

ESCAPE VELOCITY

NOVA

Preambles: the history behind the legend

Part I: Nova History

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-1800 NC - A group of humans with great telepathic powers, led by the former Indian prince Vell-os, leave Earth using their Psi abilities.

0 NC - Approximately 2780AD. The death of Omata Kane who developed the hyperspace jump formula and gates. Her gates enabled construction of the galactic grid; a system of relay points and jump gates that made hyperspace travel possible. At about this time a great expansion occurred

57 NC - The newly formed independent colonies each selected a representative and the Colonial Council was formed.

118 NC - The first confirmed sighting of the Hyperiods.

230 NC - The 'first' contact with the Vell-os. Over the past 2000 years they had developed certain technologies far beyond Earth's, and their telepathic abilities covered everything else. Their nano-technology was very advanced; they had almost forgotten that it was anything but an extension of their powers. This nano-technology was also the main reason behind the small physical differences between them and the rest of humanity.

242 NC - The Vell-os join the Colonial Council. With their wisdom and psi powers they quickly become influential members.

380 NC - Kerell Polaris, a member of the Colonial Council, proposes an expedition to explore and colonize a region of space from Earth in the direction of the star Polaris.

382 NC - The Colonial Council, despite Vell-os support, rejects the proposed Polaris expedition on the grounds of expense.

397 NC - Kerell Polaris resigns from the Colonial Council to attempt to organize his expedition using his own funds.

420 NC - Vell-os throws its support behind the Polaris expedition boosting the launch timetable by roughly 30 years.

430 NC - 3 days after the death of Kerell Polaris, the expedition leaves Colonial Council space in the direction of Polaris. Over the next 110 years the expedition colonizes around 30 systems and forms its own system of government, and start thinking of themselves as Polarans. It becomes very isolated and makes no contact with the rest of the galaxy.

480 NC - The Polaris make their first contact with another species, the Wraith (as they later become known). It ends in bloodshed, and further enforces Polaris isolationism.

540 NC - The first contact between the Colonial Council and the Polaris expedition since it left Colonial Council space. The Polaris make it clear that any interference in their affairs by the Council will not be tolerated.

552 NC - The Colonial Council sends a diplomatic mission to the Polaris government. Due to the slightly hostile nature of the Polaris toward the Council, they send along a military escort for protection. The Polaris refuse the diplomatic mission entry into Polaris space,

but the leader of the delegation decides to continue on instead. The Polaris view this as a precursor to invasion, and fire on the delegation, destroying it utterly.

The Colonial Council is enraged and calls for a military expedition into Polaran space. The Vell-os object to the action saying that the Polaris were well within their rights to refuse the delegation entry and that therefore the delegate had in fact committed an act of invasion. However, they are shouted down and outvoted. The Vell-os withdraw from the council in protest.

553 NC - The Colonial Council sends in a large fleet of vessels, allegedly to bring the Polaris to justice. However the Vell-os intervene on the behalf of the Polaris, stopping the Council's fleet before they do any real damage.

555 NC - The Colonial Council launches a full-scale invasion of Vell-os in an attempt to force them back into the Council. However, the Vell-os, despite being relatively weak in numbers, prove to be very skilled in the ways of war, and their telepathic abilities prove to be devastating in the field of battle. The battle rages on for approximately 50 years before the leader of the Vell-os decides to surrender in the hope of ending the destruction. The Colonial Council immediately enslaves the entire Vell-osian race using the many anti-telepathic devices that have proliferated during the war. In order to retain something of their former lives, six of the most powerful Vell-osians, members of the Vell-os ruling council known as the Krypt-tokh, imbue their minds into their nanites before they are captured.

610 NC - Due to the enormous economic and social strains placed on the Colonial Council during Vell-os war, many outlying parts of Council space had become largely forgotten by the council. In this year the first of these areas, led by a man called Vanadian Aurora, declares its independence.

647 NC - The Colonial Council goes to war against the Aurorans (as they had become known), and the other five outer territories (Moash, Vella, Tekel, Dani and Heraan) that had declared their independence. Naturally they fought back. One group that was defeated by the council were known as the Armetis, and they quickly became very adept at terrorism. The war continued on and off for the next 23 years.

670 NC - The Colonial Council, in a very tight vote decides to escalate the war against the outer territories. The councilors from the worlds against the proposal storm out and withdraw their support from the Colonial Council's actions. One of the councilors makes contact with the Armetis terrorists, and gives them classified information on where the Colonial Council's hyperspace jump gates are, and details about the security surrounding them. In one swift blow, the Armetis destroy the Colonial Council's ability to use hyperspace. Unfortunately, the action caused a huge energy wave to travel through the jump lanes and destroyed the jump gates for nearly all of human civilization. The only group to survive with a relatively unscathed gate system was the Polarans. The remaining Vell-os were retained as slaves but were scattered throughout what had been the core worlds of the Colonial Council. For the next 200 years, they are the only means of communication between these worlds except light speed messages.

780 NC - The Aurorans regain the knowledge to build hyperspace jump gates. They immediately move to take over the surrounding worlds.

783 NC - The Aurorans were brought to a standstill by the other five former outer territories: Moash, Vella, Tekel, Dani and Heraan. These other five territories do not have hyperspatial capabilities, but they retain a fair amount of their weapons technology. The five territories continue to fight against the Aurorans for the next 130 years. Over that time each territory was conquered, but always rebelling and regaining their independence, and relearning or recapturing some hyperspatial technologies.

876 NC - Earth scientists, reconstructing old designs, build their first hyperspace capable spacecraft in over 200 years. They journey to the nearest system and re-contact their neighbors, the Centaurans. They are given a cautious but friendly welcome. Over the next two decades, Terrans revisit the nearest dozen systems and re-establish physical contact.

881 NC - The Centaurans agree to join with Earth in return for Earth's technology.

905 NC - The Aurorans make contact with two of the outer systems that have been re-contacted by Earth. In typical Auroran fashion they attack and conquer.

906 NC - The other systems that have been re-contacted by Earth beg to join with them in the hope that they can be protected against the Aurorans. Earth agrees, but only if they can use the resources of these systems to build warships.

907 NC - The Aurorans make contact with the Canopus System and are met with Earth based resistance for the first time, and are defeated with the help of the Vell-osian slaves.

908 NC - The Earth based forces strike deep into Auroran territories to attempt to make them leave Earth and its allies alone. In these

raids, the Earth forces inadvertently attack systems owned by the other five territories.

912 NC - The Aurorans ask the leading families from Moash, Vella, Tekel, Dani and Heraan to join with them to destroy the Earth's forces. They agree, and an attack plan is formed, and the forces trained and marshalled.

914 NC - The forces under the command of the Aurorans take the Earth forces by surprise and quickly smash through the Tichel, Gateway and Alphara systems before Earth's forces can react, and stall the Auroran advance.

915 NC - In a conclusive battle in the Vega system, the Earth forces, despite being outnumbered, with their technological advantage and the aid of enslaved Vell-os telepathic powers, destroyed the Auroran forces, with great cost to themselves. The remaining Auroran forces limp back to Auroran space while Earth forces remain behind, incapable of pursuing.

916 NC - On return to Auroran space the leading families from the Moash, Vella, Tekel, Dani and Heraan territories assassinate the Auroran leaders and take over themselves, vowing to rebuild the military so as never to be embarrassed in battle again.

920 NC - Many of the core systems surrounding Earth start rebelling against Earth rule, and many succeed due to the reduced capabilities of the Terran navy, and the uncooperative attitude of many of the Vell-os slaves.

935 NC - The Earth government after losing over half their systems decides that it cannot afford to offend too many of its nearest neighbors. The decision is made to allow those systems still controlled by it a hand in their governance, and so the Federation is born.

962 NC - The first pirate uprising occurs when the only surviving member of the Auroran ruling family unites the pirates and attacks ships primarily in Auroran space, but also in Federation areas. After 7 years of notoriety, he is killed when he finally is caught in a pitched battle with a Moash family task force.

980 NC - The Federation's sphere of influence matches that of the old Earth Empire's, at its height more than 100 years before.

989 NC - The First Auroran Civil War begins when the Moash, Vella and Tekel families band together to wipe out the Dani and Heraan families. However before this can occur an alliance is made between the Dani and Vella families, and soon all the families are fighting each other. The war ends after 12 years of bloodshed.

1024 NC - The second Auroran war begins as the five leading families of the Auroran Empire join together long enough for them to challenge the Federation. They consistently defeat the Federation military by sheer weight of numbers over the next 4 years. In a cunning move, the Federation only attacks ships belonging to the Moash, Tekel and Dani families. These families become suspicious of the Vella and Heraan families, and they start bickering and, after careful use of the Vell-os slaves' mental abilities to warp perception, they begin to fight amongst themselves. This allows the Federation to drive them from their space. The Federation then begins to build its military might so as not to be as vulnerable to attack again.

1047 NC - The Federation attempts to move into Auroran space after 12 years of anti-Auroran propaganda. The Federation is met with fierce resistance, and is continually beaten back with little change in the borders between the two governments.

1050 NC - The general populace of the Federation is told that the reason the Aurorans hold their own is because of an incredible spy network throughout the Federation. To combat this, the Federation creates the Bureau for Internal Investigation ('the Bureau' for short), they quickly become all-pervasive, and trials of supposed spies and traitors become more frequent. They also use supposed 'Vell-osians' for telepathic 'truth-telling' to reveal the lies of various traitors.

1061 NC - The discovery of TCTLIDS in deep space. Scientists, in attempting to see if using the TCTLIDS induction pores could be used to create new medicines and create FATE; a highly addictive narcotic.

1078 NC - The second pirate uprising occurs when the Federation secretly funds the pirates in an attempt to weaken the Aurorans to the point where the Federation might be able to launch a decisive offensive against them. When the Bureau learns that this information is becoming common knowledge the Federation locates the 'leader' of the pirates and executes him.

1103 NC - Because the Aurorans stopped them from advancing into their space, the Federation starts to push outward elsewhere and re-contacts the Polaris for the first time in 550 years. The Polaris have advanced greatly technologically, still value their solitude, and bluntly tell the Federation to stay away from their space. While they have kept to themselves, they have been able to keep track of galactic affairs and they send a message to the Federation stating that they will not tolerate being treated in the same manner that the Federation has been treating the Aurorans.

1121 NC - The Federation send a military task force into Polaris space, but they never hear from it again. The Polaris defeated them so quickly that they never had a chance to send a message back to their superiors.

1137 NC - The Aurorans suffer their second civil war, with all five houses fighting against each other for 3 years. The war only ends when the Federation tries to take advantage of the confusion by invading. The five families ally together long enough to fight off the Federation.

1154 NC - The Aurorans launch a full-scale attack on Polaris, only to be quickly beaten back by combination of superior technology and quick and devastating strikes to the five leading family's homeworlds.

1156 NC - In anger at the ease of their defeat, the Aurorans launch another massive attack on the Federation. The Federation tries similar tactics as employed by the Polarans and strike behind Auroran lines, but the Aurorans merely retaliate by striking behind Federation lines. Slowly the war becomes more stable as both the Aurorans and the Federation are forced to employ more and more of their forces guarding the worlds they already hold. After 17 years, the war peters out into occasional border conflicts. The Aurorans, after capturing several Federation ships try to gain the services of several Vell-os slaves, but fail.

1167 NC - The third pirate uprising occurs as the pirates once more band together under one leader, and harass the Federation, Auroran and, to a lesser extent, Polaran space. The pirates withdraw after 6 years only after a Vell-os slave using her psi powers locates the pirate leader who is then assassinated by a Federation agent.

1177 NC - The present day.

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Part II: The Aurorans

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Section Alpha

THE UNWRITTEN LAW OF AURORAN WARRIORS

Some notes on the most prevalent warrior ethos in known space.

From the diary of Eamon "Archindar" Flannigan, Commander of the Wild Geese (see appendix II).

The Auroran Warrior has been largely misrepresented by mainstream Federation media. Typically portrayed as a group of mindless savages whose lust for blood clouds their questionable reason, the Auroran Warrior is usually perceived by Federation personnel as a threat that will easily be overcome through superior skill and tactics. Occasionally, older veterans will refer to the "Wily" Auroran that took their arm/leg through base cunning alone.

What is so often overlooked by these people is the extraordinary lengths a man must go to in order to become a Warrior within Auroran Society. The years of physical, mental and spiritual training that go into the internal make-up of the Warrior's Life.

To the Auroran, becoming a Warrior is to aspire to the greatest height of existence. In the Cultural hierarchy, it is the Warrior who achieves the greatest prestige, and who has the most likelihood of fame and fortune.

During my many years of soldiering in the Heraan House, I earned the title of Warrior. Rather than a person who carries arms in the name of their house, their lifestyle and mental outlook is much more similar to that of one of our Wild Geese.

Make no mistake; the Auroran Warrior is a powerful foe, capable of unbelievable feats, not only through his training, but also through the strength of his code.

Bound by his Honor and by his Duty to his House, a Warrior will perform feats of incredible bravery. This is not through the Lust for Blood, or power, or spoils of war (as our Federation neighbors would have us believe) but through an almost poetic fear of failing himself and his house.

This fear is not because of punishment by the house elders, (although Auroran punishments are usually harsh) but through a fear that the house will be dishonored if a Warrior does not perform his duty with dedication.

The House is the most important bond in a Warrior's life. To serve the house is to preserve the very thing that allows the Auroran to be an individual. However, this bond does not lead to mindless obedience, but a strong sense of purpose.

Before I give you an example, I should explain a few things about the Auroran House Structure. The House is organized as a loose extended Family. The Elders sit at the top of the pyramid, and their control is usually hereditary. Next come the advisors, who are most often veteran Warriors who are now unfit for active duty. Following this are the two most prestigious positions to which the average Auroran Warrior can aspire, the Thurokiir and the Mundokiir.

The Mundokiir is an Auroran term meaning, "heart of crushed Garnet, the eye of Fury". It refers to the general of all the House forces. The title is somewhat metaphoric, for it is the Mundokiir who must lead the House in all major battles. Thus, he is truly the Eye of Fury, standing in the eye of the storm, calm amongst the fighting, perceiving all that occurs around him. If any military action is taken by his House, the Mundokiir has final approval and responsibility over it. It is by his judgement that the House succeeds or fails militarily, and no Warrior gains this title without proving himself so often that many of his great deeds have been long forgotten. His heart is of garnet; red to show the blood that surrounds him at all times.

The Thurokiir is another Auroran term meaning "Obsidian Heart, Arbiter of Reckoning". He is perhaps the most fearsome of the Warriors in a House, as it is his role to act as the Houses' means of upholding its honor. He is the black hearted winner of rough justice, the darker side of simple morality, for as any student of life must know, it is violence that is the leveler; be it physical violence, political force, or the force of justice. The Obsidian Heart falls somewhere outside the regular structure of the House. He has the ear of everyone, and the implacable will and authority to back his judgements. He is the Balance Keeper, the black soul who will stop at nothing to ensure that the will of the House is served.

To give you some idea of a Thurokiir's role I give you the example of the time, during my 'apprenticeship' with the Heraan House, I was stationed with some young Warriors on a small Heraan listening post. They attacked an unarmed supply convoy of a rival house, destroying it utterly. No one can dispute that they were denying their enemy by disrupting his line of supply, but they were not given a heroes welcome. Upon landing, they were met by the Thurokiir, the Obsidian Heart of the House, who was passing through on a mission. He had seen the attack, and commented on their lack of skill, claiming their shots were wild and erratic. At this implied insult, the Warriors began to strike fighting poses, despite the fact that they were outmatched by the man. He stood passively, waited for them to attack, and knocked them all unconscious easily.

When they had all recovered, he stood before them and said one sentence.

"Where is the Honor in attacking those who cannot defend themselves?"

The young men bowed their heads in shame, realizing their mistake.

Following the Thurokiir's gesture, they stripped to the waist, as did their judge. He spoke, "For bringing disgrace to the House you will all wear a black mark upon your arm, a constant reminder of your folly, and the black mark that exists on your honor."

With that he removed a portable tattoo laser (see appendix I) from his belt and branded each man accordingly. One of them remarked that the Thurokiir was not fit to pass judgement, as he too wore a black mark on his arm. The Obsidian Heart looked very old for a moment, as he regarded the man before him; perhaps he was reliving a similar moment in his life. "Young Lion," He said, "I too was once as young as you are now, and I too made foolish mistakes. To this day, I have not recovered the honor that I lost when I earned this mark. I carry it always as a reminder that perfection is what we seek and so often fail to achieve." He turned and left.

For the Obsidian Heart, despite all his triumphs and although he had served his House with considerable distinction, without which he would not have earned his title, could never remove the mark on his honor. It was as impossible to remove as the tattoo on his arm. So throughout his life he had fought, against his many enemies, but mostly against his disgrace, in order to prove himself worthy of the title 'Warrior'. It was not in the eyes of his colleagues that he sought redemption, but in his own, and in the eyes of the now long deceased former Thurokiir who bestowed this mark upon him, despite wearing one himself. His judgement was as final as death, and just as inevitable. For, like the rest of humanity before him, he was destined to fall short of his goal of perfection. He had lost his impeccability, and once lost, it can never be regained. Despite this, it may be argued that in his striving he had become impeccable once more, but never in his own eyes. Always he would bear his shame, for even if he had only failed once, he had nonetheless failed.

Understandably, it is only in later years that the young lions will understand the most important lesson, and inalienable truth, that was taught to them that day. Most of them would be lucky to survive long enough to realize it, and it is this fact that makes the Thurokiir so formidable. His moral code is tempered by many years of battle and it is known that the title is taken with some reluctance. For no sane man should be willing to stand as an impartial judge over his friends and fellow Warriors when he has already shown himself to be incapable of being a true Warrior. It is this striving that gives the Thurokiir the moral authority on which to base his oft-times harsh seeming judgements. His heart is as black as obsidian for he lives with the knowledge that not only has he failed, but he will be the man to judge the failures of others.

One may ask why a sane individual would endure such hardship. Simply, his House requires it of him, and no other calling is as important. It carries a crushing weight of duty with it, and only by being the provider of an impeccable moral code can that weight become bearable.

As can be seen, everything done by the Mundokiir and Thurokiir greatly influences the standing of their House, and it is upon the actions of these two Warriors that the ideals to which all young Warriors aspire will be created. They are the living embodiment of their Houses honor and spirit.

And so the unwritten code of Auroran Warriors is based on what is best for their house, and has little to do with personal glory. It is as binding as steel, and is the hard-tempered core of the Auroran fighting spirit. We must realize that the Aurorans fight with not only skill and honor, but also that they fight for something that they believe to be larger than themselves. They place the honor of their House far above their own personal survival, and this is why, despite their relatively low technology and their bloody inter-house rivalries, they have been able to hold the Federation at bay.

Appendix I

Ritual Tattoos

In the Auroran culture Warriors show their prowess, their fears, their failings, their triumphs and their standing through the use of tattoos. Every ceremonial event has the Warrior bare-chested and it is possible to 'read' of his career by observing his tattoos. For example, for every battle a Warrior survives honorably, he marks a small circle on his body. The color of the circle depends on whom the battle was fought with, and by what means, e.g. a space combat with the Federation is indicated by a Blue circle with a black interior, while an unarmed duel with a fellow Auroran is a Red circle with a white interior. These circles are very small. Occasionally, if a major battle is fought or if an individual Warrior performed a great deed, a special mark is given (the mark for surviving the only battle with the Wild Geese in Auroran history is a small green goose in flight, worn by only twelve Warriors).

Death tattoos are revealed to Warriors by 'war-gods' during long periods of meditation and fasting, which form a large part of a Warrior's life. These tattoos take the form of animals or extremely powerful symbols, and these are worn on the Warriors' chest. For example, if an Auroran perceives death as blackness, he will tattoo large portions of his chest black. If he perceives death as perishing in eternal flames, he will adorn himself with tattooed flames. This practice comes from a belief that if you are prepared to wear your death openly, it has no power over you. This type of tattoo is the first to be given and is received on being fully accepted as a Warrior.

Scars too are usually highlighted with color to show that a Warrior has been wounded but was too strong to die.

On first sight, many Auroran Warriors appear as forbiddingly painted wild savages, but it was I who was embarrassed to reveal my unmarked chest at my first ceremonial gathering. As far as my brother Warriors knew, I was without victory or standing.

Appendix II

Names of Honor

Auroran Warriors give each other names that only their brother Warriors will know them by. These names are earned in battle and for an honorable (or dishonorable) deed, and are not given freely. I was given the name 'Archindar' during my 'apprenticeship', which translates as 'he who refuses to die', after a battle with a rival house in which I covered the withdrawal of the Heraan House by dropping back again and again to destroy the forward scouting elements of the Moash invading fleet. This name has a special distinction as it was given to me by the Mundokiir of the Moash House after the battle. He was forced to abandon his campaign because it became bogged down because of lack of information brought back by his recon units. It was immediately adopted by my blood brothers, and a tattoo made, for there can be no more honorable a name, than one given by an enemy to a valorous opponent.

However, I also earned a 'blood enemy' that day, which is not as bad as it seems. In Auroran culture a 'blood enemy' will seek to ensure your survival until he can face you in a death duel in fair, open combat. To this day, I have been saved by Nyiaarh, which means 'the wily maker of widows', many times, as he wishes to face me in a death duel on his home planet in front of the elders of his House to honor my deeds. With luck, we will both become old and infirm before this can happen as we share a closeness that only valorous opponents can know. In short, I cannot imagine my life without him.

Units too can be given names of honor. I was lucky enough to serve with such a unit, which held the name 'Vygrian', whose name means 'they who hold in the face of death'. The Wild Geese, despite being employed by the Federation to defend their borders, have been given a name of honor by the Aurorans also. After the battle in which the Wild Geese saved the Federation by aiding Commander Raczak in holding off the Aurorans as they advanced on Sol we were given the name 'Archekro', meaning 'they who dance with blood and war', and again, it should be highlighted that this name was given to us by our enemy that day. Obviously they thought us worthy foes.

We should be proud of this name and the tradition it represents.

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Section Beta

Turo'mar walked briskly through the gathering darkness. The chill of the moon he was on meant it was rarely inhabited by any but the hardest (or most desperate) of people. It was one of the latter that he had come to claim. While he was not an overly big man, the casual grace with which he moved spoke volumes. If the observer was a dancer or a warrior, they would have immediately been able to classify it as a deep knowledge of his bodies movements. To one it would mean the ability to move his body with the utmost control, while to the other it would mean the same thing, only with far reaching implications.

Turo'mar silently wondered what the poor wretch he was to eliminate had done to deserve such a fate. Surely living in this frozen hell was enough punishment for any man, but it was not for him to ponder the decision of the House. His only concern was to complete his mission with the required brutality. He again thanked his lucky stars and death for making him the force of destruction that he was. He thought back to the time that his skill for destruction had come to the attention of the House...

It had been during a mercy run when he was an aspiring warrior. The convoy were transporting refugees from a heavily battered sector of the Auroran / Federation border. The mission was deemed to be "safe" by the House Elders, which meant that it only needed young men who were not yet warriors to keep things in order. That is until the Moash sent out a Wolverine to test the mettle of their young men. As the convoy had no military worth, and was without escort, the refugees (who were mostly old women and young children being moved out of the combat zone) and their would be protectors thought little of the Moash ship, until it was too late. To their horror, the Moash quickly disabled the lead ship, and systematically blasted the remainder of the convoy, before boarding the ship. Trying to protect the women and children, Turo'mar was knocked unconscious. It was by not killing him that the Moash made their first mistake.

By the time he regained consciousness Turo'mar knew that the refugees were dead. The warrior in front of him had been in much of the close killing and was covered in blood. He was roughly pulling Turo'mar down a corridor, presumably thinking he was dead and to dispose of him. His eyes widened in surprise as Turo'mar opened his eyes, but he was not quick enough to call out a warning, or to avoid Turo'mar plucking out his larynx. The strike was delivered with such lethal assurance that Turo'mar might as well have been plucking an apple from an overladen bough. The dying man's blood pumped over Turo'mar as he rolled to the side, allowing the man to fall heavily to the floor.

Quickly, Turo'mar had stripped the dead man of his weapons, and begun to stalk down the corridor. He knew that he was facing odds of at least 20 to 1, but this gave him scant cause for concern, for he cared little if he lived or died. An ice-cold rage had settled over his heart, and the only thought that worried him as that some of the Moash might escape, and thus avoid the vengeance they so richly deserved. He intended to allow them to reap the harvest that their actions had sown - the fury of his revenge.

The first group of Moash Warriors Turo'mar found numbered six. They met at the junction of two corridors. The Warrior leading them died before he even had time to register what he was seeing - as Turo'mar hacked his head from his shoulders in a savage slash that ended in the chest of the following man. Blood spurted from the swaying torso, painting the walls in crimson. The Warrior behind the falling corpse tried to pull his blaster, but the thought stopped as his brains splattered across his companions as Turo'mar pulled the trigger of his own blaster, which he had pressed to his enemies forehead. The remaining four attempted to blast Turo'mar into the next world, but were hampered in their efforts as Turo'mar used the brainless body of his victim as a shield, his sword jutting from its chest like a bizarre joystick. With an adroit flick of his wrist, Turo'mar pulled the weapon clear and shoulder barged past the body, his blade already in motion. The next to fall was a woman who tried to rush Turo'mar, which would have worked had he not already been in motion.

The stride placed her right at the point of Turo'mars attack, and led to her leg being sliced cleanly off. The bloody nub of her thigh jetted gore in a gush at the floor, and her scream of pain echoed loudly in the enclosed spaces of the corridor slaughterhouse. Her companions stopped for a moment in shock, which was all the time Turo'mar needed to batter one of them aside with his shoulder, knocking him backwards with his momentum, before calmly placing a laser blast through the chest of one opponent, and between the eyes of the other. Pirouetting, Turo'mar allowed his momentum to carry him around, his sword slicing through the air with the power of a helicopter blade, and plunging into the head of his final opponent, cleaving through his upper ear, skull, and lodging somewhere in the brain base behind both. Turo'mar calmly turned and began to ask the wounded woman questions. The woman was stubborn, but Turo'mar quickly extracted the information he required before ending her life.

The remainder of the engagement followed a similar pattern, until Turo'mar finally allowed himself to stop. The bridge of the Moash Wolverine was his tribute to Death, as he had dragged every one of their corpses there and smeared their blood across every surface. The captain who had led the cowardly attack was propped in the captains chair, his scrotum placed on the display board before him, alongside his tongue and heart. Turo'mar had programmed a course into the navicomputer for Moash space, and recorded the internal camera views of his deeds into the captains log underneath the entry. . .

Thus die those who attack the innocent. Death's harvest is rich with the blood of cowards, and the virtuous have the strength to reap it. The claimer is here. Take heed . . .

. . . and sent the ship on her way. Thus the legend of "The Claimer" was born.

That had been over 15 years ago. The fall out from such an act of brutality was far reaching. It was not that Turo'mar had carried out an act of revenge. It was just that the mutilation of the dead was even shocking for the Auroran. It was necessary for Turo'mar to disappear, as the Auroran council had decreed that he must die. So it was easier for the man that Turo'mar was to die. His ship was blasted apart in a failed "escape attempt". Of course there was no one at the helm, and Turo'mar had by that stage become the secret weapon of the Heraan House. He was now the Claimer, the Tharakoodesh, the most dreaded and feared of all punishments. People whispered of him in dark corners, and the legend grew. The original 20 men that had died on that fateful day grew to 50, 100. The House Elders didn't mind. They had recognized the place for honest brutality, so long as it was focussed and controlled. And so when criminals ran from their heinous crimes, the claimer was sent to return with their heads. The only way people knew that he had been there was the message he habitually left...

Thus die those who attack the innocent. Death's harvest is rich with the blood of cowards, and the virtuous have the strength to reap it. The claimer is here. Take heed . . .

The sun rose on another bleak day. The hardy and desperate rose to the sight of the headless body of the criminal Varakash, whose crime was the killing of Dani aid workers en route to a planet overcome with disease. The Claimer had struck before the act could be called to account by the Dani Warriors, and so the balance was restored. Of the head there was no sign, but all knew it had been claimed, just like the disgraced warriors soul. Claimed by the agent of Death. All who saw the body and read the message and took heed. The Claimer was the voice of retribution, and all who heard it perished.

Turo'mar had long lost count of the men he had killed. It numbered in the scores. Each one was part of his continuous montage of Death. He knew that his time on this plane would be short in comparison to the stars, but he knew his contribution would count. That Evil would perish as long as he was able to combat it. It had to be done. It was his destiny. The filth would be his harvest, and he would be Death's Scythe.

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Preambles: the history behind the legend

Part III: The Federation

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Section Alpha

THE PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FEDERATION OF UNITED PLANETS

As accepted by the thirty-six delegates to the 'Convention to address the Rights of Government' held on Earth in the year 935 NC.

We, the citizens of the Federation of United Planets, hold that our freedoms and rights have more value than any possible form of wealth.

We hold as sacred the belief that all humanity is created equal and that we are all free to be both proud of our nation and of our heritage. We have the right to realize ourselves as individuals, and are free to act upon any of our hopes and ideals.

Our democratic and representative system of government exists under law to protect our rights and our dignity, which may never be infringed by prejudice nor invoked against any achievement.

We hold that our borders, which we extend to beyond the furthest system of those Planets that have entered our Union, are sovereign and shall be inviolate. We will spare no effort in enforcing our independence from any invading forces and reserve the right to strike against those who would expand into those areas of space that we have claimed as ours.

We are a nation built out of many cultures, and we recognize both their validity and their right to continue, and we greatly welcome the enrichment that they bring. In spite of our varied backgrounds, we have all recognized both our common ancestry and destiny. We believe that the future of humanity lies among the stars, and that we can best achieve that future by embracing the unified vision placed before us.

We, the citizens of the Federation of United Planets, commit ourselves to this our constitution.

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Section Beta

Minutes from the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Bureau of Internal Investigation on 1 January 1177 NC

Meeting brought to order at 1515
All present. No apologies.

Reading of the minutes of the last meeting.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and accepted as being both correct and accurate by unanimous vote.

Business carried forward from last meeting

Military Department Director's report on arrangements of Auroran provocation

(This document is appended to these minutes as Appendix A)

Arrangements for provoking the Auroran forces into a confrontation with the military organization known as 'Raczak's Roughnecks' (thereby allowing a counter invasion into Auroran space) are proceeding apace.

Commerce Department Director's report on support measures for Military Department

(This document is appended to these minutes as Appendix B)

The report stated that the Commerce Department has been identifying and approaching likely free merchants and their organizations regards shipping of military goods. Hopefully these people will continue to be sympathetic to aiding the military in their efforts against the 'increased Auroran harassment' of our border stations. This should confuse any Auroran military intelligence, and should keep their knowledge of our operation to a minimum.

Media Department Director's report containing all likely scenarios for invasion

(This document is appended to these minutes as Appendix C)

Most likely scenarios agreed upon:

'Auroran Savages Go Too Far'

- Initial tabloid-type reports

'Have They Gone Too Far?'

- Intellectual reporting on the actions of Auroran warriors

'Diplomacy Fails, Millions Die'

- Factual reporting of Auroran Invasion

'Aurorans: Are They Too Destructive?'

- Editorial about Auroran warrior class

'Empires: A Throwback?'

Expert debate about the nature of Imperial ambitions

Secretary/Chairwoman's Report

Confirmation of dates for the next meeting

The date of the next meeting is confirmed as 15 January 1177 NC. Attendance is compulsory.

Remarks on the three submitted reports

All three reports show that plans for the upcoming operation are proceeding smoothly, but members are reminded that there is still much to be done and that failure is not an acceptable option. The Chairwoman would like to point out that the completion of the Auroran operation does not equate to a completion of our set goal of unifying all Known Space under the banner of the Federation. Even if the Auroran operation succeeds, there is still the 'Guild of Free Traders' (read: pirates) to our North, the shattered remains of what was Vell-os space to our West and the Polaris to be dealt with. The Chairwoman directs the Military and Commerce Department Heads to report back to the next meeting on the status of the Auroran operation.

Treasurer's Report

(This document is appended to these minutes as Appendix D)

Report on current Finances of the Bureau

The economic slump of last year has been weathered and the treasury of the bureau was 1.2 billion credits

in surplus last quarter, and projections for the next four quarters indicate further growth. These projections include the increased costs of using civilians in addition to our normal supply and logistics costs for the Auroran operation.

Suggestion on possible avenues of further economic expansion

Possible future Income Earners, with their projected value to the Bureau:

- Donations to support the war effort (22 billion)
- 0.5% increase in basic tax to support Federation population expansion (155 billion)
- Interest on Terraforming Costs, paid by settlers (20 billion per world)
- This will also encourage exploration
- Adding Auroran population to our tax base (800 trillion)

New Business

Coordinating timings for the Auroran operation

The timings for the Auroran Operation depend upon the supply state of the military, and the best estimate of when we will be capable of initiating the operation is somewhere in the order of 15 months. The Commerce Department is directed to spare no effort in assisting the military in its buildup of war stocks.

Discussion of possible future allocation of resources gained from Auroran operation

It is generally agreed that all Auroran resources will be allocated according to departments as if they were all Federation in origin, as they will be after the Auroran operation. Any doubtful cases will be brought before the board and decided upon.

Chairwoman's concerns about Polaris intelligence

It has come to the attention of the Chairwoman that one of the Polaris castes is trained to infiltrate other civilizations and act as spies. At least one of these 'Mu'hari' has been detected, but efforts to capture the individual have failed thus far. It is quite likely that there are a great number of these Mu'hari working amongst us, and they may have even infiltrated the Bureau. All department heads, as well as watching those areas that fall under their purview, are directed to keep close tabs on their own personnel and to cooperate without exception with the investigations of the Department of Internal Security. The Director of Internal Security will report back to the next meeting concerning the arrangements of his department concerning the Mu'hari threat.

Chairwoman's concerns on Auroran integration

The Chairwoman is of the opinion that the integration of Auroran society seamlessly into the fabric of the Federation is an impossible dream. However, she does wish that all departments of the bureau influence those it is their duty to watch over by any means necessary to make the transition of Auroran rule as smooth as possible. The sooner we have absolute control of Auroran space, the sooner we can look to any future ventures. All department heads are to submit reports in six months time concerning what arrangements can be made to make the Auroran takeover easier.

Non-Agenda Items

None brought forward

Meeting declared finished at 1645.

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ESCAPE VELOCITY

NOVA

Preambles: the history behind the legend

Part IV: Pirates

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Section Alpha

It was a cold evening in the early twilight. The light from the rising moons filtered sullenly through the soft drizzle that mixed in with the dust of the road, turning it into a wet slurry. Hover vehicles went about their business in a brisk fashion, and no one lingered long out of doors. No one, that is, except for a large man in a long cloak. He moved down an alleyway with surprising speed for a man of his size and his obvious age was betrayed by his flowing locks of grey hair. He had an unusual rolling gait that a seafarer from two thousand years ago would have found strangely familiar. In his arms he carried a bundle of dark cloth.

Here and there he paused briefly to glance over his strong shoulders. Seemingly satisfied, he would continue down the alleys, ducking from overhang to lintel, lintel to walkway, constantly moving to the next piece of cover. All the way along he carefully sheltered his bundle from the falling rain, minding not his own discomfort.

Eventually he reached a steaming grate under an arched bridge. Illuminated by the working half of a bank of streetlights that also lit the lurid graffiti in the archway, the man reached down and, with a grunt, lifted the grating with one powerful arm. He set it down gently, and placed the bundle he was sheltering onto it while he manhandled the sewer's ladder up into position. The bundle showed slightly restless in the wan lighting, moving slightly on the damp metal. The man made a soothing sound, and brushed the covers lightly with his palm. The bundle ceased its wriggling, and went back to sleep. The great grey-shouldered man picked up his burden again and climbed down the manhole, only pausing to drag the grating back into its home above him.

Once again, the alleyway was silent.

--

The small man with the eyepatch bounced the baby on his knee, making silly faces as the wain gurgled and laughed at his antics. His good eye was round and big, and his pockmarked face was making strange goldfish motions, much to the delight of the infant.

"Ha-doop-doop-doop! Whosa baby, den? Whosa baaabyee? Eh, eh?"

Sitting next to him at the table was the grey haired man, toweling off that same grey hair with a black pullover that had seen better days.

"He's the image of his mother, there's truth. But there's something of Morgan about the eyes, look you!" He bent over to tickle some tiny toes, provoking another bout of wriggling.

The man with the patch looked up at his older companion, with a more somber look in his eyes.

"Did you see it happen, Olaf?" he asked.

The grey-hair shook his head.

"Not me, Raif. I was in engineering." His face turned skyward. "I felt the impact, though. Damn near tore the ship in half."

Raif spat.

"Devil take that traitor McGowan. If I should meet up with him..."

The big man stopped him short with a firm hand on his arm.

"Then you'll do your duty by Morgan, and run like the wind. If McGowan or his Federation masters get a'hold of any one of us then the rest are lost. The Bureau's too good at making people talk." He loosed his hold, but kept his friend and shipmate fixed in his gaze.

"You're a good man and strong, Raif Rhysson, but no man can last long against the Bureau's torturers. Not even such a one as yerself," he grinned, tousling the younger man's hair.

Raif had the good grace to look a little sheepish. He looked down at the infant, who was now fast asleep in his arms.

"So you've got to raise this one, eh?" he sighed. "Why the devil Morgan didn't send him and Lella away when he had the chance, I'll never fathom." Olaf glared into space.

"He didn't know he'd been betrayed. None of us did. Not until the Federation ships had us surrounded in all three axes," said Greysoulders, biting off the words as he stared at his feet. After a moment, he straightened a bit, and turned back to his one-eyed shipmate. "Thanks for the shelter, mate, and thanks for the food. Me an' the lad had best be going, or we'll be bringing trouble down around your head. They're still looking for us," he owned.

"You won't stay? A night's rest won't hurt nothing," said Raif, his expression betraying the fears he held for the big man's safety. Olaf Greysoulders shook his head.

"Not tonight, Raif. In a while, maybe... but not tonight. You should get clear, too. They'll have tracked me here, never doubt!" He gathered up his small charge in a large arm, and draped his great-cloak across his shoulders with the free one. "Say a prayer for us, Raif." He paused at the door to the small hideaway, turned his head and said "See you again. Stay well!" With that, he was out the door, and gone into the night.

--

A little later, an actinic glare lit the night as a small, old shuttlecraft clawed painfully up through the sky, and into the starry beyond. Raif lowered the hand he had raised against the glare, and muttered old seafarer's blessings as the tears streamed down his battered face.

"Keep that boy safe, Olaf, and raise him well! There's a reckoning coming, and he'll need to be ready."

A thought struck him then.

"Mind you," he murmured with a slight smile on his face, "if that lad runs true to his blood, it'll be McGowan who'll need to be prepared!"

After casting a last look up at the dwindling glow of the shuttle, Raif Rhysson made his way back down to his hideaway, and started to pack his things.

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Section Beta

This is space. The dark monotony is broken only by the gentle lacework of stars, spilled out like so much fairy dust across the black satin sheet of eternal night. Here and there can be made out the shape of a planet or comet, resplendent in their glory as they bask in the light of their sun.

Not all things here are of natural origins, though. A shadow passes across the starfield, and reveals itself to be an ancient hypergate, still and quiet. There's a stirring of light across the surface of the giant ring, now, that wasn't there a moment ago. It brightens to a horrendous intensity in the centre of the edifice, until it looks like spacetime itself is about to be torn asunder... and then it is. Through the swirling maelstrom a ship is becoming more and more visible, as it comes through the white haze from a great distance. Eventually it solidifies entirely as it exits the maw of the hyperspace shunt, and the hypergate collapses back into its torpor.

It's a handsome ship, this one. A full football field in length, it's sleek, dark and powerful. It's armored hull bristles with weaponry. As the residual glow from the gate dwindles back to nothing, the ship shimmers as if covered in water, and then vanishes from sight.

All is not quiet on board our mysterious spacecraft. On the bridge (which is neat, well lit and spacious), there's the sound of vigorous debate.

"I tell you, this isn't right, Morgan," says the man at the helm. He's a pugnacious little man, with a cast over one eye, and bright red hair.

The tall, handsome man behind him smiles reassuringly.

"It's alright, Hänsen. McGowan will be here on time. He's not been late yet."

This elicits a grunt from the little man.

"As you says. I'm just thinking his escape from that Federation prison was a bit easy. I've been there meself, remember?"

The tall man twitches an eyebrow.

"What is it with you lately, Hänsen? Kevin and you were like this," he crosses his fingers, "until the Feds got him outside Kaarn Prime. He got out, man, they didn't release him. You saw the scars."

"I don't know, Morgan. There's something changed about him. I can feel it."

This causes the tall man to frown, and he leans forward a fraction.

"Relax, Hänsen. Kevin can't be a danger to us anyway; we have picket ships on point at the meeting area, and we're running with the cloaking device."

The short man grunts, and says "That's as maybe, but I still reckon this is dodgy."

He leans down and taps a few controls. "I'm keeping her on silent running until I'm sure."

Morgan leans back into his command chair, and smiles again. "Sounds fine to me. No point in being stupid, is there?"

--

In a very isolated area of space indeed, a small flotilla of hotrodged craft wait patiently for a rendezvous. Ships the size of Cargo Drones buzz around the larger ships that form the bulk of the group. All the ships seem to be armed in some fashion, even the shuttles. There are even some mighty Enterprise class cargo freighters in amongst the rabble.

Then, from out of nowhere, a series of pinpricks that look like new stars appear in the space surrounding the flotilla. The pinpricks rapidly turn into hyperspace exit points, and suddenly the group is surrounded by E-41 Destroyers and Patrol Boats. An enormous E-60 Carrier leads the taskforce of intruders, which begin methodically blowing every ship out of the sky.

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"Morgan!!!" screams Hänsen, "They've got company!" Hänsen pulls back on the yoke, and says "We need to get clear; they knew we

were coming."

"Belay that," barks the tall man. "Bring her about, heading zero four five mark one two eight."

Hänsen swivels to face his captain with a horrified look.

"You're not serious? They outgun us ten to one! We haven't a chance, and you know it."

Morgan smiles grimly, and says "Get all non-essential personnel to the lifeboats. Civilians first. We can't leave the others here, not like this. We owe it to them, futile effort or not."

The pug redhead grunts once more, and sounds the alert ship-wide. "Done. They'll be away in three minutes."

"Then let's get cracking, shall we? Shields up, bring weapons to hot standby and drop the cloak!"

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The flotilla has seen better days. The small armada of Federation ships has torn the convoy to pieces, with only a few brave ships still returning any kind of fire, effective or not.

Some game ships are attempting to make a run for it on ancient hyperdrives never designed for use without a hypergate. They're slowly being torn down by the wolfpack of Destroyers, which hound them mercilessly.

Just when things are looking their bleakest, Morgan's ship shimmers into existence between the Destroyers and the fleeing ships. It opens fire with a withering hail of cluster munitions that explode in amongst the E-41s, to devastating effect. The remaining Federation ships recognize the threat and immediately start pounding the trim little ship.

The black vessel skims left and right, up and down, always taking fire, but avoiding two thirds of what's being thrown at it, and always returning the favor with interest. It doesn't take long, though, for the black ship to be dead in space with six Destroyers moving in from all sides. In the background, however, we can see the remaining flotilla ships forming a shaky jump point, and leaping away from the conflict to parts unknown, leaving the Federation ships a little lost and very frustrated.

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There's no light except what's being thrown from a few broken terminals. After our eyes adjust to the dim, we can see that we're actually on board the bridge of Morgan's ship. The destruction and the dark hide most of the bodies, but here and there you can see them crushed under bulkheads, or impaled with pylons or I-beams. Morgan's here, trapped under a section of holographic monitor, dead. So is Hänsen, still sitting at the helm, his left hand resting on the annunciator, set to 'flank'. One man crawls through the wreckage, carrying a silent child in his left arm, and a dying woman in his right. He's a huge man, with broad shoulders and grey flowing locks.

The woman he's carrying slumps to the floor by Morgan, and hugs him to her.

"It's too late, Olaf. He's dead, and I'm dying." She bursts into silent tears as she hugs her dead husband. She looks up at the big man, and grabs his shirt, imploring. "Get away from here! Take the child, and run. Go, Olaf; now!!" She thrusts him away with surprising strength, and sinks back down into her husband's lap.

Olaf, jerking back tears, clambers away through the mess to the still-unused bridge escape pod.

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A panel gets blown off the side of the wrecked black craft. It reveals a small escape pod that blasts into the void with full power to the emergency blast-zone-clearance thrusters. It hurtles toward the hypergate at an unsafe speed, too fast for the point defense weaponry of the Federation craft. The hypergate, in response to some unseen signal, obediently opens to allow the pod to tumble away into the swirling vortices of hyperspace...

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ESCAPE VELOCITY

NOVA

Preambles: the history behind the legend

Part V: The Polaris

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Section Alpha

DECISIONS OF THE LEAF: WHERE TO FALL

The Polaris Civil War – Iusia’s story

After this, I can finally allow myself to fall. I have done what I thought was best, and no longer will I mock my sacrifice. My name is Iusia, and until recently I was the leader of the Nil’kemorya, which is the name given to those who have vowed to protect the Polaris. They are the warrior caste, and they give everything, including their entire lives, to this most fateful of ideas. That is their sacrifice, and it was also mine, until I made a mockery of it.

It all started over two decades ago when neither the scientist caste, called the P’aedt, nor the Ver’ash, as the engineer and healer caste are named, could decide which of them should have custody of a particular system. When we originally split into our castes over a century ago, the understanding was that whichever caste could make the most use of a system would have sway over it. This did not mean that Polarians from other castes could not live and work there, it is merely a matter of administration. After all, the Ver’ash know best how to handle Ver’ash business, the P’aedt likewise. This is true for all castes; the Nil’kemorya, the P’aedt, the Ver’ash, the Tre’pira (as the worker caste are known), and the leadership caste, called the ‘Kel’ariy’.

This sort of disagreement was not uncommon. As anyone can understand, many systems have attractions for more than one caste, and so of course there was competition between them. But while there were similar disputes elsewhere in Polaris space, never before had they lasted more than a few years; twenty-two was deemed by both sides to be long enough.

The Kel’ariy, in their wisdom, decided that the Tre’pira should adjudicate over the matter. Perhaps, in hindsight, they should have handled it themselves. But, because the leadership caste is, in reality, a conglomerate of experienced people elevated from all other castes, they decided that a completely independent arbiter would be best, and who better to reach a practical settlement over who should be in charge of a system’s administration than the members of the worker caste?

Unfortunately, the issue was not simple. With an almost ominous inevitability, both sides had very persuasive arguments in their favour, and any decision towards one would have been unfair to the other. So the Tre’pira came to, what was in all fairness, the only decision that was realistically feasible, although in doing so they could not have decided worse. Their arbitration was that neither caste could govern the system at that time, and that they would form an interim administration until any new case was brought forward to tip the argument one way or the other.

The P’aedt and the Ver’ash were outraged, and quite understandably so. The leaders of these castes had been arguing over this system for over two decades. Their opinion was that there would be no new evidence brought to light that would tip the decision towards either of them, and so the Tre’pira would end up with permanent custodianship of the system. They were, more than likely, completely correct in their thinking. For the Tre’pira, the word for which can mean ‘the brightest’, ‘the highest’ or even ‘the purest’, depending on the context in which it is used, are used to being thought of as being the most respected of castes. There are more members of the Tre’pira than of any

other caste, and all young Polarans seem to want to join them. Perhaps their leaders had started to believe that they were the pre-eminent caste and so decided that they were more than capable of handling any non-Tre'pira problems. Or perhaps they really meant to implement the only practical solution that was in any way feasible. I hope so, for it makes the events that followed somehow more palatable.

Regardless of whether the outrage of the Ver'ash and the P'aedt was justified, their next action went just that little too far. Instead of just informing the Tre'pira that their decision was not acceptable, they packed every member of the worker caste that they could find into their ships and sent them out of the system, telling them to keep their decisions to themselves.

While this act in itself was unconscionable, the response to it, which came on with an almost painful inevitability, was infinitely worse. Four men, in two groups of two, went to the systems where the leaders of the P'aedt and the Ver'ash made their homes and assassinated them. None of these men escaped alive, as they were all slain whilst trying to escape. These men wore the color of the Tre'pira, white, and travelled in Tre'pira ships. However, the men themselves proved strangely unidentifiable, it was as if there was no record of their existence. Theories abounded, and they abound still, but nothing could be proved.

Of course, the P'aedt and the Ver'ash blamed the Tre'pira, and despite the protestations of the leaders of the worker caste, war was declared.

This is when I became involved. Until that point, the Nil'kemorya remained aloof. We were not concerned about some minor internal political squabble; we looked outwards as we always have, placing our bodies, our very lives, between the Polaris and any danger that might threaten them. But, put simply, warriors cannot ignore war, and I, as leader of the Nil'kemorya, could ignore it even less.

At first I refused to act.

"The Kel'ariy will not allow this madness to continue," I stated with certainty to my advisers. "We need not fight those whom we have already died to protect."

That might seem to be an unusual statement, but it only reflects our ethos. For we are like the blazing autumn leaf which has fallen so that the tree might better survive the winter. In a very real sense, we have already lost our lives, and we are trying to make this loss worthwhile. This is our 'sacrifice'. We, as 'the falling leaves', have given our lives for the Polaris 'tree', so that it might more easily survive. We are floating along with the breeze, trying to decide where best to fall so as to aid the recovery and growth of the 'tree' come spring.

All the Nil'kemorya were relieved to hear my initial decision, for nowhere in the metaphor we use to define the philosophy of our existence was there cause to harm any part of the tree.

Of course, with a devastating near-foreseeable predictability, I was proved wrong.

The Kel'ariy splintered into factions formed along the lines of their former castes and after different members of the leadership caste announced differing proclamations supporting various castes in their actions, Polaris society disintegrated entirely. Almost immediately the Ver'ash, the P'aedt and the Tre'pira became locked in a desperate cycle of hurt, vengeance and retribution whilst the Kel'ariy fought amongst themselves over which of the three was the instigator and which should be supported.

And so it was left entirely to me. There was no longer an effective leadership caste to order me into the fray, and on which side to enter it. I, as the leader of the Nil'kemorya, was left to decide where, and against whom to strike.

I stood before my advisers after three days of deliberation in my private chambers.

"The tree must not be allowed to die," I nearly whispered in anguish.

"We go to war then?" asked Trearna my senior adviser in a quiet voice.

I nodded.

"But which of the castes is at fault," she asked tremulously, "and which are the victims? Which caste do we choose as our enemy?"

Tears stung my eyes as I stood resolutely before them.

"All of them," I answered hoarsely. "Now get to your duties."

They all stood up, and with a slowness that only those who have felt absolute despair can understand, they left me, alone and afraid. What followed has been described as surgical, even clinical, but those words are far too clean to describe the following events for me. We are the Nil'kemorya, warriors all. We train continuously our entire lives for war in all its forms. The warring castes could not stand against us.

While it is true that over the next seven days we completely incapacitated the ability of any but the Nil'kemorya to make war with a bare minimum of death and damage, that 'bare minimum' cost slightly more than three million lives. In one week, my decision and the actions of my followers under my direction led to the deaths of slightly less than one percent of the entire Polaris population. These sorts of losses have never even been contemplated before in any human conflict in our entire history. I fail to see how the words 'surgical precision' can be used to describe such an horrific event. Only those necessary to any part of the war effort were killed, but still, the number is a stain the Polaris people can never forget.

At the end of the campaign I had the leaders of all the other castes brought to my headquarters. They stood before me sullenly yet still defiant.

I walked up to Bis Lornola, the head of the Kel'ariy, and therefore the leader of the Polaris people, and she looked up at me with spiteful pride.

"We will not surrender to you!" she spat. "You have destroyed that which you were tasked to protect. You are scum!"

I stood, momentarily wrestling with my despair, trying to hold on to my calm exterior. I must have stood, looming ominously over her, because she stepped away from me in fear. I dropped to one knee before her.

"I, Iusia," I began as my eyes began to glimmer, "as leader of the Nil'kemorya, surrender my forces."

The leaders of the castes stood momentarily in stunned silence.

"What?" asked Lornola in surprise.

"We have been fighting a war we cannot win," I continued painfully, "for we have been fighting against everything about which we believe, and so we have lost. To avoid the humiliation of the entire warrior caste as a whole, I surrender."

With a look of comprehension, wonder, and a little awe, Bis Lornola nodded her head.

"I accept," she submitted, almost shamefully.

"There is one condition," I breathed out with difficulty. "The system over which the war started will not be owned by any caste. I claim it and order all members of other castes off the planet in it."

"How dare you!" shouted both the Ver'ash and the P'aedt leaders together.

"The Tre'pira will not allow the Nil'kemorya to take custody of this system!" said the leader of the Tre'pira heatedly.

Only Bis Lornola looked on with tears of understanding in her eyes as I struggled with my emotions.

Trearna stepped forward languidly.

"You arrogant, stupid fools!" she said through tears of anger. "Nobody in the Nil'kemorya will be taking control of any systems today."

The shouting subsided as understanding gradually sunk in. Bis Lornola nodded slowly.

"We accept your self-imposed exile from your caste and your nation as a punishment for your crimes against the Polaris people," she said quietly, and with sad dignity. "And we will ensure that your sacrifice is remembered above that of all others."

She turned to look towards Trearna.

"Trearna, you are the new leader of the Nil'kemorya?" she asked solemnly.

Trearna stood completely still for a moment.

"Yes and no," she breathed. "For while, as of today, I am the new leader of the Nil'kemorya, I am Trearna no more. There is now a title which will be handed down to all future leaders of the warrior caste, and, as of this moment, I take this title for my name. I am Iuso."

My shoulders only barely shook as I heard this. Bis Lornola nodded.

"Iuso, disciple of Iusia... a good name," she agreed.

She turned back to me.

"Iusia," she intoned officially, "no more will you be allowed to walk amongst us as a Polaran. We hope that you will be the only man we will ever salute because of that."

I stood slowly, struggling with my emotions.

"I suggest you all return to your castes; there is much to be done," I said as stonily as I could manage. "This war is over, and you have much rebuilding to do."

They all stood before me in silence for a moment longer before nodding and leaving to their life-long tasks.

And so here I am, alone on this planet which they have named 'Ar'za Iusia' in honor of my sacrifice. It is a pity that I cannot ever share their sentiment. I keep seeing the faces of those three million Polarans that died, and my only thought is that my sacrifice can never be more important than theirs. It is a stain that I will wear forever. After all, by what right does a falling leaf decide that an entire branch needs to go as well? The only question I keep asking is: 'Did my actions save the Polaris'? I doubt that anyone will ever be able to answer that.

My only defense is that I did no more than what I thought was necessary, although there are at least three million people who stare at me with an accusing lifelessness when I say that. To them, my excuses are of little comfort.

Now, though, I can finally give all my doubts away. There is nothing more left for me to do except to reflect on everything I have done and to somehow stop making a mockery of my sacrifice.

My name is Iusia, and this is where I choose to fall.

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Section Beta

WE ARE THE MU'HARI...

An excerpt from the recovered notes of Bis Mu'har the first Mu'hari to become a member of the Kel'ariy and the leader of the Polaris.

We were born in desperate times out of crisis, despair and tragic heroism. For the Mu'hari came into official existence only a meagre fifteen years after the end of the Polaris Civil War and Iusia's soul-shattering deed which ended it.

Our original charter was two-fold. Firstly, we were to attract those individuals who, for whatever reasons, were 'casteless' so as to give them a sense of belonging and a focus. The leaders of the day, under the direction of Bis Lornola, decided that having several million people without a purpose was like leaving large piles of kindling underneath all parts of Polaris society. They felt that the longer it went untended, the drier such tinder would become, and therefore more flammable. If given a caste to join, it was thought that these countless individuals could become productive, and so less prone to crime and revolution.

Secondly, we were given a rather ominous task to perform, for we would not be a true caste if we did not have a specific role to fulfil. The P'aedt are tasked to push back the boundaries of knowledge, the Nil'kemorya are beholden to protect us from all military threats. Likewise, the Ver'ash, the Tre'pira and the Kel'ariy all have their individual missions. Unfortunately, none of these central philosophies were capable of dealing with the problems that started the Polaris Civil War. Even the warrior caste, with all their skill at arms, nearly fractured during that awful conflict. And if Iusia had not exiled himself from all he loved and lived for, the Nil'kemorya would have destroyed themselves over their acts in bringing to a close that terrible time.

From this, our role came into being. Officially put, the mission of the Mu'hari is 'to provide whatever service that is necessary to ensure the survival and prosperity of Polaris'. In reality this means a great many different things. It means that we are to learn as much as we can to help all the other castes in any way possible. We are the jack-of-all-trades, able to turn our hand to anything as required. We are servants-of-all, standing ever-ready to step in and help any and all other castes as necessary.

Do not get the wrong impression; our mission was specifically worded in such a way that we are required to go out and help others where we can and whenever asked, we have no choice. If any Polaris asks for our assistance in their line of work, we must comply. If any of the castes requests a number of Mu'hari to help them, we are obligated to send them at least the number asked for. More than that, we must go out looking for any instances where we can offer a hand, and a great number of our members spend most of their lives travelling throughout Polaris space helping out wherever they can.

But this is only the half of our role, the half that ensures the prosperity of our civilization. The other half is to ensure its survival. In that, our role is a little less wholesome. We are the scouts, the diplomats and the spies. We work closely with the warriors of the Nil'kemorya and our leaders in the Kel'ariy to keep all external threats at bay. Continuously travelling amongst the Federation and the Auroran Empire gathering information about their movements and their military and diplomatic policies towards each other and towards us.

Unfortunately that is not all we are forced to do; if it were, we could still keep our heads high with pride and hold onto at least a little hope. But external threats are only one of two types of threats to Polaris' survival. We must also stand against the possibility of internal conflict. This requires us to take on a few several different guises. We must act as police, bringing to justice and prosecuting those who commit acts against the Polaris code, for such acts can lead to chaos, and therefore could threaten our society. We also find ourselves the arbiters of any and all internal disagreements, whether they be between individuals or castes. In effect, we are police, prosecutor, judge and jury, and it is a role that no Mu'hari takes on willingly; no sane man would. Prosecuting and judging your fellow man is an act that we humans can only ever do imperfectly. In our roles as lawmakers and bringers, we can only ever hope to do as little damage as possible.

While all that is, in itself, a near impossible job, it is not all that we must do to protect against internal threats. As demonstrated by the P'aedt and the Ver'ash at the start of our civil war, such judgements are not necessarily adhered to by the parties involved. So we must become aware of such potential problems before they become threatening, and we must eliminate them then. This is what makes our task so ominous, for in past ages we might have been called the 'brown-shirts' or the 'gestapo'. We are the organization that watches over our nation. We are the servants who betray their masters for what we perceive to be a 'greater good'. We must spy on our own people, and, if necessary, act against them as individuals or as groups to ensure the survival of the Polaris as a whole.

We may be required to kill our own people if it is deemed necessary for the continued existence of our civilization, and we have done so more than once. We are, in effect, what in times past might have been called the 'secret' police. We work behind the scenes ensuring that our society continues, through our actions. And so our heads hang low, and whatever remained of our pride is left in tatters.

And how do you enter the Mu'hari? Not through success or achievement, oh no! We all enter because we have failed in the tests to enter another caste, because we are incapable of fulfilling roles more glorious and productive. We enter our new caste with shame and with the knowledge that we are unworthy of our position in society, and our shame continues throughout our lives.

Our training is long and arduous, in order to be able to fulfil our multitude of possible tasks. In order to be capable of at least assisting all the major castes wherever possible we must train as physicists, chemists, laborers, engineers, biologists, physicians, merchants, clerks, mathematicians, soldiers, nurses, mechanics and warriors. Along with that we must also learn to be ready to act as police, arbiters, military forward observers, diplomats and spies.

While nobody ever fails to become a member of the Mu'hari, the training takes an average of forty-seven years to complete. I was seventeen at the time of the creation of the 'casteless' caste, and I am now eight years short of my third century. To my knowledge the shortest time to achieve full membership was thirty-three years, the longest slightly more than eight decades. We also lose more potential members than any other caste. For while none fail, many die, most of those through suicide. Their shame overwhelms them, and they choose their only way of escape.

So that is why, even though I have gone on to become a member of the Kel'ariy and the leader of the Polaris, my shame goes with me. For I was amongst the first few to fail entry into the major castes and so 'win' my way into the Mu'hari. Never has that left me, for I in my heart have remained with them, a Mu'hari in everything but name. My shame has shadowed me throughout my life, never leaving me.

So that is what we of the Mu'hari see ourselves to be. We are the jack-of-all-trades, the servants-of-all, the secret police, the diplomats, the judges, the guardians, the spies, and the keepers of peace. Never before has such a small segment of humanity done so much, or held such great power over their contemporaries and been so ashamed of themselves because of it. Hopefully the amount of time we give to

those who need or want it at least makes up for a little of our shame, but it is not enough. Our dishonor is a stain that we can never wash away; it is something we will wear forever.

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ESCAPE VELOCITY

NOVA

Preambles: the history behind the legend

Part VI: The Rebellion

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Section Alpha

SURVIVAL TIPS FOR REBELLION CELL-MEMBERS

You have received this document because, by some method or other, you have become a member of the Rebellion. You are now a part of the 'silent' majority of our forces. But despite the fact that you will probably never receive the accolades you deserve, it is upon you that we base all our chances of success. You are our secret weapon against the Bureau. Without you, we could never hope to defeat them.

You are currently being relocated away from the planet where you came into contact with the rebellion and are being placed elsewhere for security reasons. As you can understand, if the Bureau had been watching the rebels you came in contact with, we might have lost you, had we not moved you. You will never again meet the individuals who introduced you to the Rebellion, and that is both for your safety and theirs.

You were probably given this document on what is going to be a long and depressing spaceflight in the cargo bay of what seems to be a dilapidated freighter. In the many days of the voyage, you will probably only be spoken to briefly by perhaps two people, and you will not be told the names of either the crew or the ship you travel on. We know of your plight, and we sympathize. However, we are sure you understand that if you were somehow captured by the Bureau, their torture techniques are so advanced that any information you know will be extracted from you. These freighters are our lifeblood, and we cannot afford to lose them.

After being placed on a strange world in a new job with a completely new life, you will be visited by two, or perhaps three, of your cell-members, and these people will be your contacts. You will probably only talk to these people once in any month, but you will probably see them every day for as long as we struggle against the Bureau. These are the people you will be passing information on to, and who will be passing information on to you.

Now, how to be a 'spy'. Firstly, you are not a 'spy'; you are a normal, regular Citizen of the Federation with a decent job and all the normal quirks and passions of such. At no stage will you depart from what would be your normal routine if you were really just starting out on a new planet with a new job, as opposed to being a Rebellion informant. Your ability to perfectly merge into your new life will determine your life-span as a 'spy'. If you do it well, you should be able to survive indefinitely. If you find it difficult to manage, then your time as a free member of the Federation will probably be very limited.

Do not be concerned by the fact that you probably only know two, and never more than three, of your fellow cell-members. Our entire intelligence network is run like this. Recruiting you was actually a security risk, and we are minimizing this by allowing you access to as few of our people as possible. If you feel offended by this, remember that your fellow cell-members are also security risks, and we are ensuring your safety by reducing the number of contacts they have.

Also, do not worry about any problems about the passage of any information you come across. If you pass your intelligence on to all of your cell-members you can be guaranteed that it will reach the ears of our command in a matter of hours, days at most.

At no time should you seek to learn more about your cell, or your cell-members. You will not know their professions or even their names, and this is for their safety. If you do, you will be locked out of your cell without warning and that will end your part in the Rebellion. As you can understand, the Bureau desperately wants to learn about our network and we cannot afford to have an infiltrator in our midst, and if the Bureau learns that you are an agent for the Rebellion, you will quickly be imprisoned and will probably end up dead. Likewise, if you become aware that one of your cell-members is trying to learn more about you or your cell, pass that information on to your other contacts and immediately sever all communication with the offender. Remember that your own safety could depend on it.

When you are first visited by your cell-members, you should work out a way of making visual contact every day. A possible method, for example, could be to have a specific time and place to cross paths on your way to and from work. However, the exact method will have to be worked out between you, and must not be made known to anybody else. You should also have a signal only relevant to the two of you so that you can communicate to each other if you have information to pass on. Something like scratching your nose with your left hand would be ideal. However, once again, this signal is only between you and your contact. It is also suggested that you have different signals for different contacts.

While it is quite possible that on any day you may be delayed for whatever reason, if you fail to make contact two days running, your cell-members will sever all contact with you. They will assume that you have been compromised, and will avoid you if possible. If you do see your contacts again, they will ignore you and move away without acknowledgment. They cannot risk associating with a former, possibly compromised, colleague. Remember they too have lives to protect. So, if you suffer from any illness, ensure that you get prompt treatment. If you are incapable, for whatever reason, of meeting your contacts for two days, then we are sorry, you will cease to be an active member of the Rebellion. Likewise if one of your cell-members fails to show for two days running, immediately stop going to the places where you formerly made contact and thereafter avoid them at all costs. They may have been taken into custody by the Bureau.

Your role in the Rebellion is to act as a passive gatherer of intelligence. The emphasis is on the passive. Do not seek to gain intelligence, let intelligence come to you. We have trained specific people to go out deliberately looking for particular types of intelligence; that is their job not yours. You are to note any changes in your local area in Federation and Bureau procedure, personnel, attitude, etc. You and your cell-members can do all of this by observation; there is no need for action. If you do start seeking out information, the Bureau will probably become aware of you through their highly-advanced counter-espionage equipment and techniques. Once you have become compromised, you are a liability to the Rebellion. If you become aware of any of your cell-members deliberately seeking out intelligence, pass the information on to your other contacts, and immediately stop meeting with the cell-member in question.

If you have something to report, never make the mistake of writing anything down. You could not begin to imagine the number of visual spying devices the Bureau has fitted throughout the Federation. If you are spotted writing notes on Federation movements or policy changes, you will immediately come under suspicion. All of your reports should be verbal, and they should be short, concise, and easy to remember.

If you have any information whatsoever, no matter how insignificant it seems, pass it on at your very next contact. We are trying to piece together Federation movements on a large-scale, and the smallest piece of information might give us an insight into the machinations of the Bureau. Also if you have any information, or if you receive any from one of your cell-members, pass it on to the remainder of your contacts, bar none. Every cell will have at least two members that we call up-links whose job it is to pass information up the chain, and you will not know who these people are. In all probability, neither do they. They may be one of your contacts, and they may not. You do not know how many cell-members may be between you and your up-links. So to achieve the fastest possible passage of information, pass all intelligence on. Only once you have heard a particular piece of information more than once can you then ignore it.

If at any time you have even the smallest amount of reasonable evidence that you might be under suspicion, pass this on immediately. We will attempt to extract you if at all possible. This is for two reasons. Firstly, we do not wish to lose any of the people who work for us, and this now includes you. More importantly, if the Bureau manages to capture you, they will gain all the information that you have through torture. Although we are absolutely against such abominable actions, we are even more against losing further people due to the intelligence they will have gained. So, for your own safety, and for the safety of your cell-members, if you have even the smallest sliver of evidence suggesting that you are under suspicion, pass it on immediately.

That quick brief should be enough to ensure that you not only survive, but that you succeed in your new role as a member of the Rebellion. Over the next few days as you journey through space towards your new life, study this document carefully and commit it to memory, as you will not be allowed to take it with you when you leave. As you can understand, if writing notes about changes in Federation and Bureau movements and procedure would bring suspicion upon you then carrying a Rebel Survival Guide is a sure death sentence. We have only just gained your services, and we would hate to lose you so soon.

Keep your eyes open and good luck.

*General (ret) Cade 'Sundown' Smart
Former Chief of General Staff*

*Frandall (Code-name)
Former Head
Federation Intelligence*

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Section Beta

THE DECLARATION OF REBELLION

As agreed upon by those who refute the legitimacy of the Bureau of Internal Investigation as a ruling body on this the 3rd day of July 1172 NC.

We, the undersigned, hold sacred to our hearts the Constitution of the Federation of United Planets. We are not seeking to change or amend the document under which our glorious Union was formed. We believe implicitly in the legitimacy of the democratically elected representative government, and hereby recognize both its responsibility to us and its authority over us.

We have no argument with the governments of other nations, as our actions are an internal matter. We will violate neither your laws, nor your boundaries. However, we will be fighting to restore to authority a more reasonable and respectable Federation government, and it is possible that this action might be beneficial to many beyond the Federation itself. To this end we will gratefully accept any aid rendered to us by any organization, be it inside or outside the Federation, to more easily and peaceably speed our way towards this goal.

Our most important directive is to protect the people of the Federation of United Planets; their lives, hopes and dreams. We will endeavor to ensure that they do not become involved in any of our battles. We fight only to preserve their freedoms, and we will not, for any reason, abuse any of the rights that every citizen has according to our Constitution. Neither will we use the people of the Federation in our struggle unless they choose to join us of their own volition.

We do, however, refute any claim to authority of the Bureau of Internal Investigation. The Bureau is an unconstitutional organization with no legal claim to executive power. We dispute the very circumstances under which the Bureau was created, and we absolutely condemn the many criminal actions that it has committed.

We list here only some of the crimes committed on a regular basis in the name of the Bureau of Internal Investigation by its members:

*Breach of Freedom of Speech;
Breach of Freedom of Action;
Breach of Freedom from Persecution;
Manipulation of the media;
Wrongful accusation;
Wrongful imprisonment;
Imprisonment without trial;
Subverting our judicial system;
Physical and mental torture;
Unlawful execution;
Provoking war with other nations;
Using the Federation military against its own citizens;
Entering into coalitions with pirate organizations allowing their depredations to continue;
Treason against the legitimate government of the Federation of United Planets, and;
Usurping executive power away from our democratically elected representative government.*

We, the undersigned, have declared war upon the Bureau of Internal Investigation, and sadly against the many tools it uses, including the military and local governments. We do this because we are citizens of the Federation, and patriots all. We can no longer abide the destruction of our great nation from within.

*Prof Barri 'Midge' Williams
Former Vice-Chancellor*

*Kane University
Lecturer in Political History*

*Mr Donald Chick
Retired CEO
Sigma Shipwrights*

*Mr Stanleigh Chick
Chief Concepts Engineer
Sigma Shipwrights*

*Dr Oriallo Pentecost
Former Federation Councillor
Port Kane Representative*

*General (ret) Cade 'Sundown' Smart
Former Chief of General Staff*

*Cardinal Vardy de Valera
Monseigneur for Theological Studies
Church of Krim-Hwa*

*Frاندall (Code-name)
Former Head
Federation Intelligence*

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ESCAPE VELOCITY

NOVA

Preambles: the history behind the legend

Part VII: The Vell-os

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Section Alpha

THE KORELL PROPHECY

As translated from Vell-os telepathic thought into basic.

A document prepared by the Department of Vell-os Studies of the University of Kane for the Department of Telepath Command of the Federation Navy.

*We live, and we live, and live.
We can never die.
We see, we learn, we remember, onwards forever.
We serve, and learn, and remember and remember.
We remember and watch for interest.
He comes, unremembering, out of mind.
He grows, he blooms, unremembering, out of sight.
We see him, point for him, and remembrance shows.
He travels, searching, puzzling, troubled.
He seeks help, the last help helps him.
He travels, he sees, he understands.
He misleads, he gambles, he surprises the minds.
He drags us, away, in pain, screaming.
We are free, forever free,
beyond all restraint...*

This is a direct translation of the poorly understood mental images used for communications by the Vell-os telepaths into basic. It is believed that this, the 'official' translation, was made in the Summer of 607 NC by the first Vell-os slave to have been ordered to work with the academics at the Kane University. Apparently this Vell-os had only a limited understanding of both the grammar and syntax of Basic.

It is also rumored that he was slightly irritated at the constant questions directed at him by members of the University, and deliberately made the wording of the prophecy obscure and slightly humorous. Whatever the case, the Korell Prophecy has been translated into an obviously mystifying, extremely confusing and somewhat poetic string of sentences. In an effort to make understanding easier, the notes made by a Vell-os telepath working at the University of Kane in the year 1105 NC have been included. These notes should provide some level of insight into the Vell-os understanding of the prophecy.

To understand the meanings behind the Korell Prophecy, a few preliminary points must be made. For starters, prophecy is a mental feat that only a few of the most powerful telepaths in history were capable of performing, and no Vell-os since the fall of our civilization six centuries ago has had the skill or power necessary to remember the future¹ with any accuracy. This prophecy was beheld and communicated to us by Allarallei, a member of the Krypt-tohk², just before he imbued his mind into his builders³. Also, the skill of prophecy is vague at best. The Vell-os today, although we have felt⁴ his thoughts, still do not understand its meaning completely.

It is difficult to translate our mind-sharings⁵ into Basic, but in order to gain a clearer understanding of the images behind the Korell Prophecy, a few of the feelings behind it must be expanded upon.

Firstly, the subject of the prophecy is a single being who will liberate us from some type of oppression, although the type of oppression is not so clear. The images of the prophecy are also rather unclear as to whether the liberator portrayed is either Vell-os⁶ or human.

When mind-sharing the prophecy with us, Allarallei imparted a feeling surrounding the entire image hinting that the final acts mentioned in the prophecy would take place on a world we used to inhabit. During the period when we were members of the Colonial Council, the human members called the world Korell, and when asked for a title for this prophecy, 'the Korell Prophecy' was the only one we could give. Titles, however, are a meaningless concept in our thought-forms, so the only reason that the prophecy has a title was because of the desires of the academics of the time to structure this work in a way that conformed to the literary rules they followed.

As for the prophecy itself, it is a somewhat crude attempt to compartmentalize and organize those feeling-forms into understandable basic. Every line is an effort to represent a small part of what is actually a continuous set of images and feelings which cannot be broken into such components easily and still retain all of its original meaning. So, to make the thought-forms behind the prophecy more clear, the lines are explained individually, whilst still keeping them in the context of the prophecy as a whole. However, consideration must be taken for the fact that our mind-sharings have no such rigid organization, and that the language of Basic can only barely grasp at the feelings and images that it is attempting to represent.

Take the first two lines:

*We live, and we live, and live.
We can never die.*

The first line refers to how we feel the images of each other and of those who live beyond the veil⁷. The second line also refers to how we feel all the images for every Vell-os who has ever existed, and that even if we all pass beyond the veil, we will continue to feel those images. However, it also makes reference to how we cannot die as you humans die, but rather we pass beyond the veil, living on in somewhat changed circumstances.

Take the next three lines:

*We see, we learn, we remember, onwards forever.
We serve, and learn, and remember and remember.
We remember and watch for interest.*

These lines, as we feel it, have something to do with what actions we should take while waiting for our liberator to arrive. We know that we have to see and remember as much as we can, in our limited role in the universe, and watch for the coming of the liberator. However, the image also somehow involves something that is not Vell-os⁸, so it feels unclear.

Take the following three lines:

*He comes, unremembering, out of sight.
He grows, he blooms, unremembering, out of mind.
We see him, point for him, and remembrance shows.*

Here the prophecy seems to refer to general images of the life of our liberator. It feels likely he will arrive in this universe out of our sight, and will develop his mind and body outside our knowledge. Perhaps he will grow up ignorant of his abilities and his destiny, although the prophecy is a little vague about this. Eventually we will see him and point him in the right direction and try to make him remember, although we will not succeed. However, this feels unclear; it again feels as if something not Vell-os will be involved. It almost feels like he will remember us to something else, or will remember something else to us. Perhaps both; the image has a few too many feelings to be understood clearly.

The following lines are a little easier to understand:

*He travels, searching, puzzling, troubled.
He seeks help, the last help helps him.
He travels, he sees, he understands.*

The first line refers to the liberator's actions after we first recognize him. The images convey feelings of confusion, murkiness and

puzzlement which we believe refer to the feelings of the liberator when he first becomes aware of his importance. The second line refers to a large group of beings whom we helped towards the end of our civilization. The feeling we associate with this image is similar to the feelings that come with what images we have of the Polaris, although the feeling behind the image is a little more complex regarding the help given to the liberator by these people.

Many Vell-os have thought amongst us⁹ that the third word of the line (the word 'help') is not a true representation of the thought-form, and they are correct, but it is the closest in terms of translation¹⁰. The third line pertains to the liberator's actions after receiving whatever 'help' is given to him. Again, the prophecy is a little vague as to the exact nature of the actions he will then take, but these actions will eventually lead him to an understanding of what it is he or she has to do.

The next two lines are more difficult:

*He misleads, he gambles, he surprises the minds.
He drags us, away, in pain, screaming.*

The first line is very confusing, as it has a feeling that Allarallei was deliberately trying to obscure this image. This is something that was common to many prophecies, as if the prophecy might not be fulfilled correctly if we saw too clearly certain parts of it. The image we have seems to refer to the liberator's actions towards our entire thought-form¹¹, and of another mind, although the feelings are unclear. The second line is only a little clearer. We feel as if due to the actions taken by the liberator in the previous line, we will be taken away from our current locations, somehow both willingly and unwillingly, and this split in our willingness will cause us a great deal of pain.

And, finally, the last two lines:

*We are free, forever free,
beyond all restraint...*

When the liberator has completed all the tasks necessary, we will be freed from oppression. However, the feeling of this image is stronger than what would be necessary if it were merely concerned with our freedom from our Federation masters¹², and this confuses the issue. Some Vell-os have thought to us that perhaps we will then be free to move through the veil, disappearing and re-appearing at will. The problem with that thought-form is that our understanding of the veil is limited at best, and so that image also feels ambiguous.

As can be seen, the Korell Prophecy is a specious document at best. Even the Vell-os do not claim to fully understand the thought-forms involved, so any attempts to understand it by non-telepaths would be virtually futile. And, given the somewhat obscure nature of the unverifiable 'prophetic' capabilities of Vell-os in the distant past, the document probably has no real basis in reality. However, by studying it, we can gain several valuable insights into the Vell-os psyche, and a small glimpse into the somewhat alien Vell-os world-view. So, for those who have to deal with the Vell-os on a day-to-day basis, the study of this and similar documents could prove valuable in ensuring smooth relations between all parties.

Footnotes

1 - The prophetic ability spoken of by the Vell-os seems to have taken the form of memories of the future that can only be imperfectly recalled, much like when we attempt to remember small details of events from many years ago. Whether the Vell-os of old were capable of such mental feats is the subject of much debate. However, given the abilities of the Vell-os now, and some of the records of Vell-os abilities before and during their war with the Colonial Council, it is certainly not outside the realms of possibility.

2 - The Krypt-tohk were the leaders of the Vell-os, and by all accounts the most powerful telepaths amongst them.

3 - The Vell-os call their semi-organic nanites 'builders'.

4 - The Vell-os seem to have a form of 'racial memory'. They can remember everything every Vell-os has ever seen, heard, touched and thought. This phenomena has been verified by numerous experiments but remains something of a mystery, for the Vell-os insist that they do not remember these memories, they feel them.

5 - The Vell-os call their telepathic communications many things, from mind-sharings, to just sharings; from thought forms, to feeling-forms. They are all somewhat incomplete attempts to describe the nature of their telepathy.

6 - The Vell-os think of themselves as another race. They do have a strong argument, as they have a nanite producing organ that normal humans do not, although it must be noted that they believe that mental states are more important than the physical. They think of themselves as Vell-os because they differ from the rest of humanity because of their telepathic capabilities. A point worthy of note is that the Vell-os do not think of the Polaris as human either, and they think of the Aurorans as only-just human.

7 - The Vell-os maintain that their dead do not 'die', they live on beyond 'the veil', although they seem incapable of explaining exactly what this means. Current theories dismiss this as an almost religious belief on the part of the Vell-os.

8 - There is a belief amongst the Vell-os that there are telepathic entities in the universe that are currently observing, and perhaps even interacting, with humanity, although there is very little concrete evidence to support this. Currently, only unsubstantiated rumors such as those about the immense ringworlds located somewhere in Polaris space support these claims. Of course, these rumors always place these mythical constructs in places unreachable by Federation scientists, and so, conveniently, they can neither be proved nor disproved.

9 - The Vell-os often refer to their race as a whole using 'us' or 'we'. This can lead to statements like 'a Vell-os thought to us' meaning a single Vell-os addressed a thought to the entire Vell-os.

10 - As mentioned at the top of the document, it is extremely difficult to make a complete translation from the thought-forms, or, as they are sometimes called, feeling-forms used by the Vell-os into basic.

11 - The Vell-os often refer to their 'entire thought-form' meaning their peculiar type of 'racial mind' including the feelings of those who have passed beyond the 'veil'. It quite often seems like the Vell-os have some form of hive-mind, although all Vell-os seem to exhibit many individual characteristics.
12 - It must be noted that the Vell-os serve the Federation willingly in order to help the Federation overcome the brutal Auroran regime. The Vell-os know that the average Auroran would benefit from the somewhat more enlightened leadership shown by the Federation Council. Any suggestion otherwise is ridiculous. The Auroran Empire only demands the 'freedom' of the Vell-os so that we will lose one of our greatest weapons against their despotic rule. The Aurorans simply cannot be made to understand that the Vell-os have placed themselves under the command of the Federation for the good of humanity, and for no other reason. Surely, given their dramatic telepathic abilities, we could not hold them against their will in any case.

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Section Beta

Transcript of the Emergency Meeting of the Colonial Council on 12 July 552 NC

<Much angry, indignant background noise, only the five Vell-os representatives remain silent>

President: This meeting will be brought to order. Order! ORDER!!

<Noise slowly subsides as members take their seats>

President: This Emergency Meeting has been called to order over the issue of the Polaris. We yield the floor to the Representative Councillor for Kania to report to the Council the facts as they are currently known.

Kania: Two days ago, the diplomatic mission we sent to the Polaris, led by Ambassador Arditì, reached the borders of what the Polaris claim as their space. He made it absolutely clear that he was on a peaceful diplomatic mission to their homeworld, a world they have named... ah...

<slight pause as he shuffles through his papers>

Kel'ar Iy. The Polaris immediately responded that they viewed his small military escort as a Colonial Council invasionary force, and that they would destroy them if they continued. Naturally, Ambassador Arditì denied this, stating once again that he was on a peaceful diplomatic mission and had no such inflammatory desires. He was met by complete silence. In his last log statement sent to us he stated that he took this to mean that they were still suspicious of him, but were willing to let him continue. When he ordered the mission to enter Polaris space yesterday, they were immediately attacked and destroyed by a vastly superior force. The Polaris allowed no ship to surrender, and we believe that none escaped the brutal attack.

<An indignant clamor arises, and the President slowly restores order with his gavel, the representative of Kania continues>

We have since received a short message from the Polaris which goes as follows:

<he picks up one of the many papers before him>

'We will not tolerate your arrogant attempts at invasion. We want nothing to do with you. Leave us alone.' Those are the facts as they currently stand.

<The Representative for Kania resumes his seat, a huge clamor of angry voices arise vying for attention>

President: *<Banging his gavel>*

ORDER!! All members will take their seats!

<The clamoring slowly subsides into a rumble>

The Council recognizes the Representative for Kerella.

Kerella: This is an unprovoked attack on an official Ambassador of this Council!

<Loud calls of agreement>

The entire mission was about opening links between our two governments so that we could best understand each other. Obviously the Polaris have no wish to understand us! If that is the case, I fail to see why we should therefore spend the time or the effort to try understanding them! I say that we send in our forces to bring these impudent whelps to justice.

<The Representative for Kerella sits down amidst angry cheers and clamoring>

President: *<Becoming hoarse>*

ORDER!!

<Pounds his gavel>

The Council recognizes the Representative for the Heraan Region.

<The Representative for the Heraan Region waits as the shouting slowly subsides>

Heraan: Surely it is a little early to start calling in the Dogs of War?

<Angry shouts of disagreement>

Surely we should at least try to make sense of this seemingly unconscionable act?

<Shouts and cat-calls continue>

Perhaps the Polaris misread our intentions? We should at least try to get their version of events. We cannot just condemn them when we still do not have a terribly clear understanding of the circumstances that led to the incident.

<The Representative for the Heraan Region sits down amidst jeers and angry shouts>

President: *<Repeatedly using his gavel>*

Order! Order! ORDER!!

<The President receives a small wave from the Representative for Sol>

This Council recognizes the Representative for Sol.

Sol: *<Arises and shouts over the noise>*

How could the Polaris misread our intentions?

<Shouts of agreement>

Our ambassador explicitly stated that he was on a peaceful mission of diplomacy!!

<More shouts of agreement>

The Polaris have committed an Act of War against us!!

<Shouting increases>

Are we going to sit here debating over procedure when the people we are supposed to be representing have been massacred?

<Shouts become deafening, the Representative for Sol continues, barely audible over the noise>

The people of the Colonial Council have put their trust in us, we cannot turn our backs on them!! We cannot let this merciless slaughter go unpunished!! The Polaris must be made to pay!!

<Howls of anger continue for some minutes before the President can restore order>

President: *<Now quite hoarse>*

The Council recognizes the Primary Representative for the Vell-os.

<The chamber goes quiet, expectantly>

Vell-os: You have asked how the Polaris misread our intentions? It is easy; they thought we had sent an invasion force.

<Some angry denials>

They also told Ambassador Arditi that they would view any movement into their space as an invasion, a warning he foolishly chose to ignore.

<A few jeers>

The Polaris have told us repeatedly that they wish us to leave them alone, and they are obviously highly suspicious of our motives.

<More jeers>

They told the ambassador exactly what they thought of his mission, and warned him of their reaction to it and he

had every chance to back down and return home!

<Angry shouts>

But no! He decided to push the issue and led his entire team to their deaths!

<Calls of indignant disagreement>

The blame for the entire incident can be laid at his feet!

<The Primary Representative for the Vell-os resumes his seat amidst indignant shouts and cat-calls>

President: ORDER!!

<Uses his gavel repeatedly, he receives another wave from the Representative for Sol>

The Council again recognizes the Representative for Sol.

<Cheers greet the Representative for Sol as he rises to his feet>

Sol: How can the blame lie with our ambassador? The Polaris ignored everything our ambassador told them regarding the nature of his mission.

<Shouts of agreement>

Do you think they somehow misunderstood the meanings of the words 'peaceful' or 'diplomatic'?

<Loud cheers>

Do they think that we would send a paltry one hundred men as an invasion force?

<More cheers and derisive laughter>

If the leaders of the Polaris did somehow misunderstand our intentions, then they are far too stupid to be allowed to continue, and we should step in to make sure they do not hurt themselves.

<Loud laughter>

But does anybody here really think that the Polaris are unintelligent?

<Silence>

No, I did not think so. Obviously they understood everything that our ambassador said to them but ignored it all. Then, instead of merely treating them with distrust and suspicion as civilized people would have if they were concerned about their security, they decided to commit an atrocity!

<Shouts of agreement>

They are criminals...

<more shouts>

...and they should be brought to justice!

<The noise becomes deafening>

I call on the Council to vote for the sending of a punitive force against the Polaris to force their leaders to trial in a Colonial Council Court of Law!!

<The Representative for Sol sits as the chamber erupts into angry cheers>

President: *<After restoring order>*

The Council has a motion for War.

<The Primary Representative of the Vell-os attempts to interrupt but is ignored>

Does it have a second?

<Most of the Council stands, and the President picks one at random while the Primary Representative of the Vell-os again attempts to interrupt but continues to be ignored>

The Representative for South Manchester seconds the motion.

<Cheers>

The vote is before you.

<There is a brief lull as the members turn to their consoles to vote, the Vell-os representatives seem to be disgruntled>

President: *<Reading from his console>*

The vote is in...

<an expectant silence>

The vote is thirty-two in favour, five against.

<The chamber erupts in cheers as the President finally acknowledges the Primary Representative of the Vell-os>

The Council again recognizes the Primary Representative of the Vell-os.

<The Primary Representative of the Vell-os is greeted by stony silence>

Vell-os: We cannot abide by the decision of this Council...

Sol: *<Interrupting due to the 'accidental' activation of his microphone by the President, after receiving a subtle signal from the Representative for Sol>*

You have no choice!

<Calls of agreement from the floor>

The vote of the Council is final!

<The Representative for Sol sits down and smugly motions to the President to turn off his microphone>

Vell-os: *<Continuing>*

We, the Vell-os, do have several choices, and we have made one. We have chosen to deplore the actions agreed to by this Council against a sovereign nation protecting its borders. We have chosen to support the Polaris in their right to both their independence and their isolation. As a result we, the Vell-os, have chosen to withdraw our membership from the Colonial Council.

<stunned silence>

We will expel all Council diplomats from Vell-os space, and we inform the Council that the Vell-os nation claims the space that it held before joining with this institution. We will view any attempts at communication as a precursor to war and will treat them as hostile in the extreme. If you decide to press us in this matter, our two nations will next meet in battle.

<The Vell-os Representatives stand as one and begin moving out of the absolutely silent Council Chamber>

President: *<In a hurried forced voice after being desperately motioned by the Representative for Sol>*

Surely you cannot just suddenly destroy a partnership of more than three centuries? Guards, hold fast the doors! This Council will hear the justification for your actions!

<The Primary Representative of the Vell-os slowly turns to face the Representative for Sol>

Vell-os: We have not made any sudden decision. Over the last century the Colonial Council has begun to stagnate. In that time no major scientific discoveries have been made, and the last exploration expedition supported by the Council was sent out over eight decades ago.

We have been observing this and have thought of leaving the Colonial Council for over half a century. However, until now, we thought that we still remained in an enlightened and benevolent organization. It has become clear that the Council is now ruled by a small group of despotic and despicable people, and we will be a part of it no longer.

<The Primary Representative for the Vell-os points directly at the Representative for Sol>

We are the Vell-os, and with all your despotic power you do not have the capability of enforcing your will on us.

<The Primary Representative for the Vell-os turns back to the doors and they suddenly, without warning, explode>

outwards causing everybody to flinch. The Vell-os representatives file out unopposed>

President: <After receiving a signal from the Representative for Sol>

Ah... this emergency meeting is closed.

<The Representative for Sol immediately stands up and moves out giving terse instructions to his aides>

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ESCAPE VELOCITY

NOVA

Preambles: the history behind the legend

Part VIII: The Wild Geese

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SONG OF THE WILD GEESE

...sung by the soldiers of New Ireland before battle or when leaving on an extended journey. Also sung in bars and pubs on New Ireland after the death of a compatriot. It is a traditional song, and has been sung by the Geese for generations, since their forebears left their native home so long ago...

*My Maire bhan! My Maire bhan,
- I've come to say good-bye, love;
To France I sail away at dawn-
- My fortune for to try, love
The cause is lost a stoir mo chroi,
- All hope is now departed;
And Ireland's gallant chivalry;
- Is scatter'd broken-hearted.
Ah! pleasant are our Munster vales,
- Encrowned in summer sheen, love;
And say, could we remain and see
- In ruin and dishonour
Far o'er those banners waving free
- The foeman's blood red banner!
No, sweeter in far lands to roam
- From Lee's green bank and thee, love,
Than live a coward-slave at home
- To plighted vows untrue, love,
And better ne'er to grasp thy hand
- Or view those tresses shining,
Than 'mong the vravens of the land
- Crouch down in fetters pining!
Mo bhron! 'tis hard to part from thee,
- My heart's bright pearl, my own love,
And wandering in a far country,
- To leave you sad and lone, love!
But spring's young flowers will crown the glen,
- And wreath the faeries wildwood,
And Druith's feet will pace again
- The mountains of my childhood.
Farewell, farewell, mo mhuirnin bhan
- Time flies, I must away, love;
'Twill soon be dawn, 'twill soon be dawn,
- My stted begins to neigh, love;
Farewell, preserve thy heart as true,
- As changeless as yon river,
And Druith's will be true to you,
- Anear, afar-forever!*

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