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The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
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☐ by **The Macabees** » Mon Oct 23, 2017 5:22 am

QUOTE

Behind Enemy Lines

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Day 117: Only certain men are fit for service in the Koro Kirim. You have to have a shell against loneliness. I don't think I have that shell, but I'm faced with the conundrum that if I fail, I die."

— From the journal of *Sargént* Jarl Gabán

The Scandinvan Wilderness

March, 2027

Kabanis didn't speak much anymore, not more than what was necessary, not since the day Níalis died.

They waded across tall grasslands and trekked through thick forests in silence, and Kabanis spoke only if it was truly necessary. Gabán wondered whether the *komsargént* would even warn him of a nearby enemy. He wasn't sure if the man cared whether Gabán was dead or alive. Certainly, the journey south was a solitary one.

It had been a long time since he had thought of his life before this one. Every soldier must come to terms with the loss of an old identity, but few soldiers lost it completely. Most keep enough of it so that when they go back home it doesn't seem alien to them, as if they had never lived that life to begin with. Elite soldiers have it the worst, and it's a consequence you sign up for, but still, you always have a connection to the real world. Having not a soul to speak to, having not a friend to recount memories of the civilian world, Gabán was losing his mind. The constant paranoia and the hot, boring days contributed their fair shares to his ever-growing madness as well, but it was the loneliness that shaded the most.

Sometimes they would take position on a low hill outside a random town, uncharted on the incomplete maps available to them, and they would sit there for hours looking at people come and go. A hard working people the Scandinvans were, and pious. And like all humans,

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all things in the universe, really, they had patterns. For days, perched on a hill there, another one there, peering from the forests, or hiding within tall stocks of stalk, they observed and recorded. At night, they crept up to the perimeter of the town, traveling to spots they had seen groups of people travel to repeatedly, and they left minuscule sensors that would relay their voices to Gabán and the man who seemed to hate him more than the Scandinavians themselves. From where they observed they would track and, when possible, record hand motions. Slowly they built up a small, elementary, and incomplete vocabulary of the local language, building their database in hopes that soon their devices would break the language.

That's what they were told to do, so they did it through long hours worth of tedious observation and by scanning any texts they found along the way. This was somehow to pay off in the grand scheme of things, but probably in ways whose dividends would never land on the men who did the work.

Every so often they would raid into the towns they passed by, but it was a rare thing. If they did, it was mostly to access books and other documents. Risky missions were avoided altogether, ever since Níalis' death at least. For food, they hunted and foraged. For ammunition, they kept shooting to a minimum. For everything else, they stole, and only from the easiest targets. There was no sense in taking risks when there were already so many other times where the risk was unavoidable. Surviving on the Scandinavian mainland would require grit, not foolhardiness. Foolhardiness caused men like Níalis, good men, to die.

Not everything could be scavenged for, though. Ammunition for the weapons they landed with and the technology necessary to do the job came from the empire. But how to deliver that sort of equipment into a hostile country where, for all they knew, not a single friendly soul shared the same soil?

A supply drop. Yet, they had no working communication equipment. No way to coordinate.

South they marched, saying only the most minimal words to each other. They traveled along a narrow country road, barely wide enough for a horse-drawn cart or a small tractor. Down its center ran untamed weeds and grasses, with broad paths on either side which were a product of long decades of use's wear. They traveled mostly by night, observed by day. If the sun was up and an errant farmer happened upon them, they would hide if they were not already camped and sleeping. For months it likes this, making their way along one rural cart path and then another, nearing towns only if in need of supplies or in an attempt to gather more data.

The road they were on now was flanked on either side by tall trees in full, green bloom this spring. Ancient and mangled, the ancient copse extended down the length of the countryside passage for quite some time, obscuring vision beyond ten feet to both the left and the right all the way. It was a surprise, then, when the sun's bright rays flooded through thinning branches and the small forest ended to reveal a two-lane paved highway that raced dangerously close to the dirt road and then ran parallel for about a click of flat land.

Kabanis planted a closed right fist in the air and then crouched where the edge of the treeline abruptly transitioned to the short grasses of the plain. Gabán came to a position to the *komsargént's* right, taking a knee and revealing a small device that he handed to Kabanis. The latter raised it to his eyes and started to survey the terrain. To their left, the empty paved roadway went on straight for quite some time, but the dirt path they were on veered left again back into the dark depths of the forest, which had simply receded and left this stretch of cart path uncovered. Between the two roads were tall stocks of reeds that grew along a short dip-floored embankment that ran its length. With the naked eye one could hardly see what lay on the other side, and even with the ocular device the *komsargént* could not have seen much, but he seemed satisfied enough when he

returned the sights back to Gabán.

"Let's follow the treeline and go the long ways around," said Kabanis before rising.

There was no time for Gabán to respond. The other man was already up and was marching through the thicket to go around the long patch of uncovered space. Just as the *sargént* was about to rise himself and follow, the music of the birds and the light whistle of the wind were broken by the low hum of an engine. A *big* engine.

The *komsargént* stopped in his tracks and turned around. Gabán arched an eyebrow. A tractor? Unlikely. This sounded heavier. Neither of the two spoke a word. Instead, Gabán signaled that he was going to take up a position along the embankment to peer at whatever it was that was coming as it passed by. He moved out before Kabanis had a chance to reluctantly nod his head. The *komsargént* waited nearby, under the cover of the forest, scanning the copse's perimeter along the roadside clearing just as much as he peered at the road itself. Then, they waited as the hum gradually grew louder, until finally it roared above them.

Its tracks clinked as it slowly made its way from one length of the graveled highway to the other. Through the reeds, Gabán could see the head of a helmeted soldier — the commander, most likely — poking out from one of the vehicle's hatches. The thing looked like a squat armored personnel carrier, much like a steel box on treads. As it noisily drove on the commander turned his head to sweep the side of the road with a quick check, the soldier's eyes alert, but they gazed past Gabán without noticing a thing.

The *sargént* let a heavy breath out.

He was muttering under his breath about not liking being that close to danger when there was a *hiss* from the other side of the highway and the world seemed to shake where it stood.

Gabán's eyes glued themselves to the rocket-propelled grenade as it screamed through the air. His mouth barely had time to fall and hang before the missile struck the side of the vehicle, its commander wide-eyed and in mid-yell. The explosion ripped the exposed soldier in half, flinging his torso and head into a backward roll until it hit a tree and slid down its trunk, coming to a gruesome resting position on the ground.

On the black asphalt highway, the armored personnel carrier was smoldering, black smoke from out its exhaust and from the impact area itself. All movement was dead for just a second, enough for Gabán to recover his senses and quietly slip out his assault rifle from his pack. There wasn't the least bit needed minimum of ammunition in his supplies, but if this is where he was going to die, he'd die fighting. Kabanis had done the same, he saw. Suddenly, there was a creak and then the slap of a metal ramp striking the ground. Three soldiers hustled out from within, heads down. They were dragging something. A body, it looked like. Someone who was wounded inside, perhaps? Behind them, the two crewmen emerged as soon as they had room to exit the narrow rear hatch. Cautiously and too slowly, they started to move toward the side, the one opposite where Gabán lay in hiding. *Much* too slowly.

A sudden burst of machinegun fire knifed the sky like the sound of a jackhammer and it was followed by scattered small arms fire. One of the crewmen went down right away, spasming on the road while the others fought on. A trail of blood was coming out of his mouth, spilling onto the black pavement as his eyes finally settled and grew empty. As if his soul had transcended...or simply died along with him. As the crimson blood trickled down the cracks, away from his body, another soldier's head cracked against the gravel like a watermelon, spraying red all over the dead crewman's cold, lifeless face. One by one they were killed. They fought back, but if it was effective Gabán could not see, and most certainly it wasn't helping them from dying.

Finally, the gunfire settled down and the smoke began to clear. Six bodies lay on the floor, the forest quiet again, although the birds had long left in fear and so their music no longer colored the air.

Gabán had forgotten all about the *komsargént*, but when he turned where the man had been crouching just a few minutes ago Kabanis was already right by his side. It would have startled him, if the man hadn't done it to him before. They both remained silent as they continued looking at the site of the massacre. A pit started to form in Gabán's stomach, and he wasn't sure if it was fear or anticipation.

Three soldiers dressed in a strange mixture of local clothing emerged from the otherside of the road, scrambling of the embankment and swarming the corpses on the ground. They started to pickpocket the dead, taking weapons, ammunition, boots, armor, and just about anything of use. They probably would have tried to take the vehicle if it wasn't still sizzling from the missile strike. Just exactly how much damage had been done to the vehicle Gabán could not see, as it was on the opposite side of the armored car, the one facing the opposite embankment. They may have worn local clothing, fired local guns, and looked nothing like professional soldiers, but these were *Koro Kirim*.

Aparently, Kabanis was already thinking the same thing. "Dagger," whispered, almost, the *komsargént*.

The tension multiplied. Three heads turned suddenly, surprised, on edge, and all looked in the same direction — toward the two men hiding behind the tall reeds that hid embankment on the forest's side. They continued looking for a few seconds, as if calculating their next move. And then one finally replied, questioningly, "Blade." Behind him, the other two raised their rifles and pointed them in the direction of the voice.

The *komsargént* nodded at Gabán. He nodded back and rose, slowly walking up the short slope that led to the side of the highway. From where they were perched around the knocked-out armored personnel carrier, the other three just looked at him approach. He realized then that he was wearing just as strange as a 'uniform' as them, with more local rags than the original clothing he had come in. Except for the identifying words — which, for all any of them knew, had already been compromised by the enemy —, neither side knew who the other truly was. That made the *sargént* a little bit more nervous as he walked up to the group. The two in the back still hadn't lowered their weapons. It made him step a little bit more cautiously.

"What unit you soldiers from?" he asked, after no one else had volunteered to speak.

Silence greeted him at first, but finally it was the man closest to him who spoke. "Doesn't matter anymore, our units are long gone. Hell, I think mine suffered ten out of ten casualties. I was the only exception, the only one to hit the ground in one piece." Looking at him, and then toward where he had come out from behind the reeds and where Kabanis still waited, he added, "You two a unit?" There were some chuckles from the two guys farther behind the talker, obviously also the leader.

Kabanis rose from where he was not very successfully hiding. Gabán wondered how the Scandinvan commander had missed him. He sidestepped the snark. "I haven't met a single local who speaks Díenstadi half as well as you do, guy, so I guess that marks us as friendlies. That means you boys back there can lower your weapons and get back to scavenging."

The leader turned his head and nodded, and it was only then that the two other soldiers lowered their rifles. They didn't go back to what they were doing, though, their eyes frail with wariness and alarm.

Looking back at Gabán and then the *komsargént*, the leader asked, "Only two of you? No companions?"

Gabán lowered his eyes. Kabanis' voice, though, boomed. "Just the two of us. I'm *Komsargént* Kabanis. This is *Sargént* Gabán." He paused to take a look at all three of the soldiers, his eyes stopping on the two other ones especially. "Look," he said finally, "we could work together or my comrade and I can just keep moving. I obviously prefer the former, but I ain't about to have a debate about it. Obviously, we're all who we say we are, so I trust we can resolve this little run-in peacefully. I need all my bullets for the enemy, I can't afford to waste them on you folk. What'chu say?"

Glancing one more time at the two men behind him, the leader finally nodded and reached inside a deep pant pocket. He removed from it a small device that looked turned off. Gabán recognized it. He had lost his in the drop and the chaos that came from it. Without it he had been completely starved from supplies. "You two might come in handy, actually."

At the sound of that, Gabán smiled. It was about time there was someone to talk to other than Kabanis. Or, someone who would talk at all, rather.

Outside of Cinmer

July, 2027

An arid wind entered from the east in the early hours of the mid-summer morning. Birds chirped and leaves rustled as the sun slowly climbed toward its position at the apex of the sky. Sweat dripped off of Gabán's face, his long, wet hair falling loosely along the back of his neck. It had been a long hour since the last time he cut it. Since landing, he realized.

"You know, I don't know how I feel having a *Zadaka* with us. You tell us all these stories about killing Macabéan's in the March, it's like you're proud of it. How can I really trust you have my back, Gonzales?" Abruk meant it facetiously, certainly, but his cold tone and expressionless face suggested otherwise. Still, the joke was well worn out. Apparently, Abruk and Tenobi had been bullying the kid since the day they first met each other. The day after the landing, they said. And since the very first hour, Gonzales' heritage became a running gag that Gabán was not sure he appreciated, and not because he liked Gonzales.

Gabán had been sent to the Zarbian March for bloodying after graduating from infantry school. By then the fighting had become more limited and the clashes smaller, yet he could never forget his legs dragging through the knee-dep mud of Zarbia's western forests during the rainy season. The synchronous bright reds and oranges of erupting firefights as they cleared a trench line still painted his memories as vividly as if it had all happened yesterday. He remembered how young most of the soldiers he killed were. Some were no older than thirteen. They said that Zarbia's fathers had died in the first years of the civil war, that's why her children now how to fight. Years of harsh jungle warfare had honed young men like Gonzales into hard rocks that, with the right training, turned out to be diamonds in the rough. A Zarbian in the *Koro Kirim*, a *regulare* unit, was a testament to that. Even Kabanis, the gristled thirteen-year veteran, showed the young boy a respect usually reserved for more veteran operatives.

Gonzales was only 17. His first day of combat was not long after his 11th birthday. "Fuck you, Abruk," the *Zadaka* — a pejorative term, to be clear — said. "Remember to sleep with one eye open." He winked.

Sargént Abruk smiled back with a toothless grin that was more murderous than anything else. The two of them enjoyed a sadistic friendship that Gabán struggled to understand. It was nice to have them around nonetheless, and if Kabanis never talked to him anymore, at least these two did. And despite their shortcomings, having comrades by your side was a priceless comfort forty-thousand

kilometers from home.

"Abruk, tell me again, how did you lose your teeth?" Gabán taunted more than asked, giving a quick upward nod with his head.

"Your mother knocked 'em out last night, after I made her squeal in delight and tremble in ecstasy." Behind them, Tenobi barked a laugh. The *Gi'Sargént* was walking with Kabanis, who remained silent. His face was still stone hard and when Gabán turned to look at him, the *Komsargént* did not look back. Six months it had been, and the man still hadn't forgiven him for the death of Níalis. That pressure of never being able to redeem himself in front of Kabanis' eyes weighed heavily on Gabán, just as heavily as the silence and loneliness of the long months before stumbling upon the others. It made him grim when Abruk and Gonzales had found a source of happiness despite their situation.

He gave the *sargént* a wry look. "I *thought* that was you masturbating last night. Man, there are some hotter women out there to think about. Shit man, your girl even, I let her smother my face with her double d's when I dream. Shit, just might pursue that in reality when we get back home. Maybe you should stop showing me those pics you got of her before I go pay her a visit."

"Just remember to run fast when I chase you down, 'else you might find yourself castrated with your bloody balls in your mouth," Abruk shot back, chuckling.

Gabán was about to retort when Kabanis snarled, "Shut the *fuck* up, or I'll kill all three of you. Undoubtedly the *Gi'sargént* and I would do better fighting the Woodards who will come at the sound of your shouting ourselves." He talked low so that his words carried only to them. Still, Kabanis' commanding voice cracked like a whip and they shut their mouths immediately. It was easy to forget them because they were so sparse in the areas they marched through, but the Woodards — as the Scandivans were known to them [ed. borrowing from the meaning of the archaic word 'wood,' standing for mad or insane] — were an omnipresent threat that was best always at the forefront of one's mind. Especially here, so close to civilization.

Sometimes, the evening's dry, high summer winds would blow in the noise of Scandinvan townsmen to the east. Conversations in a foreign tongue flowed in as if from all directions, rarely audible enough to understand, even for the machines strapped to them that listened and analyzed. Not too far, less than eight kilometers away, sat **Cinmer**.

It was, for its size, a quiet city that seemed more scholastic than commercial, as were most towns in this country, as it turned out. They tried not to skirt too close to it, lest they be discovered by farmers on their way to the field or by police patrols. Since the APC incident, the Scandinvan military had made itself scarce, making that an isolated event. That seemed suspicious on its own, and Kabanis had brought it up more than once. But, it wasn't the first time Tenobi and his men had come across the enemy's soldiers, apparently. That only made Kabanis more suspicious, if anything. Gabán was inclined to agree with him, although he did not actually speak in support in fear that the *komsargént* would rebuke him even in agreement. Still, they had seen no enemy armor or soldiers for over three months, a third of which they had spent here, in the vicinity of Cinmer.

In the city's center sat the beautiful Cathedral of Cinmer, with its brilliant rose window that sat like the stunning remnants of a shattered star, pieces of tinted glass glittered under the sun. Cathedral of Cinmer was how it was categorized as in the data they'd send back to *Kríermak* 'Gholgoth' *Kommand*, at least, for its true name they did not know — guesses aside. Around it sat other squat buildings with beautiful clay tile roofs and decorated with the occasional buttress and column, like the regal cathedral that towered above it all. Drums banged deeply in the distance, strong-armed monks calling the city's people to prayer.

Despite its timid demeanor, Cinmer was by no means a small city. *Gi'Sargént* Tenobi estimated that over a million lived in the city itself, with another ten to twenty million housed in its surrounding suburbs.¹ Not a small city, by any means. Moving in and out of it was tricky and only two of them attempted it at any given time, the group rarely running a mission more than once a week. They took time to prepare, long hours of observance, finding patterns in the city's routines that could be exploited for discreteness. Every city has its own flow, its own metabolism, like a complex organism with veins, organs, and muscles, breathing and acting. It was this they studied, to learn how to best exploit it. When they succeeded, which was not on every attempt, the *Koro Kirim* men sought books and films, when there were any. Everything was scanned or recorded, then put back in place, minimizing dislocation and evidence. Only in the direst of moments were they allowed to use their weapons in self-defense, and such dire circumstances had not come yet — even when Kabanis and Gonzales had been cornered by unsuspecting gendarme personnel making a routine patrol.

It had been by a cat's short whisker that they exited the city at all, let alone without being detected.

Sometimes they could be in there for three or four days. It depended on how the city was behaving. Local customs were largely unknown, making random spikes in activity too likely of an uncertainty to risk. Therefore they moved carefully, ready to take all the precautions necessary, even staying put for most of the day for as simple a sake as remaining undetected. It was not always easy.

Only four weeks ago Gabán had been sent in with Abruk. The second day of their mission, as they were readying to extract themselves through one of the main arteries that led to the western countryside, the area was swept by some sort of ceremony. Of what nature the two of them did not know. These customs were not like the ones from home; they were fascinating to observe. However, as they fortified themselves in the attic above an abandoned top-story apartment, they soon found that the apartment was not abandoned at all and that its occupants made frequent use of the attic. Hiding in the dark had been hard enough; creeping back down, making their way across rarely empty and always narrow streets, was the far more difficult task, for certain. That they had not been seen had been a miracle, if it was true that they hadn't. There was never any way of confirming one way or the other, of course.

They had collected far more data than they ever expected and it was not long before there was a general mood that it was time to move on. Thus, they found themselves on a dusty dirt road headed in a generally southward direction. Cinmer was on their left shoulder, behind rolling hills covered with tall green trees that were beginning to dry in anticipation of autumn. To their west was nothing but farmland and the occasional stone-building town.

Southwest of their position was a broad plain that they had been observing in passing. Pastors used it for their herds to graze, but there are large parts of it going completely unused for long enough periods of time. Certainly, long enough in between for them to retrieve supplies from a capsule.

That had taken a long discussion. All five of them had stayed up during the night, debating whether to call for a supply drop. Tenobi and his men had done it only once before, with no unwanted surprises when they arrived to retrieve. Apparently, the drop had been conducted undetected. Good omens that brought and it was them three who were the most ecstatic about the possibility of calling a second one. Kabanis was less sure. Gabán did not think they needed one. It was the wealth of data that came from Cinmer that pushed Kabanis toward the ledge, and Gabán's opinion held little value if Kabanis did not ask for it.

"We must do it, Kabanis, for the good of our brothers who will strike the beach," said Tenobi, Abruk and Gonzales nodding approvingly behind him. "That data is indispensable. And we can download any

updates to the database that any other unit out there may have uploaded. It's well worth the risk. It may even crack the language for us, imagine the possibilities then."

The *komsargént* had groaned then. Up where the stars sparkled, something suddenly flashed. Perhaps another shuttle blasting from out a Skyan airport toward Greater Díenstad. The flash of the afterburners was a common sight in the clear Scandinvan nights. Gabán sometimes wondered what the Scandinvans, so seemingly out of touch with the world outside, thought of those colors that stroked the dark sky all so often when another shuttle boomed into lower orbit. He wondered if the Scandinvans were ambitious enough to one day reach the moon and what lay beyond it. The truth was, he realized, all five of them still knew very little of the country they had spent seven months in already. "The invasion is a year off, Tenobi. Uploading our data can wait. Besides, the city is still too close. What if they see the capsule land? What if they too go to it? To see what it is, what it contains, or perhaps to anticipate us."

"What if we all die, *Komsargént*?" replied Abruk. "Who will upload the data then? All of our work, for nothing."

"We need more ammunition, more weapons, too," followed Tenobi, who shot a glare at the *sargént*. This was a discussion between the two senior team members. Gabán stayed out of him, studying his hands as the glare of the dull embers danced across his hands, which lay in his lap. "The time to call the drop is now, and another one in a year, when it comes time to head into the marsh. That gives us enough time to ready ourselves for what is to come."

The *komsargént* was not persuaded. This back-and-forth continued well into the morning hours, and it seemed they had hardly slept at all when they awoke at four-thirty in the morning. Finally, though, Kabanis relented. The supply capsule would be called. They'd request lightweight anti-tank ordnance, more rifle munition, grenades, and even explosives. Medicines they asked for too, including freeze-dried plasma, drugs — including painkillers —, and disinfectants. And new communication equipment, as well. That was the most important of all; most of them had lost all of their electronics in the landing when they lost their power armor to the impacts.

Now it was three days later, and toward the drop point they marched.

They arrived as the sun was still yellow, but hanging low to the west. It would soon begin to darken until the only light was the one reflected off the moon and the stars. It was a shallow valley nestled between four low-rising hills. Those short they were, the knolls hid the location fairly well from human sight, which made it the best candidate for the actual drop zone. Looking for a good place to wait, they set up position beneath the crisp, brown branches of tall pines which provided little shade, if any at all. The brown rags they wore blended in nicely, however, and from where they crouched they had an excellent view of the valley before them.

It was not long before they heard the whine of an inbound object that made them all look sharply upwards. The sun still hung in the sky, no matter how low now, and white plums were hardly visible against the clouds as the pod entered the atmosphere. If its trail did not draw attention, though, surely the ball of fire gathering around it as it burned and plummeted toward the earth was enough to draw wandering eyes. Gabán wondered whether they could see it from Cinmer, and he tisked when he realized that they could likely see it all over Gholgoth. The metal capsule came down like a meteor, slowing only when it shed metallic skin from the top. It continued to hang from the bottom, such that when the slabs of meta turned downwards they were caught at a position perpendicular to the bulbous body of the shell. These made the thing flare even more, and the flaps soon snapped off, all of it — pieces and main body, together — hit the ground with a heavy *thud*.

When the dust settled, they moved out and closed in on the

contraption. Long wisps of smoke rose into the air like twisting serpents that slithered and turned with every movement, as if the thing were steaming. As they moved closer, it shed another narrow sliver of metal skin, this time making a small door big enough for only their head and torsos, it seemed. It was a port to access what was inside, according to how Gonzales had once described it to Gabán.

Then, when they made another step forward, something creaked in the treeline to the right. "Did you guys hear that?" whispered Abruk.

"Get down," ordered Kabanis, who fell into a prone position below the abysmally low cover of the valley's wild grasses.

A spurt of gunfire abruptly erupted from where they had all heard the noise and then it ceased as quickly as it had come. Then it started up again and this time a machine gun followed suit, clipping the dirt around them. "Shit, why the fuck are the Woodards here?" swore Gonzales. "Too coincidental to be coincidence, don't ya think?"

"Stop talking and lay down fire," snapped Teboni, who was already shooting back. He had his rifle to his shoulder and he took calm shots, squeezing the trigger in a long, steady rhythm that seemed calculated. Most soldiers in this situation might have fired without discipline, just for the sake of overwhelming an enemy that had quite evidently ambushed them, but these responded with an order true to the *Koro Kirim*. As soon as Tenobi and Gonzales took some of the pressure off of them, forcing the enemy back behind cover, Kabanis pointed at Gabán and directed the *sargént* to come to him

The *komsargént* whispered, "Do you see where the two hills come together, where the trees recede a little?" He looked toward the northern and western knolls, at a junction that corresponded to the assumed flank of whatever enemy force had caught them out cold. When Gabán nodded, Kabanis went on, "Take point and lead me there. We'll regroup for our next move there. Understood?"

"Got it," replied Gabán, but by then the *komsargént* was hassling with his gestures to move out.

And so Gabán did, Kabanis tightly behind him. Tenobi, Abruk, and Gonzales maintained fire in the direction that the enemy had fired from as the two other men made their way across the exposed northern end of the valley. Fire came down upon them, but the enemy was too far or they were under too much pressure from the other three *Koro Kirim*. Their rounds struck hollow, allowing Gabán and Kabanis to reach the wooded orchard, where they kneeled against the thick, gnarled trunk of a tall, ancient oak. There, hidden behind crisscrossing branches and the gray-brown bodies of trees, was a line of perhaps twenty Scandinavian soldiers. They were the garb that Gabán had learned to associate with the gendarme, meaning that they had most likely come from Cinmer. Perhaps they were on patrol and had seen the capsule come down, deciding to veer off their route to see what it was that had made all the commotion. Perhaps they were here to report back to their commanders in the city.

Whoever they were, they broke off as soon as they caught sight of Kabanis and Gabán to their side. Three or four of them stayed behind to cover the others' withdrawal. Kabanis hit one in the arm with his rifle. Gabán clipped another in the leg, and this one toppled over and cried out in pain. One of the withdrawing soldiers managed to run back under fire, haul the man Gabán had hit onto his shoulder and escaped into the thickening woods. The one Kabanis had shot was still sobbing, his yelps ringing from one hill to another. He whimpered as the two operatives slowly walked to him, staying in a low crouch unless these fighters turn around and attack once again.

They waited for some time, the Scandinavian's complaints had grown meek now, out of fear. It may have been fear of death or perhaps fear of what these foreigners were going to do to him. When they were adequately sure that the enemy was not returning, Kabanis rose and went to stand beside the dying man. The Scandinavian started to

mutter in his language. The *komsargént* revealed the scanning device they had been using to read local books and he flipped it on. It recorded the soldier as he jerked his muscles and spat his strange words. Kabanis must have been pleased with the footage for he turned the device off, placed it back into a pocket along his pant leg, and unholstered his sidearm.

He pointed it at the man, the harsh steel muzzle looking at the forehead. The Scandinvan quieted as if resigned to his fate, almost as if welcoming it. Kabanis pulled the trigger and a loud *bang* resounded. In a flash, the soldier's face was a bloody mess, and the dying man was finally out of his misery. Despite the circumstances, Gabán hoped him a peaceful transcendence to the afterlife.

Out in the valley, Abruk fell on his back and lay with legs and arms sprawled. He let out a long sigh.

"Why the hell were they out here?" asked Gonzales.

"No idea," answered Tenobi. "All I know is that we've been caught, so we better extract what we came for and get the hell out of here." All three of them got up and continued making their way to the center of the valley, where the shiny pod patiently awaited their arrival. Two immediately began to reach in and pull out weapons, pouches full of medicines, and other assets, while the third linked his device to the capsule. Gabán and the *komsargént* caught up with them soon after. Gabán scanned the tree line as they revealed weapons, ammunition, and plenty of other goodies from inside the steel supply crate, and a certain tingle of warning never left him as they made their way back out of the valley, southwards, as day became night.

The Ambush

Early-August, 2027

As the valley stretched between the southern and western hill, the land reached a point where the knoll ended in the form of a terraced cliff. The dirt road circumscribed this cliff along the upper tier, its right side ending abruptly at another sheer drop. This pathway too was only wide enough for a horse-driven cart. Not even a farmer's tractor could have braved it.

It was there that they first caught a glimpse at what was coming for them. Off in the direction from whence they came, where Cinmer lay, the sun glinted off the steel hull of some sort of armored vehicle. When Tenobi looked through his binoculars he reported mid-sized hulls with heavy cannons protruding from turrets. Infantry fighting vehicles, from the sound of it. There were four of them, he related, moving as a patrolling force. There was no trail of dust behind them. They moved along the paved highway that serviced the city. Suddenly, they turned on to a small rural dirt road, heading straight toward the operatives who observed them on the move.

"Keep on," had said Kabanis, brusklly, lightly pushing Gabán forward. The *sargént* obliged, but he grumbled under his breath.

The *komsargént's* animosity hadn't lessened and now Gabán was returning some of the same syrup. It was a dynamic that could not last long, but one that both men put up with while they marched on. They saw not a single new enemy until one week later as July transitioned to August, when they found themselves traversing one hill that rose above its sisters in the area. As they crested it, Abruk peered down to the west and with suppressed surprise when quietly exclaiming, "Enemy, four o'clock."

Heads turned to look at a platoon-sized column that moved along the opposite side of a far hill's ridge. Their bouncing helmets were just barely visible as dark silhouettes against the morning's orange-red sky. Kabanis turned his head even further, peering behind them, searching for that tall column of dust that never seemed to leave

them. It had followed them since they first caught the convoy from the cliffside path. His mouth twisted in the way when the *komsargént* realized something was sour. Despite the frigid depths to which their relationship had plunged to, Gabán knew that expression and was alarmed by it. "What's up, *Komsargént*?" he asked, with some concern in his voice.

"This ain't coincidence," he growled. "I knew we shouldn't have called that damn supply drop."

Tenobi turned and snapped, "Relax, you two are just paranoid." A drop of water struck him on the nose and he stopped to lock up. The one dropped turned to two, then to four, and so on while the sky grew gray and cloudy, until finally it simply began to pour. "Great," the *gi'sargént* said, "let's keep moving. We'll go another hour and then we'll set up camp. Hopefully, the skies will clear by tomorrow morning."

Kabanis' mouth was deadset and grim, but he finally nodded. It was Gabán who spoke, "If they *are* chasing us, we better hope that does stop raining tomorrow, 'cuz there ain't no way we're going to see that armored column behind us as long as the roads are wet. And there ain't no way we're going to see them creeping up on us before it's too late. I recommend we turn the problem on its head and change course, take them off guard. If they're *not* looking for us, they'll be none the wiser and we'll but lose a few days. A fair trade for safety, I think. And if the *komsargént* is right, we'll have saved ourselves a whole lot of trouble."

"I don't know," replied the *gi'sargént*. "We don't know the land. We follow the roads and, when we can, a river. Those are the rules. We change course now, with this kind of visibility, who knows what we'll run into. An enemy patrol maybe." The skies were showering now and he had to shout. "There's worse we could run into," he yelled over the late summer's storm deafening drumbeat, "just hope it's not those IFVs."

The three of them looked at each other for a few seconds while the other two, Abruk and Gonzales, looked around them, their bodies in a loose pose that seemed ready to flow into combat with rifles at hand. The Zarbman had a DNR-13 slung across his back, the strap hanging from his thick, short neck. Finally, Tenobi said, "C'mon, we have to keep moving. We'll talk on the go, let's move."

He turned and continued southward, Abruk and Gonzales tailing him. Gabán went when Kabanis started. The *komsargént* nodded at him approvingly. The *sargént* arched his eyebrow at Kabanis when the *komsargént* turned away. They started walking and, when a small distance had opened between the two groups, the senior operative fell back to march alongside the man he had essentially ignored for the past six months. Water ran down his face as Kabanis spoke, his eyes two blue daggers made of ice. "Listen, Gabán. We're walking into something here, you know it as well as I. Tenobi and his boys have been making noise since they landed. Hell, this wasn't their first drop call and those things ain't exactly stealthy. Think about it. That APC we ran into, that wasn't an accident. It was looking for someone, for them. We're being tracked down, closed on as we leave clues, and we may have just left the biggest one of all to an enemy who's been looking for it."

Thunder clapped across the sky and a bolt of lightning ripped through dark, humid clouds, followed by a trail of electricity.

The pattern of the rain's fall seemed to open before Gabán, like the curtains of a window being pulled apart, and he saw for a brief second Gonzales turned around, his mouth opening and closing in an exaggerated way. He was yelling, Gabán realized. He looked at the *komsargént* and gestured. Kabanis grimaced and plowed forward, closing the gap to reach the other group of *Koro Kirim*. Gabán hurried to follow.

"Keep the fuck up," roared Tenobi, who was looking back at them.

"We can't afford to split apart and get lost."

As they kept moving, the rain began to come down even harder and lightning was prancing above them, thorned stems striking down at the earth at the command of the thunderous symphony. They descended down the hill into a narrow valley, traveling south against a rising wind that howled through the gnarled branches of the flanking forests. Perhaps hours went by, that's how long it seemed anyway, struggling against the elements to march on. Gabán's skin started to prick up with that same tingle he got a week before, after the firefight at the supply drop. Danger was near, he could feel it in his gut.

Shadows began to lurk in the heights as the light played tricks on his eyes. The hair on the back of his neck had raised, like a wolf with raised hackles. The valley had broadened and its perimeter was no longer visible through the storm's chaos. The five men continued on a straight path, a blind, but steady direction. Better than a blind and unknown direction.

Abruk was at point, leading the *Koro Kirim* column with *Gi'Sargént* Tenobi behind him. Gabán could see them clearly under the flash of lightning until they disappeared again behind the dark wall of rain. When a bolt struck across the sky the *gi'sargént's* body stood rigid for a brief second, the head seemingly was gone except for scraps of blood and bubbling flesh, until it fell limp. The night went black again. At the third bolt, Gabán could see Abruk still walking forward and Gonzales' shocked face. Kabanis was at his most natural, scowling. It was like a slow-motion movie, until a bullet slicked by Gabán's head, clipping his ear like a wasp's sting. The world began to speed up.

Tenobi's decapitated body was still writhing on the floor as Gonzales ran up behind Abruk to pull him down to the ground. Kabanis took Gabán by the collar and pulled him down. The gunfire came in a cadence, in a rhythm with the lightning, he realized. They needed to find cover, somewhere out of the line of sight. Behind them, up the valley's embankment, there was forestland. That's how had it had been as far as he could see, up until the first fall of rain, why would it change now?

It sounded as if the raindrops began to thud even louder against the wet soil they lay against, but then the *sargént* realized that it was the Zarbian and Abruk firing off into the distance. Gabán looked toward what they were attacking to see black figures in the heights around them with every strike of lightning. "We have to get out of here," he shouted. "We need to retreat into the woodline behind us, disappear into the forest."

Kabanis looked behind them. "I don't see it," he said.

"Me neither," Gabán shouted back. "But it's our best bet."

The *komsargént* nodded. He turned to Tenobi's men. "Ceasefire!" he yelled. "Ceasefire!" They kept firing. At the light of another rod of heavenly fire a bullet struck Gonzales in the shoulder. The rifled rolled away from his hands. Abruk kept firing as another round entered through the Zarbian's skull and out the neck, entering through back of his prone body. Darkness swept over them once again. The sound of war blended in with the storm's concert, a harmonious duo that played to hooves of hell's horsemen. Kabanis growled and yelled one more time, "Ceasefire!", before reaching out to rip the rifle right out of Abruk's hands. Gonzales was already dead, but another round punctured his body through his eye. Abruk's face contorted in horror and he saw what had become of his companion in this forsaken land. The *komsargént* planted himself directly before the terrified man and grabbed him by the back of his head. "Snap out of it, soldier, lest you meet the same fate as them."

Gabán's rifle was at his shoulders by this time. "Go!" he shouted, "I'll cover you."

Under the pounding rain, Kabanis and a shaken Abruk hustled across

hidden terrain toward the back wall of the valley. Gabán followed, walking backward as he shot blindly towards where the thought the enemy was. Finally, when his heel touched the lower end of the slope, he turned to start the climb up. The *komsargént* and the shocked Abruk were already over halfway up, not too far from where the treeline was thought to be. The *sargént* struggled to pick up his pace, afraid to be left behind or to be picked off by an enemy marksmen at the next bolt of lightning. Gabán had almost reached them by the time they topped the rise.

This time, the thunder rolled on in a calamitous way, bolts doing their particular dance upon the earth like veins that crisscrossed the land like tendrils of a membrane. The skies opened up as if all the gods struck in anger at once and loud winds threatened to sweep them all away. Gabán turned his head left out of happenstance as he continued to climb.

There, illuminated by the ongoing electric storm, rose the profiles of the four IFVs they had seen one week ago. The same one that had been following them ever since. They rose from the far hill they had marched down just hours ago, their protruding cannons staring at him like cyclopes readying themselves for a charge. A bullet struck by his hand, which along the ground as he scrambled up the knoll, and his head snapped forward again. This time saw Abruk draped around Kabanis, his legs drooping as if threatening to give way beneath him. The *komsargént* gently lay on the ground and went prone, disappearing over the lip of the ridge only to appear again and reach down to Gabán. "Take my hand!" the *komsargént* yelled. "Take it!" Kabanis looked toward the hills where the IFVs waited and his jaw tensed. He looked down with that wintery gaze. "Let's go, Gabán. Grab my damn hand."

The *sargént* did so finally and pulled himself up over the crest of the embankment. Not two hundred meters away he could see the grim, vague shape of the forestland. Abruk was bleeding out under black clouds, his eyes red as the rain fell upon them. Red was trickling from his mouth as he lay on his back. They weren't going to move very fast bringing along a man in his condition.

Abruk seemed to realize the problem himself. "Go," he said. "I'll hold them off while you guys run."

"No," replied Kabanis. "We won't leave you behind."

"You have to," the wounded man shot back. "I'm no good. I'm a dead man. It's time to forget about me, leave me behind, and think about yourselves. You two are more valuable alive than dead, so you best get a move on." He gritted his teeth as the pain coursed through him. "Go! Go!" With pained determination he turned over to his stomach and crawled to face back down the hill they had come from. He grabbed his rifle and brought it to his shoulder. "Go!" he said one last time, then opening fire as he screamed. Kabanis and Gabán looked at him in pity, then at each other, and then turned to leave.

Abruk's scream haunted them until they reached the treeline. It cut off at the explosive boom of cannon fire behind them. Gabán looked back to see the edge of the hill light up in a display of fire only for his collar to be grabbed by the *komsargént's* large hand, pulled away into the depths of branches and roots, where hopefully the enemy would not find them.

Behind them, they left behind three of their dead. Another three men who had died in their companionship. Three to add to Níalis.

Kabanis and Gabán slowly crept through the forest in the dead of night, running away from fate as much as from flesh.

Notes

1. Cinmer's actual populations are 1.5 million city proper, 15 million metro.

[**N.B.** This post will be periodically edited for spelling and grammatical errors, as well as to improve flow. As usual, the substance of the post will not be changed.]

Last edited by [The Macabees](#) on Wed Oct 25, 2017 10:06 pm, edited 1 time in total.

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Mokastana
Ambassador

Posts: 1554
Founded: Feb 20, 2007
Democratic Socialists

by [Mokastana](#) » Mon Nov 06, 2017 10:10 am



Batis, Firmador

"I hear the Tsarina sent you...Fetch. Tell me, what offer does she bring to the empire?" he asked, the sarcasm subtle, but razor-like.

"That she did... That she did. I'm not gonna beat around the brush with you. She commands an army on the Mainland, she has connections to the military of the Duel Republican Front of Firmador, the militias of the Jiyu Front of Free slaves, and even has the Somoza Cartel bowing down to her, well, most of the Cartel anyways. With her assistance, you could double your army and control overnight. Even have access to the lake the communists control ever since they took Liberia. In exchange, she wants to make sure her business remains unmolested. The communist don't look to kindly on drug dealers, and they already took Liberia from us. Last I checked, the Golden Throne has a reputation for being more accepting of our kind of businesses.

So here's our offer, the DRFF army forsakes their current regime and backs you, the Jiyu front is willingly annexed, the Cartel Soldiers outside of Colon stop their guerrilla campaign, and the Tsarina will provide you evidence and intelligence on the Cartel troops on the island of Medellin.

In exchange, our business will continue unmolested post war, legal under the new regime. The Tsarina doesn't want to govern, but she would like a say in how they govern. I believe those are fair terms, now, do you have the power to make a deal, or do I need to discuss this with someone else?"

Jonn Noram sat silently, mulling over the man's words. His lips curled into an almost smirk, like a hidden look of amusement. His beady eyes remained sharp, although that very well may have simply been his bird-like face that seemed to look at you like a raven. Noram was not a pretty man and he very well knew that. A scar cut from just below his right ear down to his collarbone, where it had been seared by a piece of shrapnel he received at Targul Frumos. Some called him intimidating, others unapproachable, and his reputation for intensity did him no favors in the likeability department either. Jonn thought he looked as a military commander should, not handsome, but fierce. And despite his almost-smile, the way he looked at the men brought before him was as frosty as his natural face — like winter's heart.

Truth be told, it was uncommon for military men to strike political deals. Agents usually took care of that in the shadows, off the battlefield. The generals were simply informed on who their allies were and who their enemies. But that did not mean there wasn't any flexibility. He could most certainly take a gamble and this man Fetch's offer was a good one. Not that he would make this an easy negotiation.

Fetch and his comrades had been brought to Noram's office, well inside the main building of the ad hoc *krierstatón*. The permanent base would be built three dozen kilometers to the north, well away from the city. No matter, although not exactly fit for a palace or even a minor lord's house, the office was far from Lyran [note 1]. A

broad table made of dark, finely carved wood, with scrollwork travelling up and down legs that ended in feet carved like a lion's feet, sat between him and his guests. Light green walls stood plain; most commanders displayed plaques of their victories, but the defeat at Salvasupuesta Sea was too much of a stain for him to try to mask it with laurels that now seemed insignificant. There was, however, a bookcase full of leather bound books and thick field manuals. Three of his guards, and a fourth soldier — a master-at-arms, as it looked —, stood by the door, their sidearms holstered by their hips. They looked hard at the opposite wall, all except the unknown man with his guards. He looked about to piss his pants. In another situation he may have even chuckled.

As it was, he stared at each of the Tsarista's men in turn, with a piercing gaze that he'd give to a sailor spitting an excuse for bad behavior. He waited in silence, as if waiting for them to amend their offer due to some unknown thing that the *admirant* disapproved of. Truth was, he had already decided to be flexible. The emperor wanted a quick war in Firmador and Nicaro, and this was the quickest way of ending it.

"All that production, manufacturing, and distribution requires labor, no?" he said, more than asked, ending a bout of silence that had already gone beyond awkward. "Where I come from, that's expensive. Labor here is cheap, I concede. But what in ten years, twenty? As money pours in, it will cost you more to do the same. That's if we run the Tsarina's territory *our* way. People will move to the cities, competitors will come in, you understand. That's how we do business. To do what you want to do, to stay in business over the long-term, your Tsarina is going to have to run things *her* way. And, the empire wouldn't have it any other way, in exchange for her fealty."

Continuing, "Of course, there's no such thing as a free lunch and for all the good that intelligence does us, it is not enough — it does not tie you to the throne. The Tsarina will pay a tribute. I don't care how it's done. Tax the people to death, for all I care. They're hers to govern, and if she doesn't want to then tell her to appoint a council of the twelve people she trusts the most. Everything in her current control, as well as annexed Nicaro up to the Chinadenga borders will be hers to exploit for her...business."

"We will destroy the Samoza Cartel, one way or another," he added. "You and I, and she, know their hold will weaken to a point where she will be able to access those productive assets. Our armies will of course guard the countryside, and it will continue to fight the pirates and shell the Qurigharis, but why would they disturb a legitimate operation?" he asked, rhetorically. "There will be willing customers, have no doubt about that. Do you need to take that to the Tsarina, or can you negotiate yourself?" He finished that with a smile. The Golden Throne was good for business, he knew. The north, Firmador, would slowly prosper — hardly a paradise at first —, but a growing society that would soon be able to afford a drug habit. And who would they turn to for supplies? Most certainly the Tsarina.

Fetch returned the favor, taking his time to respond, looking at his men, and back to the Commanding Officer in front of him. They were going to pawn the job of governance into the Tsarina, something she didn't want, but Fetch knew he could build her a puppet government. One that could pay the tribute requested. He turned back to his men once more, smiled and then began speaking to the CO.

"The Tsarina wouldn't have sent me here if I wasn't able to negotiate on her behalf. She trust me to get her a good deal, and I intend to. If she doesn't like my agreement, she'll impale my head on a spike. Seems fair to me.

As for your deal, what are we buying with that Tribute? Will the Throne protect us in case of invasion? Are we a puppet state of the Throne? Subjects? Obviously good customers are valuable, and your forces will be welcome into the Tsarina territory at any time. We are a business after all, not an army. But what good is paying Tribute if

anyone who isn't a fan of our products can march in and shut us down at any time?

I'm sure you won't care what happens on our side of the border, but certainly you'll care to keep those payments coming in. With the right support we may even find a way to rival the Mokan drug trade. Hell, drug money turned that banana hell hole into a local power. Imagine what it could do here."

"Pay your tribute," answered the *admiránt*, "and your business won't just be safe, it'll be *legal*. My words are as good as the emperor's, that I assure you. And as for invasions," he continued, "I wouldn't worry about that, either. The emperor's troops will be here for a very long time, permanently if all goes right. And until we're dislodged, an unlikely event, the Tsarina's production will be legal, protected by law and by foreign threat, under the jurisdiction of the new Satrapal government." He paused, then said, "We have already pledged our support for the GNLF government. It will rule over the country, as our vassals. The area of the Tsarina's control, or that of her council, which she or it will administrate separate from the business...*in theory*," but not in reality was the implication, "will be organized as a prefecture of the new satrapy. You are guaranteed the autonomy you need to create the necessary conditions for your manufacturing and distribution operations, but as a legal business it would be required for you to also pay a levy to the Satrapal government. Your Tribute to the empire forms part of this; it will be paid as a levy to the Satrapy and the Satrapy shall in turn pay for the entirety of the Imperial Tribute. Agree to this and the Tsarina will no longer be a cartel leader, she'll be the CEO of a billion-dollar company...and governor of her own prefecture, de facto or otherwise."

Before Fetch could answer, Noram nodded to the master-at-arms standing near the door. "You, what's your name?"

"Um, Ar-Argüel, s-sir," the soldier stammered.

"Okay, Argüel. Make yourself useful and go down the hall and ask for my secretary. You'll know him when you see him. Tell him to get his ass in here and tell him to bring his computer." With that, the *admiránt* turned his attention back to Fetch and his men, while the Macabéan soldier quickly slipped out the door.

Fetch smiled at the offer, the Tsarina may not care about running her own government, but Fetch did. For as the Tsarina knew, his loyalty wasn't entirely for her but a foreign power far in the east. Still, she knew as long as Fetch's true owners wanted her alive, she would remain so. She wasn't stupid however, for all of Fetch's bodyguards were Zvezdan refugees, loyal only to the woman that saved them. If he tried to betray her to the Macabeans, they would be ready to stick a knife in his back.

"The Tsarina will take your offer. We'll pledge loyalty to the Golden Throne and enjoy building a new home here. Together, we'll create a new Nicaro and Firmador."

Notes:

Note 1: Lyrán here stands in for 'Spartan.'

[Factbook](#)
[Montana Inc](#)

Quotes about Mokastana:

QUOTES



The Macabees

by **The Macabees** » Sun Dec 03, 2017 10:19 pm



QUOTE

Senator

Posts: 3870

Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

OPERATION WILLED VENGEANCE

Follows from: [4/13/2017](#).

"The war was a learning experience. We learned it wasn't worth it."

— *Kapitán* Rodolf Galos, interviewed year 2054.

For two months the Golden Thrones' armies have toiled in the coastal mountain lands of southwestern Drana in an effort to break out into the marshlands to the north. The war has not been easy and already tens of thousands have died to bullets, bombs, and disease. Fighting in their own country, the Scandinavians defend every inch of territory through a clever use of defensive positions and withdrawal tactics that have forced their enemies to pay for occupied land in blood. Many of their own have died as well, either in the mountain pass firefights or at the hands of artillery and offshore barrages that leave entire slopes barren of life. Still, they are a large army, much larger than that of the invaders, and despite giving ground they do not grow weaker. Initiative remains Macabéan, but Operation WILLED VENGEANCE has unrolled slowly, at a pace well below expectation.

In the west, the forces of *Komsektor* Aridna turn to cut Drasdag off from allied forces. It is aided in the sea by *Kríermak* Gholgoth, which continues to tighten its blockade against the southern coast of Drana. *Fuermak* High Command has marked Drasdag as its first major priority of the years' campaign, hoping to secure it as a major deep water port for the further supplying of the ever-growing number of men investing the Scandinavian mainland.

Komsektor Boris, in the middle of the invasion forces, maintains pace with its wings. The fighting in the coastal mountains has been methodical and bloody. Many of the men have succumbed to what is called The Scourge by the soldiers and the Scandinavian Plague by the medical community back home. Deadly and persistent, it kills almost half of those it infects. Desperate for a solution before it thins their ranks further, the *Fuermak* has outsourced its investigation to the internationally renowned medical community of Greater Themis. For the 'lucky' patients chosen for extraction, the clock's hands strike down against them.

To the east, news is much the same. The forces that compose of *Komsektor* Darius find themselves in much the same situation as the others. On their eastern flank, the forces of the Imbrinium Crown fight for the city of Bendred. *Komsektor* Darius begins to bend to give their allies combat support. They must also sustain their western flank with *Komsektor* Boris, assisting in the gradual conquest of the southwestern mountain range.

By late July, all three command fronts have reached the marshlands. In the west, the siege of Bandag is firing at full force. Flames dance like demons in the wind. *Kríermak* Gholgoth continues to tighten, as more ships move in from reserve to intensify the bombardment of the mainland. Thousands of aircraft battle in the clear summer skies, and even when they are not so clear and a storm passes through, running bombing missions and engaging the enemy head-to-head in dogfights that could go from beyond visual range to mere hundreds of feet in minutes' time. Hundreds of thousands of more men land every passing week on the impromptu ports organized along the beaches. They come from campaigns in the territories or satrapies, campaigns which get shorter and shorter as Gholgoth demands ever more manpower, ever more sacrifices. While optimism prevails, the first signs of wariness among the men are as clear as daylight.

In the rear, the locals of the occupied areas suffer their first weeks or months as subjects of the Díenstadi empire. Captured enemy are shipped to *Car'gún Díelaht*, where they are flown to prisoner camps on the surface of the Satrapy of New Empire. There, alongside the

captured combatants from other wars and the worst of the empire's criminals, they toil to slowly detoxify the irradiated surface soils of the country. It is gruelling work under harsh conditions, though they are given the sleep and food they need to remain strong, healthy, and ready to return to their homeland at the war's end. The other locals live their lives like they always did, but with foreign troops outside their doors and their old customs interrupted by the invasion.

The war is in its third year, first of the invasion. There is no end in sight. The Golden Throne's thirst for justice is not yet satiated.



Komsektor Aridna, Siege of Drasdag

Early July, 2028

The sun of high noon beat down on Jaro Kinsella, as he sat against a solid wall of rock. He was starving, but even *thinking* about lifting his arm caused all his muscles to tense up in dull pain. An opened field rations pack sat between his legs, a rubbery slab of faux turkey sticking out of its dark gray plastic wrapper. You could warm it up, but Jaro liked it cold. Not that he really felt like eating. His stomach grumbled and he thought of something else, preferring to rest his limbs for just another second before getting back to work. He leaned his head back against the rock, closing his eyes to the white noise of cannon- and gunfire in the distance, and let out a long breath.

The fatigue in his body, other than his left arm — more machinery than flesh now —, burned like a fire at low flame, but it was the mental fatigue that wore on him the most. It was if the fighting never ended. Moments like these were fleeting, ephemeral in comparison to the rest of it, temporary periods of only relative tranquility. The rest of it was combat, fighting, and death, day-in and day-out, as they slowly pushed their way up one mountain and back down the next.

He tried to rest, but a pack of missiles screamed overhead, one after the other. The shriek pierced his ears, drilling into his skull, and Jaro gritted his teeth. They exploded somewhere in the distance, no doubt striking an enemy entrenchment or headquarters, perhaps a radar station or a surface-to-air missile battery. *Kriermak* Gholgoth and her air complement made the punishment almost constant, expending countless bombs and missiles.

Not that it ever seemed to lessen the enemy's resolve nor break their defense. Every damn ridge they came across seemed to hold a pillbox. Small wonder the men had dubbed this place 'the Hills of Hell.'

Jaro let out a long, growling sigh and looked at the drab gray slice of 'turkey' on the ground as if debating whether to eat it. He apparently decided for it, lifting it with his left arm. Just as his tongue caught its first taste of slimy, unseasoned tofu, *Kapitán* Ronal Lakao rounded the bowing corner of the mountain pass' rock wall. Jaro's shoulders slumped when he saw the *kapitán's* sad eyes.

Leutnant Degal Septak first started to cough three days ago. That was the last time anyone in the unit saw him, before he was sent to Isolation. And the men knew damn well that once you went to Isolation you weren't coming back, no one ever did. Soldiers called it the Scourge, people back home knew it as the Scandinvan Plague, but whatever it's actual name the men had long realized that it was a death sentence. No one was ever told what happened to people who went to Isolation, but Jaro figured that the outcome had more to do with dying than it did with getting better. All the new faces in the company was a testament to that. Besides, it was comforting to think the disease killed you rather than leave you a vegetable. When *Kapitán* Lakao turned that corner, with that pained face of mourning, Jaro already knew the news he was bearing. *Leutnant* Septak wasn't coming back.

"*Gi'sargént* Jaro, stand," said the *kapitán*. If nobody was already standing it was to avoid marking the captain as such. Snipers abounded everywhere, they had learned that the hard way. The *kapitán* went on as Jaro did as he was told, "*Leutnant* Septak is no longer with us. Jaro has served his unit and his commanders well, he has a long history with the *Ejermacht*, and he has seen more combat than most of us combined. You've been promoted to *aftleutnant*, acting *leutnant*, of Karamel pieletón." He turned to the *gi'sargént*, now *aftleutnant*, and took off the insignia from his uniform, replacing it with that of his new rank.

Still sitting against the wall, the other men stood then to congratulate Jaro silently. They were all in a somber mood. *Leutnant* Septak had been a good officer and a strong leader, and although they all knew Jaro as the grizzled veteran NCO and they would all approve of the *kapitán's* choice of replacement, it would take some time for the pain to pass.

"Ready the men, *aftleutnant*, we have orders to relieve *Bandag Ekan*. We move out in five," said Lakao, turning to Jaro when the men turned back to their own business and the officers were left alone together.

Jaro's mouth tightened — combat was the last thing he looked forward to then, the cold piece of faux turkey still sitting on its plastic wrapper on the ground, where he left it —, but he nodded. "Understood, sir." Lakao turned around and walked back to where he had come from, at the head of the *bandag* somewhere around the curve of the cliffside mountain passage.

Some of the men looked at him with expectation, most of these looked...scared, nervous, anxious. They were all men of the highest caliber; all veterans of one of the most brutal wars the world had ever seen. This was their second combat tour for all of them; for some, as with Jaro, this was their fifth or sixth. None of them could be doubted in courage and selflessness. But only the insane looked forward to combat and, as desirable as it seemed now in these circumstances of doubt and uncertainty, how could an insane man ever go back home? These men had families, children, and mothers in the provinces and territories, they had the prospect of doing something greater than themselves. War was a necessity, a reality, but none of them truly wanted to rise and prepare themselves for what awaited them at the front. Because there, for most of them, they would find the end of their journey, their grave.

What worried Jaro the most was that he was no longer someone who could worry about that, because if he did so would his men, and his responsibility was to them now. A leader is a man who knows what comes ahead, and if the leader is afraid then surely there is something that *all* men should be afraid of. He wondered, his face chiseled out of rock as he scanned over his men, whether his only recourse now was insanity.

"Rise," he said.

The men did so, slowly. Their rifles, like his, hung lethargically around their neck and across their chests.

Jaro's eyes tightened. "*Pick up the pace*," he barked. "Gather up, on me. *Hustle*." One rifleman wavered as he suddenly bolted up to his feet and Jaro grabbed him by the arm to thrust him upright. "Keep it together, soldier! Holy shit! My paraplegic grandmother could stand and walk here faster than you sorry bunch of shit piles." He started to pace up and down the line, as they coalesced. "Our discipline is all we got. If you don't do it for yourself, or for your country, and even if you hate being here, keep yourself together for the sake of the man next to you. We're rotating back to the front. Remember, play it smart, play it cool, no stupid shit. Our platoon has a lot of history, a lot to live up to, and only the best infantrymen get to experience it for long. Let's live up to our name, let's live up to ourselves, let's give them every ounce of fight we got."

He nodded to a soldier holding a shotgun, the insignia on his arms marking him a *prim sargént*. "Gadis, you've been promoted to senior NCO, with fourth squad. *Korpal* Dovago, take first squad."

There were some grunts of approval among the men. Not that Jaro cared for their approval. Gadis was a good soldier and a leader of men, and if there was an NCO that he trusted the most by his side it was Gadis. That left one last promotion. Dovago was young, but so far had shown a good head on him and was by far the most experienced in the squad. The two most sensible choices, by far.

They traveled to the front by armored car, shielded from enemy artillery that would strike the mountains and valley roads in a slow, rhythmic tempo. Macabéan artillery responded in kind, firing from positions on the opposite slopes of the mountains, where they were harder to hit. Overhead, aircraft and missiles screamed across gray skies, slipping behind and between dark clouds. Every once in a while a Scandinvan fighter would catch a Macabéan counterpart in a dogfight, and it happened just as often the other way around. Flaming shapes plummeted into the hills far away, while chaff and flares lit up the heavens from the western edge of Drana to its center.

Jaro knew not where they were headed, except that it was somewhere west. Beyond the coastal mountains there, as Drana narrowed into the sea, lay the city of Drasdag. They said that its harbor would give the Golden Throne a deepwater port through which to better supply the invasion. Sitting in the dark cabin of his APC, Jaro wondered whether he and his men were being rushed in preparation to take it.

As expected, the vehicles stopped well before their final destination. The company would have to march the rest of the way, but not before stopping at a field supply warehouse nestled into a wide crevice where three hills met. There, they were helped into their battle suits, freshly arrived from deep maintenance done at a larger depot closer to the beaches. Even here, the war raged loudly. While they suited up, the cloud began to cry as a gentle summer rain came down upon bloodsoaked fields. Drops rolled down the broad, cloth-enveloped chest plate of Jaro's black armor as he walked outside.

Before them was one last steep hillside road to climb, up which they were escorted by a small detachment of divisional headquarter troops. Around them, the war roared ever louder and the beat only intensified the further they climbed. It was an awesome noise, the kind that the *leutnant* had never heard before — not even in Tlaloc.

Finally, he set foot at the very top. Other mountains flanked them to the south and to the north, and when he looked behind him he saw only an endless expanse of coastal hills. Had he really survived all of that? The pillboxes? The ambushes? And then he looked forward and realized that, with all his years at war, he had yet to see the real thing. His father had told him stories of The War, as the Macabéans called it. Jaro had visited the steel ruins of Aurillac, shells of grandiose apartment buildings and tall, glass skyscrapers that had been left to rot after their occupants had been literally burned alive in the Havenic carpet bombing. He had seen read of the great Siege of Targul Frumos and had even visited the carcasses of Ishme-Dagan. He remembered listening to his father then, remembered feeling the glory and the pride. He felt none of that here, as he looked upon the glowing city of Drasdag, he felt only fear.

It was alight in a fire, flames dancing here and there. Out toward the southern horizon, barely visible behind tall columns of thick smoke, Jaro could see the lights and silhouettes of *Kriermak* Gholgoth. Red and orange licked his eyes as they reflected the flare-up of the naval cannons and missile launchers. In an unceasing pattern, they struck the sprawling city, although at what specifically he did not know. The bombardment came from land as well, with howitzers in the mountains striking down in an unholy storm of metal and explosives. It was an enormous firepower against a goliath which, although bleeding, looked a giant absorbing mere rocks from a sling.

Most striking of all were the hundreds of thousands of warriors battling in the streets, sewers, and buildings of the vast port city's suburbs on its margins. The sun had already begun to descend hours ago and, as the shadows grew longer, the fighting seemed to light up in the dark, until it was as if a million or more torchlights waved in the night. Into this cauldron they themselves descended.



Komsektor Boris, The Scourge

Mid-July, 2028

When it came there was no warning.

'Hot' did not begin to describe how it felt in that suit. Scorching was a better word. Maybe it wasn't the suit, maybe it was *him*. Sweat rolled down Ehecatl's forehead, as he struggled to keep his eyes open. Not that it mattered, his coughing had fogged up the HUD on the inside of his helmet and gooey water strung between his eyelashes obstructed his vision.

Ehecatl did not remember much. Memories sped in and out of his mind like dreams. He remembered the fever somewhat, at least the heat that rose from within his body. Had he collapsed on the march? Yes, he had, on the road to that Scandinavian town of a name they could not yet translate or understand. They had been fighting around there for weeks, trading blows with a Scandinavian enemy that would come out from almost any crevice or cave, even ones that did not seem to have been there an hour ago. In his mind returned the mesmerizing display of two GLI-76s being torn to shreds by a flock of surface-to-air missiles, sharp flashes and bright colors blinding him temporarily. Had he already fallen down by then? No, that must have been a different time. Was it? It all blurred together, one vision and the next, like he was living those experiences now only for them to return to the past.

What day was it today, anyhow?

Damn, the suit was hot. He was burning up. It felt as if his skin was boiling and the pain was flowing through his mouth, down into his veins and organs, like it was seeping into his muscle tissues. Everything was an intense heat. Ehecatl felt like he could see the outside world, but his vision was black. Still, he could see doctors and nurses, sometimes soldiers, standing over him. They frightened him.

A white light suddenly invaded his eyes, barging in from the fringes but never quite reaching the center. It was sunny, he knew. He couldn't quite see, but he knew where he was. The caw of the *paqui'ki* bird welcomed him home and across his nose wafted that delicious scent of *brulexet*, a sweet barbecued pork like his father use to grill for feasts. In the back of his mind, he knew this all to be elusive, but he so wanted to stay there, for it to be real. So he surrendered. He started walking toward that smell that reminded him of everything that was good in life and, as he did so, his body felt like it was stretching, reaching out to something he couldn't quite grasp.

Like a bolt of lightning striking a man without warning, Ehecatl felt his whole body begin to convulse. His eyes opened wide and with them so did his ears. The noise of rotors and the crash of the waves below him were overwhelming. He turned his head, only to see a wall of gray sleet outside of an open door lined with something that gave off a red glow. Thunder reverberated across the skies and these were followed by flashes of light that cracked like whips.

Turbulence shook him like a tumbling die in a cup and at times it felt as if he were falling down what seemed a bottomless pit with edges

that he would hit, but always slip off again. *I must be flying in a storm.* What else would explain this? The thought was fleeting, regardless, evanescent. It came to him only at the edge of his mind, skirting it before disappearing again. Not something that would stay with him. Random electronic noises were coming from where Ehecatl knew not, but they sounded as if they were coming from everywhere at once, like alarms of a system trying to warn him. Ehecatl wished it would end. He wished this would all end so that he could go back to his family, to *brulexet*, and the feasts. All of that felt so distant now. The wind snapped at him and he knew it was cold, but all he felt was a burning fire inside of him.

"The patient is awake. Increase the sedation dosage."

"Increasing the sedation dosage."

The voices were muffled, distant. With every strike of lightning, Ehecatl saw the outline of a helmeted man over him. He had no eyes, or they were hidden. A long tube that connected with his mouth ran down his shoulder and then his torso, until it disappeared somewhere into the wall of the helicopter they were riding.

He felt a prick along his leg. "Relax, kid. You'll be home soon enough." He still did not know who was talking to him or if that person meant for him to hear. But, suddenly, the world felt right again and his eyes closed.

Standing naked in the pool of crystal blue waters, Yaretzi looked at him with those sparkling emerald eyes. Her breasts were full and body slender, and her long, black hair plunged into the water and down her back. Behind her roared the waterfall, the one all lovers went to as a means of getting away from the parents and elders in the village. So much had changed over the centuries, and especially so since the arrival of the Golden Throne, but Ehecatl could always count on Yaretzi and the falls. Here they made love for the first time. She giggled as she teased him to come in, to join her. His face grew red and he undressed, removing first his shirt and then his pants, and finally his undergarments. Then he dove into the cool pool with her, its jagged-edged formed by rock walls, until it reached a section where the land below sloped up to meet the surface. She swam away as he neared and he wondered if he would ever reach her.

When he awoke again he was on a bed, or so it seemed. No, on something else. It was moving. Four doctors traveled with him. These had been the ones he had seen before, or had he only seen them now? Was there a before? Where was he and how long had it been? Where was Yaretzi, it was like yesterday since he had been with her? The walls around him were a metallic white, they seemed narrower than they really were.

"H-h-Hot. Take off s-suit."

He heard himself clearly in his head. But, through a mask, all one of the doctors said was, "He's delirious."

"Temperature 103°. Blood pressure dropping." It was a distant, fuzzy voice. Or were they right next to him? He couldn't tell, he didn't exactly care, he didn't exactly not care. "The antibiotics aren't responding. Administering a higher dosage of paracetamol. Switching to fluids. Administering noradrenaline."

What were these doctors talking about? *Where was he?* He tried to feel for the canvas-covered metal of his suit...but all he felt was soft cloths. What was he wearing? He tried to lift his head, but someone held it down. His arms were clamped by his side as well, and something warm was oozing from out of his mouth and dripping off his cheeks and chin. It must have been blood. Ehecatl started to convulse, his arms twisting this way and that as his fingers twitched as if possessed. His eyelids half peeled up and his eyeballs rolled into the top of his head, as his body spasmed, barely contained by the brown polymer straps tying him down.

"Sedating."

"The bird is waiting on the surface. It won't take off without you guys, but do try to hurry." The voices were faint to Ehecatl's waning ears. "This man has four days, tops." That seemed like an important piece of information, but he wasn't sure how. Everything was rushing past him and he couldn't tell where he was going, just that they were moving quickly. Why was he out of his suit?

There was no way of keeping track of how long they kept running down what seemed like one long hallway, with some turns and twists. His mind was a thick, cloudy haze. He remembered feeling that acute pain everywhere, like a thousand knives cutting down to the bone at every point of his body. But he felt it no longer, or it was numb, like some recent recollection. There was a loud noise, like that of a screaming metal monster, and suddenly an ice cold wind lashed at him until the very deepest layer of his bones were chilled to a dull pain. It was strangely therapeutic. Beneath an oxygen mask he smiled, despite it all.

Had he been less drugged and feverish, he would have seen the aircraft with the colossal engine nozzles, broad wings shaped like a delta. A black ramp extended from its rear down to the ground and, inside, an orange light illuminated a cargo team that was helping medical personnel wheel dozens of patients into its bowls. There were some bodies laying far to the side of a runway, near one of the 'island' elevators that could take something as large as that shuttle deep down into the cavernous hangars of *Car'gún Díelaht*. The cadavers looked long dead, the skin a deepening blue. All of them, the medical staff and all military personnel, wore heavy hazmat uniforms. One nurse threw up inside her own suit, chunks of chewed-up chicken and goop-covered broccoli spraying across the covered eyes of her mask. She would have to wait until arrival at Chamazi Garrison to clean herself up.

Ehecatl was the last patient on the plane. Most of the medical team stayed behind, staring gravely behind masks at the ramp as he rose up and locked into its closed position. That door represented four inches of steel between them and the Scandinavian plague. To them, it might as well have been four miles or four thousand. Those who contracted the Scourge died, that was the rule and no one wanted to fall victim to it.

Giant engines flamed red and orange, crowned in blue, as the engines came to life. Anyone on the tarmac was already back on their way down into the depths of 'The Great Gateway', a pitch black hole consuming the square space where the elevator platform had once been. The aircraft began crawling forward until it began to cover ground in bounds, finally screeching off in the dark sky above ebony clouds that continued to cry and howl as if it were weeping for the corpses of the dead accumulating in the unforgiving Gothic badlands of Scandinavian Drana.

Administering 1mg of Lorazepam. There we go. Sleep now, kid. Was that a far, far away voice in his head? He fell asleep again to dreams of home.



Komsektor Darius, Military Justice

Late July, 2028

This war would forever be in *Kapitán* Viktor Loebil's nightmares.

He couldn't unsee the arm with loose, ribboned flesh fluttering in the summer winds. The torso it had come from lay twenty feet away, torn across the middle so that the ribs showed like teeth chewing on shredded muscle. Whatever the man looked like Loebil never knew, it had been replaced by a hole before the *kapitán* had stumbled upon

him. There were other like him along the same stretch of road, six more. Across a narrow valley, through which ran a tiny, green river, sat a pillbox no larger than was meant for a machine gun. What a toll they had paid to pass it. Too many good men had died already. Far too many.

But, nothing was as bad as this. The woman's body lay contorted in shapes he never knew the human body could make. Bones had been broken and shattered, tendons and ligaments snapped, and her clothes were half torn to shreds. A bad kind of violence had taken place here, and not a man's kind either. Whoever had done this was not a man, but a troubled boy who would soon wish he died in the war and not in the hands of *Kapitán* Loebil.

"This stuff was bound to happen sooner or later, *Kapitán*." *Leutnant* Dansa Hansik was right, but it didn't mean Loebil had to like it. He looked at the *kapitán* with a worried, concerned face. "Could have easily been a local, you know. Not a lot of men left around these parts, but those that are still here tend to be the sleaziest, craziest kind. The kind that doesn't rally to defend their homeland. Apart from all the old ones, and the kids. Some of these kids look suspicious if you ask me. A threat to us and the people of this town alike, I say. It's always the easiest explanation that's right, you know. *Okama's Razor*." The *leutnant's* eyes never left the body and his chest sunk, even he knew what he was saying wasn't true.

Loebil kept his response short, "Doubt it."

Something caught Hansik's eye and the officer walked to the nearby wall that rose at least three or four spans above them, ending in tiled rooves that came down to shade the stone-cobbled streets below. Here the streets and paths between the houses were winding and narrow, often not wide enough for a single broad-shouldered man to walk through without turning his body sideways even.

Only at high noon did the sun penetrate the most, and even then it was hardly more than a corridor of light that would guide one down the center of the snakelike paths that crept through the town of Katrvern. It was now four hours beyond noon and only a sliver light shined then, and behind it Hansik disappeared into the shadow. He crouched by a street-level, wrought-iron-barred window to pick a torn piece of plastic wrap. Loebil followed to see what the *leutnant* had found and almost wished he hadn't, he recognized what it was right away. It was the pale green bag of an imperial ration meal. "You're probably right," the *leutnant* observed aloud. He looked inside, using a pen to poke around. "There's still some meal left inside. The bastard was cold-blooded enough to eat at the scene of the crime. Or bastards." He slipped the bag into his uniform's pant leg pocket.

Loebil said nothing. He turned back to the body. The worst of it all was that he recognized who it was, and it pained him. Nanna was her name, at least one of her names. The *kapitán* did not truly even understand local names, but somehow he had built a bond with Nanna. Indirectly, but perhaps that was the hardest part of it all.

Hansik stood. He too took another look at the mangled corpse of the woman and twitched his nose in disgust. The sound of footsteps came from down the street. "That must be Aturic and his men. Let's go, they will. take the...pieces to headquarters. I, for one, need a drink and I want to visit that tavern the men are always talking about."

"Go on without me, I have other matters to attend to. Take the rest of the night off, I won't be needing you." Loebil turned to walk in the other direction. Behind him, *Leutnant* Hansik frowned.

It had been three weeks since they first took Katrvern. The battle for the town had been ferocious and many warriors on both sides had been felled in combat. Five scars still ran down the town from different directions, the product of the fighting. Chaos was a better word, that was at least how it felt. Beneath the thunder of artillery and the lightning of friendly fighter-bombers, soldiers had struggled

on the rocky, uneven grounds of Katrvern, situated along the slopes of four short mountains deep into the coastal mountain range. Just beyond, behind low-rising peaks, lay the marshes, where millions of soldiers fought on, in the fabled muddy, humid rubbus fields.

In the shell of a former house, Loebil had met Volust, a young girl who looked no older than a mere eight years. She had been crying. Her father hadn't been home in months, she said amidst sobs. The *kapitán* figured that he, the girl's father, was either fighting the war or by now dead, his body now laying somewhere in one of the hidden, lonely mountain passes of southwestern Drana. It was through great effort that he found Volust's mother.

Nanna was a beautiful woman, not that Loebil ever thought that way about her. His own wife waited for him far away from here with their two children, two boys of three and five. But he had seen the way other men, his own soldiers, saw her. Young and fools half of them, the *kapitán* expected them to follow their lusts. That's why he had set harsh rules with regards to their conduct, laying a ban on all forms of theft and sexual crime. There would be none of the hooliganism associated with armies at war, far away from the women who kept them happy at home, and he had the backing of high command. Who had acted with such dishonor, not only to do this to another woman — even one of inferior blood — but to go against the orders of his commander? Loebil had three names in mind, three men with motive. The *kapitán* knew where to find them.

The walk to the barracks was not a long one and by now he was used to making it on his own. Katrvern had been well secured in the days after the taking. Its inhabitants had been rounded up and accounted for. Prisoners of war were lined up and taken to a holding area inside the barracks' palisade. They were never seen by the townspeople again, unknown to them that they had been relocated to the prison camps of New Empire's barren, irradiated surface. All others, those who were deemed non-threats, received a number for identification purposes. It was still discouraged, but that did not stop Loebil from finding moments like this where he could be by himself.

At the edge of the town lay the barracks. Newly built, tall buildings sprawled in an arc around the perimeter of Katrvern. It was only his *bandag*, his company, that took residence here now, but the base could hold up to a battalion if needed — more in times of siege, but then comfort was not a question. It all looked very out of place in the dry mountains of Drana's coastline, like a clash against tradition; it was telling that the townspeople rarely ventured toward this edge anymore.

When he arrived, the camp was in disarray. A soldier came to him running, shouting the whole way although Loebil could not understand a word the woman was saying.

At just a pace away she came to a grinding halt, positioned herself at attention, and snapped a salute. "Sir, you must see this. Something has happened in Barracks C...t-t-the men, t-t-they found a...body. One of our own was *murdered*. *Leutnant* Garos' men found it this morning, he was one of his."

He swore under his breath. Another murder on the same day? It could not be coincidence. "Who is it?"

"I...don't know, sir. I was told to find you, that's it." She was panting, her face was flushed with a light red color like the skin of a peach. The woman must have been looking for him all over the camp.

It was Garos' men he wanted to speak to anyway. "Take me," he said, and he followed her up a short hill that ran into the joint of where one mountain met another. Rocky outcroppings lined the upward path on the cliffside, soon obscuring his vision of the marshaling yard where he had just been. At the top, there was another flat area large enough for three buildings, including a barracks and a warehouse. The other, squat and long with antennas poking from out of its roof, was an office space for a signals team.

They walked to the barracks, where *Leutnant* Aljand Garos was waiting by the steps that led to the front entrance.

The *leutnant* was chewing on something, probably tobacco, and his face was gaunt, eyes down as if holding some great weight. "Sir," he said when Loebil reached the bottom step, "we've got a situation. It's *Korpal* Davi, he's dead, killed this morning. The perp is in the brig by Barracks D. *Sargént* Gregora. Murdered by your own team leader, fuck me."

"I suppose it was meant to be this way," muttered Loebil.

Garos looked up at him. "What was that, sir?"

Loebil startled. He hadn't realized he had said that out loud. "It's nothing," he replied. "This wasn't the day's only death, *leutnant*. A civilian, Nanna, was found...in pieces. She was hacked, brutally I must say, and left to rot in the street. Thought those two and Bendoza could shed a little light on the case."

"Nanna? Wasn't she the lady that Davi always talked about banging? She lived in his patrol zone." Garos put his hand to his forehead as if realizing something. "Davi used to take her extra stuff, like electronics and better food for the woman's daughter. Hey, weren't you close to the girl? That's the one you found in the rubble, right? Shit, you weren't loving on her too?"

"No," answered Loebil, with a flat stare. "I knew about the affair, however. I caught him leaving her house yesterday evening when I stopped by to see Volusp. Davi was on his own, which I found strange, not to mention the time. She was in disarray when I knocked on her door. It smelled wrong." He shook his head. "Strangely, I was going to have you discipline him today, but I was distracted by *Leutnant* Hansik's call this morning. Her murder has occupied me all day, and now this. *Soldat* Bendoza, I shall speak to him." He paused to look at Garos. "How has he taken it, and what of the men? How did they react?"

"They're a little rattled," said the *leutnant*. He bent over the railing to spit out black tar, then turned back to Loebil. "Bendoza's been quiet and is keeping to himself. But it's Davi's girl who's taking it the hardest."

"His girl?" asked the *kapitán*.

The *leutnant* nodded. "Yes, sir. *Soldat* Anastis Valora, part of the medical team attached to our platoon. The two of them have had a romance going on for at least a couple of months now." How nonchalantly he said that struck Loebil. Discipline was failing the company lately. The security op was making them weak, it seemed. Too many luxuries in a town like this. Too many opportunities for drinking, festivities, and fraternization.

"You've known about this for two months?" His voice was cold as a winter's storm. "*And you've said nothing?*"

The *leutnant's* eyes widened. "*Kapitán*, the war has been hard for them—"

Loebil did not allow the platoon leader to finish. "It is inexcusable, and it is likely that your lax attitude toward the discipline in your unit has directly led to the situation we find ourselves in now. Has the murder of one of your men helped to relieve their stress? What of the murder of Nanna? Or does that one not count, since she is not one of us? It ends today, *leutnant*. Round up your men, I will await you in the courtyard below at exactly 1700 hours." His frigid blue eyes stared into Garos' own green emeralds, like a hunter looking at the wide eyes of a deer caught in the open. "There is no other solution, the *bandag* **must be punished**."

He pushed the sorry *leutnant* out of the way before the man could say another word. Loebil felt disgusted. Part of the blame was his

own, of course, and he wondered how he could have ever let things deteriorate this far. He pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind when he entered the barracks and addressed the soldier manning the comm at the front desk before the kid had time to rise and salute. "Bendoza, where is he quartered, *soldat*? **Quickly** now, I don't have all day."

"Second floor, twenty-sixth room, *kapitán*," answered the soldier after a few seconds of struggling between responding and rising to attention.

Loebil swiftly proceeded without giving the young lad a second thought. Calls to attention spread down the hall as he walked and he quickly dismissed them all with a wave of his hand. Bounding up the stairs he turned to head down the hallway, stopping in front of a plain brown door with two large black iron-wrought numbers depicting 26. Inside, someone was crying, their sobs muffled by the barrier between them and the communal halls of the barracks. He could barely hear because of the commotion going on outside, with men talking among themselves — about the murder mostly, if the little Loebil had heard of it was anything to go by —, but he thought he could hear murmurs coming from inside the room as well. There was more than one person in there. The *kapitán* pounded heavily on the door with closed hammer-like fists and bellowed, "Open up, this is *Kapitán* Loebil. I need to speak with you, Bendoza."

The noise inside stopped and almost a minute went by before the *soldat* timidly opened the door an inch, his eye peering through the slit to look at the *kapitán*. "Yes sir?"

"Open up kid." Loebil used his strength to pry the door open further, pushing Bendoza back with it. He saw Anastis Valora on the floor, tears running down her cheeks. She was the one who had been crying. "Good, you're both here," he said. "I have some questions, regarding the murders of *Korpal* Davi and of a local Scandinvan townswoman." Valora started to cry again. There was something about them, something not altogether normal. Loebil shrugged it off, he had seen enough death to know that each person had their own way of grieving.

"Sir, all of this came to a surprise to us and, as you can see, we're deeply distressed. I'm just not sure how much help we can be." He sounded sincere enough. Valora did not even look up. Her crying was simmering down again and she held a hand to her head, covering her eyes and face from being seen.

"Surely, soldier, you must know *something*. You spent every waking moment with Davi and Gregora." It wasn't a plea, it was a statement of fact. "Was their animosity between the two of them. At least, anything you saw that in retrospect could be tied to the murder? I need everything, son. Good men will die today because of what happened today."

Bendoza gulped and eyed Valora, who was still on the floor. "Can we speak outside, sir? She's devastated, I don't think she can handle questioning."

"Sure." Loebil led the *soldat* with his hand, letting Bendoza leave first. He looked at Valora before leaving. She seemed stiff, but any noises coming from her had stopped, as if she was waiting for them to leave.

Outside, in hushed tones, the *soldat* said, "Sir...this isn't easy for me to say, but...sir, she was sleeping with them both. Both Davi and Gregora. But she wanted to make things right with David, you know? She loved him. With Gregora it was just about the sex, I think. When she told Gregora she was going to end it, the *sargént* got jealous. I saw them arguing this morning, *Kapitán*. I saw the *sargént* shoot Davi, the bullet exit his back followed by a spurt of blood, how it splattered across the white wall. It's all in my head, sir, and I rather forget it. This is just too much, I didn't sign up for this shit."

"A crime of passion, huh." Loebil made a mental note. "You said you saw this happen? Tell me, did get a good look at *Korpal Davi*?"

"Yes, sir," answered Bendoza. "He was covered in blood. His white shirt was just dripping with it."

The *kapitán* nodded. "And that didn't seem strange to you? *Korpal Davi* dripping in blood."

"I didn't really think about it. By the time I got a hold of my senses the *sargént* shot him and after that it was all chaos." Bendoza's face contorted as if he was about to wail, but he stood there quietly, trying to keep whatever he was feeling to himself. He was a strong soldier. If he survived today then Loebil would see him promoted to team leader.

Loebil wasn't done, however. "Did you know of the affair between Davi and Mrs. Nanna?"

The *soldat* looked sideways. "Yes, sir," he said finally. "It's been going on for over a week. I don't know how that lucky bastard even pulled it off...well, not so lucky, I guess. We delivered food and water to her every day, Davi saw her often and every time we passed by he would find some way to flirt with her. He really had a way with women, *kapitán*." A few seconds passed, then he added, "If you ask me, Valora was better off with the *sargént*. At least he cared for her. The guy went ballistic when she told him it was over. He told me his contract was ending in less than eight months. Maybe he wanted a faster ticket home," he shrugged. "Even if that home is death, at least it's not here."

"Did David have motive to murder Nanna?" The question came like an arrow, without warning.

Bendoza started to massage the back of his neck with his hand. His eyes darted down to the ground, where they stayed. "She had a lot of jewelry, sir. He told us about it after he first slept with her. Davi said she had entire jewelry cases filled with stuff the locals consider high value. I guess he figured he could sell it and make a little bit of money while he was here. It was his thing, I don't know too much about it, sir. I'm sorry, *kapitán*."

"No problem, soldier. You've been helpful, I assure you." Loebil put his hand on Bendoza's shoulder. "Good luck today. I hope to see both you and *Soldat* Valora another day, if so it is Willed. You've provided me with more than enough information for me to go on." He looked at the soldier sternly, and said, "I need you to tell *Soldat* Valora to return to her quarters. Her unit needs her. I expect her there in a quarter of an hour, and if I hear that she never arrived I will handle her disciplining personally. And I will not be merciful, that I can guarantee you. *Do you understand?*"

"Yes, *Kapitán*." Bendoza came to attention and saluted.

"At ease." Loebil turned to walk away. It was getting closer to the hour and he still had one more stop before it was time to correct the company's lackadaisical attitude. He headed back down the stairs and out of the barracks, past *Leutnant* Garos who stumbled to his feet when the *kapitán* stormed out. But Loebil's attention was far too focused to even notice the officer, who would soon come to realize the consequences of his inadequate leadership anyway.

This time he drove. The brig was not far, but he had already walked quite a bit and it was becoming tiresome. Driverless, the cart took moved quickly and they arrived at his destination in minutes' time. It was more than enough time to think. If Bendoza had seen Davi covered in blood and the motive was true, then the identity of Nanna's murderer was obvious. But, there was something off about Valora and the way she was crying, how she hid herself from him. What was it that bothered him so much about that? Was there something more to the story? Besides, *Leutnant* Hansik was right, the simplest explanations were often than most accurate. If there was

anything else to learn, anyhow, it would be *Sargént* Gregora who would share it with him. It was on that thought that he stepped off the driverless cart, in front of the entry gate into the small complex.

Barracks D rose behind him, arching up along the sheer rock wall of the mountain behind it like bones to a spine. This space had been hollowed out before, for what purpose the *kapitán* did not know. Of all corners, this was perhaps his least favorite of the camp, and it was not just because the platoon that occupied Barracks D was perhaps the most morbid of the *bandag*. The space in its entirety came under the shadow of the mountain for most of the day, except when the sun was at its highest points. It was eerie, like a grave that had collapsed to reveal the skeleton inside of it. He ignored it as he walked into the holding cell complex.

Gregora was held in a cell isolated from the others, not that there were many filled. The *sargént* was sitting on the narrow bed that occupied almost three-fourths of the space. The ceiling came down low, only tall enough for a man to stand. An MP escorted Loebil to him and rattled the cell's bars with his baton when they arrived. "Rise, Gregora. The *kapitán* is here to see you."

The *sargént* stood to his feet only slowly. "And to what do I owe this honor, sir?"

"You know well what, *sargént*," Loebil responded. "I have a few questions to ask, about the murder."

"Bombs away." Gregora was as cool as a cat, the grin on his face that of an arrogant man who wanted to be caught just so that people knew what he had done. "I ain't got nothing to hide."

"Did you murder *Korpal* Davi?" Loebil saw no use in being anything other than direct.

"Yes, I did, sir." The *sargént* did not skip a beat.

The *kapitán* nodded. Gregora would hang tonight. "I already spoke to *Soldat* Bendoza," he continued. "He told me he saw you shoot *Korpal* Davi. According to Bendoza, Davi arrived at the barracks early morning today covered in blood. You were waiting for his arrival with your firearm at ready. You shot Davi point blank, killing him. If I may ask, why did you do it?"

"The shit you'd do for love, right *kapitán*?" The *sargént* laughed. Then he stopped abruptly and squinted his eyes, frowning in thought. "Huh, I guess everything happened too fast. I was pumping with adrenaline, you know. I don't remember much of what happened, just of squeezing the trigger and seeing Davi crumple on the floor. Everything else is a blur, although the more I replay it in my head, the more I remember, and the more it hurts. I don't remember him coming in covered in blood, though. Maybe it's something lost in the blur. Where would the blood come from anyways?"

"Nanna," said Loebil. "She was found this morning, quartered. You wouldn't happen to know anything about that, would you?"

Gregora pondered the question for a moment. "All I can say is that the kid was infatuated with her. It was about the time he started to see where that Valora started coming on to me. I figure her or numbnuts Bendoza already told you about our little fling since you were so sure of my guilt from the second you walked in here. I know just by smelling the judgment on you that I am a dead man. Good, I'm done with this war anyway."

That puzzled the *kapitán*. Would Davi have killed a woman he seemed to love for the sake of some jewelry he hoped to sell? But, if not him, then who murdered Nanna? No, Davi was the simplest explanation, the one most likely to be right. Loebil gave the *sargént* a weighing, judging look and said, "*Soldat* Davi was once a friend of yours, as I recollect. Reflect on that and on what you did in your final hours of life. I do not envy your position, but it is one that a man who has

done the things you have must affront with bravery for a chance at redemption before condemning himself to the eternal suffering of the soul. You have little more than an hour."

He gave the guard, who seemed lost in his own mind and was looking at Gregora with deep sorrow, a look to signal the visit's end. It took a moment for the MP to notice but then he cleared his throat and recomposed himself. "Should the prisoner be given a final meal, *kapitán*?" he asked.

"No." Loebil's stare was as frigid as northern ice. "Let us be gone from here."

The MP escorted him back to the atrium of the building. They stopped at the entrance, where the guard came to position of attention and saluted the *kapitán*. "At ease," said Loebil. "I expect him at the marshaling yard by 1650 hours, do you understand?" Most men wouldn't understand *why*. It took a certain type of vision to see the forest beyond the tree, the consequences of mercy.

"Yes, sir,...I suppose," was all the MP said in reply.

Loebil stopped by his own quarters, an on-base prefabricated officer's home that looked more like a bunker. Indeed, it essentially was just that. There, he prompted Hansik on his ear comm to tell him of his decision, leaving for the marshaling yard almost as soon as their conversation ended.

The other *leutnants* would have already learned from Garos, whose duty as offending platoon leader it was to gather the *bandag* for sentencing. Indeed, by the time he arrived, almost two hundred soldiers and officers had gathered inside the large flat terrace that extended below the taller hills and outcropping atop which the bases' buildings sat. Garos' platoon stood separate, of course. It would be their surprise that they would not be abandoned by their fellow soldiers in other platoons. They too would share the burden. Just like the others, signals and artillery, even the engineers, were responsible for what had happened today and too would suffer the consequences.

The *kapitán* quickly made his way to a wide flat-topped rock that extended across the center of the terrace like a stage. He gave them all the gravest of stares. "Soldiers," he said, "I am disappointed in you. As men and women in arms, in defense of the Second Empire of the Golden Throne, you have failed."

He went on to explain the importance of duty and the sense of moral responsibility. Of why it was important to be the just conqueror, to show that they were better than the oppressors they replaced. It was a task hard enough to accomplish, he said, without the murder and violence. And if he left the crime of Nanna unpunished then it would be followed by more, as his soldiers realized that their discrepancies would go ignored. That they were all complicit in the crimes of *Leutnant* Garos' men. Therefore, that they would all share in the sentence. And that sentence? The *bandag* would be decimated — their names would be thrown into a lottery and one in ten would die at the gallows that very night. An extreme measure, for certain, but it was an extreme circumstance, one that the *bandag* would affront as the fearless warriors that they were.

As he oversaw the enforcement of the executions, *Kapitán* Loebil still felt some unease over Valora. She was the only one he hadn't talked to directly, so apparently distraught she was. But when she saw her in Bendoza's room that afternoon her grief had come off as almost...fake. As if she couldn't wait for him to leave, because she was hiding something. Neither did the story of Davi's motive add up. Why would he kill a woman he cared for? Was some jewelry enough for treachery of that kind? And if it was a necessity to kill her, was it one to slice her into pieces? Something smelled foul.

That night the names of *Leutnant* Garos and *Soldat* Bendoza were read. By midnights their necks had broken in half. Valora, from the

medical team, survived. Gregora was not part of the lottery. His sentence was death.

Before going to sleep, she looked under her bed and from the dark revealed a small crate. She opened it slowly, her eyes glowing ever more as the lid went into its upright position. Inside was a small treasure of gold and other jewels, all necklaces, broaches, and other jewelry. Stealing them had been remarkably easy. Davi, in his innocence, had been the Gregora about Nanna's collection, and Gregora had told her. That the fool woman Nanna had seen her was an accident, but at that moment the woman had to die. Woe to her that she had slept with Davi. If she hadn't, maybe Valora wouldn't have taken so much pleasure in cutting her up.

Davi's death was the most complicated to organize. She could not tell Gregora why Davi needed to die, or that Davi needed to die at all. He had to come to that conclusion on his own. To make him fall in love with her had not been easy, but when he did she broke him, declaring her love for Davi. This war had them all on the edge of their nerves and Gregora snapped. Bendoza's hanging that night rid the world of the only other person who knew what she did. That it had all come together so well timed was purely coincidence, and a convenient one. And for her gain, she paid the price of a score of dead men who were hanging for her crime.

Such was the nature of Justice.

Last edited by [The Macabees](#) on Mon Jan 01, 2018 11:27 am, edited 2 times in total.

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Havensky
Diplomat

Posts: 888
Founded: Jan 01, 2008
Left-wing Utopia

by [Havensky](#) » Fri Jan 05, 2018 8:31 pm



Camp Resolute, Drakonian Imperium Third Iteration

"Unity to all bombers, start your attack run."

Twenty-four squadrons of *Divine Wind*-Class bombers began to dive quickly towards the Drakonian coast dropping simulated ordinance onto designated targets in three different zones of the port.

"Unity to King Group; begin bombardment"

An *Akkura*-Class corvette HRS *King of Battle* and twelve sister ships began to fire 103 meter and 144 meter practice and smoke rounds at the beach. Other ships from the alliance began to fire their own rounds as well resulting in a cacophony of booms. A wall of red smoke lined the beaches and the landing areas of the port.

"Unity to Carriers; Launch all companies"

Strider aircraft from several different aircraft carriers began to lift off into the air as Divine Wind fighters kept watch from above. Meanwhile, several squadrons of patrol boats and Qarin-class assault ships began crashing through the waves at full speed heading for the shore.

"Unity, Scarlet One: One minute to drop."

"King Group, Unity: Lift Fire"

"Unity, Scarlet One: 30 Seconds"

"King Group, Unity: Cease Fire"

The gunships ceased firing as the Striders leveled out from their dive before shifting their rotors to propel the craft straight down just before the wall of smoke. Inside the lead craft, Commander Squall

held onto his webbing until the familiar jolt of the aircraft coming to a sudden stop. The bottom of the aircraft opened up. Squall grabbed the rope and down dropped the lead platoon of Heartbreak Company dropped onto the beach.

Almost instantly, the alarms in several of the power suits went off signalling to Heartbreak that they were 'dead'

"Referee to Heartbreak and King Groups; Negative penetration from artillery on the beach. OpFor minefield wasn't cleared at 100%. You're dead Heartbreak Six and so is half your squad. Run it again."

*Uhhh!
Now stop me if you've heard this before
Here we are again in another long war*

Sixth Iteration

ZZZZZZRRRRR....BA-BOOM

Squall stopped his attack on an OpFor foxhole and quickly turned towards the sound of the explosion. He could see the smoke

"CONTROL, Heartbreak: What the hell was that?"

"Azure Six! Azure Six! Do you copy! Strider-1192? RESPOND"

Squall started rushing over to the crash site of one of the Skyan helijets. This was supposed to be a training exercise. The only injuries were supposed to be simulated. Clearly, this wasn't going to be the case this round. He picked up his communicator.

"ENDEX! ENDEX! ENDEX! CONTROL, Dispatch medical craft, we've got a Strider down WAIT ONE... Two Striders down!"

The two helijets had gotten too close after making their troop drop and collided. The maneuvers they were practicing were risky. The helijets would fly at high speeds at low altitude just before hitting the beach. They would then make a full stop mid-flight and drop all the way to the ground to drop their troops. Immediately after that, they would pull a 180 degree turn and accelerate out of the combat zone. Squadrons of these helijets would do this in a limited space.

It was turning out to be more difficult than first planned.

*Now let me explain your situation
They wrap you up; ship you out
Another martyr for Mars; out of desperation*

Ninth Iteration

As the air support craft flew overhead, the Qarin-class landing ships navigated the port and docked quickly. The ramp of the craft slammed down as smaller machine guns provided cover fire.

The port was selected as the objective precisely because it allowed Alliance Forces to bring mechanized units onto the islands. This would be vital to liberating the highly urbanized Shen Almaru.

The problem facing this particular iteration was that the opposing force had hidden a single platoon armed with rockets and sniper rifles. As the first infantry vehicle started to leave the lead craft a practice rocket hit dead on. The door isn't wide enough for another vehicle to go around and the ship couldn't reverse itself. In vain, Legionary forces tried to go around it and were hit with sniper fire.

Squall watched from the beach and shook his head.

"Run it again"

[Run it again, keep it on repeat

*Milograd, Vetalia, Citadel City
Same plot, new villain, same result
A broken bone for you, no change in the system
Locked in a cycle; same game, no escape for the hero]*

Twenty-first iteration

"Clear!"

Avenger Company was clearing out buildings in the port area. It was dangerous grueling work. Most of the buildings were warehouses that were built long and narrow with very little in terms of cover.

Supreme Allied Commander Bexar, along with most military planners, had assumed that the Slaver Empire would swarm the port with massive numbers of lightly armed conscripts. They would be easily defeated, but there would be a lot of them and in a confined space like the warehouse. For the purposes of this exercise, the OpFor were trained soldiers and not untrained rabble. The result was as one would expect.

"Avenger Five Down! I need a medic at my location!"

"Avenger Two to Control; Get me a supply drop up here we're running low on ammo"

"Avenger, Heartbreak! Hold steady, we're reinforcing you. Give us two mikes!"

An 'explosion' was heard over the radio.

Squall cursed.

"Avenger! SITREP!"

There was static on the radio.

"Control; please advise - have we seen Attestors?"

"Heartbreak, Control - be advised seven companies hit by Attestor explosions. Will update with damage assessment"

*[Run it again, keep it on repeat
Another pint of blood shed for another power struggle
No tears for commons, body count rises hour after hour
F@CK the Lords (Man, f@ck the Lords) and all that they stand for
Locked in a cycle; same game, no escape for the hero]*

After the thirty-first iteration, Squall pulled out his screen to check the latest reports. The very first one in his inbox were causality reports.

Anger and frustration filled his core as he read out the names of the ships lost off the coast of Vismer. The delaying action was important since it was buying time for the training, but Squall felt personally responsible for every loss that occurred while getting the allied forces ready.

It was late in the day. Everyone was tired. The Allied Forces were getting better and making fewer mistakes. However, it was taking too damn long. They couldn't wait to get better. Every day was another ship they might lose and Squall never had taken losses well.

The plan was to end the exercises for the day and reset in the morning. Squall decided otherwise.

"Run it again"

"...Say again Heartbreak?"

"I SAID RUN IT AGAIN"

"Sir, we're low on fuel and power. We can't possibly do another run."

Squall stood straight up and started to head towards the FOB. He had run out of patience. In a calm, cold voice he started to say.

"I gave an order! We don't have time to sit around run it again! We need to get this right and get this right now."

Nobody heard him. The battery in his own power armor had given out under the straight. His suit died mid stride causing him to trip and fall on his face.

*[Can't save yourself; can't save your friends;
Can't change the system; can't fight fate
But they'll send you to fight & that's your fate
Locked in a cycle; same game, no escape for the hero]*

The Skybound Republic of Havensky
(Pronounced Haven-Sky)

Territory held in
Texas - Gholgoth - Sondria

**N&I RP Mentor Specializing in PMT, Character Development,
Worldbuilding, and Diplomacy - TG me for help!**



The Scandinavians
Senator

Posts: 4948
Founded: Oct 09, 2004
Capitalizt

by **The Scandinavians** » Wed Jan 24, 2018 10:32 pm



The Basilica of the Honored Martyrs of the Blessed Blood of the Appointed Dres'Erid. Valdra

The grand structure of the grandiose basilica was an immense structure built to mark the greatest heroes of the Glorious Empire of the Scandinavians who had died fighting in the numerous crusades during the high points of imperial history in which the Scandinavians would often hold sway over vast swathes of Gholgoth and elsewhere. Times when the heirs of Erid were a power which gave pause to any foe. The sheer vastness of the building was meant to call back to these ages of glory and symbolize that the faith could accomplish anything when its followers were truly united.

The contours of the structure was designed to evoke grandeur and invoke awe in a society in which humility was considered essential. Where faith was meant to be expressed in silent reverence. Where people were told to set aside their own desires and fully accept their lot in life in order to serve the ordained order of the Glorious Empire. This was reflected in the standard architecture of churches of the Empire. They were normally made of gray marble or granite with the only real things meant to draw your being the crucifix that symbolized the redeemer and the various depictions of scenes in the Bible. Imagery designed to make the average individual consider how small they were in the grand scheme of things. Conceptualization meant for people to be drawn to a higher purpose during their weekly services.

This sort of sentiment given off by the basilica was what defined many of the greatest places of worship within the Glorious empire of the Scandinavians. They were each made to be unique manifestation of a ideal for the Scandinavians. A concept to be brought into reality by the people who visited them. Something able to reshape the very depths of a person's character and to overcome the weakness within. These various sacred basiclicas would ultimately create

The floor of the interior of the Basilica of the Honored Martyrs of the Blessed Blood of the Appointed Dres'Erid was marked by a floor which was made of deep red granite in order to remind people of the blessed sacrifices made by the martyrs who spilled their blood in service to the true faith and stretched forward for 2500 feet where the doors opened up. The roof stood 750 feet above the floor. It was covered by black basalt blocks to imitate the deepest night for the people gazing upon it and embedded within it were gold circles with gemstone centerpieces that were meant to mimic stars. The roof was

supported by massive grey Carrara marble columns that were carved in such a way as to appear to be smaller ones stacked onto each other. The walls of the structure were the purest Yule white marble and the windows were sky blue. The front of the basilica was a solid sheet of un-decorated silver that cut the tabernacle off from the rest of the Basilica normally.

That at least the standard daily setup of the basilica. Today however was marked by a different occasion as Crown Prince Fenric ap Erid ao Erid would be giving a sermon in support of the war effort. An event which would see a speech given to rally the people of the Empire against the invasion of the homeland by a vile foreign power. This was the first time in generations that enemy forces had landed en masse in the Scandinvan homeland. Yet, the historical precedents existed to frame the conflict in a narrative suitable to the ends of the Sons of Erid and the Crown Prince.

Therefore, a different environment was present inside the basilica. Instead of the interior near the tabernacle being bare save for the silver protective wall there was a large white marble dais that was raised forty feet into the air and atop it was the Crown Prince. Wearing regal flowing purple robes, having a dark blue hood pulled over his head, and he was donning the darkened mask of the crusader princes meant to hide one's face till the enemy was defeated.

In front of him, spread throughout the vast interior, were many thousands of silent individuals who were garbed in plain crimson attire to symbolize their uniformity and to honor the basilica's theme. A mass of men and women who were a fairly uniform mass of individuals and the only really telling sign between them was height. They, as one body, stood at attention as the Crown Prince raised his hand to forewarn about the start of his address.

In a powerful voice he started his address to the assembly, *"The course of our history has been consistently defined by the tides of conflict. Throughout these tribulations have the brave heroes of our people stood firmly against our enemies and driven most of these vile nations which sought to challenge us into oblivion where the only memories preserved of their cultures are in the footnotes of our history books. This invasion shall be no different than the others perpetuated by the dres'nalar against us. For so long as we have faith in what we are and in our faith we cannot be defeated!"*

Unlike the most recent wars of our nation, this one is not about the call to the glory of conquest or the drive to bring more of creation into the light of the Almighty. Instead, we are fighting to preserve the existence of the true faith. We are fighting to ensure that our blessed traditions of our Glorious Empire can continue unimpeded. We are fighting so that our people can survive. We are fighting so that one day we can bring paradise back to this realm of existence.

Such is the nature of this conflict that all those who fight in this war be will granted forgiveness for their sins by the Church. All those who die in shall be honored as martyrs of the faith. All those who are wounded in combat shall be declared to be righteous crusaders. And all those who take part in battle shall be remembered on the day of judgement as crusaders of the Almighty's path. For the path to the most glorious circles of heaven are open only to those who are willing to sacrifice themselves for their faith like the martyrs of yore so freely did.

We must fully realize the truth of the situation. We dres'Erid alone are to fight this dread enemy. Our victory shall not come through the intercession of legions, but rather shall emerge from the righteous fury of our valiant warriors. By proving our fealty and love of the Almighty shall we earn his favor in this war against the taint of the Golden Throne. Through that shall our victory ultimately be born. Through that shall our salvation be earned. Through that shall the future of our anointed people be secured against those who would destroy the everything that we have built for ourselves over

these many centuries.

The enemy that we now fight is a manifestation of the things that we despise and that is why the conflict against them should draw out the ire of all the Scandinavians. They do not exist in an ordered society as civilized people would understand it. They do not impose upon themselves any sort of rule which prevents them from sinking into the depths of depravity. They do not seek to build a greater legacy for their kin. They are little more than a mercenary horde ordered to our nation to fight us in return for the promise of monetary reward alone.

From these truths we know that the rallying cry of our enemy does not come from a place of righteousness. Their soldiers do not march underneath a banner offering the true path to the world. They really fight for nothing worthwhile to civilized persons. Something which is pitiable in its own pathetic fashion.

The simple truth is that they merely are a more serious threat than the usual dres'nalar. However, that does not remove them from the same innate weakness which infects all the barbarian civilizations which are outside of the divine order ordained by the Book of Erid. The battle for the fate of our nation is all the more important when we realize that the enemy carries this infection with them to whatever place that they go to. That is why it is all the more essential to drive out the enemy mercilessly and utterly.

If we let them remain here for long their taint will slowly take root. Among the slaves shall the seed of heresy be first planted. From there it shall spread to the casteless and the lowest of those with rank will eventually be infested with the vile teachings of the devil. At this point will a full fledged rebellion take place requiring to engage in a campaign which will likely see the blood of hundreds of millions spilled before it is over. That is why every effort must be made to expediently win this war. A price which would nonetheless be minute compared to the destruction born of a total foreign occupation of our Empire.

With such purpose to drive us onward I fully believe that the strength of our people shall win the day in the end. The road will assuredly be long and bloody mind you, but that is not something which has ever stopped our people from fulfilling out duties before. We shall meet the standards so bravely set by our forefathers. We each shall do our duty. Therein shall we achieve our victory and ensure that our people secure our destiny.

Through the might of our arms, the fury of our soldiers, and the righteousness of our cause shall all the world come to know that Drana belongs to the dres'Erid. After this conflict is ended shall we again remind the world that none can dare to invade the sovereign lands of our people. When we have won this war shall our gaze turn towards those within our own region who aided the Golden Throne in their invasion. They shall be taught what justice truly is.

We are the Scandin. Christus invictus! Erid invictus! Dres'Erid invictus!"

With that last part said did the crowd repeat the last six words of the speech as a form of invocation to mark the end of the event," *Christus invictus! Erid invictus! Dres'Erid invictus!"*

After this chant Crown Prince Fenric left the room and went to go take care of other affairs in Valdra related to the war effort...

Last edited by [The Scandinavians](#) on Wed Jan 24, 2018 10:34 pm, edited 2 times in total.

We are the Glorious Empire of the Scandinavians. Surrender or be destroyed. Your civilization has ended, your time is over. Your people will be assimilated into our Empire. Your technological distinctiveness shall be added to our own. Your culture shall be supplanted by our own. And your lands will be made into our lands.

"For five thousand years has our Empire endured. In war and peace we have

thrived. Against overwhelming odds we evolved. No matter what we face we have always survived and grown. We shall always be triumphant." -Emperor Godfrey II

Hope for a brighter tomorrow - fight the fight, find the cure



The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by **The Macabees** » Sun Jan 28, 2018 9:25 pm



Situation by 1 October, 2027. Green is territory held by United Pirate Front of Nicaro. Moka claim, focused on the city of Rivas and surrounding islands, not shown.

OPERATION SUDDEN JUSTICE

Follows from: [7/29/2017](#); [4/25/2017](#); [3/11/2017](#); and [8/15/2015](#).

"We lost sight of what matters most in Nicaro and Firmador, the people. It's as simple as that. We handed that country to the drug lords and the fat cats."

— Manuel Zevega, 3116th *Auskilares* Division, served 2028–30.

I

Calbazeta, 120km South of Medellín, Nicaro

20 September, 2027

"Yo no se nada," said the elderly woman, again. 'I don't know anything.' It was the same answer he had gotten from every local he had asked.

"Juan Pablo Ortega," repeated *Leutnant* Martinez. "¿Lo conozes? Es importante que hablemos con el." It was important that they talk to him, he said. He asked her to tell military authorities of any news of Juan Pablo Ortega that she heard, for his own good. That was a damned lie, of course. Ortega was to die as soon as he was found. Then he said thank you, 'gracias,' and continued his morning patrol.

Yesterday, Martinez lost a soldier to a sniper whose nest sat in the village's temple spire. It was blown to pieces, yet there was no evidence of the shooter. In the past, towns like these were simply wiped away, like the [Rape of Stamvaro](#). Although it couldn't be said that the thought hadn't passed the minds of any of the platoon's men, the *Fuermak* has started to realize that the violence was counterproductive and that auxiliary units were too ill-disciplined, and thus is introduced a rule that threatened decimation to any company-sized unit whose soldiers participated in an atrocity. Suffice to say, the new rule — one enforced with ruthless efficiency — had saved Calbazeta from certain annihilation.

In fact, it was a Sarcazan-dominated *asalto* division that was chosen for the mission of pacifying the island, known locally as Reguedo Mayor, because the *Ejermacht* had decided to try things a new way. The Sarcazan language, a mixture of Dénstadi and Zarbian, was similar enough to the Nicaroan language that soldiers and locals could communicate, the hope being that the latter could eventually be enticed to cooperate with the authorities.

So far, the theory proved to have holes. Or, it was becoming increasingly clear that the task of pacification through relationship-building and minimal security intervention was proving to be more challenging than anyone thought. Of course, Martinez was under no illusion that the pacification of the island could be completed within three days. Here he was, three days later, and the people of

Calbazeta hardly gave him the time of day. And that was despite reassurances that the battalion his platoon was a part of would remain in the area for the next two years. At this stage, a reassurance may have sounded more like a threat. He could only imagine that to someone like the old woman he had just spoken to, two years of guaranteed imperial presence sounded a lot like two years of guaranteed warfare, violence, and destruction. This would be a local bias that men like Martinez, tactical commanders with a presence in the weeds, were tasked to overturn with very limited resources — fighting this war with the new rules of engagement was almost like having one's hands tied behind his back.

Sarcanzans were unique in that they were perhaps the only citizens to know what it felt like to live on the other side, to find yourself against authority and not see yourself as part of it. Perhaps that's why this *asalto* division was chosen for this experiment on Reguecedo. They knew what it was to be conquered, perhaps that would make them better conquerors. That fact did not make Martinez feel any better, however.

As he continued down the street, which was little more than a dirt track flanked by decayed homes made of no more than brick, wood, and plaster, he looked at the local vendors who sold naranjas and melecotones, as well as other fruits, vegetables, and even plucked whole chickens in stand-like shops right outside their living space. Children ran and played with each other along the margins, where there should have been a sidewalk. The occasional car drove by, but by far there were more carts and tractors than anything. A handful of Calbazeta's populace may have been small-time entrepreneurs trying to carve a living within the urbanity, but most of the town's people worked on the coca fields that surrounded Calbazeta for hundreds of miles in every direction. And those who worked neither on the fields nor selling on the street were usually the ones you could trust to shoot at you. They were the cartel enforcers, foot soldiers with a mean streak and pissed off that the invasion was disrupting their drug operation on the island.

With him he had a four-man *ekipé*, which kept guard while he talked to the locals. Although their unit had an above-average contingency of Sarcanzan citizens, there were soldiers from all over the empire represented in the division. In fact, three of the soldiers with him were Frumosian and were unable to speak anything resembling Nicaroan.

He veered toward one of the vendors, who was selling fruit that was a mixture of light green, orange, and red. "Hola, amigo. ¿Que vendes?" he greeted. "What are you selling?" was the question.

There were three others, two women and a tall, thin man with a dark mustache, but they were quick to disappear once they realized that next to them stood an imperial soldier. The man took longer to leave and he mumbled something before he was off, something the vendor heard but was inaudible to Martinez. The stand owner turned his attention to the *leutnant*. "Bienvenido," he said. In Dienstadi then, "Ganayas, sir. They are the fruit of Nicaro. Sweet, but somewhat tart, full of juice if picked right, like these." The seller's accent was thick, his speech almost musical in quality, which Martinez understood to be unique to the Reguecedo Islands. Even more unique was his fluency.

"Sounds quite tasty," he said. "Dime, ¿conocias a ese hombre que estuvo aqui?" "Tell me, did you know that man?"

The vendor looked back at him coolly. "Solo es un vecino." 'He's only a neighbor.'

Another non-answer. He wasn't going to get a peep from these people. He wondered if 'Juan Pablo Ortega' was even a real name. The name had been dropped during the interrogation of a boy no older than fifteen, caught with a gun during a random street search the night of the attack. With shaking hands, the lad confessed the presence of a Somoza cartel garrison, said that their commander was

a *lugarteniente* by the name of Juan Pablo Ortega.

Of course, no else seemed to know the man. What Martinez knew for sure was that someone killed one of his men and was hiding among the general population. If there was an entire garrison here, the soldiers were not just hiding here, they were *living* here. Any man, woman, even child was a potential hostile. The challenge was any of them could also have been the victims, and the majority of them most likely were.

The tension was constant. "What's his name? ¿Como se llama?" he asked. "If he's your neighbor, you must know his name."

"Mira, yo no se su nombre, yo solo soy un simple hombre de negocios," said the man, with his hands up. A typical story. A simple businessman that knew nothing he called himself.

"Juan Pablo Ortega? Is he one of your neighbors too? ¿Es tú vecino también?" Silence. "Somebody killed one of my men. Somebody here. I'm going to find him. Lo voy a encontrar, one way or the other. Do you understand? ¿Me entiendes? Your cooperación will only help make this misunderstanding be cleared up much faster. Digo yo, ¿no?"

The vendor looked at him for a moment, silently. "If I talk, they will kill me, ¿me entiendes?" he said.

"I understand," said Martinez, with a smile on his face. He wasn't wearing the power armor he had trained in; there wasn't enough of it for everyone, it seemed. The Gothic Theater Group was like a magnet that pulled the best weapons, technology, and men, and the invasion hadn't even started yet. Without the armor, Martinez wasn't much of an intimidating man. So he decided to play to his strength, his charm. "You and I are going to become good friends, amigos, tu y yo. ¿Me escuchas? I'm going to prove to you that the best way to provide security for you and your family is to cooperate with me. I'm going to come back, voy a regresar, at least once a week. ¿Me entiendes? I want to help you. Do you want money? Let me give you money to help your family out. Surely, your wife, your daughter, they need it. Here, here." He started reaching for a jacket pocket behind his vest.

"No, no, no gracias. They will think I say something. They will kill me. Please, sir, stay away." The street vendor looked around nervously.

Martinez' hair on the back of his neck pricked up. He realized the enemy could be anywhere, could attack at any time, but to consciously recognize that *he could be watching you* sent a chill through him. They were tracking their movements, learning the patterns of their patrols, he realized. He would have to make his squads' patrols more irregular in their timing. "C'mon. Wouldn't the money be useful?" he continued to prod.

"Por favor, they will kill me. Por favor, vete, vete ya." The man looked about to cry. "They are everywhere, they see us. Por favor, vete." Go. When he realized that the *leutnant* wasn't going to go anywhere, he finally relented and said, "The man who was here, the man who spoke to me. He knows the one you seek. That is all I know. Please go."

"Okay," said Martinez. "No te preocupes, amigo. Nobody will kill you. What's your name, by the way? ¿Como te llamas? My name is Ignac, like Ignacio."

"R-r-roberto," he stammered. "Please, I have helped you. Vete ya."

"Well, Roberto," said Martinez, stepping closer. "You and I are going to become good friends. Here's what I want you to do for me, Roberto. You're going to give information. Every week, every week I want to hear something new. And it better be true. Because if it's not, I'm going to do something that will get you killed. ¿Me entiendes? But if you do what I ask you to, I will reward you. You will be well paid and protected. I can have you and your family moved to the city, if you'd like. You would be placed into a good job. Do you

want your daughter to be born into...*this*? No. You will do as I ask."

In a sudden arm's move, the *leutnant* swept the produce off the sloped table of the stall. Hundreds of round, multi-colored ganayas rolled across the dirt street. With a loud voice, he yelled, "You will respect me, civilian! Do you understand?" The four soldiers with him took a step forward, but he turned to raise a hand to stop them. "This man knows nothing. Let us be going," he barked.

He took a quick scan of the area before leaving. They would be back that night to raid one of the homes here, extract its inhabitants quietly, and occupy the building with a rotating two-man team. With eyes on the vendor, Martinez could slowly build a dossier of Calbazeta's most wanted. He was certain that the man who had been there when he first arrived at the stand was a local thug. The man would be back to visit the vendor again. When he did, they would see him and nab him, bring the man back to base, and interrogate him. One suspect at a time, he would crack down on the cartel garrison in the town. He *would* defeat them. It was what he would dedicate the next two years of his life to.

"This whole place just seems...wrong, sir," said one of his men, *Korpal* Baru Hesham, one of the Frumosians. "As if there are eyes everywhere."

"That's the feeling of an opportunity, *korpal*," responded Martinez. They were here. That's what mattered, because it was at least one thing he could count on. He would find out they were hiding, all he needed to do was prove to the people of Calbazeta that it was better to give the cartel thugs up than to protect them. Eventually, they would point him to Juan Pablo Ortega or to whoever the *lugarteniente* truly was.

To be continued...

II

Carretera Federal 85, Toward León, Firmador *23 September, 2027*

GNLF forces had taken León just over a week before and Imperial elements had entered into the city on 20 September 2027. The free, lawless city was taken, and most of northern and western Firmador was now firmly in the Liberation Front's hands. Only San Pecc, the area around it, and Tsarina territory fell outside their purview. That put most of Firmador, except Chinadenga pirate-held lands, within the tightening grasp of Imperial authorities.

FCG and slave state forces had either been destroyed or they had melted into the towns and villages, but there was very little sight of them. The Golden Throne was well acquainted with this behavior. It was what they had already experienced in Sarcanza, Zarbia, Indras, and elsewhere. First the enemy would hide, reconvene and consolidate, and then wage its war once again. It was a tired old pattern that the empire was keen on stopping before it even started. Addressing the problem early, by 22 September *Ejermacht* forces were already running patrols on Firmador's major highways. Armored convoys traveled from city to city, passing by a string of main and forward operating bases being built along the routes. These convoys carried needed supplies to each of those locations, but just as importantly they were an early establishment of imperial presence. The patrolling would only become more aggressive from here.

One such convoy was on route to León, having left Matagalpa the same morning. It carried not only soldiers who would garrison the city, but also fuel, food, and medical supplies for the local population. GNLF forces had been particularly violent in the area. Crops had been burned, often with its owners tied down and scorched alive along with their fields. The little in the way of a medical system in the city had been killed or scared into the underground, and hundreds of

thousands were slowly dying of wounds, starvation, or disease. The convoys were bringing in what was needed to begin rectifying and stabilizing the situation.

Carretera Federal 85 had one lane going in each direction. It looked as if the last time it had been paved was perhaps a decade and a half ago. There were potholes where Imperial bombs or GNLFF artillery had struck, and sometimes the burned out shells of destroyed vehicles were parked silently by them, looking at the convoy pass them with ghost-like eyes.

The long, 120 vehicle convoy was well protected by two armored and five mechanized platoons protecting key joints between convoy segments, spaced out with some fifteen to twenty minutes between each group of twenty vehicles. Every truck and every armored car was built for this sort of war, with tall profiles that betrayed the shape of their bellies. Along each flank moved a company's worth of *asalto* infantry, moving from one height or commanding position to next one. A squad of HIM-TECs were patrolling about fifteen minutes head and, overhead, a GLI-44 Blackjester was conducting ISR.

None of this could prevent the IED that was detonated beneath the track of one of the Nakíl 1A4 tanks at the head of the column.

Its right track snapped and began to unravel from around the roadwheels and tensioners, as the tank came to a halt and a cloud of smoke consumed and eventually concealed it as it rose toward the clouds in a giant plume. Almost immediately, the rest of the convoy halts and pulls to the side of the road. Infantry dismounted to prepare a perimeter while they wait for orders to mount up and move out again. Up ahead, where the immobile Nakíl was traversing its gun in a wide arc, the other three tanks were pulling up beside it to provide fire support as two squads of infantrymen dismounted nearby Macán IFVs under heavy enemy fire.

From the Matagalpa international airport, now almost fully co-opted by the *Laerihans* until the new military airfield nearby was fully ready for operations, rose a flight of GLI-76s. It took them some time to reach the kill zone after being scrambled in response to the ambush, but their bombs were welcomed nonetheless when they tore into the surrounding jungle brush.

By the time the smoke and dust of the bombs had settled the enemy was no longer anywhere to be seen. Scout parties later found the bodies of perhaps eleven enemies, but not much else. The struck Nakíl's driver was killed by the IED and four other soldiers had been wounded by enemy gunfire. The convoy only started moving again once a tow vehicle had arrived from the rear to hook the Nakíl onto it, after which it carried the tank to a forward operating base just outside of León.

The offending insurgents, most of whom had survived the firefight, bled into the jungle in various directions. Their commanders would reconvene later and express their content with the attack. It had sent their message: **welcome to Nicaro.**

III



The slums of San Tomás.

San Tomás, Firmador

24 September, 2027

Unlike the rest of the country, San Tomás and the area commanded by DRFF and Tsarina forces had begun to settle after the negotiations of 18 September. DRFF and Tsarina forces were given an amnesty and those who wished to continue fight would have to do so under the GNLFF umbrella. Otherwise, their fighters were asked to disarm and surrender their weapons to imperial authorities. It went

almost without saying that most opted for the former, choosing to fight under symbolic GNLF command. Symbolic because in truth there were already fractures within the GNLF that were revealing themselves, and the Liberation Front hardly benefited from the political experience to juggle the complexities of assimilating a militia of some perhaps seventy thousand *gorilas*. Superficially, in any case, it looked as if Firmador, after suffering from a long civil war, had finally been reunified under a single government.

By 21 September, the forward elements of the Macabéan garrison in San Tomas arrived with a contingent of some three thousand men and their armored fighting vehicles. The urban patrols began the very next day and only became more common as the garrison grew in size. As soon as the main body of imperial troops arrived they would begin broader patrols, covering the entire expanse between Masaya, San Tomas, and Liberia — an area known to Macabéan commanders as *Komsektor II*.

Responsible for this sector of operations was *Komstrategos* Greger Madelán. Tall and rotund, Madelán looked very much a bear of a man. His forearms were surely as large as some men's legs and his neck was like a tree's trunk. He was known among his men for his intensity and commitment to discipline. Madelán had, in fact, been one of the few proponents of the new rules of engagement which prohibited the wanton annihilation of towns and populaces. That was simply not the sort of thing an empire of civilization ought to do. He enforced the new code with ruthlessness on his men, not hesitating to decimate entire companies when accused of crimes as low as isolated rape or theft.

That the general was assigned to *Komsektor II* was perhaps meant as a backhand from high command. Most of the *Ejermacht's* brass had not yet come to accept changes in their counterinsurgency strategy that was being demanded by reality. As the insurgency picked up in Indras, Holy Panooly, and Zarbia, the lessons of Sarcanza had been long lost. To most, the insurgents, pirates, and militias were just another army that had to be found, cornered, and destroyed. They did not yet realize just how tied these forces were to the local population, drawing from their manpower, their economic production, and hiding within their towns and villages. No wonder Madelán was not put in a sector where there an insurgency was expected. High command did not want him to contradict them where the war would be most intense, reserving him for an area that was expected to mostly cooperate as a result of the informal alliance with the Tsarina.

He looked out his office's window, his eyes traveling beyond the high walls made of freshly poured cement. The general looked out toward the endless slums that extended so far that one could not even see the jungle from here. Further beyond, well outside the city were clearings chockfull of the coca plant and production plants. The empire had made a deal with the devil and *Komstrategos* Madelán was not sure what to make of it.

It was not, in any case, his place to second-guess his commanders and neither was he in a position to do much about it. He had been handed the command he had, and truth was that Greger Madelán was grateful of what they had given him. Perhaps it was not an illustrious post on the frontlines in Gholgoth, but neither was he put in administration. Maybe he'd be able to make lemonade from these lemons after all.

"Anabella, play Davidosoi's *Tenth Grand Symphony*," he said. His office, wide and spacious, was empty.

A computerized woman's voice answered. "Yes, Greger."

She was followed by a gentle stream of classical violin that was soon followed by the rest of the orchestra. He continued to look out the glass as the symphony continued to rise and build in its glory. The Tsarina's men had agreed to maintain the peace among the general civilian population, the source of their labor. But, Madelán worried

that not even the cartels had figured out the secret of enforcing the law in the lawless slums. There were of course gangs that sold cartel product and enforced their own rule of law, but they were not the kind to pay taxes. Not even to the cartels. In those slums lay the *komstratego's* opportunity to prove the value of his ideas.

The gangs would undoubtedly fight back. Neither could the empire simply clear them through a house-to-house military operation, for this would disrupt the drug trade. To the Tsarina, an alliance only made sense if it protected her profits. Making it hard for her product to circulate inside the slums went contrary to this, therefore barring the general from any grand operations. Securing the slums would be a long, slow process.

To add to all of this, he was also in charge of overseeing the disarmament of unofficial *gorila* units. As much as the DRFF and Tsarina had agreed to cooperate, there were many who were strong enough on their own to try to mount resistance or evade the demilitarization of the area. This was another hidden challenge, a problem that high command had not paid enough attention to, that he would attend to and use to prove himself and his leadership abilities. Here too he would face political obstacles, including most likely a dearth of men — under his command was little more than an infantry division, an independent tank brigade, and an assortment of special forces and air defense units.

On his face was nothing but determination, however. Madelán was not born a lord. His parents did not give him the gift of the aristocracy. He had come from a banking family and had slowly worked his way through the ranks, showing perseverance, tenacity, and intelligence. His unorthodox ideas were disliked and discouraged, but that he had come this far at all was a testament to Madelán's talent and ambition.

The music intensified as he smiled.

While the Tsarina produced her drugs and exported them throughout Nicaro and Firmador, he would use his men to patrol wide and far. They would help villagers, bring water to towns through engineering projects, and provide medical services to the poor. His men would approach the locals, make friends with them, build relationships with them. Those that opposed his disarmament would be discovered, given up by their peers even, and summarily interrogated. And if ever came the time to clear out even the Tsarina, he would have the people on his side. There would be no place for the insurgent to run to, no place to hide because all would all be loyal to the empire that had brought them wealth, law, and civilization.

IV

West of Masaya, Nicaro

24 September, 2027

The clatter of gunfire could be heard endlessly throughout Nicaro. In the city, DRFN and GNLFF forces continued to clash in heavy firefights that left homes riddled with bullets and bloody with bodies. If one could sleep at all at night it must have been due to pure exhaustion, because the dark could never penetrate the countless fires that burned perpetually throughout Masaya and the noise of war continued at its full intensity without pause. Even after ten days of continuous fighting, the two sides seemed neither attrited nor ready to lay down their arms. Worst of all, the GNLFF siege had stalled for good and the city seemed to be in a violent deadlock.

Outside, especially toward the east, the uproar was just as intense. Masaya and the areas surrounding it, as well as a strip of land that connected with the eastern bay, were all under the jurisdiction of *Komsektor II*. The sector's lack of forces meant that most of the combat was the responsibility of Macabéan-armed and backed GNLFF militia units. The quality of fighting spoke to that of the men fighting

it, and that meant little quality at all.

Jiyu militants had, in theory, capitulated to the Tsarina and that meant to the empire as well, but these were still early days and the chaos had spread to the chain of command. East of Masaya, Tsarina forces clashed with Jiyu *gorilas*, and in the mix were DRFF, GNLF, and Chinadenga soldiers. Macabéan air cover here was sparse, lest they bomb allied forces in the confusion. Even without this last element of destruction, the battle developing in northern Nicaro had caught the civilian population in the middle of it all. Entire villages were swept clean, their inhabitants gunned down where they stood, in their beds, even as they worshiped at their temples. Towns were set alight as one side or the other burned their enemies alive in the homes they occupied, and the innocent screamed as they melted along with them. Macabéan special forces assisting the GNLF hardly did much to put an end to it, watching as the different Nicaroan factions wore each other down in preparation for the inevitable imperial march down to Managua.

To Masaya's west, if one toward San Pecc they would run into *Komsektor III*. Here, about 5,000 Macabéan *regulares* were assembling around the perimeter of Chinadenga territory north and east of the big port city. These had come south from the Sandino area, which had fallen into imperial hands just over a week ago, and were building a string of forward operating bases to contain pirate raiding into wartorn western Nicaro and Firmador. The buildup would continue for the next two weeks, after which Operation GOLDEN BOLT would be launched as a late-autumn offensive to thin the pirates' ranks before the war's winter hibernation.

This operation would take place in the south, as well. On the night of 22 September, the 167th *asalto* division was transported by helicopter into the area that on the map was known as *Komsektor VI*. They would land north of Sandinista territory, which they were ordered to stay out unless in pursuit of Sandinista raiding parties coming from the south. The Sandinistas had experienced the war largely untouched, except for offensives they were conducting against Somoza cartel territories to their northeast, and the *Ejermacht* preferred to move more men south before engaging in heavy combat with them. Instead, the *asalto* division would orient itself north to strike to the rear of Chinadenga forces south of the city from which they took their name. They would be aided by heavy close air support and tactical bombardments throughout the southernmost stretches of the country, as the *Laerihans* began diverting assets away from the rapidly deescalating northern sector of combat.

The 167th would operate in conjunction with GNLF and *koro kirim* units to their north break down pirate forces under command of Commodore Blue-Eyed Nolan, a much-wanted man that the empire had been looking for two years now. They were tasked with clearing the countryside and culling the ranks of enemy fighters before the arrival of the winter halt to general operations.

In total, besides the *asalto* force being moved into the jungles north of Managua, there were 36,000 airborne troops, belonging to the 201st and 452nd *asalto* divisions, in *Komsektor V*. In *Komsektor II* there were perhaps 45,000 combat personnel more to add to some 75,000 in *Komsektor I*. Considering, finally, the 5,000 men in *Komsektor III*, that made for a significantly sized force of almost 180,000 combat personnel. When accounting for special forces, air defense personnel, and assorted other small units, the imperial ground force in Nicaro and Firmador came close to 200,000. Despite these numbers, Macabéan forces were thinning out. Operations were becoming progressively riskier.

There were another 120,000 soldiers, recently graduated Indran recruits ready for bloodying, earmarked to take part in the invasion, but they had yet to land in Batis. It would be almost another week for them to come south to prepare for the completion of the occupation all the way to the frontier south of Managua. Sooner would arrive 'Urnstellung Kreiger,' the division of Ordenite *régulies*,

but even they were at least two days away.

For now, the encirclement of the pirates around Chinadenga would need to be completed by the 167th and an ill-disciplined, shoestring force of GNLf rebels. At least they would have heavy air support on their side, because otherwise they were on their own.

[N.B. This post will be periodically edited for spelling and grammatical errors, as well as to improve flow. As usual, the substance of the post will not be changed.]

Last edited by [The Macabees](#) on Sun Jan 28, 2018 9:36 pm, edited 1 time in total.

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The Scandinavians
Senator

Posts: 4948
Founded: Oct 09, 2004
Capitalist

by [The Scandinavians](#) » Thu Feb 08, 2018 3:20 pm



Imperial Palace, Valgard

There was an ongoing conversation going in one of the myriad of hidden meeting chambers within the imperial palace. Hidden away from the main thoroughfares used by the innumerable people meandering about or working in the compound a ranking Shadow of the Emperor, the title given to the intelligence operatives serving directly underneath the command of the throne, and Crown Prince Fenric ap Erid ao Erid, the regent of the Empire appointed by his father the still reigning Emperor. Since they were speaking about a matter of gravity the room itself was one of the hidden ones which were accessible only to members of the imperial family and their personal attendants. Rooms which few people actually knew existed even within the confines of the palace's inner staff.

Inside of the room the Crown Prince had summoned the Shadow to account for a variety of charges to Shadow detailing the situation. They had already been talking for the better part of an hour and the Crown Prince had decided to conclude the conversation in short fashion. He had come to his conclusion in regards to what course of action would be the most prudent to pursue. He would have to make a choice which would either condemn to death or liberate a formerly trusted agent of his. An agent who had effectively forsaken his sworn duties to advance his own self serving agenda contrary to the plans of Fenric.

Speaking up the Crown Prince resumed control of the conversation and pushed it towards its end, "Shadow, the time has come to end this discussion. There is now little which you can say or evidence that you can provide that will alter the path that we will be chosen by me. However, for the sake of your service I will offer you the chance to make a final statement to me to conclude your defense of your conduct.

"Sire, I only acted in the best interest of the Empire. I did not wish to do anything which would be improper," the Shadow nervously said.

Staring at the man with a scowl Fenric responded, "You consistently kept critical information from me, tolerated your subordinates defying my direct orders, did not seek to root out agents who were providing information to the enemy, sought to undermine me by wantonly interpreting my commands to your benefit, used my money to fund an operation loyal only to you, allowed our assets to be destroyed from within by rebels, and a whole host of other things. Each of these alone warrants a charge of sedition. However, cumulatively these actions label you nothing less than a traitor and as such I name you a betrayer of the dres'Erid. Your sentence will be carried out in three hours and you will be beheaded as an act of mercy to mark your years of service."

"Your grace, I have never sought to harm your or the Empire's interests. All those actions you have described were merely parts of

my own investigations spurred on by my leadership capacity. All of them were aimed at bringing glory to the throne. I have never sought to aggrandize my self in a public or even professional light. Please understand this Crown Prince. I am but a humble agent for you and I will continue to be until the end of my days if you allow me to be," the Shadow proclaimed in a desperate attempt to show his backbone remained, that he was loyal, and that he was not currently deeply afraid.

Looking at him the Crown Prince bitterly stated," I have seen all the paperwork that you used in those investigations. I have read the testimonies from your subordinates. My advisors state that you are guilty of more crimes than the charges levied against you implied. I can make no other conclusion that you are guilty. May the Almighty embrace you if you chose to repent. GUARDS!"

With that said four guards marched into the room and the Shadow fell silent. He bitterly accepted his fate with his face stone cold. He was escorted out and placed into a holding cell. Three hours later he was beheaded by an axeman inside of a secret glade and his body was turned over to his family in accordance with the Crown Prince's wishes that his body be allowed to receive the proper funerary rites at the least as a sort of token sign of gratitude for his service prior to becoming corrupted. In different times his sentence might have been noticeably lighter, but during times of war there was no real allowance for mercy towards treacherous intelligence agents. Thus a sentence of death was needed to serve as a reminder that no weakness will be tolerated among the dres'Erid.

Last edited by [The Scandinvans](#) on Thu Feb 08, 2018 3:22 pm, edited 2 times in total.

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The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

☐ by [The Macabees](#) » Wed Feb 21, 2018 6:46 am



SIEGE AND ABANDONMENT, PART I

Follows from: [7/3/2017](#); [1/11/2017](#); [4/24/2016](#); [1/19/2016](#); [11/30/2015](#); [8/15/2015](#); [4/5/2015](#); [2/3/2015](#); [1/15/2015](#); [11/17/2014](#); [11/9/2014](#); [11/3/2014](#).

"At some point, we realized the easiest solution was to just starve them out."

— Interview with *Kríerlord*, identity anonymous, 13 July 2047.

Siege of Tiwanaku

May 2028

The innovation of the pirates at the hour of importing their ordnance and smuggling it into Tiwanaku never ceased to amaze Ern Dardel. Of course, there were plenty of cracks along the membrane imperial forces had established around the city, truth be told, that opportunities to cross it abounded. Even after almost a year and a half of war, encirclement, and battle, the pirates of Tiwanaku did not seem any closer to giving up.

Quite the opposite, actually. Tiwanaku might have been shelled and

bombed into a ghost-like version of itself, but within its crumbling, half-standing buildings still lived most of the people who considered themselves true Theohuacans. The pirates were as much true Theohuanacans as their civilian counterparts, but the truth was that it was hard to tell the difference — sometimes there was no difference. The enemy waited in their homes for imperial troops to pass and then they would come out again, making the effort of the imperial sweep all for naught. City blocks held for months would be lost within a matter of days and takes weeks to recover. There were rumors that hundreds of thousands, mostly women, children, and old men dead, and not all of them to bullets and hellfire. Indeed, most had simply starved. It was the sort of environment that Dardel and the Knights of *Kula'Kuladin* thrived in.

He sucked in the smoky fumes of the city as he and a group of five other Knights crept through the cramped passages of caved-in ruins. There was a distinct pleasure in all of this and it took a special man to see it, a man who had lost it all, even his soul. Dardel was such a man. You could see it in his eyes, black as pits without a bottom.

Gunfire echoed throughout Tiwanaku. Here, the sound of war was like the chirp of the birds back home. Normal, expected, musical. Jet fighters sped overhead, dropping their bombs and then quickly leaving. This was an almost constant pattern, along with the intermittent artillery shelling that would leave entire squares of urbanity utterly devastated. Inside this beast with a belly of fire lived and died the pirates and the civilians who cooperated with them out of their pitiful crew and clan loyalties.

As Dardel and his squad moved forward they came across a woman draped in grey rags huddling in the frigid cold with her small child, a boy no older than six. They were both enemies, people who refused to surrender, and they were both killed where they quivered. It was a gruesome task, one that Dardel enjoyed, but one that taxed his sanity nonetheless. In wars like these, sanity was an ambiguous thing. The depth of the hate he felt for these people was irretrievable, a gap no longer bridgeable by forgiveness. "The butcher," he was coming to be known as. They would all pay for Mariel's death, all of them.

Not long after killing the boy and his mother, they reached an open space where the weeds had grown tall and the dead grass was now black. Dardel and the others gathered at the edge, right at the line where shadows met light. It was once a park, Dardel could tell by the mangled remnants of a roundabout on the charred field of a playground. The entire area was illuminated by rays of sunlight broken by toppled walls resting on each other overhead. It was as if the heavens were attempting to cleanse it of the evil that had befallen the space. The gods would have a lot of cleaning to do when all of this was done and over. Too much, perhaps. Tiwanaku would remain unholy grounds for a long time to come, a bitter memory, a blight. It would be a monument to evil, one that the empire would try to rid itself of but would nonetheless be forever etched in its character. To be part of this tribute to violence, to have a hand in its construction, warmed Dardel.

It was not just him. He was not especially deranged. More so than the others, perhaps, but they had all suffered loss here. You could point to a random man in the city and know that he had lost brothers, sisters, and friends. There was no soldier here who had not yet seen death, who had not suffered the loss of a comrade, and who had not yet taken a life. There was not one person in this damned city who had not yet seen the face of evil. Innocence was not in retreat, it was already dead.

"Let's keep moving," said Dardel. The others nodded.

Typically, they would have rounded a clearance such as this one. Open spaces, where the light shone through, looked peaceful, glorious, and warm, but they tended to be all but those things. They were far too easy to turn into traps. This one was clean, without a trace of a body and without a scrap of a brass casing in sight. Far

too clean. But, it was their only way forward. On either side, the rubble was too thick to traverse and who knew how far out of their way they would have to travel to get to the other side. And who knew what kind of troubles they'd find along that route. Perhaps the alternative would be worse, even. Better to trudge forward.

Much time had passed since Dardel, a lifeless body being thrown against Tiwanaku's western cliffs, was [first found](#) by the Knights. He was no longer a boy, no longer a mere foot soldier, nor was he that wide-eyed, half-dead man who had given up when before being saved. In *Kula'Kuladin* he had become something more, transcended the pain within him that had clamped him down. Now the storm inside propelled him to new heights, and it was unsurprising that he now commanded his own men. He sent two of his men forward into the smoldering once-park. They made it across unharmed, reaching the other side where they quickly found cover to wait behind while the rest of the squad made their way to their position.

As soon as Dardel and the other three were halfway across a machinegun opened up from one of the heights to the right. A second one sputtered to life almost immediately, this one from the opposite end. One of his men was caught in the leg and he fell onto the ashen ground, clutching his ankle and wailing. Dardel took him from under the shoulders and pulled into a cement fountain with mostly intact walls that traveled around them in a circle.

"Gods damn it," said the injured soldier through gritted teeth. His name was Ernesto Gálvez, a Zarbian recruited into the auxiliaries late last year and received his ticket to this hell not two weeks after the end of his infantry training. Wounded in an ambush near the town of Tulumkanche, north of Tiwanaku, two weeks after his arrival, he had been captured by the enemy and liberated less than twenty-four hours later after his prisoner column was interdicted by the Knights as it weaved through the hollow city streets toward some dark, damp prison like the one Dardel had been kept in. And here he was again, wounded in an ambush, blood pouring from the bottom of his uniform pants. He clutched Dardel's wrist with his own trembling, blue-veined hands, and said, "If shit goes south, kill me. Don't let 'em get me again. Put a gods damn bullet in me."

"Don't talk nonsense, man," answered Dardel. "You're going to pull through. We're all going to pull through."

Gálvez' grip tightened. He looked at Dardel with feverous intensity. "Kill me, promise me."

"I said stop talking nonsense," repeated Dardel, with kind gravity. He stood and delivered a spurt of suppressing fire on one of the hidden machinegun nests that had opened up on them. The intensity of the fire it was delivering had fallen, but, as he looked around, he could see that his fellow Knights were still pinned behind whatever little cover there was. His squad was in a state of paralysis. "I'm going to get us out of here," he muttered.

Hansel Jiven carried the networked tablet. *Soldat* Jiven was a Guffingfordi from the city of Tilbrecht, and like most he had lived the partition of the country at the end of the [War of Golden Succession](#). Like many of his countrymen, he had welcomed the Golden Throne's occupation, after all 'the empire had saved them from the Stevidian foe.' He had joined the auxiliaries out of faith in an empire that had preserved the Guffingfordi way of life, even as the imperial tendrils tightened their grip. And even now, when [foes flirted with alliance](#), the young Jiven had maintained his loyalty. Hansel had never questioned his decisions and allegiances until he had arrived at Tiwanaku.

The poor man seemed to doubt himself most of all now, as he quivered behind a retainer wall that once held back the playground's sand. There was nothing but death-soaked concrete there now, pocked by the machinegun fire to continue to batter and abuse the area around them. Jiven was staring off into the distance, already thinking of his doom.

Leaving a bleeding Gálvez behind, Dardel braved the bullets as he rushed the short distance to the Guffingfordi *soldat*. "Jiven," he said, shaking the soldier by the arms, "Jiven, look at me."

The shell-shocked man's eyes did not flicker.

"Shit," said Dardel, under his breath. He reached for the wide pant leg pocket where Jiven usually kept the pad stashed. Its case was hardened, capable of being dropped, thrown around, and legend said even shot and still run unhindered. The *soldat* did not even move as Dardel removed it from his pocket. The Guffingfordi's fighting days were long over.

He powered the tablet on. All Knights knew how to use these, as all Macabéan soldiers were trained early on to coordinate with friendly units and fire support. And although for all else the Knights collected and trained their men on their own, the *Ejermacht* had not been shy in equipping the ad hoc guerrilla unit with all the advanced weaponry and technology available to them. Likewise, aid from nearby units and artillery firebases was always forthcoming. Indeed, the irregular Knights of *Kula'Kuladin* oft worked with their more conventional brethren to find, trap, and destroy defending pirate fighters. Indeed, in that role they were indispensable and for that service the Knights were rewarded well. It would be unlike the empire for that support not to be available here. Yet, when the pad finally turned on, on its screen was displayed 'CONNECTION NOT FOUND' in red.

Dardel hit the tablet hard on the side, but the message did not change. Clearly, something was wrong. He powered it down, waiting a few seconds, and turned it back on again. The message read the same. "*Dammit!*" His yell echoed across the empty clearing and he suddenly realized that the machine guns had gone silent.

The wind picked up just then, eerily howling through narrow concrete corridors. Only Gálvez' whimpering, curled up and clutching his ankle as he was, was the only other sound. Something felt wrong and the hairs on the back of his neck stood up in spiked alert. Dardel scanned the windows, ledges, and makeshift platforms of the disfigured buildings around him, looking for any sign of the enemy.

A black figure armed with a rifle topped the crest of a pile of rubbish, twisted metal, and collapsed structures. Behind him emerged perhaps another twenty. Another group of similar number appeared from their south and, when finally Dardel and his men recognized them for what they were — pirates —, it was *Aftkorpai* Anghel Popescu who first opened fire. Dardel was already halfway to the floor by the time the machineguns opened fire again, suppressing the Knights and requiring them to hide tightly behind cover lest they cared to die. It was like a torrential storm of metal and gunpowder.

From his prone position, hidden inside the empty concrete basin of the vaporized park's fountain in which he had jumped into, Dardel carefully aimed his rifle through an opening made by a chunk of the wall that had fallen off finally after endless abuse. He fired at anything he moved, not knowing if he hit something, not caring regardless. The enemy surrounded them on all sides and fired back, seemingly sealing the fate of Dardel and the five Knights of *KulaKuladin* other his command.

Dardel stopped firing and turned back in the direction of Gálvez, listening. He could no longer hear the man whine. When had it stopped? Even with the clatter of battle, he should have been able to hear the *soldat's* cries.

It was the sudden, *sharp* crack of a steel-jacketed 13.3mm round slamming up against the lip of the fountain wall to his right that brought him back to it.

"STATUS CHECK!" he roared, putting down the rifle and taking the tablet back in his hands, fidgeting with it to restore the network signal with *Komkent*, central battlefield command network. All around

him, the enemy was vibrant and energetic, firing with an incessant nonstop rhythm that would drive any sane man mad. Of course, those who had been stuck in this godforsaken city for the past nearly two years could hardly be counted among the sane.

Despite how the noise of war drowned out all else, he finally heard one of his men shout. "Popescu alive and well, *sargént*." The *aftkorpál* was a good soldier. He had the talent to see his foes from a mile away. You could not surprise the man, as he had proven here. At 17 years of age, the Indran had chosen his destiny early. But he would return to the poverty he once knew with surplus eagerness if it meant to escape the dungeons of Tiwanaku. The irony of it all was that, if he survived to return home, however unlikely as that prospect seemed, he was not sure whether it would be home at all. He could hardly remember what his life used to be. Tiwanaku was his reality, it demanded his unwavering attention, and it had taken over his being to turn him into another corrupted soul that could never operate in the real world again. But, the man made a damn good killer.

Pop, pop. Two enemy gunmen went down as they revealed themselves from out behind a pile of rubble, trying to dash the distance toward the fountain. Popescu took them down cold, quickly turning his attention to another pirate rifleman. *Pop, pop.* Popescu wasn't the only one firing.

"Gálvez, alive and...alive, and in the fight."

"Good to hear," said Dardel. "Jiven?"

"Jiven is out, *sargént*." It was Popescu. "Hasn't moved since you saw him last. I'm surprised the bugger is still alive given the punishment coming our way," the *aftkorpál* said, yelling over the ear-piercing screeching and stomach-churning drumming of rounds streaking through the air and crashing into walls of wood, stone, and flesh.

Dardel hardly heard as he continued playing with the networked tablet, trying to reestablish a connection with one of the UAVs circling above the city. He looked up. When was the last time he saw one? No matter. Turning back down to the screen he turned the pad off again and rebooted it, grunting on her his breath. This should not be happening. This problem had never surfaced before, access to imperial fire support had never been denied to them. And yet when the screen came back on, the same red 'CONNECTION NOT FOUND' message was displayed across the glass like a damned specter destined to forever haunt him. It was all he could do to not pick up the thing and slam it against the ground.

Instead, he threw it aside and picked up his rifle, steadying himself through the rhythm of firing. Every squeeze of the trigger was like a pound of weight being shed from his shoulders. Every man who fell at his rifle's behest was another ounce of rage burning in the engine of what drove him. If they were going to die there, he might as well give the enemy hell while he still breathed.

"Don't let up, boys," he yelled. "Fight 'til your fingers stop working and then fight with your toes."

The enemy closed in on them with startling speed. They were not Macabéan soldiers, but that did not mean that the fighters were unseasoned fighters. Most pirate veterans of the old wars were dead now, churned meat in the grinder, but the younger fighters who still lived would get more experience from a month of battle here than a year of war elsewhere. Here and there, a man in their ranks would fall, but most of those they hit surely had only been wounded.

Four of the enemy fighters had rounded the northeastern side of the clearing, coming into sight as they stood in Dardel's direct line of fire. He fired once, striking one of them in the chest and knocking him back. The other three reacted quickly, leveling their own rifles and firing back, and they would have killed Dardel had the *sargént* not rolled to the side. He climbed over the concrete wall and thrust

himself over to the other side, landing with a scraping thud. Jiven was just ahead of him, still resting against the back wall of a large concrete shard. There was a hole in his head, a small tendril of smoke rising from the exit wound.

Just as he turned to look for the others, he saw a bullet penetrate Gálvez, who was sitting on his legs and still poorly positioned back where Dardel had left him. It entered through the *soldat's* abdomen. Gálvez began to seize and convulse, contorting his body as blood poured out the sides of his mouth and his eyes rolled back into his head to show only red-veined white.

With gritted teeth, Dardel turned his right eye toward his Hali-53's iron sights. *Pop. Pop.* Behind him, he could hear the bullet shred Popescu's shoulder as it traveled through it and crashed into the concrete behind the *aftkorpai* with a crack. Dardel continued to fire, wild-eyed, waiting for death's sweet release.

Suddenly, several of the pirate riflemen were felled by once. How had he forgotten? Joan Berfugen, the Frommian, and Isaak Kanselo, the Rezeghi, two *soldat prim*, opened fire from their perches higher up along one of the half-exposed flanking buildings. It was Berfugen who was firing with his rifle, catching the enemy cold and unaware. A great many had died before they shifted their positions to get behind cover. Kanselo, who had been carrying a DNR-13, had it over his shoulder now as he fired a rocket across the urban clearing and into a crevice on the other side. One of the machineguns went silent.

The surprise was only temporary, as the pirate fighters quickly adjusted quickly, but it created a momentary lull in the battle. Just dimly over the reduced noise Dardel heard the pings of a tablet that had finally found a connection in the *Komkent*.

But the tablet was nowhere to be found. He had left it back in the fountain. Dardel cursed under his breath.

"Get it," said Popescu. The *aftkorpai* had lost color in his face and blood was traveling down his chest and arm like tributaries off of a great river. He still held his rifle in one hand, its butt against his shoulder as tightly as he could manage, and Popescu continued to fire. When his magazine emptied, he reloaded it with one hand. "Get it. Call artillery, take the bastards down with us."

Dardel nodded and started to crawl forward, back toward the fountain wall. Kanselo fired another rocket and it struck somewhere on the other side of the empty concrete basin. Men wailed. Others fired back at the two Knights with the advantage of the higher ground. And Berfugen was well-known among the Knights for his marksmanship. He was Willed, so the military priests said. Dardel recognized the opportunity and threw himself back over the wall, right back into the heat he had rolled out of what seemed minutes ago. Rifle in hand, torn strap wrapped around his arm, he fell on his belly and quickly scooted up, barrel pointed toward the opening along the northeastern edge of the fountain basin. The four who had rounded on him before must have been killed or driven away, for they were there no longer. The *sargént* did not care to spend the time looking for bodies, quickly darting for the tablet instead.

Grabbing it, he tapped to wake the device. When it cleared he saw the connection band and a map of the area, with a cluster of six green dots arranged around the position he lay at then and another cluster of six about five hundred meters northwest of his position, these colored blue. Friendly units. There were no red dots on the map, no enemies. One machinegun was very clearly alive, and yet it was marked. None of the fighters still firing from behind cover around him were marked either. It was as if there was no battlefield intelligence, no eye in the sky keeping track of the firefight for them. The only data source was a low bandwidth local wi-fi connection, short in range and from a nearby source.

The pirates had recomposed themselves and had even forced Kanselo away from his ledge with dedicated fire. Berfugen was still firing, but

he would hide behind the wall and run between firing spots between shots. Sometimes the countering fire was too strong and he would be forced into hiding. With the flanking threat bottled up, the enemy began to turn their attention back toward Dardel.

Six of them crept up toward the fountain, climbing over mounds of rubble and churned earth to reach it. When they approached the lip of the basin just to his right he laid himself against the concrete wall as closely as he could. The enemy soldiers scanned the area, rifles pointed forward and at the ready. They were searching for something. Survivors, perhaps.

It seemed like an eternity that they were there. They looked over every inch of soil and debris carefully, backtracking, then looking over the same spot twice. It was a miracle they had not seen him yet.

He silently awaited death, as if he were desperate to avoid it despite its inevitability.

When they found Popescu, still bleeding heavily from the shoulders, eyelids half-closed, they executed him where he lay. The *aftkorp* was a fighting man, but he hardly got a shot off before they gunned him down. How had they still not seen him? He was pressed against the wall. Dardel noticed that he had left the tablet behind and in his hand was his rifle. Such was the infantryman's instinct.

He decided then that he would not wait for death. He had lost it all, he welcomed death. Rifle in hand, Dardel rolled away from the wall to land on his back with the barrel of his weapon pointed toward the enemy. The man that looked back at him was not a man, but a mere boy. A Tiwanaku pirate no more than 15 in age, with hard eyes that no youth should have. He had him. The boy would die. And then the other pirates would turn and kill Dardel. Perhaps he'd get another one before he died, but this *would* be his moment to go. Dardel pulled the trigger with a bliss he had not felt since he had last seen Mariel. He would return to her.

The boy soldier fell with dead eyes, blood spilling from the wound in his neck. Dardel turned his rifle to the next one and fired, felling another one. The entire group turned to him now and Dardel embraced his liberation.

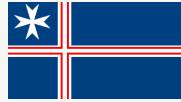
But, it did not come.

From the periphery, gunfire sounded. The rebel fighters were cut down where they stood or otherwise forced back. Rifle and machine-gun fire came seemingly from all sides, and a rocket streaked through the air to strike the second pirate machine gun nest that had not yet been knocked out. If these were friendly soldiers, there were more of them than the networked map had let on. There were at least a dozen or more soldiers entering the fray now, chasing the enemy away. The chaos unraveled and Dardel collapsed where he laid, exhausted and dejected. He had come *so close* to being unshackled from his life, his anger, and his death wish.

A Knight with day-old encrusted blood on his face crept up to Dardel and looked down on the *sargént*. Dardel's eyes were open, but he did not say a word as he was helped up. He felt like he did that day he threw himself into the ocean from the prison he was escaping from and like he did the day he woke up again. As if he had been cheated from the elixir of death once again.

It still had not hit him just how tightly he had been hugging that wall before deciding to die, just how fervently he had been holding on to his last thread of life, regardless of how much he thought he sought to die.

...to be continued.



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Founded: Oct 09, 2004
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by **The Scandinavians** » Sat Mar 17, 2018 12:25 pm



Drana Front, Drasdag

The siege of the city had taken its toll on the defenders manning the trenches and the civilians who were often forced to hide away within bunkers or other shelters when the enemy began another round of bombardment, though the lion's share had retreated northward towards the imperial hinterlands along the north coast. Those civilians who remained were generally unwilling to leave their homes or were critical personally. Hundreds of thousands of warrior caste had been sent into the city of Drasdag before the enemy had landed in force. They were dispatched en masse to defend the series of holy sites within the city against being taken by the enemy. For it was determined that the fall of Drasdag could create a massive collapse of morale if the foe was allowed to take control of a city so filled with the legacy of the righteous. Their orders in turn were quite simple: hold the city at all costs.

In order to get the right sort of soldiers to be dispatched within the city special martyr units were mustered, composed solely of volunteers, and given the special promise of joining the list of anadres' Erid, the most blessed chosen of the people of Erid. Those whose names would be carved into the granite halls of the vaults of the ascendant. Those who would go before the throne without any fear. Those whose sins, including up to murder and heresy, would be removed once their task had been completed or when their blood anointed the earth in service of the Almighty. Either way, a very convincing argument in a society which was so deeply religious that death in service to the faith was considered the greatest prize by many.

The tone for the battle therefore had been set for the majority of those who had agreed to the assignment. Though there was a notable contingent of people merely seeking glory as the city was believed to be unconquerable by many. Thus creating a structure garrison willing to take risks and accept losses that most other groups would find intolerable to endure. Something which the imperial command was counting on as they projected that the siege would be prolonged and that there would be no real relief for the defenders of Drasdag in the foreseeable future.

Overall, there was no easy answer to be found for how to best address the situation. As such, it was accepted that the war would have to continue without much consideration being given to Drasdag as it would be enveloped by the enemy early in the conflict. With such a mindset it had been determined that the city, which had been designed as a fortress complex in the event of a major slave rebellion in the surrounding rube fields where tens of millions of imported slaves toiled away in dire conditions, was fully stocked to endure a siege of up to four years in terms of food supplies and had around 3 years worth of munitions if used at the current rate at least.

The defenses of the city were arrayed in such a manner as to be able to properly counter a direct assault from the sea. Though, the fact that most of the city proper was built upon a granite mesa which rose directly out of the water to 150 feet above sea level helped to make the city unassailable through some beach landing. Added into this was a series of deep cut coastal batteries capable of firing everything from machine guns to missiles onto any force within range. Thus all attacks would likely have to come from the north if the opposing force wanted to have a good chance at proper power projection and avoid a veritable death trap. Something which had been accounted for by the creation of a series of trenches into the ground north of the city and the stone deep structures added into it designed to resist prolonged fire from modern military equipment.

The environment among those remaining citizens in the city was that the oncoming conflict would be a chance to prove their worth. They, after all, were generally people who had chosen to remain at their stations. Thereby preventing any sort of mass panic setting in hopefully. At the least, the civilians in the city were there by choice and as such the warriors stationed in the city did not have to worry as much about a breakdown of the social. After all, everyone in the city knew what they had signed up for which gave them more fortitude than would be expected from a conscript. With their families safe in the northern cities.

On top of this the clergy remained within their city to guard the various holy sites inside. Though their contribution to the direct war effort would be minimal. For, as men of the robe, the clergy were prohibited from taking up arms unless if they joined a priestly order of war. Something none of them really wanted to do. Therefore they kept to their churches praying for the salvation of the city and the defeat of the enemy.

With the city well stocked, the overall mood in the city had been quite strong during the period of the siege thus far. The hundreds of thousands of warriors held their posts, the civilians kept up with repair of damaged infrastructure, and the priests kept on praying as was their profession. Things were going generally quite fine on those fronts. Though there always was some sort of threat that could bring discord in a siege as people often find themselves with too much time to think on their hands.

Since the tone had been set from the start, the main ways that the defenders had kept up morale was by entertaining themselves. Thankfully, this was largely not fueled by people turning to drink. Nor was it egged on by the soldiers turning their frustrations loose through sinful behaviors such as gambling or doing damage to properties. Instead, their energies were directed towards a variety of sports, electronic gaming, and the sheer diversity of discussions taking place amid an otherwise undivided group of people.

Despite there being distractions, the conflict was still the primary affair of the day for everyone who was not on a form of leave within the city. Even for those who were on leave still had to deal with the constant bombardment and threats from the siege. Though thanks to the extensive system of underground structures designed just in case of a siege there was sufficient cover that when the alarm was raised few were more than a minute away from a suitable shelter.

The situation born from the various conversations occurring within the bunkers was quite alien for many people in the Scandinvan Empire, especially from members of the warrior caste. For the first time people were dealing with foreign ideals on notions of democracy, liberty, and class equality. This unknown being introduced led to many interesting conversations being had. With some people being exposed to concepts that they never even heard of before. Such a development though was not entirely welcome by the officer core. They quickly put a stop to this talk by merely threatening to inform the Inquisition and the Shadows of what was going on.

Therefore, before the fire could truly spread, the warriors were put back into line. Furthermore, the elders among them being to discipline them much more thoroughly for engaging in talks which were borderline treason or heresy. Added into this was the round of propaganda employed against the invaders and the preachers being unleashed which utterly defeated any real talks which were unwanted by the status quo of the Glorious Empire. Yet, there still remained some discussions which were merely youthful banter. Conversations which were not proper, but not forbidden as to stop them would require an expenditure of effort which was viewed as unjustified and could hamper the fighting spirit of the men.

One such activity occurring was between a veteran and group of young soldiers who had finished their training just before the war began in earnest. The divide between them was quite apparent. The veteran was a dutiful soldier who did not place any overt pride in the

making of war. He was there to uphold his oath, defend his family, and protect his people. There was little else to be factored into the equation for him. He had volunteered for Drasdag because he had felt it to be the proper thing to do.

In opposition to these positions the younger soldiers were mostly fighting out of a want to prove themselves. They were, like so many others of their age group, yearning to make their own place in the world. The Drasdag front, being bound to be one of the most bloody fronts of the war, had managed to attract more than its fair share of idealistic young men. The soldiers debating with the veteran were quite typical of the that type of individual. They did vary in that they were a tad bit more boastful about their more gratuitous attitudes when it came to pursuing the fairer sex and their appetite for alcohol. This was something that the veteran was aiming to correct in them. For he otherwise saw within them the makings of fine warriors.

One night the veteran decided to finally conclude their ongoing dispute and properly put the newbies into their rightful place. Therefore, to achieve his goal, he went before them when they were near the front one day waiting in a shelter whilst a abnormally powerful barrage of enemy fire was hitting the surface. He started off by saying, " War is never about fulfilling your own wants. There is no such thing as a battle in which an individual alone can turn the day. We each are part of something bigger and greater. We are dres'Erid and that is why we must fight against any who dare challenge our Empire.

This war is not about offering our warriors and soldiers a chance to earn renown for themselves. This is not about showing the dres'nalar the mettle of our people. This is not about allowing you pups to earn the affections of the women folk. This conflict is about so much more than those things.

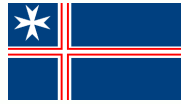
We fight to maintain the sovereignty of our nation against foreign interlopers who seek to force us to abandon the path of Erid. We wage war so that we might uphold the righteous ways that the Almighty bestowed unto us through his holy disciples. We brave the front lines so that our children do not fall into the debauched ways of the dres'nalar and forget what we are."

After hearing the speech, the young warriors were taken aback. The lecture had given them something to certainly think about in the near term. Something to keep them busy while they remained at the front and it kept them distracted from the more base pursuits they had fallen into earlier. Their time spent in reflection ended up becoming a boon to them. For they now had finally begun to center themselves. A development which helped to noticeably improve their performance on the front and decreased the rate of negative reports coming in.

For his part, the old veteran was promoted and began to be sent to other units to asses their character. With each unit he was embedded with, he left a mark upon their collective character. In Scandinvan terms at least, for the better. This continued over a few months until an enemy barrage caught him and the patrol unit he was with unawares. They were killed to the last by it and it was not until the following week that the old veteran was listed as killed in action. News which was suppressed so as not to lead to the men he had helped reform losing their edge in the ongoing struggle. Instead, his body was secretly laid to rest, with honors, below a church for martyred warriors where it would remain till he could be sent to his family's own cemetery after the war in Drana was over at long last and the invaders defeated there. An event which no one could reliably predict at that point in the war.

We are the Glorious Empire of the Scandinvans. Surrender or be destroyed. Your civilization has ended, your time is over. Your people will be assimilated into our Empire. Your technological distinctiveness shall be added to our own. Your culture shall be supplanted by our own. And your lands will be made into our lands.

"For five thousand years has our Empire endured. In war and peace we have thrived. Against overwhelming odds we evolved. No matter what we face we have always survived and grown. We shall always be triumphant." -Emperor



The Scandinavians
Senator

Posts: 4948
Founded: Oct 09, 2004
Capitalizt

by The Scandinavians » Sun Apr 01, 2018 5:54 pm



The Sons of Erid Central Compound in Valdra, Forsaken Order of the Fallen World

The room was pitch black save for the fire at the front before which stood a single figure whose outline was accented solely by black robes and the hood which hid his face. Raising his arms he loudly proclaimed, "We are the agents of prophecy my brothers! We are the ones tasked with completing the work started so long ago by the holy fathers of the true faith! Upon this world walks the next apostle of the Risen Lord! He has completed most of the trials of the prophecy of the Actra Erid Pri! He will assuredly pass the final tests and prove himself beyond a doubt to the world!"

Reciting from memory he quoted the Book of Erid, "He shall say, 'I am the Actra Erid Pri. I have overcome the clasp of death itself. I have redeemed the multitude from the degeneration of the world. My voice shatters those who teach the ways of Sodom. My hand slays the serpent whispering against the love of the Almighty. I restore the example of Adam and Eve. I come to deliver you from desire, doubt, and misery.'"

Articulating the point he stated, "Crown Prince Fenric has brought battle to those who fallen to ways of the depraved. He has conquered the agents of the sin of flesh from within our own ranks and shall soon do so for the world. He has crushed the lies of the heretic, the heathen, and the false prophets. He has again given us pride to be dres'Erid. The last tribulation of death shall soon be defeated by him for the will of Almighty is on our side. The forces of prophecy are now at work and the world shall be shaken to its very foundations soon by the might of our faith. We however cannot forget that we have an inherent duty to serve him in whatever manner the faith might require of us in the future my brothers."

Again he began to read a phrase from scripture, "The day shall again come for those who live within the embrace of the true faith to again bring the word to the heathen beyond the blessed lands. They shall instruct them in the faith with the example of the Actra Erid Pri who shall offer all of humanity the chance to know the glory of the divine."

Expanding he added to the piece further with another tidbit from the Book of Erid, "The day shall again come for those who live within the embrace of the true faith to again bring the word to the heathen beyond the blessed lands. They shall instruct them in the faith with the example of the Actra Erid Pri who shall offer all of humanity the chance to know the glory of the divine."

The man went back to clarifying the point of the citations, "Our purpose is clear my fellows. There can be no doubt about it from those with clear minds. We are to be agents of the Crown Prince we he fully steps into the mantle of his proper apostolic role. We are to be the vanguard of the faith as the dres'Erid begin the redemption of the world. We are to drive out the servants of the devil. We are to forth to the far flung corners of the world and bring them into welcoming arms of the true faith. The dres'nalar are to be taught the foundations of the faith first by the spread of missionaries. We to win the hearts of the heathens by the strength of our words, through the honor of our righteous works, the innate validity of the teachings of the Church, and through welcoming even the worst of humanity into our ranks. Those nations which shall not offer us the option to bring them the true faith peacefully shall instead be brought into the fold by the might of our swords."

Stepping into the darkness of the room he continued, "We shall be the force which finally pushes back the night that has consumed so

much of the world. We shall shatter the lies of their vile world. We shall bring the dawn which liberates humanity from its sinful existence as it stands. May the Almighty give his favor and may we prove ourselves worthy instructors of the faith!"

With that said he clapped his hands and the room was made bright by the automated lighting of the various torches throughout the room. An action meant to represent the oncoming enlightenment of all of mankind by the fires of the true faith. After this the crowd broke into a rousing applause and various people breaking out in prayer. A room of people fanatically devoted to their mission as a secret sect within the Sons of Erid which had been for generations attempting to fulfill the prophecy of one of the imperial line ascending to the mantle of new apostle. One who would bring the faith of the Scandinvans to the whole world.

Last edited by [The Scandinvans](#) on Sun Apr 01, 2018 7:01 pm, edited 1 time in total.

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"For five thousand years has our Empire endured. In war and peace we have thrived. Against overwhelming odds we evolved. No matter what we face we have always survived and grown. We shall always be triumphant." -Emperor Godfrey II

Hope for a brighter tomorrow - fight the fight, find the cure



The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by [The Macabees](#) » Sun Apr 15, 2018 3:02 pm



THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN CAROL, PART I

Follows from: [2/21/2018](#); [7/3/2017](#); [1/11/2017](#); [4/24/2016](#); [1/19/2016](#); [11/30/2015](#); [8/15/2015](#); [4/5/2015](#); [2/3/2015](#); [1/15/2015](#); [11/17/2014](#); [11/9/2014](#); [11/3/2014](#).

"We just let them rot there while we built up our strength."

— Interview with *Sargént* Enrique Jorán
Madragón, former Zarbian auxiliary; 21
November 2043.

Siege of Palenque

March 2028

Only the poorest-made gas carries color and odor.

Thirty-two bodies littered the street, all of them in the uniform of the Macabéan infantryman. They had come in light gear, seeking to surprise their enemy as the morning's dew still hung in the air, and found themselves caught in a trap. It was sarin gas that had been used. By the time those soldiers realized what was going on they were already writhing on the floor, dying. By the time their rescuers had come, they were already dead. 'Three-Legged' Carol's ambush killed the rest. The captain looked down at the dead one last time from his perch, up high on the shelled frame of an old apartment building, before turning away.

The Macabéans were usually not so easy to kill. Carol remembered fighting them in the previous wars; he remembered what it was to fight men in titanium and ceramic suits. 'Tis why he told his men to use armored bullets when they had 'em. But recently, and despite dwindling supplies, they hadn't needed to use such measures. These imperial soldiers had not worn battle armor at all, merely simple vests, and they had foregone their chemical warfare equipment. A deadly mistake.

Carol swiftly descended down the half-destroyed staircase that spiraled in a square down three floors, until hitting the rubble-strewn lobby below. There, six of his men waited for him. Another two came down behind him, apparently having been waiting in the shadows lest another unexpected attack occur and their leader be injured, out in the open as he had been as he scanned the damage he and his men had done to the imperial patrol. They exited out into another, smaller street that ran parallel with the one the ambush had taken place on, until it curved and veered in a southward direction, deeper where pirate forces ran rampant in their stronghold.

"Let us be leavin'," he barked. "Afore more o' 'em arrive."

Almost a hundred other men appeared from darkened corners and from inside buildings, and they all trotted down the narrow street together. Moving in such large numbers was unusual. It was too easy to be caught by a Macabéan UAV or by a scout waiting in the high-rises to see any sign of movement. Carol congregated them for just enough time to give them orders. "Adelmore, ye 'n yer crew are t' rendezvous wit' me in Th' Pen. Six-Toes, loot yer crew west 'n wait fer me thar. Th' rest o' ye scurvy dogs, stay wit' me 'n spread out. We be headed north," he said, quickly. "Go, now!"

About thirty of his men peeled off entirely, going their respective directions, while the rest disappeared into the savaged buildings to follow Carol where they were well hidden from imperial surveillance and reconnaissance. They moved like rats through the city, and soon enough would join them in the underworld.

He came upon a manhole hidden beneath a pile of concrete pieces, brick shards, and other waste that had been collecting here for years now precedent from the destruction caused by the artillery and aerial bombardments, the constant ground fighting, and the ceaseless conflict that had swallowed southeastern Theohuanacu whole once again. Carol motioned to a group of his men to have them remove some of the rubble. They revealed the manhole, opened it, and after all of his men had gone through it and into the sewer he followed them into the darkness below...

...Vin Morr was a born tracker. Out in the forests outside of Hoogenbosch his father had taught him all there was to know. They hunted prey of all kinds and forms, from rabbit to wolves and bears. With the Guffingfordi army, he had learned to track humans. In western Theohuanacu, he had helped Zealand's soldiers track indigenous militants back to their safe havens along the coastline. When his country fell to the Golden Throne, he joined them and found himself doing much the same as he always had, simply for different masters. Unsurprising, then, his deployment to Palenque.

Not that he had wanted to come here. **Nobody** wanted to be here, not even the damned pirates — no wonder they were always out at sea, raiding coastline townships and harassing cargo ship crews trying to make an honest living. When the sun sat high it was hot and muggy, and when the seas were unforgiving it was cold, windy, and wet.

"Any luck? I swear to the gods, we better find this motherfucker," said the *komandánt*, who was standing over Morr as if he were his supervisor on the job. Well, thinking about it, the man kind of was exactly that. Not that Morr had to like it.

The Guffingfordi looked up at the officer. "This trail has been used quite a bit, sir. I see some footprints that are perhaps a day fresh, but they're all over the place. They seem to converge over there." He pointed to a pile of debris sitting in the middle of a small plaza. At one point there may have been a fountain there, but any traces of it were long gone. Instead, the small square had become the neighborhood dump, it seemed. Morr didn't know if anybody had ever truly considered Palenque beautiful, but next to what it was now it must have been a resort. "Something is under there," he said.

"Figures," snorted *Komandánt* Rickards. He turned to a squad of soldiers waiting inside one of the adjacent buildings and motioned for them to come out. "Move that rubble, boys," he ordered.

Six soldiers carried rocks, bricks, and other scraps from the pile to the side of the street, where they tossed it against the buildings. Two soldiers kept guard, lurking in the shadows with their rifles at ready. There were other soldiers in the vicinity, but they were well spread out along a perimeter guarding the *komandánt*. When they were finished, they revealed a closed manhole.

These tunnel entrances, the Macabéans considered them worth their weight in gold. Below the surface, Palenque was crisscrossed with an ever contracting and expanding tunnel work and passageways that the pirates used to move troops around the city. When found, they could be cleaned out and destroyed, but they were quick to come back and the enemy was getting better at hiding them. But, that task was not Morr's responsibility and neither was it *Komandant* Rickard's. They were here to find a very specific group of people, a pirate crew that had ambushed and killed over thirty men belonging to another unit.

A few days ago, a Macabéan patrol had captured a prisoner who claimed to raid alongside the fabled 'Three-Legged' Carol. Carol was a pirate captain who had helped lead Palenque's defenses since the beginning of the war. His tactics were elusive and difficult to defeat decisively. Distributing his forces throughout the city, he let them roam the city freely, ambushing and fighting the Macabéans at will and only when it best suited them. And when he needed them for a raid of his own, Carol called on them at will. *Ejermacht* leadership had called on their soldiers to capture Carol...or better yet, **kill him**. The patrol staged a surprise attack on the position where their prisoner had reported Carol's camp to be, carrying only a light load to move faster and more nimbly through the ocean of collapsed buildings. When at their most confident, they were caught by a mortar barrage. The shells were laden with sarin. Sixteen men died within fifteen minutes. The others were cut down by machineguns when they came to help their dying comrades.

'Three-Legged' Carol had to die.

The *komandánt* called all of his forces to him and the Macabéan *bandag* quickly entered the dark tunnel on his orders. Morr was up ahead, looking for tracks and other clues. The passageway was narrow and forked up ahead. There were prints in both directions, but most of the freshest prints went left. Morr led Rickards' men in that directions.

There is a lot more to tracking than most realize. It's not just about prints or even the subtle clues that people tend to leave behind, like torn clothing, food cans, and other evidence of civilization and humanity. Sometimes, tracking was as primal as a man's sense of smell. Other times it was a question of listening. All the senses played a role, and so did experience. Not merely experience with the techniques, but with the environment, the culture, and its people. All of these things mattered, which was why local trackers were typically preferred to *ejermacht* trackers. But the Palenque locals were not the type to collaborate with the empire, thus men like Morr were all the empire had.

Seventeen months he had been here. Seventeen months fighting in Palenque, looking for the enemy, and escorting warriors to the killing fields. He had been in firefights himself and killed men on his own. Morr had even been caught in a few gas attacks, an event occurring with more frequency now than it used to. Despite the blockade, the pirates were smuggling in weapons in record numbers, keeping the rebellion well supplied. This convergence of factors meant that Morr had seventeen months of experience under his belt already. Enough to make him damn good at finding pirates. It was why he had been hand picked by *Komandánt* Rickards for this mission.

They walked down the unlit tunnel for another few hours with nothing but the sensors on their helmets to see. When it seemed that the tunnel was endless, they stumbled across Captain Carol's camp sight. There were cans strewn all over the place. One of them was open and Morr bent down to inspect it. "Fresh food," he said. "They left here this morning."

"We're close then," answered the *komandánt*.

"We should rest," said another officer with the insignia of a *leutnant*. "We've been marching for hours and it's a good time for the men to eat."

The *komandánt* looked at the other man. "Best to wait until after the battle to eat. I assure you, the food will taste much better then. We continue to hunt now, move on *G'sargént* Morr and scout ahead."

Soldats Balenziaga and Leket, his dedicated escorts by Rickards' orders, went with him as made his way forward. Behind him, the *komandánt* and his *bandag* readied themselves to move. Men pissed where they could and took a bite from a protein bar, or from wherever they could. There was a long day ahead of them...

...The state Palenque was in was disgusting. Weapons were more important than food, so the people starved. The Macabéans had thought themselves clever enough to offer the people rations, but pirate blood was still strong here and the majority refused, preferring to die rather than to cooperate with the empire.

As hungry as they were, the people of Palenque were still a generous people. Although they lived in the ruins of their former homes, often separated from the cold night by nothing else than reappropriated fabric pieces, most tried to make the best of their situation. Somehow, despite the conditions, alcohol was almost plentiful. And in the night Captain Carol and his men were able to stay with their friends in the populace. Most had a son, husband, or father fighting in the war, most hated the empire, and few dared show any hint of disloyalty toward the corsair cause. Those that did were quickly outed and murdered. The bodies of a dozen collaborators still hung from the light posts along the street.

There were enemy trailing them. Spies had seen Macabéans unearth the manhole they had passed through. Their tunnel had been discovered. A small loss it would be, regardless. The passageways were quite limited there, a temporary build to facilitate the movement of troops for short-term operations just south of the River Tiguana, which marked the southern border of the Taraco neighborhood. If they were destroyed, there were still plenty of other ways of getting around beneath Palenque.

He had allowed his men to rest in the tunnels the previous night. The men preferred sleeping below when they could. Up here on the surface, the sounds of war were loud and incessant, the nights interrupted by artillery barrages and missile attacks. Imperial aircraft shrieked overhead frequently and intervals, striking targets deep inside the city. Palenque burned during the day and danced alight at night. Below, the noise was muffled by hundreds of feet of packed earth. They could sleep in silence.

Today they would most likely have no such luxury. The enemy was on their heels, chasing behind him. So the captain had his men disappear by hiding in plain sight. Carol ordered his men to split up into small units and melt within the civilians. They posed as husbands, sons, or boyfriends, and waited for their pursuers to pass by. They would look on as the Macabéans walked among them, asked for them, and then moved on when they found not a clue of the buccaneer warriors around them. When they passed, the captain would collect his men and strike the enemy from the rear. If all went well, he'd have another victory under his belt and the empire would be foiled once again in their ambitions to capture him...

...Women and their children looked warily from their windows, often nothing more than cracks in their feeble, ad hoc walls. There were few men about. Most were soldiers, but all within fighting age were considered enemies. Those that tried to live their lives in neutrality were all too often the first to be lined up against the wall and shot.

Komandánt Rickards' men searched homes, shanties, and tents one by one. Every nook, every cranny, and the bottom of every rock was painstakingly checked by the *bandag*. Carol's trail had gone cold and that damn tracker, *Gi'sargént* Morr, couldn't find another damned lead. That meant that Carol and his crew had escaped...again..., **or he had decided to stop running.** It wouldn't be the first time the pirates used the civilians to cover their tracks, to hide amongst. And although any man would seem out of place here, they had interconnected cellars, bunkers, and other hiding places that were even sometimes temporarily buried beneath freshly shoveled dirt to hide.

"Ma'am, do you understand that harboring militants is illegal and punishable by death?" was saying one soldier to intimidate an older woman with arms like sticks. Sometimes, all there was to eat was hardened bread. Perhaps a square a day was all most could get their hands on. Rickards and other Macabéan commanders had tried to feed them, but the people refused. Pirate blood ran thick in these cities.

"'Tis me home! Which guests I invite in 'n which I don't be me business, nah th' empire's!" returned the woman, defiantly.

The soldier had heard the same argument a hundred times, cordon-and-searches like these were common. "We have reason to believe that Captain Francis Carol is in this neighborhood. Our intent is to find him; the more you cooperate, the less intrusive our operation, I promise you ma'am."

"Yer promises be empty, Macabéan!" yelled the woman. "Look at wha' ye've done t' our city. Look at wha' ye've done t' our scallywags. Why would we ever consider cooperatin' wit' th' ye?"

Sighing, the soldier looked at her with cold blue eyes. "Because if we find him here, **we will execute you for treason.**" Everything in his tone made it more of a certainty than an 'if.'

The woman was about to fire back another cannon load of her own, but Rickards quickly stepped forward — his guard struggling to predict him as they moved to stay around him — and bellowed, "Let it go, soldier. She is no friend of the empire and should she die today I am sure she would think herself a hero. Very well, so be it. Search her home, now!"

"You will **not** go in my home!" she screamed. "You will not!"

The soldier's *ekipe* entered the house anyway, pushing her aside and breaking down her door. Other civilians were screaming in the streets and children were crying. Overhead, three helicopters flew by to their landing zones, where they would deposit more men to further strengthen the cordon that the *komandánt* had ordered deployed around the area. A few blocks away, a heavy Nakíl tank's tracks ground against the paved street so loudly that it could have been right next to him for all the difference it seemed to make. Just as all the sound came to a crescendo, muffled gunshots came out from inside the half-collapsed one-time storefront that woman had called her home.

Then, it was as if all noise came to an end. Rickards looked up at the decrepit frame of an old housing unit that rose perhaps six levels into the sky. There, in one of the shelled-out windows, stood Captain 'Three-Legged' Carol. In a brief moment that felt like an eternity, they gazed at each other. An idea struck the *komandánt* suddenly: **this was an ambush.**

An explosion rocked the earth where the Nakíl stood. It was still there, seemingly unperturbed, and then its cannon thundered. The already-damaged façade of a tall apartment building collapsed altogether, coming crashing down onto the ground and sending up a thick, black wave of debris through the narrow city streets. Rickards bent over to cough and hack the pieces of brick, wood, and only the gods knew what else from out of his lungs as the cloud swept over him. Through it all he could hear the gun fighting within the house — within all houses, it seemed now — and, all around him, he noticed as the sun began to peek through the lightening grey mist of debris.

Someone — his guard unit, he realized — pushed him into the home that the *ekipé* had moments earlier forcefully entered. He vaguely remembered the sound of gunfire coming from inside. He seemed to have no force to say a thing, though, as he allowed them to move him to safety. Machinegun fire sounded outside, and he could hear the zipper-like cracking of the walls as heavy bullets tore through them.

A claxon sounded in the distance. Only the pirates used claxons in Palenque. They were used to warn the women and children of a chemical attack.

Shit...

...Carol had never imagined it ending this way. This cat-and-mouse game — a game in which who was the cat and who was the mouse was yet to be decided — had gone for too long, but he had never imagined winning being so easy. He hadn't expected the Macabéan commander to realize that he and his crew were hiding here. In the end, it didn't quite matter. His men were well-positioned to spring a trap, even if it was sprung on them and not behind them as was originally planned.

There were other complications, of course. Rickards was an intelligent man and Carol should not have underestimated him. The man might have been arrogant, but a fool he wasn't. If a hundred Macabéans had come with the *komandánt*, another three hundred had been brought in by helicopter and with them came eight Nakíls and twice as many heavily armored APCs. Still, the situation was manageable and if the *komandánt* died today then it would have been worth the life of every single member of his crew.

"C'mon bastards, move faster. Arrgh," he growled. He and six other pirates quickly made their way down the tall buildings. Doors were blown open if they were still there at all. The rooms that they hid still held many of the treasures people had been forced to abandon. Much of it was charred black from the heat and burning of the artillery shells or fighter-delivered bomb. The sadness was all a blur to him now as he charged down level by level, until he arrived at the ground floor and quickly darted out on to the street. And what he found was a chaos beyond what he could have imagined.

Giant flames leaped up through holes in the ground, bursting cellar doors open and sending piles of rubble flying into the air. The tunnels beneath them were being cleared, he realized. But how had the Macabéans known about them? Who had alerted them? It could not have possibly been one of the surviving locals. Their loyalty had proven to be unquestionable when offered the right incentives. No matter now, regardless. It was too late to change the game plan.

"Move, scoundrels!" he bellowed again. "He went in thar," he said, pointing to the house into which he had last seen the *komandánt* go.

The door was already broken down, but when they entered the room was empty. There were two doors on either wall and another opening to the right, the latter presumably the entrance to a kitchen. His men flooded into the flat, seeking out the imperial soldiers inside. But when they got to each room, there was nothing living inside them. The apartment was abandoned, or its occupants were intelligent

enough to have already gone to their shelters, but there was no sign of Rickards. "Farrgin' Davy Jones' locker, where be that scallywag?" he snarled. Suddenly, the claxon sounded.

"Gas?" said one of the pirates by his side.

"No," said Carol. "That can nah be. I ne'er gave th' order."

The pirate shrugged. "Someone must 'ave gone scared."

"I'll hang th' bloody yellow-bellied cur when I find 'im—" started the captain, until suddenly he fell quiet and then said, "Belay that, quiet, listen."

They all perked their ears to find what it was that Carol was hearing. For a long time there was nothing, then suddenly a muffled voice. "Cease the exterminations" — the terms the Macabéans used to describe their tunnel-burning operations — "immediately. Chemical attack impending. All soldiers unequipped or underequipped are advised to find shelter below. Kill on sight if resistance is met."

Captain Carol turned back to his men. "Smartly, th' cellar, move..."

...The candle flickered and all held their breath. It was hot and stuffy down here, you could tell by the amount of sweat rolling down Roxana's face and arms. She looked as wet as if she had just come from out of the ocean. Boy, how she missed the ocean. The sea seemed so alien to her now and she felt a sudden sadness. Damn this war. Damn the Macabéans. Damn all men.

Her two daughters, Joana and Marquisa, were here with her. Her smallest boy, Daniel, had died four months ago, when an imperial soldier ripped him from her grasp and disemboweled him with a near foot-long knife. "Best to kill 'em young, before they grow up to be murderous bastards like their father," had said the soldier with the knife to another one.

She hated the empire with a burning, smoking passion. That was the only reason she remained here, fighting for independence like all others who had stayed behind while Palenque was toppled over and ravaged.

If you did not carry a rifle, you cooked and took care of the children. Women like her did more for the cause than most would ever realize. When there was little food, it was not the soldiers who provided. It was the women who foraged, scavenged, and sometimes raided to give their children and the men food to eat. And when the warriors came by and used the women for their own ends, whether for pleasure or for catharsis, it was the women who stayed silent while the men boasted of their feats. But, it was all necessary. It was all part of the united front of resistance against imperial conquest. And until the Macabéan scum were either dead or repulsed, she'd fight 'em to her death.

The candle flickered again.

"Mama, be it time t' go?" asked little Joanna. There was little light to see each other's faces, but even so that she was scared was plain enough.

Above, the torment of mortar shells felt like the thuds of giant raindrops during a spring thunderstorm rolling in from the sea. It continued on for some time, perhaps ten minutes, perhaps an hour. Down here, any time felt like an eternity. And up above, the surface would now be crawling with gas or some other chemical agent, wrapping around whatever poor, unprotected soul still wandering the streets. Their skin would be blistering open. Their eyes would be turning to mush. They would scream 'til their deaths.

"No, nah yet, baby," she answered her little girl, holding back her own instincts to scream so that she could show young Joana how brave

her mother was.

To her side, the flame was weakening but still burned yet. And until that flame flickered its last dance, there was enough oxygen here for them. Only then would they risk surfacing to run to the next shelter.

...Rickards knew Carols was close. He could *feel* it. He did not expect to find Carols facing him when he jumped down into the cellar below.

But when he landed he found himself in a stand-off. His men numbered perhaps eight and all of them had their rifles up and pointed toward the enemy. There were, counting roughly, seven of them and they too had their weapons leveled and at the ready. Rickards wasn't armed; his sidearm was still in its holster. He inched his hand back but did not grab the gun. Instead, he said, "Well, well, Captain Francis 'Three-Legged' Carol, I have finally found you."

"Aye," said the captain. "I lament that our meetin', at last, could nah 'ave gone better fer ye."

"What do you mean?" asked the *komandánt*. "I could not imagine a better way to finally conclude our little game of hide-and-go-seek."

Carol smiled. "Remind me again, Rickards, which one o' us be hidin' 'n which one o' us be seekin'?"

Rickards chuckled. "You'll be asking yourself that question to your death, I'm afraid," he said, finally.

It started to 'rain' above. These were not drops of water, but of steel — mortar shells. Dirt fell loose from the walls and the ceilings with every strike. Otherwise, the only other sounds came from the men's breathing, as they stared each other down, holding their breath for when the order went out to shoot. In the dark, they are like mere outlines to each other, like targets at the range.

It's the *komandánt* who speaks next. "Fire!"

The narrow tunnel that barely fit two men abreast flashed alight as both sides open their weapons on each other. The first row of soldiers on both sides fell to the hail of bullets and it went likewise for the row behind them. By twos they felled each other, although the pirates who went without armor fell the truest. Most would not get up and those who tried were put down. The *komandánt's* pistol was in his hand and the slide was open. He didn't remember drawing and firing it. Instinct, it must have been. Goddamn lucky instinct. He let out a breath and reholstered his handgun.

Around him, most of his men were down and wailing, while three of them lay surely dead. Only he and another two still stood. Only three dead was a good outcome for what had transpired. Another three were wounded. To what degree, the *komandánt* did not know as his mind was elsewhere.

"Your leg, sir," said one of the men still standing, pointing downwards.

Rickards looked down and saw the blood flow down from a rip in his pants. Something had grazed his thigh. "It's nothing. See, I can still walk," he said, pushing the soldier to the side as he walked to the pile of dead pirates on the ground. "Bring me a light. Hurry. Look for him. Find him. I must confirm his death."

"I think he's dead, *komandánt*," said the soldier, gesturing at the limp, bloody bodies crumpled across the floor of the passageway.

Rickards shook his head, "No, we *must* make sure. If his body is not here, then he is not yet dead and our mission is not yet complete."

They inspected each of the bodies' faces as the mortar fire continued above. Three of them were Macabéan, six of them were

pirates. The bombardment was a considerable one; Carol must have gathered a good stockpile here, expecting to draw Rickards out to the location. Dangerously clever, that captain was. Only if Rickards saw his face would he believe the bastard dead. Carol was not among the bodies.

"WHERE IS HE?" yelled the *komandánt* in a rage. **"He must still be close. Bring me the tracker."**

Gi'sargént Morr quickly squeezed his way to the front of the column. He started down that long, narrow passageway that led to parts unknown. He kneeled for just a second, while Rickards looked at him, and then said, "He must have ran during the firefight. He can't be far. Give me the two men who are still healthy here and I will catch him."

"I'm going with you. He's mine," said the Rickards. The *komandánt* turned to the two soldiers to issue orders. "Kragor, Guti, you two patch up our wounded and wait to be cleared by a surface team. Tell them I've gone on ahead with our Guffingfordi tracker. I will not permit Captain Carol to escape from us once again." He did not bother waiting for a response before he urged Morr forward and the two of them disappeared into the dark ahead.

...to be continued.

[**N.B.** This post will be periodically edited for spelling and grammatical errors, as well as to improve flow. As usual, the substance of the post will not be changed.]

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The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by **The Macabees** » Sun Apr 29, 2018 2:51 pm



BEHIND ENEMY LINES

"The orbital drops were an experiment. To many, it was one that went awry. But, the survivors generated an immense wealth of knowledge on the innards of Drana, at least relative to what had been known before. This intelligence and the chaos they cause in the rear during the invasion made an important contribution to early successes."

— K. Nastara, *The Gothic War* (2094 C.E.)

Autumn Strolls

Late September, 2027

Jarl Gabán hammered the post into the ground as if it were his last one of the day, and indeed it was. Kabanis was cutting the wire from a roll, then flattened the piece to fit it between the two posts that sat across a five-foot divide. It wasn't the sturdiest of barriers, but it would hold the flock of sheep that Mrs. Inkeri wanted to put in the enclosure.

The old woman's husband was too old to fight in the war but had died from cirrhosis years ago. He was an alcoholic, a condition that she considered driven by the levy that consumed most of their harvest every year. They hardly left them with the means to eat. She lived alone now, her only child now dead in the Skyan Republic, where he had died as part of the disastrous attestor attack on

Citadel City. Mrs. Inkeri had never liked the empire — the Scandinavian empire, that is —, she said, but now she had no reason left to fight for it. It had taken everything she had from her.

Although she held no love for the Macabéans either, she did not truly know them and found their tales of home fascinating. The Scandinavians did not need propaganda in areas like these, where the dearth of outside information allowed for most here to live in total ignorance of the world around them. Mrs. Inkeri kept them around, serving them dinner and giving them lodging in her barn, as long as they told her stories. She even taught them the language, using the little they knew from their machine learning translation system to build on.

The sun was coming down in the distance when they finished the wire screening between the last two posts. "That's all we're going to get done today," said Kabanis. "Let's head back."

Their horses were tied on to a short steel rod driven into the ground. Gabán undid both knots while Kabanis stored their tools within their saddlebags. Getting used to writing these creatures had been interesting. Gabán and *komsargént* were city boys through-and-through. Mrs. Inkeri had had a good time teaching these boys how to ride a stallion. Both swung into their horses' saddles and started trotting down the dirt path that ran parallel to the fence on its outside. By the time the road turned to head toward the village, they were at full gallop and racing each other, their steeds kicking up a storm of dirt behind them.

By the time they reached the outskirts, it was almost fully dark. There were few house bulbs lit and these were like small islands of brightness in a vast ocean of the night. The village was small, with no more than thirty or forty people, all belonging to three farming families. Sometimes more came, but they never saw Gabán or Kabanis. None of them did. Only Mrs. Inkeri.

Avoiding humanity here was not as difficult as one might imagine since most kept to their own lands. The nearest inn was in the small town of Haugr perhaps ten kilometers away. Most of the villagers kept to themselves, working long hours on their land during the day and spending the nights in their homes. It was a hard life out here, but there was a certain charm to it.

"Come, this way," said Kabanis. "Better to tie up the horses by the back of the barn and go inside. Mrs. Inkeri can have one of the men take the steeds to the stables later."

They jumped off their horses as they approached the back wall of the barn they called their abode. Taking the reins, they walked them to a post just off of the wall and tied them there. The old woman preferred to have one of her slaves take the horses later. The slaves were told to never enter the barn, and the slaves did what they were told. Old Mrs. Inkeri favored hard work, but she was kind to those who served her and unrepentant with those who did not follow rules.

Just as they were about to go inside, they heard the sound of an approaching motor vehicle. The engine was loud, suggesting a truck or some sort of heavier automobile. "Go, go inside," said Kabanis. The *komsargént* followed Gabán into the structure, where cows laid down in the stalls they had been driven into after a long day of grazing. Their cots were on the second-level, a creaky wooden deck on either side of the barn that ran front to rear. Narrow bridges connected the two sides. Their military equipment and most of their firearms were stowed up there. During the day, they wore the local garb and carried their sidearms only beneath their robes.

Outside, an engine roared by and came to a halt perhaps a hundred paces away. They could hear the voices of four young Scandinavians; they sounded like military or gendarmerie. "Internal security officers," said Gabán, who was looking through a crack in the wall with his helmet's dismounted sight. "Four of 'em, all armed. They don't know we're here."

"Good, let's keep it that way," answered Kabanis. "Let's go to sleep. We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow, with any luck."

"You go," said Gabán. "I'll keep first watch."

Kabanis fell asleep quickly. Gabán must have dozed off at some point too, because he was awakened by the sudden shriek of the barn's front door sliding open. The moon's pale light floated in and a long shadow covered the entrance's floor. A man limped in. Limped only because the man was clearly drunk. These must be friends of the Svanhild boy, an officer in their ranks who hailed from this village and visited frequently, often with others.

This wasn't the Svanhild kid. Good thing, too. Gabán would have hated to kill a man Mrs. Inkeri spoke so fondly about.

The officer stumbled toward one of the stalls, and the cow inside stirred lightly. "Oh, shut up," slurred the man, in Scandinavian. He leaned against the door with one arm and unzipped his uniform pants with the other. He started urinating on the hay cover the floor. "Ahhh, that feels good. Haven't held a piss like that in a long while."

Gabán lightly pushed on Kabanis' shoulder and held his finger to his lip as the latter woke. The *komsargént* lay there silently, opening his eyes slowly, then rolling over on his side to take a look at what was going on below. Gabán pointed to the drunk Scandinavian. Kabanis turned to the *sargént*, and whispered, "Let him do his thing. He will go soon."

"Huh, what?" asked the Scandinavian suddenly, and loudly. "What was that?" He jumped and turned around, scrambling to unclip his flashlight off his webbing. He finally did so with shaky fingers, pointing the beam up light up at the second floor of the barn. But there was nothing there when he scanned it. "That was a bloody scare," he said.

The soldier turned and walked away, toward the open front door, but then stopped and jerk around. He shined his flashlight back across the wooden edges of the barn's upper storage platforms. "That looks as good a place to sleep as any," said the officer. "I shall alert the boys."

"Great," grunted Kabanis.

"We'll have to kill them," said Gabán, once the Scandinavian had left to grab his comrades.

"Are you crazy?" asked the *komsargént*. "Then what? What does old Mrs. Inkeri say when Scandinavian police show up to investigate a quadruple homicide? No, we can't kill them."

Gabán shrugged. "Then what do we do?"

"We get our shit and clear out of here." Kabanis reached for Gabán's sack and handed it to him, then he took his own. They grabbed their rifles and other equipment, then quickly made their way down the ladder to the bottom floor. As soon as their feet hit the ground, there were voices again outside. They were getting louder...and closer. Gabán managed to slip out the back before three men walked in, but Kabanis was caught inside and was forced to hide in the shadows. The *komsargént* held his breathing even, falling silent as he kept his eye and his rifle on the new visitors.

They apparently could not see him for they did not act, and instead one turned to light a candle while the others started to talk loudly between themselves. Kabanis took the opportunity to move on out the back as well, escaping into the night. They ran to the woodline, where they would make camp and wait for the morning to come.

"What about the cots?" asked Gabán. "We left those."

"They will be a lot easier to explain than two foreign men," replied Kabanis. "Quiet now, let's sleep. Something tells me those officers will be here tomorrow and we'll be lucky if they're not still here the day after that."

"Hey, you're the one whose whisper caught his ear in the barn," said Gabán. The *komsargént* gave him a cold stare. The man had still not forgiven the *sargént* for the death of Níalis and things had only gotten worse after the ambush. He talked to Gabán enough to give direction, but nothing more and often less. When Kabanis closed his eyes, Gabán gave out a breath. How much longer would he have to be here? And would he die here?

Surviving the Winter

Mid-December, 2027

They stayed at Mrs. Inkeri's through to late October. By then, the cold had set in and it was only bound to get even colder. There would be little food in these parts as winter came upon them and the two *koro kirim* would have to find their own way into the new year. By mid-December, they had trekked another couple hundred kilometers southwest toward the beaches.

Food was found where it could be. Animal life had become more sparse, as they slept longer or hibernated altogether. Even the rodents became rarer as the winter season matured. They could at least count on rats, opossums, and other small creatures of similar ilk, and this kind of grub was usually what they cooked and carried. The meat was tough, chewy, and altogether not good, but it was certainly better than something. And as the cold reached its height, things started to become unbearable. It became necessary to steal more clothing, medication, and shoes when they came upon rural towns and villages, and at moments they traversed lands that went unpopulated for leagues. Their traveling began to slow.

For two December nights they were disturbed by a long series of bombardments that must have been conducted by the Macabéan fleet well off the southern coast of the island. Missiles screamed through the sky, leaving behind them a trail of fire, as they streaked toward targets all throughout the country. Bright flashes danced along the far horizons with every strike of another bomb, but it was the ones closest to them that were, of course, the most spectacular. It was hard to sleep with all that noise and Gabán almost wished the imperial fleet would just leave the Scandinvans alone if it was all for the sake a few more hours of good rest.

On the third night came what looked much like a meteor shower. It must have been what the Scandinvans had seen the first time around, when Gabán, Kabanis, and their fellow soldiers were first dropped into inhospitable Drana. The Golden Throne was trying it again, it seemed. A contingency plan, perhaps, fearing that most of their operatives from the first drop had already died. They were right, most of them probably had.

It was beautiful, though. Even when the Scandinavian surface-to-air batteries and guns opened fire. Like a display show to an orchestra, almost.

Gabán dreamt of that fateful day when he fell thousands of feet from space, dropped from orbit to plummet down into the earth below. He remembered the impact, what it felt to be pumped with so many drugs, to be restrained so well by a titanium suit, as he hit the dirt at an incredible speed. He was not quite sure how he was still alive, in fact. But he was, and that was what mattered. It was always the same beginning to the same nightmare.

The next day, they continued marching southwards. Updated maps given to them by Mrs. Inkeri suggested a large town, or a small city, nearby. It sat perhaps twenty kilometers east and they sought to circumnavigate it. The *koro kirim* would stick out like sore thumbs in the city, and that would do them no good even as hungry, tired, and

miserable as they were. They soldiered on.

"What's the plan if we run across any friendlies?" asked Kabanis, suddenly. They were crossing a stream swollen with flowing water from the heavy seasonal rains.

The *komsargént* was referring to the previous nights' event, of course. They hadn't come across any of their own since Tenobi and his men. Almost better that they hadn't, as all those that had fought alongside with them in the past had died. It was like a curse that afflicted them. Gabán was not quite sure if it was him or his companions who were the true victims.

Gabán said nothing for some time, and then, "I don't know. You're the boss man, you tell me."

"I've come to dislike company," said the *komsargént*.

"Me too," replied Gabán, solemnly.

"Then it's settled," said Kabanis. "The next group we meet, we give them the rundown, exchange best practices, and go on our merry way. No use teamin' up if it's just going to get us all killed again. No damn use."

"Aye," said the *sargént*. They walked again in silence for another few minutes. The woods had thickened again and tall trees crept over the narrow path that wound through tall, snow-heavy underbrush. Wild animals grunted and howled in the distance, and nearby tall stalks rustled with the wind or when disturbed by some unseen creature. Frigid wind bit even through the thick coats they had stolen from a rancher further back many weeks ago.

"Still, it seems like a waste to part ways entirely," added Gabán, finally. It seemed not to startle Kabanis.

The *komsargént* nodded. "Aye, but no use dead to use either and that's the destiny every single one of our partners has met."

"Maybe there is another way," said Gabán.

"There ain't no other way and that's the end of it." Kabanis quickened his step to march on ahead of the *sargént*. It was a common tactic when the *komsargént* had finished speaking. They carried on in the quiet of the wilderness again for another few hundred steps. There was a clearing which they walked through and they quickly found themselves surrounded by thick forestry again.

The silence persisted this time. This was as usual as a bottle of *jinhare*m on a pirate vessel. The *komsargént* would go long periods of time without saying a word. Gabán scanned the perimeter as they marched on. A wild boar appeared from out of some shrubs and darted back into the brush. "There, a hog!" yelled Gabán before running in after it with his slingshot in his hand.

"Wait!" shouted Kabanis. "Look, there," he said, after Gabán turned around, pointing at the path.

There were tire marks through the snow that stopped, then turned around, and headed back in the direction they came from. Thick tire tread marks suggested a military vehicle, perhaps some kind of light utility vehicle. Gabán followed Kabanis off the road, tracing the steps of the vehicle's occupants. A bird cawed above and a bear growled somewhere far away. The wind rustled through the leaves and snow fell from the heavens, blanketing them with a sheet of white. Other than them, there was no sign of life. Yet, somewhere had been here, and from the tracks it looked as if whoever it was had been here quite recently.

Kabanis lay his hand before Gabán, stopping the latter and pointing up toward the canopy. The *sargént's* jaw fell open. An armored body hung there, tugging on the branch so heavily that the tree was

beginning to sag. There must have been someone inside because it was closed and sealed. It was riddled with bullets, although there was a certain precision to how they were dispersed along the legs and torso. Another armored soldier lay against the trunk, also dead. This one, though, was hit by something less accurate, more random. A heavy machine gun, most likely. The Scandinavian bastards had learned how to kill power armored operatives the first time, and now their improved tactics were on display here. Gabán felt like throwing up. He had seen death before, much of it, but this seemed so wrong to him. To see *koro kirim* slaughtered so helplessly was like sacrilege, like the word of scripture shattered before one's very eyes. He bent over to release his bile.

The *komsargént* walked over to cut loose the rope attached to the dangling powered suit, which crashed to the ground.

"Rise," said Kabanis, when Gabán had finished regurgitating his morning meal. "We should bury them."

They dug graves for the two dead Macabéans. Two six-feet-deep, three-by-seven feet holes later, they pried the corpses free of their armored sarcophagi. Inside, the bodies were harshly bruised and shredded. They dumped them into their graves then covered the pits with dirt again. Gabán swept the sweat off his forehead when they finished.

"The poor bastards probably got shot while they were still unconscious," he said. He added, "We should at least train them."

Kabanis nodded. "Yes, they should be able to defend themselves. We'll need as many of our kind as we can get if we're to survive this war, Jarl."

It was the first time the *komsargént* had referred to Gabán by his first name.

Fabian Spring

Early March, 2028

When the snow that blanketed much of central Drana ebbed, it was time for the *Koro Kirim* to prowl again. Since the orbital drop in December, there had been two other ones, although these much smaller than the first two. Gabán and Kabanis had met many of their comrades on their journey south but never traveled with them for more than a day.

They weren't the only ones who had figured out the costs of traveling in large groups. Some of the newcomers they had crossed paths with had been told very much the same by others from previous drops they had met. It looked as if the largest groups any one traveled in were three or four, and even then only temporarily or to cooperate against larger targets. Whether this decentralization of the *koro kirim* force in Drana was a product of spontaneous improvements in tactics or just out of necessity, given the task's low survivability rate, would be debated for decades to come. The men on the ground simply used the tools, tactics, and strategies that worked best.

The rate of attacks on Scandinavian internal security and military patrols had increased, as well. Once, Kabanis and Gabán had passed the burning wreckage of a military garrison building in a small inland fort. The dead still had not been picked up from the ground and buried. It smelled like the sewage of sewage and vultures circled in the skies above, ready to swoop down and pick apart the corpses strewn below. Neither did this look the work of a handful of men armed with assault rifles, and sometimes not even that. This was the work of death from above, aircraft or missiles launched from the ships offshore. Bombardments were common. Every night there would be an explosion here, a bulb of fire there, and in the distance it would sound as if it were thunder. It was the *koro kirim* that directed this deluge like mad shaman doing a rain dance.

Like flowers opening up to the spring rains, the hundreds of Macabéan special forces that had survived their insertions and the consequent trials came out in full force. The winter in Drana must have seemed calm by comparison, when most operatives preferred to seek shelter, lay low, and simply make it to the next year. It must have seemed as if all the Macabéans had been killed in their fool attempt to invade the island from the heavens. That lull was deliberate.

As if the new season's waters had overflowed from out of the mountains and into the valleys below, the *koro kirim* went on the hunt en masse. They attacked Scandinavian troops only if the odds were favorable, meaning only when the enemy were in small groups or the *koro kirim* roamed the area in large numbers. Big battles were scarce to non-existent, as the Macabéans would melt away anytime the Scandinavians came in large numbers. Fixed installations, such as bases, artillery and missile batteries, and other strategic targets were engaged indirectly, by calling in airstrikes and missile strikes.

Offshore support was plentiful and always generous. The Golden Throne's *Kríermak* Gholgoth had been built up to very nearly full strength and it was reinforced by an allied Imbrinium fleet of equal size. Almost 24,000 ships in all were arrayed south of Drana, all along the coast from east to west. This number included reserve forces guarding the flanks and rear, eagerly awaiting for the Scandinavian navy to sally.

Together, the *koro kirim* and *Kríermada* pummeled Scandinavian defenses in anticipation.

Sargént Gabán and *Komsargént* Kabanis were on such a mission themselves. Still headed southwest toward the beaches, they had come across an enemy surface-to-air missile battery which sat along their route. It must have had no radar battery attached, or at least its radar had remained silent, for no intelligence had come suggesting that command had any knowledge of this location. Inside, they had seen medium- and long-range missile batteries, dangerous contraptions that could annihilate an unwary squadron of fighter-bombers. The two immediately set forth to prepare for the battery's destruction.

Whether the enemy would change position soon was unknown, but there was no sense in waiting to find out. Kabanis put himself in charge of staking out the dirt road that connected the firebase with the nearby highway. He observed the movement of patrols and supply trucks. This data was stored locally, in a small one-handed electronic pad. No transmissions came or went that were not deliberate and requested by Kabanis himself. With him he brought a captured sniper rifle and his sidearm.

Gabán was to set up the attack. The *sargént* rounded the base via a longer path that was well out of sight of any guards or known patrols. There was a rocky outcropping just to the west, where he'd have a line of sight that offered a clearer view of the missile batteries. Kabanis had used it earlier to identify the nature of the target. There were four long-range launchers, two squads of short-range shoulder-launched missiles, and a truncated squad of short- and medium-range missile armored vehicles which stood in the middle of the grounds like broad-shouldered guard dogs. A company of infantrymen was garrisoned within as well, most likely to stave off any ambushing forces fool enough to attack directly. They carried assault rifles, along with heavier firepower, including heavy machine guns and a squad of light mortars. It was a considerable cache all considered.

He recorded visual data and saved notes, preparing these in a local queue for transmission. His device did not have a means to connect with the satellites above, so his data package would have to travel along with the *komsargént*'s. Gabán put the pad away with he was done and took out a small laser that stood on two sets of insect-like bipods. Placing it on the surface of a rock, it looked straight down

into the base without obstructions of any kind.

On the device's side was a tiny LED light. It was dark now, turned off.

With a thin wire, he connected the laser to an antenna and its stand, which even together Gabán could hide within his palm if he wanted to. When he was done with this, the *sargént* hopped down and, with a hand on his chin, studied the area around the outcropping. When he had seen whatever it was he was looking for, he revealed three anti-personnel mines from within his pack. He placed them along the approach to the top of the rocks, to guard his setup above.

Finally, satisfied that the area was safe, he returned to the laser and the antenna. He placed his data pad face up right next to him before turning his attention back to the wired contraption. Gabán turned the antenna on first, then the laser. It was largely invisible, except for a minute dot that sat nestled within one of the crevices of one of the launching vehicles. Data began flowing upwards to the satellites stationed high in space.

He scrambled back down the outcropping, staying clear of his mines, and made his way back to Kabanis. "It is done," he said when he found the *komsargént*. Gabán had crawled his way to Kabanis' position, hoping to avoid being seen. The *komsargént* had found a hidden spot rather close the base, probably to get better intelligence on the timing of supply runs and other movements on the road. "Transmitting has begun. Here, give me your datapad. I will begin transmitting our intel packages while our connection is masked. Then we'll get the hell out of here, I hope."

"Good," answered Kabanis. "And take it," he said, referring to the datapad, "it's in my side pant pocket."

Gabán found it and started the upload program once he connected the two datapads together via two-headed USB. Hundreds of gigabytes worth of data began to flow. They contained photographs of the Scandinvan world, videos of their people and their military, written notes, and other fountains of intelligence that would help fuel the continued bombardment efforts. Much of it would also trickle down to other *koro kirim* units in the field.

When the transmission was done, satisfied that their job had been done, the two soldiers withdrew to a position farther away from the base. They still sat watching over it, but neither close enough to spy on anything significant nor get caught by the garrison. They waited there for hours, and all the while the laser and the antenna continued to transmit.

Finally, a whine emerged from somewhere in the far distance, beyond the horizon. This high-pitched noise continued to grow louder as it neared and soon it was close enough to split into three, then five, then seven, and then more sources. The whine quickly evolved into an ear-piercing shriek. In the blue skies above, a rare thing these months when the rains grew harder, several dots appeared as if from nowhere. In an eye's blink, they were closer and larger, much larger. Behind them soon came others. Dozens of them. A barrage of cruise missiles was inbound and their impact was imminent. They bounded in like certain death.

The Scandinvan defenses came alive just then. The short-range missile launchers acted quickly, emptying their stores. Fire breathed from out the tubes and behind the missiles, as they sliced their way toward their incoming Macabéan counterparts. Suddenly, explosions peppered the sky and pockets of black smoke and debris appeared like clouds.

Still, the Macabéan attack came strong and behind them came a second wave. 42 missiles were used total on the location. Many of them were destroyed in flight. Others missed the target entirely. But those that stayed true impacted with devastating results. The area lit up in a ball of roaring flames, burning the low grasses and ravaging

the firebase. Scandinavian infantrymen scrambled to their posts and were then obliterated by another missile. The second wave struck then, causing further damage and killing more of the garrisoning forces. Launcher vehicles lay abandoned like twisted heaps of metal, abandoned by anything other than bone and dead flesh.

The *sargént* and *komsargént* were well on their way south again by the time the last missile struck. They would be long gone before the Scandinavian military could come, survey the damage, and begin a manhunt. There would, of course, be one last wave of missiles launched. It would be a smaller attack, perhaps 11 cruise missiles total, and it would strike at the end of the hour. As the surviving Scandinavians emerged from their hiding places to help the wounded and see what they could salvage from the wreckage, they'd be surprised again. There would be no mercy on the enemy.

All spring it rained. It rained not just water, but metal, fire, and death.

Summer of Chaos

Mid-June, 2028

Operation Will'd Vengeance it was called, the Golden Throne's [hundred million-man invasion](#) of southwestern Drana. Along three beaches they flooded into the low-rising mountains that ran along the coastline. Then they spilled into the valleys that came after, the valleys that led to the swamplands and their rubbus fields. The war had finally materialized into the bloodbath that it promised to deliver.

Even as far away from that action as he was, Gabán could hear the men cry out for their mothers in the night. The artillery bombardments were incessant and went in every direction. Gunfire ringed out at all times, like a perpetual grinding of machinery. Above, aircraft duelled for air supremacy and missiles screamed through clouds to strike targets throughout the island. It was an operation of gargantuan proportions and one could tell from just watching it unfold. The civilians must have been terrified, scared for their lives, awaiting certain death or perhaps something even worse. Gabán felt sorry for them. This war would not be kind on the weak.

The areas nearest to the battles were, by far, the most dangerous. Many *koro kirim* operated there, where the Scandinavian formations were densest and where they were almost all combat personnel, but Macabéan special forces mostly stuck to the sectors further to the rear. They pinpointed air defense batteries, artillery, and major supply bases. It was the Scandinavian supply network and its defenses that were discovered, highlighted, and bombarded. On the road, anti-personnel, -vehicle, and -tank mines were installed beneath the asphalt and used to ambush logistics convoys headed to the front. The guerilla war was incessant and augmented by the insertion of more operatives from the coast, now that the beaches were captured and under Macabéan control. Thousands more *koro kirim* and *grup koda* pushed deep into Drana, behind enemy lines, to wage an asymmetric conflict designed to slow and weaken the enemy's ability to resist the invasion.

Macabéan special forces were aided by the magnified presence of close air support and offshore fire. The Scandinavian navy had long surrendered the waters south of Drana to the Golden Throne. *Kríermak* Gholgoth sat safely off the coast, patrolling shallower waters with submarines while the larger ships, protected by their multi-layer picketts and aerial screens, lobbed their firepower at enemy targets deep inland. It was a marvelous display, never-ending fireworks show.

And as Macabéan forces continued to extend their tendrils throughout the southwest, surrounding Drasdag, pushing the front lines deeper toward central Drana, and preparing to encircle the inland coastal city of Bendred, Macabéan fire support became bolder and more prevalent. No quarter was given; the conflict was permanent, and those on the ground had to adapt as if it were a new

way of life.

Communication to and between the two- and three-man special forces team scattered throughout the countryside had increased quite a bit since the onset of the invasion. With hundreds of millions of soldiers fighting one another, there was an impossible web of radar, jamming, and electronic communication on both sides and between them. There was a lot of noise for tactical communication to hide behind and the Macabéans used this to their full advantage. After having perfected small teams tactics with limited means, the *koro kirim* behind enemy lines finally had the resources to coordinate with each other. Dozens of small teams could converge on a single point and exact a heavy justice on the Scandinavian enemy.

It was in such a situation that Gabán and Kabanis found themselves in now, as they slowly crept through tall, wet grass toward a two-lane highway that cut the landscape in half.

Ahead, a long convoy of Scandinavian military trucks, protected by anti-air defenses and a mechanized contingent of escorts, snaked its way through the shallow valley. In the far distance, the war roared on. Here, the Scandinavian air defense network still restricted Macabéan aircraft and air support was of the stand-off kind. A missile strike had already been called in by another two-man team on the other side of the road.

The Scandinavians were a well-organized military, with adequate scouting forces on the flanks and aerial cover of their own. The *koro kirim* trod carefully, staying hidden until the nose of the convoy passed by. Teams further to the rear reported on the formation of the convoy, forewarning the ambushing forces of any advanced guards or other forms of possible deception of that sort.

Arrayed along with them, Gabán estimated there to be another 100 men. A company size'd force of heavily trained infantrymen; the kind to have survived a harsh winter while being hunted down, on their lonesome. The supply drops since the start of the war had been more generous and now arms were simply smuggled across the front lines, sometimes through underground tunnels that were burrowed by heavy machines as armies fought on the surface above. Gabán carried a light machinegun in 6.64mm, while Kabanis still carried his Hali-53. Others were armed with heavier machine guns, anti-tank missiles, and even light mortars. Teams began to specialize, and the war in the Scandinavian rear became a decentralized, but highly coordinated insurgency. Attacks like these were the fruits of the system, where dozens of men with a wide variety of weaponry came together in one spot to deal a lightning bolt-like strike at an enemy's weak point.

When the convoy's main body began to pass through, the Macabéans opened fire. Armored escorts were targeted with infantry carried anti-tank missiles, while lighter rocket-propelled grenades were used against any armored trucks. Air defense vehicles were especially targeted, armored variants attacked by rockets and any lighter launchers pelted by heavy and medium machine gun fire at 100 meters distance.

One may have still placed the odds in the convoy's favor, had it not been for the sudden wail of inbound missiles as a series of black dots appeared in the distant sky. These neared quickly and it was as if an instant had passed when they were right on top of their targets. They crashed into the road, on and near the Scandinavian military vehicles, destroying these or tossing them onto their sides.

Light mortar fire started falling on the convoy's position, keeping up the pressure. As hulls smoked and burned, about 70 *koro kirim* rose in all and advanced forward in a crouched position from either side of the highway.

A firefight ensued on the flanks, where intact Scandinavian escorts counter-attacked. The *koro kirim's* heavy weaponry was relatively limited in supply, but they put whatever they had to good use,

repelling several counter-attacks as their riflemen gunned down convoy survivors. Trucks were quickly scavenged for surviving supplies, including Scandinavian weapons and ammunition, but it was almost in a heartbeat that the Macabéan special forces sprung their trap and then quickly receded back into the surrounding countryside. They scattered in the four winds in the anticipation of Scandinavian reinforcements and close air supporting, happy with the damage they had already done.

It was like this that the Golden Throne slowly chipped away at Scandinavian air defenses and back-end support, using special forces operatives to track down air defense batteries and supply convoys. In conjunction with stand-off missiles and close air support, these isolated attacks came together to represent a significant and concerted effort to weaken front-line forces by hacking down the pillars they stood on.

Former Sr. II Roleplaying Mentor | [Factbook](#)

[The Macabees' Guides to Roleplaying, Worldbuilding, and Other Stuff](#)
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The Scandinavians
Senator

Posts: 4948
Founded: Oct 09, 2004
Capitalist

by [The Scandinavians](#) » Wed May 02, 2018 9:39 pm



Monologue With a Prisoner

Prisoner of War Camp, Northeastern Provinces of Drana

In a plain room a single soldier, a prisoner of war, of the Golden Throne had been summoned and ordered to take a seat at a desk where a glass of water was provided. Save for that, the room was reasonably bright and had more of a illumination befitting some sort of office space. An environment designed to not be unappealing, but not all that comfortable. The sort of scene in which someone could properly have a discussion and still have a degree of innate coldness attached to the rather stark setting.

After about ten minutes the prisoner was met by the command of the compound he had been assigned to some weeks ago. Walking forward the commander sized up the man and said something in Scandinavian which the soldier did not understand. Coughing once he started his speech with a traditional bow of his head. Finishing the gesture he said, "You do not understand do you? That you are not dealing with a culture which considers regret a trait fit for leaders. The Scandinavians have long had a philosophical concept called, in your tongue's more narrow constraints, the "cold reasoning of realistic rulers". Essentially, it means that in order to govern and command respect individuals who are in charge have to set aside their humanity. They have to become something more than the self. To be burdened by feelings or remorse for fulfilling your duties is a weakness that will undermine your resolve. Without which you will inevitably become consumed by the temptations of this world.

Your recent attempts at invading our nation are doomed to failure because your people lack the willpower needed to give it your all and to risk everything to accomplish your goals, no matter how foolish they truly are in the end. Regardless, you are here for a purpose. You have no information that I need. Thus there is no reason to try to pry whatever might be in your head out. You are not high enough ranking to possess critical intelligence. You merely are here for my amusement to be frank and as commander of the prisoner of war camp I have some liberties.

Though it is fairly beneficial to you personally that the Crown Prince Fenric, may the Almighty forever guide him to glory, entered into a covenant of sorts with your deranged government. We are banned from using physical coercion on you and we are obliged to treat you in a reasonable manner. After all, enough of our own will be under your heel before the end where it is best not to risk aggravating the situation further. What I want to do is make at least one of your contemptible people understand my perspective of things.

Your people are brave enough in their own right. They however lack a certain aspect. A certain drive which would allow them to ascend beyond the self. That allows soldiers en masse to sacrifice themselves for a cause that they believe in; a cause which they value more than their own lives. Something that forces the individual to forget about themselves and focus only on the objectives given to them. If you were merely able to ascend beyond this your people would be so much more fulfilled with their degenerate lives.

Your people's mentality is almost always that of an individual serving their own selfish ends. This worldview causes your army's soldiers to be little better than mercenaries paying lip service to your cause whilst actually fighting for the paychecks that you get. Such a sad way to live. You have little more than greed in your hearts in the end. Your civilization's existence is predicated on struggle of each individual against the other.

This conflict that infects your nation will not be the cause of your eventual downfall. It merely makes your people predisposed to weakness as there is no great loyalty built into the basic structure of your sad culture. Few of your kind will ever escape that chasm. You simply lack the willpower on average to ascend to a higher calling. I pity you for this reason.

Whilst your people lack this key characteristic, my own the dres'Erid have quite sufficient amounts of it. We know what our place is from birth. We each have a singular purpose thrust upon us and we are molded into what we are meant to be. From this is born a certain dignity to nearly us all. Each of us is given an education which allows for us to be individuals in service of the faith and the Glorious Empire. By virtues of these occurring in our development are we instilled with a deep certainty over the righteousness of our existence.

By the time we are adults we have been molded into people able to live our lives in service to the path of Erid and the Almighty. We have our weaknesses removed from our society so that the great whole can prosper. During times of crises, such as war, we are able to rally to our common cause much more readily than you sickened dres'naalr. Thanks to these abilities we have been able to create a people capable of meeting the challenges of a world which despises us for daring to follow the narrow world to paradise. Eventually, we shall overcome all other nations in this world and show everyone the wondrous grace of the true path.

Until that time comes, we shall be forced to contend with forces such as yours. Effectively, this whole invasion is a greater test to show whether or not we Scandin remain willing to do whatever is needed to defend ourselves from dres'nalar intervention. Difficult tasks are the greatest pressures to force us to rededicate ourselves to the causes of our forefathers. Without them our faith would, at times, be worthless. Institutions which are not tested from time to time become corrupted by the stagnation around them. In a way the Scandinvans should be grateful for your invasion all the while we should fight it in every possible fashion.

Therefore, as you can likely note, we are not exactly in a situation which will see my people falter before yours. The whole pretense of your attack on the sovereignty of the dres'Erid will eventually only strengthen us. For in bloody battle are we Scandinvans able to pay for a future which shall exceed anything that we could possibly imagine. In it shall we discover the proper path for us to embark upon. The blood shed shall illuminate to the righteous their proper course, shall purge the weak from our ranks, shall uplift the strong to their rightful place, will drive out foreign ideologies infecting us, and will give unto us insight into what we truly are made to be.

Our unity shall allow us to triumph over you and you will be shown what the true might of Valgard is. Your nation shall come to know the full price of seeking to challenge us in our homeland. The place where we are our strongest and have the most incentive to fight to the bitter end. Though you do not need to fear for your life I assure you

sir so long as you do not attempt to escape. I fully intend to honor the pact we made to not harm you.

Now that is done and you dealt with my little speech. I will give you a bit of reward. You may chose your favorite type, but not brand, of alcoholic beverage and I will strive to give you a liter of it for your consumption and I will try to get you another in the next fortnight. Hopefully this will make your stay here a tad less boring. I understand how annoying it can be to be kept contained for a good while.

Well, the time has gone by fairly quickly for me. I know it could have easily been dull for you and for that I apologize. Still, I hope you have a nice stay at this facility soldier."

Those were his parting words and the commander left after that. A minute later two guards came and escorted the soldier back to his bunk where an additional roll of camp store credits that could be redeemed for books, treats, and mail home. One extra reward for the prisoner of war that the commander hoped would help make his stay a bit more tolerable. Aside from that and the booze promise life would be the same for the foreseeable future for the captured soldier.

Last edited by [The Scandinavians](#) on Wed May 02, 2018 9:46 pm, edited 1 time in total.

We are the Glorious Empire of the Scandinavians. Surrender or be destroyed. Your civilization has ended, your time is over. Your people will be assimilated into our Empire. Your technological distinctiveness shall be added to our own. Your culture shall be supplanted by our own. And your lands will be made into our lands.

"For five thousand years has our Empire endured. In war and peace we have thrived. Against overwhelming odds we evolved. No matter what we face we have always survived and grown. We shall always be triumphant." -Emperor Godfrey II

Hope for a brighter tomorrow - fight the fight, find the cure



The Scandinavians
Senator

Posts: 4948
Founded: Oct 09, 2004
Capitalizt

by [The Scandinavians](#) » Wed May 09, 2018 7:45 am



**Letter from the Office of the Steward of the Throne of Erid
Dictated by Crown Prince Fenric ap Eriod ao Erid (May the light
of the Almighty ever guide him to glory.)
Written by Steward Lord Erida**

Mi'lady Marion apa Myas,

My staff have informed me that your four sons Hemar, Godhand, Tenar, and Peter have perished during the initial incursion of the Macabean invaders into Drana in the first years of this cruel conflict. Whilst there is little doubt that you are currently in a prolonged state of mourning few could truly comprehend and I must apologize that information has been fleeting, I would like to tell you nonetheless that your sons have fulfilled their sacred duty to a point where their honor is now beyond question. With the graciousness of the Almighty, I offer you perhaps the only condolence which can truly matter: your sons have earned their way to heaven through their noble sacrifice in the battle against the dres'nalar. This path having been earned due to their actions marking them as heroes in the fullest meaning of the word.

Their service to the Glorious Empire has helped to stall the advance of a foe who seeks to destroy everything that our nation holds dear. An enemy which deserves only the deepest of contempt. Their deeds shall help to inspire the other valiant defenders of our nation find new strength against those who would destroy us. Their names will be a rallying cry for their peers on the battlefield. Their examples shall be taught in our schools.

In order to help to properly do good to the memory of your sons, I have ordered my staff to open a direct line of communication in the event that you might need anything. Additionally, your daughters bridal fees will be paid by me and so shall any funerary expenses that you might have personally incurred. These being the least that I can do as of now.

May the Almighty bless you and may your womb produce another heir who is half as worthy as those you have lost. May the other sons of the Empire look to your lost ones as an example of what is good and righteous in this world. May the Almighty reunite us all with our deceased kin one day. Christus invictus.

*Signed,
Crown Prince of the Empire,
Appointed Heir of Erid,
Regent of the Scandin,
Defender of the Faith,
His Imperial Majesty,
Fenric ap Erid ao Erid*

We are the Glorious Empire of the Scandinavians. Surrender or be destroyed. Your civilization has ended, your time is over. Your people will be assimilated into our Empire. Your technological distinctiveness shall be added to our own. Your culture shall be supplanted by our own. And your lands will be made into our lands.

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The Scandinavians
Senator

Posts: 4948
Founded: Oct 09, 2004
Capitalizt

by **The Scandinavians** » Wed May 23, 2018 7:57 pm



Interior Highland Drana Front, The Scandinavian Homeland

The war had begun to pierce into the very heart of the Glorious Empire. The central mountain range which divided the more agrarian south from the more urbanized north of Drana was determined to be the place where the enemy advance must be halted. The hardy basalt rocks which compromised much of the range were ideal for the placement of a large number of bunkers which had been constructed to ward off attacks from various anti-slaver forces during the heydays of the abolitionist wars. The strife of those times had caused the Scandinavians to become a much more prepared nation. Food had been stocked capable of sustaining the nation in the event of a total, deep seated fortifications had been built around the populous north to make any invasion there especially prolonged, and most importantly the people had been long readied mentally for the adversity of war.

These mountains, called "The World's Spine" when translated into English, were the place in which command had deigned proper to be the place to draw the land in the sand. The enemy could not be allowed to reach the north. Beyond the mountains, after all, was the densely peopled heartland of the Scandinavian Empire holding nearly all of its major urban areas and industrial capacity. A region which the generals in charge of the defense of Drana considered something that must be kept at peace in order to preserve morale in the long term. There a special fear that invading forces might even piece the blessed lands of Valgard on a larger scale than a few easily contained misfits. That possibility was ordered to be prevented at all costs. No enemy could be allowed to enter the land of Erid's life.

Therefore, in order to fill this order, the legions of Warrior Caste who had been held largely in reserve were being prepared to be moved to the front. Save for those serving in combat detachments they had largely been absent in the conflict in any real scale. Now that the was progressing to a point that the Sons of Erid had determined to be near where the initiative had to be turned against the Golden Throne the leadership in charge of the army deployments decided to begin to mark preparations for a great offensive. One which would see over three hundred million warrior caste, ten million noble legionaries, the might of the crusader orders, the depths of the casteless conscripts, hordes of fanatics added on the Attestor formula, the most recent innovations in anti-power armor armaments,

the release of fury of the Hell's Harrowing Matrix, and the opening of the vaults holding the long hidden abominations of the Empire.

This effort though was mostly independent of the plans to contain the Maccabean advance however. That was being handled by the much more common levies drawn from the burghers and greater free population of the Empire. Numbering well over a billion at this point they were viewed as much more expendable than the warrior caste in the conflict. Largely due to their costs of training being vastly lower. Though due to the human capital a large amount of them possessed due to being engineers, scientists, niche craftsmen, doctors, and other certified professions many exemptions were given from front line service. Such people were diverted to specialist service categories away from the areas of full on combat. Therefore the type of soldier one would see on front could still immensely vary. There were lawyers, accountants, carpenters, welders, farmers. slave drivers, security guards, fishermen, and all sorts of other professions represented. Though due to the gender norms of the Scandinavians no women were expected to take combat roles. The only classes of the Empire who were not serving were those born into the highest of the noble families who were usually given over to important, but not all that challenging roles in the bureaucracy.

The leadership of the armies of the dres'Erid was delegated to those nobles who survived the rigors of the Warsmith Academy. For the first time the Academy would have its graduates lead the war. The school which admitted only 40% of all applicants, a rarity for a place reserved for the nobility's highest. An educational program which typically saw one out of five entrants either maimed or killed of those who made it without dropping out of their first of five years. A place where 50% of all people quit in their first year at the academy. A system designed to root out the weak and discourage the foolish from ever even attempting to enter. Only those who were iron willed, observing of the faith, loyal to the Emperors, physically capable, and mentally sharp were truly capable of making it through.

The results of this process largely spoke for themselves. Most who made it through did not qualify as brilliant leaders nor did a large number of them possess natural charisma. They each however demanded respect. As each of their subordinates appreciated that they knew the rigors of conflict. That their existence had known blood and pain as much as the average soldier would. With their grim determination they had little room for weakness and disorder.

The dres'nalar could never truly understand the mindsets of such men. They were men whose existence was narrowly crafted. They ruled because they were born to do so. They commanded soldiers because they have proven themselves in incredibly bloody challenges. They would attain victory not because they were given a mandate by the Almighty, despite the supposed perceptions of the outlanders always assumed about the Scandinavians. They would win because they had orders to do so and nothing could prevent them from fulfilling their objectives. For failure was the domain of the weak willed and those with true resolve would achieve victory if merely given the resources to do so.

Such dour and dire officers being deployed was meant to displace the more lackluster material that had up until then led. Though the officers earlier in the war had been reasonably able, they lacked the same capabilities as seen in the Warsmith Academy. The primary reason for their exclusion so far was due to the desire of the Sons of Erid to draw the full might of the Golden Throne into a prolonged conflict. Something that had required a good bit of posturing to convince the Imperial Command to accept. However, the point that they had been sold on was the need to demonstrate to the world that the Glorious Empire would not be an easy foe to tangle with even for the greatest of foes.

Overall, the task had been considered to be accomplished sufficiently at long last. The expense for this strategy would have to be weighed later. The Sons of Erid had, after all, expended almost all of their political capital arranging this conflict and getting the factions of the

Empire to agree to wage it in a fashion that had it been. Only Crown Prince Fenric had been able to ensure that things went easily. Despite Fenric's unofficial leadership of the Sons, their organization had become more reviled as of late. Though inversely Fenric had been proving himself a capable leader as of late. So much so that the commoners and the clergy had begun to circulate rumors that he was the Actra Erid Pri, the Chosen High One from the Line of Erid.

That was however a topic for a different day regardless the growing maelstrom brewing. The focus had to be solely on the war. If the enemy was allowed to pierce into the heart of the Empire's urban region along the northern coast. Command had cast aside any objections and ordered the Academy's finest to hold the rocky slopes of the World's Spine. To this end, many preparations had been ordered to begin to take place.

Thankfully though the earlier effort from earlier wars created a situation which was quite beneficial. The generations of living in paranoid fear of being invaded by abolitionist powers had cause the mountains to be considered to be a fallback position. Somewhere the enemy could be held back for effectively forever. For this reason the region had been the area of concentration for fortifying. Countless bunkers and compounds were hidden in the World's Spine. Tunnels went for tens of miles linking northern entrances to well concealed southern exits and vice versa. The southern approach was especially well covered by artillery positions as it had long been calculated that all enemy invasions would seek to turn the massive slave populations of the south against the Scandin.

Though in this case that was not the whole story. But the circumstances matched closely enough to established protocols to allow for full usage of them to stop the Maccabean enemies now coming close to them. Thus it was decided by the new generals from the Academy to lure the enemy to attack the positions being established and then release the full fury of the mostly unused salvos awaiting awakening. Something that would not really stop them alone, but would leave enough of a bloody strike to force them to reconsider their tactics they had been using so far in the conflict.

To this end, two hundred million levy soldier who had been well rested were sent to establish the line of defense against the approaching enemy. They spent weeks digging trenches, preparing tank traps, getting ready the old bunkers, pouring new pill boxes, stocking up on munitions, and setting targeting lines. When the Golden Throne's thralls attacked they would be met with, save for the cities under siege, a well entrenched enemy determined not to give up any more ground. The change in dynamic was not expected to hit them fully at first. It was projected that the chance to escape the pitched fighting in the swamps and rubbus fields would cause the average enemy soldier to desire to engage on well drained land.

This type of inclination was what they believed would allow their strategy to fully work. Though the enemy had little choice save to attack them as the movement in the northern part of the nation indicated to anyone paying attention hundred of millions of fresh bodies were being readied to move south in the incoming months. The most effective counter to this would be to seal the mountain passes and hold them against this rush of forces. This same tactic now however now being used against the Golden Throne and there was little chance in the Scandinavian minds that the dres'nalar could overcome the southern defenses of the World's Spine. The hope was that they would not recognize the challenge of the task until they were already invested deeply into a pitched battle.

An event which would force them to invest a huge amount of materials, manpower, and attention. The ultimate goal was to draw in the Maccabean armies and distract them from proceeding to fan out across the nation and establish proper control of the land. From there the warrior caste would sweep in soon and devastate them in an overwhelming display of power. Enough that it would force the entire balance of the war to change decisively. Though they had proper backups in the event that did not work.

The plan b was just to wait them out basically. They would use their advantage in manpower and supply line length to gradually exhaust their invaders. Within a few years few peoples would have the stomach to remain invested in the dire quagmire that the Glorious Empire presented. This scenario would only be aggravated as the fighting would become more desperate in the event that the Church decided to release the inverted cross of Saint Peter which would turn the campaign into an affair that would make the earlier battles look civilized. Such a situation was something that even the Sons of Erid wished to avoid at almost any cost.

After all, the war was taxing on the invaders. They could not hold forever in a hostile foreign land teeming with people who despised. Whilst the Scandinvans were fighting for, in their minds, their very existence against an enemy who sought to make them into a footnote of history by wiping them away in their ancestral homeland. Therefore there was no potential compromise save for status quo antebellum.

Frontline, Drasdag

A dying Scandinavian soldier was coughing up blood when a Maccabean soldier clad in power armor approached him with his gun pointed at him. He did not bother to even attempt to reach for his own assault rifle. He knew he was on his last and did not have the energy left to even get a single bullet off at him. He knew that given his state that the enemy was trying to take him captive despite the obvious starkness of the situation.

As the Maccabean noticed that the Scandinavian was not attempting to fight back he pushed the assault rifle away and shouldered his own weapon. Looking down the Maccabean concluded that the man was dying and said, " Good riddance to you filth."

Sadly for the Scandinavian he was one of the few among the Empire to actually speak English and understood the bitter insult. With his last energy he stated something from the propaganda of the Empire seemingly, " Who are you to judge me dres'nalar? You pretend that your rights are inherent. That is a fiction. Your precious liberties come only from the pathetic social contract which binds your aimless mass of refuse together. Each of you is nothing more than a unit to be taxed or to be treated as a potential consumer by faceless corporations. Your culture is a tasteless heap in which each squabbling group of gibbering fools fights for an ever greater piece of the pie. You lack a common identity, faith, values, and purpose. Only your fleeting allegiance to the government placed in by a debauched popularity contests allows your lie to preserve itself."

Saying that the Scandinavian soldier passed away. He was nothing more than another statistic in a great war which had already claimed the lives of many millions. His would not be remembered on some memorial. His deeds would be unsung. His struggles would not serve as an example for others. His valor would not inspire his peers. His kin would not tell his children and grandchildren about him. He died as many young men do. Wifeless, childless, and lonely. He had no friends to ease his passing. He had no priest to offer him last rites. And he had no loved ones to embrace him in his final moments. He left the world as countless people before him had and as innumerable others would do so after him as well.

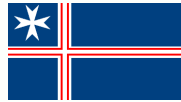
Such is the want of all wars.

Last edited by [The Scandinvans](#) on Wed May 23, 2018 8:13 pm, edited 2 times in total.

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by **The Scandinavians** » Thu May 24, 2018 2:12 pm



Mid-Afternoon, Valdra the Seat of the Imperial Bureaucracy

The city had of Valdra had long serve as the heart of the economy, the Church, and the agencies directing the empire's internal affairs. This nature caused it to be where all those who craved wealth or power tended to congregate. Therefore the city tended to crawl with nobles seeking positions, warriors aiming for glory, and burghers trying to acquire wealth. Be they great or small. Be they righteous or sinful. Criminals and Inquisitors, warriors and burghers, escaped slaves and the offspring of the plantation lords. All came aiming to build a better place for themselves in this world. Fortune called to all who had courage.

Among those who made the move to Valdra pride and ambition tended to be exaggerated features. Whilst these aspects of a person's personality could serve them well in fighting for everything a person is worth they nonetheless had the propensity of making people attempt to cast a bigger shadow than they really had. This trait was considered especially contemptible in a society so rigidly hierarchical as the Scandinavians. Though paradoxically it caused pigheaded persons of lower rank to project all the more. Something which has, at times, lead to situations that saw many arrogant individuals punished acutely for having to have the audacity to step out of their place.

Even during wartime the hum of commerce continued quite predictably. Albeit, there were far more troops stationed throughout the city and regular public executions were taking place of those convicted of conspiracies against the security of the Empire. The real means by which people could feel the impact of the war in the underworld was that security forces were much more strict. Administrative forces had declared a campaign against vices that were believed to undermine the war effort. Therefore troops that had been working in tandem with police to bust down a large number of different gangs during the course of the war against the Golden Throne. Thus far many of the largest distributors of drugs had been arrested and condemned to death on the pyres.

One local mobster known only as the Scale, due to his fondness for using scales when selling banned hallucinogens, was growing angry with so many of his network having been executed and the measures had his customers scared to even purchase goods that they were addicted to. The thoroughness of the measures that had been promoted by Crown Prince Fenric. Seething with rage Scale had decided that he had enough of the intervention of the government on his business. Against the advice of his advisers and peers he decided to order a hit on the Crown Prince in order to exact his revenge by having a bullet put between his eyes.

The move however was something that none of his agents were willing to carry out due to their inherent risks and their own personal loyalty to the monarchy. Thus was Scale forced to begin to court outside people in his attempt to find someone outside his usual circles for an assassin. There were however no bites on his offer no matter he asked for it. No one was willing to risk everything to take down the most powerful and protected person in the Empire. Additionally, on one thought they could ever get in a position to shoot him as his guard was so intense that it considered almost impossible for a stranger to approach him armed to get into a good sniper's nest.

As his attempts to find someone to take the job intensified so did the knowledge it begin to spread to the commoners of the city. At first it

was merely something to be whispered about in the taverns frequented by the offal of the area. But within a short period of time word of leak to the general populace enough to where outrage was beginning to brew against the plot. Finally, word of someone who had been approached in a minor local bar to take the job was learned by workers at one of the assembly plants in the same sector of town.

Once he had learned of it the foreman of the shift, enraptured by anger, ordered his hundreds of workers to assemble so could tell them what he had learned. The men present immediately laid down their tools and shut down their machines as quickly as they safety could. When that was done he told that the situation and with that knowledge they began to enter into a bit of a feverish fury. They had to protect their Empire from all traitors. Any who would betray Fenric would assuredly open the gates for the advancing enemy if given the chance. If the failed to act in defense of their Crown Prince they would have failed in their duty.

From there the group stormed out of the factor lead by the foreman. Armed with anything they could get their hands on they descended onto the bar where the would be assassin was. Storming into it they tortured the man until they named the individual whose agents had attempted to hire him. After the crowd beheaded him and left the bar. Then they proceeded to bar it down to remove the taint of such an establishment from their fair city.

They left the site and began to make their way to wards the compound where Scale lived. News began to be spread by members of the crowd and people began to stream in joining it. Within ten minutes of them leaving the bar the crowd had reached a size in excess of twenty thousand and some hundreds of fully armed warrior caste were marching with them prepared for a battle. The scene itself was finally reported to Scale who had woken up from a night of partying at 3 in the afternoon finally. His warning had come too late. The mob was already at the gates of his compound.

The compound, a 8000 square foot structure designed to serve as his residence was hidden as a standard warehouse in the industrial part of town, was surrounded on all sides by the mob by the time he had consulted with his guards and security cameras. Determining to make his last stand there he ordered his men to prepare for battle. Sadly for him, three out of four his guards had already fled the scene and as they left they had opened the gate in order to be spared by the mob. Not to mention they had left the secure doors unlocked.

By the time he was made aware of this the mob had streamed into the building en masse and overrun the few of his people who had remained. Each of them, eight total, had been captured alive and thrown onto the chain wire fence with knives and tools stabbed into them. Scale himself was dragged onto a hastily arranged pyre after he had been struck in the head by a thrown wrench and as he was unconscious the mob poured oil onto the pile of time and set it alight. As he was consumed by flames that he was thankfully unable to feel the crowd sang songs to the Actra Erid Pri whom they began to declare was Crown Prince Fenric in a sign of their allegiance to him. The immolation of Scale was also meant to serve as a dire warning that no one inside the Empire would be tolerated to challenge the rule of their beloved Prince especially during times of conflict.

Last edited by [The Scandinvans](#) on Mon Nov 26, 2018 5:12 pm, edited 2 times in total.

We are the Glorious Empire of the Scandinvans. Surrender or be destroyed. Your civilization has ended, your time is over. Your people will be assimilated into our Empire. Your technological distinctiveness shall be added to our own. Your culture shall be supplanted by our own. And your lands will be made into our lands.

"For five thousand years has our Empire endured. In war and peace we have thrived. Against overwhelming odds we evolved. No matter what we face we have always survived and grown. We shall always be triumphant." -Emperor Godfrey II

Hope for a brighter tomorrow - fight the fight, find the cure





Imbrinium
Diplomat

Posts: 589
Founded: Mar 03, 2008
Ex-Nation

by **Imbrinium** » Fri May 25, 2018 6:14 pm



The massive Imbrinium naval fleet moved into position to start the main operation to land on the Scandinavian mainland. The first main operation of this now being called operation "raven brook" was an unmanned operation and attacks.

The object was the port city of Benden which was handed down from the TGT command as a city within the overall operation against the Scandinavians. The first mission would be carried out by a first in the royal Imbrinium navy. The bombing and SEAD missions would be carried out by drone aircraft, ten of the twenty-five Cymrea-class drone carriers carrying F/Q-41A Raven and some thirty-shadow hawk LHDs carrying Q/F-60G Ronin to strike the SAM and military and transportation infrastructure to delay reinforcements and supplies into the city and cut down on movement of troops from one place to another.

The day started 24hrs before the operation, personnel checked and rechecked the data links with the aircraft this wasn't the first-time drones to be used but the first time to start an operation in mass. And there had been several test missions completed before they were accepted into service.

Behind the first attack would be a massive cruise missile attack and then the first manned aircraft attacks. This operational tempo would continue till the fleet got close enough to conduct the landings ashore. This would pave the way for the large force to be landed near Benden.

The fleet went to condition one of the carriers launch extra fighter patrols to support the launch of the drone force. With the extra CAP combat air patrols in the sky protecting the fleet in the time needed to launch drone aircraft. Launching aircraft off a carrier makes the carrier vulnerable to attack so the fleet goes into a high state of alert both for air, surface, and sub-surface threats.

Within an hour of launching all the drones they had formed up into their squadrons and the fighter protection drones moved into there positions and the SEAD drones took their rightful place, the heavy hitters took up the rear their job was to hit the targets with bombs and missiles.

The fleet prepared the next onslaught with its batteries of long-range missiles to pound the targets leftover by the first raid and those new ones that caught the eyes of the drones and recorded and sent back through uplink with the fleet.

Some hours later the large force of drones approached its release of the missions multi-role decoy drones this drone is based on the Helion 2 and packed with different electronics to do different types of roles from jamming, spoofing, decoying, and ISR for the battlefield or airspace. This drones would fly ahead and or away from the target and jam and decoy the radar systems on the ground.

About an hour or so later the first radar systems popped up the radars of the drones, the first attack drone locked on and launched their first missiles this where long range anti-radiation missiles based also on the Helion 2 cruise missiles.

Over a half hour later those radars when silent they were either destroyed or cut off and bugged out after being pinged by attacking missiles radars.

The sortie approached the city of Benden and the enemy air defense radars switched on and the missile crews launched in a just minutes once the aircraft came into range, and just like that the airspace was filled with missiles both with SAMs and AGM as attacks drone aircraft where hit so was the ground targets and other targets being recorded and sent back to the fleet for the later sorties. The top cap still had to dodge SAMS while protecting the attack on the city some low flying aircraft were picked up but wasn't engaged to save missiles

in case of the excepted mass counter air attack, and it wasn't long the first fighter aircraft approached the city to contest the attack on the city. The top cap moved to intercept and launch its BVRM as a standoff attack before engaging the counter air operation made close combat. It wasn't long before missiles where hitting planes on both sides.

Within an hour all stores for ground targets being spent the order was given to return to base, as the orders where being sent to the drone sortie on Benden the fleet launched its cruise missiles for the new and preplanned targets some one thousand missiles were launched to hit different targets all over the city.

When I was young I used to pray for a bike, then I realized that God doesn't work that way, so I stole a bike and prayed for forgiveness. "Deus vult" is Latin for "God wills it" and it was the cry of the people at the declaration of the First Crusade by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in 1095.

#MAGA, WWG1WGA , Q



The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by **The Macabees** » Sat May 26, 2018 9:27 am



OPERATION WILLED VENGEANCE

"This war was symbolic. Its value was in its role in fueling the cult of the Willed."

— A. Aguirre, *Ka'Reik* (2138 C.E.)

Komsektor Aridna, Siege of Drasdag Mid-September, 2028

The clouds above seemed red with blood, but it was only the reflection of the million

fires that raged across the port city of Drasdag. The noise of war was persistent and omnipresent. A horror, really. For several months now, horror was, in fact, all this city had seen, all it had experienced, all that it had lived.

Millions of soldiers toiled in the gravel-sown mud paths that were all that remained of what were once beautiful streets. Artillery, naval cannon fire, and missiles had done most of the preliminary damage, although the frequent infantry skirmishes played their role as well. These things happened more than just daily, you could measure them by the minute, by the second perhaps. There were invading airbases inland now, so the bombardments came from all directions. Scandinvan air defenses were the first to be heavily targeted by the Fuermak's long-range assets, guided by special operations teams operating in and around the city. Then everything else came to be attacked, anything that resisted against the slow, crawling block-by-block occupation of Drasdag. All the while, the city burned. Its people either died fighting, burned with it, or escaped through Macabéan lines to be collected by other Macabéans to the rear. They were herded into new, planned settlements placed under heavy guard.

Kriermak 'Gholgoth' and its Imbrinumian allies had tightened the blockade further, so much so that even the small-time smuggler would find it difficult to pass through their multi-layered picket lines that patrolled along six dimensions, if not more. These were the two most simple axes, underwater, the air, space, and the digital domain. This ever-evolving network spread south of Drana, from the eastern

- [Komsektor Aridna, Siege of Drasdag](#)
- [Behind Enemy Lines, Survivors](#)
- [Komsektor Boris, Tank Battle of Anver](#)
- [Komsektor Darius, The Siege of Bendred](#)
- [Komsektor Aridna, Raiding in Drasdag](#)
- [Behind Enemy Lines, the Breaking Point](#)

coastlines of unclaimed lands to just east of the Scandinavian mainland's easternmost point. Only Drana's northern coasts were free.

They were squeezing, and Drana was the prize. If the city fell, they would have a large port through which to supply the armies fighting further inland. As it stood, they were using temporary makeshift ports along the coastline that had to be constantly maintained or otherwise rebuilt, oftentimes relocated due to varying weather conditions, while more vital supplies were brought in by air now. It would allow them to multiply the volume of logistical traffic, even. That in and of itself would be crucial to the war effort, as the Golden Throne's armies spread out in their inland march toward the two centers of Scandinavian imperial power, the great cities of Valgard and Valdra.

None of this great chessboard mattered much to *Soldat Prim* Marius Montelo and *Aftkorpai* Jakus Norel. They were bleeding out by the side of the torn-up road, their backs against the exterior wall of a shelled-out home whose inhabitants had either abandoned it long ago or died somewhere inside, buried in the rubble, forever forgotten.

Montelo triggered his helmet to slide open. "You're the only person left in my life," he said, "and I don't even know you. Best not to be rude."

Two patrolling platoons had crossed paths, somewhere behind the front lines within Drasdag. These type of brief encounters happened from time to time. Macabéan military police were keen to keep an eye on the rear area, lest the stray Scandinavian group of soldiers mount an ambush or attack in some other way. They made for lucrative targets if a guerilla warrior could get away with organizing the area along the route. Pinpointing where exactly they would happen was, of course, impossible, and most attempts ended in disappointment. Time to time, however, the Scandinavians pulled it off well. Montelo and Norel, each from opposite platoons, paid the highest price for it. Three more soldiers already lay dead around them.

Norel managed to raise his helmet too. "I rather die alone, but if you need my presence to die in peace, so be it."

"Even dying, I'll kick your ass, so shut it." Montelo swallowed, looking for water that wasn't there. His mouth, his whole body, was thirsty, dying for it, or of it. Blood continued to seep from his body, out within the suit, and through small exit ports that had opened to release the fluid. Inside, the suits worked to keep alive. A 'malfunction' that came from the armor's priority to maintain life. "This is pretty fucking misreable, isn't it?"

"It wasn't so bad before," replied Norel. "It's much worse now, for sure."

Montelo chuckled, before coughing with hurt. "You're an asshole, although I'm sure you've heard that before. Anyway, I didn't bother you so that we could insult each other until one of us died first. I just realized something and I wanted to share it with someone. We're dying man, what's the use of dying alone?"

"Very touching," said the *aftkorpai*. "So, what was this epiphany you had?"

"The pain is getting real' bad, man. My whole side burns, where that machine gun bullet struck through. I can feel it stick out of me," laughed Montelo. "You know, I never saw myself here. Even after I signed up for the war, I didn't think it would come to this. My father's stories of The War fascinating me. Then came the long years and our victories abroad. I thought I'd find that glory here. All I've found is absolute misery."

They shared a silence. "It wasn't all so bad," said Norel, finally.

When there was no response, Norel turned his head to look at

Montelo. The *soldat prim*'s eyes were closed shut, for all of the misery he said he had been in, he looked at peace now. Norel chuckled and shifted back into a comfortable position. Then, he closed his eyes too and gave his last breath.

Sometime later, a team of three unmanned ground vehicles and their one human operator arrived, escorted by a platoon of heavily armored infantrymen. The machines carefully separated human remains from the suits. The former were bagged and then taken back to base, where they were prepared for burial. All of the bodies would be returned to the empire, if possible, buried outside of Fedala in the Fields of Glory alongside with their fallen comrades from the past. The suits, for their part, were taken back to base as well, and then to warehouses where they were repaired or recycled for remanufacturing. The war must always go on.

Behind Enemy Lines, Survivors

Early October, 2028

A trail of fire followed the burning aircraft as it plummeted toward the ground. Its metal frame shriveled up and twisted apart as it struck dirt, rolling across an open countryside field.

The pilot had ejected from the cabin and streaked across the sky as a tiny black dot. His trajectory could be traced all the way down, especially after the pilot opened his parachute and drifted toward the earth. Finally, he was lost behind a tall canopy out yonder, where humanity was still scarce.

Komsargént Kabanis led them toward the crash site, *Sargént* Gabán right behind him. They moved through tall wheat stocks quickly, rifle in hand, their heads turning to all sides as if on swivels. Somewhere to the south, not too far away, the war boomed loudly. Aircraft zoomed and zipped above, sometimes in transition toward some target or amidst a dogfight. This one had fallen in a duel. The Scandinavian fighter team had been victorious.

Its frame was still aflame when they saw the remains from the edge of a clearing. There was a cackle and then a loud explosion, then another one, and finally the fire began to die down as they approached. Kabanis pointed starboard, so Gabán took the right, circling to the other side of the fallen aircraft. They looked for any useful remnants, like intact technology. Most of that would be in the cockpit, but whatever wasn't an absolute mess was still afire, or at least extremely hot and untouchable. They scavenged what was accessible, then left booby traps for any Scandinavians who came to inspect the site, maybe to try to steal something for themselves. There was nothing that could be done about that, except exact a small price with the creative use a few anti-vehicle and anti-personnel improvised explosive devices, along with two autonomous light machine guns that sought out friendly signals and was triggered by motion via a laser sensor.

The Macabéan operatives were rapidly on their way again, wary of staying there for too long. They were behind enemy lines and surely the Scandinavians had seen the falling wreckage just as well as they had. Scandinavian troops would be here to inspect the remains too, and best to be gone when they were caught unawares by the trap that the two *koro kirim* had set.

They went hunting for the pilot, instead.

In most Macabéan fighter aircraft, the seats had a working signal that communicated with a global satellite network. It could, in fact, tune into commercial satellites if military ones were targeted. This is what it did most of the time, in fact. *Komsargént* Kabanis followed this signal as it manifested on his battle pad, which even in its hardened case looked as if it had taken quite a beating. The screen, resilient as it was, had cracked in several places. It was a miracle anything could still be read at all on that thing. Somehow, the

komsargént could see the map well enough to guide them through the challenging terrain until they arrived at another empty clearing, perhaps thirty minutes total from the crash site of the aircraft. The pilot had fallen far from the apple tree, exactly the way he was trained. By now, he was probably already on the run, heading toward friendly lines.

This was confirmed as soon as they arrived at the location the pad told them the signal was coming from. Inside the small open area the chair sat alone. It looked in poor condition. Fortunately, the pilot must have survived, because his body was nowhere to be found. Kabanis turned the signal off.

Kneeling off to the side, his eyes busy inspecting the leaf-covered ground, Gabán said, "He went this way."

"Good," answered Kabanis, "let's go after him."

They followed the tracks for some time. This pilot had run fast, apparently. Truth was, the Scandinvans were getting better at hunting ejected enemy pilots down. Well-trained pilots were at a premium, and a living pilot returning back to friendly lines was worth his weight in gold. No wonder the enemy spent his resources finding and imprisoning them. And no surprise that the *koro kirim* troubled themselves to find him first.

Finally, they ran across him as the man was doing his best to run across an open field along a low, gradually-rising hill. Atop it was a wired fence and behind that a trench. There was some kind of Scandinavian outpost there, perhaps an air defense battery or an artillery firebase. Either way, what was that fool pilot doing running in the wide open? As long as the man bent his back, there was little here to hide behind. Kabanis and Gabán went on after him, following a wider path with more cover from scouts along walls or any nearby patrols. When they were close enough, Kabanis called out, "Psssst."

The pilot suddenly froze and then slowly turned toward the south, eyes wide like those of a deer caught in the headlights.

"Come here," whispered the *komsargént*, harshly. "We're friendlies."

"What's the call sign?" responded the pilot, weakly.

"Fuck that, just come here." Kabanis motioned him over, his gesture implying that the pilot hustle. The *komsargént* turned to Gabán and said, "This guy might be more trouble than he's worth. Let's make sure he doesn't get himself killed, although after this display I think he may be our new victim."

"New victim?" asked the *sargént*.

"You know, all the others we've traveled with so far." Kabanis was looking the other way. "All the others we've led to their deaths. Don't you ever get tired of it?"

"Tired of what?" Gabán saw the *komsargént* stare off into the distance.

"This," was all Kabanis says.

"No use in that," replied Gabán. The pilot was finally hurrying over. "We're stuck here whether we like it or not. We might as well stay useful while we're alive. Might as well have a purpose, no? So, c'mon, *komsargént*. Let's this guy back into an aircraft, so maybe he can one day go home or maybe just crash again, maybe that time die while he's at it. Fuck it."

The *komsargént* shook his head. "Even stoics have a breaking point."

There were, at these heights, over one fifty million soldiers in *Komsektor* Boris. Another one hundred million would have landed ashore by the onset of winter. It was a massive operation, one tasked with perhaps the most challenging part of the war, which was pushing the front far enough north and east to mount operations focused on the capture of Valdra and Valgard in the following year.

Hundreds of thousands of tanks and other armored fighting vehicles fanned out in almost all directions along an ever-lengthening frontline that began to infect its way toward the center of Drana, much like cancer driving the body back in retreat. And much like how a disease battled its way to victory cell-by-cell, here the fiery bulbs of war sprang across the battlefield seemingly in isolation. It could fool no one, though, this was all an orchestration. It was all just elements of a bigger picture, a hellscape that had by now directly engulfed hundreds of millions, if not billions, of Scandinavians. The war had reached the peak of the autumn season and the fighting was at its worst, as Macabéan armies trudged forward movement by movement, attack by attack, making a final push before the cold winter was upon them. Only then would they rest. Best that they did their job well here too, lest the Scandinavian army be left with the strength to counterattack.

A breeze swept across the land, somewhere in southwest Drana, where Macabéan and Scandinavian armor dueled with each other dangerously. Large-cannon Nakíls fired from long range, often from behind cover or from a low-rising height. The Linces, with their smaller guns, and faster chassis, darted here and there, firing on the move with their deadly three-flechette spray. For their part, the Scandinavians fought just as fiercely, their cannons breathing fire like dragons. Behind them, the sun was coming down and darkness was taking over. With every passing minute, the colorfully hot spray of flames from the tanks' guns reflected more intensely against the heavens.

Among those flashing clouds rode hundreds, if not thousands, of aircraft. More often than not, you could not see them. They were too far away, killing each other from a distance. Bright explosions revealed themselves in the air, like fireworks exploding in a deadly show. Missiles shrieked back-and-forth, popping in and out of the packed condensation like bullets parting through cotton. The violence was at its prime here.

If one looked from one of the thousands of UAVs circling the battlefield, perhaps you'd see the town Anver somewhere near the center of it all. A quaint town of devout people, with a proud church built many hundreds of years ago, few of its inhabitants could have ever imagined something like this. Steel carcasses burned just outside of their front doors. A day's travel, or at most two, is most likely the longest adventure most of these folk have had. Now, a day's travel still leaves them in the middle of the carnage. It continues on for hundreds of kilometers in every direction. The darkness that pervades the sky today, broken only by the orange, blue, and red of fire, stems from the tall columns of black smoke that rise up toward space like hell's pillars penetrating up from the ground below. The wind does not do much to abet this, but it does carry the cries and the screams of the wounded, which sound like howls of the dead as they are pushed through the River Styx to their ultimate entrapment in the underworld.

Leutnant Karl Jerama rested his head against the side of a Nakíl that had seen better days. The rear half of the turret was almost gone, what remained being little more than charred, twisted metal. An ammunition cook-off. Jerama had been lucky to get out alive. *Aftkorpal* Andre Ferún, not so much. The Rezeghi had been caught in the hull, unable to escape through the one of the turret hatches in time before the whole thing blew up.

Sargént Gareth Garay had been somewhat luckier, but a piece of shrapnel had struck him in the neck. The *sargént* quickly bled out. He

still lay there, in front of Jerama.

"What did we get ourselves into?" he mumbled. His face was covered by a thick coat of blood and it dripped from the edge of his jaw, all the way back to both of his ears. There was little left of his original face, in fact. Shrapnel had carved up pretty well, leaving little of what anybody would have called handsome before. He wondered how his wife would receive him when he got back home, *if* he ever got back home, and *if* his wife still waited for him. So many incognitos, and here he lay half-dead against the burnt remnants of his tank. It looked so weak, seeing the Nakil destroyed like that despite its large gun and its bestial reputation.

There were plenty of other steel ruins around him, many other bodies. In younger years, maybe the sight of this carnage would have made him sick to his stomach. But Jerama had already seen this a thousand times before. War to him was like love-making to the Don Juan. So he just sat there for a while, catching a breath in a war that did not give you even a single pause of respite.

He heard the sound of tracks approaching from the near distance. He couldn't see what or who it was behind the ocean of wreckage. Jerama figured it was the Scandinvans and that he had been made for sure. It's easier to assume one's death when in situations like these than to be disappointed by false hope. He was laughing like a madman when the Macabéan APC rolled up beside him. It stopped with a series of loud clinks and one of the hatches at the top of the hull popped open. A helmeted soldier, one of the APC's crewmen, popped his head out and said, "Hey, you lookin' for a ride?"

"I guess so," answered Jerama.

"Good," said the soldier. "The battle isn't over yet and our boys need all the able-bodied men we can find. They surely have a tank waiting for you in the rear."

The *leutnant* laughed again. "Great," he said. "Life could have just let me die, but it figures that it wasn't my time to escape this mess just yet. I'm not that lucky."

Komsektor Darius, The Siege of Bendred

Late October, 2028

While forces in *Komsektor Aridna* tightened their stranglehold on Drasdag and a section of the front closest to the western coastlines, and those in *Komsektor Boris* focused on the war's main thrust, the Macabéan armies in *Komsektor Darius* played a more supporting role. They were to assist the Imbrinumians with the siege of Bendred, a major city just off the central, southern coast. This action, if successful, would secure the right flank of the invasion and make it more difficult for the Scandinvans to gain ground during a counter-attack or -offensive. That it was a "supporting" role made not it one iota easier to accomplish.

Like to the west, the Scandinvans were well-entrenched, hardened, and dogged. They made the Macabéans bleed for every inch of ground. Certainly, the forbidding terrain—a common trait among Gothic nations, the Golden Throne was already aware—played its role as well, challenging the Fuermak's usual reliance on space, flexibility, and long-distance movements. This was a much more methodical war.

The city actually lay on an island. Besieging forces looking to assault it directly had very little room to prepare or maneuver in. This task had been left mainly to the Imbrinumians. Macabéan forces were simply cutting it off from the main island of Drana, looking to sever its umbilical chord to Scandinavian forces further inland. If Bendred could not be taken militarily, then it would be starved. Yet, even as the Macabéan army built its trenches, ramparts, and forts in several layers, digging in for the long haul, Scandinavian guerillas struck from

the coastal hills, where they hid in caves or wherever else they could.

Locals called the city of Bendred the "City of the Warrior of the Faith," a beautiful name that the Macabéan soldiers approved of. It sounded like something they'd call a city of their own, dedicated to He Who Is Willed.

Korone! Atik Lankast looked at the pillar of smoke that rose from out of the city and into a sky like a pitch black hurricane. The horizon flashed red and orange at frequent moments, faraway ships launching their missiles and firing their cannons. Minutes later, corresponding explosions could be heard throughout the city. The truth was, this noise was almost incessant, day and night. In the pursuit of its goals, the Golden Throne was a relentless force and one could tell by looking at just how badly Bendred had been mauled. In a great many places, the great cathedrals rose only around rubble and ruin, if still standing at all.

"You know, we claim to attack military targets. When civilian property is damaged, it is so only because your military has used it to defend itself. I don't blame them, I would do the same exact thing. In fact, I did when I fought in the knee-deep mud banks of the River Styx in Ruska. The Havenic hordes were well armed, well trained, and willing. Aurillac was gone. Mosnoi Bor, almost gone. It took us many years to repair the damages of war, but it was worth it. I only hope that the true is same for you, my friend." Lankast turned to the elderly Scandinvan man sitting on his porch, watching Macabéan troops assemble and march on the road in front of him. They spoke in the man's native Scandinvan tongue.

When the farm had been occupied by the enemy, there was nothing he could do about it. But the Macabéan invaders would have to pull him out of his own house screaming if they expected him to go *anywhere*. The Macabéans had never demanded anything and, in fact, willingly brought the old farmer all that he needed to survive and more.

"Do you remember the younger woman who had visited me yesterday in the afternoon?" the elderly man asked.

"Yes, I do," answered the *korone!*

The old farmer sighed. "They sent a woman," he said, finally, "because young men have too much trouble moving through your peoples' lines. It is my son, he is dead. He fell at the Battle of Anver, she said, defending the Faith from the invaders as if it were his only purpose in life. Arnljot was killed a warrior."

A tear formed in the corner of the farmer's eye. He finished, "I suppose I am to be proud now."

"Pride is relative, my friend," said Lankast.

The Macabéan officer produced from his inner coat pocket a bullet-silver flask. It held something akin to a fine whiskey. Surely, something distilled decades ago, then aged in casks of Monzarki wood. That sort of thing was available to a Macabéan officer with money, as would be a veteran of a former war. Lankast had land waiting back home for him, land and a family. He couldn't see the faces of his children, to make love to his beautiful wife again, and to feel the freedom of a peaceful breeze without it being only one of few things left to appreciate in this world. The *korone!* closed his eyes for a second, hardly enough for the old farmer to notice.

There were more immediate concerns than his return home, however. "I would express my condolences for the loss of your son Arnljot if I knew that it would be an empty statement to you. You must know that as a fellow soldier I truly do respect him, your son. We fight for different reasons but, in the end, our purpose and understanding is the same. You say the victor is a matter of Faith, I say that I am Willed, and in the end who knows the truth? Only time can tell."

"What do you want, Macabéan?" asked the old man, his tone as frigid as the arctic north of Gholgoth.

"That woman who visited yesterday," said Lankast, coolly, "she wasn't the only one. My men have reported that several had come and gone, sometimes children, and sometimes others of your time. I ordered my men to detain and search all those who visited you as soon as I learned of the pattern. We have found your notes. Not a very clever code, I must say."

The old farmer sniffed. "So, did you come to kill me?"

"To kill you! Dear me, no. The Macabéans are not slayers of old men." The *koronel* laughed.

"Then what?" the Scandinvan demanded.

"Neither do we torture and enslave children, unlike you sorry lot," answered Lankast. "But one does not always have to torture children to get information from them. The ones that came to your house will soon have new homes far away from here, where they will enjoy a better life. Before they go, those that do will tell us where the guerilla camps lay in the hills. My soldiers shall lay those camps to waste. It is likely that most of your brethren will die. Perhaps if you simply tell me the location of the encampments my men will be better prepared and more lives will be saved. Surely, that is a good thing?"

The old man gave him a long, hard stare, and said, "Take up the spear to defend your people against the falsehoods and degeneracy of the alien. Drive them from the lands which are rightfully yours alone. Take from them their children and women as slaves to your house eternally. Kill their men to the last or condemn them to the labor of rubbus and the mine." [ed. h/t to Scand for this line.]

The *koronel* chuckled. "Very well, then. Here, I brought this for you," he placed the flask on a small wooden table. "It is from my homeland, I ask you to try it."

Lankast rose. "Maybe sometime in the far future, there will be less hate between our people. But, in a war like this, where men seek death, what's the use of hope?" he said as he left.

Komsektor Aridna, Siege of Drasdag

Early November, 2028

The armored tractor's massive claw dug down into the earth below churned asphalt. It grabbed a serving of dirt and rock, then spit it out over the side. The new hole opened into a trench that ran into the building on the other side of the street, its brick façade carved out to make room. Construction like this occurred all over the portions of the city's suburbs occupied by Macabéan troops, adding to the already extensive Scandinvan field works that had crisscrossed the area like scars across a body.

Soldat Anton Villesçu looked at while he took a bite from the tragic cold slab that the *Ejermacht* called 'turkey,' mesmerized. Not by the trench or the tractor, but by it all.

From a rural town in the interior of northern Indras, now in the imperial territory of that same name, he had never seen so many big cities as he had in his two years of service. Vasozia once, because that is where he had deployed out of during his first combat tour. That time it was to New Empire, where he fought in Dasch, at Granshire, and in other hard, long, and grueling battles throughout the satrapy. There he had seen many cities, all of them below the surface of the earth. It was as unnatural a thing as he had ever seen, like an upside-down beehive dug into the crust of the planet. The country's surface had long been ruined by nuclear war, and now most of it was wild country except for the steel bones of old cities

laid to waste.

Drasdag looked to have been a mighty city now, but now it had been turned into a hollowed fortress. Both sides had entrenched themselves in the streets, buildings, and even underground within the sewers and tunnels. Much of everything was destroyed, damaged by artillery, bombing strikes, and the ongoing battling in the streets. Villesçu would have loved to see Drasdag before the war, it must have been beautiful.

"Villesçu, we ride." It was *Sargént* Geza Mutu.

Peeling his eyes away from the street, Villesçu snapped back to reality. He wrapped his coat more tightly around him. The air had become more frigid as winter continued to approach. The GRX.40's engine was already rumbling, warming up in the cold weather. Called an URBAT by the men, the GRX.40 Urban Assault Unit was made for battles like this one. Armed with an imposing 160mm howitzer, it could deal massive damage directly and carry with it a supporting fire team of cavalry scouts like Villesçu. *Soldat Prim* Anton Florescu and *Soldat* Drahoslav Comeaga were already lining up behind the ramp, waiting for the other two to catch up. They looked no more enthused about this than Villesçu. The other two GRX.40s were already loaded and ready to go, with a Type 52GT Macán in support positioning itself at the head of the line. Other soldiers, infantrymen occupying the square, looked at them with little curiosity. Missions like these had become rote by now.

Taking one last look at the tractor, which was backing up to start digging a separate stretch of the trench line, Villesçu followed *Sargént* Mutu into the back of their vehicle. The ramp closed up behind them, leaving them in the dark except for dim interior lights. Inside it was not as cramped as it would otherwise be had they been wearing a powered suit. There were not enough of them to go around, especially not for mere Indran auxiliaries. Villesçu was okay with that, he hated wearing those things anyway. Some said the meds they fed you caused insanity. Focused returned again as soon as the GRX.40 jolted to a start and the column began to move forward.

They headed for the front lines taking a long, winding route. Many of the streets were blocked by rubble or deemed too dangerous still. A UAV guided their path, with an armed and modified GF15 patrolling at a higher altitude. It would provide quick reaction fire support if needed. Half-standing buildings dominated the flanks throughout their journey, like tall metal carcasses looming over them.

Fighting could be heard all over. Rifle fire was an almost constant sound. Explosions from artillery, bombs, and other weapons are frequent as well, and there were always many places throughout the city at any given moment that were embroiled in battle. These short trips to the front were almost enjoyable because, for the most part, it was an escape from the reality of war. Ironical that sitting in a tin can heading toward enemy lines could be thought of as peaceful, but these kind of experiences were relative and even 'peace' like this one could do a soldier many favors as far as his will to continue and the health of his mind. Villesçu closed his eyes for most of it, preferring to take a short rest rather than feel the creeping anxiety of yet another day in the middle of hell's fires.

Macabéan troops at the front watched them warily from their impromptu foxholes, trenches, and pillboxes. Villesçu couldn't see their faces, but he knew that those who saw them cross the dividing trench between Macabéan and Scandinvan Drasdag pitied them. Barriers had been erected along all the streets, even the smallest ones. These were tangled in wire and other rubble, most likely from the constant raining of artillery that came from both sides.

There was no preliminary bombardment for the small armored column.

Gunfire erupted almost immediately after crossing into Scandinvan-held Drasdag, small arms bullets striking the hull like a hard hail. He

could hear the Type 52GT responding in vigor with its 37mm autocannon. There was a shriek outside and then a loud bang as the active protection system fired a countermeasure, with a final shudder to pass the threat.

"Rocket," said the *Sargént* Mutu to Comeaga. It was the *soldat's* first mission in Gholgoth. He looked as if he were shitting his pants.

"Rocket?" asked *Soldat* Comeaga. "Can those kill us."

"Sometimes," answered Villesçu. "If they hit us."

Florescu smiled and Mutu laughed. "Don't scare the new guy," said the *sargént*. "Else it'll get all smelly and humid in here if he pisses himself. Besides, ain't nothin' going to kill us today. This is a quick and easy raid mission, and we come well guarded. We should all make it back for dinner tonight, no problem. Just remember, when our boots hit the dirt keep your head up and your eyes open."

The bombardment was picking up. Artillery began to fall more heavily all around. Villesçu could tell by how loud it was. He could feel its intensity in the vibrations of the hull, in how it rattled even his bones. Aircraft were making bombing runs as well, taking advantage of nearly unrestricted air superiority over the city. Surface to air missile batteries in the mountains and beyond, occupying space behind Macabéan lines further north, had served to sever the Scandinvan's air force's access to Drasdag. It was not an always successful safety net, but here the Macabéans had gained themselves a strategic advantage by the mere geography of the situation. And now they were using their strength to pin enemy forces down in their makeshift bunkers and defensive fortifications.

The conversation had served to take their mind from the drive, at least. When the four vehicles split into two columns, one with three GRX.40s and the other with a single GRX.40 and the Type 52GT, it came almost as a surprise. Almost. Moments like these took few soldiers by surprise. They were always on your mind, your mind was always preparing for them. ...Yet, one never seemed quite prepared.

That is how Villesçu felt when the vehicle finally stopped and the ramp went down. "Move, move, move," barked Mutu.

They lifted themselves from their seat and ran down the ramp, twisting right to line up against the wall of a narrow street. A machine gun had opened up from a window three stories above, but the lead GRX.40 shuddered and the only thing left of that machinegun was the dust of its annihilation. Above, a UAV kept watch of the unfolding fight. It made Vallesçu feel more secure for some reason, perhaps because he knew of just how much death that UAV could bring on the enemy. With it, and others like it in the air, the Scandinvans would have trouble moving in large numbers. A small respite all things considered, however, because local Scandinvan fire was much more than a mere machinegun. Inside the buildings, Scandinvan soldiers were moving and were unleashing unrepentant rifle fire on the briskly moving Macabéan soldiers.

On the other side of the building, on a street that ran parallel to this one, he could hear the Type 52's cannon opening up on the enemy. On this side, the three GRX.40s entered into action to protect each other while their twelve infantrymen passengers slipped through two doors that led into the same broad apartment structure. Small arms fire erupted inside almost immediately, and the cacophony was coming from the other side as well.

Inside, Vallesçu, *Sargént* Mutu, and the other two soldiers in the fireteam followed a second fire team through a long, dark hall that turned to a staircase which winded upwards. The third fire team remained behind by the doors, securing the entrances and the rear. Outside, the GRX.40s were fighting a battle of their own, pummeling the neighboring structures with their heavy cannons.

Enemy resistance was fierce. *Soldat* Comeaga would not survive; a

stray bullet struck him through the eye, killing him nearly instantaneously. He fell limp on the floor with a *crunch*. The boy could be no older than 17, and his life already extinguished. The round had missed the man it was intended for in the fire team ahead of them, gone stray, and found Comeage instead. A damn shame, but one that Vallesçu would mourn later. For now, they fought on, moving up the staircase slowly and calling on fire support from their GRX.40 when needed. Dust cluttered the air, falling down the center well that went down all the way to the lobby they had come through. Each 160mm shell that struck around them simply funneled even more dust and debris, making the space darker than it already was. Only the incessant muzzle flashes provided any sort of illumination at all. Under these conditions they reached, finally, one of the rooms on the fifth floor.

It all went down very quickly. When they burst open the door, a spurt of automatic fire ripped into the door frame. The Macabéans fought their way in, rolling in a smoke grenade to help conceal their approach as they cleared the apartment room by room. From out the veil a smoke walked out *Sargént* Mutu holding the collar of a Scandinvan man who was trying to look brave.

The extraction was done rapidly. They descended the staircase to the lobby, bringing with them the body of the young Comeage. Another two had been injured, one of them very badly. They'd soon find out that those on the other side had lost three of their own, with another four wounded. A heavy price to pay for, seemingly, one man.

They pushed him back into the GRX.40, which was still being pelted seemingly from all angles. Ready to get the hell out of there, their column was back on the road within minutes.

The IFV and fourth GRX.40 reunited with them where the two streets joined further to the north.

It was not a long drive, although it seemed longer now than it did when they were headed the opposite direction. The bombardment around them was growing still more intense and they could hear the yells of men at war. The Macabéans had launched their day's attacks, attempting to wrestle another block from the enemy before they turned back in for the night. Such was the nature of the siege of Drasdag.

They brought their prisoner back to base, behind the frontline (although was there truly a frontline in a siege like this one?). He would find the next few days difficult. An engineer, he was believed to have infiltrated into Drasdag in recent days through one of the Scandinvan's many smuggling routes. Although *Kríermak* Gholgoth had tightened the noose, this was still the Scandinvan's homeland and no one knew the waters and land like them. But this one had been caught. He had seen what the Scandinvans had amassed in the north, within and behind what they called the Spine of the World. The Macabéans wanted to know, lest they be caught unprepared for what would come with winter.

Behind Enemy Lines, the Breaking Point

Early November, 2028

Although the front had been getting closer to them with each passing day, the long trek from where they found the stray pilot to Macabéan forces was an arduous one.

Kapitán Aldro Metzúah was his name and he had been injured, badly, during the ejection. So badly that his spine had nearly visibly compressed. He could hardly walk and the two *koro kirim* operatives that had found him soon realized that the pilot was more of a liability than anything. The man also enjoyed pulling rank, dictating the trajectory of the journey south.

They had almost died because of *Kapitán* Metzúah...many times.

The first time had been soon after his rescue, when rather than wait for a Scandinavian patrol to pass by without further incident the man ordered them to ambush the three armored cars. It was a miracle that they had escaped from that fiasco at all, let alone with all of their lives. The stunt had also depleted almost all of their anti-tank ordnance, leaving them dangerously bare if ever caught cold by the enemy. This would, in fact, be the case not two weeks later, when Scandinavian forces harassed them through the ravines of the southern foothills of Drana's Spine. A tracker must have come whiff of them surely, leading Scandinavian forces in their pursuit. Escape had, once again, been a miracle.

Luck was a fleeting thing and what was due to them came not long after this last close encounter. Across an open field long left fallow, a shot rang out beneath the sun's beating heat. Gabán, Kabanis, and Metzúah had been marching for hours, the sweat rolling down their face the fruits of their toil. Metzúah fell first, blood spilling out from the freshly carved hole in his head.

"Shit, shit, sniper," yelled the *komsargént*, who bent down by instinct to take the *kapitán's* collar in his fists and drag the corpse behind the wall of a small abandoned farm building.

Gabán quickly followed. "You see where that shot came from?"

"Somewhere from the northeast," answered Kabanis. The *komsargént* struck the ground with a closed fist. "There ain't no way we're killing that sniper from all the way over here, anyway."

"Must be a tracker. That must be how they keep finding us." Gabán looked at the cold, rigid body of the *kapitán*. He was dead, there was no doubt of that. His eyes had rolled back into his head, and his mouth was agape. The bullet had struck him in the side of the head. A damn good shot that sniper was, and whoever it was would kill the two *koro kirim* given the chance. "At least we lost the baggage," he said, nodding at the corpse.

"Shut up," said Kabanis. "Shut the hell up."

They must have sat there by the wall for well over thirty minutes, with no move other than those which led to certain death. "We're either going to die here waiting or we're going to die fighting. Seems to me that if today is going to be our last, we might as well go out doing what we're paid to do." He took his rifle in his hands and gripped it tightly.

"I'm in," said Gabán. "What's the plan?"

Kabanis' face seemed bleak. "You move up the right, I'll take the left, we'll close distance, identify the target, and flank it. And if he gets us hopefully he has mercy enough to just put bullet in our head, like our friend *Kapitán* Metzúah."

"Plan sounds as good as any," said Gabán. "You go first."

The *komsargént* grunted. "I have seniority. You go first."

Gabán chuckled. "Despite it all," he said, "I couldn't have imagined spending my miserable time here with anyone else but you, and it has been an honor to have shared this journey with you." The *komsargént* only nodded back and Gabán sighed. "Here goes nothin'," he said, before rising to the edge of the farm house's back wall. He took one last breath before turning to start sprinting in the direction of the gunshot.

He stopped only at the sound of a low whistle that quickly grew louder. The *sargént* looked up toward the light blue sky. Macabéan and Scandinavian aircraft crossed through the clouds almost constantly; it was so often that now the two *koro kirim* operatives hardly noticed them. They were as common as pigeons now. But the

whistling was not coming from the aircraft that dueled for air supremacy above. No, it came instead from the dozens, then hundreds, of black dots that gradually grew larger and then into artillery shells. It seemed as if they had cast a shadow over the earth, as the world turned gray.

They struck the ground in half a heartbeat. The force of the explosions threw Gabán off of his feet, but Kabanis quickly grabbed him and pulled him back behind the wall. "Get down!" he yelled, as mud flew on to them both from a nearby impact.

Short and intense, the artillery bombardment lasted perhaps ten or fifteen minutes. To the two *koro kirim* operatives it must have seemed like an eternity, however. Hundreds of shells struck the area with impunity, dozens of them hitting at any one time. They were powerful, bulbs of fire rising where they fell. A true rain of fire. When Gabán finally lifted his head from beneath his arms he saw that only the back wall of the farmhouse was left standing. The rest of the structure had mostly collapsed in the barrage, its ruins a mere shell. He noticed the *komsargént* defeated, slacking against the wall. The rifle was lying beside his leg. With a hand on his side, Kabanis groaned. Blood seeped through his jacket, dripping onto the dry, brown grass. His breathing was getting slower, more forced, more difficult. Kabanis was dying, and he did not have long.

In the distance, rifle fire sounded. From a woodline perhaps two miles to the southwest, through which ran a two-lane country highway, a column of Nakil tanks appeared. They were followed by a platoon's worth of APCs and IFVs, and then by more tanks, including a platoon of Lince. An *Ejermacht* combined arms mechanized units. Overhead, six Macabéan fighter jets screamed across the sky. Then another six. Then another. Elsewhere on the ground, further columns of Macabéan mechanized troops poured out of the woodline. The front had finally arrived, they had reached allied troops. And to have been ambushed just before their moment of savior...a damn shame.

Gabán collapsed by Kabanis, whose eyes were closing as the *komsargént* bled out. "Hey, stay awake, help is on the way," said Gabán, weakly nudging the other man with his shoulder.

Kabanis shook his head. His voice was hoarse, barely audible. "No," he said. "My time ends now."

Blood trickled from the corners of his mouth. The *komsargént's* life slipped away from him as his back slid down the wall. His eyes closed finally as death came upon him.

Gabán could do nothing but let out a long breath. Had he more energy, he may have yelled. Perhaps even cried. But there was nothing left in him anymore either. Even if he lived, he no longer felt alive. Every ally that had joined him had died in this war. Now, Kabanis, was dead. His last victim. One of the IFVs in the approaching armored column pulled over by the side of the road. Four infantrymen merged from inside and crept up to the *koro kirim*. They found him laughing hysterically, tears rolling down his cheeks. He was still chuckling to himself when they brought him to the Type-52, helping him up the ramp into the rear passenger compartment. Gabán had reached his breaking point.

Macabéan troops continued the slow street-by-street battle in Drasdag, despite the growing cold. Imbriniumian forces did the same in Bendred, where invading forces had acted to isolate the city from Scandinvan supply lines. However, the winter would prove challenging. The Golden Throne's forces reached the Spine by the first week of November, their late-autumn operations suddenly slowed by the towering mountains that ran across central Drana like vertebrae. Furthermore, ISR UAVs had scouted deep over this area to help corroborate satellite intelligence of swelling Scandinvan forces. They were amassing in the hundreds of millions; it was a difficult army to hide.

That initiative's pendulum would swing in favor of the enemy was always a possibility. Now it was an inevitability. The Scandinavian army had done well to slow the Macabéans enough to slow the advance as much as they did. Now the *Fuermak* would not be able to attempt another breach of the defensive line along the range until the following year, and that was if they were not beaten back first.

They dug in all across the front, positioning anti-air defenses, trenches, and other fortifications to prepare a defense in depth. These would be a challenging four months to come.

Edit 5/26/18: Added jumplinks.

Edit 5/26/18: Broken link. Really should preview it first.

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OPERATION SUDDEN JUSTICE

Follows from: [1/28/2018](#); [7/29/2017](#); [4/25/2017](#); [3/11/2017](#); and [8/15/2015](#).

"It is unquestionable that Theohuanacu pirates were operating out of Nicaro and Firmador, but the limited resources that the empire put toward ending this threat raise the question of whether doing so was their principal intent."

— V. Lakusta, *The Long Wars* (2066 C.E.)

Komsektor IV

October 2027 to January 2028

Trench lines scarred the land outside of the coastal city of Chinadenga. Just months ago they were littered with the dead. Now they were clean, although Lothar Bruhn swore that the stench of rotting flesh still filled his nostrils to this day. He looked out at the countryside, now greening again, hiding the violence that had happened there. His stare was endless...

Umstellung Kreiger, Bruhn's *régulies* division, had been in the thickest of the brawling. They had been in almost *all* of it too, all of the major actions in the two southernmost *komsektors* of mainland Nicaro. The Ordenite *sargént* had not benefited from even a brief respite since late September of the previous year, when operations to occupy Nicaro down to its southernmost frontier and to contain pirate proxy forces around Chinadenga first began. Closing the frontier had been the easiest of the perpetual string of combat missions the division was put through, but even that came with its price. Guerilla forces fought mostly when and where they desired, and they extracted their toll by slowly draining the blood from the imperial occupier. It was by sheer manpower and through strict technological parity that the Golden Throne, and Umstellung Kreiger, imposed imperial rule in the south — helped by four divisions of Indran auxiliaries that landed in Batis and marched their way south.

GNLF forces had ballooned as well. The now legitimized rebels boasted of an army of more than 100,000 men. They were poorly trained, ill-disciplined, and absolutely brutal. It was them who sacked Managua on 12 October, pillaging, raping, and murdering. It was said that working men were nailed to house doors or simply lined up and executed, and Bruhn did not want to think of what they did to the women. It came too close to reminding him of what he himself had done with the *Wehrmacht*. Many unspeakable things he had committed, perhaps even worse than what the GNLF was doing to its own people in fact. But if so, it was all only relative. Evil was evil. The criminal violence in Managua, and throughout the country, was absolute.

When the Indran auxiliaries fully deployed to *Komsektor VI* — only after helping GNLF militants sack Masaya on 3 October 2027 —, they freed up Bruhn's *régulies* division and they were reallocated to *Komsektor IV*. Chinadenga pirates, and their proxy forces more accurately, had bullied GNLF forces on their northern front while containing pressure from the 167th *asalto* division to their south. The airborne division had found itself embroiled in a counterinsurgency campaign to its south almost immediately, making their efforts to break down Chinadenga resistance necessarily limited. The Indrans had only passed through, preferring to secure the southern frontier at the earliest possible. Besides, they were still green. The Ordenite division was badly needed.

Chinadenga, city, was reached on 23 October, a week after Umstellung Kreiger first reinforced the 167th. At first, militant resistance had mostly dissolved at contact, enemy guerilla forces slipping back into the jungle when threatened with defeat. But the pirates had less and less room to retreat into as they got closer to the city, and it was in the trenches that Bruhn was passing just then where the Battle of Chinadenga began.

GLI-76 multi-role fighters provided crucial close air support throughout the fighting, bombing militant defensive formations outside of the city. Most were dead before Umstellung Kreiger's armored vehicles reached the trenches. Any left alive were quickly swept aside. Dismounted infantry cleared Chinadenga's outskirts and perimeter. Aircraft and artillery continued to pummel the city for days before offensive operations first started. They were told there were *koro kirim* operating inside, gathering intelligence on pirate defenses and directing the air strikes. Despite the bombardment, when Bruhn's division finally began urban combat operations enemy resistance had not seemed to weaken at all.

In the north, GNLF gunmen raided the city throughout the day, launching bloody operations to divert the defenders' attention and strength to that side of Chinadenga. Imperial artillery and air power provided support throughout the day. Bruhn remembered hearing its thunder even all this way along the southern perimeter and as the sun grew weaker the explosive flashes of light began to dominate the skyline. As the night grew bolder, the northern attack started to slow and, in the south, almost the entirety of the Ordenite *régulies* division moved into the southern fringes of Chinadenga. Moonlight was limited, the moon as well-hidden behind thick rain clouds as it was. The 167th *asalto* division was kept mostly in the rear, continuing operations in the southern pirate-influenced territory, but it contributed a battalion to bolster reserve forces for the urban siege. Finally, an auxiliary armored brigade was borrowed from *Komsektor I* to cordon the city, disallowing supplies and personnel to move in or out, and provided heavy, direct fire support during the battle. Macabéan forces started their attacks the very next morning.

Macabéan special forces that were already inside the port city seized strategic targets, such as Chinadenga's three electrical substations and its principal power plant. They also provided reconnaissance work and intelligence for the *régulies* who were moving along several vectors, going house-by-house, street-by-street. The fighting was vicious and often challenging; the enemy had prepared the terrain well. Ladders and staircases to the roofs were hastily filled in with

concrete, bricks, or simply rubble, making it difficult for Macabéan forces to find suitable high ground. Booby traps were placed everywhere, including doors and windows. IEDs were buried beneath streets.

Tactical air support came mostly from GLI-76 squadrons stationed in Matagalpa, but some aircraft flew out of a new airfield just north of Masaya. Combat operations in the north, east, and further to the south were dying down — only temporarily, they would learn soon enough —, allowing the *Laerihans* to provide steady air power in good volume. Guided by reconnaissance and frontline forces, they pummeled militant positions day-in and day-out.

Still, the enemy was tenacious. Wrecks of old cars, plentiful in number, were used to block roads and turn the city into a hellish maze. Tall concrete walls commonly surrounded homes and other compounds, making for tough obstacles which Bruhn, his comrades, and other imperial forces were keen to simply blow holes through. Tall mountains of garbage lay oftentimes simply in the middle of the open, other times in tight, rank alleyways. The air was clamorous and noisy, with the sound of not only gunfire, bombardments, and the other elements of war, but also that of militia commanders giving orders out via loudspeakers and other rudimentary — but also effective — equipment. Enemy small arms and mortar fire was constant, the thread of death everywhere, and there never seemed to be a lull. They were to the front and to the rear simultaneously, and even buildings taken the previous day were liable to house insurgent forces again.

Over seventy of Bruhn's comrades had died in the fighting. Over a hundred imperial forces total, hundreds more dead among the GNLF. Enemy casualties were unknown but estimated in the thousands.

Over 70 percent of the city no longer remained, at least not in a meaningful sense.

Most of the fighting was well over and done with after a week and a half of fighting, but the memories of those ten days still made Bruhn shudder. GNLF forces were allowed to mop-up any urban resistance that remained, their reign of terror starting almost immediately and ending only after the bombardment-pocked streets ran red, thick with blood.

...Bruhn held back an urge to vomit. He tried to turn his thoughts to something else, but as they continued to drive into the city all he saw was the constant reminder. Over four hundred thousand called Chinadenga home before the battle and almost three-fourths of those had been chased out by the violence, migrating south as refugees. Now, as Chinadenga was slowly reconstructed, old inhabitants were coming back. They looked ragged, hungry, and homeless.

GNLF command had been instructed to distribute food and water to the civilian population, but more often than not they instead tormented them. The crackdown in Chinadenga was harsh and unrepentant. Men suspected of fighting for and aiding the enemy were lined up against the wall and shot, oftentimes tortured first. Women were raped, mutilated, and murdered. Pockets of resistance continued to spring up everywhere and the GNLF was tasked with reducing them, which often times made the problem worse. All the while, GNLF commanders seemed more interested in securing themselves political influence in the new satrapical government. Their men were starting to crossover and abandon their positions in growing numbers. The local allied coalition the Golden Throne had backed since the start of the civil war was coming apart, just as victory appeared to be so close.

It was for that which Bruhn and much of Urnstellung Kreiger found themselves in the city again. After taking it, they had been ordered to leave, leaving day-to-day policing to their Nicaroan allies. That had been a mistake, as was now evident. Thus, the Ordenites had

been ordered in again, this time to putatively supplement GNLf militiamen by taking over in the more fortified, strategic locations of Chinadenga.

A string of urban forts supplied and fed the different defensive positions, providing a system of anchors for what was expected to be a protracted stay. There were ulterior motives, but these remained subtle and unknown to most. But even Bruhn could at least *feel* that something was afoot here. Some GNLf forces operated closely with the Ordenites, but these seemed especially selected and were always the same men. The others were isolated, reorganized into their own units, almost like a segregation. The Macabéans justified it by claiming that these GNLf forces which did not train with the *régulies* would soon be reallocated to combat operations outside of the city. They had yet to follow through with that plan if that was indeed the plan.

Bruhn seemed fixated on the damage that still scarred the place. Most of the destruction had yet to be rebuilt. Most couldn't afford it and the Imperial Bureacracy had yet to earmark the funds that it usually poured into basic post-war reconstruction. Private firms expected more fighting to come soon and were hesitant to invest. They were probably not wrong.

For all the warring, the Chinadenga pirates were still strong. They had only been contained around San Pecc, to the north, and most of their naval forces were not even held in the big ports. Instead, they were spread out along the coastline, in hidden docks and small, ad hoc wharves. The *kríermada* had yet to venture this far south along the western coastline, instead focused as they were on reducing the Chinadenga presence around San Carlos and closing passage around the archipelago of small islands that formed a natural barrier along the entrance of the large sea that connected Nicaro with Lynion and other countries. The task was proving more difficult than one would think; it was said that the pirates had been supplied with submarines, but from whom no one seemed to know. Perhaps the Scandinavians, or maybe the Ralkovians, but whoever it was had given the enemy a weapon with which to exact a vicious toll on the Golden Throne.

The Ordenite *sargént* turned his attention back to reality. It was hard these days, with nowhere really to escape to other than into his mind. His armored convoy was traveling to the central-most fort inside Chinadenga, *Barbakán* Tobías, their base and where *komsektor* command had established its headquarters, its *nuklek*. It took well over an hour in thick city traffic, much of it pedestrian. They were coming from a patrol mission within the heavy northeastern vegetation from which they had suddenly been recalled after four-days of zero contact with the enemy. He had liked it out there, where there was nothing human to destroy.

Despite all that was dreary, there was also quite a bit of life. Markets had started to pop up again, where vendors could sell wares and the city's people could congregate. Security in these parts was heavy, mostly composed of GNLf soldiers but peppered with Indran auxiliaries — a division had been moved in from the south to aid in ongoing counterinsurgency operations.

Under enhanced security and tighter oversight on allied Nicaroan military forces, some semblance of pre-war living was returning. Even as it was disturbed by the frequent roadside bomb or, simply, bomb. Indeed, the pirates and their allied militias had turned to brutal anti-civilian tactics to punish the city for its supposedly acquiescent acceptance of imperial occupation. Neither public transportation, temples, or schools were safe; they were all targeted in campaigns of terror that ran in sprints and spurts. "Offensives" they were called by military men. The Ordenites, Macabéans, and local forces were targeted, but the ones who paid the highest price were always the civilians.

Still, Chinadenga attempted to move forward. It was a struggle one truly had to admire.

They arrived at *Barbakán* Tobías as the sun started to come down the horizon and the skies were tinted orange. It was busier than normal, with more personnel inside than usual as well. They were all clearly preparing for *something*, although what exactly was still unknown to Bruhn. Their convoy stopped at one of the depots along the base's outskirts, away from the barracks. From there they were immediately taken to one of the conference buildings along the perimeter of the administrative *nuklek*, without a chance to shower or eat first. Funneled into a classroom, the thirty or so men of his platoon all sat down at their own desks at their lieutenant's orders. There were other officers there too, all of whom looked cleanly groomed and well-rested. Some of Bruhn's comrades were muttering under their breath, their stomachs empty and their moods progressively going to worse.

At the front of the wide room, on a platform that stood perhaps a half-a-foot taller than the carpeted floor, sat *Leutstrategos* Ansón Jermán. He commanded the ad hoc 'Chinadenga' *Kor*, the 60–70,000-strong Macabéan corps holding *Komsektor IV*. "Welcome soldiers," said the general as they were sitting down. "I know you are tired and ready for a nice, long hot shower. I promise you that this briefing will be short."

The general took a sip of water from a glass in front of him on the table. "Your comrades have already been instructed. I came here to brief you personally because I have been instructed that His Imperial Majesty Fedor I would like to reward you for your continued service to the Empire. Your actions last month in the Magnacosta Valley have not gone unnoticed. Your sacrifice will forever form part of our common imperial history. You have much to be proud of men. You, along with all of the 'Death's Servants' *bandag* have been bestowed with the Order of the Imperial Sword, for bravery under conditions of ambush and intense fire. You men not only held your ground but emerged victoriously against all odds. Congratulations, it is well-deserved recognition."

At a sharp, menacing look of their commanding lieutenant, and then from the lieutenant's *gi'sargént*, the men bellowed, "To the eternal glory of the empire!"

"I wish I could pair this recognition with also well-deserved rest. But the time for rest has not yet come, for now we are faced with another test." The general sounded reluctant. "Our GNLF allies are proving to be more of a liability than an asset, and the GNLF may not even be around for long. The empire is choosing sides now to end the instability before it truly begins. Take long showers, eat as much as you want for dinner, then sleep, because at 0400 hours you will join the rest of your comrades in Operation GOLDEN NOOSE."

As the general provided details on the operation, some men could not hide the shock on their faces. This plan was a bold one and dangerous to boot. Much resistance was expected and they were told to prepare themselves for the worst. When the briefing was over and they were taken back to their barracks, Bruhn did indeed take a long warm shower. But he hardly ate. How could he, thinking of tomorrow?

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Aldarminia
Ambassador

Posts: 1592
Founded: Mar 15, 2010
Ex-Nation

Raised Hand

by **Aldarminia** » Tue Jun 19, 2018 8:47 am

Greater Dienstad
Theohuanacu
Palenque

"Denounce the Willéd," seethed out from the serrated teeth of the Draugr.

The Macabéan, held down by a malfunctioning

QUOTE

suit and two *Bezbholskiy*, could only shake his head. Speaking anything but what the "Dreads" wanted to hear had proven fruitless. Again, in different words, Yjhandal commanded the Macabéan, "Swear allegiance to the Eternal Master."

Besides the rumble of battle above, there was only silence in the dark, pirate-dug tunnel. In the midst of the pause, the Draugr knelt down in front of the Golden Throne soldier. Around the Dreads and the Macabéan were the bodies of his comrades who had been executed before him for not doing what he was now being told to do. Thinking that their unit's flanking maneuver had cut down and cut off enough of their enemy, they had tried to follow the combined force of corsairs and *Nyktbholstrakhi* into the tunnels. The Macabéans, especially this lone survivor, would come to regret that decision, but only for a short while as all refused to walk down the Great Path towards the Enduring. The Macabéan grimaced and nothing else. Yjhandal shook her head and commanded comprehensively in her prisoner's tongue, "Denounce the Willed and your dead gods. Then, and finally, pledge your allegiance to the *Korol'iz'Draugai* so that you may walk behind Him to the *vozbuzhdai* of Aldaric, or else..."

She turned her head and, with her free hand, and gestured to the corpses of his fallen friends and rivals. While she was speaking and turning her head back around to face him, the Macabéan spit blood in her face, "You will die like them."

Yjhandal laughed, licking the blood from her face as she did. She leaned in closer to the soldier's face, advancing for a kiss. Though he tried to pull away, another Dread held his helm in place, so that the Golden Throne trooper and the Draugr could lock lips. After a few moments, Yjhandal pulled back ever-so-slightly to wrap her lips around the tight-closed mouth of the soldier, and then she went forward again with a ferocious bite to rip what she could of flesh from the soldier's face. As he screamed and shuddered in agony, enraged and desperate to get away from the *Bezbholskiy's* grips, Yjhandal stood and grasped the sledgehammer with both hands. She reared back and aimed. The boy cried. The *Bezbholskiy* let go. Before the Macabéan could stir to get up, the head of Yjhandal's hammer fell upon the top of his helmet with a a grotesque *crunch*. Another blow fell upon the top, but the boy was still barely alive, so the Dreads closest to him and their Draugr stepped further away, so that Yjhandal could swing a devastating and side-arcing executioner's hit to the helmet's left side. The boy was dead.

The Draugr stared at the wall of earth that the boy's body lay upon. This particular small web of tunnels had been cut off from the main network in previous retreats. For the few corsairs in her party--the perils of Palenque had proven conducive to the spiritual depredations of the Dreads' faith--there would be no escape from the death that they still

feared. Gunfire echoed from the tunnel's passage to the surface. The Golden Throne did not like leaving their fallen behind, just like the Kosmokratium far away. However, there were at least fifty "rebels" armed-to-the-teeth (particularly true for the Draugr) in the severed tunnel matrix, so little to no ground was given to the piecemeal attempts to infiltrate the earthen abyss.

The Draugr Yjhandal pressed and pushed her way to the tunnel entrance with a Bezbholtskiy carrying a primitive torch right behind her. The few pirates she passed did not dare stare or grope the femme fatale. They were well aware of what had happened to the first fools who had tried this upon the Dreads' arrival to reinforce the Palenque defense. What remained of those corpses were more than likely still hanging from the broken idol of a dead Theohuanacan god somewhere in the city. As she passed the glimmering orbs of the eyes reflecting the fire of the torch, like a mediocre parade, Yjhandal counted especially the pairs of green, gold, and purple that still stood with her. These were the last dozen-or-so ethnic Aldarminians still within her host. They were the fiercest and probably the most experienced of her warriors. They had seen the Battle of the Triangle in Razulruka and the bloodied crags of southwestern Domostrovgor's fjords. They had fought with her for around a decade. These Dreads could now see that there was a frenzied flame in their Draugr's eyes. The time of their last glory was soon to come.

Stepping over a blood-choking "Brasschair" fighting with a *Strakhzoldat* as the latter cut into the soldier's suit's weak points with an over-sharpened bayonet, Yjhandal reached the portal of the tunnel. Peering out from the entrance to the left, the Draugr could see the mangled chunks of skull and flesh that had been thrashed by machine gun fire that once belonged to the head of a teenage boy. The teenager's body had been shredded after he had foolishly broken his cover to try to alert his corsair and Dread comrades to the escape route of an alleyway that led to the other side of the block of buildings the Golden Throne was currently trying to secure. He had done his job, though, and even managed to fire off two or three shots from the dirty revolver that rested in his hand.

To the front of Yjhandal's gaze were the metal behemoths so feared (foolishly-so in her mind) by the pirates. The GRX.40's and some other sort of IFV were advancing perpendicular to the Draugr's line of sight, slowly and methodically blasting and clashing their way into the rubble-strewn city block. To her right, but out of sight, she heard the corsairs that had failed to make it to the tunnel pelleting the rear of the Macabéan armored vehicles as much as they could. Most of those vehicles' infantry complements had disembarked and delineated a near-right angle line of fire as a perimeter to stave off Yjhandal's small horde and the rest of the corsairs. Behind her head was a cobble of rubble and debris that had become impassable by foot with the

consideration that anyone willing to make the climb would be gunned down in less than a minute. The only route of withdrawal that did not lead directly to just another Golden Throne unit.

Yjhandal had no intent on withdrawal. In fact, she had not made what she would consider a retreat or withdrawal since she had been to Palenque. Few if any of the Dreads had. Since they had slipped past the siege lines with pirate assistance into Palenque, only a few Dreads stayed away from the fighting. The rest quickly earned the corsairs' respect (and fear) as they engaged relentlessly with Macabéan troops. Many had fallen, but for every *Nyktbholstrakh* that lay dead in glory to be welcomed into Paradise, another pirate or two or more were rallied into the Dread ranks by the depraved priests that performed the ruthless rites under the nose of the Golden Throne or behind the corsair lines. The Dreads that did not fight directly would go around the fringes of the firefights that plagued Palenque to kill or kidnap those soldiers on perimeter watch. To many of the pirates' chagrin, the Macabéans taken prisoner by the Dreads were under constant guard by *Bezbholskiy* as they under-went assimilation.

Some of the Golden Throne's captive troops would eventually be completely converted, or programmed. And then they would be "rescued" or make their way back to their former comrades' units. The sorts of carnage exacted afterwards would probably pale in comparison to the many tolls already collected and tallied by the Dreads, but the attacks of the brainwashed would certainly send shivers down the spines of those witnessed the scenes or even survived them. Ultimately, the Golden Throne would be faced with dealing with compromised soldiers throughout their ranks, and this would, in the ambitions of both the Dreads and some higher-ranked pirates, would inflict another thorn of paralysis within the campaign to annihilate the pirate rebellion. (The Dreads just liked to toy with the Willled.)

Yjhandal noticed that the Macabéans were wrapping up their work in the buildings in the area nearest to her, and during her observation of such, she relayed her final plan to her *Bezbholskiy* who then informed the lower-rung *Strakhzoldati* and the corsairs among them. As the *Ejermacht* soldiers returned to their vehicles and the ramps started to rise, dozens of Dreads rushed forward from the tunnel entrances. Yjhandal was practically jogging behind her horde to save her strength and energy, and she watch as many bodies fall despite the corsairs providing covering fire as they made their escape. The vehicle closest to the tunnel was reached and the ramp, despite the soldiers inside's resistance as well as the machine's, was thoroughly blocked from closing by the sledgehammer she had used earlier and the arms of several *Nyktbholstrakhi*. A couple of smoke grenades made it inside before the hammer snapped and the arms were severed.

Volleys of rifle and machine gun fire came like a sideways rain to batter the mere tall grasses of bodies that climbed atop the GRX.40. The driver inside tried to blindly drive it forward but it was too late. A small barricade of flesh gave Yjhandal and two *Bezbholskiy* all the cover they could have requested. The rest of their charge's cadre--some with only a single arm to hold a gun as drug cocktails taken during the battle surged new winds into their vile efforts--used the lurching cover of the smoked-out GRX.40 to fire upon the other vehicles whose infantrymen once again disembarked to save their trapped friends.

An explosive was attached to the outer hinges of the top hatch, and then it was promptly detonated. Using a bandana to cover her mouth and eyes, Yjhandal acquired a fragmentation grenade and a heavy machine gun from the *Bezbholskiy* to her left as a bullet thrashed through their carnal cover to lacerate the skull and shoulder of the other to her right. Together, the two pulled open the hatch, threw the grenade inside the vehicle, closed the hatch, and hopped off the GRX.40 to charge at the Macabéans now advancing in a well-disciplined formation upon the Dreads' prey's carcass.

As bullets ripped through her and hers ripped through the soldiers ahead of her, the fragmentation grenade caused a chain reaction within the GRX.40. What would have been a simple ammunition burn-off became a munitions discharge in a spectacular ball of fire and cascading wave of shock. Yjhandal's internal organs, muscles, and bones were mushed moments before they were vaporized; their particles sent colliding with the shreds of the Golden Throne troops who had foolishly come forward to face her fearlessness.

In the hours following that battle, the corsairs that had escaped had spread the word of the Draugr Yjhandal's relentlessly raging courage. Her martyrdom signaled the time to raise new *Bezbholskiy* from the ranks of *Strakhzoldat* as their predecessors performed their own last rites. As night spread, the original *Bezbholskiy*, in honor of their Draugr, slithered into Macabéan positions and detonated improvised bomb vests strapped to their bodies. Though they would not be tallied upon her body, these attacks would be considered among the hosts and cults of the *Myrizstrakha* as the last maimings, killings, and terrors of the mighty Draugr Yjhandal of Madukhya.

CHANNEL: 54675LUKA>>>0098B43T
ENCRYPTION: 1/141войскОа.4277160
SENDER: ГРОБ
RECIPIENT: High Echelon Personnel of the Golden Throne
... UA DECRYPTION INITIALIZING ...
... !decrypted! ...
... MESSAGE START ...

Upon the collation and analysis of intelligence gathered by a CISB unit deployed to Theohuanacu, the Grand Imperial Kosmokratium wishes to confirm the high concentration and hyperactive intensity presence of

Myrizstrakha terrorist cells in the region of Greater Dienstad. The Kosmokratium has approved the insertion of additional CISB units to Theohuanacu as well as the initiation of cooperative efforts the nation-state of Aldarminia and the Golden Throne in order to neutralize, terminate, and/or capture all *Myrizstrakha* combatants in Theohuanacu. The coordinates of a rendezvous between relevant Golden Throne military intelligence personnel and a CISB agent already operating in the area are contained in additionally-encrypted attachments to this message. These coordinates can be acquired with two-way authentication protocols and key-codes that will be provided to the relevant Golden Throne personnel upon their affirmative reply to this message. Below is a personally-written communique from the Grand Emperor of the Grand Imperial Kosmokratium of Aldarminia and its Empire and Panaldarminium, Dalikharl II of the Blood House Aszcheyko, to whomever it may concern:

Fedor, or whoever is reading this, I implore you to not take this communication lightly. What you are dealing with now in Theohuanacu is an evil evolution of what my nation has faced for over a century now. The Myrizstrakha and the Draugai that lead them are not something to be trifled with. They are not mere radicals or rebels. They are psychopaths and sociopaths of the highest and most-sophisticated order. If you let them settle their tendrils in Theohuanacu, they will spread their disease of death and destruction across your entire empire, just as they nearly did to mine. Aldarminia has faced, hunted, and fought this scourge to the ends of the Earth as we know it. We are very close to eradicating their presence in my own lands, but if the Dreads continue to gather their wretched recruits elsewhere, no one will be safe. To exterminate the Myrizstrakha in Theohuanacu, and maybe even all of Greater Dienstad, Aldarminians and Macabéans must work together. If not, I fear that all that both of us have worked to attain and secure is in dire jeopardy.

... MESSAGE TERMINATED ...

Tlaloc

The rays of ultraviolet light from the heat-radiating sun that pierced their way into the window of the dilapidated apartment where the captain and the Draugr had chosen to meet only further strained the little melanin left in Otravar's skin. He watched with a boiling blood-thirst as a convoy of Golden Throne vehicles and soldiers made their rounds through the city below. If there was a wind, it was a slight against the oppression of the heat. Behind Otravar were the captain, two of his dogs, and three *Bezbholskiy*. Four Dreads and three pirates. A near-microcosm of what the corsair rebellion in Tlaloc was becoming.

After obnoxiously snorting his way down a few lines of prized Mokastani import on a dirty mirror-glass table, the captain continued his rant with a tired and anxious hoarseness to his voice, "We cah jus' be doin' anuh-mo' o' whatcha lot been doin'. We're jus' frightn'in' tha landlubbers ta much."

Otravar turned to face the captain sitting down on the left side of the room between his two bodyguards. With a saw-tooth sneer, the Draugr shrugged. He knew enough of the language to speak almost-fluently in entire monologues, but the mute act proved especially agitating, if not terrifying, to the pirate captain in the time since their vicious attacks throughout Tlaloc. Though the attacks had altogether stopped spare a few

Strakhzoldati sent to murder like common serial killers here and there, the Dreads' stranglehold on the pirates did not loosen. Being master guerrillas to the pirates' common rag-tag fighting force, the *Nyktbholstrakhi* had made themselves invaluable to the corsairs' fault. Otravar's "children" were the ones who alerted pirate cells to incoming raids and patrols now. Dread tactics were the ones used to prepare Tlaloc for the next stage of rebellion--martial occupation--while the only thing the pirates could really contribute was sheer manpower and the arms themselves. Though, these days, through either thievery or sorcery, *Myrizstrakha* seemed more well-armed than their pirate "allies."

The shrug of the Draugr infuriated the captain who rose in anger with his men doing so in succession. "I dinnit come all tha ways her' ta be mock't! Tell me! Whatcha gonna do 'bout all these damned landlubbin' troopas?!"

Another shrug and the captain's face flushed with red as he approached the Draugr with hand on his saber's hilt. The other Dreads in the room crept their way to circle behind the pirate's bodyguards who were becoming visibly nervous the tension in the room increased with every moment. Otravar fiddled with a dagger that the captain had given him the morning after their great attack on Tlaloc. *Time to give this back*, the Draugr concluded.

"We are only just beginning our annihilation of the weak in this land," Otravar explained as he swaggered towards the captain, spinning the dagger as he did, "We have already made clear to your people and these 'landlubbers' that there is a new force of reckoning in Theohuanacu. Now, we will demonstrate to these dregs that their gods and goddesses are merely carcasses upon which the Enduring rests. Their cults and circles are praying to beings which no longer exist within either mortal or immortal realms. The seas upon which you sail and the land upon which you fight, these are just figments of a dream of a god greater than any that you could have imagined. He and only He, Aldaric, dwells eternally in slumber beside the Stranger of Death. And for us, those without fear that is, he has constructed a great Paradise, and for you.."

The dagger pointed at the captain's heart, "...the *Vyshboga* has forsaken your souls to a place even the Stranger dares not enter. The void of real, empty 'death.' Nonexistence in totality. Once you have passed through the Stranger's realm, you will be erased from all memory. You will be neither ghost or demon. Carcass or flesh. For you, the future lacks itself, and in its place, there is only silence and blindness."

The captain could not even unsheathe his saber before the Draugr and the dagger cut a violent path into his gut. Behind the captain's pain-convulsing body, his bodyguards fell with two *thuds* in tandem after the *Bezbholskiy* used knives to stab and wires to strangle the

pirates' souls into fatal submission. The Dreads "carefully" disposed of the two low-ranking corsairs' bodies into the apartment's bathtub, but the captain's was not so lucky. First, he was stripped. Then, Otravar, reciting ancient hymns as he did so, carved passages from the books of the Trinities¹. Next, his eyes were removed. Finally, the captain was hanged from outside the window after the Macabéan patrolled had passed.

After returning to their headquarters, Otravar and his *Bezbholskiy* entourage were surprised to be greeted by a Dread of greater infamy than Otravar's. Solntsar of Vhoszny, with all his tallies and talons, sat upon Otravar's skeletal throne. The younger Draugr approached with little caution before Solntsar rose abruptly to speak, "I do not come here to take your host, Otravar of Tlaloc. I come only with news and orders from the Eternal Leader."

Otravar quietly suppressed what seemed to him to be Urshynsko trying desperately to fight his way back into control over the body and mind that was overtaken by the Draugr's. Saying nothing, the Draugr reclaimed his throne over his host as Solntsar scratched at one of the *Bezbholskiy* and pulled a chain from the shadows of the room to reveal a naked slave-girl leashed upon the chain. He spoke like a royal herald, "Yjhandal is dead. Her host and the cult with which it was enjoined is no more. I go now to other lands to grow my own with what she left to herself. Lonthod of Loshmoyzagrads sends his allegiance to you, Otravar. He also says that his host has become a great army, poised to invade the souls and minds of Theohuanacu's east yet again. The Draugr, in his belligerent wisdom, has intents to capture the hearts and minds of the people of North Point. He requests that you also send soldiers to strike at Tiwanaku. I advise that you do so. I do not wish to see you complacent, Otravar of Tlaloc, especially since..."

The Draugr Solntsar clawed his way through the slave-girl's body before smearing her blood over the Otravar's *Bezbholskiy*. After this, he slaughtered one of the fearless with a middle finger and walked towards his fellow Draugr. "...I am establishing a new cult in your honor."

Otravar humbly bowed his head as Solntsar slathered the blood of his victims over his fellow Draugr. The Dreads around them, pulsing with various movements and interactions, chanted some dark song passed on from ages ago. Finally, Solntsar with Otravar in his arms announced, "The Otravan Cult of Afar shall reign here in Theohuanacu and Greater Dienstad for generations to come and forever in Paradise!"

The ritual complete and sacrifices slaughtered, the two Draugr moved carefully through the passageways of Tlaloc that the pirates had previously shown to the Dreads. Upon their destination, where Solntsar was to continue his personal quest down the Great Path at a different pace and direction from Otravar, the

two exchanged schemes and words. An agreement was eventually made. Three dozen of Otravar's child *Nyktbholstrakhi* would be taken under Solntsar's wing so that they could be trained and groomed to become the youngest Draugai ever, and if not that... killed in the name of the *Otravabrymja*.

Outskirts of Tlaloc

Amazing what a couple kilos of Mokastani pearl and the mere promise of Lyrans small arms can accomplish, thought the golden-eyed Sova 209.

What hair of his that was not matted into completely-unkempt dreadlocks was braided with small bones and twine. His sleeveless shirt, once a red deeper than that of blood freshly-spilled, had been faded over the previous months by the gaze of the Theohuanacan sun. Irremovable stains of blood were the last bastions of carmine coloring still on the garment. Like his current subjects', Sova's trousers were loose, ripped, and stained in nearly every place they could be whilst still maintaining a degree of wearable functionality. At his side was a short rapier, balanced to his desire, rested in a worn and cheap sheath. Holstered at the other side of his hip was a Lyrans Hellhammer handgun, and on his back was strapped a LY20 HILAR with a fore-grip and red-dot scope on the forward and top rails. These two weapons were signs of 209's good faith to his "pirate comrades."

A tangled web of Mokastani cartel distributors, Nicaroan and Firmadorian smugglers, pirate-slavers, and low-level unlicensed drug dealers in Gholruka had brought the *Tymnoglaznik* to the proverbial hellhole that was the Golden Throne territory of Theohuanacan. An even more-complicated web, or trail rather, of pirate crews, well-paid informants, and even more Mokastani had finally landed the Dark Eye spy the intel he needed to acquisition several thousand standard dollars to purchase a good-will load of pearl to satiate the ever-growing-suspensions of his captain. Sova 209, who went by Treasure-Eye among the corsairs, had made a dangerous reputation for himself as a well-connected pirate who found the waters of Gholgoth too boring to sail through anymore and had decided to take his connections, skills, and ultimately business to the oceans and seas of Greater Dienstag.

More than a few had attempted to kill him for the cash in his pocket, and many more had tried to capture and torture him for the information that would have revealed his efforts and material wealth were funded by Aldarminian citizens' tributes. Whether or not his main targets were not actually the pirates themselves would not have meant much had he broken.

The jeep reached a dive-bar that was nestled deep into what could still be called "corsair territory" where the martial law imposed upon Tlaloc was enforced the least by nature of

practicality. No matter how much money and manpower they dumped into the tropical region, the Golden Throne could not magically squeeze GRX.40s and Lynce into narrow foot-paths and sending entire patrol units into the "shadow of the valley of death" that some of these narrow "streets" was tantamount to sending them into choke-points for ambush. The jeep was parked just at the end of the Macabéan armored vehicle-navigable path where the street turned into a centuries-old city block that had barely been reconstructed over the last few decades. It had not been wholly immune to either Golden Throne persecution or recent Dread depredation though, and many of the scars of battles-fought-and-passed still pockmarked the buildings. The jeep was promptly sold to an allied crew of Sova's "captain" and it would probably be used to smuggle what the pirates could between and through imperial checkpoints.

The bar had recently been purchased (Effectively twice-so as the pirates themselves had to be paid off as well) by an anonymous foreigner. Well, the new proprietor was anonymous to the previous owners and the local corsairs, but not to Sova 209. Leaving behind the jeep with Sova was his captain, Erving "Grin-Devil" Umbri. They called him "Devil's Grin" presumably because the few tufts of hair he had left after years of sailing looked very much like horns. These combined with the scraggly beard and the two fang-like natural teeth that remained in his mouth certainly did give the appearance of some caricature of a devil. With the captain and the Dark Eye agent were three others of the crew. Sova knew their names, and in fact, had almost-memorized their entire life-stories, but now was the time to start condemning those bits of information to the waste-heap of his brain. He would not need the details much longer. He would keep those of the crewmembers not present though. Those would still be useful as unwitting (and uncompensated) informants and assets.

Each of the genuine sea-outlaws carried with them their motley assortment of weapons of choice, and either because they were a bit-too-drunk off of the *jinhare*m that Sova had so generously brought along with the group on their travels (There was a great deal of run-around as the CISB placed the final pieces of their network) or the men were so true to their seafaring comforts that they could only barely manage to stumble forward on solid ground. Either way, the "deli-gah-shin," as Umbri had called it, of corsairs entered the nameless bar for the purchase of a cache of Lyran weapons and equipment from a Gholgothic secondhand-arms-dealer known only as "*Krokodyl*" to Sova 209 and his crew. After their entrance, Sova closed and locked the doors, provoking suspicious grimaces from Umbri and company. With a raised hand that seemed to work ancient magics and cast dark spells over the pirates and many other less-than-savory sorts that the Dark Eye had encountered over the years, 209 assured them, "Iv some mock-bean

landlubbers duh-side ta show thar
compleshuns, mit' as well make 'em wor' fer
openin' the door wit' a wee-bit-mar than a
knock-and-holla."

The long-perfected-accent of the spy's silver,
pirate tongue seemed to smooth out the
tension enough and placate the half-inebriated
pirates. They wasted little time ordering a drink
from Sova's true comrade who tended the bar
to keep up appearances. There were a few,
genuine locals present, but none were
recognizable as high-level corsairs to 209, so
all seemed well in the paradise lost to the
tendrils of the Aldarminian Empire of Spies. The
bartender was stout and sturdy for an
Aladamian with golden eyes herself but she
had hid these with brown-colored contacts
that made her almost appear local in
conjunction with the Theohuanacan style of
dress she wore and the not-too-long-not-
short-locks of black hair. She was a Dark Eye,
too, and Sova knew her as Lysza, or "fox,"
117. In fact, with the exception of the local
hires and the "boys downstairs" as 209 would
soon learn they were called by 117, everyone
that worked at the bar was an agent of the
Tymnoglaza of the Civil Intelligence and
Security Bureau.

A few libations and intoxications via ample
servings of *jinharem*, on the house or at 209's
expense of course, later, and 209 informed
Captain Erving, pretending to look at a
message that said as much on a cheap flip-
phone that had to have been at least a
decade old, "Krokodyl be here now, Cap'n. Cam'
on in through tha back-and-bottom I s'pose."

For a moment, Sova thought he was
compromised and instinctively reached for his
pistol while his fellow Dark Eye reached for a
shotgun hidden behind the bar as Captain
slammed his bottle down upon the bar's
surface violently in response to the news. He
and the other pirates had not exactly noticed
in their drunkenness these deft motions for
arms, and so the Captain unwittingly assuaged
the spies' concerns, "An' har I thot we was tha
one's comin' through tha back af'er all tha'
fussin' bout tha city!"

The pirates, including 209, shared a laugh as
they unseated themselves from the bar with
Sova's gesturing them to a swing-door with
stairs behind it going down just barely visible in
the disparate lighting of the back of the bar-
room. The Dark Eye agent took the rear of the
party's descent, explaining, "Well, I'll be
awness wi'tch'all, reason bein' why I had y'all
brin' the weap'ns in the firs' place was cuh' I'm
notsa sure me an' ol' Kroko still be havin'
smooth sailin's and propa riggin's upon thems
sails in our lil ole frinship. Bes' be safe than
sorry and put ye all fron' o' busy-ness, so-ta-
speak."

Passing the level where a locked glass-pane
door with a curtain behind it concealed the
more analytical staff present in the tavern-
guised spy-house, Erving slurred a promise to
Sova, "Lissun har, Treasure-Eye, if an'a when

this ol' 'croc'o'dill' gi'fs y'any trouble," brandishing his saber to 209's concealed dismay, "I'll poke 'im an' me n' you, well," giggling, "We'll skin tha landlubbin' scallawag fer boots and lady's pursas! Hell, I be half-mine to do it anuh-way jus' so tha crew can haf some prettay Lyran guns fa-free."

209 and the pirates laughed again. The lighting got dimmer, and for all the captain knew, his cohorts ahead of him either tripped or made their way to the bottom. Umbri turned in a stupor, "Y'know," *hiccup*, "Spekkin' o' half-minds, I think I be a bit too-off-cour--"

Sova 209, like a good matey, caught his captain from slumping downward and descending down the stairs in a precarious roll. He could not have now-unconscious target for interrogation get an intel-compromising and life-endangering head injury. At least not yet. Assisting the Dark Eye was another as they dragged the bodies down the damp hallway of a bisected cellar-space that had been improvised/renovated with two separate interrogation rooms. This other Dark Eye was known to 209 as Volk 64, and the man was as typically tall and burly as any Aldyrman he had known. His green eyes made him especially useful for non-domestic jobs like this one in Theohuanacu, and of course, the man's build made him able-bodied pirate in spite of his upper-middle age. Apparently Volk had arrived with his own captain and "deli-gah-shin" just an hour or so before. The two *Tymnoglaznik* exchanged what information they could to expedite the cleaning-house mission of Aldarminian assets in Theohuanacu prior to the possible commencement of joint operations with local Golden Throne personnel.

While Captain Erving "Grin-Devil" was tied and gagged into a rickety chair in one of the rooms, a peer of equal rank to him was similarly positioned in the other. The two captains' loyal-and-true crewmembers would not have such luxuries. The two Dark Eyes would never bother to wake these men up from the sedative-induced slumber, and in fact the spies became (or already-were) assassins as they used their own blades to cut and hack the fallen pirates into easily-movable pieces. Polyethylene polymer barrels filled with hydrofluoric acid were waiting at the back of the basement cellar. The pieces and chunks the two CISB agents figured were the least useful were placed with the utmost care into the barrels to be dissolved for easy-disposal. What was not immediately disposed-of was placed into each interrogation room with a smaller barrel of acid (top firmly sealing the fumes inside) in-front-of-but-not-too-close-to the captive captains.

Each were awoken in separate, alternating intervals and to each were demonstrated the chemical wonder of the acid's ability to erase organic existence. Volk's captain proved useless. The fool either outright lied or failed in cross-referencing for corroboration and verification. His lies were what really did it in for him, and even 64 remarked at one time

that the man was just a generally incompetent person. Strategic applications of a pair of pliers, a flower pot, a tire pressure gauge, and a rusty hammer, all collected from upstairs, had already made the "Grin-Devil" more than compliant and forthcoming. Now, with the mucus, blood, and tears starting to dry over his face--it was a very emotionally exhausting process to turn over his crew and fellow pirates to men whom he believed to be Golden Throne officers--the time had come to bring Captain Umbri to shore.

As he put away a roll of sandpaper he was mildly disappointed to not have used, 64 comforted the captain while Sova removed the acid barrel and tended to Erving's wounds, "Listen, Cap. *want* to hurt you earlier. Hell, if we were good-for-nothing sadists, one, we wouldn't be here, and, two, we would have just let you fall down the stairs and kept your mateys alive so we could torture them too. No, as I'm sure you know by now, we had to make sure we could trust what you were say, and well, you weren't exactly friendly at first, were you?"

Volk pointed to his cheek with his left index finger where Erving had spat at him early on during the interrogation. Fearing reprisal, the Captain jerked in his chair, frantically shaking his head and pleading, "N-n-no no-no! I says m'apologes, an' I dinnit me'n nothin' bah it! Jus' ple' doh'n opan n'other box o' yers!"

Volk had not realized he was prepping for the debriefing and had taken out another black box from under the tool table. The comforting and assuring continued as he took out a series of photographs from the box to show the Captain, "Calm down, Erv, we're not gonna hurt y'anymore. I just want ya to look at these photographs, and tell me how you feel about what's happening in them."

Most of the photographs were still frame captures from videos, but a few were taken by a non-cellular camera. All of them were breathtaking images from the Tlaloc attacks. There was no grin upon the devil's face. Taking care not to hit his handlers, Erving spat on the ground and made clear, "Guh-fa-nothin' Dreads! They up-an'-turn tha whole damned cituh 'gainst tha causs! Blood bassards! Still gots to wor' wit' 'em now tha' thur here. I try'ta tell Graydon 'Sharkcaller' tha' we's shoul'nt haf trussed them landlubbin' mongras!"

The two Dark Eye agents glanced and nodded at each other. This was their man, which was good as the other candidate was dissolving at that moment. Another photograph was handed to Grin-Devil with a finger to guide him to the picture's primary point of interest--the mutilated face of a man hanging from a window. Sova rhetorically relayed his colleague's finger's message, "That there is Sharkcaller two days a--"

More spittle raced to the ground from the surviving captain's mouth, "I'm 'wares!"

Volk nodded with a crooked frown, "That you are," pointing outside of the room, "And Oliver 'Storm-Haste' Velasquez is currently in one of those barrels just outside this room. If I'm right, that makes you, with the right haggling of crewmembers, one of the highest-ranking captains in Tlaloc with one of if not *the* largest crews as well. D'ya want in on a secret of mine and Treasure-Eye's?"

"Argh!", Umbri groaned in pain as he had mistakenly tried to shrug in his tight restraints. The captain could tell he was being dealt with. Albeit, harshly at first, but dealt with all the same, and seemingly, mercy was on the table. "Sumes ya kine'ly gents cou' loossin' up these riggin's ah bit whils' y'ar give mes y'all's shpeel?"

64 beamed and nodded to 209. There was no need to worry about a man beat, poked, prodded, cut, and water-boarded half-to-death at such an old age was going to cause them any significant trouble. With an adeptness the captain was now-too-familiar with, Sova cut his binds. As if he was trying to take control of the situation, the captain gestured for the spy, "Go on ye scurvy dawg."

Washing over him like a salty tide to cleanse his sins and redeem him in the lights of gods and goddesses alike, the words came, "We're not Macabéan. We are not agents of the Golden Throne. We have the guns you came here for today, but they're not Lyran, unfortunately, but they'll work all the same. We want you to rally as many troops and fellow captains as you can and prepare for a big fight with the Dreads. The Dreads will throw the first punch. After what they did to this city, you might as well say they already have. We don't care about your cause, *are* useful to our own causes, and so are the men that still number themselves as your crew. You all will become valuable assets to us in the coming days and weeks, and as such, you'll be compensated substantially. If the mercenary life is too low for you as a pirate, I would say so now, so we'll be nice enough to at least make what comes next quick and painless. If you try to back-stab us, you'll have to deal with a lot more than the Golden Throne and a host of Dreads coming down on you. Do I make myself clear?"

The captain wanted to say something smart, but he wisely chose not to because the men before him clearly did not play games. They had their terms in mind, and they had apparently suspected well enough the captain's terms and were prepared to meet them where they could. "Aye, ye do. Cle'r as tha seas and skies wit'ou a cloud ta bother 'em. Havin' t'ask though, who are ye?"

Sova took the reins, "Who is but the form following the function of what, and what we are is a pair of savvy investors at the low-end of a much, much larger and grander venture. That is all you need to know, captain."

With slight and less-painful shrug, Umbri

agreed and then inquired, "Aye, s'ems reasonable 'nuff. Where be tha guns then?"

"Minor issue with the guns," Sova raised his hand to calm the captain before he became too flustered, "You'll get them when you need them. We trust you enough to walk out this bar, but we don't trust you enough to do so alone. I'm coming back to the boys with you. You don't haf to make me first mate, though you may need a new one, but I do expect that if I tell the men something, that they'll listen. And if I do the same to you behind closed doors away from an eavesdropping wind, that you'll do the same. Understood?"

A grimace and tilt of the captain's head was sufficient enough. "Good," said Volk 64, "My partner and I are going to have little chat down here while you can go upstairs, seeing as how Treasure-Eye's cleaned you up enough. Grab yourself a drink. T'is on the house until Treasure gets back up there. There's no back-exit that you can find without spooking a knife or pistol of ours lurking in the shadows, so don't go looking for one. Straight up the stairs, seat at the bar, drink in your hands. Go."

The captain, with several stings to his pride and body, did as commanded, leaving the two Dark Eyes to exchange words.

"Think we can actually trust him?"

"Absolutely not, but that *is* why you're going out, right?"

"Aye. Running over-watch for the *Polmakt's* rendezvous with whoever the hell the Throne's sending."

"Good, good. We'll need all the help we can get. These damned Dreads are only getting worse. The police here are probably only just now figuring out that the serial killer is connected to them. They're gearing up for something bigger, or at the least bolder, and as usual, I don't like the vibes of it."

"Who does and who would? Probably need to be put up against a wall and shot if they do."

"Indeed. Well, I guess I'm going back to the pirate life. Checkmate Domino's going well enough so far. Can't let a beat-sober captain go and ruin it all with a lucky dodge of buckshot. As always, been a pleasure 64."

"Same to you, 209."

The two spies shook hands and parted ways. Volk 64 was going to a hotel room on the other side of the city that featured a balcony which would provided a nice little perch for a bird's-eye view of the "handshake" meeting of the leading agent of the Civil Intelligence and Security Bureau of the Grand Imperial Kosmokratium of Aldarminia and the Golden Throne's chosen liaison with the Bureau. All the intel told Volk and his fellow agents and their superiors that there was no reason to distrust the Second Empire's intentions, but being an

experienced man and a sophisticated purveyor of the business, Volk and the Bureau wanted to play things safe, knowing all too well how intelligence could be as a wrong as ignorance.

...Meanwhile, in the western reaches of Theohuanacu, the Draugr Lonthod raised an army and hatched a plan with one particularly ambitious target in mind...

OOC

Last edited by Aldarminia on Fri Jul 27, 2018 2:53 pm, edited 1 time in total.

This is FanT/PT/MT/PMT/Nightmare, you can find more Cajun Cossack Slavs IN SPACE! here:

[Vrot Kaspapa](#) (Xenos included!!!)

First High Roller of the NationStates Future Tech Discord Server
Founder and Boss of the Losieda Bratva Criminal Syndicate

Truths



The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by [The Macabees](#) » Sun Jun 24, 2018 5:14 pm

QUOTE

OPERATION GOLDEN NOOSE

Follows from: [6/10/2018](#); [1/28/2018](#); [7/29/2017](#); [4/25/2017](#); [3/11/2017](#); and [8/15/2015](#).

"The GNLf was always a temporary ally. They were too uncivilized to govern the satrapy after the war, their value was purely in their bloodlust."

— R. Alvarez, *La Guerra en Nicaro* (2084 C.E.)

Komsektor I

January 2028

Sandino — "A proud day for your nation, Satrap del Potro," said *Krierlord* Lara Surr, recently arrived in Nicaro to oversee the reorganization of the country's government. Born in southern Ruska, just along the old Havenic Frontier, he was a rare sight among the *krierlords*, even in this day. His skin color, a much tanner look than what you'd typically see among the ethnically Dénstadi core of the emperor's advisory group, would have precluded him from the position 20 years ago. But the treason of the Dénstadi aristocracy during The War had opened opportunities for the other peoples of the empire. Surr was one of the 'new men,' part of the new non-Dénstadi elite.

The satrap, Marquez del Potro, nodded. Tall and strong, the satrap represented the qualities of a head imperial bureaucrat. Despite Nicaro's purported independence and sovereignty, only 'imperial men' like del Potro had a chance at leadership under the new regime. "Indeed, *krierlord*. A great day."

Del Potro was standing behind a large, broad table made of a Panooly wood as ebony as night. There was a flat pad laying diagonally on a stand by the top left corner and, otherwise, the surface of the table was empty except for a small stack of papers in front of him. His hand held a pen and its point was on an empty line at the bottom of the last page of the document. The *krierlord* was seated beside him, smiling. Dozens of officials, both Nicaroan and Macabéan, stood to either side, clapping and looking satisfied with themselves. Cameramen and reporters were so tightly packed at the front end

that they could hardly move, but they looked too busy to complain. Camera lights flashed and bounced off the walls as the Satrap signed. Surr, still the only one seated, clapped and so did the officials around the desk. Del Potro and Surr shook hands. On the table, the document's cover poked from under the bottom and the title was clearly visible: TREATY OF SANDINO.

After an exchange of congratulations and more official photographs, the bureaucrats filed out and headed toward a large ballroom where a private dinner would be held in celebration of the treaty's signing. *Krierlord* and satrap stayed behind. Surr motioned to one of the other chairs, "Take a seat, Marquez."

As the satrap sat, the *krierlord* rose and walked toward a large globe sitting on an intricately carved wooden stand. It opened from the middle as he pushed on the top to reveal a series of square, squat glasses and a bottle of whiskey. Pouring a glass for himself and then for the satrap, he returned to sit down.

"I have given loyal commanders orders to surrender their men at the start of your operation, Your Excellency," said del Potro. "I ask that you carry out your executions discreetly."

Surr took a sip from his glass. "Mmm, this is magnificent. Try it," he said. Del Potro raised his own glass to his mouth. "Isn't it good?"

The satrap's face turned into a twisted pretzel with the aftertaste. "Yes, quite good," he answered, somewhat forced.

Surr chuckled. "I forget, you Nicaroans are fonder of jedrez." Jedrez was once uniquely imported from southern Safehaven, but ever since the end of The War its production had expanded to more...stable corners of the world, including Holy Panooly and, to a lesser extent, Nicaro. Its sweetness reminded Surr of the pirates' jinharem, made from a similar plant and in a similar way. "You will have to accustom yourself to new experiences, new ways of doing things, Marquez."

"I don't know if my people will ever become accustomed to the murder of their own," replied del Potro.

"Only when the murderers are your own people? Who slaughtered and raped their way through León, Masaya, and Chinadenga?" the *krierlord* retorted bitterly. His face softened. "Your Lordship must learn how to serve as an interpreter, to guide your people toward a higher state. You know as well as I, Marquez, that your GNLF rabble, as useful as they were to us three months ago, will only spread and enforce chaos in your country. They **must** be reined in or there will never be peace for your people. And I will let my commanders undertake the task of removing the cancerous tumor from your nation's body the way they believe to be best. We will all be better off because of it."

The satrap took another sip of whiskey, his face this time holding it much better. Surr took a drink from his own glass. "You are right, of course, Your Excellency," said del Potro, finally. "The people of Nicaro will surely welcome the weakening of the GNLF and the retribution it will bring to them, although vengeance will never be a long-term medicine to any of our ills. You forget, though, that what you call Nicaro is more than just Nicaro, there is also Firmador. There are deep-rooted loyalties to the GNLF in many parts of the country."

"That, Marquez, is now your responsibility," smiled Surr. "That is, after all, why I chose *you* as satrap. I see you as the man for the job, strong enough to enforce a new, superior order. The old government's tyranny and that of the militias has been replaced by the rule of law. The people will come to appreciate that and those who don't will be removed from society, as simple as that."

"The rule of law, Your Excellency?" asked del Potro. "Is that what you call what the Tsarina is doing in the southeast?"

"Patience, satrap, patience." Surr put down his glass, now empty.

"We must take one step at a time."

Del Potro finished his own glass then. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "You know, *krierlord*, this stuff *is* good. Yet, I still prefer a good jedrez. I suppose it will take time to acquire the taste." He paused to sigh, then said, "Shall we go to the dinner, Your Excellency? The others must be waiting for us."

Surr looked at him studiously, almost frowning for a moment. Then, "Yes, let us go mingle."

Throughout the *Stratekom* (Strategic Theater)

January–February 2028

North of San Pecc — GNLf forces had been concentrated where their numbers were most needed, around San Pecc, Chinadenga, and the Nicaroan capital of Managua. The truth was, though, that GNLf-affiliated militants were everywhere and not all of them were completely loyal. As with all coalitions, the GNLf was more so a loose association of smaller militant groups that had united their efforts in overthrowing the Ordenite-backed Contra government during the civil war. Now that the Contra government was one many of the militias had returned home, but there were still large concentrations around the major battles still burning across the country.

While Macabéan units lived on well-ordered bases, of which many had popped up around the countryside as more and more soldiers were brought into the newly minted satrapy, few militants lived within Macabéan walls. Most were spread out among their own encampments, often nothing more than an expansive shanty town where they lived with their children and wives. Many of these 'wives' were slave women 'liberated' by GNLf gunmen with their own evil intentions.

The encampments were often more dangerous than the front itself. A heavy Macabéan patrol presence was natural, as the *Ejermacht* looked to curb the GNLf's appetite for unsavory atrocities. Fighting had broken up between GNLf militias and imperial forces before, although never something that could be called a revolt. Not yet. The Macabéans came to alleviate the internal pressures as well, as children and women lived in poverty, oftentimes without permanent access to food or water. This was provided to them by their new imperial overlords, although the flow tended to be ruptured by militia warlords not interested in growing the popularity of those they saw as a threat to their power base. Their thugs intimidated the only way they knew how, with unrepentant violence. It was an explosive situation and one that was threatening to blow when Macabéan-backed GNLf forces were heavily engaged with Chinadenga forces and their allies.

Here, in *Komsektor III*, imperial forces were lightest. An initial brigade of some 5,000 men was bolstered by another four, a little more than a division of mechanized infantry. It was one of the smallest garrison forces in the satrapy and in one of the most hotly contested areas, made worse by the fact that all but one brigade was composed of freshly recruited Indrans with only two months of combat experience on average.

San Pecc was still a pirate stronghold. Most of their manpower came in the form of local militias, whose members made their living on the sex, slave, and drug trade through pirate trade networks. Perhaps as many as 30,000 militants operated in *Komsektor III*, fighting asymmetrically against perhaps twice as many GNLf soldiers and the 25,000 Macabéans. San Pecc itself was mostly still completely in pirate hands, with only isolated strongholds along the northern edge of the city's suburbs held by small, well defended imperial garrisons. Fighting inside was always sharp and quick, leaving dozens of dead behind. Most of it was done by the GNLf, some 6,000 of them already dead since the beginning of October of the previous year.

Disgruntlement with the war was growing. Some of the warlords already on the fringes of the GNLf coalition had already left and taken their soldiers with them. A few had even defected to the enemy, and there was a real threat that many more would soon follow them. The day before, the same day that the Ordenite régulies had been called back to *Barbakán* Tobías in Chinadenga, a small ground of GNLf gunmen had attacked a Macabéan convoy north of San Pecc after a reportedly heated argument on how their aid was being distributed.

The Macabéan garrison commanders took the outbreak as an opportunity. Early the next morning, while it was still dark outside, twelve battalions organized into four operating groups moved as armored columns along the roads that cut through the various GNLf encampments that surrounded the besieged city of San Pecc. Each group also benefited from an armored company, temporarily attached from an *arkagrup* (armored brigade) based just southwest of León.

Thunder rumbled in the distance. It was only a few minutes later that it came into the area, only not to be thunder at all. San Pecc was set alight by a sudden bombardment of guided missiles and bombs, striking targets all across the city. Macabéan artillery joined in as well, heavily saturating urban fortifications held by Chinadenga forces. Another four aircraft emerged out of the clouds, then. But they were not headed toward San Pecc. No, rather, they struck within the encampments themselves, their bombs and missiles hitting GNLf command centers and depots. They zipped off into the distance again, arched widely to turn around, and made a second run along the encampments. A chaos began.

Each of the four groups struck a different encampment, where at first GNLf forces began laying down their arms under orders from their commanders. Even those who hadn't received orders surrendered along with those who had.

Most camps were infected by a general confusion. They heard the fighting inside but also saw the bombardment of the city. Had Chinadenga forces opened a surprise offensive? Had they launched an attack on San Pecc? When the Macabéan columns entered their areas, those who did not surrender their weapons were quickly cut down. It started as a massacre, but as targeted GNLf forces became aware of the situation their resistance began to intensify. Firefights broke out within numerous encampments and the noise of battle crescendoed. Overhead, fighter and bomber aircraft continued to provide a strangling support, slamming concentrated defiance with impunity.

Most of the fighting lasted only a few hours. By the sun's rise, some 35,000 GNLf soldiers had surrendered voluntarily — most under direct orders. Another 7,000 had been captured, with 4,000 of their comrades dead. Some 8,000 former GNLf militants continued fighting into the day, while perhaps 10,000 in all neither fought nor surrendered. Most of both of these groups would defect to Chinadenga forces by the end of the day.

The bombardment also continued throughout the day, gaining energy as the sun reached a high point. For the militias operating in the city and around it, the fire raining down upon them must have been overwhelming. Most would survive it, but few could move while aircraft prowled the sky and imperial artillery picked off the stranded. It was enough to allow the 25,000-soldier strong Macabéan garrison to restabilize the front, restoring order within the camps and quickly removing the 42,000 or so militants who had given themselves up. Isolated gunfights and riots would continue throughout the next weeks, but — aside of the 20,000 soldiers who had changed sides — the culling of the GNLf around San Pecc had gone relatively well.

Masaya — There was no opening attack in Masaya. Instead, GNLf units were allowed to surrender piecemeal as their commanders received orders to do so. Those that refused to surrender were

allowed to continue holding their positions. Many of them did not have much of a choice, having established something akin to gangs and mafias that extorted and terrorized the populations of the city and its surrounding municipalities. This tyranny would prove the undoing of disloyal GNLF.

Sensing a momentary weakness within the coalition's ranks, a general rebellion sparked in isolation all throughout the city. As the day lengthened the fighting became worse, as fractured sides battled each other for police stations, administrative buildings, and Masaya's power stations. There were perhaps 5,000 imperial infantry in the area, but they did nothing to quell the surge in violence. Instead, they observed and bided their time, awaiting the moment to spring an ambush of their own. GNLF forces that had surrendered were detained and moved to temporary holding camps around León, Sandino, and Matagalpa, where some 60,000 imperial soldiers could keep better watch over them. In the meantime, resisting GNLF forces clashed with local militias and insurgents seeking to overthrow the yolk of their GNLF oppressors. The situation continued like this for almost a week, until 2 February.

As both sides wore themselves on, the *Ejermacht* moved an Indran infantry division into the area after pulling it from the southern frontier of the satrapy. Together with the present garrison of 5,000, these forces moved into Masaya in the early morning of February's second day. The wind was whipping about wildly, biting with a frosty cold. Moving in heavily armored columns and beneath an umbrella of close air support, imperial forces reduced resisting GNLF positions one-by-one and quickly put down the rebellion. Insurgent leaders were either forced into hiding or were captured, then executed after hastily organized field trials with hardly a neutral witness to vouch for their legitimacy.

This process did not occur without a hitch. Resistance was plentiful and oftentimes intense, especially in the countryside and around the secluded rural villages. Thousands of fighters disappeared in the jungle, undoubtedly to reorganize themselves where they could hide and then, most likely, conduct an anti-Macabéan insurgency.

In Masaya, the situation for the civilian population was critical. Although millions of its inhabitants had left in droves as refugees, most of them southward toward the southern borders, there were still hundreds of thousands of women, children, and some men in the city. Food, water, and other vital supplies were in short supply and sometimes nonexistent. Thousands had died from the fighting already, hundreds of them from starvation, but tens of thousands more would perish if help was not delivered to them soon enough. To alleviate the crisis required an impressive redirection of imperial resources, one that was at first slow in coming.

Thousands of aircrafts laden with foodstuff and other wares arrived at the airfields of Sandino, Matagalpa, and Batis. Their contents were brought south by truck, attacked here and there by a proto-insurgency that was still for the most part building itself into a serious opposition to what was deemed an imperial occupation. It took several days for this aid to arrive in Masaya in adequate amounts to satisfy the local population; in the meantime, any revolts and riots were crushed with a merciless military force that sought to stamp out the trouble before it became a larger problem.

The imperial garrison around San Tomas was larger and the GNLF presence smaller, and there the culling of the GNLF was executed much more quickly and efficiently. For the most part, the warlords here had returned home and disbanded most of their militants so that these could return to their families, jobs, and farms. Warlords not obviously loyal to the new del Potro regime were arrested, tried, and quickly excuted by military tribunals composed of mostly Macabéan officers. Almost all killed militia leaders were sentenced on war crime charges. How they and their men died would probably be considered a war crime itself. In some places, those tried 'on-the-fly' were driven to a ditch and shot en masse.

As was customary, press access to the events was tightly controlled. Superficially, reporters had only to request access under escort by imperial troops but, in practice, only select few were ever actually brought along. These were undoubtedly those with which the Imperial Bureaucracy itself had planted; those whom they trusted to tell the story in a way that favored the international image of the Golden Throne the most.

To the world, events throughout the satrapy would be depicted as the suppression of a violent and murderous revolt by part of certain GNLf constituents. The uprising in Masaya would be used to legitimize the operation, to give reason to the arrest and execution of thousands of GNLf leaders and commanders. It was all simply a humanitarian endeavor to deliver liberty and the rule of law to a people who were in dire need of it.

Perhaps this was, indeed, what the Macabéans intended for Nicaro, the rule of law. But their method of enforcement could be called nothing else but brutal. The destruction of the GNLf was a clear signal that unruly and untrustworthy elements of the new order in the satrapy would not be tolerated but rather forced to surrender or otherwise exterminated. As the middle of February approached, another 10,000 militants had surrendered themselves, with another 2,000 dead and three times as many disappearing somewhere into the jungle. And as Masaya began to quiet down again, *Komsektor II* fell into an eerie lull.

In the city itself, rebelling forces that had risen against a weakened GNLf disappeared with their numbers mostly intact. They were business owners and laborers, men and women with jobs and children. Without their weapons they looked like normal civilians, and in fact they were those same people who looked with dangerous eyes at the Macabéan tanks as they patrolled down the city's main and broad artery that cut through it at an angle from the northeast to the southwest.

Something, here, was brewing.

Chinadenga — Bruhn and the rest of his Ordenite comrades moved out at 0400 hours, practically simultaneous to the movement of the armored columns north in the area of San Pecc. There were more friendly soldiers available here, some 70,000 total distributed throughout *Komsektor IV* in the ongoing counterinsurgency. GNLf forces were also more concentrated, the geographic space altogether smaller and more confined.

The purge of the GNLf was far more barbarous here than in the north. Less of the GNLf here was loyal to del Potro, the new satrap. It had been by design that this was true, with the more violent of the GNLf constituents used to conquer and hold southern Nicaro. These areas were also the least loyal to the Sandino government and, for now, that had created a favorable dynamic as GNLf and local militias killed each other in a ferocious civil war that the Golden Throne had hardly lifted a finger to stop or arbitrate. Few on either side had any intention to surrender any arms to the Macabéans, so by necessity they would have to be destroyed by force.

Like in the north, while Bruhn's column moved to one of the encampments northeast of the small port city, imperial aircraft screamed overhead to strike at targets inside and outside of Chinadenga. Unlike San Pecc, the city of Chinadenga was mostly in imperial and GNLf hands, thus the aerial attacks there were more so directed at known GNLf garrisons and their other strongholds. The pirates and their allied militias would be mostly spared, struck only by convenience or accident.

Inside the Type 52 he rode in, Bruhn kept himself out of his mind. How many times had he been in situations like these? How often had he been trapped inside a tin can as outside everything was blown away by bombs? He closed his eyes for part of the drive down the

pothole stricken highway that led out of the city and toward a series of GNLF camps hastily organized on Chinadenga's outskirts. There were some 10,000 fighters here with their families and prisoners, or around 45,000 people total. Many of these were running about, trying to get a grasp of the chaos and its origins. Males of age, whether obviously warfighters or not, were cut down by the advancing Macabéan columns. The IFVs' cannons ripped into human bodies, turning them into red-soaked mulch. The slaughter was quick-paced, deliberate, and atrociously efficient. Like a hurricane of cannon- and gunfire that laid waste to everything in its path.

Suddenly, the column lurched to a stop and the rear ramp of his IFV went down with a heavy thud. He rushed out along with the rest of his squad, leading his men toward a ditch that gave them some cover against a pack of armed militants trying to organize some sort of resistance against the imperial rampage. With a quick series of silent orders, Bruhn sent one of his *ekipés* (fireteam) around the flank while he and another three of his men applied heavy frontal pressure on the group. As the firefight continued for a few minutes, the other *ekipé* suddenly emerged in the darkness and gunned the opposition down with a careless ruthlessness.

The first few who surrendered were shot on approach, but this practice was ended quickly by commanding officers. *Ejermacht* leadership down to the platoon level was under strict orders to accept all prisoners and to treat them well, processing them to temporary holding camps outside of major bases and then transporting them to the larger internment centers around Sandino and the other northern cities. It was hoped that by showing them mercy when making the right decision more of them would be willing to surrender to Macabéan authorities. Although thousands did surrender, thousands of others fought until they died. Neither did they fight heroically for the most part, instead they were cut down where they slept.

When one camp was cleared, a small garrisoning force was left behind to mop up. Bruhn went on to the next encampment, where it was much of the same.

Once dismounted, Bruhn once again moved through camp, tent by tent, thousands of others of other soldiers fanning out in every direction. They shot all who looked dangerous almost on the spot and without warning. Women cried and sobbed at them as they moved, pleading for the lives of their husbands, brothers, and children. When soldiers of more questionable ethics were left unsupervised, it was not uncommon for suddenly abandoned women to face unspeakable horrors.

As with the first camp, it took time for the first large groups of GNLF militants to surrender in large groups. When they did, they were accepted almost without incident. But it was not without tension, as hundreds of imperial troops overlooked the expanding throng of fresh prisoners. In the background, the jungle burned as Macabéan aircraft continued to drop bombs and missiles on GNLF positions throughout the isthmus.

When business was done here, Bruhn's men moved on to the next camp. This task they continued for hours, along with the 167th *asalto* and the 213th Indran *auskilaes*, slowly reducing the major GNLF forces around the immediate vicinity of the city. Forces in *Komsektor VI* were playing their own role, combing the massive territory under their responsibility to cull militant ranks and aiding *Komsektor IV* as well. More of the GNLF was allowed to bleed away here, where the jungles were expansive, thick, and nearly impenetrable. The fighting in *Komsektors IV and VI* would go on for weeks. It was further confused by the entry of autonomous Jiyu and DRFF elements still operating after their larger organizations had surrendered to imperial forces months ago. Here the laws of war and the clarity of its constituents were equally blurred, and even elements of the GNLF operated autonomously and often at the expense of its larger coalition.

In the south, the insurgency was simply an extension of the previous war. The GNLF had been broken and had suffered heavy losses, but its uncaptured constituents were now in hiding and free of a broader yoke. Like a kaleidoscope, the landscape in southern Nicaro was as confused as ever. But there was also a sense of greater clarity.

The Nicaroan army had been ordered to disband in accordance with the Treaty of Sandino. Elements that failed to abide would be hunted, persecuted, and, if necessary, eliminated.

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OPERATION GOLDEN NOOSE

Follows from: [6/24/2018](#); [6/10/2018](#); [1/28/2018](#); [7/29/2017](#); [4/25/2017](#); [3/11/2017](#); and [8/15/2015](#).

"The Satrapy of Nicaro was a political powder keg."

— R. Alvarez, *La Guerra en Nicaro* (2084 C.E.)

Matagalpa, Región Autónoma de Firmador

16 February 2028

"End the violence! End the wars! End the occupation!" chanted the crowd of hundreds of thousands marching through the streets of Matagalpa.

They held signs of all colors, waving their fists in the air as they walked, and their progress was incessant. *Ejermacht regulares* watched from their tanks, atop buildings, and from small UAVs that kept watch above the city. Too had they been busy tapping into the existing CCTV networks and expanding it with temporary security cameras placed by Macabéan military personnel. The protest continued unabated, simply monitored.

News of the GNLF's culling spread quickly, even manipulated by the Imperial Bureaucracy as it was. A purge was a purge, and no matter how it was spun there is a reason why the word 'purge' carries with it the connotation it does. The people of Nicaro and Firmador were shocked. Mostly confined to the urban populations of the north, held within cities like Matagalpa, Sandino, and Batis, the outrage built on its own. Angry editorials and internet comments were followed by small rallies and, finally, it had culminated into this. Matagalpa's public revolted while the rest of Firmador waited with bated breath to see what happened.

Officially, the imperial deployment to Nicaro and Firmador was not an occupation. Nicaro and Firmador remained independent, it had simply signed a binding agreement encharging the Golden Throne with the country's defense. The benefits were obvious. There would be no more armies to wage civil war, freed budgets could go back to the people, and never again would the country need fear foreign invasion. All for a small annual fee. To this mantra the Imperial Bureaucracy would stick.

Natural, then, for the imperial military not to react violently to this so

far peaceful protest. It had other resources anyway. Indeed, for one, the Satrapical Government was kept in the dark as to the Golden Throne's position toward the march. The rhetoric was certainly antagonistic and the empire's legitimacy — after killing thousands in, basically, their sleep — was on shaky ground. Better to squash the anti-imperial sentiment before all had to pay for it, even the satrapical government. Del Potro was certainly eager to prove his loyalties and, of course, his faculties for the job.

The newly formed *Guardia de Asalto* deployed in force. Loyal GNL elements were quickly repurposed. Even without an army, there was no use in letting loyal and trained soldier go to waste. Thousands of armored and heavily armored policemen, some squads equipped with heavy vehicles, crept along the fringes of the snake-like march that weaved through Matagalpa.

A crack rang across the city and it suddenly fell silent.

"Sniper!" The silence lasted for only a brief, fleeting moment, for suddenly Matagalpa exploded in a violent stampede. Women screamed and yelled, the unfortunate child brought by the senseless parent cried, and gunfire broke out in short spurts. Police forces began tightening their loose cordon around the length of the march. Macabéan forces overlooking the unfolding crisis remained dormant, except for a company of Nakil tanks deployed in small clusters on either side of the rally. These had started to crawl forward.

Along the edges the situation began escalating early. *Guardias de Asaltos* were heavy policemen, meant to break up riots, strikes, and small-scale insurrections. Their cordon began to tighten, especially along major arteries of escape for the protestors. They blocked paths and pushed the throngs back, and the cattle responded by rushing the gauntlets.

The heavily armed and armored gendarmerie responded like they knew best. The thick clouds of tear gas began to drift across the surface of the civilian battlefield and, organized in phalanxes, gas mask-equipped police cohorts pushed protestors back into the thick, suffocating mist. It was a casual evolution of affairs that civilians grabbed what they could to fight back and some had thought far enough head to bring weapons of their own, including firearms. Overhead, snipers continued firing into the crowd, but in a strangely arbitrary way that seemed to add to the confusion and chaos. People were trampled, others were pushed against the walls and nearly crushed. Windows were shattered by rocks, sticks, and any object that one could get their hands on. Some did it to find safe havens, others did it to take advantage of the uncertainty. The utter violation of Matagalpa would echo across the satrapy for weeks to come.

With the destruction escalating, the watching *regulares* soldiers started moving. Just over thirty tanks, their large canons pointed at an upward angle, as if toward the higher-up windows being used by snipers, entered the main Broadway that the protest march was being held on. Escorting infantrymen cleared a way for them the best they could, offering the tank's armor to help protect civilians as they were moved away from the violence. Imperial soldiers also began confronting the *Guardia de Asalto*, which backed off immediately in the face of the pressure. Loudspeakers mounted on vehicles began blasting instructions and messages to help the desperate throng of the fearful find safety.

Sniper fire ended almost immediately, although their rhythm had been arbitrary enough to keep chaotic minds off of them. Police forces also started to withdraw almost as quickly as the Macabéan military moved in, sometimes almost as if they had been preparing to do so all along. Surely, the people and the press did not notice in all the commotion underway.

The confusion went on for hours, only slowly dying down as more and more people fled from the scene or were escorted by imperial authorities. Behind them, they left a wake of havoc and damage.

Tens of millions of rókmark equivalents must have been destroyed that day and what of the material cost when comparing it to the loss of life? Stranded bodies were left in the streets until they were picked up by authorities. The wounded sat on curbs or lay strewn across the gravel, shocked into dormancy. When the city woke up the next morning, Matagalpa still looked like a war zone.

Fitting that the Golden Throne had made itself the savior of the people.

Managua, Región Autónoma de Nicaro

February 2028

In the south, the GNLF had emerged from the purge almost unscathed. Its elements, mostly unloyal to the new satrapical government, simply melted into the jungle and reorganized their efforts to face their new imperial enemy. But this reorganization would take time and the newly exiled GNLF forces would have to solve their internal differences before organizing a resistance against imperial armies.

In the meantime, imperial bureaucrats were in Managua overseeing the organization of the new regional government of Nicaro. A union of two nations, Nicaro and Firmador, was turned into a satrapy of two autonomous regions. As autonomous as they were, the Imperial Bureaucracy was set to embed itself deeply within the new structure. Some politicians and leaders were favored, others less so, and the most unfortunate were branded rebels and insurgents. The latter, typically a group made up of communists, socialists, and hawk nationalists, were arrested and jailed to await trial in the satrapy's evolving justice system — a system being built to favor the prevailing ideology of the empire.

The jailing of the worst of the opposition, under the pretense of quelling the civil war, also created a political vacuum that the Golden Throne could fill with monetary, logistic, and propagandistic support. One of its two basileos, two governors who formed the region's executive branch, was appointed by a del Potro who was undoubtedly influenced by *Krierlord* Lara Surr. The other was elected biannually through a popular vote. Nicaro's new bicameral legislature was modeled after that of the imperial provinces, one body made up of purely Nicaroan representatives and the other including representatives from Firmador. It was an alien government to a people who hadn't much say in the matter, and most of which were too preoccupied with day-to-day survival to care much. As the forest around the city continued to bleed, those inside were beginning to appreciate the relative peace that the imperial military presence in the city had brought.

No surprise, then, to find the polls almost empty. Today was the day to vote, to choose both the popular basileo and the Nicaroan disputados across the legislative bodies. Yet, the popular voice was nowhere to be heard. Those in the small villages outside Managua and along the border hardly had an opportunity, with no one to collect their ballot even if they knew or desired to cast it. Neither were the rebels keen on allowing the peasants to participate in the democratic process. It was a vote of the rich.

It was most likely not a coincidence that Vice President of Production Garot Hana had flown into the region the month before. He was joined by many others like him.

Despite the ongoing conflict, they were undeterred. The prospect of newfound riches was just too promising to decline to exploit, and imperial business magnets flocked to the satrapy en masse. Wearing expensive, designer aviator sunglasses, a tapered suit, and a fat golden wristwatch, Hana was every bit the businessman he played.

The watch hung loosely from his wrist as he held the clear glass to his lips, throwing his neck back. Its golden-brown fluids soothed their

way through his body. Women danced on a stage not five feet from him, fully naked and around a pole. Two other men sat to either side of him, with drinks of their own in their hands and their sights firmly on the dancers. The one on the left was Santiago Lorenzo, who presided over S.A. Taupas, the satrapy's largest textile manufacturer with dozens of factories throughout the two autonomous regions. His shirt was open down almost to the bottom of his chest, revealing thick black curly hair. On the right, Heliodoro Valentín was CEO of Don Juliano, one of the three most important sugarcane plantations in Nicaro. Two guards stood behind the three chairs, one on either side. They carried Hali-42, probably purchased from ex-GNLF personnel. Between Santiago Lorenzo and Garot Hana stood a thin, tall coffee table. On it stood a stack of bills.

Lorenzo grabbed a significant wad and threw them at the girls. Dozens of notes fluttered to their feet. One came to the short, fan man and started to dance on his lap. "Mr. Hana, I am glad that joo have decided to join us here tonight," he said, over the music. "I have heard estories of the golden rivers that crisscross the empire, like veins of moh-ney. Is it true?"

Garot laughed. A woman approached him too. "Figuratively, at least. Ours is a land of great opportunity, Mr. Lorenzo. It is a market of endless depth and unfathomable demand. One you both deserve to be in." Hana turned to the Don Juliano magnet and nodded at him. "Mr. Valentín and Mr. Lorenzo, your companies are leaders of its industries. You are best poised to gain from the inevitable avalanche of capital that is about to hit this country. Mr. Valentín, is it not true that your plantation is the largest of all the country?" He took another sip from his glass. The stack of money next to him was getting shorter.

"Jes. Jes, it is," answered Valentín, who fit snugly in his chair. His girl was dancing more so on his big, round belly which folded over his lap.

Smiling, Garot said, "Mr. Lorenzo, Taupas is the largest textile company in the market, no?"

"Jes," nodded Lorenzo.

"Goskapital V.K. represents thousands of investors looking to develop, grow, and dominate the refinery and distribution business in the satrapy. And we are just one of many financial prospectors in the empire, just one of many represents billions worth of capital. Demand for your goods will grow so quickly that plantations and factories will pop up faster than any single company's ability to produce." Garot took another drink. "To maintain your market shares, to maintain this oligopoly, you will need to spend more. And you may very well bankrupt yourself. Capitalism rewards fresh blood, after all. How will you cope?"

When neither answered, he added, "What if you had an advantage?"

It was Valentín who replied then. "How so? Espeak plainly."

"Split your company's shares. Start with the smallest investors, work your way up. Or simply sell us *your* shares. In the end, the method does not matter. Goskapital V.K. desires a 60% share of the stock, which it will then trade competitively on the market. You will remain the largest shareholders, with 35% of the shares in each of your companies. Each of you will also have a portfolio of ownership of future refineries, factories, and processing plants acquired and traded by the company, making you stakeholders in the entire industry. It will unlock doors you've never seen, gentlemen. Your treasuries will fill faster than you can make room for it all. In exchange, your companies would work exclusively through our processing plants and distributors. A beautiful symbiosis, no?"

Valentín, with his voice of gravel, said, "Joo said that Goskapital is not the only one of you, that there are more. Joo will have competitors too, no? Why should we not negotiate with them?"

"Goskapital is a subsidiary, sirs. Do you know of who?" Neither man to Garot's side answered, so he said, "Dienbank. The sheer volume of capital we wield virtually guarantees our ability to weather the overhead and early failures. We will be in the satrapy for a long time, believe you that. Regime stability has its merits, no?"

"45 percent share for Goskapital, 40 percent for us, the other 15 percent is retained by our existing shareholders. Your firm will still control the largest bloc," said Lorenzo, somewhat sourly. "How can we leave our current shareholders with only five percent? We could never show our faces, it would be a betrayal. Even 15 is an *insult*."

Garot weighed the numbers. After almost a tense minute, the girls unsure if they should remain there dancing, he answered, "It is not ideal, but I suppose that arrangement will do. I know it is a difficult decision to make, but it is the right one for the long-term health of both of your companies." And for the long-term health of Goskapital's investments via its clientele, investments that would hopefully enrich those who had put their faith in the prospecting firm and the prospecting firm itself. It was fourth largest now, but the company would be the biggest investment agency in the empire soon enough if its Nicaroan spending paid off. How better to increase the likelihood of success by providing your clients' investments with a guaranteed flow of supply? Institutionalized economies of scale. And what other company was better poised to connect Nicaroan industries with the wider imperial market than one owned by the Golden Throne's largest clearinghouse union?

The two Nicaroans thought for a minute. "Ho-kay," said Lorenzo first. "Let us do it."

Garot took Lorenzo's hand in his and shook it. "Great, you have made the right decision. What about you Mr. Valentin?"

"Joo ask for a heavy price Mr. Hana. A price that is *real*, while joor benefits are only *ideas*. I do not know much about joor Dienbank but Nicaro and Firmador is a very complicated country, I hope joo have a lot of moh-ney. Joo will need it, amigo." Valentin sighed. "But I fear if I say no to you that you will go to my competitor and that they will repeat the benefits of the new economic order instead. If my friend here thinks you are the right partner, I suppose I too agree with the terms."

"Fair enough," replied Garot. "I know that I will prove myself to you during our relationship."

"Is that it, then?" asked Lorenzo, who was getting handsy with his girl.

"There is one more thing," answered Garot.

"There is only one obstacle that is out of Goskapital's control," he said. "The popular basileo. Mr. Castaña is a socialist who will impede progress in the region. Any uncertainty can be calamitous. Labrador Jordanes seems like the better candidate, I think both of you will agree. It interests you to vote the right way. no? Neither would it hurt to pressure your employees a little."

"Haré lo que puedo," said Valentin. He'll do what he can. With a gesture of his hand, the CEO signaled the end of the conversation. Lorenzo only grunted, fully focused on the entertainment.

All smiles, Garot did the same.

In hundreds, perhaps thousands, of meetings much like this one, the economy of Nicaro and Firmador was partitioned by Macabéan investment firms looking to fund and coordinate investment projects in the satrapies. Purchasing land from private sellers, local communities, and imperial titles gained by treaty, they spent their way into the two autonomous region's political spheres and manipulated the systems ruthlessly to their advantage.

OPERATION BROWN JACKAL

"That the pirates resisted for as long as they did does not mean they fared well at any stage of the war."

— T. Stegan, *King Eagle: A History of the 167th Asalto Division* (2098 C.E.)

Island and City of San Carlos, Región Autónoma de Firmador

21 February 2028

One hundred helicopters carried just over half a battalion of men over the narrow stretch of water between the Firmadoran mainland and the large island of San Carlos. The moon still hung in the sky and little of the sun had had a chance to emerge yet. In the darkness, about six hundred men of the 167th *asalto* were dropped north of the pirate-held city of the same name as the island.

The 167th had seen a lot of fighting in the five months of its deployment so far. Part of the original invasion forces, it was soon deployed to the south where it fought Chinadenga, Somoza, DRFN, and Jiyu forces for the better part of three months. The sweeps and patrols were endless, and most of the time they only found the enemy when the enemy wanted to be found. 70–80 percent of engagements were started by the enemy, statistics would show later. It was a hellish sort of war, although one the *Ejermacht* was well accustomed to by now. It culminated with the siege and capture of the port city of Chinadenga, where the 167th suffered more casualties than they had during all of their previous operations in-theater combined. Their efforts had been 'rewarded' by their repositioning to western *Komsektor I*, where they were allowed a couple of weeks of respite.

Two weeks were just enough to get much-needed rest and for casualties to be replaced by fresh fodder. Before they knew it, the 167th was out in all its glory one morning, waiting to be taken west by helicopter in waves of six hundred men every forty-five minutes. It would take the better part of a day to land the entire division on the island, but the fighting on San Carlos began almost as soon as the first boots hit the ground. The *Laerihans* had been undertaking its own side of the operation since the night before, of course. But their bombing campaign had been largely avoided by the pirate-militia coalition that held the island.

When the first six companies were placed northwest of the city of San Carlos, inland from the island's eastern beaches, the insurgent forces did not seem dazed or reduced at all. All the opposite, they were vigorous and full of energy. If it was not for continued close air support and offshore naval fire coming from a small task force element sent to interdict pirate shipping in and out of the Bay of Napoça, the 167th's LZ may have very well been overrun.

As it stood, they survived the initial assaults until the second wave of reinforcements had come in. As soon as these were positioned on the ground, the division had a full-sized battalion to operate with. Tactical interdiction continued incessantly, the GLI-76s overhead helping to suppress enemy movements and the naval squadron acting as the division's operational artillery force. With this support, the *asaltos* could now go on the offensive.

While the battalion entrenched itself defensively, it sent two of its battalions south toward the island's namesake city of San Carlos. These overtook defensible points along the city's northern urban edge, fending off limited Chinadenga counterattacks in the process. Intermittent fighting followed for a few hours, sometimes quite

intensely. GLI-76s bombed targets inside the beach metropolis and the Macabéans were finally able to repulse Chinadenga forces in the occupied neighborhoods. This lull did not translate in the countryside, where the battle would continue well through the night and into the next morning. By then, the bulk of the 167th's 18,000 men were in the fight.

San Carlos' Western Beaches, Región Autónoma de Firmador

Night of 21–22 February 2028

Beneath the dark, impenetrable waves sailed the KSS 1830. It used its more silent electric engines to slip into the waters between San Carlos and the mainland's western coastlines.

The *Naresaeya* had joined *Admiránt* Jonn Noram's ad hoc naval *eskuadrón* in early November, part of a pack of 20 *Kartagen*-class diesel-electric submarines. Most had come to sit off of the northern Firmadoran coast, guarding the sea lanes that crossed north of the satrapy and patrolling the wider waters between the imperial vassal state, Leonna, and Timocratic Republic. Although that kind of information was always classified, the crew of the *Naresaeya* was told that they were merely the first deployment and that, as port-space was built in Nicaro and Firmador, dozens, and eventually hundreds, more submarines would call the bases of the satrapy home port.

Now this vastly expanded submarine was still an eventuality, a dream almost, and Noram had to do with what he had to successfully trap the Chinadenga pirates. Three SSKs were positioned to monitor all surface and submarine traffic in and out of the bay, leaving the channel between Lynion and the Moka-claimed island at the end of the Firmadoran-side of the archipelago and everything west of it open. A four-submarine patrol routine kept watch over that longer section, far to the north. The problems of water sovereignty were considered too unnecessary to risk the diplomatic troubles that would accompany the discovery of any imperial SSKs in or near others' sovereign waters. It was a weak blockade, much to Noram's chagrin, but it would have to do. His surface fleet was still outside of Batis and the admiral — who had already been embarrassed by the enemy once — was unwilling to sail it into the possible ambush that was the Bay of Napoça, and the other submarines were needed to monitor the more strategic sea immediate northwest of the country.

The KSS 1830 parked itself in the middle of the narrow channel, waiting for any pirate vessels operating out of the island to sally or flee. It listened and listened, and when something came to pique its interest it raised a small, tiny canister that rose to the surface and emitted its signal.

A GLI-44 Blackjester flying overhead took over from there, coordinating an aerial reconnaissance team to pick up the tracks and find their target. If such a target was visualized and confirmed, it was destroyed.

San Carlos' Western Beaches, Región Autónoma de Firmador

22 February 2028

In the early hour of the 22nd, twenty-four rubber dinghies landed in four groups at different sections of San Carlos' coastline. Two groups, a total of 72 men, deployed to a small fringe of the city's port on its southern edge. A third group landed on a northern beach and the other one on sand to the south.

The *Grup Koda* forces moved silently. In the port, they made quick work of posted guards, overpowering a garrison of 300 militants that was mostly still sleeping by the time anybody realized what was going

on. Most of the enemy surrendered quickly, the rest were killed. No one was known to have fled although the possibility could not be discarded. The two other groups of naval special forces, one on either flank of the port, advanced quickly through mostly empty streets, using shared intelligence from the 167th's reconnaissance UAVs operating over San Carlos' rooftops. The southern contingent took a bridge over the *río* Echizo, just one kilometer of the port's southern gates. The last group raided and shut down the city's single largest powerplant, just northeast of the port's northern gates, which supplied most of the power to the port area's surroundings and the city's center.

Chinadenga defenses in the city were given little time to rally and react. GLI-76 *Falkóns* were still striking enemy positions at a frequent pace. Over the course of the night, the *Laerihans* had run at least four hundred sorties to pressure and eliminate enemy forces. Taking advantage of the bombardment, a division of destroyers occupied the mouth of the harbor and landed a single battalion of *terçios*. Highly trained, well-equipped, and battle-seasoned, the twelve companies of naval infantry joined the *grup koda* and dug in along the perimeter. Four companies of *terçios*, along with the 72 *grup koda*, marshaled inside the northern gate and waited for the sun to rise just a little higher.

As for the prisoners, they were loaded onto the LCAC that had brought in the *terçios* and taken to a reduced-size division of destroyers that had braved the narrow confines of the area's waters to seal the mouth of San Carlos' waters. From there, they were transferred to the mainland and then trucked to a POW camp outside of Matagalpa. Most would spend over two years struggling and fighting to secure a reintegration with their society.

North of San Carlos City, Región Autónoma de Firmador

22–23 February 2028

In the early morning, as the sun's first rays peaked over the horizon in force, a battalion from the 167th advanced toward the Corralejos International Airport which sat at the edge of a sparse, namesake northwestern suburb of San Carlos. The field, its terminals, and administrative buildings were well garrisoned and well alerted, the previous night's and morning's air raids causing mostly structural damage.

They could hear the clatter of gunfire further to the west, where the two companies that had taken fortified positions in the northern suburbs were reinforced by another four. These had launched limited attacks along their narrow arc of front, hoping to draw pirate defenses away from the airport. Another force of 600 men was deploying along a forward line to the east of the city, with a full battalion behind it which would continue south to cut off the city entirely. This movement would require the better part of the day for these forces, allowing Chinadenga elements to reorient themselves with ample time, but the primary objective that day remained Corralejos to the north.

For all of the international-ness of Corralejos, it was a small airport. Two terminals serviced all flights, one dedicated to commercial traffic and the smaller one to shipping traffic. Almost all of its aircraft flew in from other cities of the country and, if from outside the satrapy's frontiers at all, the only foreign airports that sent their passengers there were from the nearby countries in the northern third of the continent. These days there were few flights in general, the ongoing war and the civil war that preceded it, having effectively murdered the island's once-burgeoning tourism industry. Its occupants were all armed or otherwise technicians in the employ of the pirates, rebel factions, and cartels. The only goods shipped through Corralejos these days was the kind one could snort through the nose or inject in their veins. Natural that it was well defended, then.

The battalion's advance guard was met with machinegun fire coming from inside various hangars strewn around the crisscrossing tarmac. They opened fire on unsuspecting platoons moving quickly toward the two central terminals, killing three men and wounding several others. Mortar fire arrived too and claimed their own victims, while enemy snipers did their work too. Together, they harassed the advance to a crawl and forced the attackers to move from cover to cover. Macabéan squads, platoons, and companies worked together to flank reinforced defensive positions, but they lacked the heavy armor necessary to more seriously and easily suppress enemy fire. Offshore naval guns and overhead GLI-76s were used instead, though the lack of direct fire made its mark. By midday, the larger of the two terminal buildings and the concrete air control tower were still in enemy hands.

While the battalion of air assault infantry prepared their siege, two companies of *terçios* rode north from the port in their BSI-37 IFVs. They were reinforced by a squad of BSI-122s. Despite suffering a string of small ambushes along their route, this force reached Corralejos by the early afternoon, helping the air assault battalion dislodge the considerable insurgent force.

The task was no easy feat. Almost 200 insurgent bodies would be counted and more than 300 surrendered by day's end. They neither died nor surrendered easily and the fighting went on for many long hours. Thirteen Macabéans died and there were another thirty-two wounded added to the casualty list. Those with grievous enough wounds were airlifted back to the mainland, the rest would have to stick it out with their unit. By the end of it, a third of the larger terminal had been turned into rubble in a series of bombing runs and the rest of it had more holes than surface thanks to the fire support from the light tanks' 122mm guns.

As for the air control tower, its thick steel-reinforced concrete hide had proven hard to penetrate. Neither were ground commanders thrilled about the possibility of heavy casualties fighting their way inside. Instead, they took up positions within captured buildings and along the airport's perimeter, preparing for their overnight haul. Those inside the tower were condemned to surrender, sally, or starve.

The *terçios* made the return trip to their base of operations in the port before the sun was down. The highway had become more perilous as the ambushes gained strength, but it was clear that the pirates were struggling with distributing their forces to meet the different threats forming across the city. Unable to organize an immediate counterstroke to stall the imperial operation, they settled for an overnight counterattack.

Almost one thousand gunmen rushed the southern and western perimeters of Corralejos at 0045. They rained heavy mortar fire on the entrenched *asalto* battalion, obviously more comfortable with the spatial geography of the airport than the Macabéans. Desperately, the defending infantry force held on, wishing that the *terçio* detachment had stuck around. Heavy machine gunners positioned along the terminal windows saturated rushing militants with lead while riflemen did their best to hold the impromptu bunkers that had been rapidly constructed to hold the airport's perimeter. Despite the lack of heavy forces, together with offshore naval fire and air support they were able to resist and, finally, shatter concerted efforts to rush the field. By 0400 hours the counterattack petered out, gunfire and mortar fire becoming more sporadic and less dangerous.

When the sun rose on the morning of the 23rd, Corralejos was firmly in Macabéan hands. Most of it was. The air control tower still stood independent, the men inside it intent on holding out.

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The Macabees

Senator

Posts: 3870

Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

QUOTE

THE STORY OF JONAH DERINGER

Follows from: [7/8/2018](#); [6/24/2018](#); [6/10/2018](#); [1/28/2018](#); [7/29/2017](#); [4/25/2017](#); [3/11/2017](#); and [8/15/2015](#).

"Captain Deringer's task force was finally caught when attempting to flee for Potthan. Intercepted by forces out of Vos Díelaht, Deringer's Soria refused to surrender and was finally sunk by a submarine. Many claim that he survived, appearing in Theohuanacu soon after, but this surely must be impossible.

— T. Manzert, *The Life of Jonah 'Green-Skinned' Deringer* (2082 C.E.)

A Tour of South Central Greater Díenstad

1986–2028

Jonah Deringer was born in Guffingford, in 1986. Then 'The Golden Throne' was nothing more than a distant memory, a sick empire that had finally crumbled under its own weight during the closing decade of the 19th century. He moved to Theohuanacu at the early age of eight, following his father who held a junior officer command post with a contingent of Guffingfordi advisors operating out of North Point. His father campaigned regularly in the west and south, fighting the indigenous and the pirates alike. They stayed there for several years and, one day, Jonah's father took his son with him when sent to garrison the large town Wuehexe in the far, far west of the island.

They traveled by armored military convoy and although the civilians were not exactly uncomfortable, it was a long journey that would take over a week. Of course, they would never make it to Wuehexe. Entering the largely untamed west from the north, using the old colonial highway that followed Theohuanacu's coastline, they were ambushed forty-five minutes from their destination.

The enemy — FIM elements, Jonah learned later — had known of the civilians and attacked for that reason. They wanted to humiliate the Guffingfordis, warn them of what to expect.

Jonah's family was slaughtered. His father was shot while fighting, his mother and sisters raped then murdered. He and his two brothers were taken prisoner, then forced to march down to the coastal town of Tapexa. The march was arduous, painful, and made without much in the way of food or water. Many died along the way, including one of his brothers, the ten-year-old Lucas. He remembered crying for his brother, and being flayed for it. In Tapexa, they were sold into slavery to a handful of pirate merchants who came to survey the stock. Jonah and his surviving brother, the only family he had left, were separated. He had not seen Liam since.

The pirates must have seen some kind of martial potential in him, for he was press-ganged into a crew. Only at the dawn of 12, he served as the captain's personal servant. Captain 'Black-Skinned' Butunu was not kind, but neither

was he purposely mean. A Panooly, the man must have known what it was like to suffer. The fascist, racist dictator Templeton was at his strongest then. He made his slave boy suffer too, but by age 15 Jonah was freed and made a booty-sharing member of the *Soria's* crew.

He took part in his first raid as an armed-sailor three weeks later, raiding all along the Panooly coastline from their safe harbor in the Thacu Islands. The next year they moved on to Adaptes Astrates, striking small fishing villages at first and then attempting to target the larger towns. It was a matter of time before their navy responded in force, but the Astratesians counterattacked with greater strength than Butunu expected.

They were chased down to the Thacu Islands, then hunted while they hid along the islands' many shores. The Astratesians were committed and focused, though, finding their prey finally eight months after taking chase. Butunu had ordered the ship to make way for their home harbor finally, unable to make the short voyage until now because part of the route was under surveillance. The enemy ships had withdrawn, a feint it would turn out, luring the pirate ship and its crew out its hiding place. They were struck by a missile, launched by an aircraft or ship they never knew, killing the captain and thirty other men on impact. That they limped into their harbor at all was purely miraculous.

With no clear line of succession, the remaining crew members did what came most naturally to them. They fought over the opening at the head. Three of the early favorites killed each other and six more died before a clear captain had emerged. 'Cold-Hearted' Jakobs, a Macabéan runaway criminal-turned-swashbuckler, was murdered by the crew before they had even finished repairs on the *Soria*. Soon, there were simply insufficient of them left to operate her and those that remained began to jump ship, accepting contracts with other crews. It was in this vacuum that Jonah took leadership, using what he had left of the booty acquired over the past years to buy himself a crew loyal enough to storm the *Soria* and coerce what was left of the original crew over to his side. Those who refused were killed and replaced. He was ruthless with the survivors, kind to those recently hired, and used this balance to solidify his claim to the capitancy while final repairs were underway.

His one problem, and big problem that it was, was the limit to his finances. In fact, he did not have much in the way of finances at all. The repairs were paid out of the ship's own capital, but much of that had already been plundered during the infighting. There was only one natural source of ready income, the banks. He took a loan against the value of the ship and it was in debt that he found himself when the *Soria* finally set sail again, sometime during the spring of 2004.

Anti-piracy operations around Holy Panooly had intensified. The local politics had changed drastically since the last decade, since even a few years ago. The Kingdom of Macabea, not too long ago just another small rump state of the former Golden Throne, was near to winning the war against the last once-imperial state on the continent. The wealthy Beda Fromm had held out for a long time, but much of the old empire had already surrendered and the Macabéan army had earned supra-dominance. A new coalition, the Right Wing Collective, was rising. Much of the region was unified by ideology and alliance. The pirates held little leverage in this world.

With opportunities in the east slim, Jonah — Captain 'Green-Skinned' Deringer, as he was known to men — sailed west.

The sobriquet 'Green-Skinned' he earned due to his age. Few earned the captaincy at the early age of 18. In fact, taking the position by coup was atypical. He supposed he was lucky enough to escape with something as innocent as 'Green-Skinned.'

It was not just because of the strengthened naval patrols along the Panooly coastline and to the north that he had opted to go west. He had other, more personal reasons for doing so. Although a pirate now through-and-through, he had never forgiven the slaughter of his family. It had not been the pirates who had killed his father, or his mother, or his brothers. No, they had died at the hands of FIM, the Free Inxuahtl Movement. Inxuahtl was a harbor-city of significant size in northwestern Theohuanacu, controlling a number of outlying towns and serving as the headquarters for the local garrison forces...garrisons like the one in Wuehexe, the town he and his family had been traveling to when attacked. Fighting for the independence of the city and the immediate neighboring lands, FIM was ruthless in its tactics. Thousands died and the rebellion still raged.

Taking advantage of this chaos, the *Soria* rounded the western coast of Theohuanacu and raided along the Inxuahtl coastline for the duration of the spring and summer. Local fishing villages were razed, their people raped, murdered, or sold into slavery. Larger towns did not escape Deringer's wrath, either. Tapexa, where he had first been sold into his current life, was attacked several times. Its port was utterly devastated, thousands of its inhabitants killed or captured, and it was until the FIM sent a large force into the town that Jonah finally moved on to new targets. None of the Collective's navies moved to stop him, too preoccupied with other matters to care much about what happened in western Theohuanacu.

Emboldened, 'Green-Skinned' Deringer struck the western Theohaunacan coasts again in 2005. Again in 2006.

The slave trade thrived. Merchants sold them in the far west, to the Gothic states, and to slavers throughout the world. The gold flowed like water then and they drank it, and the western Theohuanacan cities paid the price. Local commerce collapsed and the fishermen were too wary to venture into the sea. Instead, they fled inland, not knowing when a pirate party could sweep ashore to ransack their homes.

Soon, there was little wealth to steal and most people had relocated further inland or around military forces. The pirates would not risk protracted land marches to reach their targets. Luckily, the international order was once again changing. Invaded, Holy Panooly receded. Templeton retained his regime, but with his military thinned and strained the insurrections took their toll. Holy Panooly withered, it was once again vulnerable.

In 2007, he struck there. Callisto, of the Thacu Islands, the *Soria* raided several times. Other pirate crews followed and soon enough the city had simply collapsed. It was overtaken by buccaneers eager for a larger, more well-defended base of operations. Callisto would never return to Panooly hands and neither would any of the old Panooly holdings in the Thacus. In 2008, they focused on the southwestern Panooly coasts, taking advantage of the weak forces in the area. Most of Templeton's forces were north, culling the indigenous ranks around the mines and factories. Guamlumpeiron was said to be on fire, the target of a merciless siege and bombardment.

In the summer of 2009, Jonah even felt confident enough to raid as far as Indras. Here, though, the opposition was

much better prepared, the state in much better shape. The *Soria* returned home from Indras with little reward and much damage. Again, Jonah was lucky enough to make it out of the year's campaigning alive.

New opportunities arose, however. Whether to draw the pirates away from Holy Panooly, still a member of the Right Wing Collective, or to hamper the insurgency in Theohuanacu, or for both, the emperor of the Golden Throne sought to employ the pirate captains toward useful purposes. Jonah accepted a contract to escort and reinforce a division-sized force of nominal mercenaries tasked with taking the inland city of Nichahuan. The *Soria* sailed alongside an old small aircraft carrier converted into an amphibious operations ship. Its gray hull bore no markings, no name. They landed somewhere along the southwestern coast of Theohuanacu.

The insurgency had multiplied. FIM forces were now some among many more. Tens of thousands had risen in arms, forming into militias and war parties that moved eastwards toward the capital city of Theotihuacan.

Fierce fighting followed them to Nichahuan. Hundreds of men died along the way, some from Jonah's own crew. The further inland they moved, the more difficult the contest. There were vehicles with them, many of them armored enough to intimidate local opposition well enough. Still, the enemy had rockets and captured tanks of their own. The battle only continued to worsen.

By sheer will and focus, the force arrived at Nichahuan after a week-long forced march. They found the city well defended by a contingent of perhaps 3,000 militants. With orders to take the city, they began a long, deadly struggle to eject the local militias out. The fighting was tedious, moving from house to house. Some days, they would advance only a couple of streets. Others they would lose ground. It took the better part of a month, but slowly Nichahuan was cleared and it came at the price of more than two thousand dead. Most of the enemy had died fighting, few had surrendered. Those that did were executed.

Too weak to strike out at insurgent forces in the countryside, Jonah and the ghost unit he had come with consolidated their ownership of the city. All of this providing little value to anyone else, the imperial faucet closed shut and the so-called mercenaries turned to what a sadist may call taxation. With little love toward pirates and little use for what were found to be unwilling fighters, Jonah and his men were told to leave.

Of course, between Nichahuan and the coast there were still thousands of fighters. And if Jonah's own contingent would have been too small to traverse this space on its lonesome, to begin with, it was now at almost half-strength. Clearly, the mercenaries had left them to die. So Jonah did what a pirate did best. He turned. Liasoning when insurgent forces still on the outskirts of the city's suburbs, rebel militants were allowed in during the early morning. The pirates slaughtered the mercenaries in their sleep, reducing entire garrison blockhouses around the city's perimeter to rubble. It was a much more swift fight than the initial siege to dislodge the rebels, and a bloodier one too. Few of the mercenaries survived. Those who did were handed over to Jonah and his crew as slaves, who turned around and sold them in the markets of Tiwanaku.

Spring of 2010 began like any other. Thousands of pirate crews fanned out across the coastlines of south-central Greater Dienstad, striking western Theohuanacu, Holy

Panooly, Adaptes Astrates, and Indras. Some crews traveled by land to fight in central Theohuanacu, whether as mercenaries or in search for human prize. Regional attentions were turning elsewhere, the bigger and grander things. The government of Theohuanacu collapsed, unable to govern anything outside of the capital. In North Point, the government seceded to form an independent Theohuanacan state. Nuclear stockpiles held around the capital were overrun and captured, and then the militias used them on each other.

Jonah had gone to sea again, raiding as far north as Jumanota.

When they made port in Tlaloc, they found it almost...dead. The nuclear war hadn't come here, but the people said that radioactive clouds had stormed through several times. Trade was diverted to Callisto. Even Palenque and Tiwanaku, further to the south, were similarly affected. The *Soria* made way to Callisto, where it sold its human cargo and other booty. The crew was given extended leave there for the rest of the autumn and into the winter, until next year's campaigning season.

When spring flowered again, they made their way to western Theohuanacu. He did it almost out of curiosity, to see how bad the war had turned there. When they arrived, they found most of intact. The mountains that surrounded it from the east protected them from much of the fallout. As it turned out, the rebels did not know how to use the more sophisticated technology and were therefore restrained to local use of their acquired nuclear hardware. Much of central Theohuanacu was turned into a long succession of craters and the rest of it quickly withered beneath the spread of uranium decay. In fact, much of the population was now moving west. Millions of refugees, fighters, and others traveled in all directions attempting to flee the carnage in the center. The slave trade was as vibrant as ever and the vulnerable made tempting targets. Thus Jonah and the *Soria* raided.

And they were caught. Looking to avenge the betrayal of the mercenary force in Nichahuan, a task force of privateers was contracted by the Golden Throne to hunt and capture — alive, when possible — pirate war parties operating around western Theohuanacu. They waited for their prey to strike and then caught them at their most vulnerable, usually when the war party was returning to its ship with its treasure. Jonah's crew was captured in this way and brought to Targul Frumos, the infinitely enormous southern port of the Golden Throne. They were taken to Fedala, the empire's new capital, by aircraft. There they stood trial for murder, theft, terrorism, and countless other charges, and sentenced to ten-year prison sentences in the famed prisons of Telámora outside of Marsa Bruth, Sarcanza. If his imprisonment was cut short it was because of another shift in international order.

When Sarcanza rose in rebellion, with insurgents earning early victories in Prokhorovka and outside of Marsa Bruth, prisoners like Jonah were given the option of serving alongside the rebels in exchange for their freedom. Long separated from his crew, and his ship most likely a heap of metal scrap by now, he really had no other choice. This life was his for the next two years until he found the opportunity to flee south into Zarbia, then heading to Monzarc in the northeast. Guffingford had already collapsed, Macabéan and Stevidian armies positioning themselves in the remains like vultures maneuvering to fight for the carcass.

His only home was Theohuanacu anyway, so that is where

he went. He found work on a cargo ship that sailed the passage between Monzarc and the southern Greater Díenstadi countries often. In early February 2020, nine years since last captured and imprisoned, Jonah 'Green-Skinned' Deringer found himself in Tiwanaku. He never returned to his cargo ship and instead looked for a pirate crew willing to take him.

The political landscape was very different now. The Golden Throne, an annoying foe that Jonah just could not seem to escape, had invaded Theohuanacu the year before. Their conquest was quick, although incomplete. The pirate cities were allowed to exist ungoverned in exchange for a small levy and the west remained largely untamed. Callisto and the rest of the Thacu Islands had fallen to United Gordonopia, used now by their own military and extensive naval forces. The Stevidians had intensified anti-piracy efforts in the area, along with Adaptes Astrates and the Macabéans. With few outlets, the pirates did the only violent thing they could get away with — in December 2021, they rebelled and thus began the First Theohuanacu Pirate War. Jonah found himself in the middle of it all.

An experienced captain, he was taken on as the XO aboard the *Gugamela*, named after an ancient queen from around these parts. They operated around Tlaloc, which was under an intense siege. But they were no match for a *Kríermada* looking to prove itself after its questionable performance during the War of Golden Succession. It took more than a year to end the naval siege of Targul Frumos and imperial fleets were never able to unlock the Sea of Otium Aqua after their initial repulse, so the *Kríermada* took out this frustration on the pirates. When the war ended in August of 2022, Jonah was once again very lucky to still be alive...and a free man.

War broke out again less than a year later, in February 2023. Tlaloc revolted and the pirates conducted an insurgency throughout southeastern Theohuanacu. This war lasted twice as long as the first, ending only in mid-2025 with the second fall of Tlaloc. This time, the city was razed to the ground. Its pirate population was taken and transplanted to Ruska, where they served mostly as agricultural labor for local landowners, many of them military veterans. The pirate councils in Tiwanaku and Palenque were driven underground, but their constituents were not yet ready to fully surrender to imperial will.

He first heard again of his brother, the only one he knew to have survive so many years ago, after the Second Theohuanacu Pirate War. Looking to bring in revenue, the Council of Palenque had invested in a small task force for a pirate captain known as 'Blue-Eyed' Nolan. As it turned out, it was not his first name. Nolan would confess this when he was captured and brought to trial before the Council months later, after he had conquered a small island to the west and declared independence. His own crew mutinied when news arrived that a task force led by Commodore Lauristen Reeves was within two days' range. 'Blue-Eyed' Nolan, or Liam Deringer as he was once known, returned a traitor.

His own name tainted now, Jonah left for Nicaro. He had heard of fighting there, although he wasn't exactly sure where 'there' was or what would be waiting for him at that place. All he knew was that his home was no longer so much of a home, and that perhaps soon enough it would follow the path of Tlaloc. Nicaro offered a new opportunity, a new life.

Little did he know that this path would reunite him with his brother.

OPERATION BROWN JACKAL

*"Our greatest problems were our
greatest moments of brilliance."*

— J. 'Green-Skinned' Deringer,
Our Struggle for the Open Seas
(2037 C.E.)

Corralejos Airport, Región Autónoma de Firmador

25 February 2028

A company's worth of men from the *asalto* battalion tasked with taking Corralejos during the previous days remained around the airfield's control tower. The enemy had not come out from within and the Macabéans preferred to starve their opposition rather than lost more lives storming the makeshift bunker. *Kapitán* Jero Felán, the *bandag* — company — commander, was under orders to shoot anybody who emerged. In the end, nobody was shot, as nobody has yet come out.

Finally, two days after the last of the fighting around Corralejos had ended, Felán decided to take the air control tower by force. The battalion wanted to move out and there was a general impatience over the whole matter. Two platoons advanced on the position from either side, a third setting itself up half-hidden behind on the hangars. The fourth was in reserve as well. The two actively approaching the building reached it quickly, its fire teams fanning out along the walls to either side of two entrances — one on each side of the tower. One soldier from each platoon felt for booby traps around the doors and then placed a small explosive charge on the steel doors.

With two loud booms, the doors were blown open. The imperial infantrymen rapidly infiltrated the building, spreading out within its halls in two teams to hunt for the enemy. It was dark and damp inside, and it smelled of must. There was an eerie silence, the kind where one could hear the water from the early morning's condensation now dripping to that mind-rattling tune. No gunshots rang out, no cries of pain or agony-streaked screams, simply the sound of the pipes and the noise of boots against the tile floors. It did not take long for two platoon's worth of men to clear the tower, finding nothing in the way of the enemy. There were blood stains all along the walls as if a massacre had been carried out, but the blood was old. This airfield had been in Chinadenga hands for many, many months now, well over a year even. It was empty now, anyway.

"*Kapitán*, you'll want to see this," someone finally said. It was *Primsargént* Ranolt Jut of II *Pieletón*.

Felán was waiting in one of the hangars near the towers, supervising the attack. He was taken to the tower by a light utility vehicle, one of his men already waiting for him and ready to show him down to what they had found. There was a two-story basement below it all and they went to the bottom, taking the stairs rather than the elevator. The electricity had been off in San Carlos for three days now and no emergency power source had been brought in yet.

When the *kapitán* got the room from which *Primsargént* Jut

had radioed him, he saw a group of eight men looking down into something. Breaking into their little circle around whatever it was they were observing, Felán finally saw the large square hole in the ground. There were two hemp rope stairs hanging from either flank of the opening and they led into a tunnel perhaps a dozen feet below. "Son of a bitch," said Felán. He thought to himself for a second and then, turning to the *primisargént*, added, "Take these men down into the tunnel and see where it goes."

"Yes, *kapitán*," sounded off Jut.

But, as they would soon enough find out, the enemy was long gone and the tunnels — at least, those around Corralejos airport — were long empty.

San Pecc, Región Autónoma de Firmador

27 February 2028

"One o' these days, ye're goin' t' run out o' lives, cap'n," said Mollen Jimmies, the four-toothed Tiwanakean.

Jonah chuckled, "One o' these days. But, nah today."

In their small craft sailed with them close to a hundred other men. He and his retinue had escaped south out of Corralejos, taking the tunnels out to the coastlines, where they were picked up by his ship, the *Soria II*. From there, they sailed the short way to San Pecc, where they arrived beneath the moon's dim light. These were dangerous times to be sailing in open waters, with imperial jets always prowling somewhere in the skies, but it was a necessary voyage.

A small ground crew was there waiting for them, helping the *Soria II*'s crew disembark. They were led by Quartermaster Necatl. Necatl had come to Palenque as a slave, pressed into military service early on. Poorly armed, unarmored, and untrained, he was lucky to live. Or perhaps it was not luck at all, for the man managed to make quite the name for himself. He earned his freedom during the First Pirate Theohuanacu War and rose to lead a crew during the second one. A capable fighter, this one was. Jonah nodded to him, saying, "Ahoy. I ne'er thought a pirate could be this jolly t' touch land."

Necatl laughed. "Different times," he said, laconically.

"Aye," was all that Jonah said in return.

"San Carlos has fallen," said the quartermaster. "Not much of a fight, I hear. Our buccaneers are fairin' well enough in th' countryside, but th' enemy has seemed t' fall upon our positions thar too strongly. 'Tis good that ye 'ave made it out. Yer brother feared ye were dead. Was ready t' go look fer yer body hisself."

Jonah sniffed. "No needs fer that. I can loot care o' meself."

"I've seen, cap'n," said Necatl. He started walking into the city. "Come, let us go see yer brother."

San Pecc was an ugly place. Horrid port facilities made of concrete dominated its bayfront perimeter. Behind it sprawled tens of thousands of squad buildings, whether factories, warehouses, homes, or shanties. The further from the coast one went, the poorer the city and its inhabitants. Along the outskirts were the worst of mankind, the starving, the criminals, and the homeless. These made for ready recruits into the local militias, which had allied with

the pirates to feed them slaves captured from the interior. Now they made up the frontline troops against imperial forces outside of the city. Despite its shortcomings, San Pecc had not yet fallen.

They took a truck, armed with a heavy machine gun on its trailer, into the city. Finally, they stopped in front of a mundane-looking administrative building near the center. Its walls were plains and lacked decoration, its surfaces awarded the practicality of a regime that did not concern itself with humanity, let alone the humanities. Nolan was waiting for them in his office on the second floor.

"Brother!" he exclaimed when Jonah and Necatl first walked in. Jimmies had stayed behind with the crew.

Jonah hugged him tightly. "'Tis good t' see ye," he said.

"Aye, aye. Here, 'ave a seat." Nolan gestured to two chairs on one side of a small table. 'Blue-Eyed' took the one on the other side.

"Thank ye, commodore," said Necatl, lightly.

"I hear th' news from Nicaro be grim since me departure," said Jonah. "I be sorry I didn' prepare our scallywags better. Me crew 'n I are ready t' return when ye deem proper. San Carlos should nah be marooned so readily, send me back, I implore ye. Ye would honor us. Thar are crews still thar who needs our help."

Nolan raised his hand. He rose and walked to an armoire that opened into a small bar, bottles of alcohol standing on several shelves. He took three squat, square glasses and filled them with *jinharem*. The sweet liquor filled them like a brown nectar. He screwed the cap back on the bottle and left it on the narrow bar ledge, bringing the filled glasses to the table. Each man took one. They toasted and raised their glasses to their mouth, letting the *jinharem* flow through them. This was the lifeblood of a pirate, after all. When all three were satisfied, they placed their glasses on the table and Nolan spoke, "Those scallywags are willin' sacrifices. Do nah spoil thar owns honor. Yer path be elsewhere, 'n believe me ye be much needed. I 'ave a plan, a plan that may jus' well allow us t' survive, 'n ye be a scallywag that I shall needs t' see this plan t' th' end."

"'N wha' be this plan?" asked Jonah.

Nolan smiled and rose. "Let us enjoy *jinharem* first. It may be our last," he said, walking back to the armoire for the whole bottle, bringing it back with him to the table to refill the three glasses. "Thar will be plenty o' time fer war speak later. Th' gods know thar be much warrin' left. Much warrin'."

Last edited by [The Macabees](#) on Sun Aug 12, 2018 4:18 pm, edited 1 time in total.

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Imbrinium
Diplomat

Posts: 589
Founded: Mar 03, 2008
Ex-Nation

by [Imbrinium](#) » Sat Sep 01, 2018 7:24 pm



30kms south of the City of Bended

The 406th combat hospital had been setup for three days now and it all seemed like a blur to combat surgeon Col. Enza Conti, she'd been on three surgeries just in the last 12hrs trying to save young lives from the front this was the second place sometimes depending on how injured the soldier was.

Since her landing three weeks ago she has seen hundred if not thousands of soldiers coming through the hospital. There had been at least two thousand deaths and countless wounded since the invasion. She was in the Greater Dienstadi war in Southern Greal and it wasn't this bad.

The enemy was playing a delaying action all the way back to the outskirts of the city in the suburbs and now the fighting it seemed was getting tougher and more intense across the whole front.

Enza thought to herself "These children some in their first year of enlistment, these brave young men, and women of our kingdom sent of all places to fight in this hellish place."

Just then a medevac was coming in smoke pouring out the left side and the left front windshield looked blurry for some reason, it all came clear when the ground teams open the left side pilot's door of the MSA-2F and took the pilot out. The aircraft was loaded, and the pilot looked pretty bad having taken shrapnel to the windshield and face. She could tell he's lost an eye and he was losing blood fast from a neck wound, he'd be dead right now if it hadn't been for his crew. They moved him in and put him into surgery she started off by clamping the artery that was cut into luckily it wasn't his main that was something to be thankful for his eye was gone and there was a piece of shrapnel in the cavity where it once was.

Ezna thought "How in the hell is this kid still alive"

Just then his BP started to drop, and they rushed to stop him from going into more shock than he already was in, the body could only take so much, and this kid was reaching the limits quickly. There has to be more blood loss and sure, enough there was it was internal what looked like a minor cut was a piece of the windshield that had made it into his lower neck and nicked an artery the one she thought was clamped off. She cut him right their blood went everywhere as she tried to find the nick and repair it or clamp it off till it could be repaired, right now the kid was in grave danger and just then it happened. The pilot's heart stopped a 250lbs nurse known as big K jumped up and started CPR as everyone started their crash protocols, another nurse started the first line drugs and the doc tried to fine and clamp the artery, wasn't going to be easy with the amount of blood in the wound. The shock trauma team had minutes to save the pilot and it wasn't looking good, the team worked for what seemed like an hour but in the end, it had been five minutes and there wasn't a response out of the pilot. Dr Conti called it as her heart sank again the team had done everything right and he had time but sometimes none of that matters. Dr. Conti couldn't dwell on what just happened there was more trauma coming in from the front that need help, the pilot was covered in an Imbrinium flag and left there till the mortuary personal could come to retrieve the body.

3kms from the front.

It had been a hard month of delaying actions by Scand forces they didn't retreat without a fight or a surprise time had been lost and lives more than command had expected. But this is war all plans go out the window when the metal hits the meat.

The front looked like the worse part of some religious text or some dooms day movie, buildings on fire and the smoke hung low over the area in the background large plumes of smoke poured out the city. The stench of death was everywhere. There where small gains across the front block by block house by house. Tracers and explosions where everywhere the advance had slowed to a crawl as mine fields and roadblocks where everywhere.

A few kilometers south of the frontlines in a basement of a store where division and corps commanders listen to a briefing from the combine task force deputy command Gen. Salvatore "Godfather" Rossi.

"Evening gentlemen I've called this briefing to give you a warning order on operation "Railgarden" the operation to enter and clear the suburbs short the down town area of Bendred. This operation will be done in four phases in which I will get into within the order."

"The situation within Bendred is at best this, there are roughly 1.5 to 2 million civilians left in the city. Roughly 500,000 to 200,000 soldiers and between 1000 to 2000 tanks and over 3000 other armored vehicles."

"Air superiority comes and goes over the city daily that could change hour to hour depending on the operation and the means of Scand to mount air attacks."

"Phase one is the center will start off the operation with the by moving forward toward the first phase like in their AO sector. The responsible operating units in the center sector will move north of the forward line of troops, with a passage of lines through the zones within the operational sector SUNDIAL. The engineers will breach any obstacles in the way opening the way for reconnaissance units to move out and find and find the enemy."

"Twelve hours to twenty-four hours after the first movement of the units in sector SUNDIAL the units in PILEDRIVER and FELIX will move out through their forward line of troops threw the passage of lines just like the units in SUNDIAL."

"All units operating in all three sectors commanders will call up all phase lines as they make and push through them. Once all forces hit phase line COPPER which is also the LOA "Limit of Advance" at objective PEMBROKE. At objective PEMBROKE far side security will be setup in preparation for phase two."

"Phase two far side security will be setup across objective PEMBROKE, the key here is to secure the bridges across the river at all of the bridges there are only a few bridges are solid enough to be to hard to blow up without a lot of effort, if these bridges are blown that would channel us into these few bridges where we could get pinned in and bogged down there. Phase two will also see a change in the operation the change will be the left and right flanks will push out passage of lines and the forward line of troops in an effort no smaller than Corps size, I know marines don't use Corps, but you will adjust to make those numbers happen before happening."

"Phase three the unit's operating in AO sectors PILEDRIVER and FELIX will move north pushing the enemy into the center or north till they hit their objective GALWAY which is also the LOA "Limit of Advance" once there they will turn in toward each other and move to close the gap. Once the circle is closed phased three will end"

"Phase four the units in SUNDIAL sector will move north threw the passage of lines and the forward line of troops and all forces will move north and kill or capture any Scand military personal within the kill zone. Once link with all three forces is complete there will be a forty-eight hour to seventy-two-hour reorg and refit and spreading out across the front line and reestablish the FEBA "Forward Edge of Battle Area" and prepare for the next operation to take the city center and move to take the rest of city."

"Ok gentlemen this is operation "Railgarden" in short everything in detail is in your folders, and questions."

There where a few questions from the priority of fires, fuel supplies, air support all answered. Everyone in the room had done this in training and some in combat in the Greater Dienstad war in Southern Greal. The operation was sound the numbers were effective to handle the operation without reinforcements unless things change while mission underway.

The commanders in the three sectors broke off into their groups and discussed their parts of the operations and look at the maps and overlays. The operation would be ready within twenty-four to thirty-six hours.

Thirty hours later:

Everything across the front that could be done had been, and everyone was read to move. Deep recce units hadn't reported and thing new requiring a new briefing or changing of the mission.

Surgical strikes and artillery hit targets to knockout hard points and any armor near the FEBA. The engineering company of Echo company 134th Regiment moved into place Pionierpanzer moved into place with there 170mm demo gun and let lose with their charge blowing holes into make shift paths through road blocks. Once cleared sappers moved into the breach and planted large demo charges the open the gaps, the sappers could be seen in night vision counting down as the blast blinded most and the deafening noise and shock wave drove most to cover. Before the dust had settled armored vehicles moved through the opening and advanced down the streets about two blocks the first IFVs moved up and stopped and unloaded the soldiers in the rear. The squads moved up and start to clear buildings along the first cross street.

Just seconds after the infantries first moves an ATGM slammed in the lead track ripping into the armor and killing the driver instantly. As soon as the missile hit automatic gun fire opened up striking eight soldiers cutting down six instantly. The lead track's wingman opened fire with suppressive fire and popped smoke to cover soldiers trying to get to the wounded and open counterfire to suppress the enemy action.

"Baron 4 this is Baron 3 contact, contact, contact, Baron 2 hit and on fire under fire soldiers down."

"Baron 3 this is Baron 4 we are moving up to cover, break, do you need medvac or casvac?"

"Baron 3 and 4 this Cade 34 we are moving to cover into a strong point please cover!"

"Roger Cade 34 moving to cover"

Baron 3 moved up passing Baron 2 now on fire, as soon as Baron 3 turned and passed the Cade 34 two ATGMs hit the IFV and blowing the turret off the vehicle killing the crew.

This played out across the front with mixed results some breaches and advances fared better some worse but advances on the first day weren't as far as expected and the death toll first few hours were 242 casualties

A time of change before it was too late, it was time to take back the initiative and fight like the only the Crown knew how to fight. The change came to no surprise to the command nor its field commanders the gravity of what was at stake.

Moving along a main assault route (MAR) Golf and Lima companies from the third regiment 98th marine division moved a four-lane avenue the leading platoons moved up to a cross street with the support of a wheeled armored platoon. The first two fire teams made their way on the opposite side of the road to setup far side security as the first fire teams moved down the street as the other two held the corners and cover the crossing of the linear danger area, so the rest of the platoons could cross.

"Levi 34 to Ginzu 24 and Agony 4 we have the first teams across the DLA moving to secure further up the road to make room for everyone."

"Roger Levi 34 copy all"

Just then gun fire opened up down the street followed by two sizable explosions.

"Levi this Loner 6 CONTACT! DIRECT FRONT!"

"Roger sitrep Loner 6"

Just then a tank round slams into the lead vehicle of Agony platoon ripping it apart in an explosion that covered the road.

"Loner 6 this is Levi 36 sitrep over"

"Levi 36/34 we have a same size maybe one size large element intermixed IFVs and tanks, need support, working the issue now"

"Loner 6 this Levi 36 roger out"

"Brutis 36 this is Levi 36 requesting tank support have a possible company size element with armor over"

"Levi 36 this Brutis 36 we are pretty thin here, but we will push what I can out"

Within a few minutes a platoon of Tanks were rolling toward Levi 36 position to assist in the battle.

"Gator 24 this is Loner 34 move your support team up to cover my heavies"

"Roger Loner 34"

Gator second platoon moved his support fire team up and opened up support base of fight on the enemy. Loner third platoon's heavies what they call the anti-tank team with support move to a good kill spot to try and knock out an IFV that was pinning down the rest of third platoon. As soon as Gator's support opened up it forced the IFV to move up and exposing itself to the anti-tank team. The team hit the Scand IFV with two rounds from a Carl Gustav MK8 knocking the IFV out. The rest of third platoon was free to move up to the supporting positions opposite of Gator to cover as Gator moved up. Agony Platoon now down a vehicle had pushed around, and they had one vehicle still in support in the middle and two on the right moving to flank if possible.

Everyone was moving slower they knew there was at least one tank out there maybe more and more IFVs out there but where was the question. Fourth platoon from Lima company sent a UAV team up with a short-range UAV to make contact. While most of the units had UAV support in at the platoon level the UAV had been destroyed when shot down over a target building two days before. As the team moved in range the team setup and launched the UAV they caught the tank and one IFV moving north away from the engagement zone. The team quickly called in for an air strike.

"Blade 77 this Lexus 42 have three baddies headed north from grid JK45 6748-62834 targets will be a one TANGO ALPHA NOVEMBER KILO and one INDIA FOXTROT VICTOR."

"Lexus 42 roger turning to you be there 30 seconds"

"Roger Blade 77"

"Lexus 42, Blade 77 has them Rifle times two now"

With that the aircraft let loose two air to ground missiles striking their targets seconds later. Blade 77 stated confirmed kill on both and could see injured moving in the area.

The Loner platoons and Gator platoons moved through the area clearing the buildings. After the fight was all over the tank platoon showed up wondering why they were called but decided to stay close just in case more action was to come.

This action and similar actions some larger some smaller happened all over the front as the IAF pushed north. The front made its first phase line ahead of projected times and could rest and dig in for a few hours before moving toward the next phase line another 25kms

away.

When I was young I used to pray for a bike, then I realized that God doesn't work that way, so I stole a bike and prayed for forgiveness. "Deus vult" is Latin for "God wills it" and it was the cry of the people at the declaration of the First Crusade by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in 1095.

#MAGA, WWG1WGA , Q



Mokastana
Ambassador

Posts: 1554
Founded: Feb 20, 2007
Democratic Socialists

by **Mokastana** » Fri Sep 07, 2018 5:41 pm



Council Government Building Plaza del Salvador, San Tomas Firmador

"Tsarina" Sasha Tchernova might have been pretty once. The tan she had been building up over the past few months only highlighted the long pale streaks of scar tissue across her face. The pattern of shrapnel marks from a failed assassination attempt stretching from below the neck line to her auburn hair where a bit of creative styling hid some, but not all, of the damage. Not even 40 yet, all signs of youth had been lost, over the years, either during her time a drug addicted whore in war torn Red Star Union, or the stress of surviving the harsh union winters as a refugee. What hadn't been lost to those was stolen by Varathon Blood Fever, including her once beautiful voice. A long time ago she once enjoyed singing a child to sleep, but those were days of a different life, one she wasn't even sure was hers anymore. These days she rarely spoke, instead entrusting her silent demeanor to speak on her behalf. Especially during meetings of the council.

Although the Golden Throne claimed ownership of the nation, governance and civilian control fell to her. She had been forced to move her most important assets out of Zvezda when the Ordenites overran the nation, meaning all of her resources were now gambled on the success of Gente Del Agua. She didn't like it, but she reminded herself she was living on borrowed time. Anything she had now was better than the cold grounds of a burned out building, and she vowed to die before ever living like that again. Of course, these days she slept on an Emperor size mattress with cotton sheets from a nation she didn't care to remember, in a tall tower downtown. At least when she could sleep. But now was not the time for rest, it was a council meeting, meaning numerous voices fought over her drug money to make Firmador something better than a 3rd world drug den.

"The Mokans are selling surplus weapons, trucks, even armored vehicles. Not only would they be useful, but they would be legal. Vlad, tell me the police wouldn't benefit from a few armored transports."

The man speaking was Hector 'Carrion' Moldova, a Mokan gun runner who had helped the Tsarina build up her weapon stockpile. From rifles to guided missiles, he was the man she used to supply her forces. Although the Macabeeans were beginning to disarm other militias, hers had been left alone, for now. Still, she knew it would only be a matter of time.

Vladimir Smirnov, the man Hector called out, shrugged and nodded solemnly. "Our current police assets are, productive, but we still have trouble in the slums and outskirts of the cities. The PMCs training our soldiers are a major benefit, but perhaps a few extra armored vehicles would be as well. Especially if they've been well maintained."

Vlad was a former Zvezdan Police Colonel, and was now commander of all Police Forces under the Tsarina's territory. His expertise in policing a destabilized nation helped wonderfully here. Nicaro and Firmador police to use his tactics and lessons to create rapport with the locals, and to crack down on threats to public security. His rule was harsh, but fair, enforcing laws that were simple but posted in most village squares. For the moment, they only focused on stability, and he was not alone in this mission.

Alejandro "Fetch" Mondragon, the man who negotiated the deal to

give the Tsarina her position of power, had been brokering deals with PMCs from Mokastana to train her police and rapid reaction forces. The Tsarina suspected the PMCs were really Mogan Federal agents, but so far their training seemed useful. At least one police group trained under them had proven valuable at destroying her enemies, but she wondered about their loyalty. She didn't know the long term goals of the Mokans, and she feared they would not be in her best interests.

"Yes, that is all well and good, but vehicles need roads, we are slowly scraping by fixing up the towns highways, but we need more funding."

A short blonde man by the name of Hans Wagner spoke up this time. He had been a business manager in the Cartel, and now he had been 'promoted' to civil servant, rebuilding his home country on drug money. Next to him sat another local, the face of the Tsarina's "government", a politician by the name of Esteban Rojas. Esteban was an older man of Nicaro descent, and thus had a few feelings for the white Ordenite native next to him. He took command of the pause to interrupted Hans with thoughts of his own.

"Our roads are not perfect, but what we need our schools to keep the kids off the streets and jobs to give them a better wage. I've seen the manufacturing plants you funded in Liberia, selling cheap goods to The Golden Throne and other nations. We need that here in San Tomas as well. You want tax money, the people need more money to tax. Paying for free food banks in the barrios and slums will get you their loyalty of the poor, and police can respond to gang violence, but we need prosperity to make gang life undesirable to the masses."

The tsarina listened and raised a hand, silencing the room before she spoke. Her raspy voice was quiet, but commanding. She spoke in her native tongue, because although she understood the native tongue, she still tripped on the words, and she needed to be clear. Her translator, a young pale woman, Laura Kruger, translated the words of the Tsarina for the group:

"Vlad, get Carrion a list of things your police need. Carrion, we'll pay you for them when they reach our docks."

She turned to a silent member of the table, a local military Commander by the name of Dominic Castillo.

"Same for you Senor Castillo, whatever your special forces need to hunt down these traitors, you can have, just don't spend all my money."

Esteban, I understand your request, but until the roads to Liberia are safe, I cannot build factories here of the caliber you want. The food and water shipments only cost me money when they are stolen, and I don't want to risk the town's wealth just yet. In the meantime, we'll start on investing in the schools and bring in more doctors. Hans, make that highway a top priority for your improvement project, it's the lifeblood of San Tomas unless we want to rely on Imperial scraps. I want police to be able to secure it no matter the issue. Any other concerns?"

The meeting continued for a little while before they adjourned. It felt weird to be governing, but if she could put her ill gotten millions into improving the lives of her new 'children', then maybe it would be worth it. The women's shelters had been a good start, and after visiting one, and seeing the positive impact she could have on these communities, she had decided to be involved in local governance after all. It was by no means a government by the people, minus one or two local influencers like Estaban, but it was benevolent. Which was more than Sasha could say about the Communists or Fascists of her homeland.

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