assault into Capellan territory ground to an immediate halt in pitched battles over the worlds of Menkalinan and New Canton.

Marik forces fared better on the Lyran front, however. In 3006, taking advantage of Alessandro Steiner's Concentrated Weakness strategy, the Marik's JumpShips delivered troops deep into Steiner space, invading the important manufacturing worlds of Coventry and Pollux, among other worlds. This had an unexpected and counterproductive effect. The ease with which the Marik's troops took these worlds inspired Katrina Steiner to engineer a coup in Tharkad, replacing her incompetent uncle and providing the Commonwealth with its most effective leadership since the days of Archon Elizabeth over a century before.

By the time of the attack, the Lyrans were well-informed of the battle plans. Two of the three follow-up contingents had been delayed by conflicting orders, while the third had been attacked at its staging area. Unwilling to inform the Captain-General of the disaster, the commander of the operation, General Willis Crawford (a Princefield classmate and close friend of Anton Marik) ordered the attack to proceed. In addition to inflicting heavy losses to 'Mechs and fighters, Lyran special forces were able to get aboard one of the attacking DropShips and sabotage its power plant. On takeoff, the ship exploded, killing a number of personnel and nearly stranding a full battalion of 'Mechs.



BUDDIES

I lost an arm off my 'Mech in that battle, rescuing a man I despised.

Major Nguyen had just hired this new guy, whom I'll call Smith. He was a rangy, wiry guy, and not bad looking, but he smelled bad—his philosophy was that Warriors have to go in the field without bathing, and so he didn't want to get used to the luxury of bathing. You can imagine how the rest of us felt about that. A Warrior who doesn't bathe, even on R&R, has to be crazy, and there was no shortage of us to tell him so. So maybe we got off on the wrong foot, but I'll tell you anyway he was a wrong guy.

When we finished preliminary maneuvers and jumped to Menkalinan, Major Nguyen gave me the word that Smith was going to be my partner—Nguyen liked using what he called a "buddy" system with his 'Mechs—and so we would be responsible for covering one another in the fight. That was okay with me. Smith had come highly recommended from his previous unit, and he had functioned well during maneuvers. I was even looking forward to the battle. I've learned to be superstitious about that since then; looking forward to a battle brings the worst luck you're ever going to get.

We took the Liao garrison by surprise, but it didn't take them long to counterattack. Damn, they're good fighters. They loaded a lance of 'Mechs into a DropShip, lifted off, and landed a mile or so behind us. Before we knew it, they had us in a crossfire, and as they spread out, it looked like they were going to surround us.

It was only Major Nguyen's quick thinking that saved us. We spread out, two by two, in a star pattern that allowed us to engage the enemy individually. That way, we could gain ground in all directions in order to break through wherever possible. As a contingency plan, it was a pretty good one, and I remember thinking that I was glad Nguyen was on our side.

Smith was something else again. The guy who had been so disciplined in maneuvers was suddenly like a wild man. Of course, the fiercer you fight the likelier you are to win—I'd be the last one to argue against that—but Smith just had no judgment. He waded into three enemy 'Mechs: a Panther, an Archer, and even a malfing Warhammer, screaming at me to keep up. I tried fighting off the

'Mechs that had surrounded Smith, but only a lucky shot that took out the Warhammer's cockpit kept us both from being shredded.

By this time, some of the other Liao 'Mechs smelled blood. There were three more of them coming toward us, and I could see a Locust coming up for a sneak attack just slightly to my right side. Smith was getting abusive on the intercom; it seemed the scrape we were in was all my fault for not fighting harder.

It wasn't until then we finally got some aerial support. God bless the Flying Furies! Awing of the Furies laid down enough cover fire to keep the Liao 'Mechs busy while Smith and I got out of there.

Immediately afterward, as we went to help out Lauren Sharpe and Bill Yee in their Shadow Hawks, he did the same damn thing.. He waded into the enemy like there were a

resort lake on Regulus. This time, he marched right into Bill's and Lauren's line of fire, keeping them from knocking out an Atlas that they had had their sights on.

Within seconds, his fat was in the fire again, and he was screaming abuse at Bill, Lauren, and me for not being as suicidal as he was.

To get him out of there, I had to do just what he did, running right into the fray. Just as I knocked out a Locust, the Atlas caught me at the joint of my 'Mech's left arm and blasted it right off.

When the battle was over, Smith insulted me for my performance in the battle, and I requested that Major Nguyen never make him my "buddy" again. Later, I found out that Bill and Lauren had made similar comments about his rashness, and that Nguyen was seriously considering having him cashiered. It turned out not to be necessary; Smith himself re-requested, and was granted, permanent leave.

I also found out that the person who had recommended Smith so highly was an uncle or cousin or something in the Oriente bureaucracy. I only regret that there were no replacement parts to repair my 'Mech. I continued working with the regiment as a Tech until the repairs could be made, but by then, I'd been out of combat for months.

—From *Griffin in Hell*, by Sharon Ciardi, Karamou Publishing, 3013

BROTHER AGAINST BROTHER

While his military forces struggled against their age-old opponents, Janos Marik became increasingly more isolated in his granite capital. In 3006, his seventh child, Thomas, entered the service of ComStar with his father's blessing. He left behind a bitter father, who had become disheartened over the failures of his bold strokes, and a step-mother, who had become an invalid, suffering from a rare form of degenerative bone disease. Within two years, Janos—now approaching 50 years of age—would lose another child. His eldest daughter Therese eloped with the young Marik Militia captain Jeremy Brett, and was subsequently disowned. Shortly thereafter, Janos's tenth and youngest child—his namesake and the last child Ana bore him—would die of a seizure.



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BETRAYAL

If any event could evoke sympathy for the Captain-General, it would be that day when Janos Marik confronted the truth that his own brother had made common cause with the Liao enemy. After a decade of disappointments, it was the ultimate disillusionment.

—From *Crossed Swords*, by Erna Kochkhov, Rahne Publishing, 3021

Historians have frequently speculated about the reasons for Anton's betrayal of Janos Marik. The events that might have led to Anton's revolt range from long-term (his resentment of Janos's primacy as Captain-General) to more proximate causes (the execution of General Crawford, the movement of Capellan front troops to the Lyran front without his being informed).

DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

Maximilian Liao, in the guise of a free trader, arrived at Kashmir Arcology on Terra on a September day filled with monsoon rains so fierce that they nearly precluded the shuttle landing. It was not the Chancellor's first visit to the world, or the mountain city-complex, but it would doubtless be his most memorable one.

He came in the company of Jaime Wolf, the commander of the justifiably famous mercenary unit, Wolf's Dragoons. In the past few years, the Dragoons had become the scourge of the Capellan front, to the point that the Captain-General of the Free Worlds was hard pressed to coerce his battle-weary troops to enter into combat with them. Wolf was an imposing, almost frightening figure, and it would have been easy for anyone to notice that he was no trader. Still, the Maskirovka, the highly efficient intelligence service of the Capellan Con-federation, had been most thorough in distracting the over-worked and underpaid minions of SAFE from the events about to take place in the Himalayas.

Shortly after the Chancellor had settled himself in the penthouse suite of the Arcology, he made a vid-phone call to the offices of an import-export house in the shadow of Buenos Aires Starport. It consisted of a few innocuous words: "I have come to the bank of the Rubicon." He who received the message arrived less than six hours later on a private passenger liner. He boarded a stratospheric commuter jet within an hour of making planetfall, and shortly arrived at the Liao penthouse.

The interview was short and to the point. Troop dispositions and bribing local governments were discussed. Nothing was signed, or committed to tape; nothing of this sort ever is. Just as he had arrived first, Maximilian Liao departed first, bound for his own capital of Sian, to make the appropriate arrangements.

Jaime Wolf, however, departed with his new employer, carrying a signed mercenary contract in his vest-pocket. After three years of near-inactivity, he would finally be able to put his troops in the field, with all of the Free Worlds as possible booty. Before his contract expired, he would prove to be Anton Marik's trump card in the conquest of the Free Worlds League.

—From *Crossed Swords*, by Erna Kochkhov, Rahne Publishing, 3021

It is clear that Anton Marik sought to become Captain-General himself. He did not rise in rebellion to liberate the Free Worlds League from the tyranny of Resolution 288; he intended to control nothing short of the entire League. Even the alliance with Maximilian Liao was a necessity to permit him to gain the services of Wolf's Dragoons and to secure his flank once he took the field against his brother. From the tone and phrasing of his Proclamation, issued through ComStar on May 22, 3014, it is apparent that he believed that all the provinces of the Free Worlds would join his cause against the "mad tyrant." He identified himself with the august spirit of Oliver Marik, the jacobite usurper of three centuries before (and, by extension, drawing a parallel between his older brother and the tyrannical Elise). A quarter of the Free Worlds' provinces joined the rebellion at once, some in sympathy with the cause, some out of spite for the Captain-General, and some simply because their leaders had received a goodly sum of M-Bills to do so. As commander of the Capellan front, Anton was also able to bring a portion of the Marik Militia and even the Regular Hussars under his banner. With Wolf's Dragoons in the lead, his troops began a campaign of sanguine conquest, seizing Nova Roma, Emris IV, and Sophie's World almost before loyalist troops could be summoned to oppose them.

The past few years had aged Janos considerably. His wife Ana had died in 3011, and with her had gone much of his *joie de vivre*. Visitors received into his presence during the years after her death had been ushered into a dimly lit drawing room, filled with memorabilia of earlier times and cluttered by the day-to-day accumulations of a man with a restless intelligence and a curtailed attention span. While the visitor waited uneasily, Janos would appear from some gloomy corner of the room, startling or frightening the visitor. Even his correspondence was clipped and uniformly dour, though dozens of messages were issued daily.



Anton's proclamation reached him within two days of its issue. Eyewitnesses recall that Janos showed little emotion when he heard about his brother's treason. Stonily, he issued the necessary orders to mobilize loyal forces and sent a message to Parliament, informing the body that, by their leave, he would speak to them the following day. Then, accompanied only by his ubiquitous guards, he left Ryal for the Marik mountain estate, where he remained incommunicado for 23 hours, a full Atreus day.

Janos Marik's address to Parliament was brief and emotionless. With frightening calm, he accepted responsibility for ruling unjustly and for making recourse to the "exigencies of the moment." He apologized for not having succeeded in the initiatives he had undertaken as the Captain-General. Regardless of his weaknesses or failings, however, he had neither sympathy nor tolerance for treason. He loved his brother, he told Members of Parliament (though some were conspicuously absent), but from that day forward, his brother was dead.

In early June, Anton's hope for a general rebellion quickly faded, following a proclamation by the Captain-General declaring him outlaw and threatening the death-penalty for any who "consorted with or harbored" him or his allies. The provinces of Sirius, Andurien, and Regulus, as well as more than two dozen smaller ones, declared their neutrality toward the emerging conflict and invoked the Home Defense Act. The Duchess of Andurien refused to send any troops at all, including her vaunted Defenders, to the aid of the Captain-General. Neither would she send aid to Anton Marik, ignoring his entreaties and returning his bribes untouched. "Andurien will accept no money tainted with the stink of Liao," she announced in Parliament in August, refusing more than a million M-Bills sent by Anton to obtain her alliance. The governments of Regulus and Sirius were placed in extremely uncomfortable positions when some of their unit commanders pledged allegiance to one or the other side. In late 3014, both provinces promised their loyalty to the Captain-General and were rewarded with bonus payments from the Marik treasury, which remained under Janos's control. In exchange, however, they (and other pro-Loyalist governments) were required to endorse Order 1136, making those provincial units that had joined Anton's rebellion subject to the Replevin Doctrine. Janos was careful and diplomatic in the early stages of the Civil War, but he required that provincial governments choose sides and remain with them.

THE LOYALISTS STRIKE BACK

Early successes, especially by the Dragoons, had buoyed the rebellion. The concerted might of the Free Worlds League, however, began to make its presence felt as the year went on. The rage that loyal MechWarriors felt against the traitors countered their fear of the legendary Dragoons. Anton had preyed upon the frustrations and pent-up emotions of the vocal minority in the League, which opposed the continued rule of his aging brother. Janos, however, could draw on a much more powerful resource—patriotism.

The Captain-General threw off the ennui and gloom of the past few years, as he set his mind to the task of defeating the rebellion. He had separated the conflict from family considerations, seemingly through sheer force of will. Ultimately, the needs of his office had taken precedence over any sentimentality, though he did relent in his demand for the death penalty for any military force that surrendered to his forces. Some of his commanders were, however, far less forgiving.

The Lyran Commonwealth had stepped up activity against the Free Worlds during the Civil War, and the Captain-General had been forced to withdraw troops to defend against deep raids by Steiner forces. Withdrawn from the rebel front between late November and early January, the Orloff Grenadiers were thrown onto the border world Nestor, where they held the crucial industrial complex of

Selathon against elements of the Donegal Guards. They returned, bruised but largely intact, to participate in the successful invasion of the heavily defended rebel world of Tiber.

By February of 3015, nine months into the conflict, the rebel forces had been pushed back to a small number of star systems centered on Ling. Fighting had become more desperate as the months dragged on. With enemies closing in from every direction, Duke Anton summoned Jaime Wolf to his field headquarters on New Delos. In a closed-door meeting that quickly devolved into a shouting match, the Duke ordered Wolf to break up his Dragoons into smaller task forces, that could be inserted to stiffen the resistance of his regular units. Unsurprisingly, Wolf refused to do so, and both sides claimed that the other had violated the mercenary contract. Wolf stalked from the meeting, little to know that he would never see Anton Marik alive again.

Angry HPG exchanges ensued. Anton warned Jaime Wolf of dire consequences if he continued to refuse direct orders, but Wolf knew well that he had the upper hand. Without his forces, the rebellion would collapse, and so he ignored the threats and warnings. The younger Marik then made a mistake that would cost him his life. He arrested Joshua Wolf (Jaime's brother), tried him for treason, and, ignoring all the conventions that had existed between governments and mercenary units, had him shot.

When word reached the commander of Wolf's Dragoons, the mercenaries descended on New Delos en masse. Anton's troops held the Dragoons off for three days and three nights, but a company led by the feared Black Widow, Natasha Kerensky, punched through the rebels' lines and broke into their command center. Kerensky and her troops gave no quarter, slaying Anton Marik and his retainers.

The sudden turn of events left the rebels shocked and disordered. Loyal forces moved into the vacated positions all along the front, and within six weeks, the rebellion was over. The loyal troops, hungry to gather spoils from Wolf's Dragoons, were disappointed when the Marik offered Jaime a contract to serve the Free Worlds League.

On April 12, 3015, Janos Marik entered Cienfuegos, the capital city of New Delos. He dispassionately inspected the former headquarters of his late brother, and paid a visit to the graves of the rebels that had been killed in Kerensky's raid. He lingered only a moment before Anton's final resting place, lost in thought, then walked back to his skimmer and drove to the treason trials that began that day.

For six months, the treason trials continued, with the Marik in attendance. The rebellion had struck deeply into the heart and soul of the Free Worlds, and had profoundly changed Janos Marik; he now bore none of the exuberance or optimism that he had possessed when he entered office a quarter-century before. In their place were deep unhappiness and profound suspicion. He showed no mercy to the leaders of the rebellion; a large number were sentenced to lifetime terms on prison planets or in mines or factories, while others—including his own son Gerald—were executed.

CURRENT EVENTS

During the four years following the Civil War, the Marik employed Wolf's Dragoons in a series of skirmishes against the Lyrans, and rotated units through the Capellan front to conduct hit-and-run attacks against House Liao. The Capellans proved as determined as ever, and, although the Lyrans had their best forces deployed on the far frontier against House Kurita, the Free Worlds forces, including the Dragoons, were too exhausted to gain much ground. Little movement occurred on either side; the Lyran's seizure of Ford balanced a full-scale League invasion of Megrez, and the seizure of the Liao industrial world Jasmine followed a devastating Capellan raid against Hassad.

In early 3019, the Marik's old comrade, Annabel Danton, Marshal of Dieudonne, presented him with a bold plan. Wolf's Dragoons would undertake a long-range strike against the Steiner world Hesperus II, which contained the greatest remaining 'Mech factories in the Inner Sphere. The mission, at the outset, seemed impossible; the unit was intended to fight its way single-handed from world to world, and hold off the Steiner forces as it moved toward Hesperus. Privately, some muttered that the Hesperus raid would be an efficient way to avoid paying Wolf for another year. Nevertheless, Jaime Wolf accepted the undertaking.

While the Free Worlds regular forces continued to pick at the Steiner defenses, the Dragoons slipped across the border into the Commonwealth interior. They moved quickly from system to system, attacking only isolated outposts and only when they needed to replenish their food and water supplies. When they finally reached Hesperus, however, they found the world strongly defended, due to a leak from the court at Atreus. With little recourse, the Dragoons attacked, though they were outnumbered two to one. Despite the odds, the mercenaries hammered their way toward their objective, the old League factories hidden in the transcontinental mountain range. At last, with much of his force damaged, Wolf was forced to break off the attack and retreat to his Free Worlds base. Within six months, the Dragoons had departed the Free Worlds to join Katrina Steiner in her ongoing war against the Draconis Combine.



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TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

The Inner Sphere had been locked in a deadly embrace for more than two centuries, but the treaty between Houses Steiner and Davion threatens to alter that configuration. It might have been otherwise, but while the other states continued to fight their ceaseless wars, Katrina Steiner and Hanse Davion took the initiative and altered their course, and it was solemnized by ComStar.

—From *The Course of Our Times*, by Precentor David Polonia, ComStar Press, 3024

Indrahar speaks eight languages fluently. Amazing to think that he learned six of them just so he could interrogate suspects directly.

—Janos Marik

The alliance between Houses Steiner and Davion, concluded with the blessing of ComStar in May 3022, gave sudden impetus to the other three states of the Inner Sphere. The alteration of traditional balances threatened each of the federations, but it menaced the Capellan Confederation most of all. Thus, it was not surprising when, later in the same year, Chancellor Maximilian Liao sent an embassy to the Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, Takashi Kurita, offering a possible alliance against their common enemy, the Federated Suns. This offer was greeted at first with amusement, and then later with consternation, by the always-suspicious Kurita. After mulling over the prospect for a time, however, the Coordinator developed an alternative. He sent a courteous reply to Chancellor Liao, and in the meanwhile, dispatched his close advisor Subhash Indrahar to the Court of Atreus to seek an "understanding."

In the past few years, Janos Marik had become extremely paranoid, especially about possible threats to his life and to the Captain-Generalcy. A high-priority message from SAFE Director Jaime Cornejo alerted him to the appearance of the Kurita intelligence director in Free Worlds space. Before Janos decided upon a course of action, however, Indrahar sent a message directly to Atreus, bearing the official seal of House Kurita, and indicating, in general and diplomatic terms, the reason for his mission. Because that act elevated Indrahar to the level of state visitor, the Marik had no recourse but to welcome him.



Over the course of many years in the Byzantine court of Luthien, Subhash Indrahara had acquired the nickname "The Smiling One." A broad-shouldered, vaguely rotund individual of middle age, he had clawed his way up to the Directorship of the Draconis secret police, the feared ISF. Nonetheless, his admiration of the fine arts, especially literature and dance, had given him a most disarming personality that belied the ruthlessness of his day-to-day profession. When the two men first met on a snowy day in early September, 3022, they immediately liked each other. Within a few days of Indrahara's arrival, the Marik showed him all the major libraries and museums, and the two men had discussed subjects of all kinds. Both held their suspicions about the other, but the initial meeting had brought a profound understanding, of the sort that Janos had not felt in years.

Eventually, Indrahara, as representative of House Kurita, brought forward the notion of an alliance between the two states. Certainly, commonality of interest between Marik and Kurita was not a new thing; Kenyon Marik had been close to Coordinator Minoru Kurita at the time of the Succession Crisis; Albert Marik before him had exercised his diplomatic skills on a Kurita at the time of the founding of the Star League more than four centuries ago.

The terms of the alliance were simple and straightforward. It entailed merely a cessation of hostilities between the powers and a liberalization of trade, allowing each to export trade goods and import much-needed items (the Free Worlds, for instance, was critically short of PPCs). Indrahara completely avoided discussing the involvement of House Liao in the negotiations. Because of the peace movement in Parliament and the alliance between the Lyrans and the Federated Suns, the Marik was beginning to feel both his own and his nation's impending mortality. Consequently, he was receptive to the alliance and agreed to meet Takashi Kurita himself on neutral ground (Terra) later in the year.

Captain-General Janos Marik visited Terra for the first time since his youth in September, 3022. The meeting, arranged by Indrahara, took place at the restored 20th-century mountain retreat of Elmau in the Bavarian Alps.

Hard-pressed by the now-allied Lyrans and Federated Suns, Kurita needed reliable allies to draw off the heat. It is not clear why the Coordinator made the inclusion of House Liao such a necessary condition of the negotiations; perhaps, as the Marik speculated later, Kurita was preparing the Capellans for a surprise attack on the Free Worlds when he no longer needed the Marik as an ally. It was, in any case, a stormy negotiating session, which lasted nearly a week. Though typically diplomatic, Maximilian Liao nearly tore the session asunder with the revelation that eight years earlier, the Marik's brother had "sold his soul" in the penthouse atop the Kashmir Arcology. It took the consummate skill of Subhash Indrahara to keep the two leaders from drawing swords on each other over the conference table.

Finally, after considerable struggle and give-and-take, the three leaders came to an agreement, which was signed at Kapteyn on October 13, 3022. The Concord, as it came to be known, ended the longest contention in the history of the Inner Sphere, between the Free Worlds and the Capellan Confederation. Regardless of the ardent protests of some elements of the Parliament and despite a number of minor border skirmishes and other "incidents" over the next several years, the Concord has remained in force. For the first time in the long history of the Succession Wars, the Inner Sphere was divided into two camps.

MEETING OF MINDS

It was a memorable occasion when the two great leaders met. Janos Marik, the oldest Successor Lord in the Inner Sphere, seemed bowed over by the weight of his bitter experience, while Takashi Kurita, 55, stood ramrod-straight and extended his hand to grasp that of the other. For the first several minutes, Marik and Kurita exchanged small talk. Abruptly, Kurita stood, and, fixing the Marik with an expression that was half wry humor and half sadistic amusement, said, "It is probably time that we welcomed our third partner." Before Janos Marik could reply, the pair of oak doors swung wide, and Maximilian Liao walked into the room, his perfectly tailored uniform ablaze with military ribbons and decorations, some of them clearly from the long war between the Capellans and the Free Worlds.

Marik glared at Kurita, then at Liao, then back at Kurita. "What is he doing here?" he finally asked.

"He is here to negotiate peace, of course," Kurita replied, extending a hand to the small Capellan. "He is here because he is an enemy of our enemy, Hanse Davion." He dropped Liao's hand and turned to face Marik once more. "He is also a loaded gun, friend Janos. It is better to take such weapons in hand and point them away from one, then to leave them for an enemy to pick up. I'm sure you agree."

Liao flinched at the metaphor, but smiled, showing a row of perfect teeth.

"You would make this a necessary condition of our own alliance?" Marik asked.

"I would."

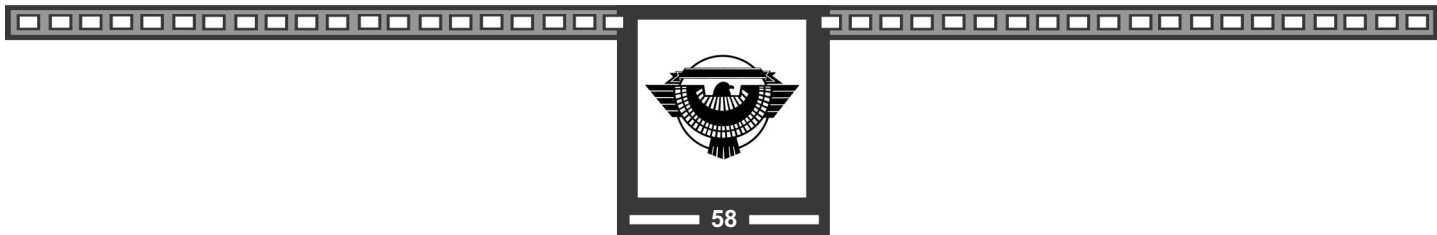
"And if I do not choose to negotiate with such as him?"

"Then, friend Janos," Kurita replied softly, "you may do what you like and be damned. Steiner and Davion will swallow you up, preying upon the deep rifts in your society and in your foolish Parliament, which you should have done away with centuries ago. You need Draconis, Captain-General. Draconis does not need you."

—From *The Course of Our Times*, by Precentor David Polonia, ComStar Press, 3024

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

Though the Concord of Kapteyn has reduced the number of active enemies of the Free Worlds to one, the Free Worlds faces a difficult road. The successor to Janos Marik, as yet not established, plays a major role in the direction that the Free Worlds will take in future years. Janos Marik, who in his youth had such high aspirations, is verging on his 70th year, and trusts almost no one. Some of his enemies accuse him of not being forceful enough in his prosecution of the war against the Lyrans, while other enemies believe that his bellicosity only prolongs the war. Other enemies dismiss the aged Marik as being in his dotage, and call for him to step down. Despite these forces, he is still the Captain-General of the Free Worlds. While he struggles with Parliament and develops new plans to fight Steiner and awaits betrayal by the Capellan Confederation, he continues to carry on the tradition that seven hundred and fifty years of history have thrust upon his shoulders.



SOCIOPOLITICAL STRUCTURE



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The government of the Free Worlds League is a predictable offspring of the non-homogeneity of the League's culture. The executive (who is, for all intents and purposes, a military dictator) rules a federation ostensibly ruled by a Parliament. This arrangement is a direct consequence of the Succession Wars and the emergencies that have arisen from it. Thus, when discussing the Free Worlds' form of government, a distinction between theory and practice must be made, as the government described by the Document of Incorporation is considerably different from that which rules the Free Worlds League today.

GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

Unlike most other Successor States, the Free Worlds League has a strong representative tradition, which dates back to the Treaty of Marik. The Document of Incorporation, signed with the Treaty of Marik in 2271, established a Parliament as the Free Worlds League's chief ruling body, and granted temporary authority to a "Captain-General" in times of crisis. This kind of government was by no means revolutionary; by the late 23rd century, there were numerous examples of this sort of government, including the Senate and General Secretariat of the Terran Alliance. Of course, the founders of the League believed that they had learned from the failings of the Alliance and other such governments. Limitations placed both on Parliament and on local governments within the League would allow the maximum amount of individual and provincial freedom while avoiding the scourge of despotism, without compromising the profit-oriented ideals upon which the Free Worlds League was established.

PARLIAMENTARY MEMBERSHIP

By the terms of the Document of Incorporation, representation in the Parliament is determined on the amount of tax contributions to the League treasury. As such, the three original signees were allocated proportionate number of seats. In the original sitting in 2272, which numbered 80 delegates, the Marik Commonwealth seated 26, the Principality of Regulus 29, and the Federation of Oriente 25. The Stewart Commonality, annexed by Act of Parliament in 2295, was granted nine seats on the basis of its tax contribution. Regardless of economic strength, however, each state in the League is granted at least one seat in the Parliament. Even the tiniest province in the League—the Grand Duchy of New Assam—always has one representative. In 2368, Parliament limited the total number of seats in Parliament to 200. In 2472, this number was revised to 350, and the civil war in the mid-2700s increased this number to 500.

Members of Parliament serve two-year terms. Since 2290, electoral districts are redrawn every decade on a province-by-province basis, according to the economic strength of each state. Conducted by the Free Worlds Supreme Judicial Court to avoid gerrymandering, this redistricting reflects shifts in wealth and population. The actual mode of election is by runoff, with each voter choosing an entire slate of candidates.

Parliament convenes on the first Monday in January. The first session of Parliament, in 2272, met on Regulus. Following the completion of the Parliament House in the summer of 2275, sessions were held on Atreus, their home ever since. The first act of a new Parliament is to meet as a Committee of the Whole and elect a representative as Speaker, who in turn, creates the League Council. If a Council from the preceding session is strongly supported in the new assembly, this vote is virtually a rubber stamp. Tomas Allison, President of Oriente, held the speakership from the founding of the League until his resignation in 2290—nine two-session Parliaments in all. Many of the most famous Parliamentary floor fights in Free Worlds history have occurred over the session-starting election of a Speaker.

By law, Parliament is accorded all of the responsibilities associated with government. It may lay and collect taxes and duties to support the civil service and the common defense, it may borrow money against the credit of the Free Worlds, and it may establish laws regulating commerce, industry, naturalization of aliens, and punishment of felony against the Free Worlds. The Parliament may establish or alter the League's system of weights and measures, promote science and the arts by granting patents and copyrights, exercise authority over territory acquired by the League, and originate budgets and appropriate funds. In fact, it may draft any statutes that do not conflict with the Document of Incorporation, as interpreted by the League's Supreme Judicial Court.

LEAGUE COUNCIL

An elected Speaker forms the League Council, appointing nine ministers to head the various governmental departments: Defense, Foreign Affairs, Taxation, Trade, Intelligence, Energy, Communications, Human Services, and Justice. The League Council must contain at least one member from each of the three original Free Worlds states: Oriente, Regulus, and Marik. (Though this provision of the Document has been hotly debated over the centuries, it has never been eradicated, much to the consternation of the smaller states of the Free Worlds League.) Each appointment requires the support of the majority of the Parliament. The Council conducts the affairs of the League by presenting bills in Parliament. By custom, the Council offers bills such as treaties, budget proposals, and tariff and duty bills exclusively, but parliamentary procedure allows any member to propose a bill.

A three-fifths vote from the Parliament can recall a Speaker and his Council at any time during a session. More often, however, members of a Council without the support of Parliament will submit their resignations over this "vote of no confidence". A Speaker is not obliged to resign, but may attempt to form a new Council (if he has the votes).



THE DOCUMENT OF INCORPORATION

In addition to establishing a unified government, the Document of Incorporation codified a number of other constitutional issues for the new state. Negotiations for the Document were extensive, entailing more than three years by the Tripartite Commission between mid-2268 and the fall of 2271. In many respects, it is a direct descendant of such landmark documents as the United States Constitution, the Alliance Concordat, and the Articles of Federation of the European Commonality. Long and complex, it addressed many of the issues and concerns of the League's founding fathers and protected the rights of individual states while providing a framework for future modification and extension. It accurately demonstrates the foresight of the League's original architects, while also pointing up the compromises they had to undertake in order to achieve unity. Several key provisions of the Document are summarized below.

Tariffs

One of the earliest negotiated points in the Document was the removal of tariffs and duties between the three signatories. An earlier treaty, the Customs Union Accord of 2263, provided the basis for economic cooperation between the Federation of Oriente and the Marik Commonwealth; the Principality of Regulus endorsed the Accord a year later. The Customs Union encouraged the three provinces to trade with each other and imposed duties on trade with smaller states outside it. The total elimination of all interstellar tariffs was incorporated directly into the Document.

Troops

The sudden withdrawal of Terran involvement left the outer states scrambling for protection against pirates and each other. As a result, substantial amounts of revenue had been poured into military forces, increasing interstellar tension. In all three of the signing states, but especially in the Marik Commonwealth, troops were personally loyal to the ruling family, and these household troops presented a real threat to political union. After extensive negotiation, the three parties agreed to limit their household troops to a fixed number of men and ships during peacetime.

Honors

During the era of the Terran Alliance, honors of nobility became common in the colony worlds, though the method of appellation varied considerably. Generally, holders of land grants would receive the title of Baron; the dignity of Earl,

Count, or Viscount would be reserved for the ruler of a world. After the withdrawal of the Alliance, rulers of federates took up the honors of Duke or Prince; in some cases, they were even bold enough to call themselves King. As a special provision of the Document, the Free Worlds League established

a College of Arms to standardize titles and to register the pedigrees of the great families of the realm. Furthermore, the ruling families would be accorded uniform titles, either Prince (adopted by House Selaj of Regulus) or Duke (adopted by House Marik, and later also by House Allison of Oriente). The honors provision of the Document further specified the way in which honors would be granted and registered in the future.

Private Treaties

The negotiators of the Treaty of Marik scrupulously protected the rights of individual states, yet the establishment of the Free Worlds League took from them one of the greatest powers of an independent state—the right to conduct foreign policy. By explicit declaration, the Document gave the Free Worlds Parliament the exclusive right to forge and negotiate treaties.

Codification

When the Treaty of Marik was signed, each state had already evolved a code of laws to govern themselves. Though they had a common origin, these codes diverged greatly, emphasizing points of law unequally. Two of the chief responsibilities of the Tripartite Commission was to reconcile those codes, and to establish a judicial review process to handle conflicts following unification. In addition, the Document explicitly stated that laws enacted by the League governing body—the Free Worlds Parliament—would be in force throughout the League, and could not be contravened or nullified by individual worlds or states.

Expansion

The architects of the League expected that there would be further expansion in the future. Consequently, the Document contained a proviso allowing for the inclusion of new states. The terms of Section IX established a new world's minimum tax contributions, assigned noble titles, promulgated the League's code of laws, and established the new state's representation in Parliament. (For centuries after the Treaty of Marik, conquered worlds were required to endorse Section IX as a part of the peace.)

THE CAPTAIN GENERAL

One of the key sections of the Document is the provision for the appointment of a Captain-General to act as overall military commander in time of national crisis. Although this Parliament-appointed person is not subject to recall, he requires the consent of Parliament to provide financial support for extended campaigns. The original signees thought that this provision was sufficient to prevent the establishment of a dictatorship while assuring the cohesion of the League's diverse states in a national emergency. The office of Captain-General came to be a traditional sinecure of House Marik, at first due to the exceptional military capability of Marik scions and later as an Act of Parliament, which granted Marik the right of first refusal in time of crisis.

Crises have been declared for many reasons over the centuries, though the most frequent case by far is a military threat to the integrity of the Free Worlds, either from another state or as a result of civil war. The discretionary powers of a Captain-General are wide and absolute, and the office-holder is not answerable for his actions during his term of service. Following the Crisis of 2420, Parliament attempted to censure a Captain-General by passing the War Powers Act, which sought to constrain the authority of the Captain-General. Having little effect, this act was finally repealed in 2461. The only check imposed on a Captain-General is indirect; the Parliament controls appropriations necessary for a Captain-General to fund campaigns, controlling the purse-strings, so to speak. Nonetheless, the Captain-General has the right to issue letters of marque and to claim prizes and booty directly, though this revenue will usually not sustain him for long.

Until 2779, the Captain-General was severely constrained by his one-year term of appointment. Parliament had the right to refuse to continue a Captain-General's term of office by terminating the state of crisis or by replacing an appointee with another (though this has never been done). The architects of the League thought this check to be sufficient, and under normal circumstances, it might have been.

When the Free Worlds League joined the Star League, Parliament granted the Captain-General the right to be the Free Worlds' Council Lord in the Star League Council. This step gave House Marik even more power, setting the stage for Kenyon Marik to propose Resolution 288.

RESOLUTION 288

The founders of the Free Worlds League had never imagined the crisis that eventually erupted into the First Succession War. No circumstance had ever placed a Captain-General in authority for so long, and no situation had made the constant vigilance of a Captain-General so necessary. In 2779, the incumbent was Kenyon Marik, "the Eagle," one of the greatest ever to hold the Captain-Generalcy. He recognized that the divisive forces inside the Free Worlds (that had bitterly erupted into civil war less than 50 years earlier) could greatly imperil the League if Parliament became recalcitrant. Thus, while the Inner Sphere girded for war, Kenyon Marik presented Resolution in Council 288, granting the Marik discretionary authority over the League, even including the summoning and disbanding of Parliament, for "the duration of the crisis." This resolution, without precedent in the history of the Free Worlds, was nothing less than a Parliamentary resignation of authority, but its acceptance was not surprising in view of the composition of the Parliament. It was dominated by delegates representing smaller states (many created as a result of the Cam-lann vs. Free Worlds precedent). Relatively inexperienced in the machinations of the Parliamentary machine, these representatives panicked in the face of a military crisis.



Resolution 288 was passed over the strident objections of representatives from the larger states (though they believed that the Resolution could be easily over-turned when the crisis was no longer imminent). The war between the Star League regular forces and those of the Usurper Stefan Amaris was, at that time, less than a year from conclusion, and it seemed that the crisis would evaporate

as soon as General Kerensky won the war. Most assumed that the Star League Council would bestow the title First Lord to Kerensky himself, and that things would return to normal. This was not to be. The animosity between Kenyon Marik and the Protector, as well as the Council Lords' mistrust for each other, brought on the First Succession War, and Resolution 288 has remained ever since, for nearly two and a half centuries.

Despite the vast authority granted by Resolution 288, Captains-General have been plagued with administrative problems on and off the battlefield throughout the long "crisis". Every person who has taken the oath of "First Lord and Captain-General" (since 2786, the official title of the Marik) has faced stubbornness from Parliament in such areas as trade, industrial reconstruction, and recovery of lost technology-areas where Resolution 288 is conspicuously silent, leaving them as matters of negotiation between the executive and legislative arms of the Free Worlds Government.

THE LEAGUE IN 3025

Although the Parliamentary opponents of Resolution 288 recognized the need for continuity in the Captain-Generalcy, they did not unite to oppose the Resolution and had little opportunity later. The fragmentation of the political environment due to Camlann vs. Free Worlds, as well as the polarization caused by the Home Defense Act of 2906, made the Free Worlds even more factious than ever before. By playing the diverse elements in Parliament against one another, successive Captains-General have been able to prop up and legitimate their continuing rule.

At present, the Free Worlds contains numerous factions, some supporting the Captain-General and some opposed. The provinces represented in Parliament mirror the fragmentation of society: their number has grown from 15 in 2571 to 154 in 3025, with little appreciable change in the size of Free Worlds space (other than expansion into the former Terran Hegemony). It is not even uncommon for a province's Parliamentary delegation to disagree within itself, since members must stand for election every two years, and nowadays often reach Parliament due to personal popularity or association with a current cause. Still, many provinces have "favorite sons," popular figures who become perennial Members of Parliament. Often, rulers of provinces will be MPs themselves, leaving an appointed trustee to handle the affairs of local government. However, most MPs depart Parliament almost as quickly as they arrive, remaining only a single term.

The table below lists the approximate alignment of the various provinces in Parliament (based on voting patterns in the 375th and 376th Parliaments) and their voting strengths.



PROVINCES

Of the 154 provinces in the Free Worlds League, the vast majority consist of one or two worlds. Below are the larger and more influential territories.

MARIK COMMONWEALTH

One of the three original states in the League, the Marik Commonwealth has remained largely immune to the balkanization caused by Camlann vs. Free Worlds. It is the political base for the Marik's power, as the large, well-trained Marik Militia is directly responsible to the Captain-General. Because it is located well within the boundaries of the League, this province has suffered little from the vast destruction of the Succession Wars. The Commonwealth has the largest and most closely knit delegation in Parliament.

THE PROTECTORATE

For the last ten years, the Protectorate has been under the direct control of House Marik. Its six worlds—Sophie's World, Nova Roma, McKenna, New Delos, Fuentes, and Emris—had been independent states legally separated from the Duchy of Oriente during the previous century, and placed under the administrative control of Janos Marik's younger brother Anton, the Duke of Procyon. In 3014, the Duke rebelled against the Marik and the government of the Free Worlds, making common cause with the Capellan Confederation. With the help of the renowned mercenary unit Wolf's Dragoons, he resisted the Marik's forces for a full year before collapsing after a dispute between himself and Jaime Wolf. After the war, Duke Anton's rebelling worlds were placed under the Marik's direct authority, and their economic output—and therefore, their Parliamentary voting strength—are at his command.

VOTING BLOCS

Province	Pro-Government	Opposition	Independent
MARIK	52		
GRAHAM-MARIK	9		
THE PROTECTORATE	9		
ORIENTE	40		
ORLOFF	8		
BORDER PROTECTORATE	10		
TAMARIND	12		
ABBAY	12		
STEWART	18		
SIRIAN CONCORDANCE	8	4	
SILVER HAWKS	9	8	8
ANDURIEN		33	
REGULUS		48	
REGULAN FREE STATE		6	
GIBSON		5	
MOSIRO		8	
RIM COMMONALITY		13	
OTHERS	40	65	75
TOTAL VOTES	227	190	83



CAMLANN VS. FREE WORLDS

Even in the 2600s, more than five centuries after man first ventured into interstellar space, there were many planets left untouched by expansion due to the high cost of terraforming their ecologies. The greatest component of this cost was the importation of pure water, possible only through the use of iceships, huge vessels capable of transporting millions of gallons of water across interstellar distances. When the Laranth water-purification process came into wide use in the 2630s, independent firms with no assistance or backing from parent governments invested large amounts of capital to develop these worlds. Once settled and profitable, these newly established worlds began to resent their relationship with those governments. Often, they sought to separate themselves, emulating their predecessors who had broken away from the Terran Alliance centuries before. In most cases during the 2660s and 2670s, these separations were attempted violently and with little success. However, in a landmark case in 2683 (Camlann vs. Free Worlds, H.G. Duke of Regulus et. al.) a terraformed colony successfully argued for political separation from its parent state, the Principality of Regulus. By demonstrating its self-sufficiency, Camlann, a commercial venture less than 50 years old, was able to take its place as a voting member of Parliament. The nature of the proceedings and the precedents used by Camlann set its case apart from the uprisings of the previous two decades, and the decision was viewed as a pragmatic solution following the spirit upon which the League had been founded. As a result of this precedent, more than three dozen new states acquired independent status over the next half-century, each petitioning for the same status once they had demonstrated viability as independent states. During the Succession Wars, the Marik has strongly supported this fragmentation, as it helps to disrupt united opposition to the regime.

An unpleasant side-effect of this trend was the fragmentation of traditional alliances and voting groups in Parliament. The separation of client-state from parent-state was frequently less than civil, and new, small states often took positions contrary to the voting position of their former mentors. Quentin Mbutu, author of *The Fourth Industrial Revolution: 2650-2750*, studied the Free Worlds League for six years and predicted an era of unease as a result of this balkanization. "It is the most profound of mistakes to believe that total independence is a virtue," he wrote in his conclusion. "Societies that no longer have anything in common will quickly fall to fighting." Killed in a shuttle accident during a speaking tour in July 2753, he never lived to see how true his prediction would become, within the Free Worlds League and across the entirety of human space.

—From *Free Worlds Federal Law*, by Precentor Janet Tsao Wu, ComStar Archives, 3019

PRINCIPALITY OF REGULUS

Regulus has had a long and checkered history. One of the three original states in the Free Worlds, the Principality was long the wealthiest province in the League. For centuries, however, Regulus was also the gathering point for opposition to the government in Parliament. The al-ways-contentious Regulans were independent from the start, always placing the interests of the Principality ahead of those of the Free Worlds, and, later, the Star League. Exacerbated by economic losses in the mid-27th century, the Regulans were in the forefront of the Protectionist movement, and ultimately supported the terrorist group "Scourge of Death." The massive retaliation by Captain-General Geralk Marik ultimately drove out the ruling Selaj family, fracturing the Regulan state and its network of allies.

Although the province has never truly recovered, it still maintains an influential place in League politics. In place of the imperial Selaj family, numerous political machines rule the remains of Regulus, most recently the supremely venal Cameron-Jones family, which seems perfectly acclimated to the political environment of the modern Free Worlds League.

DUCHY OF ORLOFF

The Duchy of Orloff was a fief of the Federation of Oriente during the foundation of the Free Worlds League. For more than four hundred years, House Orloff was the close ally of House Allison, the hereditary rulers of Oriente. The Orloff family has had a long and distinguished history; numerous Oriente military leaders have had an Orloff heritage and often the Orloff surname as well. In 2691, House Orloff invoked the Camlann vs. Free Worlds Doctrine (after much apologizing) and established itself as an independent province with its own representation in Parliament. Nonetheless, Orloff has maintained a good relationship with Oriente, often introducing bills on behalf of Oriente in Parliament.

DUCHY OF ANDURIEN

Since 2366, the Free Worlds League and the Capellan Confederation have fought over the province of Andurien. Given to the Capellans in exchange for their joining the Star League, Andurien fell to Marik during the First Succession War. At that time the rule of Andurien was granted to the Humphreys family, whose scions Sir George and James helped forge the foundation of the Free Worlds League in the 23rd and 24th centuries. Under the Humphreys aegis, Andurien has become one of the strongest provinces in the League, the bulwark of its rimward defenses. Unfortunately, the attitude of the Humphreys family toward House Marik—and the trappings of Marik authority—decayed rapidly over the years. Today, the position is almost completely adversarial. During the last few generations, the deterioration has been exceptionally rapid, as House Humphreys has begun to make overtures to the Periphery state of Canopus in order to strengthen its position within and without the Free Worlds. As long-time rival of Oriente as well as of Marik, Andurien is something of a wild card in Free Worlds League politics.

DUCHY OF ORIENTE

One of the three founding provinces of the Free Worlds, Oriente was once the League's technological and industrial center, the strongest and most unified province in the League. The Succession Wars, however, have ruined Oriente's economy and industrial might. As the most populous province on the Capellan border, it has been the target of numerous attacks from Marik's longtime enemy. Generations of young Oriente men and women have been sacrificed to the bloodshed, including the rulers of Oriente, House Allison, the last of whom perished in battle in 2845. Since the death of the last Allison, House Halas, a MechWarrior family originally endorsed by the Marik, has ruled the province. The province of Oriente's thirst for revenge has made it among the Marik's closest allies in Parliament. This position has also made the Oriente MPs opponents of the highly provincial Andurien bloc.

STEWART COMMONALITY

The fourth province to join the Free Worlds, the original Stewart Commonality was annexed after its conquest in 2295. Whatever animosity resulted from that conquest has long since dissipated, and the proud Stewart heritage has a long legacy of support for House Marik. Even the long Succession Wars have not diminished the Stewarts' loyalty for the Captain-General. The current leader of the Stewart delegation is Hector Stewart, the Earl of Stewart and Speaker of Parliament. He has spent the better part of his life fighting the Mark's battles in Parliament.

SILVER HAWKS

Founded by the Concord of Danais in 2966, the Silver Hawks is not a province within the League, but is instead a coalition of independent worlds with common interests. The provinces of Danais, Amity, Shiloh, Callison, and Kalidasa comprise this coalition. For the past two generations, the Silver Hawks have voted largely as a bloc, opposing many of the Marik's initiatives for campaigns against both the Lyrans and the Capellans. Repeatedly invoking the Home Defense Act, the Silver Hawks have continually refused to cooperate with the war effort. During the last few years, though, cracks have formed in the Hawks' façade, due largely to two issues: the Treaty of Kapteyn with Kurita and Liao and the rising anti-bionics attitudes in the League. Some political observers in the League believe that the Hawks' coalition may well have its best years behind it.

SIRIAN CONCORDANCE

The worlds of the Sirian Concordance were settled more than a thousand years ago. Although part of the Terran Hegemony and the Terran Member-State for centuries, they were left open to conquest after the eruption of the Succession Wars. The Civil War and the First Succession War had left these worlds destitute by the time the Free Worlds League seized them. Although the worlds in the new province have a strong democratic tradition, that attribute has caused their delegates to quarrel and rarely present a united front in Parliament.



BORDER PROTECTORATE

The worlds of the tiny Border Protectorate have a long heritage of association with the Free Worlds, but the province itself is not very old, as it has changed hands often through the years. It currently consists of three worlds Alula Australis, Zosma, and Denebola, all of which are heavily garrisoned and economically depressed. Although its two representatives in Parliament, appointed by the military dictator of the Protectorate, are ardent supporters of the Marik and the war effort, the popular sentiment in these worlds is quite the opposite.

ABBAY DISTRICT

Near the rimward edge of Free Worlds space, the Abbey District was originally a military dictatorship, but it became a republic with the redistricting of 2862. As most of its industrial strength was smashed during the first two Succession Wars, the district has remained poor. Only recently has the discovery of germanium and other rare earths on the planet Hammer attracted trade with the Free Worlds' trading cartels. Since its inception, the government of Abbey has remained staunchly in support of the Marik.

RIM COMMONALITY

The Rim is a successor to the once-large Principality of Regulus. It separated from its parent state by Act of Parliament in 2681, following the fracturing of the Regular state by Captain-General Gerald Marik (the so-called "Bionic Lord"). The Rim Commonality has enjoyed a fruitful trading relationship with Regulus ever since. The five-world Commonality is a bitter opponent of the continued rule of the Marik, and it chafes under the taxes imposed on its fragile economy.

PRINCIPALITY OF GIBSON

The three-world Principality of Gibson was also originally within the Principality of Regulus, but successfully petitioned for independence under the Camlann vs. Free Worlds doctrine in 2699. Following the redistricting in 2700, it was seated in Parliament. For more than two centuries, the government of the little state was ardently opposed to the Regulans, both in and out of Parliament. During the Succession Crisis, there were even border incidents between the two provinces (in which the tiny navy of Gibson was supported by cruisers conspicuously bearing the eagle of House Marik). However, the political leanings of Gibson were abruptly overturned in 2919 when a scandal surface, revealing that Captain-General Samuel Marik had riddled the Gibson government with SAFE spies in order to take control of Gibson's 'Mech factories. Since then, Gibson has become increasingly defensive (some say even paranoid) about its limited resources. Its relations with Marik have cooled while it has become increasingly amiable to Regulus. At present, the Gibson Parliamentary delegation does not always follow the Regular lead, but their votes count with the opposition.

REGULAN FREE STATES

This tiny federation has a similar history to Gibson, with one major difference. Following the "scouring" campaign of Gerald Marik in the Principality of Regulus, this three-world province broke off and established a pro-Marik civilian government. Over the course of time, however, Regular intelligence has infiltrated the government to the point that the province is no more than a Regular satellite today. As such, it belongs to the opposition coalition in Parliament.

DUCHY OF GRAHAM-MARIK

The Graham family name has a long and honorable tradition in the history of the Free Worlds League. One of the "founding families" of the Marik Commonwealth, the Grahams freely intermarried with the Mariks from the 23rd century on. In exchange for this long and faithful service, House Graham was assigned a province in the Free Worlds in 2404, following the successful conclusion of the Andurien War. The Duchy of Graham-Marik, as it came to be known, was first given representation in the Parliament of 2408. During the various internal conflicts of the Free Worlds, Graham-Marik has always been a staunch ally of House Marik.

During the Civil War, the warriors of the House stood by Captain-General Elise Marik, though they surrendered to Bertram when the war reached its end. During the Succession Wars, the province has continued to be a close supporter of the Captain-General, sending many soldiers to battle and many M-bills in taxes to pay for the campaigns. The Duchy presents a united front in Parliament, supporting the government with its votes.

DUCHY OF TAMARIND

Generations of fighting have ravaged the four-world province of Tamarind, destroying its industries and impoverishing its people. During the last dozen years, the province has enjoyed something of a renaissance, due to the discovery of radioactives on the outer worlds of the Kosciusko system. The gradual growth of Tamarind's voting strength in Parliament has prompted both the government and the opposition to court this province. It is presently in the government camp.

OHREN AND ZION PROVINCES

These two provinces defected from the Capellan Confederation during the tenure of Captain-General Samuel Marik. The defection was not without cost, however. Though the governments joined the Free Worlds willingly, there was a serious rift in the military forces, and several industries were destroyed before the loyalist forces could be ousted. Like other border provinces, these worlds have taken a pounding over the years, reducing their industrial strength to a fraction of its peacetime strength. Presently, the provinces are in a rebuilding phase, helped by long-term government loans and the peace along the Marik/Liao border. However, these worlds remain a bone of contention between the two Successor States, an issue not easily swept away by mere treaty. The loyalty of the two provinces is not fixed but varies from session to session.



Selah Bey, heir apparent to the Countess of Albert Fails, was adopted by Count and Countess Van Vaal after radiation exposure in a defective BattleMech rendered the Countess unable to bear children. In order to assure a smooth transition of power when the Van Vaal line comes to an end, Lady Bey was chosen to begin a new dynasty based on her personal abilities and her family's traditional connections to the outgoing regime. Lady Bey has pledged to continue the Van Vaals' progressive policies along with unflagging loyalty to the Government of Janos Marik.

This is believed to be the first time in Free Worlds history that one dynasty, knowing it was about to end, has selected the new ruling family to follow them.

PARLIAMENT

Hector Stewart, Earl of Stewart, heads the 376th Parliament, in session since January 5, 3025. He was first elected in 3017 in mid-session, when longtime Speaker Stephanie Alvarez died suddenly. Originally a compromise candidate, Stewart has shown himself to be a thorough Marik supporter, as was Alvarez. As Speaker, he has directed a Parliament that has been very successful at attaining at least interim goals. Other than the flamboyant Duncan Marik and the eternal Olwine Greenwald, Stewart's Council members are largely political appointees who rely on the long-entrenched Atreus bureaucracy to conduct the affairs of government.

FLOOR SUPPORT

The government must rely on the support of MPs to gain approval of its political agenda. While not members of the Council, the "back bench" floor support is quite important. In addition, it is quite diverse, as many Parliamentary delegations are split. Nevertheless, the Council and Speaker can usually count on the support of nearly all of the Marik Commonwealth, the Protector-ate, the Orloff delegation, most of Oriente, the Stewart MPs, the Sirian Concordance, and the Border Protectorate. The chief deputy of Marik, "Lefty" Eastwick, is the government "whip," responsible for rounding up votes prior to a division of Parliament. He is also occasionally called upon to introduce a piece of legislation to the Parliament.

Depending on the nature of the vote, the government can also rely on a varying percentage of the many smaller states. Certain issues are especially difficult—commitment of troops, taxes, regulation of bionics—and the non-controversial Speaker will tend to shy away from them whenever possible, to the constant frustration of the Marik. Even an issue as apparently popular as peace with the Capellans—accomplished by the Treaty of Kapteyn just a few years ago—was a source of heated and vituperative debate in Parliament. The vote was close enough to nearly bring down Hector Stewart's government.

FLOOR OPPOSITION

"It is the nature of the opposition to be outnumbered and un-popular," wrote the political historian Darryl McMurchison. "If it were otherwise, the opposition would be the government." The loci of opposition to the Council and Speaker are the two provinces of Andurien and Regulus. These two strong and relatively healthy provinces have substantial influence inside and out of Parliament. Their inability to thwart all of the government's initiatives or to be seated in the Council is largely due to provincial attitudes (especially on the part of Andurien), which make them somewhat unpopular. Nonetheless, the evolution of the League's constitution has given the opposition powerful tools to force stalemates on certain key issues. The most obvious one is the Home Defense Act of 2906, which has hindered the Marik from all-out commitment of military forces for nearly a century.



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POLITICAL GOALS

It is difficult to assimilate the diverse political aims of the various parties in the Free Worlds League. Each province, planet, and representative has its own interests at heart. Nonetheless, certain general trends can be identified from the pattern of activity for both the Parliament and the Captain-General.

THE CAPTAIN-GENERAL

Since 2779, the Free Worlds League has been led by a scion of House Marik embracing the tenets of Resolution 288. This act has allowed the military rulers to maintain the semblance of legality while pursuing their own policies, constrained only by the budget Parliament has imposed.

Examination of the private correspondence of Captains-General through the centuries of this "crisis" shows that the members of House Marik believe that the Parliament, if left to its own devices, would lose the war, and that the Free Worlds League would be destroyed. This arrogance and self-importance is not without foundation; certainly, the military acumen of these men and women have saved the Free Worlds from conquest more than once. Therefore, as patriots—but also as pragmatists—House Marik strives to maintain its power and to make smooth transitions from one Captain-General to another. (Editor's Note: The current Captain-General, Janos Marik, has not yet publicly designated a successor. There are several candidates for the post, most prominently Janos's nephew Duncan, presently a member of Parliament and Minister of Trade. By the terms of a private accord to which ComStar was a party, however, Janos's seventh son, Thomas Marik, K.E., Adept XVIII, has been privately confirmed as the next Captain-General.)

Although the Treaty of Kapteyn has suspended hostilities with the Capellans, discussions with the Marik suggest that both the Captain-General and a substantial majority of Parliament believe that the treaty is temporary, and will disappear as soon as the current dalliance between Houses Steiner and Davion falls apart. Because of both states' mistrust of each other, nothing short of reconciliation between the two parties will resolve this enmity for some time to come. The Captain-General must make the resolution of the Succession Wars a high priority, even though it is a war he seemingly cannot win.

In addition to the aforementioned military objectives, the Captain-General has certain internal priorities. The ongoing war has instilled certain paranoia in House Marik and its supporters, creating a belief in numerous hidden enemies within the League seeking to thwart its objectives. This paranoia is by no means recent, as the Blessed Order is well aware. Nearly two centuries ago, our A station on Oriente was attacked for just this reason. Through use of the governmental intelligence agency SAFE and the Free Worlds military, the Captain-General has "ferreted out" these enemies with some success. The most outstanding ex-ample of anti-government activity during the tenure of Janos Marik is, of course, the rebellion of his brother Anton twelve years ago. Though that revolt was ultimately thwarted, suspicion and mistrust have cascaded through every individual and military unit associated with the rebellion, enhancing the paranoia in the Free Worlds capital.

Sir Charles Smith, MP from Amity and the foremost proponent of peace with the Lyran Commonwealth, is shown here in the ceremonial robes worn by all members of Parliament while in chambers. The chasuble of this garment is worn over a loose-fitting, high-collared shirt of white linen, and is dyed primarily in the royal purple colors of the Free Worlds. The color of the shoulder stripes and center strip of the robe identify the MP's provincial affiliation (in this case, orange and gold of the Silver Hawks confederation). Smith's hair is cut long in a style currently favored by many members of the noble class. The heavy gold gauntlet



THE PARLIAMENT

The power of the Parliament has been usurped somewhat, due to the two and a half century "crisis" which has allowed successive Captains-General to rule the Free Worlds League without discarding the legal underpinning of League society. This legacy, considered shameful by the present delegates to the Parliament, has spurred them to act whenever possible to extend their power at the expense of the Captain-General. If the five hundred MPs could act in concert, Parliament would have long ago overturned Resolution 288 and ended the crisis. It is a testimony to their centuries of disunity that it still stands.

Though constrained by Resolution 288, the primary objective of Parliament is to control the activities of the Captain-General. It exercises this control in three ways. First, the League Council is composed of members of Parliament, and the Council depends heavily on the advice and consent of the Parliament. Therefore, the policies formed by the government, either supporting or opposing the Captain-General, cannot veer far from being moderate or conservative. Second, the Parliament has control of the budget, which is virtually the only source of financial support for the war effort. (There are documented instances of Captains-General extracting financial support from occupied or conquered territories, though Parliament by no means condones this.) Third, and perhaps most important, member provinces can veto the deployment of their own military forces by invoking the Home Defense Act. This legal nullification, now in force over a century, allows a province to retain up to 75 percent of its military forces inside its borders. In these three ways, the Parliament seeks to involve itself in the policy-making process, sometimes cooperating with, but more often contending against the Captain-General.

While the Captain-General tends to think in national terms, the Parliament is composed of representatives whose perceptions and interests are far more parochial. A large number of these representatives are mandated to protect local interests above all. An MP's term lasts only two years; those that fail to argue for local issues will likely be gone by the next election. In keeping with this view, many members support defense only, protecting against foreign incursions and protecting local industries from capture, destruction, or pillage. Speeches in Parliament, especially in recent years, suggest that members of Parliament do not generally believe that the Succession Wars can be won, and are more concerned with protecting the fragile remains of the Free Worlds League economy from foreign competition. Frustration with the bellicose attitudes of the Captain-General and his supporters has even spawned a grass-roots peace movement, sponsored chiefly by Sir Charles Smith, MP from the border world of Amity. Smith himself has even concluded a treaty between Amity and the Lyran world of Rahne. His book, *The Amity Initiative*, which describes his political system, has been circulated both in the Free Worlds and in the Lyran Commonwealth. While the so-called Initiative does not have broad-based support, the appearance of a peace movement is an indication of the common peoples' displeasure with the war.

THE DUCHY OF ORIENTE

Unlike either Marik or Andurien, the Duchy of Oriente has not been ruled by the same noble House since it joined the Free Worlds. The extinction of House Allison in 2845 left the ducal authority to the Halas family, a noble Mech-Warrior clan of two centuries' lineage. Originally endorsed by the Marik, House Halas has remained loyal to the Captain-General, embracing a sort of "brotherhood of the sword" that underscores a highly personal bond between the family and House Marik. It has colored both the domestic policy of the

Duke of Oriente in his own Assembly, as well as his pattern of support for the Marik in the Free Worlds Parliament. During the entire tenure of House Halas the province has never invoked the Home Defense Act.

The province embodies many of the common qualities of the post-Star League era Inner Sphere. Once the technological and industrial leader of the Free Worlds (it had the greatest voting strength for nearly four centuries between 2300 and 2700), it has suffered tremendously from the constant destruction of the Succession Wars. Further, the Camlann vs. Free Worlds decision has been invoked several times against the Duchy of Oriente, producing a number of new provinces that do not share the political orientation of Oriente.

In short, Oriente is neither as big, as powerful, nor as unified as it once was. Its goals revolve around recovery from this diminished position. Oriente's proximity to the Capellan border has made this difficult, but the Treaty of Kapteyn has given the province some respite from the ravages of war. Halas is well aware that the tides of war and peace move rapidly, and also that fellow provinces are unlikely to offer help. In short, it will have to make whatever recovery it can on its own. The relationship between House Halas and House Marik is such that Oriente believes its destiny to be inextricably tied to that of the Free Worlds League.



THE DUCHY OF ANDURIEN

The Duchy of Andurien poses a remarkable counter-point to Oriente. Over the centuries, Andurien has become alienated from House Marik, and has recently striven to assert its independence from the Free Worlds' mainstream.

The proximity of the Duchy of Andurien to the Liao enemy has made it a front-line target, and residents believe that Marik has (on many occasions) failed to support Andurien troops. In addition, House Humphreys has decided that the Captain-General is prepared to throw the province of Andurien "to the dogs" in order to save the rest of the Free Worlds. Because of these factors, the province has moved more and more into an adversarial position, taking up the role that the Principality of Regulus had filled before House Selaj's involvement with the Scourge of Death and its subsequent hunting by Captain-General Gerald Marik. Unlike Oriente, Andurien has concluded that its future survival is linked to separation from the Free Worlds League. This decision has not been made lightly, nor is it generally known that Andurien, forcibly incorporated into the Free Worlds League more than six hundred years ago, would desire to return to its prior status as an independent state located between two much larger ones. Communications between Dame Catherine Humphreys and the Magestrix of Canopus suggest that the Periphery will be involved in the secession of Andurien from the Free Worlds League. Because active public pursuit of separation would be dangerous, House Humphreys has not declared its intentions. It has, however, pursued a most contrary policy in Parliament, seemingly always being at the forefront of opposition to the government. Furthermore, by the terms of a declaration in 3014, the Duchy of Andurien has invoked the Home Defense Act every time that the Captain-General has called for troops to fight against either the Lyran or the Capellans. Thus, while other Free Worlds troops have suffered substantial losses in combat, the Defenders of Andurien and other Andurien military forces have remained largely intact. Within the last 18 months, other provinces in opposition to the government have invoked the Home Defense Act, following Andurien's lead.

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Each of the nine ministries in the government has its own area of responsibility, which it carries out through the efforts of numerous lesser departments and agencies created over the course of seven hundred fifty years of Parliamentary legislation. A brief review of the ministries and the Council Member that heads them is given below.



DEFENSE

The Ministry of Defense has the largest bureaucracy and the most convoluted infrastructure of any of the organs of Free Worlds government. It is responsible for raising and maintaining regular troops, including BattleMechs, according to the direction of the Free Worlds Parliament. In addition, the Minister of Defense sits on the LCCC, the strategic council of the Free Worlds military; as such, he is an important participant in the strategic planning and logistical direction of the war effort. The current Minister is retired Marshal Erin McQuarrie, MP from Silver (Abbey District).

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Headed by Sir Ellis Hardeagh, MP from Oriente, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is almost as important and prestigious as the Ministry of Defense. Foreign Affairs is chiefly responsible for conducting the foreign policy of the Parliament (or, during a crisis, of the Captain-General). It has other duties as well: appointing, governing, and recalling ambassadors; conducting embassies and diplomatic missions on behalf of the Free Worlds government; maintaining foreign embassies; issuing passports and granting visas; and protecting Free Worlds citizens abroad. Since the outbreak of the First Succession War, the Ministry has also been responsible for designating prohibited travel regions, including war zones and nations with which the Free Worlds is at war. (Since the signing of the Concord of Kapteyn with the Draconis Combine and the Capellan Confederation a few years ago, this condition applies only to the Lyran Commonwealth.)

TRADE

Behind the above two posts, the Ministry of Trade is the most important office in the Council. With great traditional importance in the commerce-minded Free Worlds, this office is responsible for governing both intra- and inter-State trade, granting rights of commerce and free passage, and issuing trading permits to foreign nationals. The Ministry also controls the Customs Service, which establishes tariffs and duties and guards against traffic in illegal or contraband items. The Trade ministry also establishes guidelines for commerce between provinces in the Free Worlds and licenses free merchants and trading companies to provide support to the military when necessary. The current Minister of Trade is Duncan Marik, MP from Marik, the Captain-General's nephew and rumored heir.

TAXATION

The Ministry of Taxation is responsible for the collecting taxes and duties owed the government. In accordance with the Unified Tax Code of 2984, taxes on both individuals and member provinces are levied according to a theoretically simple formula calculated annually in the Parliamentary budget. This method was intended to replace the Byzantine tax code that had built up over the centuries. In practice, however, the complexities of the old code are mild compared to the web of exceptions, deviations, exclusions, and limitations established by Parliament over the last four decades.

Christian Santini, the third son of a titled MechWarrior clan from Hellos Minor, has a sinecure as a minor official in the League's Ministry of Energy. The alphanumeric symbols on his vest denote his field of jurisdiction—namely, the rare earth mining and refining facilities located in Abbey District. The variegated stripes adorning Christian's jumpsuit are non-standard issue, and appear to be drawn from the common warrior practice of painting campaign slashes on the vessels they pilot. It is not known what they are meant to signify in Santini's case (perhaps the number of safety code violations he has uncovered?).

In addition to collecting taxes, the Ministry of Taxation also conducts the extremely important biannual survey of the Free Worlds provinces, which establishes the voting strength of each province in Parliament. The current Minister of Taxation is Olwine Greenwald, the sole representative from the tiny province of New Assam. Greenwald has held the post for 32 years.



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INTERSTELLAR RELATIONS

LYRAN COMMONWEALTH

The Free Worlds and the Lyrans are ancient enemies, having become rivals in the mid-24th century. Over the course of seven centuries, the long border between the two states has been a constant source of contention; a number of worlds along that border have been exchanged dozens of times, and have suffered heavily thereby.

In the Free Worlds, the Lyran Commonwealth is (and nearly always has been) the enemy. The Capellan-Free Worlds rivalry, which is older by nearly half a century, does not seem to excite as much ardor as the Lyran one does. The average Free Worlder's perception of the Concord of Kapteyn is that it is a temporary truce signed in order to obtain the alliance of the Draconis Combine. By comparison, the thought of peace (much less alliance) with the Lyrans is repugnant beyond description. As the old Oriente saying goes, "Never turn your back on a Capellan, but shoot a Lyran on sight."

The war with Steiner has varied in intensity throughout the Succession Wars. Upon ascending to the Captain-Generalcy, Janos Marik believed that he had the capability to conquer his age-old enemy, but fell short of resources to do so. Despite this, he has spared no effort to propagandize the Free Worlds' image as the aggrieved enemy. When the Civil War broke out in 3014, there was some concern that the Lyrans might try to take advantage of the League's internal strife, but the war with Kurita prevented them from doing so. The Treaty of Kapteyn has allowed the Captain-General to make plans against the Lyrans, but as yet he has been unable to marshal the forces to undertake an extensive campaign.

CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION

The Capellan Confederation is a traditional enemy of the Free Worlds League. The Free Worlds press portrays that government as a deceitful, untrustworthy foe lacking principle and honor. Nonetheless, the vicissitudes of the Succession Wars have made House Liao an ally.

As previously mentioned, the people of the Free Worlds consider the current peace with the Capellans to be temporary. Little love is lost between the two peoples, and there are frequent "incidents" along the Capellan border involving both civilian and military personnel.

This enmity reflects the personal relationship between Janos Marik and Maximilian Liao. Janos has an intense personal dislike, stemming from an almost paranoid mistrust for the Liao lord. Since his brother's alliance with the Capellans, he has held Maximilian personally responsible for the Civil War and his brother's death.

DRACONIS COMBINE

The relationship between the Free Worlds and Draconis has long been neutral, occasionally interrupted by periods of cordiality. During the Succession Crisis, Captain-General Kenyon Marik befriended Minoru Kurita in order to thwart the peacemaking efforts of the Lyran Archon. Although this accommodation evaporated following the defeat of Stefan the Usurper, there has always been relative peace between the two realms.

Although the relationship between Kurita and Marik seems even on the surface, Takashi Kurita is actually in control. Kurita dictated the terms of the Concord of Kapteyn, and was also able to include House Liao in the process (despite the obvious consternation of Janos Marik). It is clear to the Marik that Maximilian is no more than a Kurita catspaw.

INTELLIGENCE

The Ministry of Intelligence is responsible for accumulating intelligence data for the Free Worlds Parliament. In addition to monitoring the activities of the Free Worlds' civilian intelligence service, SAFE, the Ministry also reviews the activities of military intelligence agencies and conducts occasional investigations of anti-government activities. During the Succession Wars era, and especially during the last decade, the activities of SAFE have been almost exclusively controlled by the Captain-General. Under the provisions of the Sedition Act, SAFE is not obliged to report its activities to Parliament if the Captain-General designates such activities as vital to the security of the Free Worlds. The current Minister of Intelligence is Dame Adrienne Gaynor, MP from Camlann and a mild-mannered bureaucrat with few enemies in Parliament.

ENERGY

The Ministry of Energy is charged with maintaining crucial energy resources in the Free Worlds, including rare earths, used to repair JumpShip drive cores; nuclear fuels, used to power fusion power-plants in ships, AeroSpace Fighters, 'Mechs, and ground vehicles; and solar power, generated in refueling stations across the League. An important, but lesser, concern of the Ministry is the investigation of new (or rediscovery of old) energy technologies. The current Minister of Energy is Sir Alois Cameron-Jones, younger brother of Lynn Cameron-Jones, Regulus's ruler.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Ministry of Communications is the most unusual Ministry in the government, as its primary responsibility is the maintenance of relations with ComStar, which has sole control over the Hyper Pulse Generator technology that allows worlds to communicate with each other. This otherwise mundane office has traditionally been important because of the history of trouble between ComStar and the Free Worlds. In addition to handling this delicate liaison, the Ministry also directs the activities of the FWCC, the Free Worlds Communications Commission, which regulates vid-tapes and other private sector transmissions. The current Minister of Communications is Dr. C. Calvin Ottgen, an unprepossessing little man who represents the tiny province of Panjang.

JUSTICE

As the legal arm of the Free Worlds Government, the Ministry of Justice is charged with locating, prosecuting, and detaining enemies of the State. The Minister of Justice also represents the government before the Supreme Judicial Court. The current Minister, retired General Beatrice "Bloodhound" Rincius, is MP from Mosiro.

Janos Marik respects Takashi Kurita, admiring not only the man but the way in which the Coordinator is able to direct the affairs of state. Certainly, the cordial relationship between the two men makes a lasting Marik-Kurita treaty possible, even if the Capellan "alliance" fails.



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COMSTAR

The ComStar Order, the inheritor of the legacy of Blessed Blake, has always professed neutrality in the conflicts between the five Successor States, but the scions of House Marik have often speculated that the Order has been less than neutral toward them.

In the late 2830s, the Marik launched an attack on the Oriente A station, precipitating the ComStar War and a nearly two-year-long Communications Interdict. Though ComStar was fully compensated for the loss, the suspicion between the Captains-General and the Order has never fully subsided. Part of this is naturally due to the paranoia of House Marik.

The present Captain-General harbors his own suspicions about the activities of ComStar. It is an open secret that ComStar was kept fully informed of the activities of both sides during the year-long war between Janos's and Anton's forces, and Janos suspects that the Order may have had a hand in the affair. Since the end of hostilities, Janos has used SAFE to spread disinformation in order to keep the Order from infiltrating his own intelligence operations.

FEDERATED SUNS

The location of the Federated Suns, beyond the Capellan realm, has isolated it from significant interaction with the Free Worlds League. However, the recent détente between House Davion and the Lyran Commonwealth has placed the Federated Suns in an adversarial position to the Free Worlds. Furthermore, the Suns are the long-time bitter enemies of the Draconis Combine, with which the Free Worlds League is now a hard and fast ally. The "friendship" between House Liao and the Free Worlds certainly presents a tactical problem for Hanse Davion.

Though the Davion-Steiner relationship has made them adversaries, Janos Marik has stated privately that, had circumstances not placed them on opposite sides, they would have made staunch allies.

NOBLE TITLES

The following information is excerpted from the standard work on the Free Worlds nobility, Casion's Peerage. The authors have used the current 3025 edition, and wish to express their appreciation to Globe Press of Atreus for its permission to use the information contained therein.



ANDURIEN

Conquered by the Free Worlds League during the First Succession War, Andurien entered the League with no permanent peerage. Thus, until 2894, the lord or lady of Andurien was styled "President," in reference to an hereditary office in the Humphreys family. The Andurien Peerage Resolution in 2894 gave the President of Andurien the hereditary title of "Duke," or "Duchess" if the head of the clan were female. In this latter case, the title "Dame" has often been used, generally in address or correspondence. In 2917, the Duke/Duchess of Andurien was also granted the title "Defender of the Free Worlds."

GIBSON

The Principality of Gibson, separated from Regulus in 2699, has traditionally awarded its leader the quaint corporate title of "Principal." Unlike many titles, the Principal of Gibson is not hereditary. The Principal must resign his authority after seven years, and may not be named to the post again until a full seven years have passed. Former holders of the Principalship form an advisory body known as the "Emeriti."

GRAHAM-MARIK

By virtue of its long standing rather than its diminutive size, Graham has a ducal dignity. The full title of the provincial leader is "Duke of Graham-Marik." After 2533, the Dukes were also granted the right to carry the title "Defender of the Free Worlds," in recognition of their long and faithful service.

LEFARGE

The lord of the province of Lefarge was granted the title "Earl" in 2911.

MARIK

In addition to the Captain-Generalcy, the Lord of Marik has assumed the title "Duke of Atreus" since 2271. Since the Peerage Act of 2354, the Duke of Atreus has also been styled "Defender of the Free Worlds." In 2804, Thaddeus Marik assumed the honorary title "Eagle" in reverence for his late father.

ORIENTE

The traditional title held by House Halas is "Grand Duke," bestowed originally on House Allison by the Peerage Act of 2354. The Grand Duke also is the honorary President of the Oriente Assembly, an honor that dates to the Federation Era. Since 2616, the ducal dignity carries with it the honorary title of "Princeps of the Order of Atreus," established by Hektor Allison, Grand Duke of Oriente from 2602 to 2639.

This Andurien noble is decked out in Andurien forest green. Note the conspicuous absence of a purple sash, showing her disrespect for House Marik.

ORLOFF

The lords of Orloff have taken the title of "Earl" since long before the province's separation from the Duchy of Oriente. By resolution of Parliament in 2792, the Earls and Countesses of Orloff have also been granted the additional dignity of "Banneret," denoting their hereditary right to bear the flag of the Free Worlds in full dress parade and, when part of a combined force, into battle.



PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

The Free Worlds Parliament shall make no law to regulate or control the form of government maintained or adopted by a member province and shall not interfere in the affairs of provincial governments, except as they touch upon or interfere with the collective security and harmony of the Free Worlds League.
—The Document of Incorporation

Within the Free Worlds League, there are a multitude of provincial governments, each with its own local authority. In keeping with the doctrine of non-interference by the Free Worlds Parliament, there are very broad parameters for the constitution and responsibility of these governments. Indeed, by the standards of the other Successor States, the Free Worlds is a shining example of representative democracy.

However, a League citizen's degree of participation in local or national government is usually directly related to the wealth and prominence of their province. For example, residents of the Marik Commonwealth, the Duchy of Oriente, or the Duchy of Stewart can take advantage of a long representative tradition and a healthy, wealthy society not only to elect members to their respective provincial Assemblies, but also to elect Members of Parliament. By comparison, residents of poor worlds, like those of the Rim Commonality or even the Silver Hawk world of Shiloh, participate little in the decisions of their governments, which are usually autocratic and oppressive.

CIVILIAN DICTATORSHIP

This government is controlled by a single leader, usually a highly charismatic figure or single family that is prominent in local or national politics. Such a regime is relatively recent and usually seized power (rather than receiving general acclamation). Often, such a government will be extremely venal and corrupt. The power to name Members of Parliament resides exclusively with the province's ruling authority.

Examples include Regulus, Ohren, Zion, Wisconsin, Gallatin (since the uprising of 2989), Home, and Jiddah.

MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

Similar to the civilian form, this government has a single ruler or junta in charge. The authority will, however, have a strong military background, often at the national level. Over the course of the Succession Wars, some provinces have been militarily occupied, and the garrison force has seized or has simply retained power. Also, recently conquered or reconquered provinces will have forms of government that are essentially identical to a military dictatorship.

Examples include the Protectorate worlds (since 3015), Sirius (after Grise's takeover), Maxwell, Zosma, Claybrooke, Talitha, and Cajamarca (under SAFE occupation since 3022).

OLIGARCHY

An oligarchic government consists of a small subset of society, usually either an entrenched nobility or professional class, with exclusive control of the government and the designation of Parliamentary representation. There is little direct participation by the rest of society, though some provincial oligarchies will "hold court" to give the populace an opportunity for input.

Examples include Orloff, Andurien, Alula Australis, Gibson, Mosiro, Camlann, New Assam, Holt, and Kyeinnisan.

REGULUS

The peirage of the Principality of Regulus, one of the founding states of the Free Worlds League, was decimated by Captain-General Marik in the late 27th century, and the title held by the Selaj, "Prince," has been vacant for centuries. The present rulers of Regulus, having more common birth, have styled themselves by the title "Count(ess) of Harmony."

SHILOH

The world of Shiloh is ruled by the ascetic Exituri, which have no hereditary peirage. The leader of the sect is traditionally styled "Blessed Leader." Outside of Shiloh itself, however, this title is usually replaced by either "Lord" or "Lady," often infuriating the leader so addressed.

SIRIUS

The elective leadership of Sirius has been granted the rather pompous title of "Primus, Protector, and Sublime Princeps" for the better part of a thousand years. It was recognized as a proper title by Act of Parliament in 2962, despite substantial protest.

STEWART

The hereditary title of the Stewart nobility is "Earl," first chosen by Richard Stewart in 2259 following his acceptance of fealty from the neighboring world of Merak. Under the honors provision of the Document of Incorporation, the Stewart family retained the title following the Free Worlds' conquest of the province in 2295. In 2406, Parliament offered Earl Nathan Stewart the right to a ducal coronet, but he refused, asserting that the title "Earl" was "Good enough." The Stewarts retained that motto in the Stewart family crest from 2445 onward, and it has evolved into an additional honorary title, "Gudano," which is most commonly used in second person address.

TAMARIND

The leader of the province of Tamarind has been granted the dignity of "Count" by application of the most recent Peirage Act.

THEOCRACY

A theocratic government is a subset of the oligarchic form, the only difference being that the theocracy is a priesthood. The classic example of a theocracy in the Inner Sphere is, of course, ComStar. Even within the Successor States, the increasing fragmentation of society has allowed certain religious cults to take control of planets. Such provinces tend to have severe laws, little social mobility, and little, if any, participation by the masses.

Shiloh, Al Jubaylah, and Second Chance are examples of League theocracies.

FEUDAL AUTOCRACY

Feudal autocracies have become more and more popular during the Succession Wars, coinciding with the rise in social standing of the MechWarrior nobility. Such a government consists of an established nobility, usually landholders holding power by consent of, and as the formal protectors of, the ruled. Due to the consent nature of this government, the masses can participate at least in local government, though there is a strong formal distinction between the upper and lower classes, and only the upper class may appoint MPs.

Examples include the Rim Commonality, Regular Free States, the Duchy of Graham-Marik, Chilung, Nathan, Danais, Graham, Maderas, and Edmondson.

REPRESENTATIVE COMMONALITY

The pattern on which the Free Worlds itself is based, this form of government is founded on a specific code of laws and generally extends the franchise to all adults in the populace. In some cases, a government may impose some requirement on voters, such as a tax or military service. The population votes for local authorities and representatives to Parliament.

Oriente, Stewart, Amity, Dalton, and Van Diemen IV are examples of representative commonalities.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Compared to the representative commonality, this democracy is a nation of men, rather than laws. Often a replacement government for an overthrown dictatorship, such a government will tend to be volatile and sometimes will not have constitutional restraints on its actions (similar to ancient Greece and revolutionary France on old Terra). Representatives in Parliament are commonly elected on popular issues or merely on personal charisma (mass appeal), and are replaced frequently.

Examples include Sirius (before Grise's takeover), Tamarind, Bordon, Deschenes, Antipolo (since overthrow of the Autarch in 3013), Wilkes, and Trinidad.



STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The Free Worlds is the oldest province in the Inner Sphere, antedating even the founding of the Terran Hegemony by nearly two generations. As the inheritors of the legacy of the Blessed Blake, we have had a great deal of trouble with the League, because of its independence and fragmentation. Psychohistorians in the ComStar Order have been prophesying the demise of the Free Worlds League within the next generation for centuries, predicting irreconcilable internal conflicts, the collapse of the Free Worlds economy, and the shattering of the delicate legal balance between the "temporary" Captains-General and the ever-changing Parliament. The continuing industrial decline of Oriente (the Marik's chief ally outside of his own territories) and the increasing duplicity of Andurien (the focus for opposition to the Marik's authority) have seemed to lend credence to this analysis.

Despite this, reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated, to paraphrase an ancient Terran wit. As ROM has reported to the First Circuit, Free Worlders are fractious, parochial, contentious, and stubborn; they pledge their allegiance and follow their leaders from Oriente to the Abbey District, and they chafe under the continued rule from Atreus. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that, beneath that surface, they would rather hold the meanest citizenship in the Free Worlds than patents of nobility in the Lyran Commonwealth.

For example, when Anton Marik turned against his brother in 3014, the Marik obtained substantial public support not because Anton's rebellion was perceived as illegal or treasonous, but because Anton had sought help from the hated Liao enemy. Ultimately, Anton became a traitor in the minds of his countrymen. Because of this attitude, the Free Worlds did not split into two opposing parties over the rebellion, contrary to the expectations of some members of the First Circuit. There seems to be no indication that this condition will change, and this humble observer believes that the Free Worlds will continue to exist for some time to come.

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY



PHILOSOPHIES

It is impossible to speak of a predominant philosophy or a state religion in the Free Worlds League, due to the wide disparity among the League's peoples. Nonetheless, there are certain sociological trends, movements, or "modes of thought" that have had a serious impact on Marik culture.

ENTREPRENEURIAL PHILOSOPHY

Over a thousand years before the onset of the Succession Wars, Adam Smith, author of *The Wealth of Nations*, postulated the ideal free market, one in which prices found their own level, peaceful negotiations determined the worth of goods and services, and, in general, the climate of business (and, therefore, society) became steadily more pleasant because it was in everyone's interest that it should do so. Though his theories were utopian, perhaps idyllic in vision, the central foundations of his theories were held to be valid and true even into the 20th century on Terra.

It was natural for a similar philosophical bent to develop in the Free Worlds, when the former dominions of Terra lay open and available to economic exploitation. That long-gone era was one of tremendous opportunity, when countless fortunes were made and lost with little restraint and even less regulation. In those days, the merchants of the Free Worlds acquired reputations as shrewd, cunning, but fair dealers. A contract was a solemn and unimpeachable bond, far more sacred than a mere diplomatic treaty.

The age of prosperity that commenced with the beginning of the Star League reinforced the entrepreneurial "anyone can be a millionaire" attitude of Free Worlds traders. It was their pride—and their folly—that led them to believe that mankind had given up war entirely, and (as Smith had suggested) that the trends of the free society and the free marketplace would keep it from coming back. Needless to say, the Succession Wars came as quite a shock, and the merchant class's inability to curtail or prevent them was an incredible disillusionment.

Merchants in the more dangerous and violent present still carry the philosophical outlook of their entrepreneurial forebears. Although The Succession Wars have destroyed some of their original precepts, many principles (such as the sacred nature of contracts) have remained, as merchants have learned to make the most of a bad situation.

ANTI-BIONIC SENTIMENT

Like many other scientific developments of the Star League, myomer-based bionic replacements for failed human body parts were first developed in the Free Worlds League. Prosthetic limb and even artificial organ technology dates back to the pre-interstellar era, but by the middle 2600s, medical science had advanced beyond the wildest imaginations of those early inventors. Aside from the spine and the cerebral cortex, there was no organ or limb in the human body that could not be replaced with an artificial prosthesis that was stronger, more durable, or more energy-efficient. Furthermore, replacements had advanced to such a degree that they were hardly distinguishable from the real thing.

At first, there was no onus attached to replacements of real body parts with artificial ones. In fact, it became fashionable in some circles to have an artificial organ that would last several lifetimes. Nevertheless, the replacement of other parts—frontal lobes of the brain or the pituitary gland—raised uncomfortable moral questions. Furthermore, artificial replacements for the purpose of enhancement rather than replacement (specially developed eyes, skin, or respiratory or circulatory systems) suggested that the individuals so treated had ceased to be human. Naturally, the high cost of such treatments fostered resentment among those unable to afford them.

The end result was extensive anti-bionic sentiment, especially among lower classes. This philosophy, which prevails even today, most often expresses itself as distaste or bigotry, but sometimes flares into violence. In some cases, this sentiment has become a religion on its own; for example, consider the sect of the Exituri, centered on the border world Shiloh. The Exituri hold advanced technology—especially bionics—to be the culprit for the fate of mankind, having caused the Divinity not to recognize man any longer and to cast him into the wilderness.

Bionics, especially myomer fiber implants, are not uncommon with MechWarriors. This only further raises the ire of the "havenots." Needless to say, though bionic implants and prostheses have saved many lives, they are not attributes that a possessor is eager to advertise.

THE WAY OF ARME

The last and most curious philosophical trend in the Free Worlds League is also the newest. The Way of Arme originated somewhere in the province of Stewart (or so official chronicles assert). It is centered on the teachings of a prophet, Brian Arme, who preached a nihilistic cult of spiritual enervation through total abnegation: denial of everything from vices to necessities, leading to starvation, euphoric nirvana, then self-destruction. The Way, as it called itself, would never have become significant at all but for an event that took place nine years ago. By unknown means, Arme was able to gain control of the broadcast facilities on the planet Marcus for just under eight minutes. During that time, he presented his teachings and philosophy, and then—while several hundred million persons in the system watched—he took his own life in a final act of self-negation that followers of the Way called the "Culmination."

Although considered the isolated act of a madman, this act was at once both repulsive and compelling. Arme's message, promoting solace through self-destruction, was strangely appealing in an age when racial self-destruction seemed to be the norm. While a few disciples followed Arme's example by taking their own lives on the broadcast media of a world, some of them withheld that final peace, remaining in the world to teach and recruit.

While the message of the Way is appalling and seemingly pointless, it has been able to take root in the Free Worlds, despite the government's best efforts to eradicate it. It is particularly seductive to disaffected classes, notably common soldiers, ex-property-holders, and Dispossessed MechWarriors. In some sense, the persecution of the Way has made it stronger, creating even more martyrs.

Rumors about the Way's inner teachings abound. Skeptics claim that Arme is still alive, conducting the cult as a business and acquiring ever more wealth from converted fools who commit suicide at the cult's behest. Others assert that Arme's followers have transformed his insane beliefs into a frightening cult of assassins with unknown intentions or objectives. Believers who have not yet reached their own Culmination claim to have seen visions of Arme or of another reality that beckons to them. There is also a tale of a more frightening, unedited version of the Arme broadcast that reveals the mad prophet's evil purpose. In addition, because the follower's suicide is performed in a locked room containing only an aspirant and a disciple, critics of the Way suggest that the final act is by no means voluntary.



Roman Catholicism

Over the centuries, the Roman church has benefited from a strong infrastructure of ecclesia, a central leader, and a rich canonical tradition. The funds of the Vatican have supported the activities of its teaching arm, the Society of Jesus, which has attracted many skilled and knowledgeable individuals. The strict interpretations of the

Papacy and the rigidity of its canon have hurt the Roman church considerably, both in ancient times and in modern (consider the Papal schism of the mid-23rd century, when a second Pope ruled for a time from the archiepiscopal Palace on Hesperus II). Nonetheless, the constant state of war has revitalized Roman Catholicism, giving persons an alternate haven in which to peruse the works of the ancients.

Protestantism

Today, the many Protestant churches flourish, though on a much smaller scale than Roman Catholic churches. Unlike Catholicism, which has always been highly structured and organized, Protestant churches have suffered from the inability to provide answers to their congregations' theological questions. The growth of humanity to an interstellar species has posed new problems that these faiths cannot solve. As the 23rd-century poet André Herriault asked, "Where is Heaven now that we have touched the stars?"

Nonetheless, the Protestant faith has sought to grapple with these questions through the Free Worlds Protestant Synod, an organization of Protestant churches and Bible-related societies formed in the early 24th century. The Synod has been responsible for numerous pronouncements on moral and ethical matters over the centuries, and has at times been extremely political. During the middle 27th century, the Synod was one of the most ardent organizations to propound the Protectionist philosophy, arguing for government support of private industry and vast welfare programs.

Regardless of the political inclinations of the Synod, the Protestant faiths in the Free Worlds have contributed significantly to scriptural studies and other sacred literature. Prominent works include Alfredo Smythe's *Where Is God?* (Cormorant Press, New Olympia, 2402), Sir Vincent Stewart's *Signposts* (Spire Books, Oriente, 2683), and the mystical *Echoes of His Footsteps*, by Renée von Lausche (White Dove Publications, Atreus, 2911).

Fringe Groups

The evangelical tradition has surfaced at least twice a century since the Protestant Reformation. Like the evangelicals of the past, the current exponents of evangelical Christianity offer the usual assortment of faith hearings, demon banishings, and outré interpretations of scripture. They preach the imminent and violent Second Coming of Christ (an event which has thus far remained undocumented) and the fulfillment of apocalyptic Biblical prophecies. Powerfully charismatic individuals dominate this realm of Christianity, and their popularity seems to grow in inverse proportion to the economic well-being of the average person. The current lull in the war with Steiner, along with the Concord of Kapteyn, has made the fringe groups and preachers less popular, but just over a half-century ago, the evangelical segment of Christianity was growing fast enough to warrant supervision by SAFE, the Free Worlds intelligence service. After the millennium (at which time, it was predicted, the Savior would return and establish His thousand-year reign), their influence rapidly waned.

TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

Spiritual quests have occupied a considerable quantity of mankind's energies and resources throughout recorded history. The Way of Arme and the Exituri have overshadowed, but failed to eradicate, religions that have been with mankind for millennia. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism continue to affect the Free Worlds today, though the approach of each is somewhat different.

JUDAISM

The trials of the "Chosen People" of the Old Testament, from their slavery in Egypt nearly four thousand years ago through the Holocaust of the 20th century, are a vital part of this religion's culture. Long-established traditions, recitation of the Scriptures, and recounting the history of the People of Israel bind the many forms of Judaism together.

There is, however, scarcely any ecclesiastical middle ground in Free Worlds Judaism. The extremely orthodox sects, such as the Hasidim, have clung fiercely to their forms of worship, dress, and social interaction. Though at first dwindling, the numbers of traditionalists have recently stabilized. In response to the trials and tribulations of the Succession Wars, orthodox Jews have turned inward and found solace in the old ways. In contrast, the many sects of reformed Jews have become hardly distinguishable from non-Jewish society, discarding many of the customs and habits of their more traditional brothers and sisters.

On the whole, neither traditional nor reformed Judaism has much impact on Free Worlds society. It remains a closed faith, into which one is born and either embraces or rejects. Because of this fact, there are large Jewish communities on many planets in the Free Worlds, but no completely Jewish worlds. Still, the League contains more than 150 rabbinical institutes and centers for Talmudic learning.

CHRISTIANITY

Unlike Judaism, Christianity has scarcely any common culture any more, other than the Bible itself. Alternately benefiting from and suffering under waves of evangelical revival over the centuries, the extremely broad Christian community has splintered over theory as well as practice, with new interpretations conflicting with more traditional ones. All claim to seek salvation through the acceptance and propagation of Jesus' teachings, while sometimes disagreeing violently with each other over the particulars. The attitudes and influence of some of the major participants are given below.

The majority of other fringe Christian groups did not fare well during humanity's transformation from a planetary to an interstellar society. In particular, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Scientology were hard hit by this metamorphosis. Other groups, however, have taken well to mankind's widened horizons. Interstellar history has been particularly kind to the genealogy-oriented Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), and, surprisingly, to the Amish peoples of Terran Pennsylvania, who settled on the world of Home and remain there to the present.



Unlike other faiths, Hinduism has never demanded strict compliance of its followers. Consequently, there are dozens of different flavors of the faith, seemingly one for every world on which it has taken root. After some initial adjustment, the complex, multitheistic beliefs of the Hindu religion have taken well to the interstellar scene, and the spectacular rituals and festivals of the faith have attracted many nonbelievers.

ISLAM

In contrast to the other "Peoples of the Book," the Moslem community has retained little influence in the Free Worlds League. The Islamic faith is very constraining and not at all in harmony with the entrepreneurial nature of the Free Worlds. In particular, the payment of zakat (alms) and the sexist attitude of some Islamic sects are disharmonious with the Free Worlds' temperament.

Islam has not fared especially well in the interstellar environment because it has long since ceased to be in harmony with a technological culture and because it trails some excess traditional baggage that makes it difficult to practice. (Which way is Mecca from Atreus? And how, in the midst of the Succession Wars, can an orthodox Moslem hope to journey there, as the Koran obliges him to?)

In the Free Worlds League, Islam has few adherents, although there are no prohibitions or restrictions on its practice. The most prominent Moslem communities are on the world of Djubba, home to the Tower of Allah Mosque, and the world of Ideyid, home to the Golden Dome Mosque. Despite the relatively small size of the Islamic population of the Free Worlds, the millennia-old conflict between the Shi'ites and the Sunnis, the two primary Moslem sects, has been carried out as acrimoniously as on Terra, to the further detriment of Islam.

Over the centuries, the Islamic community has also suffered from divisive sects. Most have extremely small followings, though each has affected the already diminutive Islamic population. One of the most popular sects is the Black Muslim faith, a carryover from 20th-century Terra. It is most popular in the province of Mosi-ro, where black Americans and Africans settled during the early period of mankind's exodus. The doctrine of K'Wara, founded by an Islamic mullah on Kanata during the middle 25th century, is the most popular representative of the conservative offshoots of the Moslem faith. It is extremely anti-technological, almost Luddite in its outlook, and is presently one of the most virulent anti-bionic groups. The liberal Qarad'yani sect, an offshoot of the Ba'hai doctrine, is exactly the opposite, as it under-takes a symbolic interpretation of the Koran.

HINDUISM

The exodus of humanity from Terra passed by the Hindus, because of their attachment to India and because their extreme poverty made it nearly impossible to migrate to a new world. Unlike some of the other prominent religions of the pre-interstellar age, however, Hinduism had a patron in the Free Worlds—the powerful Selaj family, rulers of the province of Regulus. Through the influence of the Selaj, a substantial Hindu community developed in Regulan, and eventually Free Worlds, space. More than 50 worlds have a substantial Hindu community, predominantly in the principality of Regulus and outlying provinces.

BUDDHISM

The simplest and yet most complex of the major religions, Buddhism has many different sects, ranging from the active and militant to the quiet and contemplative. Its belief system is by no means restricted to descendants of Terran Orientals, as the 20th and 21st centuries witnessed a burst of Occidental interest in Buddhism.

Buddhism has never been a strong, organized force in the Free Worlds. There are more than 20 Buddhist monasteries, ranging in size from the tiny, 30-person Blue Door House in the wild mountains of Chilung to the sprawling, 1600 person zen center of New Tibet on Sorunda. The Buddhist culture of the Free Worlds is far more prominent, however, in philosophical and contemplative literature. Examples include the Land of Non-Being, an anonymous work of a 24th-century monk, and the beautifully poetic Steps of the Dancing Circle, by zen master Carl Chuan, published by Globe Press of Atreus in 2761.

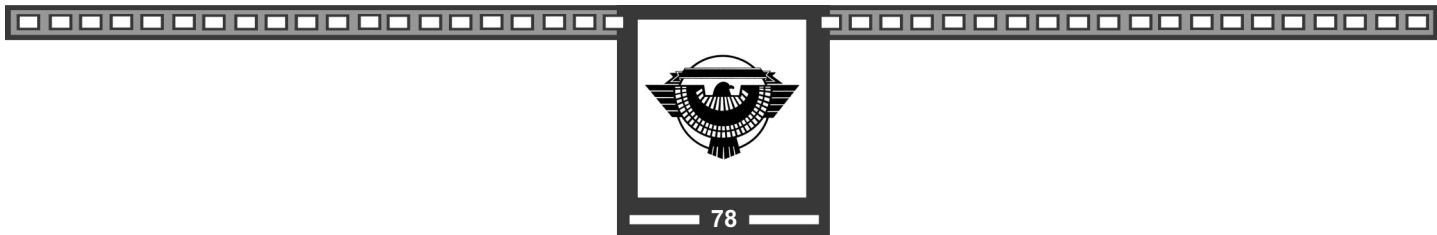
MYTHS AND LEGENDS

The gradual obscuring of routes to the Periphery has lent that area an air of mystery that invites legend. The mercantile nature of the Free Worlds, which is the nexus of the state's communal psyche, has given rise to many legends of piracy, primarily of the Flying Dutchman variety. In the most popular form, the crew of a trading vessel discovers an abandoned ship, where they find the secret of eternal life. This most precious gift exacts its own price. They find themselves condemned to wander forever between the stars, calling no world home and thwarted in every attempt to settle down.

Another popular legend is drawn from the era of the Succession Crisis. The abrupt departure of Aleksandr Kerensky's fleet in 2784 has generated a plethora of stories regarding that flotilla's ultimate fate. In the Free Worlds, there is a tradition (embodied in the famous three-volume epic Kingdom of the Gypsies, published in 2899) that Kerensky's command settled in a star cluster and plotted to destroy the cultures of the Inner Sphere by supplying all sides with weapons. Central to the theme of the story is Kerensky himself, transformed into a bionic madman and still alive after almost two centuries of bitter, self-imposed exile.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

People of the Free Worlds find it difficult to embrace modes of thought that cannot be measured on a spreadsheet of profit and loss. What is more, the conflicts between religious groups, and even between different sects of the same religion, has worked against the influence of religions. That is not to say that citizens of the Free Worlds are especially agnostic or atheistic; every session of the Free Worlds Parliament is opened by an invocation to the deities of each of the five major religions (the order is, in the great tradition of the League, chosen by lot). However, compared to other states of the Inner Sphere, the Free Worlds has not been a fertile ground for new offshoots of traditional religions or entirely new faiths.



THE FREE WORLDS MILITARY



The Free Worlds League can currently muster approximately 60 full 'Mech regiments (including contract mercenaries) and about 700 regiments of infantry, armor, aerospace support, naval, local garrison, and special services (hovercraft gunship, paratroopers, rangers, Liberation Units, etc.) personnel. Of these forces, however, only about 40 percent of the 'Mech units and 50 percent of the non-'Mech units are under the direct control of the Captain-General. The remainder of the units are provincial forces, whose primary allegiances lie with the leader of their planetary ruling House, and whose availability to the League war effort varies from Captain-General to Captain-General and even from year to year.

COMMAND STRUCTURE

The overall commander of all League forces is the Captain-General. Since the mid-24th century, this position has been the hereditary title of a member of the Marik family. Upon declaration of a state of crisis by the League Council of Parliament, House Marik was permitted to nominate "any appropriate family member of majority age" to this post, subject to confirmation by a majority of the full voting body. Prior to the Succession Crisis, the post was disbanded at the end of each crisis, with the retiring Captain-General assuming the honorary title of 'Warden of the Perimeter Defenses." Since the onset of the Succession Wars, however, the Marik family has held the Captain-Generalcy in perpetuity, using the proclamation of Resolution in Council 288 in 2779 as its statutory justification. Parliament continues to go through the motions of confirming each successor to this title, though no meeting of that body has actually attempted to overturn Resolution 288 since the ill-fated Parliament of 2804 felt the might and wrath of Thaddeus Marik in Government Square.

The Captain-General's chief administrative and planning body is known officially as League Central Coordination and Command (LCCC) and colloquially as the "seven sons of Solon" or the "dark circle." Headquartered on the planet Marik, far from the political squabbles of Atreus, this body is responsible for the strategic planning and support of all military operations, the disposition of captured territories, and the administration of all military facilities (including Star League storehouses, active and inactive production and repair facilities, and MechWarrior training academies). Besides the Captain-General, the LCCC consists of:

The Minister of Defense, the overall administrative head of all League regular forces, including the 20 'Mech regiments of the League Guard.

The Director of Military Intelligence, coordinator of all domestic (counterintelligence) and foreign intelligence operations, including Liberation Unit activities.

The Quartermaster General, comptroller of all logistical support activities, and administrator of military recruitment and the New Olympia 'Mech and Flight Academies.

The Chief Armorer, whose responsibilities include maintaining the 'Mech plants at Kalidasa and Kendall, the DropShip drydocks at Oceana, and the AeroSpace fighter bays in the Helm asteroid belt, and planning and conducting all military R&D.

The Occupation Liaison Officer, whose staff monitors the defense and "reintegration" (exploitation) of all territories "liberated" during the war effort, and

The Government Liaison Officer, who attempts to gain Parliamentary approval for the plans formulated by this body and by the four military district commands.

The units under the LCCC's aegis include about 22 'Mech regiments, 40 armor regiments, 12 Aerospace fleets, 40 infantry divisions (200 regiments), and 50-75 battalions of special support forces, plus whatever provincial defense forces a province decides to yield to the Captain-General. These units are allocated among four military districts, headquartered at Oriente and Ryerson along the Capellan front and Dieudonne and Tamarind along the Lyran front. Each district is commanded by a Marshal, who is responsible for carrying out the directives of the LCCC, maintaining the defense readiness of their district, and coordinating and supporting operations launched from their district.

Usually, Generals command major military offensive and garrison/defense operations. Appointed by either the LCCC or by District Marshals on an "as needed" basis, Generals retain command authority only for the duration of a given campaign (though the ceremonial title of "General" is usually awarded in perpetuity to all but the most abject failures). Individuals receiving this rank come from a diverse mix of backgrounds, ranging from highly decorated, popular, retired 'Mech or Aerospace commanders to career back-line bureaucrats or political appointees with little or no actual battlefield experience. The rewards of generalship are great—high pay, a better-than-average survival rate, and the opportunity for booty, glory, and public exposure. Officers in both the regular and provincial armies often aggressively pursue such appointments.

During the long history of the Succession Wars, the bulk of the League's Generals have traditionally been graduates of one of the League's 'Mech or Flight Academies. These individuals have had the greatest schooling in tactics and combined arms coordination and the widest exposure to the activities of other branches of the military. During Janos Marik's reign as Captain-General, however, experience has become secondary to political orthodoxy, as the civil war of 3014, four unsuccessful assassination attempts, and the growing recalcitrance of Andurien and the Sirian Concordance have driven the Marik to prize loyalty above all—even at the expense of competence. As a result, the ranks of Janos's generals have become increasingly populated with his political cronies, a hard-drinking, cigar-chomping lot with more experience at back-room wheeling and dealing than in 'Mech maneuvers. This trend has placed greater responsibility on the regimental commanders in the field, who grumble that others seem to be getting the credit and rewards for their unceasing efforts.



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UNIT STRUCTURE

Most unit commanders receive a great deal of latitude in carrying out the general orders of their superiors, even in large-scale operations. Well-regarded commanders often are solicited for ideas in the planning process and have “unofficial” authorization to improvise a new plan of attack (or even strategic withdrawal) if the operation’s objectives appear to be unattainable. If their improvisation produces a failure, however, they may make a powerful enemy of their commanding General.

The structure of individual League units varies according to the branch of service involved, as described below.

BATTLEMECH

A Colonel commands a ‘Mech regiment, with individual battalions under the command of a Captain or Major (depending on unit age and the individual’s length of service). A full-strength regiment consists of 108 BattleMechs, 18 AeroSpace Fighters, and a full complement of support personnel (Techs, Scouts, engineers, etc.). The AeroSpace wings of ‘Mech units are generally commanded by either a Commodore (if the regiment possesses its own DropShips) or a Lieutenant Commander (if the regiment possesses AeroSpace Fighter support only).

INFANTRY

Infantry divisions consist of roughly 8,000 soldiers and officers, ordered into either four or five regiments. Division commanders are generally Colonels, with Lieutenant Colonels commanding regiments. Majors or Force Commanders usually command battalions (400-500 men). Provincial units often assign regimental commanders the rank of full Colonel. Normally assigned at the battalion level, gun batteries attached to infantry units are controlled by either the battalion commander or an independent Gunnery Captain.

ARMOR

Armor regiments vary widely in size, depending on the composition of units assigned to them. Heavy tank regiments consist of 60-80 tanks, their crews and repair technicians, and a complement of HQ, support, and scout vehicles. Light tank/patrol regiments consist of between 100-120 combat and reconnaissance vehicles, and associated communications/relay facilities. Both types of units contain a total complement of 1,200-1600 men, under the command of a Major or Force Commander. The basic operational armor unit is the platoon, consisting of 10-15 vehicles and their associated personnel, which can be led by either a Lieutenant, Captain, or a Sergeant Major. Mobile artillery units, commanded by a Major or Gunnery Captain, usually consist of three batteries of four-six Long Toms or eight-twelve Sniper cannons and their crews, accompanied by three-five light armor platoons. A wing of Chameleon spotter planes sometimes supplement these units, especially when they are assigned to assault duty as part of an invasion force.

This is a hovertank crewmember of the Oriente Hussars. He was clandestinely photographed during secret maneuvers near the Canopian Border in late 3025.

AEROSPACE

AeroSpace units (JumpShips, DropShips, and AeroSpace Fighters), which are directly assigned to Marik Central Command, are still organized under the official term “fleets,” even though the term has had little practical meaning since the destruction of the FWLS Pleiades and FWLS Arcturus, the last surviving star cruisers of the once-magnificent Marik warship flotilla, in the early days of the Second Succession War. In the current parlance, a fleet consists of three to six JumpShips (with a combined carrying capacity of 10-15 DropShips) and their standard complement of crew, gunners, and AeroSpace Fighters. A fleet commander generally holds the rank of Admiral or Vice Admiral, while JumpShip commanders receive the rank of Lieutenant Admiral. DropShip captains generally hold the rank of either Commodore or Captain, although commanders of Regular ancestry commonly refer to themselves by the ancient honorary title of Virdan (“starrunner”). The 30-man marine detachments assigned to each DropShip are commanded by a Captain, who has absolute authority over the ship’s security, gunnery, and perimeter defenses during planetfall.



SPECIAL SUPPORT

Special support forces (atmospheric airship squadrons, naval units, paratroops, rangers, Liberation Units, and so on) are generally organized at the battalion level under a Colonel or Major, and contain anywhere from 100 to 300 men each. Generally attached directly to one of the four military district HQs, these units are detailed to planetary garrisons or assault forces when needed. On other occasions, Liberation Units (LUs) and rangers may receive their orders directly from a Marshal, and operate in-dependently behind enemy lines for periods of months or years.

Depending on the size and strategic importance of the world, planetary static defense garrison units, commonly referred to as SDUs, can be commanded by anything from a Captain to a full Colonel. SDU commanders control both the urban defense of a planet’s major cities and the operations of its on-world mobile military forces (including infantry and artillery, wet navy, and atmospheric airforce). During enemy assaults, the SDU commander is supposed to defer to the ranking member of the regular on-planet garrison, but in practice, the relationship between the two is often quarrelsome.

Andurien AeroSpace Fighter Pilots are renowned for their daring tactics and maneuvers. Their colorful uniform shows that they enjoy standing out in a crowd.

Marik Ranks



Oriente Ranks



RANKS

Within the provinces of the Free Worlds League, there is considerable variation in the organization of military ranks and titles. Furthermore, the troops provision of the Document of Incorporation allowed military structures of the three founding states to remain essentially intact following the Treaty of Marik, and states that joined the League subsequently also invoked the same provision. In the course of seven centuries, numerous Captains-General and dozens of Acts of Parliament have sought in vain to impose a regularized scheme upon the various titles and organizations used by the provinces. The traditions built up over hundreds of years make the task of simplification and regularization almost impossible, except for the regular forces such as the Navy and the Free Worlds Regulars.

Over the years, local military organizations have followed the pattern established by one or another of the major provinces. In the earlier centuries of the Free Worlds League's history, four provinces were greatly significant—the Marik Commonwealth, the Duchies of Oriente and Andurien, and the Principality of Regulus. Following the treachery of the Selaj, the Regular organizational style, by far the most structured and articulated, was almost completely eliminated from the provinces that had followed it.

Since the outbreak of the Succession Wars, nearly every province in the League has sought to streamline its ranking scheme and hierarchy to follow one of the three major provinces (Marik, Oriente, and Andurien). The three organizations vary only slightly in number of officer and enlisted ranks. The Marik organization has seven officer and seven enlisted grades; Andurien, seven and seven; and Oriente, six and seven. Certain differences exist between the three hierarchies, as illustrated below.

COMPARATIVE RANKS		
Marik	Andurien	Oriente
<i>Officer Ranks</i>		
Captain-General	Major General	-
General	Lieutenant General	General
Colonel	Colonel	Colonel
Lieutenant Colonel	-	-
Force Commander	Major	Major
Captain	Flag Captain	Captain
—	Force Captain	-
Lieutenant, sg	Lieutenant	Lieutenant, sg
Lieutenant, jg	-	-
Lieutenant, jg	-	-
<i>Enlisted Ranks</i>		
—	Master Banner	Banner
—	Banner	-
Sergeant Major	-	Sergeant Major
Master Sergeant	-	Master Sergeant
Staff Sergeant	Serjeant	-
Sergeant	Junior Serjeant	Sergeant.
—	Thegn	-
Corporal	Corporal	Corporal
Private, FC	Private	Private, FC
Private	-	Private

COMMISSIONED RANKS

General

General is the highest commissioned rank in the Free Worlds, except for the Captain-General himself and the four Marshals who command the military districts. In League forces, which follow the Marik organization, there is no differentiation among Generals. Precedence is determined by length of service; thus, the most senior Generals are those who have served the longest. In Marik formations, Generals are formally ranked based on favor or merit, subject to the Marik's personal determination.

In Oriente, seniority is based on academy or graduating class rather than term of service. In case of two graduates from the same year, academy has precedence over officer training, and class standing is the ultimate determining factor.

In Andurien, there are two grades of general: Major General and Lieutenant General. Ranking among Major Generals is by length of service, but Lieutenant Generals are ranked arbitrarily by the Duke/Duchess of Andurien. The reason for the bilevel hierarchy is the Oath Edict of 2914, which allowed prominent landowners to receive a General's commission regardless of previous military experience. Most such landowners become Lieutenant Generals. Few of these ever hold field commands, and fewer still are promoted to Major General.

Colonel

The rank of Colonel generally denotes command of a regiment. Colonels command more than 90 percent of all regiments in Free Worlds and provincial service. This rank is also the honorary grant to a provincial ruler in the Free Worlds military. It is also generally assigned by contract to mercenary regimental commanders. In the Star League era, any Virdan in the Free Worlds navy and any military attaché from another member-state is accrued the rank of Colonel. In Andurien space, any Colonel of ten years' standing is given a knighthood and honorary Lieutenant Generalcy.

Lieutenant Colonel

This rank exists only in the Free Worlds military and in the Marik military. It was created to allow officers who had not yet been promoted to Colonel to command regiments, thus brevetting them to act on equal footing with their superiors. In principle, this brevet would be in effect only until a full promotion could be approved or a replacement Colonel could be appointed. In practice, however, this rank has allowed some of the more stringent requirements of the Marik military code to be circumvented, without creating many additional Colonels. Both regimental commanders and senior battalion commanders may hold the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Force Commander/Major

This rank applies to battalion commanders, as well as commanders of garrison troops smaller than regimental size. In earlier eras, Majors generally commanded DropShip/JumpShip troops (marines). This rank is the lowest of the so-called "Field Grades," denoting officers that command formations capable of acting independently, (Below Major, officer ranks are referred to as "Company Grades.") The Force Commander is present only in the Marik military, and the Major exists in the League, Oriente, and Andurien military.



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Captain

The highest rank of the "Company Grades," Captain applies to company command. In addition to skill requirements, promotion to Captain generally occurs upon fulfillment of merit conditions, which vary considerably from province to province. Free Worlds military historians suggest that the honorific "Captain-General" reflects this elitist aspect of the military hierarchy, separating the "band of noble Captains" (and higher ranks) from lower grades of officers and all enlisted personnel. Indeed, tradition in the Marik Commonwealth excludes any Marik scion from consideration as Captain-General unless he has reached the rank of Captain within three years of graduation from a military academy.

In Oriente, the extremely lean officer corps places a great deal of administrative burden on Captains, who serve as the bureaucratic arm of the officer hierarchy. In Andurien, a special Captaincy exists for liaison and other staff purposes. Such officers are called "Flag Captains," while Force Captains command field formations.

Lieutenant

The lowest rung of the officer corps, Lieutenants are either enlisted personnel promoted through the ranks or military academy graduates. Lieutenants in the field command platoon and lance formations or serve as staff officers. Lieutenants are divided into "senior grade" and "junior grade" (abbreviated "sg" and "jg"; sometimes denoted as 1st and 2nd Lieutenant). In Andurien, however, no such distinction exists.

PROVINCIAL MILITARY ORGANIZATION

Across the Free Worlds, many minor variations of three primary hierarchies exist, due to local government edicts and traditional grants and dignities. Below is the military organization used by each state. However, few states, especially the smaller ones, adopt the exact pattern set by their larger cousins. Note that one world is even listed twice. (Major states are listed in boldface.)

Marik

Albert Falls, Athena, Alphard, Alula Australis, Ashburton, Autumn Wind, Bainsville, Bella I, **Border Protectorate**, Cajamarca, Callison/**SH**, Caseraigne, Castor, Chalouba, Chertan, Conakry, Connaught, Diamantina, Dieudonne, Dirusbacken, Dubhe, Epsilon, Eromanga, Gallatin, Gannett, **Gibson**, Gomiesia, **Graham-Marik**, Helm, Holt, Home, Ibarra, Ibstock, Kakada, Kyeinnisan, Loongana, **Marik**, Mauripur, McAffe, Meadowvale, Mundrabilia, Nathan, Nestor, Nockatunga, Norfolk, Oliver, Pilpala, Pingree, Promised Land, **The Protectorate**, Rchamba, **Rim Commonality**, Rochelle, Savannah, Scheuerheck, Sheridan, Simpson Desert, Sirius, Sorunda, Sterling, **Stewart**, Tanis Australis, Trinidad, Tuamotu, Uhuru, Wing, Wolof.

Oriente

Aconcagua, Alorton, Amity/**SH**, Antipolo, Atzenbrugg, Aylmer, Ayn Tarma, Barlaston, Berenson, Bernardo, Bordon, Bowang, Cap-Rouge, Cerillos, Cole Harbor, Corbeanca, Curaumilla, Dalcour, Danais/**SH**, Futuna, Galisteo, Ghaziabad, Goodna, Goth Khakar, Granera, Guangzho, Harsefeld, Hazeldean, Hiratsuka, Huntington, Iknagoro, Ipswich, Irian, Isabela, Kali/**SH**, Kendall, Kilarney, Kiyev, Kogi, Kutludugun, Kwamashu, Lahti, Landfall, Lepaterique, Ling, Maderas, Mansu-ri, Menkalinan, Merton, New Assam, Newcastle, **Ohren**, **Oriente**, **Orloff**, Panjang, Park Place, Ruschegg, Sackville, Samanvih, San Nicolas, Saonara, Sciedam, Second Chance, Shiloh/**SH**, Shuen Wan, Siendou, Sierra, Stotzing, Talitha, **Tamarind**, Tormentine, Valli'yevskiy, Van Diemen, Vikindu, Wasat, **Zion**.

Andurien

Abbey, Al Jubaylah, **Andurien**, Asellus Australis, Asellus Borealis, Bayindir, Bismarck, Butzfleth, Camlann, Cascade, Chagos, Chilung, Cirebon, Claybrooke, Colfax, Cronulla, Dalton, Descenes, Edmondson, Elektrougli, Eleusis, Fadiffolu, Fagerholm, Fieferana, Furud, Gatchina, Glevakha, Gouderak, Griffith, Hednesford, Hindmarsh, Howrah, Ideyid, Jiddah, Kanata, Karachi, Karakiraz, Katiehong, Kearny, Kujari, Labouchere, Lengkong, Mackezie, Mankova, Megrez, **Mosiro**, Nilhau, Nullabor, Obrenovac, Oceana, Piriapolis, Prato, Preston, **Regulus**, **Regulan Free States**, Rexburg, Rohinjay, Romita, Rzhishchev, Scarborough, Schererville, Sharqah, Shasta, Siendou, Tapachula, Tellman's Mistake, Thermopolis, Togwotee, Umka, Vakarel, Wallacia, Watermael, Westover, Wilkes, Wisconsin, Yanchap, Zortman.

ENLISTED RANKS

Banner

A special grade in the Oriente and Andurien military, Banner has no equivalent in the Marik Commonwealth or the Free Worlds League. The rank equates to a senior grade of sergeant, and, along with a Sergeant's usual duties, the Banner has the honor and responsibility of bearing regimental or other flags in battle. As this honor is granted only to enlisted personnel of great loyalty and long service, only the most senior NCOs will be promoted to this dignity. In Andurien, where two grades of Banner exist, the rank carries more real authority than that of Lieutenant, which technically outranks it.

Sergeant/Serjeant

There are a number of grades of Sergeant in each military force's hierarchy. (The spelling "Serjeant" is peculiar to Andurien.) Although the duties vary, each organization validates the long-standing adage that Sergeants truly direct the operations of the army. Sergeants permeate such branches of the armed service as the quartermaster corps, the scouts, technical support, construction engineers, cooks, chandlers, drillmasters, clerks, and medics. The officer training program draws more recruits and civilians than the army's sergeants, and ambitious enlisted men will more often set their sights on a Sergeant Major's stripes than on a Captain's bars.

Thegn

Pronounced "thane," this rank is present only in Andurien space. Established during the conquest of the Periphery more than four hundred years ago, Thegn is bestowed to reward the service of enlisted personnel. A Thegn has little more responsibility than a Corporal, but will command slightly greater respect from superiors.

Corporal

The second-lowest rung in the enlisted hierarchy, Corporals (and Thegns) command squads. In motorized formations, the Corporal is often the driver or pilot or mans the main turret of the vehicle.

Private

The lowest rank in the military, Privates are "grunts," especially in the infantry. Their lot varies from skilled soldier to cannon fodder, depending on their unit and leader. Except in Andurien space, the separate rank of Private, First Class" (abbreviated "pfc") is awarded almost exclusively on the basis of seniority.



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MILITARY UNIFORMS

What's that? Where's my uniform? Well, lessee, I had one once. Hotter than spit to wear in here during a fire-fight, I can tell you that. Oh, wait, now I remember. I got the shirt wrapped around a leaky coolant pipe inside. That thick cloth was finally good for somethin'

—Transcript of interview with Marik Militia Captain Robert Stinson, 3023

The profusion of military attire among Free Worlds League forces is truly one of the army's most extraordinary features. It is a wonder to me that the different units of the League don't spend half their time shooting at each other.

—Excerpt from House Steiner intelligence report, 2813

The garb of the League's military forces is decidedly not uniform. Each of the League's three major provincial powers—Marik, Oriente, and Andurien—has evolved its own clothing traditions, styles, and colors. The situation is further complicated by the fact that many warriors find standard issue uniforms "confining" or "inadequate", and improvise their own personalized battle garb. When seen together on a parade ground, the effect is not unlike the billiboo bird (the Regularan peacock) showing its plumage—a shimmering profusion of colors that leaves the unsuspecting onlooker dazed and confused.

Consequently, inexperienced enemy reconnaissance patrols have difficulty identifying Marik forces. It is hoped that the comments below will aid ComStar field personnel in making these distinctions.

DRESS UNIFORMS

The diversity of League military garb is most pronounced in regard to the dress uniforms worn during occasions of ceremonial importance.

The most elaborate dress uniform, unsurprisingly, is worn by members of Andurien's provincial forces. It consists of a white jacket over buff pin-striped trousers and matching buff dress shoes. A sash and belt worn over the jacket bear the colors of the wearer's regiment, and are linked together by a metal circle bearing Andurien's emblem. Rank insignia is displayed on both cuffs, and the jacket also has studded shoulder pads that are dyed according to the wearer's rank—purple for senior officers, vermilion for junior officers, and rose for enlisted men.

At the other end of the spectrum is the plain attire favored by the Duchy of Oriente. The Oriente dress uniform consists of a form-fitting white twill coverall, unadorned save for a brown belt with a buckle bearing the Grand Duchy's insignia, and two studded vertical rose stripes across both shoulders. Rank insignia is displayed on the right cuff, and unit insignia on the left. Officers who wish to add a dash of color to their attire sometimes wear their service braid on the right arm of their dress whites.

The dress uniforms of the Free Worlds Guards, Marik Militia, and Regularan Hussars fall between these two extremes. Both the Guards and the Militia wear a pleated, long-sleeve jacket (colored rose with a purple front piece for the Guards, and deep purple for the Militia) over white stirrup pants. The trousers of the Guards also have a thin buff vertical stripe running down both legs. The Regularans wear dark blue jackets (cut like those of Andurien, but with much less elaborate detail) and matching trousers; enlisted men also wear a dark blue cap as part of the uniform.



CONVENTIONAL TROOPS

Artillery, armored vehicle crew, and infantry uniforms differ less between provinces than those of other branches of the military services. All such troops, regardless of provincial affiliation, wear a full-length coverall covered by a combat vest, helmet, gloves, and boots. The outfit's outer garments offer varying degrees of protection against enemy fire; the League Regular and Regular troops wear full torso armor, while Marik, Andurien, and Oriente forces favor a hybrid that provides a triple layer of titanium around the shoulders and chest, combined with a much thinner layer of kevlar around the lower torso and abdomen (substantially lowering the vest's total weight and increasing the wearer's mobility). The League-issue boots are made of leather or thorn-hide with thick rubber soles and extend almost to the knee; many models contain an ankle sheath for a dagger or throwing knife.

Although lightweight and providing less protection than the helmets worn by MechWarriors, the conventional helmet is still loaded with useful features. The chinstrap and side-panels contain short-range communication transmission and reception equipment, while the glare-reflective goggles contain infrared sights. The center stripe of the helmet is color-coded with the provincial affiliation of the unit: magenta for League units, deep purple for the Marik Commonwealth, yellow for Oriente, green for Andurien, and crimson for Regulus.

SENIOR OFFICERS

Senior officers' uniforms differ not because of branch, but because of their principality. The only common denominators are their white, calf-length boots (usually adorned with buckles and other baubles) and their gold shoulder braid.

An Andurien senior officer wears a tunic made of kreccht hide (a tough, thick material that provides some protection against projectile weapons), which is dyed maroon. The buff trousers are made from the heavy but comfortable wool of the Ryerson terrelli. Down the front of the tunic are several large, gold buttons bearing the inscription of the wearer's principality. Bright gold edging lines the sides and front of the tunic. Rank insignia is worn on the right gold cuff, and the wearer's unit insignia (if any) is worn on the left gold cuff. A Colonel wears one gold braid, a Lieutenant General wears two, and a Major General wears three.

In units that follow the Oriente uniform code, senior officers wear plain gray tunics and gray trousers. Both are made of synthon, a synthetic material that is very resistant to tearing and ripping. Inside the tunic are thin strips of armor plating to protect the wearer. Epaulets on the shoulders sport the officer's branch and unit insignia. A Colonel wears one braid, and a General wears two.

Marik Commonwealth and League senior officers wear heavy, dark blue, cotton jerseys, with armor plating inserts. Gold trousers with purple edging, a gold ascot, and a purple sash are also included. On the left pocket is the officer's unit insignia, and on the right pocket is the officer's branch insignia. A Lieutenant Colonel wears one gold braid, a Colonel wears two, a General wears three, and, when in the field, the Captain-General wears five gold braids.

This Oriente Fusilier infantryman has had his picture plastered on posters across Oriente as part of a new recruiting drive. Although a member of the Fusiliers, he has never seen action other than behind a camera. In civilian life, he worked as a commercial model.

MECHWARRIORS

MechWarriors of the Free Worlds League wear uniforms resembling those of the other Successor States. The extremely hot environment inside the 'Mech cockpit forces the MechWarrior to wear a cooling jacket, which covers the torso. A wide utility belt with the eagle of the Free Worlds League encircles his waist. Units allow their MechWarriors to stylize their neurohelmets however they desire; most, however, sport the eagle on the front. Biofeedback apparatus, connected to various parts of the body, plugs into the back of the neurohelmet.

Marik Commonwealth MechWarriors wear a gold sleeveless and legless tunic, gold boots, and heavy brown gauntlets. Rank insignia is worn on the left gauntlet. In Oriente units, the MechWarrior's tunic is Oriente gray, as are his boots. Rank insignia is displayed on the right shoulder. Andurien MechWarriors wear purple tunics and light blue boots, and their rank insignia is also on their right shoulder.



FIGHTER PILOTS

Free Worlds League AeroSpace Fighter Pilots wear a jumpsuit that totally covers the body. Interwoven in the suit are many sensors and regulators that ensure that high-g maneuvers have no ill effects on the pilot's body. Although lightweight, the suit is extremely thick to protect the pilot from the frequent jostling inside the cockpit. In addition, knee, hip, shoulder, and elbow pads are also worn. The belt contains environmental controls that connect to various parts of the body; by operating some of these knobs, the pilot can increase or decrease the amount of oxygen and his temperature. This is very important because when traveling from deep space to atmosphere, the temperature changes from freezing cold to boiling hot in milliseconds. All the regulators and sensors connect to the full white helmet, which in turn plugs into the fighter console.

Naturally, the color and frills of the uniform depend on the pilot's principality. Marik Commonwealth and League pilots wear dark purple suits with gold edging. Oriente style is a buff suit with white edging and pink trim. Finally, Andurien and Regulus pilots wear black and red striped suits with purple edging.

SUPPORT PERSONNEL

Techs, astechs, and other support personnel wear the same basic garb. The outfit consists of a yellow synthweave coverall, which is thick enough to protect the wearer from acid spills but thin enough to allow ease of movement and comfort while working in stifling environments. The coverall has many pockets and loops to hold tools, small parts, and portable computers. Rank insignia is worn on the chest of the coverall.

This veteran Tech is wearing a fairly standard technician's outfit, covered by a workman's apron with a large butt pack to hold small tools, bolts, spanners, and the like.



BATTLEMECH REGIMENTS

The following section contains brief descriptions of the military units that comprise the League armed forces.

FREE WORLDS LEAGUE UNITS

Parliament shall allocate sufficient funds to raise, train, provision and supply a Regular Army, and shall...supply funds annually to maintain and extend these forces.

—Document of Incorporation

Free Worlds Guards

In the first session of the first Parliament in 2272, Parliament carried out the terms of the Document of Incorporation, commissioning ten regiments of infantry and armor. Authority over these regiments was given to the Ministry of Defense in peacetime and to the Captain-General in wartime. Today, the three BattleMech regiments of the Free Worlds Guards are the core of the military forces available to the Captain-General in his ongoing war against the Lyran Commonwealth. Under the terms of Resolution 288, these regiments are personally loyal to the Marik, rather than to any particular province or House (or, for that matter, Parliament). In a tradition established by Thaddeus Marik in 2804, every new Marik receives a renewal of a personal oath of loyalty.

The Guards vary considerably in quality and cohesion. Some units are well-equipped and well-trained; others seem to be a revolving door for personnel—especially leaders—and often have difficulty obtaining repairs or equipment. Nonetheless, many of these regiments have long traditions, some dating back to the early years of the Free Worlds League. In many ways, the Guards are the most critical troops in the Free Worlds, as Parliament is obliged to appropriate funds for them, and they have no loyalties to any province.

Unit Name: 1st Guards

CO: Colonel Bartholomew Alcála

Experience Level: Elite

'Mech Weight: Heavy

Fighter Weight: Light

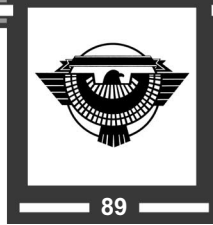
Unit Profile:

First constituted by Peter Marik in 2426 as an assault unit, this regiment was designed for securing important locations and for establishing beachheads. Shortly after the Free Worlds began building 'Mechs in the middle 25th century, the unit was converted to a 'Mech regiment. During the tenure of Gerald Marik, the 1st Guards were summoned back to "defend" Atreus; Gerald's daughter Elise used the 1st to arrest a number of MPs, touching off the Civil War. During the Succession Wars, the 1st has been one of the best-led and potent offensive threats in the Marik's arsenal.

The 1st consists of two battalions of heavy 'Mechs and one of medium 'Mechs. The finest technicians and support personnel are attracted to the 1st; in fact, the unit trains apprentice Techs to assume positions of greater authority in other regiments. Traditionally, the 1st holds open two 'Mech positions and one Tech position each year for Academy graduates.

The Guards are currently commanded by Colonel Bartholomew Alcála, a handsome, powerfully built man who is an extremely competent 'Mech commander. Alcála understands strategy well. He has, however, made some enemies by disagreeing with his superiors over the conduct of campaigns, which may have kept him from advancing to higher rank like his predecessor, Marshal Toshio de Medici.

Unit Name: 2nd Guards
CO: Colonel Josiah Kimbolton
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Light



Unit Name: 3rd Guards
CO: Colonel Albrecht Kiel
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium

Unit Profile:

The first 'Mech unit to be specifically commissioned by Parliament was the 2nd Free Worlds Guards, created by the Defense Act of 2464. Like the 1st, the 2nd has a strong tradition that instills considerable pride in the few admitted to its ranks. The motto of the 2nd is "Ever Faithful"; it has never breached the Captain-General's trust in them.

The 2nd saw heavy action during the First Succession War, when it spearheaded the attack into Terran Hegemony space. Although Captain-General Kenyon Marik promised it the opportunity to seize Terra during the Procyon campaign of 2789, the 2nd's secret base was betrayed and attacked. Shortly afterward, the thrust toward Terra was called off. Because the mercenary forces of ComStar had already seized Terra by this time, some believed (erroneously, of course) that ComStar was responsible for the attack on the 2nd Guards. Despite this setback, the 2nd saw a great deal of action on the Terran front, and later on the Capellan front during the First Succession War. When the Second Succession War broke out, the 2nd led the attack on Capellan-held Shiro III, which captured large quantities of 'Mech parts and supplies. To the consternation of the 2nd, however, this booty was used to reconstitute other units, rather than to rebuild and supply the 2nd itself. Afterward, the unit was reassigned to the Lyran front, where it has remained ever since. Though the unit has never raised a weapon against the government, suspicions about its loyalty kept it away from the war zone during the rebellion of Anton Marik.

Today, the 2nd consists of three battalions of medium 'Mechs, along with a reconnaissance company of light 'Mechs, light Aero-Space Fighters, and a fire lance of assault 'Mechs. Like the 1st guards, the 2nd attracts the best technical support personnel.

The commander of the 2nd Guards is Josiah Kimbolton, a much-decorated soldier. Kimbolton holds a Distinguished Service Award set off by two diamonds, representing more than 10,000 tons of documented kills (thus his nickname, "Can't Miss"), and is a member of the prestigious Order of the Saber. He has been a MechWarrior since he was 17, and worked his way up the ranks to his present position. He is a superb field commander, though he seems to be somewhat unequal to the task of planning overall campaigns. Politically naive, he has continually petitioned Parliament for reinstatement of the three remaining regiments of the Free Worlds Guards, though it is clear that this is unlikely to occur.

Atrean Hussars

Unit Name: Atrean Hussars
CO: Colonel Eleanor Wansi
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Medium

Unit Profile:

The Atrean Hussars is an extremely young regiment. Founded in 2923, Captain-General Samuel Marik equipped it largely with captured 'Mechs acquired from the Capellans. Samuel was facing a contentious Parliament, as provinces were just beginning to make extensive use of the Home Defense Act to withhold troop support from the Captain-General. Accordingly, Samuel hoped to create a unit loyal to him personally. Although the Hussars have been extremely faithful, they have suffered because of their origins and lack of pedigree and competent leaders. (Appointment to a command in the Hussars is not very prestigious.)

The Hussars consist of one medium and two light battalions of 'Mechs, though there are a small number of heavy 'Mechs scattered throughout all three battalions. Although well supplied and equipped, they do not receive the best opportunities for combat or booty. This is partly due to their disagreeable commander, Eleanor Wansi, a veteran 'Mech commander. She was appointed to command the Hussars following the SAFE report on a plot to overthrow the Marik circulating among Hussar officers. Many commanders were transferred, demoted, or drummed out of the military. Wansi's appointment from outside the regiment outraged the Hussars. The ill-tempered Wansi has been quoted as saying that she would "trade all the Distinguished Service medals in the Hussars for a good DropShip." This has helped exacerbate tensions between the unit and the other League forces.

Atrean Dragoons

Unit Name: 1st Dragoons
CO: Colonel Alicia Denichuk
Unit Size: Regular
Experience Level: Elite
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Heavy
Unit Profile:

These 1st Dragoons is equipped with many heavy 'Mechs, primarily Crusaders and Archers. The unit has only recently returned to active status, as it was nearly eradicated during the rebellion of Anton Marik eleven years ago. Colonel Alicia Denichuk, a young MechWarrior with nearly a dozen awards of the Eagle Crest, presently leads this unit.

Unit Name: 11th Atrean Dragoons
CO: Colonel Omar Sandusky
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

The 11th was formed when the Free Worlds acquired Battle-Mechs in 2484. Assigned to the Lyran front, the 11th saw heavy fighting in the border wars, including a semi-legendary fight to the death over the world of Bolan in 2541, which effectively destroyed the regiment as a fighting force for nearly two centuries. During the tenure of Ewan Marik, the regimental banner of the 11th was turned over to Erin Chu, a former mercenary leader who had entered the Marik's service as a military advisor. Chu's skill and charisma helped her recruit a complete regiment of battleworthy veterans.

During the Succession Wars, the 11th has acquitted itself well, earning nearly three dozen Distinguished Service Awards. An interesting feature of the 11th is its extraordinary level of technical support and resupply, unusual for an otherwise unremarkable unit. Some have speculated, however, that this is due to the close ties between the unit's commander, Colonel Omar Sandusky, and the notorious businessman Alejandro Derida-Stewart.

Unit Name: 12th Atrean Dragoons
CO: Colonel Julian Langsdorf
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

This regiment has been reconstituted around the core of loyal MechWarriors who did not follow Anton Marik in rebellion. The unit has received better equipment and personnel than might be expected for one whose division banner was raised against Janos Marik, which has angered some members of the Free Worlds Guards and Marik Militia. However, the Marik has hedged his bets by appointing Julia Langsdorf, an old political crony, as regimental Colonel. Langsdorf has excellent experience as a 'Mech tactician, and is personally loyal to Janos Marik.



Marik Militia

The "mailed fist within the velvet glove," the Marik Militia has been the backbone of the Free Worlds League since about 2525, after the peace treaty between Albert Marik and Michael Cameron provided the Free Worlds with full access to Terran Hegemony technology. The Free Worlds troops were soon reorganized with fresh-from-the-production-line 'Mechs.

During the Reunification War of the late 26th century, the 1st and 3rd Militia regiments served with distinction in the campaign against the Magistracy of Canopus. The units captured enough enemy materiel to create a sixth regiment, stationed on Emris. Later, by 2700, the Militia forces had grown to 20 'Mech regiments.

The civil war of 2729-2734 produced the first rift in the Militia's loyalty to the Captain-General, as the 3rd and 8th Militia regiments defected to the cause of Oliver the Usurper. The peace settlement between Bertram and Oliver Marik granted the defectors full amnesty, and all the units were restored to active duty (though several of the commanding officers were "retired" over the next few years).

The sudden death of First Lord Simon Cameron threw the entire League into a furor over the future of the Star League. Between 2755-2760, in the wake of the Star League Council's resolution authorizing a doubling of House forces, eight new Militia 'Mech regiments were commissioned. Twenty-five years later, one of those new units, the 13th, would take part in the first Marik offensive of the Succession Wars, a brutal and stunningly successful assault on the Capellan JumpShip drydocks at Aldebaran.

During the long years of the Succession Wars, the Marik Militia has had its share of both successes and failures. The steadfast defense of the Militia units on Berenson, Bordon, and Van Diemen IV during the so-called "ComStar War" slowed the advances of the invading Steiner and Liao armies, and gave the Marik's supporters the time they needed to restore military funding to the beleaguered defense effort. Two of the Militia's most famous engagements occurred early in the 30th century, as the 10th and 14th Militia regiments spearheaded the successful takeover of Sirius in 2901, while the 6th regiment, supported by a large complement of DropShips and AeroSpace Fighters, dealt the Steiner forces at Loric a crippling blow.

Over the last half-century, however, the Militia's fortunes have declined, even as the Marik's power over League government has dwindled. In 2971-2973, Stephen Marik's ill-fated invasion of Loric ended in abject failure, doing long-term damage to the combat-worthiness of the 5th Militia. Two new regiments (30th and 31st) were commissioned and organized in 2980 to press the war effort in the face of Parliamentary opposition, but both supply and maintenance problems have plagued the units since their creation. Finally, in 3007, the 21st regiment suffered the final ignominy when its entire command staff was captured during a Lyran raid against Danais, forcing its personnel to be redistributed among the other surviving regiments.

During the Civil War of 3014, all but one Militia regiment remained loyal to Janos Marik. The 3rd Militia, which had been commanded by Duke Anton Marik for almost ten years, defected to his ranks at the outset of the war and wound up facing off against their old comrades, the 6th Militia, in a bitter but indecisive engagement for Sophie's World. After Anton's rebellion had been crushed, Janos Marik did not choose to show the same mercy that Bertram had offered his former foes two centuries earlier. He executed or imprisoned all the 3rd's officers, stripped the remaining members of their lands and titles, used the unit's equipment to hire Wolf's Dragoons, and declared the regiment "permanently disbanded and stricken forever from the Militia's history." Although these actions may have satisfied the Marik's taste for vengeance, they also antagonized a number of members of other Militia units, many of whom sympathized with the conflict of loyalties felt by the 3rd. This undercurrent of discontent is still very much alive in several of the Militia's regiments today.

Duncan Marik, overall commander of the Marik Militia and cousin of Janos Marik, is a popular commander whose ambition to be named Janos's successor is no secret. He plans to use the Militia's prominent position in the Lyran border assault forces to cement his claim. Duncan presides over a general staff that has performed effectively in the field despite internal dissension. Generals Hanford and Marik-Winston despise one another, and are constantly accusing the other of interfering with their own chain of command. The eccentric Nissan-Dodge traces his ancestry back to the merchant princes of 21st century Terra and claims to remember more than 20 of his past lives. Nonetheless, the slender Tech is a genius at dissecting and duplicating the latest captured enemy weaponry and ordnance.



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Unit Name: 1st Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Shanna del Rey
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Medium

Unit Profile:

Largely composed of light 'Mechs, the 1st Militia is best suited for hit-and-run raids and advance reconnaissance. Consequently, it is surprising that the unit's most heralded action in the last decade occurred during the bloody, tight-quarters fighting in the Skada Ravine on Megrez in 3018, when a routine garrison assignment turned into a full-scale Lyran assault. That battle earned Marcus Radatz (commander of the Perth River Strike Battalion) the Order of the Silver Hand and made an instant hero out of its current commander, Shanna del Rey. Del Rey's Orion single-handedly wiped out three Steiner 'Mechs (two Griffins and a Stinger that had encircled the rear of the Marik force and threatened to trap the battalion in a withering cross-fire. Her knack for telling homespun homilies about the engagement has made her an overnight vidtape legend.

The 1st Militia's San Anselm Air Wing is comprised of five Stingrays, two Cheetahs, and a recently captured Lyran Chippewa. Although its commander, Alison Gould, is one of the most decorated AeroSpace Fighter Pilots in the Marik Militia (with 14 kills to her credit) she readily acknowledges that the best flier in her group is Cassandra "Sassy Cassie" Blake, a 21-year-old less than two years out of the New Olympia Flight School. Already, Blake has earned her ace's patch and has been given the honor of piloting the much-prized Chippewa, queen of the Steiner AeroSpace forces.

Unit Name: 2nd Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Philip Ortega
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Light

Unit Profile:

The 2nd Marik Militia, long a mainstay of Lyran border defense forces, is currently in a period of transition. Though its command personnel and main strike unit, the much-renowned Ridge Riders, have remained virtually intact for over 15 years, the remainder of the regiment was decimated during an ill-fated raid against the refineries at Algorab in 3020. After almost three years of refitting, the 2nd is back on the front line again, fielding a fire battalion composed of almost two full companies of raw recruits, and a recon battalion with barely more experience. Appleton's Fire Battalion, the "Fender Benders," has thus far managed to survive, thanks to the good instincts of the unit's lanky young commander, Graham "Fuzzy" Karker. Although the veterans in the outfit have tagged the battalion with a tongue-in-cheek nickname, privately they believe that the new unit could be the equal of its famous predecessor with time and a little luck.

It is not difficult to understand how the command Lance of the Ridge Riders has come to be known as the "Tongue Twisters." Lieutenant Colonel Barton "Black Bart" Burton, Burt Button, Martin Morton, and Billy "Butt" Bouton dress alike, share a similar physical build, pilot virtually identical Orions, and have even begun to talk alike. The consternation caused by their appearance, however, is insignificant compared to the confusion that their tightly coordinated tactics can cause on an enemy's line of defense.

Unit Name: 4th Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Vernon Cherenkov
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:



Unit Name: 6th Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Boris Ames-Marik
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Assault
Fighter Weight: Heavy
Unit Profile:

This recently commissioned regiment has been slapped together from the salvaged remains of Anton Marik's defeated forces and parts seized by the 6th Militia during its deep raid on Nanking in 3021. Its manpower shares equally questionable parentage, consisting mostly of raw Academy graduates and misfits from other Militia regiments who Duncan wanted out of his hair. To the General's horror, the new unit has elected to assume the number of the famed 4th regiment, which fell heroically while counterattacking a Liao invasion force besieging Berenson in 2840 (during the ComStar War). Despite his anger at the unit's effrontery, Duncan is too practical to waste valuable 'Mechs (even salvaged ones) to satisfy a personal pique. Consequently, the 4th is likely to see little action except garrison or light recon duty until its capabilities and new commanders have been better tested.

Duncan Marik despises no man or woman more than Colonel Vernon Cherenkov, the unit's new commander and a strong candidate for the position of most odious man in the galaxy (non-Kurita division). This veteran Archer pilot's twin loves for medicine and mayhem could barely be more incongruous. The Ares Conventions never addressed whether it is proper for a victorious warrior to dissect fallen enemy pilots on the battlefield in the name of science, but the practice earns the good doctor few close friends. Although there has never been any question about Cherenkov's battle or tactical competence, it is unknown whether he can overcome his personality quirks to become an effective leader.

Unit Name: 5th Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Allyce Verschwunden
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Light
Unit Profile:

The 5th is a struggling unit, which has never fully recovered from the beating it took on the planet Loric when it was ordered to remain on-world for two years as a guerrilla force after Steiner reinforcements drove off the rest of the garrison force. Though the survivors were resupplied upon their return and awarded medals for their efforts, most of the participants could not shake the losing image that they had picked up from spending 24 months with the enemy constantly nipping at their heels. Two members of the Cestus Battalion later committed suicide, while several other MechWarriors retired well before their time. Today's unit personnel, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the Loric invaders, seem to carry the same specter of mediocrity over their heads.

The organization of the 5th is unique among the Marik Militia, with a relatively thin layer of AeroSpace support but powerful mobile ground artillery and motorized infantry. Although the unit was designed for close assault, its striking power has been diluted as medium 'Mechs have replaced losses of heavy 'Mechs from the Assault and Strike battalions. As the 5th's current commanders are an uninspiring lot, any future improvement in the unit's fortunes will have to come from the ranks.

The 6th is clearly the shining gem of the Marik Militia. Specially designed for major invasion and assault operations, it carries enough aerospace firepower to rule the planetary skies in most engagements and has the enviable luxury of fielding three full-strength battalions of assault 'Mechs. The aptly named Death Watch Brigade, an elite assault battalion, is especially effective when held in reserve and committed to the fray when a weak spot in the enemy line is exposed.

Colonel Ames-Marik, the swarthy scion of one of the Marik clan's oldest cadet lines, is an efficient but rather colorless man who seems to be interested only in doing his job and being left in peace between assignments. Indeed, with the promotion of the unit's crusty former CO Saj Rahal to the post of Marshal of Oriente, the only real "character" left in the 6th's ranks is Captain Dick "Diver" Dickson, a long-time member of Wilhelm's Fire Battalion. Dickson has a near-fatal affection for using his jump-jet equipped Ostroc in the dangerous "Death from Above" maneuver.

Unit Name: 9th Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Montague Van Castille
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:



The 9th is another Marik Militia regiment in transition due to losses sustained during the civil war. Fighting for Janos Marik, it held its own against the combined forces of the 4th Regular Hussars and two battalions of the famed Wolf's Dragoons during the battle for planet Vanra. Unlike other damaged regiments, which have been rotated to rear lines for refitting, the 9th has remained in the heat of the action along the Capellan front, defending the planet Hassad against a Capellan raiding force in 3017 and invading and garrisoning the former Liao world of Goodna between 3019 and 3021. The unit has survived and prospered despite adversity because of the unit's crack cadre of Techs, whose uncanny abilities to scrounge or jury-rig parts keeps the regiment's battered 'Mechs in the field.

The unit's Senior Tech, Jasper Montoya, is loud, vain, and willing to deal with underworld characters or concoct elaborate scams to get the supplies he needs. He is one of a vanishing breed, a man with both broad scientific knowledge and the ability to teach that knowledge to those under his tutelage. It is rumored that Colonel Jaime Wolf himself tried to convince Montoya to join Wolf's Dragoons.

Although the 9th has a 300-year history of unbroken loyalty to the Marik, many of the current members of the regiment feel that they have won battles in spite of, rather than due to, the Captain-General. The 9th's most outspoken malcontent is Montoya's frequent partner-in-crime, MechWarrior Grady Sheen, a handsome, stocky young blond with a silver tongue and a flair for Four-Card Drax. Though Sheen's battlefield performance in his oft-rebuilt Phoenix Hawk LAM is unspectacular, his charm and card-sharking abilities have saved the unit from off-field difficulties more than once.

Unit Name: 10th Marik Militia
CO: Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Garibaldi
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

The 10th Marik Militia regiment, based on Bernardo, is a versatile, well-stocked unit that has served well over its long history. Its Cannery Attack Lance, the strongpoint of Colonel Albert Sung's Condition Red Assault Battalion, has been notorious among the League's enemies since its rear-guard sweep enabled the Marik to recapture Sirius in 2901. More recently, a company at the other end of the firepower spectrum, Captain Symington Beauregard Lee's Running Rebels (a scout/recon group comprised almost entirely of Locusts and Hermes IIs) achieved a similar fame during an urban engagement against heavy Steiner units on the planet Callison in 3020. Currently, the unit is assigned to garrison duty and is champing at the bit to get back into action.

Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Garibaldi is the Marik Militia's newest commanding officer, having ascended to the post less than nine months ago. If bloodlines have anything to do with battlefield competence, Garibaldi should prove to be a rousing success. His grandfather was a commander of the 10th, while his mother Athena piloted the Militia's Union DropShip "Sierra Madre" for many years.

Unit Name: 13th Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Chang Janewicz
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Light
Unit Profile:

Armed extensively with the unique sensor and communications equipment of the Hermes II, the 13th primarily conducts reconnaissance and deep penetration raids from its base on Irian. Their popular commander, Chang Janewicz, has bucked tradition by refusing to move up to a larger, better-armored 'Mech and still pilots his Hermes into the thick of battle.

Destroyed while raiding Hesperus II, the 13th was rebuilt from the surviving elements of the shattered 6th Militia after the Com-Star War. Their AeroSpace Fighters, Long Tom mobile artillery units, and two full companies of Archers and Catapults provide great long-range firepower, which can be very effective in an invasion or siege. Often, the unit works behind the lines with Marik Liberation Units. In the troubled years of Janos's reign, however, the 13th has spent most of its time on the home front, shoring up trouble spots where a scent of rebellion has been detected.

Unit Name: 15th Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Jake Hawkins
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Medium

Unit Name: 18th Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Isadara Alvares
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Heavy

Unit Name: 20th Marik Militia
CO: Colonel Mbangi Dombwesa
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Assault
Fighter Weight: Heavy

Unit Name: 23rd Marik Militia
CO: Lieutenant Colonel Adiss Sullivan
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Light

Unit Name: 30th Marik
CO: Colonel Azi Ochombo
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Light

Unit Name: 31st Marik Militia
CO: Lieutenant Colonel Millicent Anson
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium



PROVINCIAL FORCES

The provincial forces fielded by each of the League's principalities have been described as everything from the backbone of the League defense to the bane of its existence. Regardless of one's personal viewpoint, however, no survey of Free Worlds military forces would be complete without mentioning these separately maintained and controlled armies. From the tiny Duchy of New Assam (whose army consists of three regiments of infantry, four batteries of mobile artillery, and two battered Wolverines) to the powerful military establishments of Oriente and Andurien (which can each field five regiments of 'Mechs, several JumpShips, and about 50 infantry and armor regiments), the provincial forces are a constant thorn in the side of the Marik. Whether these armies participate in military campaigns can make the difference between military success or failure.

The existence of independent planetary armies has been an accepted tenet of the Free Worlds League since its inception, as no province wishes to place its protection solely in the hands of the central government. It was not until 2906, however, that the Captain-General's right to use provincial troops was called into question. Today, any principality that can muster a voting majority in Parliament can invoke the Home Defense Act and declare up to 75 percent of its army unavailable for League mustering. Virtually every principality has invoked the Act at least once over the past century, and Dame Catherine Humphreys of Andurien has invoked it for the entire 36 years of her reign. As a result, major offensives by the district Marshals and military planners of the LCCC have been severely curtailed.

Provincial units assigned to the League armed forces are nominally integrated into the normal chain of command, with regimental and battalion commanders receiving their general orders from Central Command. In practice, however, the tense relationship between the Marik and the provinces has forced the LCCC to handle these units carefully. In 3017, for example, the Border Protectorate withdrew two battalions of 'Mechs in the middle of a campaign after an argument between the commanding general of the invading force and the Border commander, Colonel Bradford Holmes. Thus, provincial troops have an autonomy formerly reserved for only the most elite regiments, and the LCCC ignores errors that would have caused a court-martial in earlier times. Unsurprisingly, this special treatment has roused ire among some of the Regular forces. During the post-invasion garrisoning of the captured Liao world of Wasat in 3019, a firefight almost erupted between the 9th Marik Militia and the Silver Hawk Irregulars.

Marik Guard

Unit Name: Marik Guard

CO: Colonel Takei Bryce-Marik

Experience Level: Elite

'Mech Weight: Light

Fighter Weight: Light

Unit Profile:

The provincial unit of the Marik Commonwealth, the Marik Guard has displayed its traditional red and yellow banner since the formation of the Commonwealth over eight centuries ago. The regiment distinguished itself in the 1st Andurien War, when the jump infantry repulsed a Capellan invasion of Ryerson. Equipped with 'Mechs in 2484, the Guard suffered heavy losses in the Callison and Megrez campaigns. It remained loyal to Bertram Marik during the Civil War, and was nearly destroyed when forces under Oliver Marik's general, the infamous Karel Vashkov, attempted to root them out of a defensive position on Ariel. Colonel Lionel Bryce-Marik elected to rebuild the Guard with light 'Mechs and LAMS, giving the regiment excellent reconnaissance capability as well as speed. Today, the unit is about three-quarters LAMS, with the heaviest 'Mech in the regiment being a light Hermes II.

A member of the Bryce-Marik family has commanded the unit for more than three hundred years. Although low in firepower, it has a reputation for bravery. The few Techs of the Guard are innovative, giving the unit some tactical advantages in combat. For example, the Techs pioneered a gyroscopic control system that allowed 'Mechs to better sustain the "fumbling" effect during atmospheric reentry. ComStar purchased the design for this innovative technology in 3023.

Fusiliers of Oriente

The greatest fighting force of the Duke of Oriente, the Fusiliers of Oriente have been the bulwark of the Free Worlds' Capellan march defenses since their creation in 2485. Unlike many provincial forces, the troops of Oriente have always responded to the call of the Captain-General. Over the course of the years, remnants of other 'Mech units have been assimilated into the Fusiliers to keep them at full strength. The 'Mech forces that march under the Fusiliers' banner are among the best in the Free Worlds.

General Beauregard Waslewski was given command of the Fusiliers eight years ago, after the previous commander, General Fyodor Mallory, was cashiered for embezzling unit funds. It was a low point in the history of the Fusiliers, who had gone for nearly two years without a major battlefield victory and desperately needed repair and resupply. Waslewski was not expected to provide any quick fixes, but merely be competent enough to keep the unit from being destroyed. Skeptics were surprised to find that the country boy from Les Halles was a superb tactician with good instincts and a fierce loyalty to Oriente. Within six months of his appointment, Waslewski had scored a major victory, seizing Carver across the Capellan border and capturing a House Liao DropShip. With the proceeds from this venture, he was able to underwrite badly needed repairs, regaining the Fusiliers' strength and prestige.

Unit Name: Ducal Guard

CO: Colonel Selim Halas

Experience Level: Elite

'Mech Weight: Heavy

Fighter Weight: Heavy

Unit Profile:

The oldest regiment in the Fusiliers, the Ducal Guard created by executive order in 2485. Presently, it consists of two heavy battalions and one medium battalion of BattleMechs and heavy AeroSpace Fighters. Visitors to the regimental headquarters are



usually awed by the flags and banners, the elaborate changing of the guard ceremonies, and the extensive pedigrees of the men and women of the regiment. The Ducal Guards bear the banners of eleven fallen regiments and pays reverence to their memory.

The commander of the Ducal Guard is Colonel Selim Halas, first cousin of Duke Christopher Halas of Oriente. Halas has served for more than 30 years in the Ducal Guard. He is given to abrupt changes of temperament, from being amiable to violently angry in the blink of an eye. Though astute and knowledgeable, he is sometimes rash and even foolhardy in the field.

The dress uniform worn by Lieutenant sg Marissa Morgan reflects the Principality of Oriente's pre-occupation with function over form. The uniform consists of a simple, virtually all-white twill coverall with matching white shoes. The brown belt bears the Oriente insignia on its buckle. Rank stripes are displayed on the right wrist, and unit insignia (commonly a miniaturization of

Unit Name: 1st Brigade
CO: Colonel Aaron Barksdale
Experience Level: Elite
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:



Like the Ducal Guard, the 1st Brigade has a long tradition of military service, yet it conveys an extremely different air. Whereas the Ducal Guard has always been known for bravery and honor, the 1st has always made cleverness and innovation its hallmark, resorting to unusual strategies and tactics to achieve its goals. While this tradition has served them well over the years, they often draw criticism from units both inside the Fusiliers and out. Nonetheless, alumni of the 1st Brigade have many distinctions, and a contingent of former MechWarriors of the regiment form the core of a 'Mech unit attached to SAFE, the notorious Dark Shadows Battalion.

The unit consists of a wide variety of 'Mechs. The first battalion contains several heavy units, including four modified Stalkers, and a patched-together Mackie that is more than six centuries old. The second battalion varies from super-light Stinger LAMs to medium Wolverines.. This unit performs reconnaissance as well as raiding functions for the unit. The third battalion is similarly diverse.

The unit is commanded by Colonel Aaron Barksdale, an unusual fellow given to unorthodox strategies. He works well with his people, believing that he can only succeed if he finds a use for everyone and everything under his command.

Unit Name: 2nd Brigade
CO: Colonel Ricardo Fuentes
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Heavy
Unit Profile:

The regimental banner of the 2nd has flown for as long as there have been Fusiliers of Oriente. During the rebellion of Duke Anton Marik, the 'Mechs of the 2nd were thrown into battle against Wolf's Dragoons and suffered enormous damage during several hard-fought battles. When the rebellion ended, the unit was combined with the shattered remnants of two Oriente Hussar regiments.

This action, though not unprecedented in the history of the Fusiliers, raised the hackles of many Oriente MechWarriors, especially those with long family traditions. The commander of the Ducal Guard, Colonel Selim Halas, demanded the regimental banner of the 2nd, but was rudely refused. The friction between the Guard and the 2nd has never completely subsided, and General Waslewski has been forced to keep them deployed at separate locations.

The 2nd Brigade consists of three medium 'Mech battalions with a large number of Hermes II 'Mechs. The third battalion is seriously undermanned, lowering the regiment's overall efficiency. Although the MechWarriors of the 2nd are, by and large, brave and skilled, they suffer from a lack of heritage and tradition. The commander of the unit, Colonel Ricardo Fuentes, is a veteran ex-mercenary who is much disliked by his fellow regimental leaders.

Unit Name: 3rd Brigade
CO: Colonel Coram "Old Cory" d'Youville
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

Commissioned during the Marik invasion of Canopus in 2581, the 3rd Brigade has long been the point unit of the Fusiliers. Nicknamed the "Corkscrews" and the "Fighting 3rd," the unit specializes in jumping from orbit, and often leads the assault when the Fusiliers are detailed to seize a planet. At the moment, with the peace on the Capellan front and quiescence on the Lyran front, the unit is close to full strength, and its personnel have survived long enough to be rated veteran on average.

The regiment varies considerably in strength and composition. In the unit are an assault battalion, which includes a dozen 'Mechs of more than 80 tons; a medium battalion with excellent AeroSpace fighter support; and a light battalion with more than 50 percent LAMS. Its commander is Colonel Coram "Old Cory" d'Youville, a bionic marvel who (it is joked) has had more MID operations than anyone in the Free Worlds League.

Unit Name: 4th Brigade
CO: Colonel Eve Hansi
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:



Also commissioned during the Canopus War, the 4th Brigade has many combat stripes to its credit. However, the unit is severely understrength because General Waslewski discovered a plot against the Free Worlds government involving several MechWarriors of the 4th. As a result, he has been conducting a series of investigations and courts-martial to uncover the traitors. The inquiries of SAFE have increased the 4th's distrust of the central government.

When at full strength, the 4th Brigade is well-equipped, with a light battalion of Locust, Spider, and Hermes II 'Mechs, and two medium battalions with a preponderance of Wolverine-M 'Mechs. The two medium battalions have heavy fire lances consisting of one Trebuchet, one Archer, and two Centurions.. Command of the 4th is presently in the hands of Colonel Eve Hansi, a SAFE officer detached from the Dark Shadows Battalion, who served for a time with the 4th Fusiliers before joining Intelligence.

Unit Name: 5th Brigade
CO: Colonel Pavel Bolton
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Heavy
Unit Profile:

The 5th Brigade was commissioned as the Star League's independent 208th Hussar Regulars before the Periphery rebellion. Regimental tradition and legend say that the unit refused to depart with Kerensky in 2784. Prized possessions of the regiment include a letter of commendation with the Protector's signature and a scratchy two-minute video showing an Orion BattleMech destroying the gate to the Star League Presidential Palace on Terra.

The unit chose to remain in the Inner Sphere as a free mercenary, taking the name "Bolton's Rangers." Signing on with House Kurita, the Rangers participated in the great invasion of the Federated Suns during the First Succession War. Like

many mercenaries, however, the unit suffered treachery at the hands of the Draconis military bureaucracy, and shortly thereafter contracted with the Duke of Oriente to participate in the Free Worlds' invasion of the Capellan Confederation. In 2845, when House Halas succeeded to the ducal dignity, the unit was offered regular status as the 5th Brigade, which it accepted.

Today, after suffering heavy losses during a number of campaigns in Oriente service (which has led to its classification as regular), the 5th is one of the most battle-hardened units in the Free Worlds League. Its Terran origins lend it additional mystique, distinguishing it from its fellow Fusilier regiments.

The command of the 5th traditionally rested in the Bolton family, which has commanded it since its founding. The present scion is Pavel Bolton, a 32-year-old hellion who is neither the best nor the worst of the Fusiliers' COs. He has political ambitions, but has determined that he must first distinguish himself on the battlefield.

The 5th has the heaviest ordnance in the Fusiliers. Classified as heavy, the first two battalions include ten Marauder-Ms carrying heavy lasers instead of PPCS. The third battalion is classified as assault, consisting of Orion, Awesome, Goliath, and Stalker 'Mechs.

Protectorate Guard

Unit Name: Iron Guards
CO: Colonel Bradford Holmes
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

The unit insignia of the Iron Guards bears the legend "Never Surrender." This attitude epitomizes the long tradition of the regiment, which has served both the Border Protectorate and the Free Worlds faithfully for nearly five hundred years. Because this all-volunteer unit is often used as a spearhead, personnel turnover is great; members are a curious combination of grizzled Mech-Warriors and young, talented 'Mech pilots. Officers in the Iron Guards often use somewhat unorthodox tactics to achieve objectives, relying on the skills of their unique charges.

Unit Name: Steel Guards
CO: Colonel James "Gentleman Jim" Stroud
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:



In 2799, Captain-General Kenyon Marik captured the world of Alula Australis from the Lyrans in a campaign so swift that it left a pair of Lyran mercenary battalions stranded planetside. Instead of forcing the unit to surrender, the Marik accepted its pledge of loyalty and allowed it to remain on the planet as a garrison force. When the planets Alula Australis, Denebola, and Zosma united to form the Border Protectorate, the former mercenaries became the first regiment of the Protectorate Guard.

The hereditary command of the Steel Guards is in the Stroud family. James "Gentleman Jim" Stroud, the current regimental Colonel, is a direct descendant of José Stroud, the mercenary commander who first pledged loyalty to Kenyon Marik. Jim has shown himself to be a wily negotiator with a packrat mentality toward any supplies or materiel that fall his way, commenting, "You never know when you might find somethin' valuable."

The Steel Guard is a powerful unit, with two battalions of medium 'Mechs and a battalion of assault 'Mechs. Three of its BattleMasters are said to have been part of the mercenary contingent that defended Alula Australis over two centuries ago.

Sirian Lancers

These three much-battered regiments are the sole remains of the once great 'MechWarrior legions of Sirius, who, in the height of the Star League's greatness, once fielded almost a dozen regiments of crack BattleMechs. Almost a third of these units were destroyed during Stefan Amaris's takeover of the Star League and in the bloody civil war that ensued. Nearly another third joined General Aleksandr Kerensky into exile in the Periphery in 2784. Since 2793, when Sirius Lancers and its client states Procyon, Pollux, and Graham IV were "liberated" by Kenyon Marik, the Sirians have fought under the Free Worlds League banner. Its once-mighty 'Mech factories have long ago been reduced to rubble, though its Star League designed 'Mech repair depot still remains almost fully operational.

Since Primus Louis Grise's bloodless coup three years ago, he has drastically altered the structure of the Sirian Lancers to serve his personal agenda. Grise has transferred the bulk of the unit's best warriors and best-maintained 'Mechs into the 2nd Lancers, leaving the 1st and the 3rd staffed with raw recruits and burned-out veterans piloting a mismatched collection of Tech's nightmares. The 2nd's commander, Jenny Twofeathers is a proud and beautiful woman whose ancestry traces back to the tribal chiefs of the Sioux Indians of Terra. One of the few locals who has his complete trust, she is an ardent supporter of the Primus's authority and now has the firepower to back him up.

Understandably, the impulsive, hot-headed Colonel Atir Atioff of the 1st Lancers and the sarcastic, cigar-chomping Colonel Alexander Zander, are not happy about losing their best equipment and personnel. Grise has notified the Marik and his military District Commanders, that due to Sirius's invocation of the Home Defense Act, only the 3rd Lancers will be available for League operations outside the Sirian Concordat.

Unit Name: 1st Lancers
CO: Colonel Atir Abloff
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Light

Unit Name: 2nd Lancers
CO: Colonel Jenny Twofeathers
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Heavy

Unit Name: 3rd Lancers
CO: Lieutenant Colonel Alexander "Smokestack" Zander
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Medium

Silver Hawk Irregulars

The Silver Hawk Irregulars, an outgrowth of the 2966 Treaty of Danais, constitute the mutual peacekeeping forces of the Silver Hawks coalition. As the Hawks draw units from each of their five member states, the quality of forces within the two regiments differs widely from company to company, and even from lance to lance—from the newer, well-supplied troops of Kalidasa and New Hope to the battered rustbuckets of the armies of Shiloh. The 'Mechs of the Irregulars are well supported with light AeroSpace Fighters and light tanks.

Though the Silver Hawks have staunchly invoked the Home Defense Act since forming their alliance, the Irregulars have hardly wanted for action over the past half-century, as their homeworlds have remained prime targets for assaults and raids. Their inconsistent battlefield record is dependent on the ability of regimental and battalion commanders to get their disparate forces to work together.

Unit Name: Falcons
CO: Colonel Michael Cameron-Witherspoon
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

Michael Cameron-Witherspoon of Callison, at 47, is considering retirement, but remains a savvy leader both on and off the field of battle. He encourages and rewards initiative in everyone from the lowest Scout on up, and he has an uncanny knack for spotting leadership potential in his men.

Unit Name: Gryphons
CO: Colonel Martha "Slice 'n' Dice" Zuritas
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Light
Unit Profile:

The Gryphons, who were generally regarded as a laughing-stock by Free Worlds military men along the Lyran front less than a decade ago, have dramatically turned their reputation around under the stern regime of Colonel Martha "Slice 'n' Dice" Zuritas. This fire-breathing leader who dispenses mayhem from the cockpit of her much-decorated Marauder has been compared to the Queen of MechWarriors, Black Widow Natasha Kerensky.

During a stay on the planet Oceana, a confrontation arose between Kendra Mullock, (Commander of the Black Dog Unit) and young Martha Zuritas, Ms. Zuritas did not appreciate Mullock calling her "Toadeyes" and retaliated by killing the commander with a dagger. Furious about the event, the Black Dog Company seized Ms. Zuritas, viciously beat her and finally lynched her, leaving her for dead. .

Miraculously, she did not die and underwent orthomedic plastic surgery to mend her destroyed features (leaving a few scars to remember her assailants by).

Unrecognizable because of her complete facial change, she returned to the Black Dogs and joined the company. The unit came to its end shortly thereafter when Zuritas walked into the barracks and filled the room with gunfire from her submachine gun. After the smoke-cleared she smiled and said, "Well doesn't that beat all. I didn't know it was loaded."

She currently commands the Gryphons for House Marik and has earned respect with the appropriate name "Slice n' Dice"

Oriente Hussars

Although not as prestigious as the Fusiliers of Oriente, the Oriente Hussars have a long and distinguished history. The Hussars' commander, General Anatoli Gotch, has been trying to instill an esprit de corps in his troops to little avail. Hussar MechWarriors resent the fact that the best equipment and supplies go to the Fusiliers. Although originally consisting of eleven regiments, the Hussars now have only five understrength regiments.



Unit Name: 1st Hussars

CO: Colonel Pierre Mondou

Experience Level: Veteran

'Mech Weight: Medium

Fighter Weight: Light

Unit Profile:

The Danais 1st Hussars has the largest troop strength of any Oriente Hussar regiment. Almost two companies of 'Mechs were lost during the recent Steiner raid against the Danais client state of Bondurant.

Unit Name: 2nd Hussars

CO: Colonel Caleb "Mad Dog" Covaleski

Experience Level: Regular

'Mech Weight: Light

Fighter Weight: Light

Unit Profile:

The 2nd Hussars has a well-earned reputation for taking the normal craziness associated with the lifestyle of a MechWarrior one step beyond. Often, the unit employs highly unorthodox strategies (especially for a lightly armored unit without artillery support) to gain their objectives. Though the unit's long-haired, boisterous commander "Mad Dog" Covaleski gets most of the credit for engineering the 2nd's unconventional reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, the men of the unit know that the real mastermind behind their operations is chief scout Calderon "Silent Cal" Benge, a slender, shy young man of 27. Cal's aversion to the limelight has thus far concealed the fact that he is one of the most ingenious military tacticians of the current age.

Unit Name: 3rd Hussars

CO: Colonel Irving Clifford

Experience Level: Green

'Mech Weight: Heavy

Fighter Weight: Medium

Unit Profile:

This regiment is heavily stocked with older-model 'Mechs (Archers, Griffins, Wasps) and lacks sophisticated on-board communications and tracking systems. Intra-unit coordination is good, and the 3rd Hussars exhibit particularly strong discipline under fire. Only actual field results will determine its quality, however.

Unit Name: 4th Hussars

CO: Lieutenant Colonel Geddy Carver

Experience Level: Regular

'Mech Weight: Light

Fighter Weight: Medium

Unit Name: 5th Hussars

CO: Colonel Millicent Toromov

Experience Level: Green

'Mech Weight: Light

Fighter Weight: Light

Sergeant Wilson Downs, a DropShip marine attached to the Oriente Hussars, is shown here in the standard dress uniform of the Free Worlds League armed forces. Like most League uniforms, this design is an amalgam of the dress garb of several different principalities, combining the dark purple of the Mariks with the lighter rose hue favored by Oriente, and adding the studded shoulder pads that adorn Andurien uniforms. The Sergeant's rank is denoted on the patch on his left wrist. The blue-yoked silver star around his neck is a Steiner campaign ribbon.

The Defenders of Andurien

The formidable MechWarrior force known as the Defenders of Andurien originated in 2514, when two battalions of 'Mechs were added to the planet's defense forces in response to rumors of a Capellan military buildup (which would culminate in the Second Andurien War in 2516). The 'Mech units acquitted themselves well in the Andurien wars, and grew steadily in size and reputation. It was on the diplomatic table—not on the battlefield—that the province of Andurien fell to the Capellans.

Like the Humphreys family itself, the Defenders of Andurien have a heritage of independence and willingness to stand against the League leaders when necessary. Forced out of Capellan-held Andurien, the Defenders settled on the planets Kanata and Granera, both just outside the Andurien province. The Defenders backed Oliver Marik “the Usurper” in the civil war against his sister Elise. In 2779, the Defenders participated in the attacks to capture the Andurien province once and for all. Faced with what Duke Innocents Humphreys called the “absolute insanity” of Thaddeus Marik's ambitious Operation Killing Stroke, Andurien invoked the Home Defense Act, placing three of its four regiments beyond the reach of the Captain-General's plans.



Since the ascension of Dame Catherine Humphreys to Andurien's throne, the Defenders have allowed the Captain-General the use of only one regiment. The rest of the units are less than one jump from the Principality's borders, while their own worlds have only rarely been subjected to attack by Capellan forces. Consequently, much of the combat experience possessed by the current

crop of MechWarriors in the Defenders has come from the elaborate planetary maneuvers that the unit's general staff delights in devising. Thus, even though the Defenders' five regiments are better equipped and supplied than any other Free Worlds 'Mech unit, their ability to withstand the rigors of an extended campaign is uncertain.

The Defender's commander, Major General Sir James Coker, is a white-haired, immaculately groomed gentleman of 55 who has held the post for well over half of Catherine's long reign. He is an effete, pedantic drillmaster and a compulsive stickler for detail. Many Free Worlds commanders ridicule Coker for his lack of campaign experience and his stubborn insistence on applying textbook principles to warfare. Nonetheless, even Coker's biggest detractors grudgingly concede that his spartan training regime keeps his troops in extraordinary physical trim and mental vitality. Similarly, although his training simulations lack the urgency of life-or-death situations, they are usually well conceived and executed, and teach a number of tactical or strategic “lessons.” Most members of the Andurien court tolerate him rather than like him.

Andurien has historically rebuilt units that have been partially destroyed in battle rather than raising new ones to keep a strong sense of tradition among the ranks. The one exception is the 2nd Defenders, which was disbanded during the latter days of the Second Succession War after the unit was decimated three times in battle within a decade. Legend holds that a Capellan shaman named Cephass cursed the 2nd after it sacked and burned his small rural village. To this day, the Defenders often speak of “Cephass's jinx” whenever a run of bad luck befalls them.

Unit Name: 1st Defenders

CO: Lieutenant General Xeng Garibaldi

Experience Level: Veteran

'Mech Weight: Medium

Fighter Weight: Heavy

Unit Profile:

The 1st Defenders Regiment is officially charged with the defense of the Court of Andurien and spends 90 percent of its time garrisoned on Andurien. Although this duty was truly a Herculean responsibility (since Andurien was a jewel much coveted by the Capellans), today the unit's role has become largely ceremonial. Nonetheless, the 1st continues to draw the cream of Andurien's MechWarrior crop and is regarded as the most prestigious duty to which an Andurien can aspire. Indeed, several of the posts in the unit are hereditary sinecures of noble families, such as the Chandlers of Tiber and the Grazzas of Shiro III.

Because of the 1st's role as a mobile home defense unit, all three of its battalions contain a polyglot of heavy, medium, and fight 'Mechs that can be adapted to a variety of needs. In addition, the unit possesses a staggering 26 lances of AeroSpace Fighters, artillery, and light and heavy tanks that greatly enhance its fighting and reconnaissance capabilities. The 1st appears to be ready for anything and has consistently outscored its regimental counter-parts on maneuvers for the past several years, but it has seen virtually no “live” combat action for almost ten years.

Unit Name: 3rd Defenders
CO: Lieutenant General Menio Drews
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

Of all the Andurien regiments, the 3rd Defenders is probably the most rabid supporter of the Duchess and detractor of Janos Marik. It is also one of the more recently blooded units, having participated in the defense of Shiro III in 3021 and Andurien's retaliatory raid against Betelgeuse later that year. As a result, one of its battalions has just been almost totally rebuilt, and the unit's support lances are not quite up to the level of the other Defender regiments.

Unit Name: 4th Defenders
CO: Lieutenant General Farrell "Flying Fish" Nogales
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Medium

Unit Name: 5th Defenders
CO: Colonel Jimmy "Jayhawk" Lee
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Medium

Unit Name: 6th Defenders
CO: Lieutenant General Mildred Humphreys
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Light



Stewart Dragons

The Stewart Commonality was the first principality to join the Free Worlds League after its inception. This union was far from voluntary; the Stewart Confederacy, as it was then known, erroneously believed that the Free Worlds was incapable of concerted effort against it.

There has never been much fallout from that initial conflict, and Stewart has long since served the League faithfully. Like the scions of most of the other states, its sons and daughters have marched to war in increasing numbers as the rate of bloodshed in the Succession Wars has increased. The number of capable MechWarriors has dwindled so that today, proud Stewart has only six battalions of 'Mechs. These two regiments consist of many battered and repaired 'Mechs, some of which have been heirlooms for centuries. Although their numbers have diminished, their courage and pride have grown by leaps and bounds, as if to compensate.

Unit Name: Home Guards
CO: Major-General Lao Jarreau-Stewart
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

The Stewart Home Guards consists of one heavy battalion, one light battalion, and one LAM battalion. In the last 18 months, the LAMs have seen a great deal of action along the Lyran front, which has imparted valuable experience. Still, the Stewart Drop-Ships that used to carry Crusaders and Goliaths now carry beat-up Wolverine-Ms and Hermes IIs.

The commander of the Home Guards is Lao Jarreau-Stewart, a rogue who fought and cheated his way to his present position. He has adopted the hereditary title of Major-General, a title that once meant command of more than a thousand BattleMechs. His fellow commanders much dislike him for putting on airs.

Unit Name: Juggernaut
CO: Colonel Inga Bjornnson
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Heavy



Regulan Hussars

Formed in 2478 as the BattleMech arm of the Principality of Regulus, the Regulan Hussars had the dubious honor of receiving the initial production run of Archers and Wasps from the 'Mech production plant on Cameron.

These first units, manufactured from plans purloined from the Lyran Commonwealth, were fraught with operational problems and spent as much time in the repair bays as they did on the battlefield. Indeed, after a disastrous engagement against a force of Capellan heavy tanks on the planet Lopez in 2485, the noted Regulan military strategist Brigadier General Baba Townshend declared 'Mechs to be "little more than titanium steel coffins," and predicted their quick demise. He could not have been more wrong. From these humble origins, the Hussars have emerged as the most celebrated unit in Regulan history, surviving even the fall of House Selaj, the principality's founding family.

One of the Hussars' greatest moments occurred during the war waged by Gerald Marik against the Selaj family in 2678-2680. Spurred on by a personal visit by Rajneesh Selaj, who earnestly proclaimed his innocence, the three regiments of the Regulan Hussars fought against six regiments, delaying the conquest of Hellos Minor and Harmony long enough to allow several members of the Selaj clan to escape into exile. Ever since, the Hussars have been wary of putting too much faith in politicians.

During the civil war between Elise Marik and Oliver Marik the Usurper, the Hussars remained loyal to the Captain-General and acquitted themselves well on the field. At the end of the conflict, Elise's son Bertram awarded knighthood to each Hussar regimental and battalion commander and gave the unit 10,000 acres of land on Avior, which remains its base of operations to this day. This period marked the beginning of almost 250 years in which Regulus (through the ruling Cameron family) and the Mariks remained close political allies, and the Hussars became one of the most reliable elements in the Captain-General's 'Mech forces. The symbolic end to this link came dramatically in 2973, after the 6th Regiment of the Hussars was decimated when First Lord Stephan Marik left the regiment stranded on Loric without reinforcements or supplies for two grueling years.

Over the past 50 years, the loyalties of the Hussars to both Regulus and the Captain-General have varied widely between regiments, and often from month to month. Nothing exemplifies this situation more clearly than the recent Civil War between Janos and Anton Marik. During this brief but bloody conflict, the Regulan government initially declared neutrality, and sided with Janos only after the war's outcome was certain. Without clear guidance from the home front, each Hussar regiment independently decided its allegiance. The 1st and 2nd regiments remained loyal to Janos, while the 4th and 5th joined the rebel cause. The 9th, raiding in Liao space when the war broke out, elected to keep on raiding and did not return to League space until the crisis was over. Tensions within the Regulan Hussars were exacerbated rather than soothed by the war's end, as a sizable portion of the war reparations paid by the 4th and 5th wound up in the hands of the 1st and 2nd.

The five surviving regiments of the Hussars share three significant traditions that influence their operations both on and off the battlefield. The first dates back to the First Succession War, when the Trebuchet 'Mech, produced in large quantities on Irian, made its first appearance. The Hussars were the first Free Worlds unit to recognize that a lance with two Trebuchets inflicts a brutal rain of destruction on a distant foe while maintaining enough short-range power to hold its own in close quarters. Each regiment of the Hussars possesses at least two of these specialized lances.

Orloff Grenadiers

The name "Orloff" is associated with the finest military traditions of the Free Worlds League. The Orloff Grenadiers are part of that honorable lineage, as they are well-equipped, expertly led, and superbly trained. Each Grenadier regiment is organized in classic fashion, with three composite battalions each containing one heavy, one Medium, and one light company.

Admission to the Grenadiers is a rare privilege. Except by special dispensation of the Earl, membership in the regiment is limited to citizens of the Duchy of Orloff who have at least five years' service as MechWarriors and who either have a Distinguished Service Award or are members of the Order of the Saber. Primogeniture in the Grenadiers does not guarantee membership for the descendant, though preference, of course, is given to legacies. Induction into the unit is conducted in a secret initiation ceremony that bonds the new Grenadier to the unit and commits him never to fight against the regiment or House Orloff in battle. The Captain-General has long opposed this ceremony, which borders dangerously close to treason against the free Worlds League.

Unit Name: 1st Grenadiers
CO: Colonel Sigurd McDowell
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

The 1st Grenadiers are commanded by Colonel Sigurd McDowell, a member of the Order of the Saber whose military record is a shining testament to bravery, valor, and perseverance. Unlike many units, the 1st has neither hereditary nor appointed leadership. Instead, the commander of the unit is chosen every two years by election, with each lance allowed a single ballot. Any warrior in the regiment may be elevated to command the unit. Elected after five years as commander of the 1st Grenadier's Strike Battalion, McDowell has served four two-year-terms.

Unit Name: 6th Grenadiers
CO: Colonel Hosan Chilung
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Heavy

Unit Name: 8th Grenadiers
CO: Colonel Andracar Shikovitch
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Light

The second tradition of the Hussars dates back to when Bertram Marik bestowed orders of knighthood upon the officers of the Hussars. To this day, all battalion and regimental commanders in a unit are still given these by now honorary titles, and are still addressed as "Lord" or "Sir" by their subordinates during formal ceremonies or full meetings of the unit.

The final tradition of the Hussars dates back to the unit's origins, and the "free trader" spirit of equal opportunity that has historically permeated the Regularan people. The Hussars have always held that the right of command is "a trust bestowed and not a privilege," which belongs to an officer only as long as that trust is not violated. Consequently, the Hussars continue to acknowledge the ritual of challenge combat, which allows any MechWarrior who feels himself more competent to lead the right to challenge the existing unit leader. Each regiment attempts to keep on hand two battered but functional Chameleon or Stinger training 'Mechs which are used to conduct this combat, with the victor receiving the continued fealty of the other members of the unit. Over the long years this code has been in place, a set of informal rules for its use have evolved-as a result, the ritual is seldom invoked without a just grievance, and the combats fought are seldom carried to the death. Nonetheless, this tradition places a strong check on the authority of the officers of the Hussars, and in this current period of uninspired leadership may provide the means for bringing new vitality into the unit's command structure.

Unit Name: 1st Hussars
CO: Colonel Tomaso Kinchuhara
Experience Level: Elite
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Medium
Unit Profile:

Regardless of the storms and controversies that swirl about the Hussars, its 1st regiment remains a formidable fighting force. For the past six years, it has been ably commanded by Colonel Tomaso Kinchuhara, a wiry veteran who rose to prominence during the 1st's furious two-day duel with the 17th Skye Rangers in the Battle of Kendrew's Crossing. Tomaso is a stern disciplinarian, who expects his men to keep their 'Mechs and gear as well-maintained as his own Orion.. Despite his gruffness, he is well-respected by his men because he sets the same rules for officers, MechWarriors, and support personnel alike, and judges his men by results rather than personalities. For example, to lead the Eastern Star Strike Battalion he chose Major Vic "The Ripper" Davis. Davis is little more than an animal off the battlefield, a crude and sadistic boor whose violent temper has propelled him into countless bar fights and duels, but he is also the best pilot in the unit. His battle instincts seem infallible, and his bravery in the cockpit of his battered Cyclops has been demonstrated time and time again.

One of the most celebrated pieces of equipment in the regiment is the "Hamilton," a Leopard class DropShip that has been attached to the Hussars since the days of the Star League. The "Hamilton" always winds up in the thick of the heaviest action and somehow finds a way to survive. Its present commander, Virdan Graham Ruxton, is only 25, and some of the ship's officers have privately questioned the wisdom of Transport Coordinator Kinnunen's appointment.



Unit Name: 2nd Hussars
CO: Colonel Sweeney "Beadle" Banford
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Light
Unit Profile:

Banford's unit has poor reconnaissance and mediocre air support, but it is excellent at leveling a devastating close-range assault against an enemy force or stronghold. The regiment has often been used in major planetary invasion forces, usually with other units that can provide the speed and recon capability that it lacks. Though the 2nd has a winning record, its close fighting style subjects the unit to unusually heavy battering. Over the years, the unit's commanders have been forced to shuttle 'Mechs between battalions to the justly famed Green Monster Assault Battalion at full strength. In the process the combat readiness of the other two battalions has often slipped to dangerous levels, leading to serious dissension.

Sweeney "Beadle" Banford is an engaging fellow who has commanded the regiment for nearly a decade. He has gained notoriety for singing (in a loud but rather pleasant baritone) during combat to keep himself relaxed. Though Beadle is well-liked by most of his command, some resent him for his inability to refuse the many demands of the Green Monster's commander, Major Ingrid Sjornsson, a snarling, chestnut-maned harpy who many feel controls the destiny of the unit.

Unit Name: 4th Hussars
CO: Colonel Gary "Lights" Carter
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Light
Fighter Weight: Light
Unit Profile:

Almost the antithesis of the 2nd Hussars, the 4th Hussars is alight, quick-strike force best used for recon and deep penetration raids. The unit possesses a substantial number of Hermes IIs equipped with Irian BattleMechs' advanced ESR sensory and long-range communications systems. The unit's Techs are justly proud of their ability to keep these delicate systems operational, which even some members of the current IMB technical design staff cannot match.

The unit's commander, Gary "Lights" Carter, is an enigmatic man of 34 who is equally loved and hated by the MechWarriors who fight under his banner. On the one hand, he is a savvy tactician who has learned well the tactics of Lyran and Capellan units and has been able to use this knowledge to outguess his enemy on the battlefield. On the other hand, he is a shameless publicity hound, who never misses an opportunity to blow his own horn to vidtape war correspondents. His nickname, a derisive short form of the old Terran video-maker's cry "Lights! Camera! Action!" is testimony to the way many of his men view his headline-grabbing stunts.

Unit Name: 5th Hussars
CO: Colonel Linda Koloff
Experience Level: Veteran
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Heavy

Unit Name: 9th Hussars
CO: Colonel Shamir Bharan
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Medium

MERCENARY UNITS

Unit Name: 21st Centauri Lancers

CO: Colonel Thaddeus Kusaka

Unit Size: 1 regiment

Experience Level: Elite

'Mech Weight: Heavy

Fighter Weight: Heavy

Armor: Yes

Infantry: Yes

DropShips: Yes

JumpShips: Yes

Unit Profile:

Originally a battalion from House Liao's St. Ives Armored Cavalry, the Lancers mutinied against their regimental commander over wages nine months overdue. The Lancers ransacked the Regimental BattleGroup and captured some of the Cavalry's DropShips and a JumpShip as payment. Becoming mercenary, the 21st served each Successor State except for House Liao, against which it still harbors a grudge.

Colonel Thaddeus Kusaka, leader of the Lancers, is one of the very few well-respected and trusted mercenary leaders in the Inner Sphere. Honest to a fault, Kusaka demands integrity from everyone from the lowliest astech to the Captain-General himself.



Unit Name: Smithson's Chinese Bandits

CO: Colonel Erin Viola

Unit Size: 1 regiment

Experience Level: Veteran

'Mech Weight: Medium

Fighter Weight: Heavy

Armor: Yes

Infantry: Yes

DropShips: Yes

JumpShips: No

Unit Profile:

The Chinese Bandits have served with the Free Worlds League for a long time. Enlisted by Samuel Marik in 2926 following their estrangement from the Lyran Commonwealth, the Bandits are fairly typical mercenaries-moderately greedy, marginally courteous, and reasonably loyal (as long as the paycheck arrives on time). When originally signed by the Captain-General, the Chinese Bandits consisted of two regiments of BattleMechs and a regiment of heavy AeroSpace Fighters, mostly Chippewas and Stukas.. The Marik desperately needed competent, battle-hardened troops, and the unit was immediately hurled into combat on the Capellan front. It suffered heavily over the next few years, causing a reorganization of the Bandits into the single regiment they possess today.

Like most mercenary units, the Chinese Bandits have had trouble replacing personnel and equipment. In 3014, however, the Bandits received a substantial bonus less than two weeks after the rebellion of the Marik's brother, allowing Captain-General Janos Marik to place them immediately into the fray.

The Bandits consist of one heavy battalion and two light battalions. Erin Viola, the commander, is a bull-headed, arrogant woman, with an opinion on every subject. She ardently dislikes LAMS, and refuses to use the hybrid 'Mech design. Among her fellow commanders, she is not taken lightly, having acquired a reputation as a hard-nosed fighter who will stop at nothing when booty is involved.

Unit Name: Clifton's Rangers

CO: Major Elias Clifton

Unit Size: 1 battalion

Experience Level: Green

'Mech Weight: Medium

Fighter Weight: Light

Armor: No

Infantry: Yes

DropShips: No

JumpShips: No

Unit Profile:

Clifton's Rangers is a fairly recent addition to the Marik arsenal, having come from the Draconis Combine in 2995. Like many other mercs, the unit had run afoul of the Kurita secret police, the ISF. After hastily returning its advance payment, the Rangers entered Free Worlds space, hoping to benefit from the change of venue. At first, the unit did benefit, participating in the Free Worlds' siege of Berenson, captured by House Liao just months before. However, the Rangers are not high on the list for replacements or technical support. Consequently, the battalion lacks parts, supplies, and armaments, making them somewhat vulnerable when committed to combat.

The commander of this unit is Major Elias Clifton, who is thin, gaunt, and extremely pale, hence his nickname "the Count." He rarely speaks more than a few words at a time, preferring instead to communicate his wishes and intentions by chilling glares. He exacts loyalty from his soldiers who, it must be admitted, are more than a little scared of him.

Unit Name: Caesar's Cohorts

CO: Major Worrell Orosco

Unit Size: 1 battalion

Experience Level: Green

'Mech Weight: Medium

Fighter Weight: None

Armor: No

Infantry: Yes

DropShips: No

JumpShips: No

Unit Profile:

The Cohorts' commander, Worrell Orosco, is a lanky, ambidextrous, country boy whose fists are as quick as his temper. Orosco assumed command of the unit after a disastrous campaign on Wyatt, in which the unit lost the last two air lances it possessed. This engagement also ended the unit's seven-year contract with the Lyran Commonwealth and sent it in search of greener pastures.

Orosco's troops have found their diet of garrison duty and "mock combats" a godsend, enabling them to stabilize their shaky morale and slowly mend their battered equipment. Their pay, though unspectacular, has been steady, and they have gradually upgraded their crude bivouac accommodations on Epsilon into a modest but defensible stronghold. Worrell and his men are now anxious to bring home some real booty, and have greeted with anticipation the growing rumors that "something big is in the air."

Unit Name: Langendorf Lancers

CO: Major Wayne Roland

Unit Size: 2 companies

Experience Level: Regular

'Mech Weight: Medium

Fighter Weight: None

Armor: Yes

Infantry: Yes

DropShips: No

JumpShips: No

Unit Profile:

The Langendorf Lancers have served the Free Worlds League for nearly the entire span of the Succession Wars. The unit was greedy and headstrong, which cost them dearly more than once during the First and Second Succession Wars. Once the greatest jewel of all mercenaries in service to Marik, the Lancers have deteriorated to a hungry unit far from the cutting edge of military technology.

Its configuration is somewhat unusual. The unit has two oversized companies, with a startling assortment of 'Mechs of all sizes and descriptions. The personnel are tough and generally uncooperative, but will always respond to a money or supply incentive. The commander of the regiment is Wayne Roland, an arrogant and forceful man who grumbles often about serving other Houses.



Unit Name: Fuchida's Fusiliers

CO: Major Michael "Mad Mac" Iverson

Unit Size: 1 battalion

Experience Level: Regular

'Mech Weight: Heavy

Fighter Weight: Heavy

Armor: No

Infantry: No

DropShips: Yes

JumpShips: No

Unit Profile:

The men of Fuchida's Fusiliers trace their origins back to the former Rim Republic's Tartan Brigade, one of the household units that fought valiantly—albeit on the losing side—during the brutal civil war between the usurper Stefan Amaris and the Star League forces under Aleksandr Kerensky. After the end of that war, the battered but still proud remnants of the Brigade quickly found employment as mercenaries pledged to Coordinator Minoru Kurita. In the intervening years, the renamed Fusiliers have led a nomadic existence, moving from contract to contract and never remaining in the service of any employer for more than a few years at a time. After three previous stretches under the House Marik banner (2834-2845, 2882-2898, and 2931-2935), they rejoined House Marik in 3021 following a campaign with House Davion. Thus far, they have been deployed along the Lyran Commonwealth border, where they have conducted a variety of raiding and sabotage missions.

Though the fortunes of Fuchida's Fusiliers have risen and fallen over the years, the unit's love of its traditional heritage has never wavered. The members paint their DropShips and AeroSpace Fighters in tartan plaids and wear stylized, synth-weave variations of the ancient Scottish kilt as their standard uniform (even in the heat of combat). Over the years, the Fusiliers have honed a reputation for bloodthirstiness and a history of remaining on the battlefield long after more prudent commanders would have withdrawn. This brash and reckless bunch seem hell-bent on destruction in an age when most mercenaries have elected to take a more prudent course. Despite being kept almost continuously in action since their arrival, Major Iverson has found the opportunities for booty on the Steiner front to be less than he expected and has begun to consider shifting allegiance again at the end of his current contract.



The unit consists of three companies of medium 'Mechs. Because of the extensive equipment contract with the Marik, the unit has a rather high percentage of Hermes II 'Mechs in harness, though there are other 'Mechs of far more remote manufacture. They all seem to be lacking in dents or other damage.

Unit Name: Head Hunters
CO: Major Bruce Chu
Unit Size: 1 battalion
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: No
Armor: No **Infantry:** No
DropShips: No **JumpShips:** No
Unit Profile:

When hired by the Marik in 2914, the Head Hunters were on the verge of dispersing their equipment and meager resources. Although the unit was scarcely able to field any kind of fighting force, Captain-General Elisabeth Marik offered the unit minimal pay and sent the mercs to school at the Orloff Academy. Re-equipped and trained by members of the Orloff Grenadiers, the unit became a rejuvenated, aggressive fighting force within a decade. Through successful campaigning, the Head Hunters have been able to refit with heavier and more reliable equipment, including a number of Vulcan 'Mechs and some Cicadas captured from rebelling units during the war in 3014. Despite this excellent treatment by House Marik, the Head Hunters have elected to remain mercenary.

Unit Name: Martian Cuirassiers
CO: Major Elliot Webb
Unit Size: 1 battalion
Experience Level: Green
'Mech Weight: Medium
Fighter Weight: Heavy
Armor: Yes **Infantry:** Yes
DropShips: No **JumpShips:** No
Unit Profile:

The Martian Cuirassiers are not highly regarded. Though well-equipped and reasonably well-organized, the unit has scarcely seen battle, being relegated instead to garrison and escort duty for members of Parliament. The ostensible reason for this inactivity is that the mercenary contract guarantees the unit a substantial combat bonus and salvage rights, benefits that (it is said) the Marik is unwilling, or perhaps unable, to pay. However, the private correspondence between the Cuirassiers' commander, Major Elliot Webb, and the Minister of Defense is rife with requests for better equipment, improved facilities, and especially more time for specialized training. In short, the Cuirassiers have provided a string of excuses for not entering into combat. The relatively short combat resume of the unit is compelling evidence that this sort of thing has happened before.

Unit Name: Carson's Renegades
CO: Major Dwight Allbery
Unit Size: 1 battalion
Experience Level: Regular
'Mech Weight: Heavy
Fighter Weight: Heavy
Armor: Yes **Infantry:** Yes
DropShips: Yes **JumpShips:** No
Unit Profile:

Carson's Renegades have served in the Free Worlds for more than a century, having worked under contract to Oriente, Andurien, Stewart, and even the Silver Hawks for short periods of time. Following in their wake have been reports of a series of "incidents" that have given the unit's warriors a reputation as troublemakers, bullies, and practical jokers. Within the unit's ranks are racketeers, armed robbers, demolitions experts, and quick-draw specialists from all over space. Off duty, they qualify as genuine lowlife, the scourges of the Inner Sphere. On duty, however, they are some of the best pilots and gunners that ever sat inside a BattleMech, and have gone toe to toe with some of the Free Worlds' most dangerous foes.

The commander of this incredible crew is Major Dwight Allbery, a reformed criminal who affects the title of "Sheriff." Sheriff Allbery is well respected by his troops, who will follow only him. When asked how he is able to keep the ruffians in line, Allbery smiles and taps his forehead, saying, "Special neurohelmets, y'know."

As might be expected, the Renegades have a patois of equipment, ranging from the Stinger LAM flown by the lunatic "Top Tommy" Easton to the captured Steiner Zeus piloted by the murderous "Slasher" von Aalberg, a 290-pound MechWarrior.



'MECH UNIT DEPLOYMENT TABLE
(as of 3025)

Unit Name	Experience level	Loyalty	Homeworld	Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
Free Worlds Guards				Marik Guard			
1st Guards (CO: Colonel Bartholomew Alcála)	Elite	Fanatical	Berenson	Marik Guard (CO Colonel Takei Bryce-Marik)	Elite	Fanatical	Van Diemen IV
2nd Guards (CO: Colonel Josiah Kimbolton)	Veteran	Fanatical	Bella I	Fusiliers of Oriente			
3rd Guards (CO: Colonel Albrecht Kiel)	Regular	Fanatical	Zion	Ducal Guard (CO: Colonel Selim Malas)	Elite	Fanatical	Tamarind
Atrean Hussars				1st Brigade (CO: Colonel Aaron Barksdale)	Elite	Reliable	Griffith
Atrean Hussars (CO. Colonel Eleanor Wansi)	Regular	Reliable	Ling	2nd Brigade (CO: Colonel Ricardo Fuentes)	Veteran	Reliable	Maxwell
Atrean Dragoons				3rd Brigade (CO: Colonel Coram d'Youville)	Veteran	Reliable	Promised Land
1st Dragoons (CO: Colonel Alicia Denichuk)	Regular	Fanatical	McKenna	4th Brigade (CO: Colonel Eve Hansi)	Regular	Questionable	Oriente
11th Dragoons (CO: Colonel Omar Sandusky)	Green	Fanatical	Matheran	5th Brigade (CO: Colonel Pavel Bolton)	Regular	Reliable	Sheridan
12th Dragoons (CO: Colonel Julian Langsdorf)	Veteran	Fanatical	Vanra	Protectorate Guard			
Marik Militia				Iron Guards (CO: Colonel Bradford Holmes)	Regular	Fanatical	Alula Australia
1st Militia (CO: Colonel Shanna del Rey)	Veteran	Fanatical	Fletcher	Steel Guards (CO: Colonel James Stroud)	Green	Reliable	Kosciusko
2nd Militia (CO: Colonel Philip Ortega)	Green	Reliable	Hassad	Sirian Lancers			
4th Militia (CO: Colonel Vernon- Cherenkov)	Green	Reliable	Park Place	1st Lancers (CO: Colonel Atir Abloff)	Green	Questionable	Pollux
5th Militia (CO: Colonel Allyce Verschwunden)	Regular	Reliable	Les Halles	2nd Lancers (CO: Colonel Jenny Twofeathers)	Regular	Questionable	Procyon
6th Militia (CO: Colonel Boris Ames-Marik)	Veteran	Fanatical	Holt	3rd Lancers (CO: Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Zander)	Green	Questionable	Megrez
9th Militia (CO: Colonel Montague Van Castille)	Regular	Reliable	Carbonis	Silver Hawk Irregulars			
10th Militia (CO: Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Garibaldi)	Veteran	Reliable	Bernardo	Falcons (CO: Colonel Michael Cameron-Witherspoon)	Green	Questionable	Callison
13th Militia (CO: Colonel Chang Janewicz)	Regular	Questionable	Irian	Gryphons (CO: Colonel Martha Zuritas)	Regular	Questionable	Kalidasa
15th Militia (CO: Colonel Jake Hawkins)	Regular	Reliable	Wasat	Oriente Hussars			
18th Militia (CO: Colonel Isadora Alvarez)	Green	Questionable	Oliver	1st Hussars (CO: Colonel Pierre Mondou)	Veteran	Reliable	Trellisane
20th Militia (CO: Colonel Mbangi Dombwesa)	Regular	Reliable	Concord	2nd Hussars (CO: Colonel Caleb Covaleski)	Regular	Reliable	Wallacia
23rd Militia (CO: Lieutenant Colonel Adiss Sullivan)	Green	Questionable	Merak	3rd Hussars (CO: Colonel Irving Clifford)	Green	Reliable	Ipswitch
25th Militia (CO: Colonel Azi Ochambo)	Green	Reliable	Dieudonne	4th Hussars (CO: Lieutenant Colonel Geddy Carver)	Regular	Questionable	Atreus
30th Militia (CO: Colonel Forest McCall)	Regular	Fanatical	Wing	5th Hussars (CO: Colonel Millicent Toromov)	Green	Reliable	Sierra
31st Militia (CO: Lieutenant Colonel Millicent Anson)	Green	Reliable	Uhura				



**'MECH UNIT DEPLOYMENT TABLE
(as of 3025)**

Unit Name	Experience Level	Loyalty	Homeworld
Defenders of Andurien			
1st Defenders (CO: Lieutenant General Xeng Garibaldi)	Veteran	Questionable	Andurien
3rd Defenders (CO: lieutenant General Menlo Drews)	Regular	Questionable	Shiro III
4th Defenders (CO: Lieutenant General Farrell Nogales)	Veteran	Questionable	Scarborough
5th Defenders (CO: Colonel Jimmy Lee)	Regular	Questionable	Nestor
6th Defenders (CO: Lieutenant General Mildred Humphreys)	Veteran	Questionable	Andurien
Stewart Dragoons			
Home Guards (CO: Major General Lao Jarreau-Stewart)	Veteran	Reliable	Stewart
Juggernaut (CO: Colonel Inga Bjornnson)	Regular	Reliable	Payvand
Orloff Grenadiers			
1st Grenadiers (CO: Colonel Sigurd McDowell)	Regular	Reliable	Vanra
6th Grenadiers (CO: Colonel Hosan Chilung)	Veteran	Fanatical	Cerillos
9th Grenadiers (CO: Colonel Andracar Shikovitch)	Regular	Reliable	Lesново
Regulan Hussars			
1st Hussars (CO: Colonel Tomaso Kinchuhara)	Elite	Questionable	Regulus
2nd Hussars (CO: Colonel Sweeney Banford)	Regular	Questionable	Avior
4th Hussars (CO: Colonel Gary Carter)	Veteran	Questionable	Tiber
51h Hussars (CO: Colonel Linda Koloff)	Veteran	Questionable	Chertan
9th Hussars (CO: Colonel Shamir Bharan)	Green	Questionable	McAffe
Mercenaries			
21st Centauri Lancers (CO: Colonel Thaddeus Kusaka)	Elite	Reliable	Nestor
Caesar's Cohorts (CO: Major Worrell Orosco)	Green	Questionable	Epsilon
Smithson's Chinese Bandits (CO: Colonel Erin Viola)	Veteran	Reliable	Zosma
Clifton's Rangers (CO: Colonel Elias Clifton)	Green	Questionable	Epsilon
Langendorf Lancers (CO: Major Wayne Roland)	Regular	Questionable	Colfax
Fuchida's Fusiliers (CO: Major Michael Iverson)	Regular	Questionable	Cascade
Head Hunters (CO: Major Bruce Chu)	Green	Questionable	Uhura
Martian Cuirassiers (CO: Major Elliot Webb)	Green	Questionable	Concord
Carson's Renegades (CO: Major Dwight Allbery)	Regular	Questionable	Oliver

Junior Serjeant Vlad Hassan, a gunner's mate on a Demolisher tank in Andurien's 4th Armored Corps, is decked out in that principality's dress garb—a white jacket over buff pinstriped trousers and matching shoes. The belt and shoulder sash over the jacket, fastened with a large circular replica of Andurien's emblem, bear the wearer's regimental colors. The pads on his cuffs sport his rank insignia. Hassan's uniform (like most Andurien uniforms) bears several decorations across his chest, mostly awarded for performance in mock campaign exercises. The ceremonial mace and crest of the eagle adorning his sash, however, attest to his true bravery in combat, which was demonstrated in 3021 in the firefight that cost him his left eye.

MEDALS AND DECORATIONS

The Free Worlds League has always had a special affection for pomp and circumstance, the glories of award ceremonies, and the elaborate ritual of elite secret societies. If anything, the last 250 years have enhanced these urges. The Marik, Parliament, and even individual Houses have their own awards and medals, all intended to boost the morale and spirit of troops fighting the endless war. As a result, virtually all Marik MechWarriors or AeroSpace Pilots possess one or more of the awards described below, making an impressive sight in a full dress uniform.

CREST OF THE EAGLE

First granted during the tenure of Captain-General Kenyon Marik ("the Eagle"), this decoration is a fairly common one. Parliament awards the crest to members of units that have played key roles in successful campaigns. Veteran MechWarriors may have a dozen or more of these awards, displaying them on a scarlet or purple sash. At the opening of Parliament each year, the Captain-General submits the Honors List of units (battalion-sized and up) to be nominated for the award. Although a Parliamentary Committee reviews the credentials for these units, this review is a mere formality that allows members of Parliament to extol the virtues of units from their provinces. It has been more than a century since Parliament took issue with any nominee.



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

The most practical of all decorations, this award consists of a bronze, leaf-shaped lapel pin. It is set with a single stone corresponding to the amount of documented enemy kills recorded by the soldier. If he records 500 tons, he earns a ruby; 1000 tons, an emerald; 2500 tons, a sapphire; and 5000 tons, a diamond. These decorations confer great honor on the wearer, and they are usually passed down from generation to generation as family heirlooms. Only a desperate or Dispossessed House would ever consider trading the stone for its substantial market value.

RAIDING RIBBONS

These ribbons are awarded to each member of a unit that participates in a successful raid (defined as any operation that destroys its primary target or recovers significant booty). Raids on Steiner worlds are commemorated with blue ribbons; raids on Liao worlds with gold. MechWarriors and AeroSpace Pilots sometimes further advertise their exploits by painting slashes of the same color on their equipment.

THE SILVER CROSS

A "Maltese" cross with fluted stems and a diamond set in its center, this decoration is reserved for AeroSpace Pilots for "acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty." It is often awarded posthumously. First given during the Canopus Campaign more than four hundred years ago, the award confers a knighthood (though not a hereditary title). Thus, a bearer of the Cross would have the right to style himself "Sir," if a man, or "Lady," if a woman. Traditionally, if a recipient finds someone wearing another's Cross, he is obliged to challenge that person to a duel of honor.

CONQUEST RIBBONS

These ribbons are awarded to each member of a unit that participates in a successful capture of a planet. They are similar in color to the raiding ribbons described above, but are bordered in purple and have the name of the captured world embroidered on the face of the ribbon in white (Steiner) or black (Liao) thread.

THE ORIENTE LEGION OF MERIT

A three-man committee, consisting of the Duke of Oriente and the commanders of the Fusiliers of Oriente and Oriente Hussars, has the authority to induct into this honorary society “warriors who have demonstrated the proper blend of bravery and wisdom”. Members normally wear the Legion’s emblem—a pin depicting crossed swords over a palm branch—on the right lapel of their dress uniform, though some wear the token into battle as well. Tassels hung from the base of the pin denote the number of years a warrior has served in the Legion; each red tassel represents one year, and each blue tassel represents five years of active service.



REGULAN ANKH

Forged of white gold, the Ankh is the official medal of honor for warriors who serve with distinction in the forces of the Principality of Regulus. It is popularly alleged to give its bearer an extra reserve of strength in times of crisis. The awarding of this decoration is usually (though not always) accompanied by a land grant.

LIFE SERVICE MEDAL

The Captain-General awards this decoration, depicting an eagle’s head etched in silver, to long-time members of the League armed forces for “illustrious career service to the cause.” Because this award is almost never awarded posthumously, some of the younger, more reckless members of the League officers corps often deride it as the “chicken hawk’s crest.”

ALLISON’S CHAIN

Allison’s chain was commissioned in memory of the heroic efforts of Harlan Allison, the last scion of the long-time ruling clan of Oriente. The LCCC bestows this three-stranded chain (gold, platinum, and silver) each year to the Marik regiment (regular or mercenary) that has demonstrated the greatest “valor under fire.” The command lance of the winning unit traditionally carries the chain wrapped around its regimental standard. Popular legend claims that no standard so adorned has ever fallen to the enemy in battle. The chain is currently held by the Orloff Grenadiers.

ORDER OF THE SABER

The highest honor attainable by a warrior in any branch of the service, the Order of the Saber is presented by the Captain-General for acts of “heroism in pursuit of the Cause.” The Order has chapter houses in the capital cities of several prominent League worlds, which provide free meals and lodging to any needy member of the Order. The first Chapter Houses—on Atreus, Harmony, New Olympia, and Orloff—were built just after the Civil War in 2737. Members fervently guard these Houses, which are reputed to contain technological artifacts that antedate the Succession Wars. The truth behind this speculation is un-known.

ANDURIEN COMMEMORATIVE AWARDS

Though the provincial forces of the Duchy of Andurien have seldom seen combat action over the last 50-75 years, its ruling classes have attempted to make up for this by awarding more special decorations than any other League state. Andurien issues copious medals to any unit that engages the enemy, commemorative pins to the members of those battalions that “win” elaborate maneuver exercises, and even awards citations to units which complete a successful tour of garrison duty. Consequently, any Andurien soldier whose dress uniform does not look like a veritable fruit salad of decorations is either a raw recruit or a royal screw-up indeed.



MAJOR MILITARY ACADEMIES

There are a number of ways to receive military or technical training in the Free Worlds League, ranging from the government-subsidized League MechWarrior and Pilot schools on New Olympia to the provincial academies sponsored by most of the League's major principalities to privately managed 'Mech "schools," which often spring up and disappear overnight.

1. THE ALLISON MECHWARRIOR INSTITUTE

Located less than two hundred miles from one another on the Marik Commonwealth world New Olympia, the Allison MechWarrior Institute and the Lloyd Marik-Stanley AeroSpace school are the League's two specialized military training academies (each named to commemorate a famous League military hero). Rivalries between each school's student body, who often refer to each other as "tin-can warriors" and "junior flyboys," are usually intense, surfacing in everything from hotly contested athletic competitions to relatively harmless pranks (like stealing the opposition's school mascot or spray-painting its equipment lavender the night before a full-dress review). Occasionally, there are more serious incidents. In 3017, three AeroSpace School plebes were seriously injured in a barroom brawl with several Institute cadets, one of whom was Misha Orloff, son of the reigning Earl of Orloff.

The competition between the two schools is nothing compared to the competition for the 500 spots in each school's entering class. Because the final selection of these appointments rests with the Captain-General and his Minister of Defense, they often use appointments to reward or bribe MPs, officials, and heads of business. In addition, since the late 2890s, ten percent of the placements in each class has been reserved for members of families Dispossessed by the Succession Wars. This policy has enabled the Mariks to reward the leaders of its highly successful Liberation Units.

The MechWarrior institute has a three-year curriculum, where cadets receive extensive training in 'Mech piloting, gunnery, and repair, as well as schooling in leadership and tactics, personal weaponry, athletics, and outdoor survival. Graduates are eligible to receive commissions as Lieutenants into the Free Worlds Guards or the Marik Militia (a route that 80-90 percent of each class follow), but only a fraction actually receive 'Mech piloting assignments in their first year of duty.

2. THE LLOYD MARIK-STANLEY AEROSPACE SCHOOL

Like the Allison MechWarrior Institute, the AeroSpace School has a three-year curriculum. Those select few chosen to receive JumpShip or DropShip flight training, however, take an additional two-year program. AeroSpace School graduates receive the bulk of their training in AeroSpace piloting, gunnery, and engineering, and log many hours of practice time aboard the school's computer simulators and actual training craft. In addition, they also take course in communications, tactics, athletics, wilderness survival, personal weaponry, and even artillery gunnery. Like Institute graduates, they are eligible for a Lieutenant's commission in the Marik Militia or Free Worlds Guards, though they have a much better chance of reaching a cockpit in their first year out of school. Those graduates who complete the five-year JumpShip/Drop-Ship program are commissioned as First Lieutenants and serve as junior officers on the Marik's fleets.



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3. THE PRINCEFIELD MILITARY ACADEMY

The Grand Duchy of Oriente's chief military school has existed for over 700 years. Steeped in tradition, the Academy has long served as the finishing school for the future heirs of many noble families. All students at the Academy undergo the same 18-month training program, which provides a general grounding in military history, strategy and tactics, personal combat skills, and physical training. At the end of this period, only the cadets ranked in the top 20 percent of the class are eligible to enroll in the Academy's two-year MechWarrior and Pilot programs. The remainder receive a final six to twelve months of schooling in any other specialty, becoming Techs, scouts, or officers in the principality's infantry, armor, or artillery units.

Competition between class members at the Academy is intense and often violent due to the extreme pressures placed on the individual and the natural (albeit less honorable) desire of some students to eliminate their rivals. Duels between students are officially sanctioned, provided that the challenger can prove a legitimate grievance to the school's Provost Marshal. Non-noble members of the student body are particularly vulnerable to such challenges, given the elitist attitudes that prevail among the Academy's instructors and administrators. It is hardly surprising that the average cadet's days at Princefield are marked with little of the youthful camaraderie that prevails at the two New Olympia schools. Most of those who survive to become MechWarriors or Pilots, however, seem to forge a deep bond with their fellow graduates. There are many famous stories of Princefield alumni who have gone out of their way to aid a former classmate in trouble.

4. THE HERO TRAINING INSTITUTE

Founded on Maxwell in 2989 by blacksheep entrepreneur Roncelli "Ronco" Morrall, the Hero Institute is justifiably notorious for its saturation advertising campaign ("Think you can pilot a 'Mech? So do we!"). Its slogan has been blasted across every element of League popular culture, from vidtapes to matchbook covers, for the past three and one-half decades. The Institute's three run-down campuses, which collectively house over 1,400 students per year, have no more than a few functioning 'Mechs (most of which have been cobbled together from salvaged equipment), while their faculty is a motley collection of Dispossessed and often drugged-out MechWarriors and the occasional charlatan. Nonetheless, for most who lack political connections or economic clout, schools like this are the only way an individual can get hands-on 'Mech experience of any kind, and the Institute's tuition rates and waiting list have grown every year.

Though Ronco and his educational associates leave no stone unturned to keep their expenses and overhead to a bare minimum (charging exorbitant admission fees and subjecting students to constant risk of injury by neglecting proper maintenance procedures), at least they offer some modicum of a real training program. For every Hero Institute in the Successor States, there are five other schools that are either partial or total scams, giving their applicants anything from a correspondence school textbook to a campus address that turns out to be unclaimed swampland. Hero's two-year curriculum is worth no more than about three months of provincial school training and provides each student with no more than a dozen hours of actual hands-on experience as a Pilot or Tech. Still, this is often enough to earn a graduate a job in a mercenary regiment or a non-com position in the Regular or Provincial forces.

MILITARY EQUIPMENT

The Free Worlds League was never a leader in Successor State military production, though its output of Merchant and Explorer Class JumpShips and Fury, Triumph, and Condor Class DropShips was second to none. Instead, the League always relied on its trading acumen to ensure that its borders were defended with the most up-to-date equipment available. Because of special clauses, rebates, and under-the-table barter, it often paid less than the manufacturer's own native House. The Succession Wars have reduced military trade to a trickle, leaving the League suddenly dependent on its own production resources for the first time since the late 2400s.

The Free Worlds has neither the active technological strivings of House Davion, the raw industrial and natural resource base of House Steiner, or the extreme centralization of political power of House Kurita. As a result, House Marik's 'Mech and conventional force firepower has steadily weakened, leaving the League increasingly vulnerable to assault. The Marik's push to reopen military trade with the Capellans and Andurien's efforts to rebuild the BattleMech production facility on Irian will only partially stem this tide.



League manufacturers that support the 'Mech production industry are in better shape than the primary producers themselves. The sensor, communications, and tracking systems produced by Garrett SatComm and IMB Systems are considered to be among the finest produced in the Successor States and endow scout 'Mechs with powerful reconnaissance capabilities. The

Imperator autocannon and Mark II and Mark V laser designs have proven reliable with low maintenance requirements. The Oriente and Leyda 'Mech repair facilities, which served the Star League Regular Army during the Reunification War, still remain among the most efficient repair depots in the galaxy.

Even in these sectors, however, problems prevail. The Free Worlds League has had a chronic shortage of new and replacement PPCs for almost a century, which has forced it to replace PPCs with LRMs or heavy lasers on several of its 'Mechs. At present, the one operational PPC plant at Campbellton cannot come close to meeting demand, which has driven the Marik to cement a risky trade agreement with Liao for 500 PPCs from the Ceres Metals plant on Sarna. Both SAFE and ROM agents have reported a large number of new PPCs sighted during Andurien military maneuvers on Xanthe III. Speculation is that the long inactive Magna Metals PPC factory on Lopez has been secretly reactivated, and Andurien has stockpiled its output in violation of Resolution 288.

Like every other Successor State, the League also occasionally lacks gyros, replacement myomers, and reactor shielding. Recently, a large number of shielding failures has prompted the Ministry of Energy to investigate possible improprieties in the production practices of the Kerr-McGinniss plant on Umka. This had partially satisfied the company's small but vocal opposition, whose rallying cry "A thousand years of bad press can't be all wrong!" may bear more than a germ of truth.

AEROSPACE CRAFT PRODUCTION

Even though the League has suffered substantial losses to its AeroSpace production capacity during the Succession Wars, it still retains its reputation as "The Gateway to the Stars." The League has ten active DropShip/JumpShip manufacturing facilities, each producing approximately three JumpShips and eight DropShips per year. Eight other factories manufacture 325 AeroSpace Fighters per year.

The Free Worlds retains only three facilities (at Clipperton, Tamarind, and Loyalty) capable of producing a Star Lord or Monolith Class JumpShip, and only a handful of Techs who possess the technological know-how to supervise such a complex operation. Following the lead of Hanse Davion, Janos Marik has convinced Parliament to fund the creation of a University of Science to prevent these skills from completely dying out.

Because of the complex nature of the technologies involved, most replacement parts for JumpShips, DropShips, and AeroSpace Fighters are manufactured at the primary production facilities. One notable exception to this general rule is Forerunner, A.G., a longtime producer of high-quality jumpsails. However, the sails are also prone to maintenance problems, keeping the League's drydock facilities busy.

OTHER MILITARY EQUIPMENT

The Galleon light tank, backbone of the League's armor battalions, is produced in large quantities at three facilities. Both the M4T laser rifle (produced by Austen Vale Ordnance) and the more recently designed Derenforth rifle (manufactured by Arm-strong Industries) have had spotty battlefield records. Most infantry commanders prefer to outfit their men with Steiner or Kurita laser rifles, leading to an active black market in such weapons.

'MECH PRODUCTION

The Free Worlds presently has 17 fully or partly operational 'Mech production facilities, manufacturing an estimated 500 'Mechs per year. Another seven production lines are currently shut down (due to component shortages) or disabled. Twenty-four different 'Mech types are currently manufactured in the League, with the most common being Stingers, Wasps, Orions, Griffins, Hermes IIs, Locusts, Wolverines, and Warhammers.

As previously noted, the Free Worlds League has had a serious shortage of assault 'Mech production capacity for the past 20-25 years. In 3025, League plants have only four active production lines of this type, producing an estimated 30 units per year. As a result of this problem, the League's assault battalions have become increasingly populated with Orions, Warhammers, and other lighter 'Mechs, placing them at a distinct disadvantage against equivalent units from the Lyran Commonwealth, which are well-stocked with new Zeuses and Goliaths.



STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The state of the Free Worlds League's military forces in 3025 mirrors the League's current status within the Inner Sphere. As the preeminent builder of new and reconditioned DropShips and AeroSpace Fighters, the Captain-General and his provincial "allies" field the most flexible and most mobile armed force remaining in the post-Star League galaxy. The actual size and might of Marik's 'Mech and conventional armor units, however, cannot match up against those of the other Successor States.

Except for the period between 2953-68, when it controlled the Liao Atlas and Victor production facility on Carver V, the only new assault 'Mechs produced by the Free Worlds League during the past century have been Awesomes, BattleMasters, and Goliaths. As a result, the League's regular regiments have become increasingly dominated by medium, 45-60 ton 'Mechs like the Phoenix Hawk, the Hunchback, and the home-grown Hermes II. Their armor units usually consist of light support vehicles like the 30-ton Galleon tank. This mix of units allows the Free Worlds to respond quickly to opportunities along its borders to conduct rapid, quick-strike raids behind enemy lines. Nevertheless, they are ill-suited for close, pitched battles against tightly massed forces and have had spotty success in full-scale invasions of enemy worlds.

The separation of forces into League and provincial units has turned major military operations into administrative nightmares and made coordination a virtual impossibility. Conversely, this provincial self-reliance, coupled with frequent civil unrest, has prompted the League's major worlds to maintain garrisons in a state of readiness seldom seen in the other four Successor States. The net result has been a military structure capable of defending its own territories, often in the face of extraordinary opposition, but which has been less successful in attaining the type of conquests required to win the Succession Wars.

'MECH PRODUCTION FACILITIES

Kali Yama Weapons Industries, Inc.-Kalidasa

<i>Hunchback</i>	14
<i>Trebuchet</i>	8
<i>Orion</i>	17
<i>Wasp</i>	20

Irian BattleMechs Unltd.-Irian

<i>Hermes II</i>	14
<i>Awesome</i>	7

Earthwerks, Inc.-Keystone

<i>Griffin</i>	18
<i>BattleMaster</i>	12
<i>Phoenix Hawk</i>	13
<i>Stinger</i>	27

Earthwerks, Inc.-Calloway VI

<i>Archer</i>	15
<i>Shadow Hawk</i>	14
<i>Stinger</i>	15

Irian BattleMechs-Shiro III

<i>Stalker</i>	11
<i>Hermes II</i>	20
<i>Wasp</i>	31

Kallon Industries-Thermopolis

<i>Rifleman</i>	8
<i>Wolverine-M</i>	18

Kali Yama/Alphard Trading Corp.-Kendall

<i>Orion</i>	25
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Free Worlds Defense Industries-Gibson

<i>Marauder-M</i>	8
<i>Wolverine-M</i>	18
<i>Cicada</i>	6
<i>Locust</i>	16

Brigadier Corp.-Oliver

<i>Griffin</i>	23
<i>Crusader</i>	7

Nimakachi Fusion Products, Ltd.-Tematagi

<i>Warhammer</i>	17
<i>Spider</i>	16
<i>Vulcan</i>	13

Corean Enterprises MacAdams-Suharno-Stewart

<i>Trebuchet</i>	8
<i>Goliath</i>	4
<i>Locust</i>	16

Ronin, Inc. (Div of SelaSys, Inc.)-Wallis

<i>Marauder-M</i>	13
<i>Warhammer</i>	5

Technicron-Savannah

<i>Quickdraw</i>	9
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CULTURE AND ARTS



In this nation of traders, beauty and technology are both sources of profit. In fact, many arts can be enjoyed only because of technology. For example, null-G dance is made possible by the technology that can maintain spaceships, make asteroids livable, and maintain the vidtape network through which the dance is brought to thousands of planets. Thus, arts and culture in the Free Worlds League is entwined with maintaining and nurturing technology.

TECHNOLOGY

During the Succession Wars, vast amounts of technical know-how were lost when companies storing trade secrets were destroyed and when the person responsible for safeguarding the location of those secrets was killed. Thus, while enough was retained to keep the Free Worlds' Mech factories running, gaps appeared in Mech assembly knowledge. Tradition solved maintenance problems: "Well, we fixed it this way before and it worked."

As such gaps became more evident and affected trade, they drew the attention of Parliament. Representatives held debates on ways to prevent greater loss of knowledge and to encourage technological research. Thus was born the notion of a League-wide technical university, which would disseminate knowledge and promote research into the lost technologies. By then, the Federated Suns had established the New Avalon Institute of Science, and was already showing materiel and tactical innovations. Steiner military officers were attending the NAIS by right of alliance, while the Draconis Combine, not to be outdone, was rumored to be opening its own university.

The Free Worlds Technical Institute was set up on Atrius in 3023. Its greatest difficulty lay in attracting teachers who knew and were willing to impart the trade secrets that formed the basis of most Free Worlds technical knowledge. Some secrets had been held by a family for centuries.

On this issue, the Parliamentary representative of Abbey District, Linkel Grant, has shown himself to be a top-notch negotiator. He is extraordinarily capable of coaxing a company to yield its secrets in exchange for trade concessions from the League. Grant believes that disseminated knowledge grows and yields profits far beyond its original intended use, returning indirectly to its former owner a profit many times over.

Grant's other accomplishment was to open the university to anyone who passes the entrance examination, on the theory that a sharp mind should not be wasted, no matter from where it comes. Because the entrance exam is highly technical, very few people without a noble's, MechWarrior's, or Tech's education pass, although some ambitious commoners have managed it with the sponsorship of a noble house.

Depending on his major, a student attends the Institute for three to five years. All subjects are designed to give students, regardless of age or eventual field, a solid understanding of science, physics, industrial manufacture, and planetology. In addition, they also master the histories of every Successor State. This attention to history was prompted by Quing Soyuz, the master trader who was the first dean of the Institute. A firm believer in Santayana's observation that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it, she rose to mastership by believing that a trader must know everything, in particular that which affects his competitors/enemies.

Soyuz's belief is reflected in every class—whether military or administrative—throughout the Institute. In establishing the Institute, the Parliament had hoped to produce graduates closely attuned to political and economic realities and who could be placed (after due tests of loyalty) in administrative, governmental, and military positions of influence to promote the cause of the Free Worlds League. It is too early to determine whether it will contribute to the unity of the League and strengthen the common cause.

EDUCATION

Knowledge other than the recovery and furtherance of technological knowledge is important too, as effective trading requires more than just product knowledge. Schools are not free, but are of good quality; scholastic standards are League-wide. Reading, writing, and ciphering are ruthlessly instilled, along with a basic knowledge of history (both natural and political), geography, and science.

After the basics, further schooling depends on the choice of profession and finding a sponsor to pay for it. A MechWarrior, noble, or tech will receive intensive training in a variety of subjects and rigorous technical training, while a commoner or apprentice will learn the skills of their basic trade.

FREE WORLDS UNIVERSITIES

The Free Worlds offers more universities than just its Technical Institute. Some are quite specialized, while others offer a liberal curriculum that attracts eclectic scholars from worlds around.

Business Schools

Two fierce rivals of outstanding quality are the Trade School on Loeches in Oriente and Maarakiva University on Olafsvik. These business schools thoroughly prepare their students for the life of a spaceborne trader, offering more than 300 disciplines to sharpen and master the intricacies of plain horse trading and dickering. While their curriculum resembles that of the Technical Institute, graduates of these universities are strictly oriented toward making a living.

Loyalty Theatrical Academy

Of quite a different persuasion is the Loyalty Theatrical Academy. This lively young institution was founded a mere 50 years ago to meet the demand for trained dramatic actors created by the vidtape fad. Although the fad eventually petered out, the academy continued, with backing from both major vidtape networks.

This has placed the Academy in an odd position. Some of the best performers in the League were hired and given carte blanche to provide the networks with a constant stream of talent and ideas. Then, unsatisfied with their results, the networks tried to control the curriculum by manipulating the purse strings and hiring practices.

The turnover among the teaching staff is high, although teachers may be fired and rehired several times, depending on which creative direction manager is in power at the networks. The Academy is currently seeking independent backing from a powerful House to sustain its struggle against censorship. Along with the standard (and sub-standard) videotape fodder, it is turning out original and exciting actors, writers, producers, and directors.

Kira Place

Located on Home, Kira Place is the self-proclaimed last bastion of free thinkers in the Free Worlds League. This amazingly eclectic school is the product of a cooperative that sprang up around a vacation retreat on this beautiful, lush world.

Thornton Hyadil and Muhren Dahl, professors of philosophy and economics at the Maarakiva University, often vacationed on Home, building castles in the air and demolishing present-day economic and philosophical practice. Others on recreational leave shared their enthusiasm for Home, and they made a pact to return there at regular intervals and practice cloud-building. The group grew to several dozen persons, who attracted small followings of their own. The meetings grew more regulated, and eventually the group hung out its shingle, choosing the unorthodox name of "Kira Place."

It is a point of pride that Kira Place is still relatively unstructured, encouraging the loose, informal discussions that its founders so enjoyed. Hyadil still maintains that Kira Place is the only place in the Free Worlds where one will hear original thought untainted by official regulation and timetables.



CULTURAL LIFE

In the tradition of a trading nation, an eye for beauty and a sense of value go hand in hand. The arts flourish as a by-product of the focus on trade. Created objects (plastic sculptures and abstract myomer art) and created movement (null-G dance, plays, and improvisational drama) are appreciated beyond their utility. The fact that they can be hawked or shown for gain is merely a profitable side-benefit.

Some art forms rise above the profit motive, however. The Park of 'Mechs on Norfolk has drawn visitors from all over the Inner Sphere with its recreations of famous battles, while enemy raiders have left the Paradise Jungles on Miaplacidus, close to both the Lyran and Capellan borders, untouched. Carmina Burana, a talented null-G dancer, has established several schools on various League worlds. She herself, however, lives by choice in isolation on a small asteroid circling Atreus, maintained on a permanent grant by Parliament, who is well-aware that she is one of the best advertisements of the benefits of a united Free Worlds League.

Throughout the Free Worlds, there is a roaring market in the burlesque. While objects and talents that awe people are duly appreciated, the talent of making them laugh is far more precious to the general populace. Popular acts and comedies are spread by videotape, the holographic media that carries news and fiction to every part of Free Worlds space.

A side benefit of the videotape is the vidnovel, a screen about 20 by 35 centimeters that shows black characters on a white background. The vidnovel can either be read as is, or the person may slip a light-weight headband (a distant cousin of the neurohelmet) over his head. The headband provides subliminal background information on the subject of the vidnovel.

Headbanded vidnovel reading is rather difficult, as the information gleaned from reading and from subliminal assimilation must be integrated. However, mastering the task provides the reader with a powerful way to learn about his subject. Vidnovels are very popular with historians, who can cram large amounts of the background necessary to understand their subject.

THE VIDTAPE FINALS

The political balkanization of the Free Worlds League is equally apparent in its social and cultural aspects. Unlike the Federated Suns, where a particular planet is acknowledged to dominate a particular talent, the Free Worlds has no clear victors. Each province smugly proclaims itself to be the best.

Over the years, this has evolved into a League-wide contest, which settles opposing claims while entertaining the Free Worlds. Seeing the contest as another method of unifying the competitive League worlds, Parliament actively promoted the contest, even providing the vidtape leaders (Columbia Vidtape Services and Associated Broadcast Vids) with minor subsidies in return for broadcasting "The Vidtape Finals." The two-week contest is broadcast to all League worlds and generates incredible revenues.

Few worlds manage to dominate a specialty. The crowns of "Theater World", "Vidtape Producer", and "Null-G Dancer" change worlds yearly. A side benefit to these competitions is the populations' increased interest in the other worlds that make up the Free Worlds League.

LEISURE

Leisure opportunities vary with wealth and location. Border worlds usually do not have the resources or time to take luxurious or extended vacations. On the Inner Worlds (where the richer Houses are) some forms of recreation have grown to industry proportions.

Vidtape is an enduring recreational form, regardless of one's wealth. There is no one so poor that he cannot afford at least the public tapes. Most have vidtape projectors in their residences, and there are vidtape theaters everywhere.

In addition, there is also a national passion for gambling and games of chance. The League's most popular game is Four-Card Drax, but there are many other games designed to test the nerve of opponents as well as to separate the sucker from his money. Sitting in lavish, soundproofed rooms on Kyeinnisan, the Gambler's World, amid the smoke of fine dryweed, some inveterate gamblers will even wager on the flip of a coin.

The wonders of nature are quite accessible. Several of the inner worlds are famous as vidtape backdrops, with spectacular natural terrain. Even worlds not as wonderfully endowed can be engineered to provide some thrills.

Not all League inhabitants jump at the chance to get back to nature. There is a continual flow of new and different games from other League worlds and beyond. Each city boasts its own bazaar; even the smallest hamlet sports its marketplace, where villages discuss news and see the latest imports.



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CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Because inhabitants of the Free Worlds are canny and contentious, there are plenty of opportunities for lawsuits, both between individual parties and between worlds. Usually, suits between individuals are resolved by the next highest authority; i.e., two denizens of a House are bound by the House Court, and individuals of two different cities are judged in one of the two cities' judicial apparatus.

Suits between worlds are settled by the Supreme Judicial Court, empowered by Parliament. Despite his great power, the Marik has never been able to influence its adjudications (and their attending court costs). The Parliament keeps this power jealously, maintaining that only representatives of the Free Worlds can adequately render justice.

Suits between worlds usually center about control of resources and industrial espionage. Although conscious that dissent among themselves could weaken the Free Worlds' accord, most worlds are still extremely jealous of their rights as originators or patent holders of scientific and technological processes. They still smart from the forced sharing of trade secrets during the Star League days.

Crime is not all espionage, however. The more violent crimes of murder, rape, and robbery occur frequently, especially on worlds with rougher industries (mining and smelting). Worlds with substantial 'Mech units also suffer a good deal of disruption and carousing, which can erupt into violence in an instant. Usually, the more a planet depends on service industries, the more effort is expended in providing a police force capable of repressing any disturbing incidents.

The Gambler's World, Kyeinnisan, maintains a frighteningly efficient, well-trained security force that maintains the lowest crime rate on any Free Worlds planet, including Atreus. Each business owner on the planet pays a special levy to maintain the "Holy Rollers." Owners who are remiss in their payments are not brutalized; their establishments simply are not patrolled or monitored.

On the inner worlds, punishment tends more toward confinement and loss of civil rights. On the outer worlds, where battles and raids constantly disrupt ordinary living, local inhabitants are less conscious of the niceties of justice. A violent crime reaps a violent reward. There, most murders are punishable by immediate death, and some border worlds include torture before execution to deter others.



FOUR-CARD DRAX

The convolutions dear to League hearts are evident in its favorite card game, Four-Card Drax, also known as Drax. Especially favored by the military, Drax needs just 52 plascards to play. There are even Drax tables at the Cave, the League's most popular gambling palace on Kyeinnisan, an independent planet between the Protectorate and Regulus that is also known as "the Gambler's World."

Traced back to an ancient card game called poker (which is still played), Drax itself is quite old, being played before the formation of the Free Worlds League. It lends itself very well to high-stake gambling. Legend has it that Corey Chang won Highpoint Traders from Hugo Schmatz on the last turn of a Drax card. While history does not record what became of Schmatz, rumor persists that he remains at the Cave to improve his game and to win his company back.

Equipment

The deck consists of 52 plascards, divided into four suits: House Marik, House Steiner, House Kurita, and House Davion. Cards rank, from low to high: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, Lancer, Rifleman, Regent.

Deal

The first card is dealt face down (the "hole" card). After each player receives an up card, there is a round of betting. Then, another card is dealt to each person, followed by another round of betting, until all players have four cards.

Rules

Hands are judged according to their rank (see below). The three top cards—the Lancer, Rifleman, and Regent—have no value but change the values of the cards in the player's hand as follows:

Regent	All cards increase value by one
Rifleman	All cards decrease value by one
Lancer of House Marik or Kurita	All cards in suit increase value by one
Lancer of House Steiner or Davion	All cards in suit decrease value by one

If a player receives a Lancer, Rifleman, or Regent as a hole card, he keeps it face down; it will affect his cards as given above. If he receives one of these cards face up, he sets it aside and receives another card. He will continue setting any of these cards aside until he receives a normal card, 1-10. These cards, although set aside, will still affect his hand; he is obliged to keep them in sight where other players can see them.

The cards' effects are cumulative. For example, if the player receives two Regents, all cards in his hand will increase by two.

When a Regent, Rifleman, or Lancer pushes a card over 10 or below 1, the card's value goes "round the corner", from 1 to 10 or from 10 to 1.

RANKING OF THE HANDS

(From low to high)

- Nothing
- One pair
- Two pair
- Three of a kind
- Sequence of four, mixed suits
- Drax (Sequence of four, same suit)
- Four of a kind

If the hands of two or more people have the same rank, the higher cards win. For example, if two people have four of a kind, four 9s will win over four 3s. If nobody has at least one pair, the highest card wins.

The sudden shifts of fortune, as a Regent drops on the last deal or a Lancer is flipped as the hole card, make Four-Card Drax a suspenseful game, demanding alertness from its participants.

SAFE

Since ancient times, nations have needed information to conduct their day-to-day business. This is especially true in foreign affairs, where a nation's survival depends heavily on knowing what both enemies and friends are up to, and why. Thus, governments commit substantial re-sources to gather and analyze domestic and foreign intelligence, which they hope to use in various kinds of covert operations. Early on, the Free Worlds League developed the means to obtain and process intelligence data, at first strictly as a survival mechanism, and later as a cornerstone of its government. These intelligence agencies have changed considerably over the years, sometimes becoming too powerful, at other times acting as mere pawns in the complex political struggles of the League. One way or the other, the Free Worlds League has always placed a high priority on maintaining its intelligence services at peak performance.

ORIGINS AND HISTORY

The Document of incorporation provided for an amalgamation of government under a central Parliament, as well as the combination of certain strategic resources under a single authority. Surrender of state intelligence services, however, was a contested issue prior to the Treaty of Marik. Though the founding states eventually agreed to replace their individual intelligence agencies with a central government agency, it is not surprising that they showed so much initial resistance to the idea. In the volatile period when the Free Worlds League was conceived, no one was sure whether or not it would survive. It was not until the Trade Act of 2283 that any legal authority existed to give the three services access to each other's resources. During the 2280s, sufficient cooperation developed that the Parliament could confidently appoint Juliano Marik Captain-General in order to conquer the Stewart Confederacy, whose military and economic strength had been accurately assessed.

Juliano Marik was the first great military hero of the Free Worlds League, holding the Captain-Generalship during the war against Stewart in the 2290s, and again during the Terran crisis of 2314-16. In this role, he saw the kind of logistical problems created by having six different intelligence agencies, none of which could give him the whole picture. As a Marik MP, he sponsored a bill to create a Free Worlds intelligence bureau that would be overseen by the Minister of Intelligence and responsible to Parliament in peacetime and to the Captain-General during crisis. The bill passed by a very narrow vote, and in August 2317, the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) was born.

NIA OPERATIONS

From the start, NIA conducted its operations both inside and outside the League. Outside, the Agency had to deal with the development of new states along the League's borders, particularly the Lyran Commonwealth, the Capellan Confederation, and the small but wealthy Duchy of Andurien. Inside the League, the NIA was charged with uncovering treason and anti-government plots. Except in several nasty spy trials involving the Lyran Commonwealth and Free Worlds agents in the late 25th century, captured spies were usually treated like negotiable goods.

During the first few centuries of the NIA's existence, the intelligence game became a very polite one, carried out under very specific and binding rules. The ordinary person's romantic image of the high-spy life were a far cry from the research, routine detective work, and fastidious analysis that characterized NIA operations.



NIA AND THE STAR LEAGUE

The Star League's Intelligence Concordat was endorsed by all six Council Lords in 2576 to coordinate intelligence operations during the conquest of the Periphery. Intelligence services were encouraged, though not absolutely compelled, to share data with one another on matters that affected more than one member-state.

The first combined operation in which the NIA participated was in 2603, when it teamed up with its Lyran counterpart to break an extensive piracy and smuggling ring that had been preying on shipping for nearly two years.

Meanwhile, the NIA was developing into a closely knit organization that was almost a society within a society. In the famous exposé, *The NIA Unmasked*, former NIA Director of Intelligence Shannon Cantrell describes how the agency used its intelligence methods even within its own ranks. Cantrell states, for example, that the NIA Accounting Division prepared two sets of internal costing records from 2588 through 2631. One set was presented to the Minister of Intelligence and the other to the NIA Oversight Committee in Parliament. Cantrell even points out that the DJ could never be completely sure that the Agency records accounted for every operation that the various NIA cells were conducting.

These other extralegal activities ultimately erupted in a scandal. In response, Parliament revoked the centuries-old charter of the NIA and established a replacement agency, SAFE. The agency's acronym was based on an old saying in an ancient Terran language, but its meaning has now been lost.

SAFE AND THE "CLEANSING"

The attack on the Marik family estate in 2678 affected the course of history for the next two generations. SAFE was the chief agent of Captain-General Gerald Marik's investigation of the Scourge of Death, and it was a SAFE team that uncovered the link between the terrorists and the Selaj family. During the next half-century, the agency was given ever-increasing authority to conduct investigations of "suspicious" or "potentially subversive" persons, organizations, corporations, and even planetary governments. Unlike the NIA's activities, these operations were conducted with Parliament's full knowledge. Because of the political tenor of the era, that body was compelled to condone them. The tenures of Gerald Marik and his daughter, Elise Marik, transformed the Free Worlds into a nightmarish police state, an era that many historians consider to be the most repressive in the long history of the Free Worlds League.

SAFE DURING THE SUCCESSION WARS

The military crisis of the Succession Wars has both inhibited and encouraged intelligence activity. On one hand, the brutality of the conflict has made it difficult to carry out such operations. On the other hand, the need for the special brand of information involved makes these agencies even more necessary.

Under the terms of the Security Act, Captain-General Kenyon Marik amalgamated the defense intelligence agencies under the umbrella of SAFE. Members of Parliament viewed this move with some concern at first, for SAFE had been known to abuse its powers as recently as the 2730s. The terms of the Intelligence Act of 2735 were quite explicit concerning SAFE's authority within the Free Worlds; in any case, Kenyon the Eagle was far more concerned with using SAFE to fight the Succession War than in prosecuting potential traitors, and so he redistributed its assets to handle foreign intelligence almost to the exclusion of domestic operations.

SAFE AND THE "COMSTAR WAR"

The tenure of Charles Marik, son of Thaddeus, began with the Free Worlds at peace, but the Captain-General's thoughts never strayed far from war. With the resources of SAFE in short supply, he tried to use a highly placed ComStar contact, his older sister Jeannette, to obtain advance information about military movements in the Lyran Commonwealth. It took but one piece of advance intelligence to bring the two sides to conflict, and it was the Marik who attacked first, launching his forces against the Steiner world of Wyatt. Charles, however, was suspicious of ComStar from the outset, worrying that he might become a pawn in one of their mysterious schemes. He set his intelligence network to uncovering evidence that the Free Worlds were being manipulated.

Over the course of the next five years, the directorate of SAFE was placed under ever-increasing pressure by the Marik, who grew ever more paranoid about the intermittent messages from his sister. In 2837, SAFE sent a transmission through ComStar, falsely describing a Star League warehouse discovered on the abandoned world of Bonaire. When a Liao expeditionary force invaded the system, the Marik knew that ComStar was passing its priority messages on to enemies of the Free Worlds. Without further consideration, he hurled his fleet into action against the ComStar "A" station. Shortly thereafter, the Free Worlds were placed under Communications Interdict, not to be withdrawn until Charles Marik personally capitulated and made restitution nearly two years later. After the ComStar debacle, SAFE's funding and Parliamentary backing were so reduced that it could do little real good or damage.

SAFE AND THE WAR OF 3014

Like his predecessors, Janos Marik once employed the intelligence agency almost exclusively against foreign enemies. After so many decades of turning away from domestic issues, Marik intelligence sources were not alert enough to catch on to the treasonous intentions of the Captain-General's brother Anton, Duke of Procyon. Thus it was that the sudden mutiny of a portion of the Free Worlds military and the rebellion of a dozen worlds caught both SAFE and the Captain-General by surprise.

Janos Marik went to Parliament for authorization to amend the Intelligence Act to allow SAFE to seek out treasonous acts. As an experienced political bargainer, he made his case quite clear: SAFE was answerable to him, and it would seek out and arrest traitors with or without the emendation. Faced with the Captain-General's fait accompli and with the prospect of a protracted civil war, the Parliament caved in. They repealed a number of key provisions of the Intelligence Act though only in exchange for the right of ex post facto review of SAFE's activity, both domestic and foreign.

In the years since Anton's rebellion, Parliament has repeatedly debated whether to restore the constraints of the Intelligence Act. The Captain-General's supporters have been consistently able to thwart such action, arguing that the volatile domestic situation mandates even wider authority for SAFE. Almost as proof of this position, SAFE has uncovered a number of plots against the Free Worlds government in the dozen years since the rebellion, and the timely publication of details of these plots have placed public opinion squarely behind the Captain-General. MPs, serving but two years at a time, can only acquiesce. As for Janos Marik, he learned how important it was to strengthen the domestic organization of SAFE, paying careful heed to its regular reports of dissatisfaction and unrest.



Presently, SAFE has three main areas of endeavor: the gathering and analysis of intelligence data, the execution of covert operations, and the protection of Free Worlds (and its own) security through counterintelligence.

INFORMATION GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

Contrary to the glamorous fantasies of espionage fiction, intelligence-gathering is largely dull detective work, and analysis consists primarily of assembling a picture of the enemy from the information provided by intelligence assets, both public and private. The materials to be analyzed range from publications and videotape reports to back-channel diplomatic discussions and intercepted messages detailing changes in unit deployment. SAFE's Analysis Branch devotes substantial time and efforts to developing a data base on enemy resources.

COVERT OPERATIONS

SAFE has placed increasing importance on covert operations. In contrast to intelligence-gathering, which is often a tedious, lengthy process with no specific goal in sight, covert operations are time-constrained and generally have very specific objectives. They generally entail more risk than other types of spy missions, not only to the operatives) charged with carrying out the mission, but also to the intelligence agency itself. Still, the ability to carry out such operations is a powerful weapon in a war that has been fought to near stalemate for two and a half centuries.

The decision to engage in any extraordinary operation must come from above the level of the Director of SAFE, usually from the Minister of Intelligence or the Captain-General himself. A major consideration is whether SAFE has enough assets (agents, civilian contacts, safe houses, mail drops, and so on) in the target area to help carry out the plan. These assets are also crucial to the aftereffects (if any) of the mission, recovery from failure, and assurance of secrecy before, during, and after the fact.

COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE

SAFE must also take pains to protect itself, and the Free Worlds, from the activities of rival and enemy agencies. Two prime examples of the efforts of the Counterintelligence Directorate of SAFE are the systematic search for persons, military units, and governments sympathetic to the rebellion of Anton Marik and the coup resulting in the defection of the provinces of Ohren and Zion from the Capellan Confederation in the waning years of the previous century.

Counterintelligence, by its very nature, is the most difficult of the three sub-professions of the intelligence business. It breeds distrust, and draws to itself the most patriotic-and the most treacherous. It has been said that counterspying is "no fit employment for a Free Worlder." Without it, though, the security of the entire Free Worlds League would certainly be at risk.

SOCIO- ECONOMICS



The entrepreneurial and commercial tradition in the Free Worlds is strong and hallowed. For seven hundred and fifty years, the greatest motivation in the Free Worlds has been the desire to make money, and the ethical framework promoting this desire has become all-pervasive.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the foundation of the Free Worlds League in the latter half of the 23rd century, the human race had experienced a century of expansion that still stands without comparison in the history of mankind. The discovery of the Kearny-Fuchida technology had opened the door to an era of free-wheeling expansion, with little restriction or control from the mother world. Today, unlimited expansion and boundless opportunity seem like myths; nonetheless, the booming Terran economy was further fueled by the exploitation of resources available for the taking.

Eventually, the Terran bureaucracy began to impose restrictions on commerce, especially on goods moving from one colony to another. Terra imposed tariffs and duties, extending the already-sprawling bureaucracy into the affairs of private industry. The obnoxious tendencies of Terran Customs inspectors with regard to search and seizure was the last straw; relations between Terra and the colony worlds quickly eroded, leading eventually to rebellion. With no means to keep the colonies in line, however, the Terran Alliance let the colonies go, expecting them to return to the fold voluntarily when their political or economic systems collapsed.

Terra's withdrawal drastically depressed its colonies' economies, and the states found that going it alone was difficult. Because the worlds were interdependent and because of the threat posed by raiders and pirates, the former colonies joined coalitions and alliances. Ultimately, three such alliances joined to form the Free Worlds League.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE ECONOMY

From the first, the League followed contemporary economic theory. Arthur J. Bodhran's *Conflict in the Marketplace* (Great Circle Press, 2263) is the authoritative work of the era. Its theme is that military struggle would ultimately give way to economic struggle as governments realized how costly and futile military campaigns were to execute. By comparison, economic "warfare" was productive by its very nature, and a competitive economy would maintain itself, rather than provide a further drain. "We will defeat them with weapons of commerce," Charles Marik declared during the first sitting of the Free Worlds Parliament in 2272. "Our legions will consist of trade representatives, and we will fight our battles in boardrooms and on the floors of stock exchanges. And in the end, even our enemies will enjoy the spoils of our victory." Despite this altruistic approach, however, the Free Worlds did not fail to allocate funds for the military.

The economic policy of the Free Worlds League rested on two pillars: free trade and technological innovation (compensating for the lack of industrial base in the League). In response to the stifling rule of Terra, the Free Worlds always favored the idea of unrestricted and unregulated commerce. This policy fostered a ruthless brand of social Darwinism among the highly competitive traders in the Free Worlds League, driving smaller traders out of business or into partnerships. The drastic reduction in the numbers of trading companies between 2300-2400 was so striking that Parliament frequently debated the subject of government protection, but such legislation was consistently defeated. On one memorable occasion, Stephan Allison, former President of the Federation of Oriente and Speaker of Parliament from 2342 to 2347, said that government had no business involving itself in the commercial affairs of the League-business knew its own business. It would remain this way for years to come.

As a result of this "winnowing" effect, business experienced a boom during the middle of the 24th century, and the Free Worlds grew into a dominant force in the economic affairs of the Inner Sphere. This was not easily won, as the departure of the Terran Alliance substantially devalued the Terran dollar, which only had confidence to support it. By comparison, the successors to the Terran Alliance were obliged to back their currencies with real value, most often choosing commodities such as petroleum, radioactives, rare earths, or precious metals. As there was no provision in the Document of Incorporation concerning currency for nearly a century after the Treaty of Marik, the member provinces had their own legal tender. In 2353, following a lengthy and extremely acrimonious debate, Parliament adopted the rare earth metal germanium as legal tender to support its own currency. Arcadia Mining Corporation, a vast conglomerate based in the Principality of Regulus, had uncovered a lode of the metal in the Irian system during the previous year and had placed it at the disposal of the government in exchange for a lucrative contract. The Free Worlds economic clout was so powerful that every other major state adopted the germanium standard within a decade.

The traders of the Free Worlds have served many roles over the years. During the waning years of the 24th century, Captain-General Peter Marik turned the network of official Free Worlds trade missions into a civilian intelligence network, providing him with advance warning on the activities of the League's rivals and friends. The speed with which the Marik was able to react to political maneuverings surprised many at first, but soon the traders' second profession became well-known and accepted as a matter of course.

Because of great strides in technology, the Free Worlds continued to prosper. BattleMech technology was a source of constant innovation as the Free Worlds contended with its rivals for military superiority. However, the real fount of discovery in the Free Worlds was the refinement of jump technology. Advancements in metallurgy and polymerization allowed the size of the jump sail to be reduced by nearly a factor of three, leading to significantly lower costs in shipbuilding. The Conde process, a high-pressure crystallization technique applied to the titanium/germanium alloy, extended the lifespan of Kearny-Fuchida drive cores from about eight months to more than two years. Finally, the



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RISE OF PROTECTIONISM

Following the conquest of the Magistracy of Canopus, the Free Worlds embarked on an extensive investment campaign to rebuild the Canopus economy. The Canopians worked hard to regain their former status and benefited greatly from this investment. Its new facilities, modern equipment, and inexpensive labor were soon put to work in direct competition with the industries of the Free Worlds. Within two decades of the withdrawal of Free Worlds troops in 2604, the Magistracy had driven the Free Worlds into a deep recession that would last more than ten years.

This event, along with the rising industrial might of the Lyran Commonwealth, created a new school of economic theory—Protectionism. The Protectionists were in favor of government regulation of trade and industry, aid to businesses harmed by the deep recession, and tariffs to protect local industry and commerce. At the outset, the Protectionists were a minority, as the majority of Parliament continued to favor free trade and nonintervention by government. In 2622, however, Globe Press published the seminal work, *Chains of History*, by Edmund McVey Hassan, which fully articulated the Protectionist position.

Hassan's arguments were twofold. First, for centuries, economic policies of Parliament had been dictated by a small group of wealthy "merchant princes," whose interlocking financial collusion had perpetuated their class at the expense of others. Second, membership in the Star League had drained all initiative from the Free Worlds, as it gave away its cultural and political identity as readily as it gave away its technological expertise. According to his thesis, if the two tendencies were not reversed, the Free Worlds would drift into economic servitude and would soon break apart into a number of smaller, less powerful states with no ties to their past and no hope for the future.

This skillfully written book appealed to both dilettantes and grass-roots demagogues. An overnight success, it remained on the best-seller lists for nearly two years. Free-trade MPs were driven out of Parliament, and the Protectionists came to power for nearly an entire generation, between 2624 and 2640. While the Star League specifically forbade the passage of tariffs against other members, the Protectionists diverted large amounts of money to subsidies, low-interest loans, and investments in Free Worlds industries to compete with foreign ones. Meanwhile, encouraged by the Protectionist successes in Parliament, trade and industrial unions fomented disputes, seeking to grab greater pieces of the pie. It was not until the discovery of the Laranth process in 2639, which drastically reduced the cost of water purification and greatly helped the exploitation of worlds, that the Free Worlds economy rose to a new prosperity. On the wave of this success, the Protectionist coalition splintered over long-range financial planning and gradually lost control over the formation of economic policy.

The landmark decision *Camlann vs. Free Worlds*, which paved the way for the fragmentation of the larger provinces, also had lasting effects on the Free Worlds economy. During the prosperous secondhalf of the 27th century, a substantial number of companies, both industrial and commercial, were created. The trading firms took advantage of the new opportunities for trade with recently independent worlds, some of which were hostile to their former mentors. Investment in the newer provinces gave greater possibilities for fortunes to be made.

Brandt recoil simplified the delicate calculations made by jump crews, and the number of dreaded misjumps was reduced to almost zero by the end of the 25th century. The great yards at Oriente, Angell, and Stewart acquired renown for housing the finest shipbuilders in space. On the wings of these and other developments, the Free Worlds remained on the cutting edge of technology, strengthening its economy immeasurably and becoming a major player in the foundation of the Star League.

THE SUCCESSION WARS

The merchant princes of the Free Worlds League never expected the First Succession War to continue for as long as it did. The entrepreneurial philosophy of the Free Worlds' traders simply did not allow for the notion that such a war would be pursued, because it was simply bad for business. Deteila's biography of Kenyon Marik (The Eagle Triumphant) describes a trade delegation in an interview with the Marik in the fall of 2793, inquiring about the opening of commercial lanes between the Free Worlds and the Lyran Commonwealth. "It was the Marik's sad duty to inform them," Deteila writes. "that this war would be unlike any other in the long history of the Free Worlds; that it would be fought until one side or the other had won." He was at least partially right: it was to be unlike any other war, but there would be no victor, merely generation upon generation of destruction and bloodshed, until the very state of peace had become the stuff of myth and legend.

The change from peace to war substantially altered the status of the Free Worlds' trading combines. Parliament immediately passed the Proscription Act, forbidding the importation or sale of a wide variety of products manufactured in the other Successor States. While this act had obvious political motivations and consequences, it also marked the return of Protectionist economic policy to Parliament, as many of the proscribed goods were in direct competition with similar goods inside the Free Worlds League. Though this policy was a boon to the industries, it was extremely harmful for Free Worlds trading firms, especially ones that did extensive trading across the borders into other states.

Traders had three options in response to the Proscription Act. First, the prohibitions could simply be ignored or circumvented by smuggling, bribery, or other illegal means. Once the war heated up, the Free Worlds had few resources to pursue wrongdoers. Second, the company could curtail or terminate operations out-side the Free Worlds in favor of strictly domestic trade. This eliminated the need to contest the Act, but also required it to break into established and long-held markets. The third option, rarely chosen but often arrived at, was for the trader to go out of business. With markets closed, extremely violent war raging, and the ever-present threat of confiscation or impressment, even the renowned acumen of Free Worlds traders was unable to counter-act the effects of the deepening war.

The end of the First Succession War in the 2820s was by no means the end of trouble for the Free Worlds League. The fighting had lasted an entire generation and had cost more money than any government could possibly pay. Conscription of personnel and resources had been exchanged largely with government scrip, to be redeemed by the issuer at the conclusion of hostilities. The end of the war had made these debts due and payable in the currency of the Star League—the rare earth metal germanium. The inability of the governments to pay more than a fraction of the total caused widespread unrest.



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CURRENCY AND INFLATION

By the most recent emendation of the ComStar Currency Exchange Bill, the established exchange rate between the ComStar C-Bill and the Free Worlds League M-Bill (also known as the "Eagle") is 7 to 10; correspondingly, the rate of exchange between the M-Bill and Capellan L-Bill is approximately 7 to 5, and the rate between the M-Bill and the Draconis K-Bill is 7 to 8. These rates apply, of course, exclusively to above-board banking transactions. The present unsavory nature of commerce means that rates can be far more unfavorable in less accommodating circumstances. Trading in Lyran or Federated Suns currency is strictly prohibited.

The actual form of Free Worlds currency has changed over the centuries. During the Star League era, there was no actual scrip; electronic machines were used to conduct monetary transactions, even in restaurants and grocery-stores. The Succession Wars have made this automation all but impossible, as central banking institutions are no longer equipped to track and control a completely "paperless" economy. Instead, the Free Worlds Central Bank (headquartered on Atreus) has fallen back on pre-Star League technology to produce currency to support the exchange of goods and services. Using a process known as induction-field electrophoresis, M-Bills are "minted" from special leaves of polymer vellum by passing a particular electromagnetic current through them. This current "images" the bill with a pattern that is practically impossible to counterfeit. Furthermore, attempts to tamper with the polymer itself generally fragments the pattern image, rendering the bill "denatured" and useless.

The purchasing power of the M-Bill varies considerably from place to place in the League, but in general is equivalent to about \$3.50 U.S. (1988). Below are some sample costs of goods and services in the Free Worlds League.

Speeder, rental (1 day)	10 M-Bills	
Meal at good restaurant	15 M-Bills	
Overnight at fine hotel	35 M-Bills	
Suit of tailored clothes	50 M-Bills	
Transcontinental air trip	60 M-Bills	
Shuttle flight, surface to orbit		70 M-Bills
ComStar message, 1000 words		120 M-Bills
Speeder, purchase	700 M-Bills	
Income, laborer/month	120 M-Bills	
Income, office worker/month		180 M-Bills
Income, infantryman/month	350 M-Bills	
Income, MechWarrior/month (regular)		850 M-Bills
Income, MechWarrior/month (mercenary)		400- 900 M-Bills

CORPORATE PROFILES

FREE WORLDS DEFENSE INDUSTRIES

League Stock Market Symbol: FWDI

Home Office Location: Andurien

President/CEO: A. Liam McNeill

Founding Date: October 2562

Principal Divisions

Division Name: Gibson Federated BattleMechs

Division Head: Samuel Humphreys

Chief Products: BattleMechs

Division Name: Andurien AeroTech

Division Head: Lady Shanna Valdssen

Chief Products: AeroSpace Fighters

History:

FreeWorlds Defense Industries, or FWDI, was formed in 2562 by the merger of Gibson Federated BattleMechs and Andurien AeroTech. Although both corporations were relative newcomers in the defense industry, the significant military expertise of their founders (many of whom had risen to high rank during border conflicts with the Lyrans) compensated for their business inexperience. When the merger occurred, Andurien AeroTech had been dedicating resources to the production of two types of surface-to-orbit escort craft, the *Aquarius* and the *Lyonesse*, for the Andurien military. Gibson Federated had been producing *Wolverine-M* BattleMechs at a tremendous pace, but had run into cash flow problems. The merger provided the aerospace company with new investment possibilities, while giving the BattleMech company a new source of income. *Wolverine* 'Mechs became a mainstay of Free Worlds forces, allowing FWDI to expand operations, refit the extensive industrial site on Gibson, and open a new 'Mech production facility on Westover in 2607 and a new product development installation on Lopez in 2611.

During the 2620s and 2630s, the competition from Canopus hurt FWDI, which cut back sharply on production. The most direct consequence of this action was labor unrest, including strikes at all major FWDI sites and sabotage at the Westover 'Mech factories. In 2628, FWDI retreated into bankruptcy to avoid creditors, though it became solvent less than a year later due to government support. A SAFE investigation of the union solved the labor problems by convicting six prominent leaders. Though this action was later censured by Parliament, it effectively defused FWDI labor problems for years to come.

In the restoration period immediately prior to the Succession Crisis, FWDI received a government contract to develop a new AeroSpace Fighter for Free Worlds military forces. In 2744, it



produced the *Deathstalker*, an 80-ton fighter with a unique wing design. Only 20 of these fighters were manufactured, and none ever saw action. Four years later, the design was modified, and the resulting fighter—the F-90 *Stingray*—became one of the most popular fighters in Free Worlds service.

Shortly before the eruption of the Succession Wars, FWDI introduced the powerful *Riever* AeroSpace Fighter, a 100-ton heavily armored monster with another unusual wing design.

Business Profile:

Like most industrial firms, FWDI has suffered heavily from the destructions of the Succession Wars. In 2796, the industrial installation on Lopez was leveled to its foundations. It was rebuilt under a special grant from the Duchy of Andurien, under the provision that a representative from House Humphreys, the rulers of Andurien, head the BattleMech division, a condition which has prevailed to this day. Andurien continues to influence FWDI's internal organization, though it only directly interferes in the FWDI facilities in Andurien space.

The AeroSpace Division is in charge of producing two AeroSpace Fighter types: the 60-ton *Stingray* and the 100-ton *Riever*. Both vessels are produced at the Westover facility, where the division is headquartered, and at the newer, refurbished Lopez factory. The head of the AeroSpace Division, Shanna Valdssen, is a retired AeroSpace Pilot who holds both a Silver Cross and the Order of the Saber. She was much decorated while in active service, but suffered a massive injury during a dogfight in the Ninth Battle of Berenson. Her right leg has been extensively reconstructed by MID implant.

Headquartered at Gibson, the BattleMech division is primarily responsible for producing the *Wolverine-M* 'Mech. This popular 'Mech is built with lasers instead of the usual right arm autocannon. The Gibson factory has also made several innovations in the design of the jump jets, making them somewhat more reliable. In 3016, Parliament licensed the Gibson facility to convert an unused production line to construct the *Hermes II* 'Mech, though this line has been troubled by shortages, equipment failures, and general inefficiency. His Grace Lord Samuel Humphreys, Baron of Delburton and first cousin to Andurien's duchess, is a bureaucrat and administrator with no combat experience. However, he has done a great deal to increase the productivity and reliability of the division's facilities.

Security/Military Forces:

FWDI employs various security forces at its scattered installations. It has on call two companies of BattleMechs, which are all *Wolverine-Ms*. At Gibson, there are also two lances of newly built *Hermes II* Mechs. At the Andurien facilities, there are also numerous plainclothes intelligence service operatives, especially at the research facility; it is extremely difficult to get into or out of the plant. In recent years, there have been a number of "incidents" involving SAFE and Andurien intelligence agents, the former attempting to penetrate the security of the latter.

Notes:

Like most defense contractors, FWDI has profited from the continuing war, both because of the need for its goods and the steady reduction of competitors. With the financial support of the Free Worlds government and of the province of Andurien, FWDI has fared better than other manufacturers. Current CEO Liam McNeill is an Andurien cipher, and has left the BattleMech division largely on its own. From ComStar's point of view, FWDI's future will be determined by its research and development activity and the extent to which Andurien will be willing to share it with the rest of the Free Worlds League.



Since the beginning of the Succession Wars, Irian's financial star has steadily waned. The company's well-known stature in the defense marketplace made its production facilities high priority targets during First and Second Succession Wars, when the five Houses still believed that the wanton destruction of enemy manufacturing capacity would enable them to win the war. Similarly, the corporation's heavy concentration of facilities near the League borders (which has historically aided IrTech in penetrating new markets in other Star League member states) greatly increased its vulnerability to attack. Of the 87 production and laboratory facilities operated by IrTech before the First Succession War, less than 20 percent survived the end of that war unscathed. However, the company has stubbornly refused to move its operations further into the League's interior, declaring publicly that "Irian is and always will be our home." The intervening years have taken a heavy toll and left IrTech a smoking shell of its former greatness.

Business Profile:

Irian BattleMechs currently has two operational 'Mech production facilities: a stripped-down but still efficient plant on Shiro III, which produces *Quickdraws* and *Wasps*, and the Soapstone Mountain plant on Irian, which, though virtually razed by Anton Marik's rebel forces during the civil war of 3014, has resumed producing *Hermes II* BattleMechs due to financial backing from Dame Catherine Humphreys. The division's recently appointed President, Sigmund Hughes, has received many accolades for bringing the Soapstone Mountain plant back on-line in less than three years. In truth, however, the real credit for reopening the plant should go to two mysterious non-IrTech Techs, Nkrumah Blake and Gowarjapul Campion, who spearheaded the rebuild effort.

Headquartered on the world of Carbonis and with subsidiary plants on Irian, Nathan, and Van Diemen IV, IMB Systems manufactures everything from 'Mech sensor arrays and atmospheric flight instrumentation to vidtape and vidcube viewers, household and industrial security systems, and computerized data storage/retrieval equipment. Its CEO, Maren Spandau, is said to be able to "sniff out a consumer trend even before the customer knows he has a need." Over her 14 year tenure, she has astutely shifted the division's product lines and greatly improved IMB's profitability.

United Fiber Optics' original flagship line has suffered severe damage to its production capacity since the Succession Wars and is barely managing to stay in the black. Over half the division's former production and R&D facilities have been shut down to cut costs and are rusting away.

From its origins as a manufacturer of copper wire and filaments, Irian Non-Ferrous has expanded its operations into mining, refining, manufacturing, and wholesaling non-ferrous metals production. Besides copper, INF's current product metals include silver, lead, and platinum, as well as more exotic, non-Terran resources like garcinium and ternigum.

In the days of the Star League, IrTech's Technology Transfer Division was instrumental in turning the scientific gains of its colleagues into economic profits, identifying and opening new markets for the company's goods, and arranging cooperative exchanges of know-how and raw materials with other firms. Today, they still serve as a key marketing arm of the company, albeit on a much reduced scale. ITT field teams usually travel in small *Explorer* Class JumpShips, carrying a crew complement of 4-8. The company retains about a dozen of these vessels in active service at the present time.

IRIAN TECHNOLOGIES

League Stock Market Symbol: IrTech

Home Office Location: Irian

President/CEO: Fafard Kjellson

Founding Date: July 2182

Principal Divisions

Division Name: Irian BattleMechs, Unltd.

Division Head: Donald Ramsell

Chief Product: BattleMechs

Division Name: IMB System

Division Head: Maren Spandau

Chief Product: Sensor arrays

Division Name: United Fiber Optics

Division Head: U Dpo

Chief Product: Fiber Optics Cable

Division Name: Irian Non-Ferrous

Division Head: Elena Jacinsky

Chief Product: Metals

Division Name: Technology Transfer

Division Head: Boris Tijueva

Chief Product: Marketing

History:

The fortunes of Irian Technologies, one of the Free Worlds League's greatest success stories during the days of the Star League, have dovetailed those of the Free Worlds. Founded in 2182 as United Fiber Optics (a manufacturer of underwater communications cable), the company prospered and soon expanded into mining and refining the non-ferrous and precious metals used as its raw materials. By 2309, when Irian accepted membership into the fledgling Free Worlds League, the company had become Irian Technologies, operating over 30 manufacturing and R&D facilities across Irian and three neighboring worlds. Its headquarters at the mouth of the Kirin River had grown into one of the universe's largest single-owner industriplexes.

With the rise of BattleMech technology, however, IrTech truly came into its own. Four IrTech scientists were included in the 15-person Project Arcturus team that built the League's first copies of the Terran-designed *Archer* and *Wasp* BattleMechs, and IrTech secured one of the first League contracts to manufacture 20 prototypes in 2482. Within 25 years, the Irian BattleMech plant at Soapstone Mountain was branching out and producing its own highly successful 'Mech designs: The *Hermes*, a 30-ton light 'Mech with enhanced long-range sensors, and the *Guillotine*, a 70-ton 'Mech with jump jets and heavy leg armor making it ideally suited for the risky but devastating Death from Above maneuver.

In 2698, IrTech opened new facilities, particularly among the lucrative markets of the Duchy of Andurien, and moved into weapons manufacture, AeroSpace Flight instruments and controls, and sensor arrays. In 2715, the corporation received the ultimate acknowledgement of its planetwide importance when its CEO, Carlton Brigeham, was appointed MP from Irian (a post that IrTech personnel would hold seven more times over the next 300 years).

Security and Military Forces:

Unsurprisingly for a 'Mech manufacturer, IrTech has a small complement of light and medium 'Mechs at its private disposal. Each of the two active 'Mech production facilities are garrisoned with a company of 'Mechs, with about 12-15 other 'Mechs scattered among IrTech's other facilities to supplement the manned and automated security systems present at each location. The general level of company security systems (most of which are produced in-house) is Tech Level 3 for military equipment facilities and Tech Level 2 for non-military facilities.

Notes:

Visitor access to IMB and IWW facilities is currently restricted to those bearing company authorizations accompanied by the appropriate recognition sigil, or individuals holding an active Code Blue security rating with SAFE. Only three ROM agents in the Irian sector possess a Code Blue clearance. (An effort should be made to increase this number).



CURTISS HYDROSYSTEMS

League Stock Market Symbol: CHydro

Home Office Location: Paradise

President/CEO: Grant Wong

Founding Date: August 2618

Principal Divisions

Division Name: Aquiculture Technologies

Division Head: Jintao Fujigata

Chief Product: Hydroponic Food Systems

Division Name: Purification Technologies

Division Head: Muhammed Al-Radi

Chief Product: Pure Water

Division Name: Power Systems Division

Division Head: Sandra Caleavechia

Chief Product: Dam construction

Division Name: Ryan Iceship Group

Division Head: Blanton Stilwell

Chief Product: Pure Water

History:

Curtiss was a small but successful manufacturer of hydroponic food production systems when it received a Star League contract in 2618 to manufacture and distribute the TriFil water purification system. Under the visionary leadership of then CEO Anwar Wong, Curtiss transformed this single stroke of fortune into a half-century of extraordinary growth. The corporation used its purifier sales profits to beef up its fleet, then rapidly diversified into a wide variety of other water-related businesses (ranging from deep-sea mining to satellite aquifer sensing systems). By 2668, the corporation's assets had grown more than tenfold, and had reached the point where Curtiss could purchase all the equipment and assets of the Ryan cartel's nearly bankrupt Iceship Division. At the time, this transaction was conducted more out of pride than sound business practices, as the Iceship Division continued to lose millions of credits a year before better management and cost-cutting measures stabilized its finances.

The TriFil process and other purification technologies developed by the Star League helped colonize many formerly uninhabitable worlds, spawning a new age of territorial expansion throughout every corner of the settled galaxy. The newly settled worlds in the Free Worlds League and Canopus sectors became Curtiss's most lucrative clients over the next century, keeping the company's coffers full. Nevertheless, Curtiss was not blind to the clouds of war gathering on the horizon. Between 2778-2784, to the considerable anguish of many of its stockholders, the company abruptly suspended its payment of dividends and instead pumped its profits into extra production runs, amassing a vast stockpile of essential chemicals and replacement parts. During the same period, company scientists were given orders to re-search means of keeping the TriFil systems operational during a temporary state of emergency. The Iceship Division began the production of five new vessels, the first of their kind built in almost two centuries.

These efforts more than paid for themselves as the Succession Wars quickly escalated, and the Ares Conventions were cast aside. The production facilities of the Purification Technologies Division became immediate military targets, and those that were not destroyed became disabled. The company's stockpiles and many of its best technicians, however, had been hidden deep within League space and were never seriously damaged. As a result, Curtiss has been able to keep 70-80 percent of Marik worlds supplied with pure water. Meanwhile, Iceship construction has again become big busi-

has again become big business, and Curtiss is by far the dominant figure in that field. Overall, the conglomerate remains prosperous. Retaining its reputation for foresight, it has already promised jobs to over ten percent of the first graduating class from the Free Worlds League Technical College.

Business Profile:

Since an internal power struggle in the mid-2700s, Curtiss Hydrosystems has been managed by a triumvirate of executive directors, one of whom is always a member of the Wong family. Today, the three directors possess a strong unanimity in their business outlooks, even though they could hardly be less alike. Grant Wong is a handsome young playboy of 30, a petty noble in the Paradise court who has been romantically linked with the daughters of a half-dozen prominent League families. General Blanton Stilwell, a veteran campaigner on the Capellan front, now employs his no-nonsense organizational savvy to the task of keeping the Ryan Iceships profitably deployed and protected from enemy assault. Sandra Calcavecchia, nicknamed "the Mole" by the vidtapes for her reclusive life, is a diminutive middle-aged woman who shuns the spotlight. Many, however, admire her scientific and administrative skills.

The Aquiculture Technology's self-contained hydroponic mini-farms remain one of Curtiss's most lucrative products, but have today been joined by irrigation systems, meteorological sensing and cloud-seeding equipment, and soil percolation and recycling systems. AT's many innovations have been instrumental in keeping over 20 League worlds agriculturally self-sufficient in the face of the Succession Wars, an impressive achievement.

Because the stockpiles of Purification Technologies have long been depleted, the division's few surviving production plants can no longer assemble complete TriFil units and can barely keep up with demand for replacement parts. Its service subgroup, however, has earned a good reputation for jury-rigging operational problems that would permanently cripple a purifier system. The corporation's MultiFil purifier, a more modest version of the TriFil, is becoming the standard system on many League worlds.

Power Systems' one-time big product line, the Omega Sea Floor Miner, has long been discontinued. Today, the division is primarily involved in the construction of dams to generate hydro-electric power on worlds whose fusion power capacity has diminished.

Curtiss's symbolic purchase of the Ryan's Iceships division has proven to be the conglomerate's most fortuitous acquisition. The group's 37 active Iceships provide the sole lifeline to over a dozen League worlds, including the lucrative mining worlds of Jubka and Ayn Tarma. The ships have also delivered precious water to a number of Capellan worlds since the signing of the Concord of Kapteyn, much to the consternation of some of the more hawkish members of the Parliament.

Security and Military Forces:

Due to the protected location of most of the remaining Curtiss facilities, the conglomerate is one of the few surviving firms of its size that does not maintain a private 'Mech force. On occasion, however, the company will hire mercenary units to guard its Iceships when they are traveling near enemy borders. Most of its plants maintain moderate (Tech Level 2) security provisions against potential intruders.



OTHER MAJOR INDUSTRIES

Name: Earthwerks-FWL, Inc.

League Stock Market Symbol: EFWWL

Home Office Location: Procyon

President/CEO: Sir Campbell Carrington

Business Summary:

Earthwerks began operations on Terra in 2357 to develop a commercial version of the D-812 mining robot designed by its co-founders, Miroslav Mendel and Ivan Lecir. The results were staggeringly successful, revolutionizing the underground extraction of ore and making Mendel (who bought out Lecir) one of the richest men in the galaxy. As time went on, the company became one of the inner Sphere's three dominant producers of all types of 'bots, from man-sized security robots to BattleMechs, both large and small. As its success grew, its facilities spread across each of the Star League's member states.

When the Succession Wars erupted, the five Successor Houses moved quickly to secure the fruits of Earthwerks' local production capacity, essentially sundering the corporation into five separate parts. In the case of the Free Worlds League, this transition was a relatively painless one. The trading cartels who had worked with Earthwerks used their influence to convince the Parliament to overrule Captain-General Kenyon Marik's request to seize and occupy the four Earthwerks 'Mech plants in the Free Worlds League. Parliament passed a resolution allowing the company to maintain control of its facilities (under the name Earthwerks-FWL) in exchange for a long-term contract giving the League military the right of first refusal to purchase all output from those plants at a fair market price. Today, only two of the 'Mech plants remain operational—the Kodes plant on Keystone, which manufactures *Stingers*, *Thunderbolts*, and *Griffins*; and the Martina plant on Calloway VI, which manufactures *Archers* and *Stingers* and has a third production line currently being retooled to manufacture *Phoenix Hawks*. Many of the corporation's other facilities have also been ravaged, and almost half its assembly lines are permanently out of service. Nonetheless, the company continues to survive, as few companies can match its level of quality.

Although Earthwerks' ads make a big display of the fact that the firm uses its own security 'bots in its plant defense systems, its management is neither vain nor foolish enough to rely totally on such automated measures. Earthwerks maintains a standing security force of almost a battalion of 'Mechs, supported by a small but surprisingly elite private corps of atmospheric fighters, spotter planes, and AeroSpace Fighters. In particular times of trouble, the company will often supplement these forces with mercenaries.

Though Earthwerks is allowed to trade with other Successor States, the corporation has made comparatively little use of this provision over the years (save for those rare occasions when the League is actually at peace with its foes). Nonetheless, the company's perceived independence has traditionally been a sore point with the Marik family, which is quick to order SAFE to investigate Earthwerks personnel whenever a military security leak is revealed. No proof of improprieties concerning the company's management has ever been uncovered, though rumors persist to this day.

Name: Kensai Holographiks
League Stock Market Symbol: KnHolo
Home Office Location: Gibson
President /CEO: Tatiana Vanderbilt



Business Summary:

Kensai Holographiks designs, produces, and markets “recreational hologram environments” or RHES, one of the major forms of home entertainment available in the 31st century. These environments consist of prerecorded holograms that are designed to interact with various miniature props in the viewer’s home to produce a remarkably life-like effect. Viewers can experience first-hand the sensation of piloting a ‘Mech or AeroSpace Fighter in battle, of climbing a mountain, or of hunting a klima-beast in the jungles of Karakiraz—all without leaving their homes. The sensations are so realistic that individuals with vivid imaginations will often find themselves sweat-soaked and exhausted after viewing a physically strenuous RHE.

Kensai, the largest of several holo producers, is a publicly held corporation whose stock price has fluctuated wildly over the years. Its current Executive Director, Tatiana Vanderbilt, started out as a starlet in Kensai’s adventure holos and later married the corporation’s then-CEO Milton Horowitz. Since succeeding her late husband in 3020 (after a no-holds-barred boardroom struggle that left several high-ranking company officials jobless), Tatiana has shown an able hand at management and a cutthroat’s zeal at wheeling and dealing.

For the last 50 years, KH’s Licensing Division has hired the vidtape’s latest war heroes (at lucrative fees) to appear in military simulations. As a result, the company has had much greater access to front-line locations and equipment than would a civilian concern, which has made more than one district commander nervous about security leaks. Little can be done, however, since many of these contracts have been authorized by Janos Marik himself.

Although the teachings of the Blessed Blake tell us that RHEs are decadent and mentally debilitating, it is estimated that almost 40 percent of League homes currently possess a functioning hologram viewer hook-up. Neighboring families often circulate expensive holo/prop packages or hold parties to celebrate the release of a particularly long-awaited holo. Although these entertainments do foster an unthinking passivity in their viewers, they do appear to make the lives of the average Successor States citizen a bit more bearable in these troubled times.

Name: Man-TLE
League Stock Market Symbol: None
Home Office Location: Unknown
President/CEO: Raoul Duke

Business Summary:

Despite a recent 18-month investigation by SAFE and an independent four-month review by ROM agents, little is known about this mysterious company that sprung up less than a decade ago to produce bootleg holo-environments known as TLEs (“True Life Experiences”). TLEs differ from RHEs in two very important respects. First, they come packaged with a narcotic substance known as “Can-Do” which, when burned while viewing the holo, heightens its sensory impacts. Second, they are highly addictive, producing a deep, sometimes suicidal depression in heavy users deprived of their pleasures for more than a few days.

Though the Parliament has declared the display and sale of TLEs to be illegal, the Ministry of Trade’s enforcement capacities are minimal. Our latest reports indicate that sales continue to escalate at a rapid pace. The appearance pattern of new releases suggests that the company’s production facility or main distribution center is located somewhere toward the rimward edge of the

Lyran border (though it is difficult to say which side of the border it might be on). The production values of the holos themselves are fairly primitive, tending to rule out a mainstream holo producer like Kensai as a source. Man-TLE’s only visible spokesman, a tall, imposing figure with a shaved head and dark glasses known as Raoul Duke, has made occasional appearances on pirate satellite-casts emanating from several League worlds (including Stewart, McAffe, and Megrez.). There have been unconfirmed rumors that Duke is actually Patrick Rejak, a high-ranking member of the Way of Arme. Regardless of the truth of this rumor, the activities of this company certainly bear continued scrutiny.

Name: Free Flight, Ltd.
League Stock Market Symbol: FreFli
Home Office Location: Fletcher
President/CEO: Virdan Pablo Karamazov

Business Summary:

Free Flight is a relatively new entity built from the remains of one of the Grand Duchy of Oriente’s oldest trading combines, Amalgamated Spacewares. During the short armistice between the Second and Third Succession Wars, Amalgamated’s board of Directors decided that the toll of 75 years of war on its suppliers, markets, and financial resources had made the continuation of its normal line impossible. After a complete reorganization, which included the sale of over three billion credits worth of assets, the combine reopened its doors as Free Flight, an independent purveyor of personal transportation and freight hauling services within the League and beyond. To avert the ever-present danger of having its vessels impressed into the military “for the duration of the war,” Free Flight signed an agreement in perpetuity with Captain-General Philippa Marik to carry military personnel or cargoes on a priority basis whenever or wherever the need arose. This basic agreement has been affirmed, with minor modifications, by all but two of the Captains-General appointed since, and is still in force today.

Free Flight currently maintains a fleet of seven JumpShips (including two *Star Lord* Class ships) and over 15 DropShips (including a rare *Overlord* Class vessel). As part of its current agreement with Janos Marik, the company permanently stations two of its JumpShips on Atreus and Marik to serve the Captain-General’s needs. Three other vessels run regularly scheduled transport routes across the League, while the remaining two vessels are available on a contract, pay-as-you-go basis (arranged through one of the company’s four dispatch centers at Fletcher, Holt, Atreus, and Maxwell) to anyone able to afford the company’s rates. Some of the more experienced commanders in the fleet are said to still indulge in a bit of speculative trading whenever they have excess cargo space available, especially when their contracts take them beyond the boundaries of the League.

All Free Flight JumpShips and DropShips carry a full complement of marines (largely drawn from the retired ranks of the League's own marine forces) to operate their ship's guns and act as ground security when the ship is on land. Nonetheless, the company still relies heavily on spaceport and local garrison forces to protect its investments from harm. Three years ago, Free Flight lost a JumpShip to pirates operating along the League's Periphery border. Security forces and on-board gunnery of vessels plying that route have since been increased.

Name: Flame Tech

League Stock Market Symbol: FITech

Home Office Location: Fletcher

President/CEO: Kenneth Schmidt

Business Summary:

Best known for its manufacture of the Flame Tech K-213 incendiary projector (usually just called a "flamer"), Flame Tech produces a wide variety of other weapons and support equipment for BattleMechs and AeroSpace Fighters. It has benefited greatly from the ongoing combat of the Succession Wars, as there is a constant need for its products.

In 3019, Flame Tech received a government contract to supply the Free Worlds Guards with replacement weapons and spare parts. The contract was large enough to permit the company to open a new production facility at Fletcher and to expand its small research operation. Unfortunately for the Guards, the rate of supply has dropped off in recent months, which has been blamed on "logistical problems" and "shipment errors", but which (it is widely suspected) is due to much of the government funds disappearing into the pockets of CEO Kenneth Schmidt and his cronies on the corporation's board of directors.

Name: MediQuick Services

League Stock Market Symbol: MedQik

Home Office Location: Rochelle

President/CEO: Martin and Woodruff "Duff" Hesse

Business Summary:

MediQuick's three jump-capable vessels and twelve DropShips support a network of conventional ground and air freight vehicles that market medical equipment and supplies to over two dozen Marik worlds along the Steiner-Marik border. In a war where casualties are one of the few things that are booming, the market for MediQuick's product lines is strong. Nonetheless, there are consistent reports that the company's sales representatives engage in price-gouging and profiteering whenever possible to increase their gains.

MediQuick has recently purchased four White Whale Mobile Surgical Hospital units, which they are renting to the League military on a long-term basis. The company's reputation for dishonesty and corner-cutting is so widespread that there have allegedly been a number of cases in which seriously injured MechWarriors have refused to be treated after seeing the MediQuick insignia—two yellow-edged white crosses on a scarlet background—on a MASH unit.



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Name: HighPoint Traders

League Stock Market Symbol: HiPoint

Home Office Location: New Delos

President/CEO: Corey Chang

Business Summary:

A small corporation old enough to have a Star League trading license, HighPoint was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy five years ago when its president, Hugo Schmatz, placed it on the table during a high-stakes game of Four-Card Drax—and lost. Its new president, a scuffling rogue named Corey Chang, has managed (through a combination of hard work and fortuity) to make enough money from it to expand its operations.. Much of the corporation's recent success has been the direct result of the recent Concord of Kapteyn, which has opened up substantial new avenues of trade between the Free Worlds and the Capellan Confederation.

HighPoint possesses two JumpShips and seven DropShips, though most are held together with little more than prayers, bailing wire, and HarStick epoxy. Its reputation for shady dealing has only been enhanced during Chang's tenure. Nonetheless, the firm is viewed to be sufficiently reliable and has been employed by House Marik and House Orloff (as well as the Commonality of Sarna in the Capellan Confederation) to carry passengers or freight on a contract basis.

Chang is a clever but greedy man, whose grasping mind is willing to consider almost any profit-making scheme regardless of its immorality. HighPoint has been accused of smuggling, piracy, and operating unsafe vessels, and there is little doubt that these charges are true (though nothing has ever been proven in a court of law).

TRADE WITH OTHER SUCCESSOR STATES



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Virtually every trade combine based in Free Worlds League space has an “arrangement” with the League’s military command that grants the Marik’s armed forces priority use of cargo space and ships during “emergency situations.” Such agreements even permit the temporary “impressment” of crewmen into military service. In practice, the average trading vessel usually spends 10-20 percent of its time each year carrying out military assignments of one type or another. These demands can reduce a trader’s margin of error to a bare minimum, and have driven more than one combine into bankruptcy over the years. Nevertheless, military missions also offer unique opportunities for profit to those clever enough to take advantage of them. Several League firms (such as HighPoint Traders) attribute a large fraction of their present economic well-being to military contract work.

Outside of these informal arrangements, there are few League restrictions governing foreign trade, and virtually no regulation that cannot be bypassed with fast talk and a few properly greased palms. Though many agencies of the Marik government (including spaceport civilian security forces, planetary garrison person-nei, and Ministry of Taxation tariff inspectors) have the authority to inspect incoming or departing vessels, such inspections are usually carried out rather perfunctorily. Competition between combines for goods and markets is fierce; it is not unheard of for one trader to improve his position by spreading misinformation about his rivals around the local spaceport.

Nonetheless, the select few who have survived to ply this trade do share a unique bond that has evolved into a rough code of honor—no trader may refuse to aid a fellow countryman in trouble in foreign space. This code has saved more than one freighter pilot from potential disaster, even though the rescuer and victim are likely to be at one another’s throats as soon as they get return to League space.

Major ports of entry for traders entering League space include Promised Land, Thermopolis, Kalidasa, and Callison along the Lyran border; Castor and Graham IV near Terra; and Zion, Les Halles, and Shiro III along the Capellan border. The starport cities on these worlds contain magnificent bazaars, teeming with merchant houses, wholesalers, and speculators who can find a profitable market (legal or otherwise) for virtually any commodity. Nonetheless, many traders sometimes bypass these worlds for the League’s interior, seeking to increase their profits by delivering their goods directly to a local market.

THE CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION

Trade relations between the League and the Capellan Confederation have been strained since their first conflict over Andurien. Even with the new bonds of alliance forged by the Concord of Kapteyn, distrust between the two governments remains strong. Nonetheless, both Liao and Marik manufacture certain materiel that are in short supply on the other side of the border. These items have become the linchpin of a new focus of trade between the two states.

As noted in the **Military Forces** chapter, the League’s armies desperately need replacement parts, especially particle projection cannons. House Liao, which has major PPC production facilities on both Zurich and Capella, has been more than willing to supply these weapons in exchange for sophisticated targeting and instrumentation systems manufactured by League firms like Irian Systems

and Garrett SatComm. Other formerly restricted League-made items currently being traded to the Capellans include metallic alloys (in bar stock form) from Helm and Galleon light tanks from El Giza and Elektrogli. Although Capellan-manufactured equipment is often considered inferior to other House products, laser pistols produced from New Westin and Quark Motors hovercraft from Overton have proved exceptions to this rule. If the Concord can manage to remain in force for a few years, it is even possible that the two long-time foes might even begin to sell each other ‘Mechs and AeroSpace Fighters to diversify each side’s mix of forces.

Before the signing of the Concord, trade between the League and the Confederation was more of a lucrative trickle than a flood. Some Marik traders risked search and seizure to deliver gemstones from Marik or Tanis Australis, or specialty chemicals, from the refineries of Lopez or Holt, to Capellan worlds. Conversely, Free Worlders prize Capellan artwork (especially sculptures, holopaintings, and antique furniture recreations) from the burgeoning artist communities on Liao worlds, and illegal narcotics like opium and KZ (a powerful mind-altering chemical that is extracted from the leaves of a certain type of palm tree). It is not uncommon for a trader to conceal a cache of narcotics inside Capellan artwork.

Traders in Liao space must contend with the maze of nagging bureaucratic regulations passed by Liao Chancellors to generate revenue from outsiders. Any cargo-laden vessel entering a Capellan port must possess a valid commercial license for the Liao district he is in. Given the short lifespan of the typical license (usually 90-180 days), this is not an insignificant expense. Furthermore, Liao starport inspectors are more observant than anywhere else in the Successor States; they can always find (or invent) small violations of safety or quarantine regulations that require the ship’s pilot to pay fines or to hire on-world repair technicians to rectify the problem. The cliché “It takes money to make money” was coined with Capellan trading in mind.

THE LYRAN COMMONWEALTH

Although the League and the Lyran Commonwealth have been at each other’s throats for centuries, trade has never ceased between the two Successor States. Politics and war may declare that Steiner and Marik are enemies, but business is business—and good business says that the marriage between Steiner technology and Marik savvy has always been a lucrative relationship.

Lyran often claim that their trade representatives are unmatched at finding markets for their goods, but, in truth, most of their skills are nothing more than a duplication of techniques already perfected by League traders three and four centuries ago. Marik merchants recognized early that the quality of Lyran high-tech machinery (such as transportation and communications equipment, robots, and military assault vehicles) was unmatched

in the Inner Sphere. They also learned that the Steiner traders and advertisers were the same people who ran the factories—energetic, hard-working sorts who lacked the creative spark to ignite the consumers' interest. Thus, it was League cartels like the Selaj who packaged these products in a fashion that enabled them to achieve full market penetration. Indeed, it was not uncommon for League firms to purchase speeders or domestic servibots, redesign their appearance, and then resell them at a large mark-up.

Today, Marik traders still deal heavily in Steiner equipment, such as computers, agricultural and mining machinery, and non-military vehicles. Although all these items are much in demand in the League, some traders have found it even more lucrative to ship these cargoes on to Capellan or Periphery worlds that are even more desperate for advanced technology. In recent decades, Lyran agribusinesses have also begun to export raw foodstuffs to a half-dozen or more Marik worlds ravaged by the Succession Wars. Lyran imports from the League consist of natural and synthetic fibers, chemical products (including pharmaceuticals, soaps, and perfumes), and certain types of non-ferrous ores and refined metals.

Starports in both the Commonwealth and the League require that all vessels crossing the border submit to searches for military contraband items (as trade in military ordnance or vehicles between the two states has been strictly proscribed for over two centuries). Nonetheless, there is brand-new enemy-manufactured equipment in the ranks of both Houses, a tribute to the ingenuity of the traders from each side.

THE DRACONIS COMBINE

The Captains-General of the last 75 years have envied the absolute power wielded by House Kurita. This fascination has translated into a steadily increasing importation of goods from the Draconis Combine, with most of the activity centered upon Graham IV and Devil's Rock in League space and Dieron and Asta in Kurita space. Initially, this trade was primarily restricted to art and luxury items, such as alcohol, jade, gold and bronze jewelry, and ceremonial weaponry.

Since the signing of the Concord of Kapteyn, however, House Kurita has escalated this traffic to include industrial goods and heavy equipment of all kinds, including military hardware. The Kurita government desires to shore up its light reconnaissance by purchasing *Hermes IIs* from Irian BattleMechs (at 25 percent over normal prices) and additional sensor systems to refit its own 'Mechs. In return, Janos Marik (through Corey Chang of HighPoint Traders) has recently contracted to purchase 50 new heavy 'Mechs (including *Marauders* and *Dragons*) over the next two years.

The agreement between its two neighbors, the Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns, has no doubt influenced the Combine's open exchange of technology, which is uncharacteristic of its normally paranoid attitude toward outsiders. Still, the Draconians will probably change their spots before long, pushing to slant these trade arrangements into their favor. Neither partner overly trusts the other; both Marik and Kurita traders have discovered that SAFE and the ISF (the Draconis Combine's Internal Security Force) are shadowing their movements abroad.



THE FEDERATED SUNS

The old political saying, "My enemy's enemy is my friend" summarizes the relationship that has traditionally existed between the Free Worlds League and the Federated Suns. After the first 20-25 years of the First Succession War (when all five House armies engaged each other to conquer the worlds of the old Terran Hegemony),

Marik and Davion armies have seldom been in direct conflict and have sometimes momentarily allied against their common foe, the Capellan Confederation. As a result, trade between the two states has remained relatively unaffected throughout the Succession Wars. Both parties have freely traded non-military goods, often using Terra as a neutral drop-off and transfer point.

Davion commodities traded to Marik have ranged from computer millimicro-chips, plasteels, and agricultural livestock to the latest synthweave fashions and holoivid syndications. In 3005, well over half the League became swept up in the Pop-ball fad. This Davion toy manufacturer's creation amused and baffled its legions of devoted players for 18 months, and then faded completely in both States in a matter of days.

Marik exports to Davion have been a similarly mixed bag, including non-military atmospheric aircraft, fire control equipment, arctic oil drilling rigs, spices (mainly cerinth and Cursan red pepper), and Irish whiskey from the painstakingly restored pre-20th century distillery located on the planet Bismarck.

Sadly, the increasing polarization of the two States now threatens much of this lucrative commerce, as Hanse Davion strengthens his ties with Katrina Steiner, and Janos Marik allies with Takashi Kurita. Though no government sanctions forbidding trade between the two Houses have been passed, the volume of shipments through Terra has declined by over 30 percent during the past year. If the increase in tensions continues, future transactions between these states may become confined to the black market, a change that would probably harm the Marik economy far more than that of the Federated Suns.

THE PERIPHERY

For most of the Inner Sphere, contact with the hundreds of the worlds of the Periphery ended with the outbreak of the Succession Wars. However, League traders had no wish to abandon the long-standing economic relationships with these areas (most particularly the Magistracy of Canopus), even if the government's official position was that these worlds had "ceased to exist." Consequently, a small group of traders led by the Tanghal family (who had bought a portion of the Selaj family business holdings when the latter fled the League in disgrace) have attempted to maintain contact with the Periphery over the years, with moderate success.

Trade vessels preparing to head into the Periphery usually disembark from one of three border worlds: Thurrock near the Capellan border, Campoleone in the interior, or Sierra near the Lyran front. All three planets are sparsely developed, sleepy worlds with one thing in common—an unusually large population of ex-spacers who are willing to share their knowledge of the mysterious "beyond." It has become a tradition that traders who return successfully to these ports give a cut to anyone whose advice directly contributed to their success. This practice has surely increased the group's willingness to talk to outsiders.

Even with this information, a venture into the Periphery is far riskier than a trip through a war zone in the Inner Sphere. Circumstances change quickly in the Periphery. For every area, like the Magistracy of Canopus or Circinus Federation, that has been forged into an ongoing political entity, there are ten planets that are ready prey for any ragtag mercenary company that comes along. A vessel arriving at a planet reported to be a likely source of trade goods may find it conquered by privateers who are more interested in seizing a trader's starships than stocking it with cargo. Nonetheless, there will always be dreamers who hope to emulate the success of Johann Sebastian O'Reilly, whose venture into the abandoned storehouses of Alphard IV uncovered enough germanium to construct an eight-world empire. In the meantime, enough ships return from the Periphery with valuable cargoes (ranging from old Star League technology to exotic local foodstuffs, spices, or wildlife) to prompt traders to continue plying the spacelanes there.



STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Because the League's wealth was made from trade rather than manufacturing, its economy is more vulnerable to the ravages of war than those of the other four Successor States. To date, House Marik has managed to keep its major markets open and in some cases has even found new ways to profit from the crisis. Nevertheless, the polarization of the five Houses into two alliances may soon close lucrative markets to League traders. Unfortunately, such markets are in states with the most robust economies.

The League's military production capacity is no match for that of the three larger Successor States, but is still capable of manufacturing a diverse output of equipment and weaponry. The only major weakness in the Marik war machine is its inability to produce large numbers of heavy and assault 'Mechs to match the forces of House Steiner.

Because economic wealth determines Parliamentary representation, the impact of the Succession Wars on the various League principalities have changed the balance of political power. The fortunes of Andurien, Regulus, and the Marik Commonwealth have risen, while those of Oriente, Silver Hawks, Sirian Concordance, and Border Protectorate have waned. These changes have increased the size of the bloc opposed to the Captain-General, making it more difficult for the Marik to have his way in Parliament.

PERSONALITIES



Name: Janos Marik
Title/Rank: Duke of Atreus, the Marik
Position: Captain-General of the Free Worlds League
Birthplace: Marik
Age: 68
Sex: Male

Brief Personal History:

Janos is the eldest of the five current Successor State warlords. The Free Worlds League that he inherited from his father Stephan was a fragmented beast of disparate principalities and personalities, each attempting to push the Parliament in its own direction. Only a man of extraordinary diplomatic ability and vision could have harnessed these contentious individuals into a cohesive unit, and Janos has hardly been such a man. A moderately capable administrator and competent tactician, he has sharp-tongued impatience and an imperious demeanor that have alienated many (including his own brother Anton). His ambitious political agenda to bring the farflung worlds of his domain under direct bureaucratic control has had little concrete success. The end result of his efforts has been a series of abortive coups, assassination attempts, and bloody rebellions that have drained the strength of an entire generation of MechWarriors and made a sizable dent in House Marik's family wealth.

Janos's one major concrete achievement has been the signing of the Concord of Kapteyn, a treaty between Marik, Kurita, and the League's long-hated rivals, the prolific Liao family, which has at least temporarily removed the threat of war along the Capellan border. However, even this move has caused political protest from some of the Marik's most traditionally loyal supporters. MPs from the Duchy of Orloff and the Sirian Concordance have loudly contended that the closing of the Capellan front has eliminated the League's best chance for booty and territorial gains.

Though Janos sired ten children by his two wives (and a rumored dozen or more unacknowledged bastard offspring), this profusion of heirs has clouded rather than clarified the question to Janos's successor. His eldest son Martin was assassinated in 3018. Gerald, his second son, was tried as a co-conspirator of Duke Anton and executed in 3015. Of the six children that survive today, only Duggan Marik is currently prominent in League political or military circles and has been assumed by many to be the heir to the Captain-General's baton. However, Janos has given no public support to Duggan's claim, leaving others, such as Janos's nephew General Duncan Marik, free rein to declare their own ambitions for the throne.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Since signing the Concord, Janos has escalated the activities of SAFE along the Liao border to keep an eye on his new "allies." He believes that the cessation of hostilities along one border and the establishment of official relations with his enemy's enemy (House Kurita) give him the best chance to stop his recent spate of military losses along the Steiner border.

Manner:

Janos has been deeply stung by his supporters' lack of faith and has withdrawn to a small circle of confidants whom he still trusts—Duke Christopher Halas of Oriente, Parliamentary Speaker Hector Stewart, floor leader "Lefty" Eastwick, and his increasingly influential mistress, Bronwen Rafsani.

Special Skills/Powers:

Only a handful of people know or suspect that Janos has actually chosen an heir—his seventh child Thomas Marik, who is currently stationed outside the League in the service of ComStar as an Adept and Tech. The announcement of this decision, whether it is made before or after Janos's death, is likely to astound many and could well foment another civil war.

Name: Bronwen Rafsani
Title/Rank: None
Position: Advisor
Birthplace: Nova Kama
Age: 30
Sex: Female



Brief Personal History:

During the occupation of her homeworld in the abortive civil war of 3014, Rafsani caught the eye of the occupation force's deputy commander, Major Grant Grzenda, and soon became his lover. After traveling with Rafsani for a year, he was reassigned to the Military District Headquarters of Oriente, and she soon transferred her affections to Colonel Arlen Walker, commander of the 2nd Fusiliers of Oriente. This pattern repeated itself several times, until Rafsani finally reached Atreus in 3021 on the arm of Sir Ellis Hardeagh, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Within six months, she had moved into the Ducal Palace, where she remained comfortably ensconced as Janos's mistress.

Strange as it may seem, none of Bronwen's old lovers appear to harbor any animosity toward her, and Sir Ellis in particular has remained a doting friend.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Though her bed-hopping has placed Rafsani close to many influential individuals, there has been no indication that she is motivated by anything deeper than a desire to make her life as comfortable as possible. Thus, it is unsurprising that Bronwen is already actively seeking to protect her place in court after Janos's demise by having a torrid affair with Duggan Marik, Janos's third son and the popular choice as heir to the Captain-General's baton.

Manner:

Bronwen is a compellingly beautiful woman with long flowing black hair and dark eyes. One of her eyes is bionic, which lends her an almost hypnotic air of mystery.

Special Skills/Powers:

Catty tongues around the capital claim that Bronwen has "bewitched" her male companions with her bionic eye, and even Shane Eastwick, Janos's normally level-headed chief deputy on the floor of the Parliament, believes that Bronwen holds an unnatural influence over the Captain-General's policies and actions. Though our ROM agents have seen nothing to indicate that Rafsani possesses supernatural powers, there is little question that she has a very discerning mind and an uncanny ability to determine what a man wants.

Name: Duggan Marik
Title/Rank: MP from Marik Commonwealth
Position: Minister of Trade
Birthplace: Atreus
Age: 41
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

Duggan Marik is Janos's third son and eldest surviving male child. He has been an MP from the Marik Commonwealth for the last four terms, and was appointed Minister of Trade by Hector Stewart in 3022. Though heavy jowled and endowed with a considerable girth, Duggan's full beard, twinkling eyes, and engaging manner have always served him well with the ladies, making him one of the most popular bachelors on the Atreus social circuit. However, his easygoing, devil-may-care image conceals a man of considerable depth and driving ambition.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Over the past few years, there has been increasing speculation around the capital that Duggan will be the next Captain-General, talk that Duggan himself has subtly attempted to encourage. Particularly well-liked by the Regular and Gibson delegations to Parliament, the Minister of Trade could bring those long-time opponents of the Mariks back into the fold if he were named Janos's successor. Unfortunately, the Marik himself has never seriously considered him as his heir. Thomas's selection will almost certainly come as a great shock to Duggan, and there is no telling how the minister will react when his younger brother appears on the scene—especially given the demanding nature of his new part-time lover, Bronwen Rafsani.

Manner:

Duggan has always had a slightly larcenous bent. Since becoming Minister of Trade, he has received kickbacks from merchants, bribes from traders seeking contracts or favorable licensing, and inside information that has helped him make several killings in the League stock exchange. Nonetheless, he has also shown himself to be a capable administrator, whose straightforward "favor for a favor" style has proven popular with both his Ministry staff and the companies he regulates. He perceives his affair with his father's mistress, Bronwen Rafsani, to be a similar arrangement, though his increasing captivation with her charms suggests that he may be getting in over his head.

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Therese Marik-Brett
Title/Rank: Force Commander
Position: Staff officer of Tamarind Defense Forces
Birthplace: Paradise
Age: 42
Sex: Female



Brief Personal History:

The third and eldest of the Marik's surviving children, Therese defied her father's wish to marry her to Corbin Tkaczuk, son and heir to the First Speaker of the Regular Free States, in an attempt to win the allegiance of that principality. Instead, she eloped and married Captain Jeremy Brett, a handsome and dashing young commander of an artillery lance in the Marik Militia. Brett was immediately cashiered, and Janos publicly disowned Therese. The couple and their two young sons now live on Tamarind, where Jeremy serves as coordinator of the Khe Shang province's static defenses.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Married to the man of her dreams, Therese is content to live in obscurity. She has not spoken to her father in the 17 years since her elopement. For his part, Janos speaks of her as if she were as dead as her siblings Martin, Gerald, Cartwright, and Faith.

Manner:

Shy and quiet, Therese always did what her parents told her to do. In fact, marrying Jeremy Brett has been her only act of defiance against Janos. Her high virtues have endeared her to the populace of Khe Shang province.

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Thomas Marik
Title/Rank: ComStar Adept XVIII
Position: Heir-Designate to the Captain-General
Birthplace: Marik
Age: 35
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

Thomas is Janos's seventh-born child. Having little opportunity and no burning desire to hold the Captain-General's baton, he enrolled in the service of ComStar with his father's blessing at the age of 16. He quickly demonstrated an aptitude for technical pursuits. After seven productive years as a member of the Explorer service, Thomas spent several tours of duty as a deputy chief of HPG maintenance at various stations, and more recently was granted authorization to pursue independent research in medicine and astrophysics.

In the last few years, however, events in the League have conspired to give Thomas's destiny an unexpected turn. Four of his siblings have been killed by the depredations of the Succession Wars or the intrigues of the Atreus court. The two who remain (Therese Marik-Brett and Duggan Marik) do not have Janos's confidence. Thus, the Captain-General's contacted the Order secretly and purchased its permission to allow the young Adept to return to public life as his heir. The documents confirming this arrangement were signed at the First Circuit relay station on Procyon in 3021.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

While still residing at the ComStar station on the Steiner world Teukros, Thomas has split his time between his normal research and the conscientious study of ROM reports on the current state of League political, economic, and military affairs. Though ROM's information should make Thomas well prepared to administer the needs of his empire, he will still be a virtual babe in the woods in dealing with the Byzantine intrigues of the Free Worlds League. The barely concealed ambitions of Duke Christopher Halas of Oriente, Dame Catherine Humphreys of Andurien, and General Duncan Marik will only aggravate the danger. Though ROM can supply him with guidance, Thomas's ability to survive and govern effectively will depend on his ability to discern who to trust, who to confront, and who to eliminate. In the process, we devoutly hope that the Adept's years of indoctrination will keep him more loyal to the Blessed Blake than to his own family's checkered heritage.

Manner:

A soft-spoken, brown-haired man, Thomas is intelligent and reserved. Only when talking about his research does he become excited.

Special Skills/Powers:

Although he has made no major breakthrough to recover lost Star League technologies, he has nonetheless become one of the more learned men in the Inner Sphere and a highly respected member of his order.

Name: Paul Marik
Title/Rank: None
Position: 3rd Assistant CompTech
Birthplace: Stewart
Age: 28
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

The eldest of the three children borne by Janos's second wife, Ana, Paul is a minor functionary in the computer section of the League's Ministry of Intelligence. Though without the intellectual aptitude of his half-brother Thomas, Paul is also a student of Star League technical lore. He has recently helped SAFE reactivate some of its long-inactive computerized data retrieval and analysis systems.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Paul has no political aspirations at all. Like Thomas Marik, he enjoys scientific investigation, and one day, he hopes to become Principal CompTech in the Ministry of Intelligence.

Manner:

Married with an infant daughter, Corinne, Paul is a bookish, unathletic sort who rarely appears at state functions except at his father's request. Alone among his siblings, he has stayed in contact with Thomas during his years with ComStar and greatly admires his older brother (who spurred Paul's own interest in science through games and joint "projects" during their youth together on Marik).

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Kristen Marik
Title/Rank: Lieutenant
Position: MechWarrior
Birthplace: Marik
Age: 27
Sex: Female



Brief Personal History:

Kristen is Janos's youngest surviving child, a well-built but homely woman who shares a strong facial resemblance to her father, as well as his renowned stubbornness. Unwilling to trade on her highborn position to gain an automatic officer's position in the Marik Militia, Kristen determined to make it on her own. Using the alias Kristen Markus, she enlisted in the service of the mercenary company Langendorf's Lancers as a Tech on her 20th birthday. Though her true identity was soon revealed (even mercenaries read vidtapes), she was awarded the captured Steiner Hunchback she pilots today on merit. She has already recorded three solo kills.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Kristen is an adventurous soul who wants to succeed without the help of her family's influence. Like most of her siblings, she shuns politics, preferring to fight an enemy rather than to negotiate. She hopes to form her own mercenary unit and lead them to victory throughout the Inner Sphere.

Manner:

Janos has always doted on Kristen and speaks of her with more affection than any of his other children (including Thomas). Nevertheless, the young MechWarrior has visited Atreus only once in the three and one-half years since Bronwen Rafsani took up residence in the palace, for she finds Janos's dotage on his young mistress (who is barely older than Kristen herself) demeaning to her mother's memory.

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Duncan Marik
Title/Rank: General
Position: Supreme Commander, Marik Militia
Birthplace: Marik
Age: 39
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

The only child of Janos's younger sister Sylvia (who died shortly after giving birth), Duncan has been a MechWarrior for over half his life. If events had unfolded differently over the last 20 years, it seems likely that Janos would have indeed looked upon Duncan as a perfect heir, for the two men are cut from a similar cloth. However, the Marik sees Duncan as another Duke Anton waiting to happen, and views his lobbying efforts as the prelude to a possible coup attempt. The Marik has maintained a cadre of personally loyal troops in every Militia unit (including the central command) to keep a close watch on Duncan's activities. The latter's continued presence as Militia commander would seem to confirm that no evidence of disloyalty has been found to date. Still, it is difficult to predict whether the General will remain loyal if he should learn that the Marik has already chosen his successor.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

In moving rapidly up through the ranks of the Militia, Duncan has never attempted to keep his overbearing ambition a secret. Today, the General has actively used vidtape interviews and military ceremonies to express his belief that he is the most logical heir to the Marik.

Manner:

Though prone to take a bit too much credit for the successes of his underlings, Duncan is otherwise a generous commander who has always ensured that his troops have enough supplies, intelligence data, logistical support, and reward for every operation. He has never married and seems unlikely to do so unless he attains the Captain-Generalcy and needs to produce an heir. Experience does not seem to have mellowed him; the burly blonde is as brash and boisterous as when he graduated from the New Olympia Academy as a newly commissioned officer.

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Shane "Lefty" Eastwick
Title/Rank: Earl of Atematwa
Position: MP from Marik Commonwealth
Birthplace: Atreus
Age: 56
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

Eastwick is a big, gruff, hard-drinking man in his mid-fifties. For over a decade, he has been the chief spokesman for the Marik Commonwealth's 52 representatives in Parliament, and he has unofficially managed the floor activities of the entire pro-Marik coalition in the legislature.

Eastwick served as a MechWarrior in the Atrean Hussars during his twenties and was decorated for bravery on several occasions. During a firefight on Zurich, his right leg was shattered and his right arm was severed at the wrist, forcing him to retire. Shunning bionics as "unnatural," he wears an old-fashioned metal hook (with which he is remarkably dexterous) and walks with a pronounced limp. Though he shares many of the anti-bionic views espoused by Elena Kubayshev of Shiloh and her Exituri movement, he has remained publicly silent on the issue out of loyalty to Janos, who is a staunch supporter of bionics as a way to keep his best soldiers in the field. Eastwick's close friends and drinking companions include retired Colonel Anjiro "Anj" Watkor (MP from the Marik Commonwealth), Diego Corradin (MP from Marcus), Sir Jason Tomlinson (MP from Holt), Millburn Tench (Deputy Director of the SAFE Covert Operations Division), and Elena Verdon (Chief Constable of Atreus City).

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

A wily hard-wheeler who understands well the art of political horse-trading, Shane saves the Marik's budget requests and political initiatives from defeat by using every weapon in his arsenal—including the filibuster and the eleventh hour roll call. Recently, he successfully marshaled the narrow passage of Janos's controversial trade bill calling for the opening of commerce in restricted material (including 'Mechs and PPCs, which the League desperately needs) between the League and the Capellan Confederation.

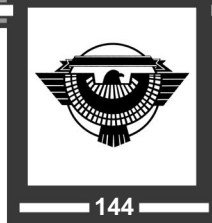
Manner:

Though Eastwick is compassionate, he can be a dangerous and vicious foe when angered. To discredit an enemy, he will resort to innuendo and dirty tricks. At present, his two biggest political enemies are Jonathan Steele, MP from the Duchy of Andurien and floor leader of Andurien's parliamentary voting bloc, and Silver Hawk Charles Smith of Amity, whose repeated calls for a peaceful end to the Succession Wars offend Lefty's patriotism. He also mistrusts the motives of Bronwen Rafsani, though he has had no luck in convincing his ruler that the woman is cuckolding him to serve her own mysterious ends.

Special Skills/Powers:

Eastwick knows that Janos has chosen Thomas Marik to be his heir.

Name: Hector Stewart
Title/Rank: Earl of Stewart
Position: Speaker of the Parliament
Birthplace: Adhafera
Age: 49
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

Hector is the latest of a long and nearly unbroken line of Marik supporters from the ruling family of Stewart, an important industrial world. The balding Speaker has held his office for nearly eight years, having survived three general elections. Doubtless, the fact that his sister Ana married Captain-General Janos has a lot to do with his popularity.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Hector believes that his appointment constitutes a sacred mission to aid the Marik in winning the Succession Wars. Though his energy for exhorting the Parliament to “put aside its petty differences and pull together for the good of the League” appears boundless, his efforts have brought mixed results at best. He still relies heavily on the back-room wheeling and dealing skills of Lefty Eastwick to bring home the necessary votes on critical pieces of legislation. On the administrative front, he has been more successful, selecting and maintaining a Council that has remained virtually intact and free from scandal during his term, despite frequently discouraging news from the Lyran front.

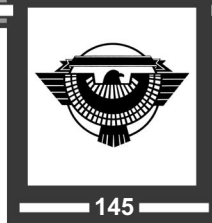
Manner:

Despite his unwavering support of the Marik, the current Earl of Stewart is a difficult man to dislike personally, and most in Parliament (save those staunch misanthropes who enjoy kicking dogs) consider Hector and his wife Alicia friends. The same cannot be said for Hector’s cousin, Alejandro Darida-Stewart, a black-sheep industrialist whose corporation, Redfern Properties, Ltd., has been accused of engaging in war profiteering. A sucker for Alejandro’s slick charm, Hector has used his influence on more than one occasion to get his cousin out of trouble with the Ministries of Trade and Taxation.

Special Skills/Powers:

None

Name: Olwine Greenwald
Title/Rank: Minister of Taxation
Position: MP from New Assam
Birthplace: Tiber IV
Age: 73
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

Olwine Greenwald has represented the miniscule Duchy of New Assam (which consists of a continent containing 4 million people on the world of Tiber IV) in Parliament for over 40 years. In addition, he has served as the Council's Minister of Taxation since the turn of the century.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Though he has infuriated many MPs with his whining and frequent complaints and has been subjected to three recall attempts, Greenwald's obvious competence and the inability of his opponents to agree on a successor have thus far enabled him to survive these challenges. At present, it appears that the only thing likely to remove him from his post is death, even though his many personality defects seem to be magnifying with age. Still, he has managed to reduce tax fraud greatly during his tenure and has created a number of ingenious ways to raise revenues for the Marik. However, he is a businessman first and staunchly opposes any legislation that would increase taxes, tariffs, or licensing fees—in short, most of the mechanisms by which the Marik has sought to increase his funds.

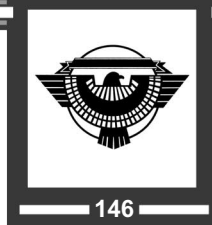
Manner:

Now 73 and mostly deaf, this irritating and officious little man rules his Ministry with an iron hand and a nitpicking attention to detail that can drive his subordinates crazy (or into jobs in other Ministries).

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Christopher Halas
Title/Rank: Duke of Oriente
Position: MP from Duchy of Oriente
Birthplace: Oriente
Age: 45
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

Christopher Halas is a tall, rangy man with dark hair and a military bearing and presence. An accomplished MechWarrior and AeroSpace Pilot with almost two decades of front-line experience, Halas is one of the most decorated members of the League armed forces, a holder of the coveted Order of the Saber, the Silver Cross, and a two-diamond Distinguished Service Award (10,000 tons of enemy kills). Yet, unlike many other ex-military officers elected to the Parliament, the Duke of Oriente is an effective politician who has flourished amid the many intrigues at the Atreus Court.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

As the unquestioned leader of the third largest voting bloc in Parliament, Halas holds substantial power in that body's deliberations. Over the past decade, he has thrown his support consistently behind Janos Marik's initiatives. The Duke's support is partially motivated by pragmatism; Halas truly believes that the Free Worlds League needs the Captain-General to keep it from becoming deadlocked in internecine squabbles that would make it easy pickings for its foes. His loyalty has paid off, as Janos, normally wary of trusting his nobles since his experience with Anton, has become quite close with Christopher. Janos has confided his hopes and dreams with Halas and has used him as a front-man for some of his biggest initiatives.

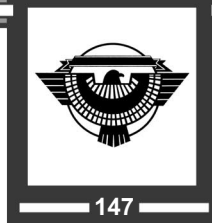
Manner:

Though basically honest and honorable, Halas is not without guile and keeps an eye toward improving his and Oriente's stature in the League. Believing that Thomas's specialized technical knowledge is insignificant compared to his own military and political experience, he fully expects to become the "power behind the throne" in the years to come. Halas has made many friends and enemies over his years in and out of Parliament. For the last several months, he has been engaged in a running feud with MP Tarak ben-Aden of Andurien, an ardent isolationist whom Halas once called "a spineless coward" on the floor of Parliament. Halas believes that ben-Aden was behind a recent assassination attempt made against him. It is not known whether any proof of this will be uncovered or whether Halas will attempt to retaliate.

Special Skills/Powers:

The Duke is one of only four men outside of ComStar (along with Janos, Shane Eastwick, and SAFE Director Jaime Cornejo) who know about the Marik's arrangement to make his son Thomas his legal heir.

Name: Li Weaver
Title/Rank: Earl of Lefarge
Position: MP from Bowang
Birthplace: Bowang
Age: 29
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

One of the most highly regarded new members of Parliament, Li is a husky, hawk-nosed man with black hair, a handlebar mustache, and an insouciant grin. Weaver distinguished himself as a military commander during the Marik's last major Liao campaign in 3020-3021, coordinating the field activities of several battalions of the Fusiliers of Oriente and mercenaries from Smithson's Chinese Bandits on the Capellan worlds of Krin and Exedor. He has shown flashes of the same tenacity and steadfastness on the floor of Parliament.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Li's talents have drawn the attention of Christopher Halas, who has solicited the former's aid in drafting speeches and legislation and in using his persuasive abilities on behalf of Oriente and the Marik. Weaver has been willing to toil loyally (and largely anonymously) on the Duke's behalf, but has been compiling quite a long list of people who owe him favors.

Manner:

Li is a diligent administrator who has succeeded in making the transition from military man to Member of Parliament. In addition, he has proven to be a clever negotiator.

Special Skills/Powers:

Li plans to use his list of favors to garner enough votes for a position on the League Council.

Name: Vicente Orloff
Title/Rank: Earl of Orloff
Position: MP from Duchy of Orloff
Birthplace: Vanra
Age: 56
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

Vicente is the reigning patriarch of House Orloff, a noble family with one of the longest heritages of allegiance to the League. At 56, he is nearly a contemporary of the Marik, and was a far greater friend of Christopher Halas's father Burton than he is to the current Duke, whom he considers a disrespectful young upstart.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Vicente is pragmatic enough to realize that the continued independence of his small and war-battered Duchy relies heavily on the good will of Oriente. His vociferous attacks on the opposition and hard-line positions are designed to allow Duke Halas to appear to be the voice of reason, when the latter "convinces" Orloff to compromise on a watered-down bill that still gives Oriente and/or the Marik most of what it wants. Though this strategy has been surprisingly effective, it is a thankless job that has earned Orloff many powerful enemies, not the least of whom is Elena Kubayshev, Orloff has viciously ridiculed for her proposals for a halt to bionics on the floor and in vidtape interviews. Nonetheless, the Earl carries on without complaint, believing that Orloff's lot is best served by backing a winner.

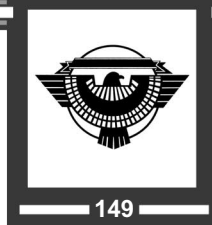
Manner:

Orloff has a wife (Sabrina), three sons (Alfonso, Vicente Jr., and Salvatore), one daughter (Regina Orloff-Lang) and eight grandchildren. The family is very close-knit and ready to rush to each other's support in times of crisis. The clan takes pride in the fact that its ancient stronghold at Helm's Peak on the planet Vanra was firebombed during a Liao raid in 2991. The damage to the building's north wing has never been repaired, and Orloff displays it as a badge of courage to visitors.

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Dame Catherine Humphreys
Title/Rank: Duchess of Andurien
Position: Leader of Duchy of Andurien
Birthplace: Andurien
Age: 74
Sex: Female



Brief Personal History:

At 74, Catherine Humphreys has the distinction of being one of the few nobles in the Free Worlds League who is even older than Janos Marik. In her youth, she served with distinction as an AeroSpace Fighter Pilot in the Defenders of Andurien, rising to become commander of the 1st Regiment's Remington Air Squadron. She succeeded to the Ducal throne upon her Aunt Morgaine's assassination in 2989, and has been an active force in League politics ever since.

Under Dame Catherine's leadership, Andurien and its eleven client states have steered a strict isolationist course that has been a source of consternation to both the Captain-General and his Parliamentary foes. Under the cover of the Home Defense Act, the Duchess has steadfastly refused to contribute anything but token military support to the Marik's war effort. More recently, she has even attempted to use the Act to allow Andurien defense plants to declare their output "essential to planetary security," thus restricting the flow of goods to the Captain-General. At the same time, however, Andurien's MPs (led by either Dame Catherine herself or Jonathan Steele) have just as steadfastly refused to throw their support behind the opposition forces (led by Regulus and Kalidasa) seeking to overturn Resolution 288 and remove the Captain-General from central authority. The Border Protectorate's Tam Singhn spoke for many when he declared "The only damn word that woman [Catherine] knows is 'no!'"

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Since ascending the throne, Catherine's outlook has always been to protect and expand the interests of Andurien, whether or not these interests coincide with the goals of the League. The revolt of Anton Marik eleven years ago has prompted her to entertain her own notions of seceding from the League. Because she is not naive enough to believe that her modest provincial forces could withstand the military might of the Marik, Catherine has spent the last decade searching for a reliable ally who could provide her with the firepower she needs to survive such a bid.

After preliminary discussions with the Camerons of Regulus fell through in 3018, the Duchess turned her attention beyond the boundaries of the League, toward the Magistracy of Canopus and its charismatic leader, Kyalla Centrala. Kyalla has pledged to defend Andurien with ten Mech and 50 armor regiments in exchange for Dame Catherine's promise to aid Kyalla's plans to attack the Capellan Confederation. ROM intelligence reports indicate, however, that Kyalla's real plan may be considerably more grandiose, aimed at seizing a large chunk of Andurien as well. Only time will tell whether Catherine's dream of independence will make her a mere catspaw in a military venture that might literally tear the League apart.

Manner:

Catherine maintains an air of grace and dignity at all times. This genteel facade conceals one of the most Machiavellian minds in the Free Worlds League. Her tireless plotting on behalf of Andurien rivals the machinations of Maximillian Liao.

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Sigmund Hughes
Title/Rank: President
Position: Manager of IMB Unlimited
Birthplace: Wilkes
Age: 32
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

A young and energetic man, Hughes started his IrTech career at the age of 20 as a junior supervisor at the IWW Kirin River arms plant. He quickly displayed the communications and administrative skills that would rocket him up the company's ranks. By the age of 26, he was managing an IMB Systems flight instruments plant on Andurien, where his calm during a wildcat strike caught the eye of Dame Catherine Humphreys of Andurien.

Three years later, Hughes was suddenly the president of IrTech's embattled IMB Unlimited and assigned a daunting task—the restoration of the ravaged 'Mech production plant at Soapstone Mountain. Backed by a crack team of Techs and the deep pockets of Dame Catherine, Hughes transformed a tangled pile of metal into a fully operational production facility. This past March, he watched the first new Hermes II stride off the production line under its own power.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

IrTech has given Hughes a free rein to make the rounds in Atreus, hoping that the publicity will give the battered conglomerate a much-needed shot in the arm. Those who have had close contact with Sigmund, however, might justifiably wonder which master he most faithfully serves, as his private and public statements are filled with praise for Dame Humphreys. It is rumored the SAFE, in particular, is eyeing this potential alliance closely.

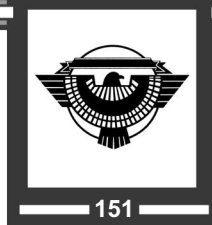
Manner:

Hughes has not been oblivious to the praise (and envy) he has received from many prominent figures in the Free Worlds. Indeed, for the last several months, he has spent less and less time on Irian itself, leaving the plant operations in the hands of his technicians, while he makes appearances on the social circuit around the court of Atreus. Though he has maintained his affable, easygoing manner, he recognizes his current celebrity as a boon to his personal ambitions, and has been milking it for whatever it is worth.

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Corey Chang
Title/Rank: President
Position: Manager of High Point Trader
Birthplace: Kyeinnisan
Age: 44
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

For almost two decades, Chang plied the spacelanes of the Free Worlds League as an independent trader, scraping out a hand-to-mouth existence as a contract cargo carrier along the Oriente-Regulus trade route. Five years ago, he won the ownership of HighPoint Traders (a large but economically unhealthy combine) in a high-stakes game of Four-Card Drax. Since then, Corey has parlayed a few called-in favors, some underworld contacts, and an extraordinary run of luck to put High-Point back on its feet again. His trade runs between worlds on both sides of the newly peaceful League-Capellan border have been highly profitable.

Though the combine's short-term prospects look rosy, Chang knows that a concentrated attack on his vessels by either Marik or Liao could wipe out everything he owns. As a result, he works hard to grease the right palms throughout the border territories in which he operates, seeking to keep port officials and local government bureaucrats from exhibiting too much of an interest in some of HighPoint's more questionable enterprises. Thus far, he has been successful and will probably remain so if he can resist the temptation to try for a bigger "score."

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Though Chang likes to put forth an image of himself as a ladies' man with a lover in every starport, his real vices are gambling and drugs. Corey occasional uses the depressant KZ (or "Krayzee"), and when under the influence, he is likely to say or do almost anything. His gambling habits, which are considerably more compulsive, were a primary cause of his prior financial troubles. Just as the Shilovian seskratt cannot change its distinctive spots, it seems unlikely that Chang's newfound respectability will be able to survive these dual addictions.

Manner:

A craggy-faced charmer with mischievous dark eyes and large, graying muttonchop sideburns, Chang is the epitome of the 31st-century trader—clever, impulsive, greedy, ruthless, and slightly criminal. However, he maintains a fair face to the public.

Special Skills/Powers:

None.

Name: Pedro Ellingsen
Title/Rank: None
Position: None
Birthplace: Prato
Age: 47
Sex: Male



Brief Personal History:

Ellingsen, a hefty big-gutted man with a warm smile and a hearty laugh, was a salvage prospector who spent most of his adult life chasing after dreams in his battered Explorer class ship "Frumious III." Unlike virtually all salvage men, however, Ellingsen found his pot of gold (in the wrecked Star League JumpShip "Andromeda"), and has become the unexpected toast of Atreus society in the process.

Personality:

Motivations/Desires/Goals:

Pedro loves attention and has allowed his sycophants to run up some of the most outrageous bar tabs in Free Worlds history. Nevertheless, he has not wavered from his plan to invest the bulk of his earnings into a multi-ship salvage expedition to find a rumored Star League storehouse in the zone between the League and the Marian Hegemony Periphery state.

Before embarking on this great expedition, Ellingsen has expressed an interest in taking a wife and starting a family. Because of Pedro's billions and the fact that the average salvage man lives a short life, he has had many lovely young suitors from among the local nobility. At present, however, his heart belongs to Sheena McGillicuddy, a cashier in a leather shop who has thus far shyly resisted his advances.

Manner:

Like most salvage men, Pedro has spent virtually all his life aboard ship, and has had no experience with upper-class society. His lack of social graces might have made him a laughing stock, but his good-humored nature and plain-faced honesty make him almost impossible to dislike. Unfortunately, his total lack of guile has also made him a target for every unscrupulous schemer and con man within 100 miles of the capital, all of whom are trying to separate him from a portion of his new-found wealth.

Special Skills/Powers:

Pedro still possesses the ancient, unintelligible map to the Star League storehouse that his father gave him.

A BRIEF ATLAS



The Free Worlds League currently contains over 400 settled worlds, presenting many contrasts of economic development, political structure, and physical characteristics. Space and time considerations prevent our publishing full data on all these worlds; it is hoped that the short excerpts presented on 30 League planets will give First Circuit readers a sampling of the information at our disposal.

[Note: If there is a working recharge apparatus at one or both of a system's jump points, then the entry will list *Zenith* and/or *Nadir* to indicate at which jump station it is located. *Percentage and Level of Native Life* is a rough estimate of how much of the world's planet and animal life is indigenous, as well as stating the highest level of development reached by its fauna.]

MARIK COMMONWEALTH

World Name: Atreus
Star Type: F4V
Position in System: 3
Days to Jump Point: 16
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Form of Government: Representative Commonality
Noble Ruler: Duke Janos Marik
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Most Exalted Ambassador, Pedregor Aliz, Precentor of Atreus Station
Population: 5,391,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 10%, Mammal

Atreus was first settled during the Exodus period, when it was one of the farthest rimward planets to be settled. In 2271, the Treaty of Marik established Atreus as the capital of the Free Worlds. One of the reasons that the delegates chose Atreus was because its capital, Atreus City, was one of the few cities that had not been planned; its sprawling, hillside neighborhoods seemed a pleasanter environment in which to locate a government than the austere cities of Oriente, Marik, or Regulus. In all the centuries since, the security precautions that separate the House of Government from its surrounding neighborhoods have never destroyed the city's charm.

The House of Government is located at the north end of the city. It is an excellent example of 23rd-century post-Terran architecture, with magnificently curved eaves highlighting chromium-and-marble-trimmed ferrocrete facades. It is the only original capitol building still standing in the five Successor States. (The capitals of the Federated Suns, the Draconis Combine, and the Capellan Confederation were moved and the capitol building of the Lyrans Commonwealth was destroyed by an earthquake). All this gives Atreus City an air of antiquity that belies the vigorous economy of both the city and the planet.

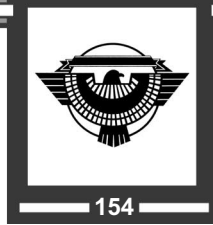
The principle industry of the city is ceremony. An astonishing 40 percent of the populace is employed in services connected with imperial ceremonies, such as catering state banquets, fueling and servicing vehicles for motorcades, supplying bunting and other decorations for official receptions, and polishing the shockproof, diamondglass windows in the government buildings. Another 20 percent of the city's populace work in areas ancillary to the government, such as providing parts and repairs for the government's vast computer complexes.

The rest of the planet is largely undeveloped, except for the state-of-the-art fishing industry and an AeroSpace manufacturing facility in Semidam. One of the major weaknesses of the Marik government is that it is too reliant on offworld goods and services. In two centuries of almost continuous warfare, Atreus has never been invaded, but citizens of Atreus fear a blockade more than they fear an invasion.

World Name: Angell II
Star Type: G5V
Position in System: 2
Days to Jump Point: 7.5
Recharging Station: Nadir
Form of Government: Representative Commonality
Political Leader: Primus Katya Domenici
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Melissa Schwartz
Population: 1,145,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Mammal

First mapped by Marik Commonwealth explorers in the early 23rd century, Angell II was settled during the Great Exodus. Because almost 90 percent of the planet's bodies of water are tainted with the chemical citrium (a natural depressant that can slow the human metabolism to dangerous levels), life on Angell II has always been heavily dependent on iceships and water purification technology. Nonetheless, the world has plenty of mineral resources (especially radium and cesium) and has been one of the Marik Commonwealth's biggest sources of wealth for centuries.

The societal structure of Angell II is stratified between the powerful few, who have access to water purification technology, and the drones, who either receive a meager ration of pure water from their employers or rely on crude, unreliable "home cookers." As the depredations of the Succession Wars have widened the breach still further, the drones' unrest has more than once erupted into violence. During the most recent Steiner raid on the planet in 3019, it is rumored that a number of drone partisans fought side-by-side with the Lyrans, though a series of arrests and trials produced no concrete evidence.



World Name: Marik
Star Type: K0V
Position in System: 2
Days to Jump Point: 5.5
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Form of Government: Hereditary Oligarchy
Noble Ruler: Duke Janos Marik
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Luka D'Allessandro
Population: 4,780,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 10%, Mammal

First settled by Terran Alliance ships in 2139, this metal-rich planet evolved into the cornerstone of the financial empire that would become the Marik Commonwealth. Today, with its most lucrative mineral deposits mined out, it serves as the symbolic seat of the Marik's power and the site of the Captain-General's winter residence.

Marik is a Terran-sized planet, with a gravity slightly higher than Terran normal and a hot, dry climate. During the height of its summer, devastating duststorms and tornadoes are common. Consequently, both the royal palace at Dormuth and the LCCC headquarters complex outside Malkent are stark, sprawling facilities that possess little of the majesty one expects to find in a major public edifice.

Between the Captain-General, the LCCC, and Imstar Aerospace's Fighter production facility in Cugyar, the planet receives many military visitors. Many of the civilian travelers who arrive at Andrew Marik Memorial Spaceport come either to trade, to prospect for firestones (a much-prized orange-red gemstone), or to compete in the Burlingrad Hoverdrome, where weekly individual and team speeder races are vidtape entertainment staples.

World Name: New Olympia
Star Type: G1V
Position in System: 3
Days to Jump Point: 10
Recharging Station: Zenith
Form of Government: Monarchy/Feudal Oligarchy
Noble Ruler: Prince Felix D'Andre/Earl Hagar Kefalczyk
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Blake Bock
Population: 2,540,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Plant

During the 22nd century, this fertile planet was settled by a half-dozen waves of colonists, who battled one another over land and water rights. In both 2196 and 2220, Terran Alliance military forces had to intervene to halt these conflicts. After the fall of the Alliance, the population formed three republics, Olympica, Kasnov, and New Greenland, which immediately went to war with each other.

In 2265, the latter two regions accepted Alonzo Marik's proposal to join the fledgling Marik Commonwealth. The ruling d'Andre family of Olympica, however, declined the Marik's overtures. With the aid of a naval contingent from Regulus (which was contending with the Mariks over spheres of influence), Olympica managed to secure recognition as an independent state—a status it retains to the present day.

Though virtually all the agri-domes that once dotted New Olympia's landscape have been damaged or destroyed by the Succession Wars, the planet remains an important agricultural exporter to other League worlds. Its seas remain abundantly stocked with marine life, including marlin, sea bass, speckled hoodoo, and Hodson's Fliers (a unique breed whose members can grow to over four meters and can leap more than ten meters out of the water).

New Olympia also houses two of the League's military academies: the Allison MechWarrior Institute outside Darienbad and the Lloyd Marik-Stanley Aerospace School, located in the New Greenland mountain range known as the "Garden of the Gods."

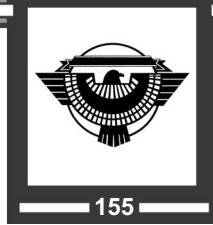
ABBAY DISTRICT

World Name: Maxwell
Star Type: F9III
Position in System: 5
Days to Jump Point: 11
Recharging Station: Zenith
Form of Government: Military Dictatorship
Political Leader: General Isaac Trent
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Abu Baizan
Population: 3,817,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Amphibian

There is no intermediate level of technology on Maxwell, a remote world in the Abbey District. The mountainous but fertile terrain makes land vehicles impractical, but the quality of the soil is ideal for farming. As a result, there are clearings for DropShips, silos, and warehouses, but the rest of the world is rural. Every home is equipped with high-tech communications devices, and every garage sports some form of personal hovercraft, but most of the work is done by beasts of burden called taraises, sleek, big-eyed oxen that roam wild on the slopes of Maxwell's mountain ranges.

Because of either its rough terrain or its lack of industry, Maxwell has never been invaded. Its exports have greatly aided relief efforts to war-torn worlds, particularly those in the Duchy of Tamarind.

Maxwell has produced more than its share of distinguished Parliamentarians. Among the greatest of these have been Ronald lasceau, who was instrumental in working out tariff compromises with the Capellan Confederation during the Star League days; Jimmy "the Romanian" Romanici, who opposed Kenyon Marik dramatically in Parliament and nearly brought about a vote to prevent him from leaving the Star League; and Carolyn Levanthal, a recently retired delegate who eloquently defended the peace proposals of Sir Carven Gibson when he was unjustly accused of treason.



DUCHY OF ANDURIEN

World Name: Andurien
Star Type: G0V
Position in System: 5
Days to Jump Point: 10.5
Recharging Station: Zenith
Form of Government: Hereditary Oligarchy
Noble Ruler: Dame Catherine Humphreys, Duchess of Andurien
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Franco Bando
Population: 4,950,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Amphibian

Andurien's heritage is filled with ironies and contrasts. It was a constant source of contention between Houses Marik and Liao during the Age of War, yet has been virtually unscarred by the violence of the Succession Wars. Over the last 50 years, its military forces have seldom seen combat, but wear more honors and decorations than the Marik Hall of Heroes. Although its leaders are the descendants of men who helped forge the Free Worlds League, they often seem bent on tearing it apart.

The primacy of the Humphreys family has never been seriously questioned, despite the sometimes erratic actions of its ruling scions. Even today, the political climate in the capital city Jojoken appears as serene as the famed botanical gardens that stretch to the north of the city. It appears likely, however, that the loyalty of the people of Andurien will be put to its strongest test ever if Dame Catherine goes through with her plans to secede from the League (with the help of Kyalla Centralia, the Magestrix of Canopus).

World Name: Lopez
Star Type: MOV/M5V
Position in System: 1
Days to Jump Point: 3
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Form of Government: Democracy
Political Leader: Secretary General Abraham O. Wiesenthal
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Debbie Loo-Yee
Population: 2,600,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 30%, Reptile

Lopez is a small, hot planet orbiting weak twin suns. Beyond the confines of its major trading centers of Orton and French Bluff, much of the planet's face remains covered with lush jungles, a cornucopia of local plant and animal life, and many lakes and waterfalls. The planet has always been a popular travel destination for people looking to get away from it all. Whenever the planet has been invaded by enemy forces, these areas have served as excellent bases for guerilla operations.

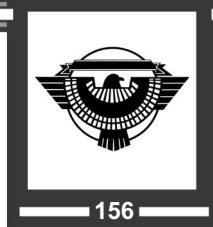
The most unusual species of creatures roaming the planet's surface is the branth, large flying lizards who resemble dragons of old Terran tales. These great reptiles of prey (whose wingspans measure up to 16 meters) can be broken and ridden as beasts of burden or of war. Hundreds of adventurous souls come to Lopez's shores each year to make the attempt. All attempts to export these strange and wondrous creatures off-world have failed, however, as the branth is highly susceptible to disease.

BORDER PROTECTORATE

World Name: Alula Australis
Star Type: A7II
Position in System: 8
Days to Jump Point: 28
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Form of Government: Oligarchy
Noble Ruler: Dame Renée deLouton
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Maximilian Archer
Population: 3,119,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
10%, Amphibian

Alula Australis was originally a Steiner world, but was conquered by Geralk Marik in 2458. Perhaps in memory of that conquest, the people of Alula Australis welcomed the opportunity for their world to be the site of the first full-scale BattleMech manufacturing center in the Free Worlds. Unfortunately, this made them a prime target during all three Succession Wars. Four times the facilities have been destroyed: twice by House Steiner, once by House Liao, and once by House Marik to prevent them from falling into Steiner hands. After the fourth destruction in 2947, Captain-General Brock Marik decided to relocate the facilities to Savannah, which is farther from the Steiner border.

This caused a considerable depression of Alula Australis's economy for half a century, until gemstones and rare earths were discovered in the mountain ranges outside the capital of New Horizon City. The rare earths are being used in the chemistry industries located on Cirebon, Leng-kong, and Mosiro. The gemstones, particularly sapphires, are mostly sent to Atrous, where they appear to be used in top secret technological experiments. As yet, ComStar has been unable to discover the purpose of these experiments.



PRINCIPALITY OF GIBSON

World Name: Gibson
Star Type: G2V
Position in System: 3
Days to Jump Point: 9
Recharging Station: Zenith
Form of Government: Participatory Democracy
Political Leader: Principal Jonathan Argoulis
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Mildred Apanno
Population: 4,137,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
10%, Mammal

Politically, Gibson is a prime example of politics making strange bedfellows. Declaring independence from the Principality of Regulus, it joined with Molokai and Clipper-ton to form the Principality of Gibson. The natives of this arid, culturally diverse world perceive the Regulans as their oppressors. Independent for three and a quarter centuries, they are still wary of the Regulans, but have lately sided with the Regulans in the Free Worlds Parliament.

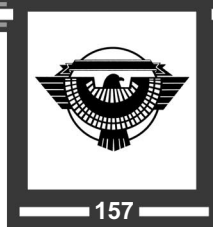
Formed from dozens of ethnic and religious groups, the people of Gibson cling tenaciously to their Terran heritages and customs. In the capital city of Portent, it is not unusual to see men in dashikis walking with women in dirndl dresses; neither is it unheard of for one to hear three or four languages spoken in a quarter-kilometer of one of the many shopping districts. The largest single religious group is Buddhist, but all other major religions (and several minor sects) are represented in large numbers. One neighborhood in the capital is divided almost equally between Arabic and Japanese peoples, and a small town nearby has Quechua as its second official language.

Geographically, Gibson was once 80 percent land, but the contours of its surface made it ideal for terraforming. With the importation of water, lakes and rivers occurred naturally as the first rains ever fell on many parts of the planet.

MOSIRO ARCHIPELAGO

World Name: Mosiro
Star Type: K0V
Position in System: 3
Days to Jump Point: 5
Recharging Station: Nadir
Form of Government: Oligarchy
Noble Ruler: Duke Ali Jafik
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Sandra Olif
Population: 3,399,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 25%, Plant

Mosiro lies at the center of the Mosiro Archipelago, which also includes El Giza and Hudeiba. Primarily Arabic and Islamic in origin, the people of Mosiro tend to oppose the Marik and his cosmopolitanism in Parliament. Although the planetary government officially holds the same tolerance for religious dissent and social diversity as the rest of the Free Worlds, there are some local variances. For example, all citizens and visitors are expected to respond to the muezzin's call to prayer. Although this is not required by law, any non-Moslems are required to apply to a government bureaucracy to be excused from the daily prayers. Moslems are given preference in employment, and "infidels" are far less frequently promoted in their jobs.



Mosiro is not a parochial place, however. Its leadership takes pride in hearkening back to the days of the European Dark Ages of old Terra, when Moslem civilization was at its peak. Moslem architecture rises majestically from the plains of Mosiro, and the people take pride in their accomplishments in poetry, the arts, and science. Mosiro's second city, al-Hassam, houses the most advanced astrophysical laboratories outside of Terra itself, and the capital, al-Ibn, boasts a cultural complex that includes government archives, library, art and natural history museums, public park, hanging gardens and waterfalls, and the largest mosque in the Free Worlds, all of which combines to rival the Alhambra of old Spain on Terra.

In this enlightened cultural environment, the only major theological conflict in recent decades came in the 2990s, when a group attempted to resurrect a Terran religion called Rastafarianism on Mosiro. The Rastafarians' belief in a millennial, apocalyptic destruction of "Babylon" (everything outside themselves) and their smoking of marijuana as a sacrament caused them to be persecuted wholesale. Since the coming of the new millennium, they have largely disappeared, having apparently gone underground until the next millennium.

DUCHY OF ORIENTE

World Name: Calloway VI
Star Type: F5V
Position in System: 6
Days to Jump Point: 15
Recharging Station: Nadir
Form of Government: Corporate
Political Leader: Executive Director Milton Stalls
Parliamentary Representative: Esau Bresnahan
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Aaron Mize
Population: 1,250,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Insect

Located in the Duchy of Oriente, Calloway VI is one of the most prosperous planets in the Inner Sphere due to the business acumen of its merchants. There are no exportable raw materials, and almost all necessities must be imported, including the metal for the BattleMech factories located there. Because of the success of this trading colony, the Duke of Oriente had his winter retreat built there in the late 2400s.

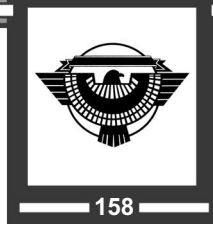
In fact, the people of Calloway VI are so mercantile that they hunted the vast herds of Calloway wildebeests (similar to the Terran wildebeest) to extinction for their meat, hides, and tusks, which were prized by ivory carvers throughout the Inner Sphere. In the late 24th century, environmentalists tried to preserve these beautiful animals. By that time, however, the herds had been reduced below the critical number of animals necessary to breed, and so they passed into extinction (along with several other species of indigenous lifeforms).

One of the most unusual aspects of life on Calloway VI is that there is no true night. The three large moons that circle the planet reflect so much sunlight that nowhere on the planet has it been necessary to install streetlights. Natives who visit other worlds tend to be inordinately afraid of the dark.

World Name: Oriente
Star Type: F2III
Position in System: 4
Days to Jump Point: 191
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Form of Government: Representative
Commonality
Noble Ruler: Grand Duke Christopher
Halas
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor
Alexandra Oberon
Population: 3,972,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
20%, Mammal

Oriente is the most cosmopolitan of the Free Worlds. Early in the Exodus period, House Allison encouraged progressive ideas in the sciences, arts, industry, and commerce. The level of sophistication resulting from having the best-educated populace in the Free Worlds is one thing that the ravages of the Succession Wars have not been able to destroy. Even so, no other world has so deeply felt the effects of the loss of technology and the destruction of industry. Estimates indicate that the standard of living has declined by more than half since the start of the war. House Halas has considerable military accomplishments, which may be just what Oriente needs, given its vulnerability to Liao attacks. However, the Halases have shown little of the imagination or progressiveness that the Allison used in making Oriente one of the crown jewels of the Inner Sphere.

With average temperatures slightly warmer than Terra, Oriente is a lush, green world of rolling grasslands, panoramic mountains, and tropical rainforests. Frequent Liao raids have damaged Oriente's manufacturing facilities, but have left the environment untouched.



THE PROTECTORATE

World Name: New Delos
Star Type: G8III
Position in System: 4
Days to Jump Point: 6
Recharging station: Zenith, Nadir
Form of Government: Military
Dictatorship
Noble Ruler: General Jessica Owen
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor
Bernard Ofwitz
Population: 2,110,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
10%, Reptile

New Delos has been the site of several historical developments. For example, it was the homeworld of Sir George Humphreys, the architect of the Free Worlds League itself. In 2531, it was the site of the conference that ended the Second Andurien War. Harlan Allison, the last member of House Allison, was killed there in 2845, and it was on New Delos that the failing-out occurred between Anton Marik and Jaime Wolf that led to Anton's death at the hands of Wolf's Dragoons. With all these historical sites, however, there is almost no tourism on New Delos.

Part of the reason for this is the ravages of war. During the Third Succession War, the people of New Delos have been reduced nearly to subsistence level. Under the circumstances, it is nearly impossible to build adequate tourist facilities, even if enough people could safely get to New Delos to see the sights.

This is regrettable, both because the planetary economy would benefit enormously by the influx of M-Bills and because the sweeping panoramas present some of the most breathtaking scenery in the Free Worlds. Certainly there is little value in the land itself, being almost devoid of valuable minerals and unsuited for agriculture. Without tourism, the economy of historic New Delos will remain depressed for years to come.

World Name: Nova Roma
Star Type: F6IV
Position in System: 3
Days to Jump Point: 14
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Form of Government: Military
Dictatorship
Political Leader: Colonel Stanton de Beer
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Alex
Dumarov
Population: 2,662,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
25%, Reptile

"Often it is Fate, not tactics or strategy, that determines the site of great battles. From Waterloo and Gettysburg to New Vandenburg and Kentares, the critical military moment all too frequently comes at a time and place that few expect... and leaves behind a dreadful legacy." These words, penned by a House Davion historian in 2798 about the Kentares Massacre, also apply to Nova Roma. Settled during the good years of the Star League by the Indrus Corporation, the planet remained a modestly successful, rather sleepy agrarian world for four centuries. Because of its utter lack of strategic importance, it even escaped attack from enemy forces in the Succession Wars. In 3014, however, Nova Roma's luck finally ran out.

In September of that year, elements of Wolf's Dragoons landed on Nova Roma and easily subdued the garrison of Free Worlds Guards stationed there. Later that autumn, Duke Anton delivered an incendiary address from Nova Roma, surrounded by the smiling members of the planet's Executive Council (who had been rounded up by bayonet for the occasion). The videotapes of this event was broadcast to Loyalist Marik forces, raising their ire. Thus, when Anton's forces regrouped on Nova Roma for their final stand, Janos's advancing armies laid waste to many farms and mines during their pursuit of the enemy.

This damage decimated Nova Roma's economy, which may not recover without outside help. However, the crisis does not concern the planet's governor, Stanton de Beer, who spends his time assiduously checking out every rumor of rebellion. In the meantime, the planet's Executive Council is powerless to do anything but smile at the new faces holding the same bayonets.

PRINCIPALITY OF REGULUS

World Name: Regulus

Star Type: K6III

Position in System: 4

Days to Jump Point: 4

Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir

Form of Government: Civilian

Dictatorship

Noble Ruler: Count Derick

Cameron-Jones

ComStar Facility Class: A

ComStar Representative: Precentor Aldo

Marabi

Population: 3,139,000,000

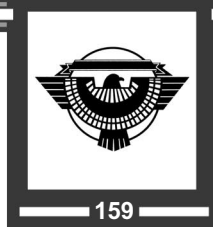
Percentage and Level of Native Life:

10%, Reptile

Regulus has undergone considerable change in the decades since the Cameron-Jones family took charge of the Principality. The Hindu influence that marked its early history, when the Selaj family ruled like maharajas, has been gradually dissipating since the 2550s, when the Selaj fled the League.

Recently, political developments on Regulus have been extremely duplicitous. For centuries, Regular representatives have been a leading voice of the loyal opposition in the Free Worlds Parliament. The possibility of secession from the Free Worlds has arisen, but Derick Cameron-Jones fears Capellan intervention more than he resents Marik mercantile guidelines. The mercurial Dame Catherine Humphreys, Duchess of Andurien, has sounded out Cameron-Jones on the subjects of secession, bloodless coups, and formation of a sixth Successor House, but how far these ideas have gone is open to conjecture. ComStar believes that Cameron-Jones is using the Duchess as a stalking horse for his own purposes, which are more economic than political. Tradition notwithstanding, there is no way of guessing whose side he might join if it comes to a showdown between the Marik and the Duchess.

Regulus is also the homeworld of the Free Worlds' most popular entertainer, John "Icepick" Melton, a man of many talents who never performs the same show twice. Actor, comedian, musician, performance artist, and magician, he presents the illusion of singing underwater, makes large musical instruments appear and disappear by slight of hand, and levitates his audience while holotaping live comedies. He takes pride in never having let one minute of redeeming social value into any of his performances, and fans from Delcour to Claybrooke attest that his show is the most fun they have ever had in a theater.



RIM COMMONALITY

World Name: Lesnovo

Star Type: G4III

Position in System: 3

Days to Jump Point: 8

Recharging Station: Nadir

Form of Government: Feudal Autocracy

Noble Ruler: Dame Candace Silver

ComStar Facility Class: B

ComStar Representative: Precentor

Liryl Eton

Population: 2,631,000,000

Percentage and Level of Native Life:

30%, Plant

One of five worlds of the Rim Commonality, Lesnovo has recently been subject to bandit raids from the Marian Hegemony in the Periphery. The people of Lesnovo feel abandoned by the Atreus government, despite Janos Marik's continued concern with preventing incursions by any Periphery powers.

There is not that much to take from Lesnovo. Only its proximity to Marian space makes this planet a target; its food production is barely enough to feed its own population, and there is nothing to export to bring in wealth. Consequently, the raids have taken what little the people of Lesnovo have. This has led to bitter denunciations of the Marik government in the Free Worlds Parliament, and even suggestions from some Rim Commonality representatives that replacing the Mariks with another House might be in order.

All this has not escaped Catherine Humphreys. House Humphreys is a good candidate to replace House Marik, and Dame Catherine, as the most capable of loyal opposition leaders, would be the logical choice for the Captain-Generalcy. The question of how much support she could muster throughout the rest of the Free Worlds is undoubtedly what stays her hand, but there is little doubt that the government and people of Lesnovo would support her claim.

SILVER HAWKS

World Name: Amity
Star Type: M2V
Position in System: 2
Days to Jump Point: 3
Recharging Station: Nadir
Form of Government: Parliamentary
Political Leader: First Minister Raymond Richards
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Farrell Akerfelds
Population: 2,324,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
30%, Mammal

An independent member-state of the League since 2335, Amity spent the first 450 years of its membership as a prosperous, non-controversial industrial state. Its four great cities of Freewheel, Oxbridge, Ruhr, and the island megalopolis of Stryker produced everything from Galleon light tanks and Farley speeders to Sonnheim and Four Winds musical synthesizers and recording equipment. Since the Succession Wars, however, Amity has become both a military and political battlefield.

On the military front, the planet has been raided or attacked by enemy forces on 23 separate occasions. The Lyran Commonwealth has occupied this planet twice, between 2837 and 2858, and for 30 months in 2980-2982. The early battles of the war destroyed much of Amity's industry, which was then further pillaged by the Lyran garrison during the final months of 2858. Between 2863-2865, however, Captain General Philippa Marik dispatched a team of scientists to help the populace restore these factories to full productivity. Today, the planet is once again able to provide a decent standard of living for its citizens and actually has a positive balance of trade.



Instead of gratitude for this effort, however, the leaders of Amity have become increasingly critical of the Mariks, spear-heading the passage of the Home Defense Act, and uniting with five of its fellow principalities in the mutual defense association known as the "Silver Hawks." Three years ago, First Minister Richards and MP Sir Charles Smith made the most radical break of all—concluding an independent peace treaty with the neighboring Lyran world Solaris. Janos Marik and Minister of Defense Erin McQuarrie have renounced this treaty as invalid, but have thus far refrained from making any kind of attack against Amity or Solaris (knowing that their fragile coalition of supporters would not back such a move). The absence of retaliation has made Charles Smith's cries for a full-fledged peace settlement even louder on the floor of Parliament.

World Name: Shiloh
Star Type: A8V
Position in System: 4
Days to Jump Point: 26
Recharging Station: None
Form of Government: Theocracy
Noble Ruler: Blessed Leader Elena Kubayshev
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Ilsa DeSuevo
Population: 1,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
10%, Plant

Shiloh is the home of the famous Exituri, the religious ascetics who left Terra early in the Exodus to pursue their severe but secret doctrines. The Exituri leadership disdains political involvement, but because the priesthood must make political decisions, religious leaders have had to take positions on interstellar matters about which they have little interest.

Shiloh has been conquered twice: once by the Lyran Commonwealth in 2838, and once by the Free Worlds League, who took it back in 2910. The devastation on this world convinced the Blessed Leader to join the Silver Hawks, a mutual defense pact with several of Shiloh's neighbors, in 2966.

A bitter foe of the Marik, the current Blessed Leader of the Exituri blames the Houses of the Inner Sphere not only for the suffering of her people during the Succession Wars, but for all the tragedies of the human race.

Although the surface of Shiloh is arid, requiring the Exituri to import most of their water, this is not the main reason why crops are difficult to grow. The fierce winds increase the difficulty of farming enormously, as does the Exituri's disdain for technological labor-saving devices. Their farmers live by the horse and plow, and they are proud to say that the chores that they assign their children will either toughen them up or kill them. Most of the Exituri's food is imported, though there are few other offworld items that they require. They export traditional crafts, such as decorative woodcarving and silkscreening, which they themselves regard as foolish vanities, but for which they do not mind charging top dollar.

SIRIAN CONCORDAT

World Name: Procyon
Star Type: F5V
Position in System: 3
Days to Jump Point: 15
Recharging Station: Zenith
Form of Government: Hereditary Oligarchy
Noble Ruler: Emperor Claudius Stewart, Lord of Avalon
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Carter Hall
Population: 5,250,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
30%, Reptile

Colonists from the North American continent of Terra first settled Procyon in 2134. Because of its rugged terrain and proximity to Terra, it quickly became a major stronghold of the Terran Alliance, and remained a major naval base during the years of the Star League. In the early 28th century, Oliver Marik and his supporters resided on Procyon to plan the actions that eventually led to the Marik Civil War. Sixty years later, the planet fell to Free Worlds military forces shortly after the exodus of General Kerensky.

Though Procyon's location, raw manpower, and substantial gemstone and fossil fuel reserves have made it a frequent bone of contention between Marik and Liao forces, most natives of Procyon take a lackadaisical view about the outcome of these struggles. Despite over 200 years of Free Worlds control, the world retains most of the customs of the Terran Hegemony. The most telling image of Procyon's indifference is the sprawling, long-abandoned Brigadier Corporation 'Mech production complex at Cleveburg—a symbol of the planet's glorious past, trapped within a desolate present.



DUCHY OF TAMARIND

World Name: Simpson Desert
Star Type: G9V
Position in System: 4
Days to Jump Point: 6
Recharging Station: None
Form of Government: Feudal Autocracy
Noble Ruler: Count Jan Erickson
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Philipe Ortez
Population: 619,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
20%, Mammal

There are two popular explanations of how the pleasant, temperate planet of Simpson Desert got its name, neither of which is correct. The planet was first explored by Professor Waldo Wadenius Simpson, a distinguished botanist, whose DropShip landed in a desert area. The story goes that Professor Simpson mistakenly thought it was a desert world, thus the name.

It is also said that Professor Simpson, upon arriving on the planet and finding how fertile it was, decided to use the old Iceland/Greenland Switch, giving the productive world an unattractive name to ward off raiders. This reflects as badly on Professor Simpson's honesty as the other story reflects on his intelligence.

The truth of the matter is that the name resulted from a typo. In the desert, Simpson discovered a new spice, Simpson's Delight (Waldonia Simpsonis), which is now in demand throughout the Inner Sphere. Justly famous as a flavoring agent, the bittersweet leaves of this plant were first used in a delicacy called Simpson Dessert, from which the planet got its name. Somehow, during the registration process with the bureaucracy of the Terran Hegemony, one "s" was dropped from the name, and Simpson Desert became Simpson Desert.

World Name: Tamarind
Star Type: K2IV
Position in System: 4
Days to Jump Point: 5
Recharging Station: Nadir
Form of Government: Participatory Democracy
Political Leader: Otho Kortiuk
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Katherine Kajidama
Population: 3,562,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
15%, Reptile

Otho Kortiuk (Otho the Cold) is single handedly responsible for reviving the lost art of falconry, which the people of Tamarind bitterly resent. They can forgive the eccentricities of rulership, but not when the Tamarind economy lies in a shambles because of the war. When confronted with this by emissaries from Atreus, Otho replied imperiously that falconry signifies a majesty of the spirit and is an excellent way to relax, and that the people of Tamarind would not be going hungry if they paid more attention to their own business and less to his. This attitude has made Otho the most unpopular leader in the Free Worlds. He stands little chance of reelection as prime minister and may even provoke armed insurrection before the next election.

Tamarind's artists and craftsmen are legendary. Although conventional industries, such as textiles, machinery manufacture, and food exportation, have been torn apart by the war, talented artists are capable of commanding high prices from more prosperous worlds in the Duchy. This has contributed to an ever-increasing gulf between the haves and have-nots on Tamarind, where many artists stay only for the extra money they can charge by being Tamarind artists. It galls the natives to be unable to afford the beautiful works of their native artists, especially when the artist is someone from the old neighborhood.

The planet Tamarind is a scarred, desolate place that once was beautiful. Too many BattleMech engagements have killed off much of the local fauna, repeated bombings have left trenches where once were fields and farms, and the forests have been burned down to prevent the enemy from using them for cover.

UNAFFILIATED WORLDS

World Name: Camlann
Star Type: M0III
Position in System: 1
Days to Jump Point: 3
Recharging Station: Nadir
Form of Government: Oligarchy
Noble Ruler: Duke Valentino Korcinski
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Nging Sho Tang
Population: 3,428,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Reptile

Located just coreward of the Regular Free States, Camlann was the center of the most monumental court decision in the Free Worlds' history. In 2683, the planetary council brought suit against the Free Worlds League itself, stating that it had outgrown its status as a mere colony of Regulus and that it could be self-sufficient. In his landmark majority opinion, Justice Nkwameh Mbili stated "it is in the best interest of all members of the body politic for each organ of that body to be healthy. For one world to feel itself oppressed by the exploitation of another is counterproductive to the economies of each. Therefore, the world of Camlann, having demonstrated its planetary adulthood, must be allowed the freedom to pursue its own goals, as much for the sake of the Principality of Regulus as for itself."

Since that auspicious start, however, Camlann has done little to stand out. Its healthy economy is in large part due to its central location, which has prevented invasions. Aside from such standard industries as farming, manufacturing, and food processing, the principle export is high-tech communication devices, including some so sophisticated that ComStar itself is a primary customer. Other than this, Camlann is a standard, self-sufficient world.

Terraforming this formerly arid world was a monumental task, which was the main reason why Regulus did not want to let it go. Only one continent (in Camlann's western hemisphere) has been left unchanged. It is used as a wildlife preserve, where the local reptiles (some as big as Terran dinosaurs) wander freely in the 18-hour nights.



World Name: Claybrooke
Star Type: F2IV
Position in System: 6
Days to Jump Point: 19
Recharging Station: Nadir
Form of Government: Military Dictatorship
Noble Ruler: Lieutenant Colonel Carla Chestine
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Davis Adderly
Population: 3,592,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 10%, Amphibian

Claybrooke lies on the edge of the Periphery between the Magistracy of Canopus and the Duchy of Andurien. Dame Catherine Humphreys is known to covet Claybrooke for its ranch and dairy products, as well as its natural gas and fossil fuel. She appears to be using the proximity of the Magistracy to put pressure on the leaders of Claybrooke to join the Duchy, offering favorable tariffs and other economic incentives.

The military dictator of Claybrooke, Lieutenant Colonel Carla Chestine, is having none of it, however. She has political problems of her own, including arguments over mineral development of Claybrooke's two moons that have begun to resemble the arguments between the Liberals and Expansionists of old Terra. In fact, Chestine is using the threat of Andurien takeover to hold her dictatorship together, as it is the one issue on which everyone on Claybrooke agrees.

World Name: Dalton
Star Type: K1V
Position in System: 5
Days to Jump Point: 5
Recharging Station: None
Form of Government: Representative Commonality
Political Leader: First Minister Archibald Carter
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Warren Chu
Population: 2,756,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Mammal

In 2310, the first probe of Dalton found plentiful water, arable land, breathable air, edible lifeforms, and even mammalian lifeforms. It also found a far greater degree of seismic activity than any other planet ever settled. With so many other promising worlds available for colonization, no settlement was established on Dalton. By 2521, when another probe was made, the seismic activity had mysteriously ceased, and so settlers began emigrating there. In the five centuries that humans have lived on Dalton, there has not been a single earthquake.

There has also been little political upheaval. Part of the reason for this is that leaders are careful to reward good work in every field. With no one embittered by the greater success of others, there is little basis for discontent. Unfortunately, this system has also produced almost no native art or literature, as such work cannot be fairly evaluated at the time it is produced. Creative artists tend to emigrate the first chance they get.

There has been a remarkable paucity of celebrities from Dalton, at least among those who choose to remain there. The most famous individual to have come from there was Hilda Lauber, Janos Marik's first wife.

World Name: Eleusis
Star Type: K4II
Position in System: 6
Days to Jump Point: 4.5
Recharging Station: None
Form of Government: Feudal Autocracy
Noble Ruler: Dame Julianna Chu
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Wilhelm Sterck
Population: 2,947,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 10%, Plant

Located at the edge of the Periphery, Eleusis is popular for its lakes. In 2360, the Sultan of Eleusis directed a public works project to lay out a series of small lakes, ponds, and lagoons so that a filigree of water extended for hundreds of miles in all directions. From overhead, the lakes resemble a decoration from the Sultan's favorite copy of the Koran.

Surprisingly, Islam is not the predominant religion of Eleusis. In the last two centuries, there has been a revival both of animism and of worship of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. (Theologians of this religion point out that the people worship the aspect of wisdom and personify that aspect by giving it the name "Athena".) The planet's religious diversity has led to problems, the worst being the age-old debate between Shi'ite and Sunni Moslems as to whether secular or religious authorities should control the government. The fact that Moslems comprise only 35 percent of Eleusis's population renders the question moot.

The atmosphere of Eleusis contains traces of poisonous gases that can be breathed safely only a few hours a day. Consequently, all buildings are air-conditioned, and the inhabitants wear filtration devices when traveling outside.



World Name: Irian
Star Type: G5III
Position in System: 3
Days to Jump Point: 7.5
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Form of Government: Corporate
Political Leader: President Georgio Frapollo
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor William Mullahey
Population: 2,169,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Plant

Located just coreward of the Marik Commonwealth, Irian is best known for its vast BattleMech manufacturing centers. This heavily garrisoned world has been invaded only once, by the Lyran Commonwealth in 2842, and the factories were left undamaged in the subsequent fighting.

A survey taken in 3025 indicates that, of all the worlds in the Free Worlds League, the people of Irian spent more time per capita watching videos than any other. The reason for this is unknown; neither the quality of the technology nor the variety of programming is any better here than elsewhere in the League. Perhaps it has something to do with Irian's seasonal changes, which make people sluggish in the summer and restless in the winter, or perhaps there is something narcotic in the environment.

The Irian landscape offers little of interest to either tourists or developers. Inedible grass covers most of the hilly or mountainous land, and the flatlands consist mostly of deserts with few minerals of any value. The oceans and rivers yield little in the way of seafood. Despite the fact that the people here have to import most of their food (or perhaps because of it) Irian cuisine is notoriously bland.

World Name: Kendall
Star Type: F9V
Position in System: 4
Days to Jump Point: 11
Recharging Station: None
Form of Government: Feudal Autocracy
Noble Ruler: Countess Elizabeth Montcalm
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Ivan Detkov
Population: 2,172,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 15%, Insect

People have fit comfortably into the ecology of this anomalous world, whose lopsidedness and eccentric orbit compensate to create mild seasons. The dominant lifeform is a large, migratory insect that apparently has yet to notice the incursion of humans some seven centuries ago. The creatures generate hive-like homes that, after the creatures move on, are ideal for human habitation. Although it takes decades for the organic dwellings to deteriorate, they begin exuding a smell that is equally unpalatable to humans and insects alike in just a few years. Therefore, they are abandoned regularly, and the areas in which they are constructed remain deserted for a century or more.

The principle industry of this rimward world is agriculture; its native strain of cereal grass is the staple of the diet of nearby worlds such as Lahti, Landfall, and Huntington. The extensive apiary industry uses a native bee-like insect for food and to produce honey. This product is sometimes mixed with the honey of Terran bees, which are also cultivated on Kendall. It is said that this product once deterred a Capellan invasion of the Free Worlds prior to the Second Succession War, as the Chancellor had no wish to cut off the supply to his breakfast table. The expression "smooth as Kendall honey" is common as far away as the Outworlds Alliance.

People on Kendall have always been the best-nourished people in the Free Worlds. Combined with the planet's light gravity, this has caused men to grow to an average height of nearly seven feet, and the women to reach an average height of nearly six and a half feet.

World Name: Oliver
Star Type: M5V
Position in System: 1
Days to Jump Point: 2.5
Recharging Station: Zenith, Nadir
Form of Government: Military Dictatorship
Political Leader: General Rashomon Horowitz
ComStar Facility Class: A
ComStar Representative: Precentor Ho Fong Chi
Population: 2,329,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 5%, Mammal

Long an industrial and military mainstay of both the Terran Alliance and the Terran Hegemony, Oliver fell to the League in 2790. For 30 years during and after the ComStar War, it was occupied by both Kurita and Steiner armies; Robin Halas of Oriente successfully invaded the planet in 2869. Since then, Oliver has been invaded eight times by Steiner or Liao forces and has been the target of raiding parties on a score of additional occasions.

These assaults have taken their toll on the planet's industrial capacity. Nevertheless, the people of Oliver have proven remarkably resilient, rebuilding their industry after each crisis. In the process, they have also managed to keep afloat two important facilities: the Brigadier Corporation 'Mech plant at Gordon and the 'Mech repair facility beneath the bowels of Warez (now a virtual ghost town).

If the cycle of destruction/reconstruction has kept Oliver stagnant economically, the same cannot be said about the planet's political leadership. The world has buttressed its defenses (and its status) by entering into the Ring Coalition (along with Zosma, Devil's Rock, Graham IV, and Silver Hawk Callison). Oliver has taken a stronger role in the alliance over the past decade under the guidance of the McKenzie brothers, the first siblings to ever represent Oliver simultaneously in Parliament.



World Name: Tellman's Mistake
Star Type: F6VI
Position in System: 2
Days to Jump Point: 14
Recharging Station: None
Form of Government: Feudal Autocracy
Noble Ruler: Count Jido Takashuma
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Valron O'Dell
Population: 3,027,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life: 20%, Mammal

Close to the Periphery not far from the Rim Commonality, Tellman's Mistake is a strictly agricultural world that imports all its meat. It is named after Zacharias Tellman, who established the first colony there in 2460. Tellman was convinced that this world, with good soil, temperate weather, and no large predators, would be an ideal place for a colony of farmers.

When the colonists arrived, they found the world infested with small, batlike, vampiric creatures whose bite—though only momentarily painful—injected saliva containing a natural anesthesia that deadened the victim's nerves. Almost from the first day, the colonists began coming down with a mild fever that steadily worsened. Tellman frantically collected specimens of the animal and sent blood and tissue samples to the nearest clinic on far-off Regulus. As they waited for the results, most of the colonists recovered from the fever, but a few died, sparking heated debate as to whether they should stay.

Within days, the colonists who recovered found themselves feeling stronger and more energetic than they ever had before, and after the first week, no one else died from the bites. Tellman insisted that this indicated that the deaths were probably due to some form of allergic reaction, and that the colony would be safe for those who had survived. The lab reports from Regulus indicated that, except for people with a certain rare blood type, an enzyme in the animals' saliva stimulated the victim's immune system and increased the efficiency of his digestive system. Nearly six centuries later, the colonists' descendants still cultivate the animals for their medicinal properties, although they, like all the fauna of the planet, are inedible by humans.

Tellman's faith in the colony had been vindicated. A year after the colony had been established, the first colonial legislature officially—and affectionately—christened the world "Tellman's Mistake."

World Name: Trellisane
Star Type: G7III
Position in System: 3
Days to Jump Point: 6.5
Recharging Station: None
Form of Government: Participatory Democracy
Political Leader: President Andreas Alvarez
ComStar Facility Class: B
ComStar Representative: Precentor Ocho Rahn
Population: 3,313,000,000
Percentage and Level of Native Life:
15%, Mammal



The people of Trellisane have devised a unique political structure. Settled early in the Exodus by disaffected political expatriates seeking a new democracy, Trellisane had a fiercely public-spirited populace for two generations. The descendants of the original settlers, however, soon became as complacent about their democratic rights and privileges as their Terran ancestors had long before. Particularly galling to the world's leaders was the fact that both voting and voter registration had steadily declined over the years, as more people figured that their vote would make no difference. When voting dropped below 50 percent of those eligible, the leaders declared a crisis and introduced a surprising solution.

Because the number of voters had become so unwieldy but because voting was the cornerstone of participatory democracy, the leaders decreed that everyone eligible to vote would be required to do so by law, but that each adult would be eligible to vote only once every three elections. Thus, the electorate would be smaller, and everyone would have their chance at voicing their opinion at how the government should be run. Knowing that the next election in which they could vote would be six years away, rather than two, a far higher percentage of people actively campaigned and debated issues. The next plebiscite had the highest voter turnout ever in the history of Trellisane.

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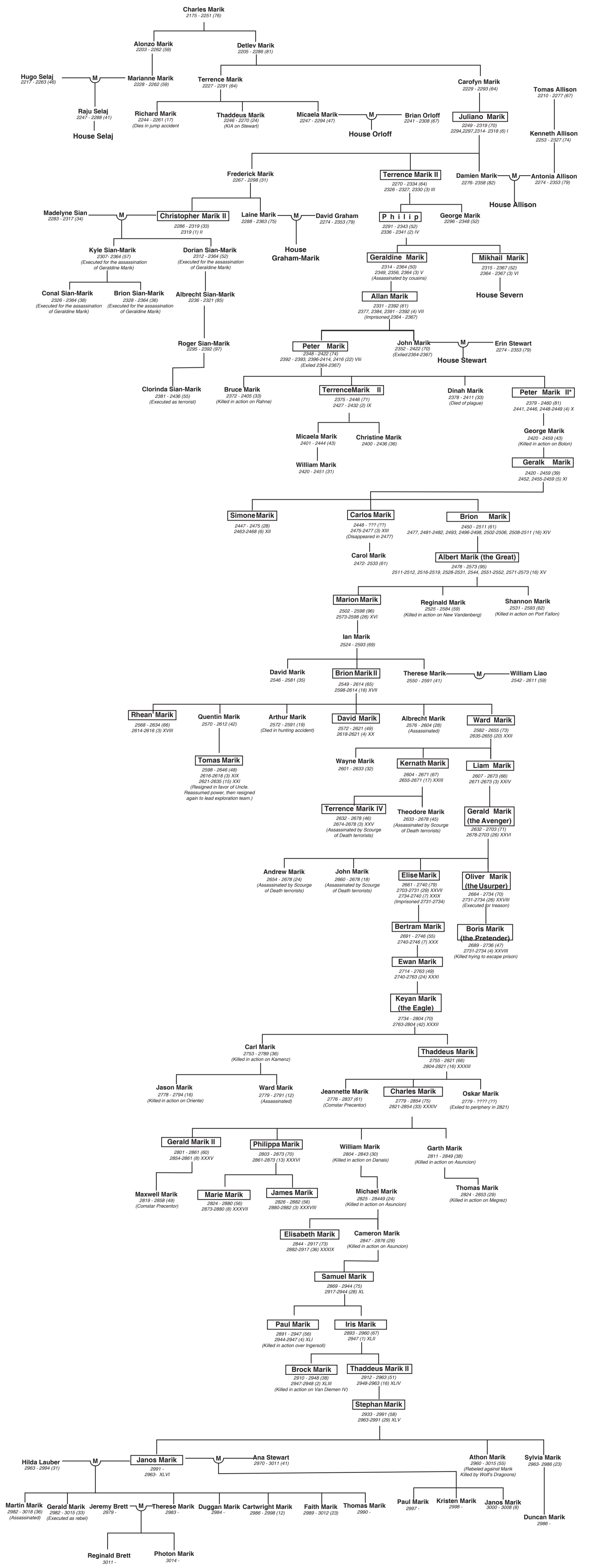
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THE FREE WORLDS LEAGUE

The Captains-General Line of Succession and Partial Marik Family Tree

Dates and years in italics indicate time spent in power as Captain-General



When the Civil War of 3014 was over, Captain-General Janos Marik emerged triumphant.

But at what a cost...

Marik has lost his brother, his wife, and his confidence. The realm he rules, the Free Worlds League, weakened by over two centuries of warfare with the Lyran Commonwealth and the Capellan Confederation, is being torn apart by the diversity that was once its greatest strengt.

Yet the winds of change blow throughout the Inner Sphere Marik has entered into an alliance with the Draconis Combine and his former enemies the Capellans, an alliance that may tip the balance of power for centuries to come.

This ComStar report on House Marik and the Free Worlds League includes dozens of full-color illustrations depicting League personalities, daily life, and military regalia. Classified documents on League and various League factions armed forces, military structure, and political intrigues are also provided. In addition, the large history chapter stretches from the initial unification of the Marik Commonwealth, the Principality of Regulus, and the Duchy of Oriente to form the League through House Marik's consolidation of power and its position today as leader of the now divided Free Worlds Leagues.

