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Senator

Posts: 3870
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by **The Macabees** » Sun Sep 09, 2018 6:46 pm

QUOTE

THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN CAROL, PART II

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"Palenque was my home for six months before deploying to Gholgoth. Our commanders were aggressive, always stubbornly so. We lost many men, many friends, and still to this day sometimes I wish I had been one of them."

— Interview with *Gi'Sargént* Berndt Letz, veteran of the Monzarki auxiliaries; 17 August 2044.

Palenque Proper

March 2028

"He must still be close. Bring me the tracker," screamed *Komandánt* Rickards.

Van Morr nodded and headed further down the tunnel toward its darkness. The sound of the rain above was still tremendous as steel shells pounded the ground. The tracker hoped that the innocent had found it to safety, but he had seen too many dead children to believe that truly. He sighed and muttered, "I've seen too many dead, period. After this, I'm going to take a bloody vacation."

"Keep focused, man." Rickards' voice startled Van Morr, who hadn't realized the *komandánt* was following him.

It became so dark that any and all last ray of light disappeared into the nothingness around them, although with their hands they could feel the dirt walls that closed in from all sides. Chunks of earth shook and fell with every mortar which struck above, the mud and dirt falling in their hair and eyes. The air was thick and hard to breathe. The Guffingfordi tracker had already pulled out his sidearm, holding it in front of him as he continued deeper and deeper down the tunnel. The *komandant* had brandished his own weapon, as well. They continued moving in silence now, only their heavy breathing

interrupting the faint sound of battle on the other side of the meters' worth of packed earth between them and the surface.

"He must still be close," repeated the *komandánt*, this time in a hoarse whisper that still seemed somehow loud within the narrow confines of the passage. Moving through them in large groups must have been horrid and dangerous, nerve-wrecking with the incessant agitation of the land. No, fighting in these depths must not have been pretty. And it was common. In fact, imperial soldiers often sought it out, constantly looking to discover and destroy the tunnels that extended as far as Tiwanaku's hinterland to the north. But there were so many and they could not all be destroyed at once.

The passageway forked suddenly. "Hurry, find a lead," urged Rickards, the frustration in his voice evident.

"I cannot *will* it, sir. In this light, I'll be lucky to catch a whiff of his scent or some such mundanity as that." He bent down to take a knee, removing a tablet from one of his pant leg pockets. Its light was dim but he was able to make it brighter. He handed it to the *komandánt*. "Hold this, please. While I see what I can find."

Rickards took the device begrudgingly, clearly unhappy with being told what to do. The man would live. Van Morr looked for footprints, but the ground here had been heavily traveled in recent days. Most likely used by insurgents to move through the city and outside. They traveled like this when possible, which was most of the time, as it kept them out of the sight of prowling ISR UAVs. With his finger, he directed Rickards toward the wall, which the *komandánt* shined with the tablet. "Illuminate it there," he said, "yes, perfect. You're a natural, sir."

"Don't push it, *Gi'sargént*," retorted Rickards, who did as asked regardless.

There was nothing to be seen, though. No torn clothing. No abandoned supplies. Not even a visible drop of fresh blood. It was too murky and poorly illuminated for any of the senses to get much sense of anything at all. "Nothing," confirmed Van Morr. "We should turn back, sir. The men need you in the surface."

Rickards' eyes flashed toward Van Morr like whips, flames dancing inside of them. With a growl, he said, "Don't presume to tell me what my men need."

"I apologize," said the Guffingfordi, a slight accent on his *Dienstadi* words. "I must reiterate, I fear we are unlikely to find him today, sir. It is my duty to be honest."

"You're duty to be honest?" asked the *komandánt*, incredulously. "And now you lecture me on the duties of a soldier of the empire? Are you calling an *officer* of the empire ignorant, soldier? For your sake, I hope not. Anyway, our pursuit will end when I say so. Are you sure there is no clue? No sign of Captain Carol? You would do well to be *honest* now and exhaust all possible resource. I am not keen on failure."

The tracker grunted but went on with inspecting the area more closely. He took the tablet himself this time. But even after a good while longer of looking for *something, anything*, Van Morr found nothing. And that is what he told Rickards. "Nothing, *komandánt*. Not a godsdamn thing, sir."

Still unconvinced at first, Rickards finally relented. "Okay, okay. C'mon, let's get back to the men."

They felt their way back down the tunnel the way they had come. It was more familiar by now, but not familiar enough. It took some time to traverse again. Above, the mortars were making themselves more sparse. Under the growing silence, Van Morr said, "I know he killed our men, hundreds of them, thousands, and in vicious ways. But surely, there's more. No offense intended, of course, sir. I'm just

curious. Why do you want him dead so bad? Enough to chase him down a black tunnel on your own."

At first the *komandánt* was silent. Then Rickards said, "It's really none of your business, soldier. Really. Is it not enough that he has killed many of your comrades?"

"The information could possibly help me track him down," said the Guffingfordi.

"If you want to know, I'll tell ya," answered the *komandánt*. "I suppose you being the tracker and all, knowing this may come in handy." He stopped, taking a deep breath. Then, "He killed my boy, *Gi'sargént*. He killed my boy. My son. He was an officer serving in the *regulares* when the war broke out. He was with the first unit to respond to the rebellion. The kid sought glory, like his father, but more importantly he sought promotion. And promoted he got, 'til a road bomb took his life. That IED was placed by someone under the command of Captain Carol. That makes it that pirate scumbag's fault as anybody else's and I will make him pay for that personal loss to me. I promise you that. Even if it takes me to the end of this war or after, I will make that pirate pay."

"I believe you, sir," replied the Guffingfordi.

They walked in silence the rest of the way.

By the time they arrived back to where they had come from, the bombardment had ended entirely. Much of the surface was most likely still polluted, the chemicals most likely still active in some place. Hopefully, most of the men found safe quarters. But experience that said some, perhaps many, were likely to have been caught by the attack. When the light finally penetrated to them and they emerged once more into the cellar of the home to which it belonged, the men were still waiting for them there. The wounded had been attended to, although one of them had died. Four total in his guard unit. And for all the sacrifice, Captain Carol had gotten away. The *komandánt* grunted and looked down at his leg, where a bullet had removed a chunk of meat. It was bleeding, the blood soaking the uniform in that spot. He had forgotten about it, but now as the adrenaline subsided the pain was coming to him. He let one of his men dress it.

To Van Morr he turned and said, "We *will* find him."

"We will," nodded the tracker.

Estoria, Town 35km Northwest of Palenque

June 2028

The imperial strategy behind the Siege of Palenque had been changing since the end of the last year. Like in Tiwanaku, the military was pulling back, entrenching itself along a densely fortified perimeter around the two cities. To go in or out required passing or fighting through military checkpoints, forward operating bases, and other defenses. Papers were always asked for and undocumented migrants were often arrested and thrown back into the cesspools that were the two besieged urbanities.

But to think that this stopped the insurgents from striking deep behind imperial lines was mistaken. Hundreds of tunnels crossed beneath the lines leading to thousands of exit points scattered across the southwestern plains. Dozens were being built on any given day, dozens of others destroyed all the while. The empire deployed its technology to fight the growth of more and more subterranean routes, using vehicle-based ground-penetrating radar as well as radars mounted on cable-operated drill-like drones that tunneled through the earth. But as imperial forces accelerated their own efforts to plug the holes in its sea-and-land blockade of the two cities, the pirates responded in kind.

Most of what was once lush farmland, fruit tree groves, and small industrial plants was now burned down or artillery pocked. It was the focus of an intense insurgency that had plagued southwestern Theohuanacu since soon after the start of the rebellion. The war had taken a clear toll. Even the roads that cut through the countryside like winding black snakes were in desperately poor condition, chunks of the asphalt missing in spots throughout. The farm houses and villas had all been burned down or destroyed. Even the small villages had been deserted, refugees migrating north toward the Zealand Prefecture in droves. Imperial soldiers were congregated along the front, with firebases and larger encampments guarding the major highways at regular intervals toward the north. Still, even as the *Ejermacht* gathered strength, the pirates found plenty of opportunities to cause mayhem. They moved in small groups, avoiding detection and counter-insurgency forces.

A convoy of ninety trucks, guarded by a platoon of mechanized auxiliary forces, rolled south on the *Kapes Sukratas*. The Sukratas was the largest highway that traveled in a north-south direction and had been the main artery for imperial logistical operations to combat the rebellion. It was protected by a platoon of mechanized auxiliary infantry, including four Type 52GT infantry fighting vehicles and four attached heavy armored personnel carriers.

Convoys like this one were common. And they made for good targets.

Tall grass had taken the place of vineyards, barley, and wheat fields and a section of this newborn wilderness of overgrown weeds flanked the *Kapes Sukratas* on both sides for a considerable stretch. One one side waited a fist-sized crew of insurgents, about fifty of them hidden within the countryside. On the opposite side was another fist, and two more were about one kilometer north and south. A fifteen minute forced march north and west and there were rolling hills that rose at most little more than a thousand meters. The two hundred or so militants waited in relative silence as the convoy continued to make its way south.

They had to be careful because three ISR UAVs circled the area, scanning the air and the ground for threats. The empire had been fighting this kind of war for a long time and they had gotten good at detecting insurgent forces attempting to maneuver on the surface in large groups. It was why the pirates had been relegated to using their network of underground passages.

As the convoy began to pass through before them, they allowed the first section of trucks to drive through to the end. The IFV that led them went with them. An Itomoxala eagle screamed overhead. Dark, low clouds darkened the sun's light, casting a shadow across the land. The second segment entered the guarded strip ten minutes later.

The leading IFV penetrated as far as the middle without incident, as did the first and second truck of the twenty-truck segment. The third followed, close behind and in good order. **BOOM.**

It flipped on its side, its hull sustaining the blast well enough to protect the crew inside. Its axle had been blown clear off, however, and its hull was right charred. The truck behind it swerved to avoid a collision, only narrowly missing. The rest of the convoy accelerated and went around the smoking Tiznao. The IFV's turret began to swerve and, slowing, it pulled to the side. A rocket flashed from the grass and shrieked toward the Type 52, striking it on the front corner of its hull to release a counteracting metal plate. Another rocket struck then, and the vehicle opened up its 37mm main gun.

The IFV stopped. Its rear ramp went down, hitting the shredded black pavement with a thud. Four soldiers stepped out. They deployed along the embankment on the eastern margin of the highway. Further to the rear of the segment the heavy APC also stopped, releasing twelve armored infantrymen. They deployed to the west.

The enemy did not give the convoy very much time to prepare. A hidden machinegun opened fire then, lighting up the fireteam that had just exited the IFV. These fell to the ground for cover and the Type 52 opened fire with its chaingun. It fired one of the missiles from a turret-attached launcher, striking an insurgent rocket team.

Rifle fire cracked almost simultaneously, creating a deluge of gunpowder and bullets that peppered the two vehicles and their dismounted infantry. Imperial infantrymen responded in kind.

BOOM. Another truck was flipped over by a massive explosion, another IED. This time it was further down the road, near the end of the kill zone. The trucks in line tried to skirt around the victim, but one collides directly into the back of the burning wreckage of the Tiznao-60. Armored as they are, this bomb must have been larger than the last, for this one ripped apart the loose articles of the undercarriage and threw the shell of the hull perhaps five feet off the road. If there were any survivors, they were hurting and on a thin lifeline. A thick column of smoke collected from the separate tendrils that rose from the burned out vehicle like steam.

Overhead, the UAVs tracked insurgent movements as the battle intensified. They coordinated the return fire, helping the IFV and the APC suppress enemy fire as their infantry teams inspect the two targeted supply trucks. Survivors are pulled out and taken to the armored vehicles, where they were at least ready to be extracted as soon as the rest of the segment drove through. Another heavy APC, this one further to the rear, joins the fight and its own infantry contingent dismounts.

What felt like a handful of minutes must have been over an hour. The third and fourth segments had accelerated to close the interval gaps between them, hoping for strength in numbers to get through a kill zone that was still hot.

The insurgents were creeping closer, so close that one could almost feel their breath on the back of their neck. They liked to keep the distance between themselves and their imperial enemy as minimal as possible as to make it difficult to suppress them with artillery, lest the empire was willing to accept friendly casualties. They hid well in the brush, shooting and then moving to avoid return fire. To the north and the south, the two other pirate fists also started to close in, ambushing the escaping elements of the convoy's second convoy and the nose of the third segment.

The sound of helicopter blades came from the distance, like a low thunder warning of a coming storm. They appeared as dots in the sky first, three objects. As they flew closer their shapes suddenly turned into two attack helicopters, RoLu-21s, and a tilt-rotor transport. The attack helicopters closed the distance the quickest, using their nose-mounted cannons to utterly devastate insurgent positions in the weeds.

With the battle's favor turning, the insurgents began to withdraw. They fled toward the hills.

As they did, the tilt-rotor veered and deposited its contents directly in the withdrawal path. Three squads worth of armored special forces, *grup koda*, dismounted and positioned themselves to catch the retreating enemy in the tighter confines of the shallow valleys and ravines that scarred the nearby hills.

Most of the pirates melted away, surviving for another fight. Many were killed and a good number, perhaps fifteen in all, were captured.

The convoy continued to drive south, its escorts moving again to find their rightful place within the string of vehicles they protected. After chasing the rebels until they could no longer be tracked, and where they had fragmented into so many smaller units it was impossible to chase them all, the attack helicopters turned to escort the convoy the rest of the way to their destination. The tilt-rotor went in the opposite direction, toward its base further north.

Barbakán El Glorioso, 176km Northeast of Palenque
July 2028

Van Morr got a call in the early morning hours with orders to take a helicopter flight to *Barbakán El Glorioso*, the northernmost fortification along the *Kapes Sukratas*. It sprawled into the fields, its perimeter marked by three walls. One was a barb wire fence as tall as three men standing, then a concrete wall of the same height, and finally an even taller concrete wall with guard towers at fast intervals. It made a hard fortress to penetrate. Never once had the pirates been able to breach its walls and it was not from a lack of effort. Mortar attacks occurred aplenty, but a chemical laser point-defense system managed to contain most of it. It was a sensible decision, then, to bring the prisoner here after he had been picked up along the highway further south. Apparently, the poor bastard had been captured while withdrawing to the hills. *Grup Koda* operatives had swooped in for the capture, having prior intelligence of his involvement in the attack. An attack they were intent on leaving unprevented so that the counter-ambush would go as planned.

All in all, the ploy had cost three injured drivers, an injured infantryman, and several vehicles in need of repairs. A small price altogether. It could have been worse, much worse. A soldier could have died. The *Fuermak* had slowly been introducing a fleet of autonomously driven trucks, but most of these were prioritized for Gholgoth, where there was an intense focus on managing the logistics footprint behind over a billion soldiers and civilian contractors directly involved in the war effort. It needed to come here. Those three wounded could have been none.

The chopper ride was short. He was only sixty kilometers away, spending his time in the small town of Xelatogal. A short drive from the firebase, it had maybe two thousand inhabitants. One of the few places left in the empire that hadn't become bloated with people and more people. Despite its lack of size, its name was household throughout the area. All the men knew of the Xelatogal whorehouses. Dozens of them, all along the *Kapes Sukratas*, their bright multi-colored lights flashing in fancy patterns around tacky signs. They were decorated by drawings of things like rabbit heads, legs, and a pussycat.

Van Morr liked the one by the name of Macuilxōchitl. The girls were nice.

Komandánt Rickards was waiting for him at El Glorioso's landing pad. The base had taken its name from the Zarbian auxiliaries that had been calling it home for the past nine months. They had another 15 ahead of them. Guards patrolled the walls and from where the helicopter hovered he could see the well-protected machine gun placements with clarity.

"You're late, *Gí'sargént*," said Rickards.

"I got here as fast as I can, sir." Van Morr put his hand over his eyes when he caught the HIM-TAC heading toward them. "They must be here for us."

Rickards turned to look. "They're here to take us to him."

The HIM-TAC pulled up in front of them. The front passenger door opened and a short officer stepped out. "*Aftleutnant* Janara Miraja, sir. I am here to escort you and *Gí'sargént* Van Morr to the prisoner, Eric Giroudan. You two, me, *Sargént* Mikal Gerova who is driving my vehicle are part of a very small group of people who know of Giroudan's retrieval."

"Why the secrecy?" asked Rickards.

Miraja proffered a wicked smile. "We figured it would give you more

freedom when conducting your interrogation."

The HIM-TAC took them to the command nucleus of the base, where a small surface jail connected with a subterranean network of interrogation rooms and high-security cellblocks. High profile enemy POWs were kept in isolation here, regularly questioned for intelligence, oftentimes to death. Torture was not used regularly, but intelligence operatives took on a very scientific approach to experimentation. Nothing was off limits. Nothing.

They parked in front of a squat building that seemed smaller than it should have been. It had an elegant desert architecture to it. Its sliding doors opened automatically for them. They felt the climate control immediately. *Aftleutnant* Miraja led them past a front desk, where two soldiers stood at attention after calling ahead of the *komandánt*. Down the passageways, it was more of the same, soldiers who worked in the building stopping at attention within sight of the party. They arrived at a large, thick metallic door guarded by two soldiers armed with assault rifles. A third one stood behind a wooden desk. They stood at attention.

"At ease," said Miraja. The three guards relaxed, widening their stance.

From behind the desk, the one said, "Good morning, *aftleutnant*. They are expecting you. May I see clearance for your two guests?"

"Identification?" asked Rickards, arching an eyebrow. He looked at the insignia on his uniform.

"Sorry, sir," answered the one behind the desk. "Top secret clearance is required to pass this point. I am required to ask to see it."

It was Miraja who replied. She passed two slips of paper to the soldier. "Here," she said. "I have them."

The soldier looked at them for a minute, seemingly reading even the fine print. The other two, the ones with the rifles on either side of the door, did not move. Their eyes remained fixed straight ahead and they stood with a relaxed preparedness, as if ready to defend the door at any minute. Finally, he handed the papers back to her, and said, "All clear, *aftleutnant*. Thank you, *komandánt*."

The door buzzed open, giant locks sliding loose. It swung backward, slowly, its weight no doubt difficult to shift. They walked through and into a hall that took them past a small room where other guards were playing cards. They hastily stood to attention when the party passed them, but quickly returned to the game when they were gone. Miraja led them to an elevator at the end, which opened almost as soon as she pressed the call button. It took them down below ground, falling rapidly until it came to a soft bounce and finally to a stop several hundred feet below. The doors opened again to reveal a large lobby-like room with another guard post surveying a metallic gate that barred entry from the floor to the ceiling.

An electronic voice sounded over an intercom. It was female, but robotic. "CLEARED."

The gate gradually slid open, almost like it was dragging. They headed through, into a wide, well-lit tunnel that led deeper into the complex. There were several hatch doors, but all left opened. They would be undoubtedly closed in case of an emergency, such as an escape attempt. It was safe to say that any opportunity for escape down here was slim at best, and in fact the only escape truly achievable here was death.

Led by two guards, they headed toward where Giroudan was being held. While walking, Miraja said, "The subject has been here for two weeks. He's been interrogated by local staff several times, always in relation to his participation in attacks on imperial troops and in the assassination of *Koronel* Deg Yonoros. They tried everything. Waterboarding. Cramped isolation. Wall standing. Sleep deprivation.

Everything. The prisoner hasn't cracked yet, but I believe we are a good place to begin negotiations."

"Makes sense," nodded Rickards. Van Morr remained silent. The *komandánt* asked, "Health?"

"Healthy enough," responded Miraja.

They walked past several cell blocks. The walls here were made of the original earth's stone, with steel doors barring the only man-made exit from the rooms. There was only a slit large enough to pass food through the doors, no windows. It was said that the doors and walls were thick enough to suppress even the shouts, cries, and desperation. Some of the interrogation rooms were open with the lights on. Some of them had strange-looking machines that Rickards could only guess at their purpose. Torture, most likely. Whatever they did, it did not seem pleasant at all. Van Morr shuddered. With all the death he had seen, this was...different.

Stopping at one of the doors finally, Miraja said, "This is it, *komandánt*. Are you ready?"

Rickards nodded and said, "Yes. Slap him around a bit when we get in, *gi'sargént*. Slap him about good."

"Yes, sir," answered the Guffingfordi.

Miraja pressed a palm-sized pad on the wall and it lit up, a scanner illuminating her hand. The system buzzed and the cellblock opened. The prisoner was on the ground in the fetal position, naked. His hair had grown down past his shoulders and a thick beard covered his face. Muscles were beginning to disappear and soften, probably from both a lack of movement and malnutrition. Giroudan didn't move.

Van Morr entered first, picking the prisoner up by the arms and throwing him up against the wall. He held them there with his hand around the man's neck, then struck him in the stomach with his fist. Giroudan crumpled and coughed. Van Morr picked him up again, this time above his head, and then slammed him on the ground. He heard a crack and Giroudan writhed.

"That'll be enough, *gi'sargént*," said Van Morr. "We have rules. We are civilized. You cannot simply treat the prisoners how you'd like. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Van Morr.

The prisoner started laughing. "Civilized, you say. You have a sense of humor, it seems."

The Guffingfordi tracker struck Giroudan again, the man's face hitting the ground without a cushion. His temple split open, blood flowed over his eye and down his cheek. Rickards grimaced and turned to the two guards, pointing to the limp subject. "Pick him up and take him to the interrogation room. Now."

"Yes, sir," they said, moving quickly to do as told.

Turning to Van Morr, Rickards said, "Good job. I'm going to need more of that throughout the night."

The Interrogation of Captain Eric 'Four-Fingered' Giroudan

July 2028

Giroudan was seated on a chair behind the small metal desk in the middle of the large room. He was chained to the ground. Clothing had been hastily fitted on him for decency, but it fit poorly and looked uncomfortable. The prisoner seemed not to care, his eyelids half closed and his gaze lost in space.

"There are some in the empire," said *Komandánt* Rickards, "who think torture is immoral or...unbecoming of an empire like ours. You know, I think about and often find myself in agreement. But I can do nothing about it, really. I am just a low-ranking officer, after all. All I *can* do, anyway, is offer those who cooperate a way out, an alternative path. But until someone does, what happens to them is outside my power. Luckily, most who've I spoken to have turned out to be reasonable, so many have come to enjoy the greater freedoms and the better life that I can offer them."

The prisoner said nothing. Van Morr was seated against the wall, a dozen paces away. The two guards were waiting outside, on either side of the door. Miraja and the sergeant with her watched the interrogation behind the glass that covered one of the walls from end to end. Rickards tapped on the table with his fingers.

"You're Astratesian, aren't you?" asked Rickards, "Or, at least, you were at some point. Now you are just a pirate."

No answer.

Van Morr rose and walked over. He struck the subject across the face with an open palm. The prisoner jolted and leaned as if to fall, but the chain leading to his left arm yanked tight to hold him in place. His wrists were raw and red, bleeding in places. The Guffingfordi hit him again, for good measure. "Answer," he said, his words slurred by his thick accent.

"To not answer is seen as rude, Eric," said the *komandánt*. "The prison staff does not believe prisoners should be rude to imperial officers. They will hit you if you do not answer. I can do nothing about it, I have no control over men not under my command. You understand, right? Nod if you understand, Eric."

Giroudan remained motionless at first, but when the Guffingfordi shifted to strike him again the pirate grudgingly nodded.

"Good, good," said Rickards. "I'm glad you have decided to cooperate. I truly am. And by that I don't mean agreeing to what I have to offer you. Rather, I appreciate that you talk to me at all."

The chained prisoner raised his head, light brown eyes radiant within his dirt-streaked face. He was panting. "T' wha' do I owe th' great pleasure o' yer company? Surely, I be nah so lucky as t' 'ave come across th' random sympathy o' a stranger. Aft weeks o' torture 'n pain. Me, wha' god given mercy that would be. Nigh-on too good t' be true. Wha' be it that ye wants?"

"Why must I want something?" asked Rickards, calmly. "Let us just...talk."

Giroudan snorted. "Go on then."

"You have been kept here on charges of treason against the empire, the murder of imperial soldiers and agents, and the assassination of *Koronel* Deg Yonoros. Is this correct?" asked the *komandánt*. He took a sip from a glass of water in front of him. There was one for the pirate, as well, although chained to the floor as his arms were he could not drink from it.

"That be wha' be they tell me," replied the prisoner.

Rickards smiled. "We have the evidence and, as far as it seems, you were caught red-handed."

Giroudan laughed. "Then why don't ye jus' walk me off th' plank?"

"Trust me," answered the *komandánt*. "If you were just a normal crewman, a boy with a gun, that's exactly what we'd do. Or ship you off to one of the POW camps in Zarbia. But you're a captain of a ship. You're important. You're the type of the guy the men like to

bring here and keep alive, on the condition of eternal hurt. You know what I'm talking about by now."

The prisoner looked at him with cold eyes. "These so call scallywags ye speak o', all they do be scratch an itch. Nothin' t' be bothered about. I like it here. Why don't ye sod off?"

Van Morr, who had remained standing there, raised his arm to strike again, but Rickards spoke before he had time to bring it back down. "Hold," said the *komandánt*. He looked at the pirate with an uncaring face, and said, "Okay, Eric. Have it your way. I won't be coming back, so I hope you're making the right choice here. Either way, good luck, there are many years of calling this place home ahead of you." He stood and walked over to the door, hitting it with three heavy thuds and calling out, "Guards, open up, we're done here. The prisoner is ready to be taken back to his cell."

The door buzzed open.

"Belay that," said Giroudan. He tried to gesture to the chair the *komandánt* had just been sitting in, but the chains made it difficult to use his hands at all. "Sit."

Rickards nodded at the guard who poked his head in and the door was closed again. He walked back to the chair slowly, taking his time, pulling the legs of his pants up a bit as he sat so that they wouldn't constrict. His gaze fell on the prisoner. It looked merciless, but empathetic all the same. A drink of water later, he put the glass down again and said, "Eric, I can help you but you have to cooperate with me. Do you understand?"

"Aye, I understand. Wha' in god's name be that ye wants, scallywag?" shouted the pirate in outburst.

Van Morr struck him across the mouth with the back of his hand.

"You have been involved in a great many attacks on imperial soldiers, Eric," said Rickards. "You will stay here a long time. You have to understand that. It's not just about the sadism, the justice. You hold a lot of information that would do many people a great deal of benefit. It would help us kill key leadership within pirate organizations and that could make the war correspondingly shorter. The military administration won't allow an intelligence asset like you get away without being fully squeezed, like a sponge that you want to get the last drop of water out before it rots. That's you. That's your future. Unless you work with me."

The *komandánt* did not give Giroudan time to reply. "You see," he continued, "I know that in many of those attacks you cooperated with Captain Francis Carol, a man who I have a personal interest in finding. I know that during the course of many ventures together that you two built a camaraderie shared by few. I know that you know where he stays. If you tell me where, I will have you transferred to Zarbia."

"Zarbia?" asked the pirate, the z said with a long roll. "Wha' does Zarbia 'ave fer me?"

"The chance at a life after the war," said Rickards, gently.

"Ye wants me t' betray me best heartie, me leader, all t' go live in a camp 'n then wha'? Live as a good citizen o' th' empire? Bah!" scoffed Giroudan. "Ye ask fer too much. Offer too wee."

"Okay," said the *komandánt*. "Like I said, no problem. You might think I'll be back. Why would I waste this opportunity? Maybe I could have you thrown in a chest for a couple of days, maybe I could have your food taken away, maybe I could play music so loudly you couldn't even go to sleep. Your muscles would cramp. You would want to scream, but you couldn't from the panic that would set in. Then I'd bring you back, thinking you broken, and try again. I would do that, in fact. If I could. But the truth is that by the time they would let me

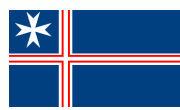
see you again, your brain will have probably been too damaged for me to extract anything from value. But they...they will find a way to get what they want from you."

The pirate roared, his veins in his neck popping through his skin. He tried to jolt himself to his feet, but the chains held him back with unrepentant constraint. "Now, now," said Rickards. "Calm down, all this aggression is not useful for anybody, least of all for you. Your choice is simple. Give me what I want or stay here, for the rest of your short, miserable life."

"Ye farrgin' bastard. Ye farrgin' bastard." Giroudan let his head fall toward his chest. It hit the metal table with a bang. He began to sob. Finally, after some time, he lifted his face to look at the *komandánt*. His eyes were blood shot, red and brown like the embers of a dying fire, and he said, "My brothers forgive me, I'll tell ye where he be."

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by [The Scandinavians](#) » Wed Sep 19, 2018 2:09 pm



The Scandinvan Empire was preparing for the greatest offensive in its history. Throughout the north the whole of the warrior caste was being mobilized for the great push meant to drive the enemy from their homeland, Drana. For the first part of the war they had been used sparingly with their full force never utilized. At any one time only a fraction of their might had been deployed to the front lines. Their strength having been overwhelmingly keep in reserve with their cycles to the battlefields meant to largely acclimate them to the enemy for when they would be called in force to meet them at last. They would be the spearhead of the gambit meant to bring the war to a swift conclusion with a single massive offensive with little precedent in the history of the world.

The warrior caste was after all, in the consideration of the imperial leadership at the least, the group most fit to lead the great advance against the Maccabees. They had been educated since their tender years to live as the mailed fist of the Empire's will. Each of them was a carefully made weapon to be utilized in the manner that the Emperors' considered must prudent. They, due to their rearing, were willing to live their lives as such quite readily. Something which the Warsmiths understood made them uniquely capable of undertaking orders few others would be willing to follow. Something that they fully intended to exploit shortly.

The tactic though had a few questions. While there were over five hundred million warrior caste men under arms, there was a concern that using them to be the sole source of soldiers for the offensive would be foolhardy. Instead, the campaign would be joined by a wide array of forces. From the Crusader Militias of the Church to the dregs released from the prisons, a massive host was being assembled for the attack. The foremost among these would be the reserves of the general Scandinvan levies who had already mostly been set aside for the task.

In line with intended usage of the levy reserves, the planned offensive was to be joined by the full excretion of the deep reserves of manpower which had been carefully managed up until then. Whilst, the front had hundreds of millions of brave Scandinvan already there will at least a matching number of men being available to either serve as replacements or to contribute to the winter campaign. The exact numbers were however not known to anyone except Crown Prince Fenric and a number of the Warsmiths. This was due to the profound belief that the court had that knowledge must be held by few people as possible about the true capabilities of the Empire. For if they were ever known the revealed hand of their strength would undermine the Scandinvan ability to successfully manipulate their enemies behind the vast curtain of shadows which kept the dres'Erid as an unknown factor. Therefore the general public was just fed the constant line of

the infinite legions of the Glorious Empire.

When all was accounted for, the lion's share of the Empire's forces still were waiting in wait for them to be called into actual combat. The general situation as understood by the enemy command was incomplete, due to the limited range of knowledge available to all save a very small circle of the Scandinvan leadership, thereby meeting the overall design of the Warsmiths. Though they did not fully comprehend the Golden Throne's access to intelligence, they nonetheless appreciated that the enemy maneuvering had not been aimed at addressing the winter offensive for the threat it truly posed. As such, the scheme was ordered to begin its final preparations in November. However, certain actions had to be done in order to mask the mass movements of soldiers towards the front.

To this end, the Warsmiths ordered various front line armies to begin to make probing attacks in the directions of the cities and fortresses being besieged by the Golden Throne. Part of the initial stratagem as thought out by them was to allow key cities to be enveloped on all sides so as to provide clear targets in future feigned attacks. After all, each of the cities held behind enemy lines were of sentimental value enough that foreigners could be deluded into thinking that freeing the cities of their sieges would be enough of an incentive for the Scandinvans to commit massive resources to. These gestures would also allow the people at the home front to begin to witness the shifting tide of the war. For it would be the first time that the war's initiative would fall back into their hands since the invasion of Drana had begun.

Along with these efforts, the Empire's propaganda was beginning a new wave of efforts to rile up the general population. Their support, whilst already quite high, would ideally reach a nearly ravenous level by the time the offensive would begin. This would be ideal as the campaign would be by far the most bloody portion of the war thus far according to the projections made. Understanding the chance of this, the command structure of the military and the court had agreed upon the need to embark upon a widespread effort to rally the people of the Empire to their endeavor. For even in the realm of the Glorious Empire a confident citizenry was something that cannot always be assured.

Thereby creating a need for the people of the Empire to have an image to rally towards. The ideal image had thankfully been already generated in one particular incident where enemy forces had completely devastated a lonely cathedral built on a forgotten hill manned only by a small cadre of warrior caste guards assigned to stand guard over the remains of a saint of imperial blood whose legacy had become nothing more than an echo. Nonetheless, the 70 guards attired in ancestral types of shinning plate mail which were unadorned. They maintained their silent watch over the site at behest of the Emperors who each decided to preserve the ongoing vigil out of an inherited sense of duty. Therefore the site was marked as one of the handful of places in which one of the endless watches was sustained A site that was holy and could not be forsaken regardless of the feelings of the attendants of it.

Thus, when the Maccabeans had advanced the front to only a few kilometers from their location the guards held firm at their posts. With each of them being bound by an unbreakable oath which would see their names forever dishonored if broken, the choice was quite clear to them. They would remain at their posts in spite of the clear threat posed to them. This task was not something that they wanted to truly undertake, but understood that they had no real choice. Their duty was clear.

Faced with this grim prospect, the men present took their normal positions despite the increasing enemy bombardments of the area and the occasional attack skirting near the cathedral itself. For a few hours the attack subsided enough for the men to take a bit of a breather. This was broken when the Scandinvan artillery enacted a splintered shield scenario where they believed that the enemy might be aiming to encircle a front line position. Once the order was given,

a massive hellfire array firing pattern was enacted the sky was consumed by a mixture of lantern munitions (a Scandinavian tactic meant to fill the sky with heated particulate matter in order to confuse opposing sensors) and that was followed by a overpowering attack on targets expected to be part of the maneuver. Their concentrated barrage tore deeply into positions which were little more than thinly manned observation posts. So, for two hours, the attack went on utterly devastating the points of attack. There however was no real reward in inflicting damage to the enemy. The only thing they succeed in doing was provoking a counterattack.

The cathedral, to its disadvantage, was in a battlefield and occupied a key position overlooking everything. When the Golden Throne's force were analyzing sites to attack in response to the Scandinavian barrage they decided to attack some Scandinavian entrenchments that were less than a kilometer away. Due to this, the cathedral was ended up marked as a target in sighting logs. An action which would eventually turn into the doom of the cathedral which had stood somberly for centuries. For no act of the divine would be able to spare it from the oncoming onslaught which will be hurled against despite the understanding that churches were not being for offensive or defensive by the Scandinavians who considered it anathema to their principles for them to do so as it would be a form of desecration.

Those who would knowingly bring ruin to a Church were considered the lowest of the low. They who would bring violence to a house of Christ were unworthy of respect or honor. They showed that they were merely contemptible curs who dwelt outside the bounds of civilized law. They proved that they could not be trusted to behave in a manner befitting of a being truly capable of being touched by divine teaching. Therefore, they must be regarded as true dres'nalar whose existence demanded that the dres'Erid conquer them.

Thus, the attack on the cathedral would become a propaganda coup for the Scandinavian war effort. For, up until that point, the Golden Throne had generally respected the sanctity of holy sites to a degree which had satisfied Scandinavian cultural norms. The change in the situation brought upon by attacking a cathedral would change that dynamic completely. Thereafter the Scandinavian war effort would change in character quite a bit.

The enemy attack on the cathedral was rattling the very foundation of the structure, the pillars upholding up the building were beginning to moan under the street, and pieces of the ceiling begin to fall down on the guards within. Nonetheless, they kept up their guard and began to chant songs of faith to keep their minds focused on their duties rather than their impending doom. The mood began to shift away from one of a resigned to death sobriety to one which openly welcomed death. They had moved on from the expectations of this life and had instead fully embraced that their heavenly reward was coming near. For those who died in their duty to guard sacred sites were to be given full dispensation of their sins for those who willingly embraced death in pursuit of a holy obligation had purified themselves by the right of the blood that they shed.

From such confidence was born a type of serenity few would ever grasp. Reality no longer was there primary concern. The Almighty was now calling them where the trumpets of the angels rang to announce their triumphant entry into the eternal paradise where endless laurels awaited them. At this point, they fatalistically and happily began to sing a death chant meant for martyrs. As one body they sang a tone which sounded like it was from heaven itself.

This display was better than anything that the propagandists of the Empire could ever hope to have orchestrated themselves. Therefore the cameras in the cathedral were actively recording the incident. Every second, every image, and every piece of audio that could be recorded were being collected in the highest quality possible. They would not let a situation of this value be wasted in any form.

The images of where the ceiling began to collapse in larger chunks which began to kill a number of the guards of the cathedral were

especially valuable to the propagandists. The sight of the scene was simply all to good from their perspective. Heroes were standing their post without regard for their own safety. Each one upheld their sworn duty. The chant of the martyrs beguiled all who heard it. Every guard stood at their post to defend a holy. Not a single soldier dared to forsake their sworn duty. All together it created a mosaic which fit in well with the Scandinvan culture which placed duty and honor above all else.

When the cathedral finally collapsed after one especially powerful attack the cameras had gathered everything they needed. Despite the deaths of every man present in the structure, their action in holding the cathedral until the bitter end was a gift which would pay dividends and ensure that their names lived in a manner which none of them could ever have dream of. Now each of their names would serve as a rallying cry. The videos of them bravely standing guard in the face of death would inspire million. Their final song would be played across ear waves to rally the people of the Scandinvan Empire to the war effort like never before.

As such, did the High Command of the Scandinvans gain the material needed to antagonize their people onward in the war. They had what they needed to increase the of the soldiers assigned to the upcoming offensive. Thus they now had what they needed to begin to move this war into its final chapter at long last...

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



The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by **The Macabees** » Sun Oct 14, 2018 9:04 am



THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN CAROL, PART III: THE BATTLE OF GIBO'AS MARKET

Follows from: [9/9/2018](#); [4/15/2018](#); [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](#).

"With Captain Carol out of the picture, that's when the war started to come to an end."

— Interview with *Koronel* Leiso Ena, veteran of the *regulares*; 21 February 2039.

Barbakán Gerundis, Komsektor Palenque *11 August 2028*

Rickards stood over the drone operator sitting in front of a large screen embedded into the upward sloping surface of the soldier's desk. The display was in black and white, although it could change to color, thermal, and other settings via the remote sensors capturing the footage. It was of the Gibo'as Market in northern Palenque.

Since the gradual withdrawals from the city, the market was more and more returning to use, although not in the way one would initially suppose. Imperial raids into Palenque were frequent despite the decision to settle in and wait out the besieged. Pirate breakout operations into the countryside, where they would disperse and wreak havoc, had to be harassed and disrupted before they

occurred, meaning that combat inside the city happened almost constantly. Except, the imperial auxiliaries never stayed for more than a day and attacked in small, highly mobile groups as small as four to thirty-two men. This made it difficult for civilians to amass in a market like they once did at Gibo'as.

Still, certain goods were still getting into the city and it made sense to sell them where people knew they could find what they needed. Vendors occupied the stalls, backrooms, and warehouses, hiding their wares in the area and selling to small groups who came a few at a time. The drone was surveilling four men who had just come out of a sports utility vehicle. They walked into one of the buildings.

"Bingo, that's our guy," said the *komandánt*.

The tracker, van Morr, was standing next to him. He nodded. "That is definitely him, sir."

Another vehicle appeared on the screen, the another. Eight more gunmen emerged. There were some crawling onto a nearby roof now, as well. A team of two set up what looked to be a machinegun position across the square, giving it a perfect field of fire into the open space below. Captain Carol always expected an ambush. Even after Rickards had passed on attempts to kill or detain him to see if the pirate commander would relax his guard, Carol kept his men disciplined. There were likely dozens of other insurgents in the area on guard in case of an attack. Hundreds more were less than an hour away in any direction.

"Are the men in position?" asked Rickards.

The XO, *Leutkoronel* Maxamel Samels, nodded and replied, "III *Tabor* is en route, traveling along the *Kapes* Sukratas toward our target. They are ten minutes out, on schedule. II and IV *Tabors* are currently engaging their targets south, west, and east of Gibo'as. Several platoons have reported contact with the enemy. 501st and 740th *Grup Koda* detachment are two minutes out. Air support is three minutes out, sir." All according to plan.

"Excellent." I and V *Tabors* were here, at the base, sitting in reserve, Rickards knew. The *Grup Koda* had been a welcomed gift. The *Fuermak* had given Captain Carol's death priority after three more ambushes killed over a hundred Zarbian auxiliaries operating in the rural countryside just west of Tlaloc. With the two special forces detachments, donated begrudgingly by the *Kríermada*, *Komandánt* Rickards now had the elite forces needed to surgically extract the man who had more so long dodged and eluded him. The Macabéan commander looked at the screen in silence for a minute, brooding. All he could do was wait. The image on the screen widened suddenly as the camera zoomed out. It captured the whirlwind of rotating blades as a group of helicopters entered the picture from the northwest. They covered ground quickly, closing the distance with every passing second.

Van Morr looked at Rickards for a moment. The *komandánt* was visibly anxious, sweat rolling down his face and his hands balled up into fists. The Guffingfordi tracker turned back to the screen.

Rickards said, "Remove those rooftop positions."

"Yes, sir." The drone operator pressed a button.

Gibo'as Market, Palenque

11 August 2028

Captain Carol stood flanked by three guards, the finest men hand-picked from the crews pledged to him. They were twice as wide as him, half as much taller, and all three looked mean enough to butcher a family including the children. Two had heads as bald as they were shiny, the third had hair that came down to his waist. "The

barbarian," they called that one. They carried heavy rifles, although he only had his sidearm and a sword that hung diagonally from his back. A door was the only way in and out of the room. Two more of Carol's men stood guard on the other side. The room itself was drab. The paint was in shambles and parts of the walls were crumbling. In front of them crouched a man dressed in rags crouched over a long wooden crate. He looked up at the pirate captain, smiling. He said, "I 'ave wha' ye asked o' me. Ye 'ave no idea wha' I sacrificed t' find it."

He opened the crate. Inside there was a long, thin rocket launcher. "TI-13 Sakrat scallywag-portable air defense system, imperial made," he said. "One o' th' finest infantry weapons ever mass produced 'n mass exported by th' Golden Throne. They were smuggled into th' city from Holy Panooly. 'tis gettin' harder 'n harder every day. Thar ships are gettin' more plentiful, our means less abundant. Fewer 'n fewer weapons are gettin' through, 'n less 'n less grub. Th' people are dyin'."

"Ye let me worry about that," Carol replied, while the merchant handed him the weapon. "'tis beautiful. I 'ave nah seen one in many weeks now. How many do ye 'ave?"

The man's face looked doubtful. Doubtful, perhaps, that the captain would be happy with the answer. "I 'ave fifteen."

"Fifteen?" asked Carol. "That be hardly enough t' supply me owns crew, let alone those o' me clients 'n th' rest o' Palenque's. We needs more. Many, many more. Who did ye get them from? Whoever 'twas, tell them t' get us more. Our treasury may be dwindlin', but it exists yet 'n th' pirates o' Palenque can pay fer wha' they needs. We shall need hundreds more, thousands as th' Scandinvan arms become rarer."

Shaking his head, the merchant said, "I shall see wha' I can do but th' seas are gettin' harder t' navigate. Th' empire's navy be tightenin' th' blockade at sea, its army by land. 'n those who dare run are becomin' fewer. They say a storm be brewin' in Nicaro 'n Firmador. Th' political situation be gettin' worse, th' civil war be comin' t' a head, 'n many in th' country say th' Golden Throne be preparin' an invasion. 'tis claimed that they will attack as early as sprin' o' next year. Merchants I 'ave met from those lands tell me that Commodore Nolan has spread his influence thar, that be th' only good news I know."

"I suppose I'll loot wha' I can," muttered Carol.

He had met Nolan once. It was not long after the man had been stripped of his honors and brought back to Tiwanaku as a prisoner. Carol had gone to see the spectacle. It was one of the few times he had gone to the great city of Tiwanaku, so large that it looked to swallow the land around it. Even then, after the second rebellion's end with the sack of Tlaloc, Tiwanaku retained its splendor. He wondered what it looked like now, besieged. He wondered whether it looked as withered and decrepit, as broken and fractured as Palenque. He wondered whether even Tiwanaku was destined to survive this third great rebellion, or whether this was the end of his people for all time.

An explosion outside shook the walls suddenly and he was thrown against the one next to him. The room's door swung open on its own, letting in a gust of hot air. Men were shouting outside. Another explosion struck then, then another. Shouts turned to screams. Gunfire erupted. The captain looked at his men. He ordered, "Come, let us go see wha' be goin' on."

As they headed outside they heard a warrior cry from outside, "Look t' th' skies lads. Th' enemy comes by helicopter."

When Carol finally made it outside the sun's bright light almost blinded him at first, but then he saw why he hadn't heard these helicopters the crewman was talking about. As they approached, their blades were audible but, at a distance, they had been drowned out by the

noise of battle that permeated the city. To any who fought between the jagged ruins of Palenque, that sound was life. It was what the city sounded like, and the helicopters for a moment had been part of it. But when his vision recovered he could see them clearly. They were practically upon him and had already started to descend.

From their bowels emerged soldiers clad in thin, tapered armored suits that were sleek and black. Carol recognized the symbols on their arms. *Grup Koda*, imperial special forces. Around him, Gibo'as Market was in flames. The building across the square had collapsed in on itself, flames dancing upon wooden slats spread across the rubble. Next to him, the stall just beside the one he had been in was toppled.

A helicopter opened fire then. It wasn't one of those evicting their deadly soldiers onto the ground, it was different and much larger. The RoLu-21 was modified too, although if Carol had missed it at first it was because of the unfolding chaos before him. The machine spurted out its deadly fire, cannon rounds sweeping the rooftops in pursuit of the captain's main faithfully manning their posts.

Behind him, the merchant poked out his head from inside. The captain saw him out of the corner of his eye. "Brin' me th' weapon, fool," he growled.

The merchant timidly nodded and disappeared back inside.

Many of the *Grup Koda* were already on the ground. They looked so intimidating in their armor. A single red eye protruded from their smooth-surfaced helmets. They were graceful with their weapons, skilled in their movement, and fought like men who had mastered war through sheer experience. Few pirates had fought them and lived. They were said to be more fearless than even the famed *Koro Kirim*. Captain Carol believed the rumors. He had fought them before...and lived. But it would be a challenge to the same thing twice, that he was keenly aware of. The thought propelled him to move.

"Follow me, scallywags," he said, darting back into the squat building he had come out of. His guards and the men posted by the doors followed him, also looking to avoid being torn to shreds by an overpowered flying death machine. Running into the room where he had met with the merchant, he saw the man try to load a missile into the launcher. The merchant looked up. "I could nah carry both th' weapon 'n a warhead. I had t' load it."

"Move," said the captain, crouching and pushing the man aside.

He loaded the missile and handed another one to the merchant. "I 'ave used these more than once in me life, ye know. 'ave scuttled me fair share o' those landlubbers wit' somethin' mighty much like this one. Here, hold this 'n lead us out aft, or ye will die today. I'll scuttle ye meself. I 'ave no more patience fer those nah loyal t' th' cause."

The merchant nodded, slowly. He took the missile. "This way."

They all followed him out the room, through a back door and into a small warehouse space in the rear. Any shelving had fallen apart long ago so there was nothing neatly organized back here. Carol doubted the merchant kept his wares somewhere so obvious, anyway. This is just where they met, not where the product was delivered. They walked through the disheveled maze until they reached a stronger metallic door all the way at the back. When the merchant opened it, light flooded in and the suppressed sound of the helicopters' blades once again filled their ears. He picked the missile launcher up over his shoulder and stepped outside.

A *Grup Koda* operative was waiting for him at the corner of an opposite building, but one of the captain's guards saw him first and popped a few shots to force the Macabéan soldier into hiding. The operative disappeared behind cover, but he would still be there. Carol took his shot quickly. Using the primitive optical tracking device on TI-13, he aimed, locked, and pressed down on the big red button to

fire.

The missile hissed out, followed by a stream of light, white smoke. It shrieked and swerved up into the sky like a mad witch. The attack helicopter swerved in an attempt to avoid the warhead, but the missile struck its tail and the Boneharvester began to spin in circles. Black smoke began to pour from its rear rotor. Falling, it crashed into the open square on the other side of the building the captain, his men, and the merchant had come out from. Carol darted back inside as soon as he fired, managing to get back behind cover just in time. The crewman who had just saved his life was not so lucky. The same operative had turned the corner again and put a bullet in his head. The captain mourned him, but just for a fleeting moment. He wished he could spare the man a greater memory, but these days hardly anyone could claim the honor of memory at all. Most of those who died in Palenque would never be remembered as anything other than rebels and traitors.

An urge to panic crept up on him, like hands slowly scaling his back. But he kept himself composed as far as the others could see. "Be thar a hold?" he bellowed, with steady voice.

"Nay," said the merchant.

"Damn it scallywag," yelled the captain, striking the wall with his fist. "Here we stand, then, condemned t' die like dogs or be chained up like slaves." He turned to his men. "Says I that if today be our day t' die, if 'tis our last hour here, let us die wit' dignity. Let us die wit' honor. Let us die like pirates. Raise yer rifles, scallywags. Keep yer eyes open. 'n scuttle every last one o' those bastards 'til th' last light o' life be left in ye."

They all growled their oaths and steeled themselves. One was dead, but there were five other warriors with him there. The merchant hid in a corner, surely doing what he could to survive the gunfight and hope the victor pitied him. Despicable. And to think that it was men like this one who were profiting from this war by bringing in the weapons that men like Carol used to kill each other. He realized then how pathetic it all was.

The enemy came through the wall first. While the pirates guarded the entrances, a small explosion exterminated much of the brickwork of the wall, sending fragments of ceramic and hardened mud in all directions. Smoke, dust, and debris turned everything black for a long moment, but it did not suppress the raw noise of armored men clinking their way into the room. The blast had muted his hearing a bit, but Captain Carol could hear the sound of rifle fire. He heard the cries of those who died. Although he could not see, he knew that they were all his men. He himself was caught in the leg and he fell to the ground. Good thing too, as a bullet whizzed above his head just after the moment he began to descend down to the hard cement floor. When he struck the ground he felt warmth flow from out his mind but then his eyes closed, and for the first time in a long time he felt...peaceful.

Intersection of Garfallo and Hereton, Palenque

11 August 2028

Four soldiers moved up along the half-standing façades of the buildings that lined the street on the right. Another four advanced on the opposite side, tucked away into the shadow. A truck was stopped at the intersection just ahead. The machine gun mounted on its bed and the gunner were looking the other way. There was gunfire coming from that direction. It was close.

When they got close enough, one of the soldiers on the right took a knee and loaded a grenade into the launcher fastened onto the rail beneath his rifle's barrel. Placing the stock against his shoulder, he aimed, and fired. A grenade rapidly rose and fell in a wobbly parabola,

landing just against the technical's rear right-hand tire. It exploded and the vehicle was flipped on its side.

Despite the small victory, the two teams of eight advanced cautiously. The two up front kept their rifles trained forward, the third ones looked at the roofs, and the fourth kept an eye on the rear. They moved almost as one. When it came time for the one on the right to cross the intersection, the left-hand side *ekipé* stood watch and covered the approach. They switched roles and promptly surrounded the vehicle. When two insurgents crawled out, their faces black with soot and red with blood, the soldiers shot them dead. They were not here to collect prisoners. They were here to kill.

That's almost exactly what the *komandánt* had told them during the previous night's mission briefing. "The enemy is dispersed enough to avoid us if we form a fist, but when we attack in teams they organize to overwhelm us in numbers. Tomorrow, we will capture or kill one of the most important enemy commanders, a man who has killed thousands of your brothers. Our leaders, our commanders, they call him the Chemist of Palenque. We cannot allow him to escape. We cannot allow him to weave through our fingers like sand, but we must be prepared for an ambush. Your job, men of II and IV *Tabors*, is to disrupt, distract, and destroy the enemy in pockets by choking their ability to organize into larger units. Tomorrow, you are to move, seek, and engage, with the mission of forcing the enemy's response to stumble. Travel ammunition heavy, boys. There'll be a lot of killing to do."

The men were hungry for it. The withdrawal may have been sound, given the butchery that daily urban combat on a mass scale had created, from the commanders' point of view. For many of the enlisted men, it was demoralizing. They wondered why the enemy had not yet defeated, why they had not been reinforced to end the rebellion once and for all, and whether they would see out the rest of their deployment to the Theohuanacan theater waiting out an enemy who dragged on its final moments by scratching back whenever it could. Many longed for their homes. These soldiers all hailed from Zarbia, recently recruited, and already tired of the dreary tedium of counterinsurgency. Today's mission gave them a chance at victory, the opportunity to accomplish something truly meaningful — something that would take them closer to ending the war. Eager to the brim, they were indeed.

So eager were they that when a crew of some thirty or so insurgents emerged from one of the side streets, clearly unaware of the imperial squad prowling the area, they were quickly cut down by men who had no intention of asking any of them to surrender. The pirates who froze died. The others, just over half, dispersed and disappeared wherever they could.

A gunfight opened up inside a structure three of the insurgents had withdrawn into. It was over as quickly as it had come. From out the entrance appeared four soldiers. Although they recognized each other as friendlies, if for no other reason than the designation fed to them through an ocular device that hung from the front lip of their helmets, there was a certain wariness in their look. Gunfire popped in the near distance and the four soldiers ducked back into the house, returning fire against some hidden enemy. The two *ekipés* melted back into the shadows and kept moving.

The two fire team leaders put up their fists and the two columns came to a halt. Through a private channel, the leaders spoke, "Intelligence says we're about to get hard. A company-sized unit of insurgents is moving in our direction, hoping to intercept our friends at Gibo'as Market. We're tasked with intercepting and harassing them. There are brothers all around us to assist us in our task. Remember, our people are now Willing to victory."

Not too far away, the city of Palenque shook as a GLI-76 dropped a bomb on its target. A plume of smoke rose into the air. Very likely the bomb did nothing more than cause a spectacle. The enemy was intelligent. They would be moving just as dispersed as the Zarbian

auxiliaries and, unlike the Zarbians, they commanded the trench lines and tunnels they built.

A little farther away another bomb plummeted into the ground, consuming everything around it for several blocks.

Nearby gunfire erupted again. It quickly cut out and then continued, only to cease again. When it started again the sound was coming from somewhere closer, although the original fighting persisted in spurts. The pirate wave was coming and it was already clashing with elements of *Bandags* 'Eresta' and 'Jekal.' But, telling by how close the most recent rifle fire was, the enemy was moving quickly. Surely, their focus was only on rallying around their leader, the elusive pirate captain, Francis Carol. The Zarbians engaged with them and broke away when overwhelmed, joining battle again further down the insurgent group's route. This slowed them down just enough to allow the two *ekipés* still near the intersection of Garfallo and Hereton to deploy themselves inside the buildings that looked down upon the square. It made the perfect place for an ambush.

But by the time the first elements of the pirate formation approached, they had had enough. So when these first elements were caught in the ambush unawares, the enemy had already come to a halt. After the first wave was cut down, no more insurgents came through the square. Instead, they reconsolidated and prepared to surround the position.

Mortars began to rain down upon them. The shelling intensified and persisted for over five minutes, until an artillery shell fired by some faraway artillery gun silenced the barrage. It lasted for only a quick moment as the bombardment soon started anew. But imperial artillery was more regularly intervening in the battle now. So were imperial aircraft, which were coming from the sea and from land bases to the north. This must have been one of the many mini-battles gravitating around Gibo'as, for by now the shrill scream of battle was deafening. Although Palenque was always alive with fighting, this battle was different. It pulsed as if all who were fighting it understood what was at stake.

A squad-sized unit of insurgents darted into the square just then. Two Zarbians watching from a window on the second story of a shelled-out apartment building opened fire, killing three pirates almost immediately and wounding a fourth. The insurgents shot back at first, but then quickly withdrew for cover. By the time they realized that it was all a distraction, the two *ekipés* held firm expecting another attempt to cross the square.

Instead, the enemy attacked from the sides. Macabéan soldiers were trained to occupy floors irregularly if it was simply to take a height, and to always imperil the route they took to their position with boobytraps to punish those trying to attack them in the rear. This they did and it's what warned many of the men of the enemy trying to attack from below.

If it was truly a company-sized formation, a "fist" as the pirates called them, then this surely must have been the brunt of it. But there must have been more than a hundred pirates in the area. There was still fighting in the nearby streets and in the near distance, the battle was raging everywhere, but there was no small contingent of forces attacking the now encircled *ekipés*. It was an enticing option to fight. They would maim many enemies before they fell. Their deaths would come at a costly price for the insurgents. But they were more disciplined than this. Instead, they moved through the walls, blowing holes in them with their rocket men when necessary, fleeing with caution to set up for battle elsewhere where they were not compromised. In their wake, the insurgents died to their tripwire-triggered grenades, proximity sensor anti-personnel mines, and many another nasty surprise.

But there were many enemy and they kept coming, despite the casualties. Inside the expansive depths of Palenque, the pirate was king. They moved swiftly through known paths, keeping pace with

the Macabéans who created their own path as they moved. The two *ekipés* stopped when necessary to deal with immediate threats, focusing on keeping the enemy at arm's length and continue withdrawing.

This was harder said than done, of course. One of the Zarbians fell to a knee after a bullet struck him in the abdomen, shattering the plate of armor. He may have been okay had another run not hit him in the top of the head then, penetrating cleanly through the helmet and into the man's head. There was no time to think about it. The firefights continued, their tempo accelerating like the beats of their hearts. An explosion went off, another boobytrap. There was an ear-piercing silence. A wave of dust made the air too thick to see through. It gave the imperial soldiers a chance to shake their pursuers.

When they finally did, the seven surviving soldiers took the chance of their first respite to take a break. They fell against an inside wall, sitting for just a small moment.

Then they rose to do it all over again.

Target's Location, Palenque

11 August 2028

"Target captured," said one of the armored soldiers standing above the limp, knocked-out-cold body of the infamous Captain Francis "Three-Legged" Carol.

Another one stooped down to pick the prisoner up. The first followed the other one out. They carried the prisoner outside to a helicopter that was just touching down in the center of the square. A statue had once stood there but it had been pulverized long ago in some other battle. The one carrying him loaded the body into one of the transports and then climbed in. Another three soldiers followed suit, including that first one. When everyone was in, the helicopter quickly jerked and rose into the air, gaining altitude quickly and leaving just as fast. "Extraction commencing," said the same one who had reported the capture.

From high above the entire battlefield could be seen with clarity. There were hundreds, maybe even thousands, of small engagements taking place throughout the north of the city. Columns of smoke rose from where a bomb, missile, or artillery shell struck. The bombardment had been going on for some time, gradually accelerating in pace. Apart from the smoke, it was hard to tell current destruction from the past. All of Palenque was really a ghost of a city now. Where sight could see there was not one building left standing in the entirety of the metropolis. Not one. Palenque was little more than a graveyard.

A flash of light appeared and a missile shrieked toward them.

The helicopter took evasive maneuvers, moving this way and that, like a ship out at sea during a storm. It swung wide, finally shaking off the missile, but a second one was fired. This one struck the rear, almost shearing the tail right off. It fell to the ground with little grace, spinning until it crashed on to a narrow street and into a low-rising building. Then, for a short while, as the dust settled, nothing stirred.

Finally, an armored soldier crawled out from the wreckage. He helped another emerge from under as well, then their prisoner was extracted. The last soldier came out next, followed by the pilot and his badly wounded co-pilot. The *Grup Koda* took lead. Looking at the pilot, the one communicating back to headquarters nodded at the co-pilot and instructed, "Support him. Help him. Carry him, if need be. Make sure both of you keep up. It might be rough."

Somewhere in the clouds, a fighter jet dropped three bombs, the closest of which landed no more than a thousand meters away from

their position. Fighting was taking place a few blocks down and it was coming closer.

"Follow me," said the lead soldier, although for a second he sounded aloof, as if there was another voice in his ear. "Rendezvous point is three blocks over, at a square marking the intersection between Garfallo and Hereton. We have ten minutes to get there, otherwise pick up will miss us and we'll have to wait. Keep up, move fast, if you start to fall behind know that you might kill us all."

The prisoner had regained some of his consciousness after the crash and he was coming to, held as he was by two of the armored *Grup Koda*. Looking around him, then at the billowing smoke and raging fires across the city, he said, "Me brothers be comin' fer me, Macabéans. Ye will nah leave here today wit' yer life, I assure ye that." His eyes wavered under the strain of an ocean amidst a storm. He started to yell then, "Avenge me, brothers! Kill th' imperialists! Kill them all! Fear nah fer me life, fight fer yers! Free me, free us, 'n drive th' invaders back out o' th' city. Palenque be ours! Palenque be ours!"

"Silence him," said the lead soldier, laconically. One of the two holding the prisoner hit the ragged man in the head with the butt of his rifle.

Captain Carol fell to the floor, blood which trickled down his temple slowly collecting in a pool. The other soldier jerked him up, almost pulling his arm out of its socket. The pirate grunted and spat blood. "Dear gods, spare a warrior today. Do nah let me become a slave. Allow me t' die fer ye wit' honor." He tried to break free and fight, but one of the *Grup Koda* struck him in the head with a rifle again. This time, the captain went out cold.

"*Gi'sargént*, friendly forces are engaging with the enemy four hundred meters to our rear," said the operative who had taken up the rear. "We should keep moving."

The one in the lead, the *gi'sargént*, nodded. "Agreed."

Fighting was happening ahead of them, too. Not only could they see it through the displays on the inside of their helmet, but they could hear it as well. The sound of battle was immense, and the clash was unfolding violently. Seven — they were missing a man — auxiliary infantrymen were in a gunfight against what looked like a platoon's worth of insurgent militiamen. The Zarbians looked to be having a hard time, being slowly pinned down inside an elongated warehouse-like structure. Those men had been deployed to the area over an hour before the raid on the market had begun. They were surely exhausted, low on ammunition, and would be thrilled to link up with special forces operatives. Besides, beyond them lay the extraction point. "Let's help our friends secure the area," said the *gi'sargént*, his voice steeled. "We'll need to, anyway, if a chopper is going to land for us. Come on, let's move. Hustle. Hustle."

They lurched forward. The co-pilot was walking on his own now, but limping. Both he and the pilot had drawn their side weapons, but the co-pilot looked in no condition to fight. Apart from the leader, two of the *Grup Koda* were free to do battle. The other one had thrown the prisoner over his shoulder, carrying his rifle in one hand. He'd be restricted, and besides he'd be the main target — the enemy would surely focus on freeing their leader.

Cautiously, they moved up the street, using twisted paths through the rubble when possible. But those were also the domain of the enemy, where the pirates were strongest. When they had to cross a street, they did so cautiously and quickly, using the surrounding battle to distract from themselves as much as possible. The stray imperial bomb or missile turned into an opportunity to make it past an enemy position without having to fight it.

They engaged the platoon-sized insurgent force now fully surrounding the besieged seven-man Zarbian *sektón* by smashing into its flank. The two helicopter crewmen and the soldier burdened by the prisoner

looked for cover while the other three slaughtered the opposition. The *Grup Koda* moved like wolves, working together to take down the pirates one by one, group by group. When the Zarbians realized who was helping them they started to push back and fight harder, using the slackening in the enemy's will to crush them and drive them into retreat. The few surviving insurgents fled into the mazelike landfill of concrete, brick, and stone.

"Sure glad you found us," said one of the auxiliary infantrymen.

The *gi'sargént's* face was hidden by his helmet, but his stare must surely have been flat. "Do not celebrate just yet, auxiliary. This prisoner in our custody is none other than Captain Francis Carol himself, the target of this operation. We are to extract him from the city so that he can stand trial for his crimes against the imperial state. But to do that we must secure the square that marks the intersection of Garfallo and Hereton. Help us. The sooner this prisoner is at base, the sooner you and your boys will be out of here as well. Understood?"

"Sure, we'll help," said the Zarbian, shrugging. "We just came from there, anyway."

The lead operative nodded. "Good, now let's go."

The thirteen of them made their way through the remnants of the buildings, making their way to the intersection. For the Zarbians, it was like returning to where they had started. Fitting that this is where it would end...hopefully. When they arrived, they immediately occupied one of the dominant buildings that loomed over the square. There were enemies inside many of the other structures. A big battle was raging just northwest, where the company-sized insurgent force that had been drifting southwards earlier had now grown to almost battalion-sized and was fighting disparate groups of auxiliaries that were coalescing into an organized front.

Well above the city a drone circled Palenque in a slow, broad arc. It connected with a network of ground command posts, as well as land-, sea-, and airborne sensor suites and weapon systems, organizing the battle like a conductor would a concert. It had two *bandag's* worth of forces peel off and organize a formal line that protected the square in an arc around it. No enemy was to make it through for the duration of the extraction process.

Just in case, the *Grup Koda* ordered their new escort to deploy the *ekipé* of four men to hold a building across the intersection. From there they could command the other side, engaging any insurgent elements that filtered through the friendly cordon that was quickly coming into existence. The *ekipé* of three would stay put while the *Grup Koda*, the helicopter crew, and the prisoner prepared for the coming helicopter ride.

While they waited, the battle around them continued to rise in intensity. If it had been raging before it was now like a volcano about to explode. Artillery and air support was beginning to concentrate its firepower on the area, suppressing the enemy's ability to move in large groups and helping to pin them down while friendly ground forces did the dirty work of pinning the militants in place and exterminating them. It was a war of little mercy. Apart from the target, there was no interest in taking prisoners. They would just add dead weight to soldiers instructed to simply kill, kill, kill. These soldiers only murdered with impunity.

The wait felt like an eternity. At moments, it did not seem the Zarbian line would hold. These men were green, recruits who just months ago were fresh out of boot camp. To their credit, even when they wavered they continued to hold. Luckily, the cavalry was on their way and the balance in the battle was about to shift once again.

III *Tabor*, Palenque

11 August 2028

Like a stampede of wild beasts rampaging through a city, the mechanized columns of III *Tabor* bulldozed anything in their path and rose a cloud of dust in their wake. The heavy APCs, carrying a squad and a half of men apiece, were interspersed with smaller AFVs sporting four anti-aircraft guns and turret-mounted missile launchers. They scanned the broken rooftops as the rows of vehicles moved toward Market Gibo'as from the northeast. There were dozens of columns, if not more, like dark, scaled snakes darting through ravaged urban grasses of glass and rubble with cautious grace. Imperial aircraft escorted them overhead, dropping bombs and missiles on enemy positions along the flanks. It was like a storm sweeping through Palenque, with thunder and lightning accompanying it. The mechanized force struck into the enemy's flank like a mailed fist to the ribs.

The enemy harassed the imperial force along the way. Although it was getting more and more difficult to smuggle anti-tank weapons into the city, it seemed that the insurgents were bearing all of their teeth. They were willing to sacrifice all for their leader and by now they must have all known that Captain Carol was captured. Cannon and machine gun fire was followed by explosions.

A small remotely piloted car sped into one of the streets, struggling across the craters left behind by two years of fighting now. It exploded beneath the hull of one of the APCs, causing it to suddenly jerk to a stop. One of its tracks came loose, falling to the ground with a heavy thud. Enemy small arms fire rained down from the half-collapsed buildings around it.

Heavy cannons fired back. Visibility was minimal. Smoke covered the area like a low, thick morning fog.

Within the action raced forward an eight-vehicle convoy including five heavy APCs and three combat escorts. They blasted their way forward, passing by friendly units locked in combat along the pocked city streets. Artillery strikes rocked the earth and one wondered how anything, even the stray wall, stood at all in this vicious world of violence. Cannons going wild the whole way, the mechanized *sektón* sliced their way through the battlefield. Suddenly, a strange calmness settled among their surroundings. They could still hear the bombs, the gunfights, but for them the battle was distant. Then, as suddenly as it had come, this peace ended. It as if they had left one battle and entered another.

But they swept all before them all the same. The insurgents were deeply embroiled in their own fights. II and IV *Tabors* had done a brilliant job of tying down their reaction by occupying nodes along their distribution routes. Intelligence showed small battles raging all over the northeastern quarter of the city. The eight-vehicle convoy minded its own business, instead focused on its mission.

It came to a stop just inside a square sitting where *Kal* Garfallo and Hereton intersected.

The rear ramp on one of the middle heavy APCs lowered to the ground.

A Zarbian NCO wearing heavy body armor stepped out. Behind them a *sektón* of auxiliary infantrymen deployed alongside the vehicle, keeping an eye on the rooftops, inside the buildings around them, and on every dark crevice. They knew the enemy could come from anywhere. In Palenque, the pirate was king. Four men in body armor stepped out of one of the buildings. One of them was carrying a body. Two other armed soldiers stepped out behind them, one hobbling on his foot just a bit.

The Zarbian *primsargént* nodded at one of the armored soldiers. "*Gi'sargént* Ankor?"

"Are you our ticket out of here?" said the *Grup Koda* through the helmet. "I thought we were getting picked up by a chopper."

The Zarbian shrugged. "I guess someone higher up changed their minds." He turned back to his APC. The other Zarbian soldiers were looking at him, their stares pleas for the *primsargént* to move the party into the back of the vehicle so that they could all leave. Raids into Palenque were never pleasant missions, especially with cargo of this value. The faster they got out of the city the faster they'd live to see another day. With thick accent, but in *Dienstadi*, the auxiliary *primsargént* said, "Six of you, right? Good thing we've got plenty of room to fit you all. You, the prisoner, and the one carrying him will ride with me. Your other two soldiers will go with the Shalmaneser behind me, and the other two in one of the other two. Let's go. The faster we get this evacuation underway the likelier we'll all get out of this shit storm alive." The other APCs dropped their ramps behind him.

The *Grup Koda* operatives moved with deadly grace. They were unperturbed by the chaos. Chaos was their world, where they thrived. Once inside the *primsargént's* APC, the Zarbian turned to *Gi'sargént* Ankor, and said, "The enemy's response to the raid has been even more aggressive than command expected, is what I've heard through the grapevine at least. News of his" — he nodded at the prisoner, who was still unconscious — "capture spread quickly. What started out as hundreds of insurgents responding to the attack has become thousands. Command probably thought it wiser to extract you guys by armored convoy rather than risk the loss of another helicopter."

As he finished, the convoy started moving. At first, it rolled through the city streets slowly, turning at one block and then at another to finally face northeast. They accelerated. The world burned around them.

Dozens of drones were flying overhead to keep tracking of friendly and enemy movements alike. One, in particular, was flying along with the convoy, paying particular attention to it and helping to coordinate nearby units to block and ambush pirate forces attempting to attack the column carrying the prisoner. Just as an insurgent with an RPG appeared on the third story of a structure whose crumbled façade existed only in patches, an artillery shell struck it like thunder out of the sky. The eight vehicles continued through unimpeded. And when there was trouble, their own weapons proved more than capable of giving the enemy a good mauling.

Not that this meant their time went easy. One of the escorting vehicles, its four-barreled contraption above the hull swiveling this way and that to unload a barrage of heavy cannon fire, was struck by another mobile mine drone that had shot out in the street. It just stopped at first, smoke rising from inside in solid black wisps, until the vehicle started to burn. Four men evacuated as quickly as possible.

Only one of the other escorts stopped. It dropped its ramp to let the four stranded crewmembers aboard, its four cannons all firing at once. The turret turned this way or that, moving to meet dozens of threats as they popped out from behind cover to take shots at the exposed crewmen below. An unsympathetic spurt of heavy cannon fire pushed them back into hiding in short order, if it did not outright kill them instead. Once the four crewmen were inside the vehicle that had stopped for them, it quickly accelerating to catch back up with the rest of the convoy as soon as their brothers were inside. The struck vehicle sat there watching the distance grow between it and the other vehicles. Flames danced within it as dark, dark smoke continued to rise. Then it exploded. Its diabolic weapon station shot up into the sky propelled by a great lick of fire that seemed to always be on its tail, where it broke up into a dozen pieces. The hull exploded a second time, then a third, and a perpetual fiery popping sound went off in the background as the ammunition continued to cook off throughout.

"Well, that was dramatic," said one of the *Grup Koda*, watching the ordeal through his internal display.

"Stay alert, Rickards," snapped *Gi'sargént* Ankor.

As they rolled forward, an armed helicopter escort formed overhead. Three RoLu-21s mirrored their route, keeping a close eye on the flanks and quick to suppress any sign of resistance. Parts of *III Tabor* were also withdrawing, some trying to keep pace with the extraction force. Seeing that the situation was quickly leaving their hands, the insurgent forces began to melt away into the decayed wastelands of Palenque. Today, they had been defeated. But they knew that there was always tomorrow and the day after that. They watched from the shadows as the column sped up the *Kapes* Sukratas.

Behind them, the fighting went on. As the sun moved down in the sky, the battle began to die. Imperial forces withdrew or were extracted over the course of the day and were back at base by nightfall to lick their wounds. For their part, the insurgents in Palenque would be left battered, bruised, and brooding. Palenque was still in their hands, but they had just lost their leader.

The extraction column did not stop until it reached a friendly outpost just on the northeastern edge of the outermost suburb in that direction. *Barbakán* Araola was dusty, grimy, and filled with poor auxiliary sods who looked miserable. Attacks out here came nightly. Men on deployment here almost never slept so command found it necessary to rotate units in and out of Araola. It became something of an experience every man deployed to the Palenque *komsektor* went through. They would get a few hours of rest here, as well as food, water, and more ammunition, before continuing on in the morning. It would be a long night.

Countryside, *Komsektor* Palenque

Night of 11–12 August 2028

"They 'ave 'Three-Legged' wit' them," said one, his dark, dirty dreads falling well beyond the length of his shoulders. The man was missing an eye. There was no patch, no glass replacement, merely a socket that looked almost as if it were infected with mold. "We should break 'im out now. 'n scuttle them all."

"Nay," said the other, holding his hand up.

They were both on a height, looking down on the imperial convoy make its way into the small firebase just outside the metropolis' farthest northeastern reaches. When they were young, that part of Palenque did not exist. It was where the poor were being pushed into as the rich colonials bought property inside the city proper. Now the colonists were no more. Those who hadn't run were killed, butchered in the streets during the first weeks of the rebellion. Now all that was left was this, absolute ruin. Yet, both rather live in ruin than chained by imperial law. The first one grunted. He wanted to fight, to kill.

"Gather th' crews," said the second one. "Tonight, we shall feast under th' moon's light. We shall needs t' build energy, fer tomorrow will see th' greatest battle yet."

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

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Morrdh
Powerbroker

Posts: 8417
Founded: Apr 16, 2008
Democratic Socialists

by **Morrdh** » Wed Nov 28, 2018 11:57 am



North of Drasdag Drana Province Scandivan Theater

Largely unnoticed amidst a supply convoy for Kiermak Gholgoth arrived a motley collection of Morridane vessels. Included in the collection was a handful of troop ships, cargo ships, a light carrier

and a number of escorts. This small fleet carried what was to be 1st Morridane Task Force (1 MTF), a surprise contribution from the Commonwealth to aid the Golden Throne's war efforts in Gholgoth. Once the brigade-sized task force had been unloaded most of the fleet would sail home to Greater Dienstad whilst the carrier, HMMS *Faslane*, would remain on-station acting as a helicopter carrier to provide limited aviation support to the task force.

Arriving just before the onset of winter, the task force didn't expect to see much action. The three light infantry battalions that made up the bulk of the task force had been detailed to protect Macabean lines of communication round Drasday and to interdict Scandivan back country logistic routes running supplies and men into the besieged city. Two of the battalions were typical of a standard Morridane Army infantry battalion, consisting of a mix of veterans and National Service conscripts with a wide range of experience between them. The third battalion was from the Royal Genchi Rifles, made up of volunteers from the aborigines of Morrdh with a mix of Genchi and Morridane officers. The Genchi in particular were famed as having a mastery of stealth that almost borders on being supernatural, though a fair number make it as scouts for the Morridane special forces.

The three battalions would operate on a rolling rotation every two weeks; one in the field, one in reserve and one on training/admin. It was hoped that this system would off-set fatigue and keep each battalion busy enough to help keep them sharp and focused on the job at hand. Support elements of the task force included engineers, logistical elements, a rumoured detachment of the Morridane SAS, plus small units of artillery and armour. Not wishing to rely on the Macabean supply lines, the Morridanes established their own operating base with a strict two mile "no civilians" zone surrounding it as a protective security zone. The local population was still considered to be hostile and, drawing upon decades of counter-insurgency experience, the Morridanes weren't taking any chances and it was reflected in how they operated. That not to say that interactions with the local civilians didn't happen, they were a prime source of local intel and efforts were made towards 'hearts and minds' but the Morridanes balanced this towards maintaining operational security.

Also part of the process of setting up the Morridane area of operations was establishing a number of Radio Rebroadcast, or 'Rebro', posts for the task force's radio net. This usually involved small convoys going out into the area north of Drasdag and typically consisting of a CVR(T) light tank, a pair of Land Rovers, a command & control vehicle (either FV 432 command variant or FV105 Sultan) and a four-tonne truck carrying a squad of infantrymen. A pair of signallers from the Royal Morridane Corps of Signals would actually man the Rebro, whilst the infantry section was from one of the infantry battalions and would be acting as a protection party for the Rebro.

Rebro Two-One was one such Rebro that was being setup along with a handful of others, its designation showed that it was being manned by personnel from the first company of the task force's 2nd battalion. Though, in practice it would operate under a different callsign. But all of the Rebro Detachments were setup and operated in the same way; first scout out possible locations on a comms recce before choosing a site to operate from. For Rebro Two-One it was a church, abandoned but it had escaped the worst of the fighting. The infantry had the thankless task of conducting a clearance patrol, making sure that the location was free from unpleasant surprises such as traps or enemy troops. Once the section had checked out the site and given the OK, the convoy moved in under the watchful of the infantry section.

The Rebro parked up beside the church, then a cable and aerial was run up the spire before a comms check was made and the Rebro became operational. With a couple of sentries posted, the infantry section set about making themselves comfortable within the church by pitching sleeping bags and cleaning up derbies. Despite the general pagan beliefs of the Morridanes, great care was taken to

avoid damaging the church by placing wooden boarding and sandbags. Concessions were for defence, mainly two-man silt trenches were dug and stone from the wall of the churchyard was repurposed to help provide some hard cover for the trenches. The section's general-purpose machine gun was setup in the spire of the church where it could provide a greater field of suppressive fire.

Last edited by [Morrdh](#) on Wed Nov 28, 2018 11:57 am, edited 1 time in total.

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In your Uplink, hijacking your guard band.



The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by [The Macabees](#) » Sat Dec 29, 2018 10:50 am



THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN CAROL, PART IV

Follows from: [10/14/2018](#); [9/9/2018](#); [4/15/2018](#); [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](#).

"A guerilla movement survives on the charisma of its leadership."

— Atxuehl 'The Toothless', *Toward the Overthrow of Imperial Rule in Palenque* (2023 C.E.)

Kapes Sukratas

13 August 2028

The highway winded inland, following the coastline of Theohuanacu and passing through towns, tall grasses, and green hills along the way. Light bounced off the waves of the ocean in the east and to the west vegetation extended to the horizon, encroaching even on lands that a decade ago were near to being barren desert wastelands. Serving as the largest artery in southern Theohuanacu, the *Kapes Sukratas* connected all the major coastal cities from Palenque to Tiwanaku and from there to Tlaloc, where if one continued they would go all the way to North Point. Today, like most days during this damned war, there was scarcely a vehicle on the road and very few that did not belong to the *Fuermak*.

The armored column traveling north was most certainly imperial. Its tanks, infantry carriers, and armored cars all bore the double-headed eagle of the empire. Along its flanks helicopters, some only with guns and other with infantry, moved along the flanks both ahead and behind. It was a lot of protection for a group of vehicles that in most circumstances could take care of themselves.

But these were no ordinary circumstances. The people of Palenque had seen perhaps the leading man of their revolt pushed into one of the armored personnel carriers in that convoy just the day before and others had followed this group of vehicles all the way to *Barbakán Araola*. Men waited just outside the imperial base, hidden in the hills, and watched the convoy leave to continue its journey north the next morning. These same men and others who joined them followed it, evading and staying away from the imperial scouts that guarded the column's flanks. The pirates and their militias held an intimate knowledge of these parts while the Macabéans did not, and so they succeeded in hiding from even the skilled ranger men used by imperial airmobile infantry who were trained and equipped especially for missions like these. And with this advantage, the guerrillas began to close in on their target.

Ahead, where the highway curved, three cars were piled into each

other in the middle of the road. Steam rose from the hood of one. A man sat inside another with his head on the wheel, not moving. A second man was crawling along the concrete, bleeding from his face, arms, and legs. This had been an accident.

The convoy started to slow but not stop. When they arrived at the location, most of the vehicles veered off the road somewhat to round the scene and continue on their way, but one of the IFVs stopped. Four men emerged from within, exiting from the back, to inspect the damage. One of the soldiers helped the wounded man up.

Gunfire sounded in the near distance, just beyond the flanks of the highway. The flanking forces must have found something. Indeed, they began engaging a force of pro-pirate militants that had seemingly emerged from the nothing to harass infantry forces occupying one of the heights along the route. Back at the crash, one of the soldiers helping the man on the ground looked up toward where the fighting was taking place. He wasn't able to see a thing as it was all taking place behind the crest of the hill, and neither did he see the sniper who squeezed the trigger of his rifle and put a bullet in the center of the soldier's head. The Macabéan fell over, crumpling atop the wounded driver.

For his part, the wounded local screamed out in pain as the heavy infantrymen fell on him. He seemed healthy enough for all the blood on him. But the troops had little time to analyze him. A gunfight had started and bullets were flying. A rocket came out from behind a patch of grass and just barely missed one of the APCs attempting to skirt around the accident site. And as it did that, the "dead" driver in the front seat of one of the vehicles suddenly raised his head, opened the car door, stepped out, and revealed a rifle from under his robes. He was shot to death before he could hurt or kill any of the soldiers, but by now the infantrymen were rattled. They put a bullet in the "wounded" man's head, as well, right in the back where it connects with the neck. With that, they took their fallen comrade and loaded him into the back of their IFV, which cannon was afire as it rattled the surrounding landscape with its 37mm cannon.

This was unlikely any other guerrilla attack in intensity. In fact, the pirates and their militias rarely conducted such brazen and bold operations like these. With superior technology and firepower, the Golden Throne was always guaranteed to win. But this was an atypical time, where the fate of the Palenque rebellion seemed to revolve around the life of a single man: Captain 'Three-Legged' Carol.

Like a conventional army, tens of thousands of armed gunmen poured out from where they were hiding minutes ago, rushing the convoy like the angry zealots they were. Heavy imperial firepower responded in kind, including not just the vehicles and their weapons but also the accompanying helicopters and infantrymen. And despite the death that accompanied their attack, the insurgents continued to mount pressure on the column.

Suddenly, the lead vehicle, an IFV, exploded and flipped. Where it was once was now existed a large hole in the road, the work of an IED. Three men crawled out from the ruined carcass of the struck vehicle and they quickly worked to get the rest of their brothers out, two of which they would find already dead. Behind, other vehicles swerved to move around and continue on, knowing that to stop was to die. But the column slowed further out of necessity and, seeing the weakness, the insurgents began to attack in larger numbers and more frequently. If the Macabéans focused their firepower, the pro-pirate militants simply melted away and maneuvered to re-engage further up the highway.

In that fashion, the guerrillas kept pace with their target, engaging and disengaging at will. Despite their fluidity and light feet, they risked much by coming out in the open in such numbers. The Macabéans raked through their ranks with concentrated fire, killing dozens and wounding hundreds. All the same, the convoy continued to slow down.

More rockets came from out of the brush, striking armor up and down the column. But it was in the center where most of the pressure was applied. There, a large APC was flanked by cannon-bearing IFVs and two heavy Nakíl tanks. An anti-tank missile streaked through the air, a trail of flames behind it, and it hit the tank on the lower corner of the turret's rear. At first, nothing happened but then a ball of fire blew through the blowout panels and rose into the sky like a giant pillar of red, orange, and blue. The tank stopped in its tracks. The other began to maneuver to help cover.

What seemed like minutes had actually been hours. The sun had begun to descend for some time now. Unlikely that anyone had noticed as the battle continued with the same intensity throughout the evening. But while bullets continued to fly down the *Kapes Sukratas*, elsewhere events were going a different way.

Barbakán Araola

13 August 2028

A strange-looking transport helicopter with angular surfaces and coated blades rose into the air from the impromptu landing pad in the center of the firebase. The legs of an armored *Grup Koda* hanged from the side. Surely there were other operators inside, as well. Indeed, there would be plenty of security, for the helicopter carried some of the most valuable cargo in the world. It carried Captain 'Three-Legged' Carol.

The distraction and feint had worked like a charm. The pirates and their militias had gone for the bait, the armored convoy they had seen leave Palenque with the captain in its hold. That same convoy left the firebase early that morning. Given the fire it was receiving now, the guerrillas must have tracked and followed it north. They were throwing their all against it, if the battlefield reports were accurate. This was exactly the kind of battle the enemy liked to avoid because it came with heavy casualties, but here they were handing their own heads over to the empire on a silver platter.

In the meantime, the helicopter lifted off and headed to an airbase outside of North Point.

North Point

14 August 2028

"Yes, my lord," said the soldier, who bowed and then stepped away before turning around.

Angiko Bas was paying something else mind, anyway. The leaves of all the trees in North Point were turning brown with the season and soon they would all be gone, as autumn gave way to winter. He noted the peace of this city, its calm, and the relaxation of its people. These days, with frequent visits to Holy Panooly, Indras, and the war zone to the south, it was rare to enjoy this caliber of civilization. The *kríerlord* sighed as he turned his attention back to present matters.

Lasagos Encalii Jerispo'vener, a Frommian who spoke the imperial language with a thick accent and wore his head perpetually shaved. His mustache wrapped around his mouth, turning down until it reached his chin. The field marshal had been saying something after the young soldier had left but Angiko had not caught it, noticing only when he ended with, "...*kríerlord*."

"My apologies, field marshal," replied Angiko. "My mind was elsewhere. Please, forgive me."

Jerispo'vener nodded and said, "Not to worry, my lord. Your days have been long since the wars began." He paused, but the *kríerlord* did not respond. After a short silence, the commander added,

"Sometimes, I find myself agreeing with those who think this emperor has brought us more trouble than benefits. Of course, I mean no disrespect toward His Imperial Majesty. Curse the scum who say we chose the wrong man in The War."

Angiko turned his head and bore his eyes into the *lasagos* like two lasers. Sharply, he said, "His Imperial Majesty is Willed. He has brought glory onto our empire, raised it from the near ruin and turned it into a superpower. All greatness brings with it responsibilities...and risks of equal size, but empire-making is not for the meek. What is your age now, field marshal? Sixty-two? Or is it sixty-three? Men of your age begin to think of retirement, no? I am sure that you are eager to embrace the emperor's generosity, a generosity you have earned through years of service to Him. No?"

The commander coughed sharply and changed the subject. "The prisoner, my lord. Captain Francis Carol. He arrived overnight. The ruse worked like a charm, I must say. It was a fantastic idea on your part and we managed to slaughter over ten thousand of their fighters along the Sukratas, the largest tally of enemy casualties we've managed to inflict outside of the city since the start of the rebellion, *kríerlord*."

"The attacks on our convoys, then, they should cease?" asked Angiko.

Jerispo'venere curled his lips and implied caveats with the movement of his head. "They are sure to decrease, yes. But the enemy will always be out there until this war is won for good. Nevertheless, yes, yesterday's victory is a crucial step toward that end and the men will be grateful for it. Of course, with the army here expanding to accommodate the emperor's great mobilization, I've had to base them further south down the coast and in the west. The growing presence of imperial troops, even if they do not fight the pirates in the cities, is helping to secure the countryside for us. The enemy is simply unable to infiltrate as many of the rural towns and cities anymore because there are too many of our men, our security cordons around the population centers are too tight. We are slowly bottling them up in Palenque and Tiwanaku."

"Will that not make those cities harder to take then?" inquired the *kríerlord*.

"Yes, my lord. But the more difficult the path, the more satisfying the result. Trapped where they cannot hide, we can kill them all in one big, final battle."

"And how many lives will that cost among our armies?" asked Angiko.

The commander's eyes saddened. "Many, my lord. But it would end the rebellion. Not just this one, for it would rid us once and for all of these dreaded pirates that for a decade have proven to be thorn in the empire's side."

Angiko nodded. Jerispo'venere was a leader and magnificent general, one who cared for his troops. If he thought this to be the correct way then Angiko believed him. But the *kríerlord* could not help but think that perhaps there was a better way of eliminating the insurgents once they had been pushed back into their two fortresses, one that would cost less lives.

"Would you like to see the prisoner?" asked the field marshal.

The *kríerlord* shook his head. "No. Keep him confined. Provide him only with one meal a day and vary the hour you deliver it. Do not let him sleep. He is responsible for the deaths of thousands of our men and tens of thousands of our people. Let him suffer. Let him pay. And when he is broken, I will return."

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Anarchy

by **The Macabees** » Thu Jan 17, 2019 8:54 am

QUOTE

TIWANAKU: SIEGE AND ABANDONMENT, PART II

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](#).

"Tiwanaku was beset by a rot that wore away at a hollow, war-torn soul."

— Darmus vin Lajore, *The True Story of the Fall of Tiwanaku* (2057 C.E.)

Tlocopexa Hold

June 2028

Dressed in baggy cotton pants and a torn shirt covered by a patchwork jacket, a man sat by a fire sharpening his knife as others stood and watched. He was speaking. "Soon, lads, through darin' action we shall exterminate th' rats that infest our city 'n by doin' so th' winds o' th' war's initiative will begin t' blow in our favor. They do nah see it, and thank th' gods fer their lack of wits, but th' imperial dogs 'ave done us a great favor by settlin' down on thar haunches 'n diggin' in around us. They reckon us no better than stray dogs. Says I, let us take th' war t' them. But first, th' enemy inside our city must be scuttled so from a secure ship we can strike out behind th' enemy's armies."

"Look around ye, Dorian," said one of the men standing. He brought up his arms as if to take in the room and everything outside of it. "Tiwanaku's heart has stopped beatin'. Th' people...wha' people? A hundred thousand fighters in all, maybe two, 'n whatever strumpets 'n sprogs o' ours who haven't already succumbed t' disease or slaughter. That's it. Little else be still alive. 'n whatever worthless life unfit fer fightin' yet survives I hope be hidin' beneath th' deepest crevice, under th' deepest pile o' rubble 'n rubbish, fer this war nor its winner will ever 'ave mercy on them."

"Our fathers won more wit' less," answered the one called Dorian, the one sitting. His blade rasped sharply as he slid it against a whetstone. "Those worthless lives ye so eagerly condemn t' th' plank number in th' millions yet 'n from them we owe our strength. 'n wit' those hundred thousand or two swords we shall enflame imperial holds up 'n down th' damned eastern Theohuanacan coast, from North Point t' Tlaloc."

One who had been leaning against the fractured concrete wall of the small, lantern-lit room spoke now. He wore similar garb to Dorian, clothing that looked put together as if from scraps, as they did all. Behind his shoulder jutted out the barrel of a rifle, its butt extending from behind his opposite leg. "Garec be right, cap'n. Our hour be nigh," he said.

"Ye be betrayin' me as well, Ferrico?" Dorian's glare could melt stone.

The young lieutenant pushed himself off the wall and walked over to the fire, until he stood not more than a foot away. Knealing, he said, "No, cap'n. Wit' ye, I shall sail t' th' end, as I pledged t' ye when I joined yer crew. Without doubt all th' men around ye will say th' same thin'. But our situation be dire. Th' enemy waits outside o' our cities only 'cause it knows we cannot dislodge it 'n that we shall slowly die under its ever tightenin' stranglehold. Ye be right that thar are still

millions who live. But how many more will 'ave t' die afore we admit defeat?" He looked to others for support and some of them nodded.

Dorian grimaced. He put his knife back in its sheath, the stone he stored away. From a clear bottle quarter-filled with golden-brown *jinhare* he took a swig. "Mighty well, th' days ahead o' us will be long enough t' give time t' discuss this further. Fer now, let us focus on th' task at hand."

"Th' scuttlin' o' Ern Dardel," said another pirate.

Dorian looked at him with bottomless black eyes and said, "Yes."

He continued, saying, "I be young 'n yet ye call me cap'n. Me experience was born in this war, fightin' in this city. Th' rot, th' decay, th' death be all I know. Throughout out crusade o' liberty against imperial tax collectors, I 'ave conducted meself in a way that has brought me success 'n glory. No scallywag can deny this fact. Those who 'ave sailed wit' me 'ave tasted th' sweetness o' victory where many o' our brothers 'ave only eaten defeat. While 'tis a war driven by our needs t' be free, t' loot wha' we needs from th' sea 'n its civilizations, fer me 'tis a quest o' survival 'n I intend fer it t' end in me favor 'n that o' our scallywags. Fer ye, this can be wha' seems right in yer owns terms. We all 'ave our reasons fer hatin' this scallywag, Ern Dardel, Knight o' Kula'Kuladin. No matter th' endin' ye see comin', no matter yer beliefs as t' th' fate o' our scallywags, in this purpose o' ridin' ourselves from a scourge that has afflicted us fer too long, I be honored t' know that we all sail triumphantly united in present conviction. 'n mark me words, Ern Dardel will die."

"By me blade," said one of them. "He murdered me mateys!"

Another cried out, "Nay, he 'n his rats lay wit' me beauty 'n butchered me sprogs. Th' only hand he shall die by be me owns!"

Others joined in with equal vigour and a great cheer went up. Dorian smiled as his men looked...rejuvenated, in a way. They looked like they did when this rebellion had first started. Back then they had rattled their sabers and screamed their war cries, eager to prove themselves in a great struggle against a civilization that represented the antithesis of a pirate's liberty. That was before the siege has slowly sapped them of energy. But now they were hungry for something again, now they had something to look forward to. Dorian hated that Dardel boy as much as any other in his crew, but this boy may just have been the kindle needed to relight the fire of revolt.

When they all fell silent again, or as silent as they could in their current spirits, Dorian looked at them and said, "He has caused much pain t' all o' us. T' th' scallywag who brin's me his head I shall give a hundred century-weight gold doubloons. Fer each other Kula'Kuladin head I shall award ten. That way thar death will all th' more be yer loot. Now drink, lads. Enjoy yourselves, afore our hunt begins."

The men cheered again so loudly that Captain Dorian 'Red-Gloved' Dawson almost believed that someone above, outside this collapsed pile of steel and concrete, could hear them with a faintness. Truth was, this bunker was so far removed that it was no surprise not a single imperial hound had found it yet.

Kula'Kuladin

Late June 2028

Ern sat by a window whose ragged edge betrayed the munition that had created it. Out of it, he could see the silhouette of several warships in the distance, and although a low fog betrayed their form one could see their lights sparkle through the mist. There were more ships now than there used to be and they were getting closer to shore. It was an impressive sight, even if Ern could not see a tenth of the overall blockading force. Once those ships had given him great respite or hope, but he had lost any reason to hope a long time ago.

He wondered if there was still a chance to return to normal life when the war was over and before the last month perhaps there was, but now that the empire had betrayed him how could he ever go back to it?

He scowled as the memories of burning skin, blood that came out from his mouth as he coughed without choice, and the pain filled his mind. To think that the empire had given up on taking the city by decisive attack, to think that it had abandoned those soldiers who fought on from inside even as they lost it all. To think of all those who died in the initial assaults, even Mariel...had she died for nothing?

"What are you thinking of?" asked a voice from the shadows behind the tower room's door.

Ern looked over, calmly. "Purpose is a strange thing, isn't it Knight Josefan?"

Confused, the man answered, "I'm not sure what you mean, Catique."

Ern had adopted the rank catique as a harkening to the ancient Jeraqlean order of knights of ancient Díenstad and it caught on, other men of equal status taking on the same rank even as a tribute to Ern Dardel, who had won himself much praise among the men for his many exploits. His leaders had even taken the rank of Peremarq, and the general that of Anaqas, King.

"Purpose," he repeated. "The *thing* that drives you. The beliefs that awake you in the morning and compel you to labor. For some, purpose comes from love. Many of the men here have girlfriends, wives, mothers, and children waiting for them in civilization. Others are here for the money, and perhaps even more simply seek citizenship and land. And there are no doubt a great many fools who say they fight for honor. But we all fight for something. All of us, except those who have surrendered responsibility to another. You are not one of those and so you must have purpose. What is it?"

Josefan, as Ern had called him, stood and thought for a moment. Then, he said, "Well, I suppose what drives me is the belief that I can survive until this end of this horrific war so that I can one day see my daughters again, Catique."

"Ah." Ern struggled to smile. "Anisa and Eneta. How old again?"

"Six and nine, when I left, Catique," answered Josefan. "That makes them seven and ten now, their birthdays fast approaching. I was hoping to send them messages although that now seems as likely as any fantasy." He said that last part with a certain sadness. Then added, "And yours, Catique? What is it?"

"My..." asked Ern.

"Your purpose." Josefan took a seat on a stool that sat against the cold rock walls of the fortress.

Ern turned his head to look back out toward the sea. The moon was a half crescent and it hung high over the sea, its reflection wide across a violent sea that threw itself against the rocks below. After a long moment, he said, "Vengeance. Bloody, bloody, vengeance. And, be certain, I will kill all of those who have done me harm."

Josefan sighed. "Vengeance is an empty purpose, Catique."

"No," said Ern. "Not empty. Vengeance certainly isn't empty. It comes with euphoria. Instantaneous satisfaction. Much like a drug, really. And if the beggars can have their heroine, the young Levantine girls their cocaine, and the soldiers their marijuana, then us warriors can have our blood."

A momentary silence came between them, as one thought and the other waited, then Josefan said, "I remember reading when I was a

student a book by an ancient writer and general, Yeraploxos. It tells the story of Medulai and Querosca, two cities that sit along the modern northern Frommian coast, as well as almost all of their neighbors. The war between them consumed not only their lands but all lands for thousands of miles in all directions. It was as if the whole world, certainly the whole world to them at the time, was at war. And for many years neither city could defeat the other, one always gaining the upper hand only to lose it in a moment of arrogance and hubris. But in the thirteenth year of the war, a Medulainian general by the name of Trosidas leads an army of six thousand men deep into the enemy's colonies, won many battles, and turned the cities one by one against their former master not by violence and death, but through generosity and mercy. The name Trosidas is synonymous with that of a warrior even to this day. I am sure you recognize it."

"Aye, I do," answered Ern. "If only the world today was as simple as it was back then and I could simply persuade with enlightened words the pirates to peace. Alas, I cannot, and so like you I must see through to the end of this war through means of violence. As for my other enemies, perhaps when the day comes I can treat with them differently, but I do not foresee it."

Josefan nodded, but his lips betrayed disagreement. Nevertheless, he asked, "What was it that you summoned me here for, Catique?"

"Your mind, for one, Knight. You are a good man to speak to, I value your thoughts. Second, I must brief you on upcoming operations. After surveying the intelligence provided by our scouts, informants, and by imperial data drops, as well as following our own discussions and those with the other leaders, I have determined our targets for the rest of the summer and into the autumn." Ern stood.

"Oh?" asked the other man. "The men will be excited to hear that we will soon be away from this place. Being confined here begins to take a toll on one's soul."

Ern laughed. "As if we still had our souls, Knight Josefan."

The other man arched an eyebrow, but only meekly. Otherwise, he said nothing. Ern went on, "The rebellion is built on the labor of its leaders, the captains who lead men into battle and the commodores who direct the movements of these. Without these, their crews are directionless and the militias cease to receive their money. It follows that the faster these men fall, the sooner the revolt will end."

"True," said Josefan. "And the empire has not thought of this, Catique?"

"Of course they have," retorted Ern. "But you remember the caverns below the city, the tunnels of brick, concrete, and wet, packed dirt beneath layers of rubble, where it gets so dark that even our flashlights illuminate only what is directly in front of us. You remember the enemies we fought there and the dead we've left behind. The enemy hides where the bombs cannot reach them, and the empire is too weak-willed to spill the necessary blood for a quick victory. Luckily, it has men still loyal to it who believe they are the key to ending this dreaded rebellion once and for all. Is that not so? Is not your purpose to end this war so that you may see your daughters? And would this not help you attain this satisfaction all the faster?"

"Aye, Catique," answered Josefan. "It would."

"Then listen..." and Ern told him of his plans, of where the attacks would take place and against whom. He went on until the night and the two of them planned and schemed together, Josefan leaving for his own quarters only late in the night. The next day they told the men of these plans and for the next two weeks the Band of Dardel anxiously awaited for the second campaign of the year to begin.

Totem of Pexoxho

July 2028

The totem rose in the center of the square like a spire toward the sun. Its marble face was carved with imagery of the old sea gods on all sides, and on its head sat that of Pexoxho himself, the master of all of these gods and others.

All around it, the bones left of the buildings that once stood here were fortified by pirate crews and allied militias that had come into the city. Ern could see some of them from the perch on which he stood. Behind him, waited four knights who lounged at different spots in the ruins of what could have been a room. They looked as relaxed as wolves.

He saw four enemies at the top of what was now a makeshift tower which dominated the square. A cloth covered it atop, concealing it from the air — including the prowling drones. From inside protruded the barrel of a machinegun. Its crew had a clear arc of fire that took in most of the open space below, and whatever was missed would be covered by a machinegun placement undoubtedly somewhere on the opposite side, although it was out of view for now. Behind the crumbled stone walls elsewhere Ern could see the dancing shadows of a fire by the pattern in the light which escaped. There were dozens more, perhaps hundreds, if his scouts' reports were even half-right. According to some, the rebels had been accumulating forces in the area for weeks, even many from the outside towns. It was unnatural for them to bring so many men together, in fear of a strike that could wipe them all out, and it was doubly unnatural to prepare for an attack inside the city, especially now with the majority of imperial forces now comfortably positioned all along the suburbs of Tiwanaku.

What the pirates were planning, Ern could only guess. Since the imperial army had surrendered the initiative of the siege in order to starve their enemy out, most believed that the pirates would take the opportunity to strike up and down the Theohuanacan coastlines while infiltrating into the imperial rear. And perhaps they were doing that, but they were gathering strength here, too. And for what? Many feared the worst: that the pirates and their militias were looking to cleanse the city, or what was left of it, of the Knights and other operatives who continually terrorized the civilians and fighters alike.

Ern looked beyond the square and its totem for a moment, at the rising towers of rubble behind and all around. Very little of the physical damage had been done by him or any of the Knights. For that, Tiwanaku had to thank the imperial aircraft, warships, and artillery. But Ern liked to believe that where he had an impact was in the psychological damage the city and its people had suffered.

In his mind flashed the images of the women as they cried when the Knights invaded their sanctity and the children whose eyes looked empty as they lay dead, and bloody, on pieces of rock and concrete. He remembered the fighters he had impaled in squares and major thoroughfares all over the city and its suburbs. There was no mistaking the enemy's hate for the Knights, and now Ern suspected that they were accumulating here to put an end to the terror.

"What do you see, Catique?" asked one of the knights standing behind him.

The question startled Ern somewhat if only because until now no one had said anything and he had grown accustomed to the silence. He did not answer right away, but finally said, "Enemy sentries directly across the square, atop one of the towers. There's some movement within the buildings and below, but it's hard to make anything out. Any drone intel?"

Ern looked back and the knight shook his head. "No, Catique." He fidgeted with his tablet a bit more, then added, "It hasn't connected to any imperial network in the past 72 hours."

Imperial drones surveilled almost every inch of Tiwanaku (and Palenque) at all times, yet this intelligence was hardly given to the soldiers still fighting in the city. Because electronic equipment within the city could not be properly inventoried and monitored by imperial authorities, the military was loathed to allow the Knights access to their networks at all. Rather, data was sent in packets from sources separate and remote to the principal network, and delivery was neither on a schedule nor guaranteed. Ern looked up at the sky, dark clouds gathering above them menacingly, knowing that somewhere there was a drone and wishing he could see with its vision.

Alas, he only had the vision he was born with, and with what he had seen so far Ern already had formed of an idea. He turned to his companions and said, "Knights Regalus and Bolón, remain here and continue scouting on the enemy. Collect intelligence and I will send runners for your report every morning and night. No detail is too small, annotate anything and everything on the enemy. Knights Gelón and Hertato, let us return to the men. Gelón, take point. Hertato, watch the rear."

They proceeded down the staircase, jumping over gaps when needed. At the edge of the ruins of what was once the building's façade, Knight Gelón peeked to either side of the street. Seeing no enemies, he nodded his head and led the party to a faux tunnel formed from the collapsed rubble. Inside here there was an opening that led down a tunnel, its entrance was hidden by foliage and rubbish purposefully left over a rusted iron sheet door. Opening this door, they continued into the narrow tunnel which dirt walls scraped against their shoulders and which ceiling almost did not clear their heads. There was scarcely light. Here and there the earth shook from sporadic artillery strikes, which continued to bombard Tiwanaku at will. It seemed to continue on forever, never a deviation or alternate route along its length. The men rarely spoke, the only sounds coming from the rhythmic splash of water droplets seeping from the earth and rocks, and their grunts as they struggled on.

Finally, Ern and the four knights with him reached a widening that led to an intersection. They were all veteran enough to know the route by memory, but in case they did not the symbols along the walls helped to navigate them. The five of them turned into one of the other tunnels, this one even narrower than the other. At the end of it was another intersection.

After another tunnel, they emerged back onto the surface. The harbor was to their back and the great ancient fortress of Kula'Kuladin loomed above them. It stood on a tall outcrop which overlooked the ocean.

A guard standing watch at an overlook that one reached through a cave that connected with the fortress saw them and signaled to others above him, at the walls of the castle. These slowly lowered a wooden lift down to ground level, and after the five of them were on it, the lift slowly rose again. As they gained height, the whole city of Tiwanaku spread before them, its toppled surface a ghastly glory.

"Catique," said the guard when they stepped onto the stone walls. "Peremarq Gotak sends for you. He waits in his study."

"Aye, Knight Iritatu." He turned to the men who had come with him. "Knights Gelón and Hertato, go back to the men. Tell Menoteq Bodestaf that Knights Jerospar and Muñoz are to make a run to our outpost at the Totem before the rising of the sun in the morning. Have them prepare for their task tonight." The two knights nodded and parted to their barracks.

He crossed the lower area of the fortress, a large martialing yard that was now full teeming with activity. Up one of the several staircases was the upper fortress, or the citadel. This itself consisted of a wall, a courtyard, gardens, and the decrepit keep at the highest point. A series of lifts took him up these higher levels until he reached the keep itself. Knights on guard snapped to attention as he walked by,

calling his name. The name Ern Dardel was well-known throughout the Knights, a name built on his deeds on the field of battle. He continued on through the courtyard, then into the citadel and down its winding, twisting, and turning halls.

It was a while longer before he reached a closed door, two knights standing to either side of it. They stood at attention when he came into sight, letting him pass through. Behind the door was a library full of so many books that Ern wondered from where in this war-torn city they had come from. Peremarq Gotak sat on a chair in the middle, reading a tome that he held with one hand by the spine.

Ern stood at attention. "Peremarq Gotak, I heed your call."

The peremarq looked startled, as if he hadn't even noticed Ern walk into the room. "Oh," he said, "sit, Catique, sit."

Ern did so, choosing the chair by the peremarq's. Gotak closed the book after marking the page and placed it aside on a table. "Dardel," he said, "I must commend you again on your service to the empire and to the Knights. Your gallantry in action serves as an example to others and has been pivotal to many of our successes. It was for these reasons that I have given you an army and extraordinary powers for your rank so that you could hunt and eliminate the enemy, with the hopes that one day this may decisively break the spine of the rebellion. For a long time you did very well in this role, yet I hear that in the past months you and your men have been less active. Certainly, action reports have become scarcer, your kill counts have decreased, and rumors abound that the pirates are gathering in great strength inside the city. How do you explain this?"

"Aye, peremarq," replied Ern. "It is for that last reason that I've used my men less in battle and more in intelligence gathering. In fact, I have just come back from an outpost overlooking the Totem of Pexoxho. There the enemy keeps camp and there are hundreds of them there, perhaps more hidden within the ruins. And that is just one of them. I have been surveying this gathering at Pexoxho and plan to attack it next week. But I'm afraid that even a stunning success there will not stave off what's coming."

Gotak nodded. "And what is it that you think they have planned?"

"That I do not know for sure, peremarq" answered Ern. "But, if I were to guess, my belief is that they will attack us here."

"Here?" asked the peremarq, bewildered. "This fortress is impregnable, especially with the armada directly behind us. They could never hope to take this place."

"It was impregnable," corrected Ern. "But the pirates have advanced capabilities and who knows what they are hiding. Despite our efforts, the enemy is still smuggling weapons by way of their bases in Nicaro and Firmador. Their supply of chemical weapons surely has not seemed to diminish." He shuddered.

Gotak considered that for a moment, then said, "I still have my doubts, but my reports are the same as yours. The pirates are bringing in the militias from the outer towns and villages, even those now behind siege lines. There are thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of fighters accumulating in Tiwanaku. And they will do something big, but what? And when? Before the next barrage season, that much is certain."

Ern nodded. Every month, the warships of the armada combined their firepower to indiscriminately bombard Tiwanaku, Palenque, and the many towns and villages in between and around, for 72 hours. This month's barrage had already occurred, leaving behind it a swath of destruction that, even if it defied the physics of the situation, added to the demolition of what had already been demolished countless times before. When the next month's bombardment would happen no one in the city knew, but there were at least three weeks until then. He replied as much to Gotak, then added, "Aye, Peremarq. We must

prepare here, I tell you. The strength they are bringing to bear is abnormal and under any other circumstances they would not have been gathered. What do you think they are fielding so many men for? To hit our isolated detachments? They don't need the numbers. To hold out against an imperial offensive? Our armies show the opposite intent, digging in instead and waiting for the enemy to starve. There can only be one option and that is that they seek to eliminate us from the field and thereby secure their rear and therefore better weather the siege."

"Perhaps," said Gotak, after a moment. "You may be right. Even if you are not, we ought to prepare for the eventuality anyways. Continue to scout and take note of the enemy's movements. Any reports you receive from your men should also come to me, and as such I expect updates every day from either you or a man sent in your stead. Do you understand, Catique Dardel?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ern.

Gotak picked the book he was reading back up. It was a history on the Plánol colonization and conquest of these coasts during the ancient past. The peremarq said only, "Very good, you are excused to return to your men, then."

"Thank you, sir." Ern bowed, turned, and then walked through the halls to his barracks.

The peremarq had ordered him to scout and collect intelligence, but in truth he had much more than that planned. The greatest generals always said that the best defense was an aggressive offense, and go on the offensive was exactly what he planned to do. When he returned he spoke to his top NCOs and then left for his room, where he immediately began to prepare the attack on the enemy forces arrayed around the Totem of Pexoxho.

Captain Dorian the 'Red-Gloved' watched from his perch, high above the Totem of Pexoxho. He saw the Macabéans descend down their own position and into the dark depths below the city. He smiled. Let them see, let them know what was coming, for even what they saw was but a fraction of the total forces preparing against them. And perhaps in their aggression and risk-taking they would deliver the pirates an early victory and morale-boost, a much needed one after so many years of revolt and suffering. He turned to the men around him and said, "Let us return to our hold. The men here will continue to fortify the position for our return."

One of his crewmates nodded and replied, "Do you think they'll give us trouble, captain?"

"I hope that is so," he answered. "The more of them that die out here, the easier taking their citadel will be."

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Capitalizt

by [The Scandinavians](#) » Thu Jan 31, 2019 7:41 pm



Resra, Drana

The grand ploy meant to end the war was finally beginning to take shape. Hidden behind a series of smokescreens the mobilization of the entirety of the warrior caste was taking place. Throughout the northern part of the Scandinvan homeland of Drana four hundred and fifty million men were assembling underneath the auspices of a mixture of units being replenished, people on furlough, and a few other things. It certainly left some room for distrusting the overt intent, but Scandinvan command ensured only a circle of a dozen members of high command knew the true scale of the campaign being prepared for. After all, they did not want the Golden Throne to be

able to have enough of an advance notice to thoroughly carefully selected fortified positions nor have the ability to adjust the deployment of all its forces on the front.

With this as the basis of their prospective, the Scandinavian command began to set into motion the needed framework for everything to fall into place as designed. This required an extensive series of false flags on their part though. They needed to maintain a proper air of disbelief to ensure that the enemy was not capable of putting everything together. As such, a number of false attacks would be demanded to keep the Golden Throne's generals confused over the general intent of the various troops movements. One of the most obvious ways of doing so was to simply launch a number of counter offensives that ultimately functioned as no more than probing assaults in actuality.

From this requirement, came a number of plans designed to mask the overall movement of troops. One of the more potent was a plot to use a mass purge of a small city long renowned for being a den of vice, heresy, and dres'nalar influences it made a pretty noticeable target. Whilst, the Scandinavians had not conducted any large scale purification projects during the war thus far the mask of one would certainly provide cover for the movement of a nice little fraction of the troops. They, though not directly taking part in the purge, would nonetheless be excusable as performing quarantine operations meant to ensure that no one escaped and that the news was played out in a fashion favorable to the Church and before the Teharsn (the way of light). Nothing though could be taken for granted though. Therefore a large number of precautions had to be put into place.

Throughout the northern part of the Empire the Inquisition began a massive hunt for all heretics, sympathizers to dres'nalar, promoters of practices considered deviant, people who had hidden their mixed blood status, and anyone who was considered to be a threat to the Teharsn. However this time would not see an age of mass pyres. For after a decade of effort the Scandinavians had finished perfecting the Salvation Apparatus. In a first, the Scandinavians had created a device which could over the course of hours indoctrinate a person by rewiring their brains to facilitate religious euphoria. This technology however demanded that a person not resist its efforts to rework their minds. These developments were notable departures from the usual method of just executing those who would oppose the status quo of the Empire or the will of ap Erid ao Erid.

Such processes did not emerge as the result of a singular goal given to a group of researchers to achieve. They were the result of years of attempting to find a way to thoroughly force someone to recant their sinful ways. Over time various projects resulted in a confluence of research which came together into a unified theory essentially. Combining the information from a broad spectrum of labs saw them conclude that the existing data implied that a breakthrough could be achieved by manipulating a person into a state of religious euphoria which could be initiated after the treatment through proper triggers. Something which caught the interest of the Inquisition who secreted away the publicly available stories on the project and placed the researchers under seal. In return they would have an unlimited budget and complete support for whatever they might need. An upgrade few of the already zealous scientists would be able to turn down.

The Salvation Apparatus would become the hallmark of the new campaigns of the Inquisition. Instead of crudely burning nearly a million people a year at the pyre for their failure to repent of their sins now they would have the ability to break the spirits of the unrepentant. For the first time in centuries a breakthrough had occurred which would revolutionize the redemption business. Now more souls could be saved from the fires of the pit. Now the Inquisition was ever closer to fulfilling their mandate to force sinners to confess their sins and atone for them. Developments which belied the sheer brute force potential of the Salvation Apparatus.

Overall, the Salvation Apparatus worked through taking an individual

bound to something which outwardly resembled a mall photo booth in shape and size. Though the interior was massively different. Inside of it a person would be strapped into a unit which would handle all their basic needs in the time that they were confined in the Apparatus. During their time inside of it they would be subjected to a series of processes aimed at breaking their personal investment in whatever they once held dear save for their families. In the place of their old worldview only the righteous path would be left. No doubt would be tolerated to remain within their minds as to the proper place of those subjected to the Salvation Apparatus.

This was all done through a rather invasive process through chemical incentives, mental reconditioning, emotional transfiguration, denial of positive associations, pain, and a myriad of other means of breaking the will of the subject. Things which were designed to teach people placed within the Apparatus to come to hate themselves for what they once were. Over the course of the first half of the Salvation Apparatus' process these routines would be reinforced by each. With those who were resistant to the process being separated for special treatment. The artificial intelligence utilized had been refined through the sacrifice of five thousand people who had suffered through the refinement of the Apparatus. The Inquisition had managed to get success rates to be over 85%. Among the remaining 15% most people would possess a physiological profile which made them largely resistant to the Apparatus and from them a proper archetype had been established to test against. After these studies the AI had learned the parameters which could see those who could withstand the process and they would be taken off by the Inquisition for either execution or a more personal approach to matters.

Through the secondary part of the treatment the Apparatus would begin to train the subjects within to come to feel a deep euphoria by serving the Scandinvan Empire and the Scandinvan Church. They would be bombarded by hours of selective programming to form attachments to positive virtues. They would be made to understand where they had erred. They would be made to embrace the rightful way of thinking, They would be made into proper members of the faith. They would come to love the Almighty fully. By coming to attach joy with service those who endured the reeducation would come to enter a state that the Inquisition considered to be ideal for a person to repent in. They would come to love their new state and embrace it fully. Something which was required of those who properly wished to recant of their old ways so that they might again enter the congregation of the faithful in true grace, at least according to the studies thus far conducted.

None would be allowed to defy the will of the throne. The ascendancy of Fenric will be accepted by all. The weakness tainting Scandinvan society will be expunged by the fitful. The divine truth of Erid and the true Church would be the only foundation for all who dealt within the rule of the Scandinvan. No challenge to their authority would be tolerated. Any who dared defy it would be broken and turned into willing agents thanks to the Salvation Apparatus.

Based upon the results of the Apparatus during the trial periods the Inquisition now felt fully comfortable moving onto much larger applications of it. In line with the mandate to begin operations to serve as a cover for large scale troop mobilizations the Inquisition encircled the city with four rings of soldiers totaling well over a million for a city of just 600,000. There was a common acknowledgement among the Inquisition and high command that the forces were mostly to prevent any unwanted information from leaking out. Only the messages that they wanted to leave would be made available to the greater world. The city of Resra would burn.

Now that the Resra was surrounded and no outflows of people could occur the processing of the inhabitants began. Children under the age of majority (17) would be separated from their parents and taken away to new guardians more capable of providing them with righteous guidance. The adults of the city would be herded through various holding compounds where those on select lists would be targeted for immediate execution due to their perceived status as

intellucals or leadership cadre types who defied the proud ways of the Empire. Those who were found loyal would be released quickly and have their families reunited. Those who were found wanting would be sent into one of the Salvation Apparatus rigs for their redemption.

Thus was the operation carried out over the course of a week. Street by street, house by house, family by family, individual by individual was everyone sorted. Among the death lists slightly over three thousand persons were executed by immolation on the spot. Their bodies displayed as examples to those who would defy the ongoing operation. Among the people who were not found wanting they were in effect sent back to their homes with their families with the personal identification electronic forms of each given bettered status allowing them access to better credit, more freedom of movement, and improved housing options in the future. Those who were processed by the Salvation Apparatuses were to be held in containment for a month whilst their alterations were properly monitored after they had undergone the treatment by the specialized AI which had been developed to liberate their souls from their debauched ways. After they were to be released and reunified with their children when it was deemed reasonable by the Church.

After these events, would the city of Resra appear free. With the hope that the operation would distract enough international attention to distract the Golden Throne for at least a short period of time. It was understood that it would not be all that much, but every hour provided them with cover to enact the Scandinavian plans for a much bigger offensive that would be obscured by the cleansing of Resra. Nonetheless, a few other smokescreens were about to place to better ensure that their gambit would pay dividends in some form. After all, only a fool would attempt to invest all their hopes inside of a single endeavor which was a test run for a tool whose overall effectiveness that was not yet properly battle tested.

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
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Founded: Oct 09, 2004
Capitalist

by **The Scandinavians** » Sat Feb 09, 2019 11:03 pm



Thus far the activities had been aimed at attracting the attention of the Golden Throne and convince them that the feint was a wholehearted campaign worthy enough to attract their full attention. In order to do so though would require a good bit more effort in the minds of the imperial high command. Therefore a general consensus had been formed that more fireworks would need to follow. The introduction of the Salvation Apparatus, whilst being an intellectual curiosity, was not enough to been seen by most reasonable people as some sort of groundbreaking change to the distribution of forces nor would it appear to weaken commitments at the front. To follow the opening act the forces of the Glorious Empire of the Scandinavians would enact a greater scheme meant to hide the moments of their forces as they prepared for a grand offensive.

There was a rather straightforward way to convince the enemy (whose understanding of Scandinavian internal politics was imperfect) that the large scale movements of forces merely mirrored a relatively harmless thing. The upcoming month was the time in which all enlisted men who were not in combat duties were allowed to return in various shifts for a time to visit their families. This opinion was thankfully something many average soldiers had been hoping for. In actuality, the custom was never allowed in times in which the homeland had been invaded. However, it had so long since the last time that this occurred that the exception was forgotten by all save

high command. To help fuel this way of thinking, unit commanders had been offering their soldiers the chance to receive care packages from home and to directly call their families in the time leading up to the supposed celebration.

Such a stunt would not be without concerns. The overall populace needed to be kept loyal after all. This required that the soldiers at the front not come to feel that they had been part of some scheme aimed at deceiving them wholesale. Yet, at the same time for the plan to work they had been to quite convinced that they would indeed have a holiday of some sort. The compromise proposed for this would be that the soldiers would be given a series of holidays in which they would be allowed to pursue off duty recreational activities save for those on front line deployment. On top of this, special distributions of more prized meals were to be made to all troops as a way to remind them of their cooking at home.

The hope from this strategy was to manage to honor the traditions of the past, but to present things in such a way to make people realize that certain customs could not be honored whilst the very homeland of the dres'Erid was so gravely threatened. Certainly this was not a foolproof way of addressing the situation. No singular auspices could properly convince everybody that they had not been duped in some fashion. Despite this concern the general sentiment within command was in agreement that they had to press forward with it. They, after all, needed to create as large and persuasive of picture as was possible.

As such, the overall approach to this aspect of things had been fully weighed as far as the command staff were concerned. They would add a few additional support officers to ensure discipline was sufficiently maintained, but they were confident that the cohesion of their forces would remain quite steady. Though the Golden Throne was expected to not have any real idea what was going on. For they lacked access to the hidden agendas of the highest echelons of the military and the average soldier spreading rumors would believe that they would so gain away time. These circumstances created the perfect storm for misinformation in the minds of the generals.

How it would play out in its entirety was still up for grabs. Only the Almighty already truly knew the answer to how well this would all play out for the Scandinavians.

Last edited by [The Scandinavians](#) on Sat Feb 09, 2019 11:06 pm, edited 2 times in total.

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



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Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by [The Macabees](#) » Thu Mar 07, 2019 12:51 pm



TIWANAKU: SIEGE AND ABANDONMENT, PART III / SIEGE OF KULA'KULADIN

Follows from: [1/17/2019](#); [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](#).

"The Knights claim many things. But abandoned they never were."

Totem of Pexoxho

11 August 2028

Dardel saw directly into the plaza from the shelled-out lobby of an old building. Four other men stood in the shadows, comprising of his usual fire team with the addition of Knight Josefan, who Dardel brought with him for the sake of good company. No doubt the Catique also sought to get Josefan out of the fortress, where the knight liked to hole up. Kula'Kuladin was rich with books, all of them in its formidable library that had miraculously survived centuries of conquest and piracy. Thousands of leatherbound tomes stood on dark shelves contained in bookcases rising five men tall to the chamber's wide arching ceilings and lining the walls from end to end. The keepers claimed that some of the books and manuscripts they held were the sole surviving originals of the work. It was no place for a man destined for a life of killing, which was the path Josefan had taken, the path of a Knight of Kula'Kuladin.

One wondered just how voluntary this journey was. Certainly, Dardel had no say in his own fate. When he was pulled from the rocks at the base of the fortress into one of the many caves carved into the shoreline cliffs of the city he had decided against life. But, his...he supposed, enslavement by the Knights gave him a new purpose. Josefan would find a purpose of his own in all of this, something more than just merely surviving.

In the space behind the catique, there was a hastily covered hole in the floor. They had all emerged from there, coming from the far end of a tunnel which connected with a hub that fed into the caves below the fortress. It was these tunnels that allowed the Knights some ease of movement within the city, especially so near to the besieged harbor.

The navy conducted its daily bombardments in an irregular rhythm. Now the battle was as much psychological as it was anything else. The empire had long ago determined to preserve the lives of its own men by simply starving the rebels out, and the fleet had overseen its own responsibilities in this area rather well. Pirate smugglers were succeeding less and less, and those that came rarely brought food or water. Those who did not die of hunger or thirst were kept on the edge by imperial ships growing bored of picketting and patrol duties. The errant artillery shell was a common theme and one could hear the explosions throughout Tiwanaku, at any hour of the day.

The square around the Totem of Pexoxho was devoid of life. Not a single enemy was wandering about the rubble pathways carved from collapsed buildings. It was strange, but not unknown. The enemy was bunkered down, and that usually meant an impending attack or fear of bombardment. Nothing would suggest that it was the latter, and the former presented an exciting opportunity — to strike down the pirates just when they thought the initiative was theirs. It would be another great victory for Dardel to bring back to Peremarq Gotak. Beyond fueling his legend, it was the promise of blood that drew Dardel the most. He smiled as he looked at the empty square. He smiled because he knew that somewhere down there, perhaps in subterranean chambers, a host of pirates were hiding. And they would be his prey. His grip on the rifle slung across his chest tightened until his knuckles turned white.

He turned to his men and snarled, "Come, let's move out."

Two of them uncovered the hole leading into the tunnel. Dardel went first, followed by these two. The third went through as the fourth guarded, and finally the fourth man carefully jumped in while pulling the cover back over the entrance as elegantly as he could. Iron tools were anchored into the dirt by clasps and he took these to better position the cover. Once all were collected below, Dardel ordered

Josefan to take point and they marched on in the dark.

It was not long before they came upon another chamber, dimly lit and visible from perhaps a hundred feet away. They could hear the whispers of men. One at the edge saw them and waved Dardel and the others in. Inside, there were some two dozen soldiers waiting for them and they all fell silent at the sight of the catique.

He grimaced. They were fortunate a pirate scout hadn't heard and led a crew to butcher them. Scowling, he nodded his head at one and then at another, and ordered, "Knight Kilaro, run now to the platoon under Jiparq Veranza. Tell him that he is to attack along the route planned. Do the same, Knight Bejame, run to Jiparq Arjen and tell him that the time to strike is now. The rest of you," he continued, his gaze now sweeping over all of the men arrayed before him, "follow me to the surface. It is time to root out the pirate scum from their hideouts and ratholes. Leave none alive. And when we return to the Fortress of Kula'Kuladin, we shall arrive proudly of our great achievement. For we will have wiped out an enemy contingent surely poised to attack us near to our base of operations. Follow me now. I have seen them with my own eyes and they have recessed. Today, this very moment, may be the final opportunity in our grasps."

"Follow!" he repeated, trotting back into the darkness of the tunnel. Some thirty men total wearing stoic faces fell in line behind him, following their leader into battle, like they had done so many times in the past. And they had always emerged victorious. Why should today be any different?

Knight Josefan stuck closely to the catique and when they reached the hole, it was Josefan who climbed to the surface first. The skeleton remnants of the room Dardel had returned to were still as empty as they were when he left. Quietly, the rest of his men filled it, hiding behind walls and even spilling into adjacent areas to find unoccupied cover. The thirty of them organized themselves with their backs to the plaza. Their weapons were grasped firmly. That Dardel's Knight's had been couped up in the fortress for some months was easily observed. They itched for battle.

They surged forward suddenly. Turning around the walls they hid behind and led by their catique, they quickly skirted the edge of the square. Each of them kept a wary eye on the surrounding buildings. If the pirates were here, they surely had sentries posted on the surface to warn of an attack or to observe a patrol. On the opposite side of the square, another thirty men or so emerged from the shadows as well. Somewhere, a third platoon ran rampant. Together, the better part of a company converged on a long block of buildings on the other side, behind the Totem of Pexoxho.

Along the rooftop, there were 'towers' that Dardel and his men were careful to avoid. Those could easily contain machine gun nests, although the ones that the catique had seen the first time he was here were gone. Most likely, they had simply been repositioned. The pirates were by no means fools. So, any makeshift tall, flat, and protected 'tower' made from the ruins of what was once undoubtedly a beautiful building was smartly bypassed by the men on the ground in as circuitous a route as necessary.

In any case, the cleansing of the surface of pirate sentries and outposts was left to the fourth platoon. This one, for now, remained hidden and unknown.

Back on the surface, the three platoon made contact with each other. They cleared the many rooms, finding nothing. Scouts quickly discovered tunnel entrances and these were taken by team-sized units. Like this, the nearly one hundred Knights moved swiftly and smoothly, returning once again to the depths below the surface of the earth. Slowly and carefully economizing on noise, they crept upon the enemy they suspected was down there with them..

..."They be here," said one of the captain's scouts, whose rags-for-clothes were barely that now. The man looked like he had hardly eaten in ages, his cheeks hollow and the skin tight against his thin bones.

Dorian 'the Red Gloved' smiled. "Good," he answered. "Mighty good."

His men were already arrayed, split up by their crews all around and below the Totem of Pexoxho. He had made sure in the past days to practice their positioning, for they could not be seen by the Knights until the enemy was right upon them. The captain was waiting with his own crew within a small, unlit chamber that one entered through a tunnel reached from the surface.

"Should I give th' order t' sprin' th' trap?" asked the scout.

"Nay," said Dorian, shaking his head. "Nah yet. Let them invest themselves more. Let them reckon they be surprisin' us. We'll catch them wit' thar breeches down 'n thar behinds bare..."

...Dardel and his men trudged forward through the dark, damp tunnel. There was some sort of chamber ahead, although very little lighting. Whether there was life in there, they did not know. With eyes peeled open and nerves at the world's end, the catique and his squad advanced toward uncertainty.

Suddenly, the ground shook. Not more than, perhaps, two hundred feet away, something exploded. Dardel checked around him and the tunnel still seemed intact, but he knew that something bad had happened. Maybe another squad had set off a mine or a bomb, maybe it was something else entirely. Truth be told, he only had a split second to think about it.

A machine gun opened up at the end of the corridor leading to the chamber and its bullets ripped into human flesh.

If there was no light before, now the dark walls came to life behind the fire spitting out of the machine gun's barrel. "Gods damn it, gods damn it all," said Dardel. He gritted his teeth, grabbed some of his men, and pushed them forward. "Keep moving you fuggin' cowards. Attack! Attack! Or we'll all be dead meat."

Loose dirt along the walls fell freely with every shake of the earth. The sounds of battle were coming from the surface and the tunnels alike, some of it reaching them clearly. The tunnel shook again when one of the Knights threw a grenade into the chamber. It exploded and silenced the machine gun, allowing Dardel's squad to keep advancing. Now rifle fire joined in, although it seemed that whatever was in there had either died, fallen silent, or withdrawn. It was not, however, a surprise when they reached the chamber and gunfire came from the tunnel on the other end of the room.

The gunfight lasted no more than thirty minutes in all, which was a long time for what amounted to a measly subterranean chamber — one of tens of thousands, in fact. Dardel thought he had seen the face of the pirate captain, but when they finally secured the room, all traces of the pirates were gone except for their dead and wounded. The latter were quickly put to death.

From the tunnel they had come through another man, a Kula'Kuladin Knight that the catique had left as a sentry at the mouth of the tunnel, came running in. Panting, he said, "Catique, the enemy...the enemy has ambushed us. The situation is dire. There are at least two fists, perhaps even a third."

Dardel gritted his teeth more tightly than he had before. "Good," he said, almost forcefully, "the more enemies that attack us, the more we'll kill."

Fortress of Kula'Kuladin

14 August 2028

Three days after the ambushing of the company under the command of Catique Ernst Dardel, the Knights assembled a rescue force. Three additional companies, a strong force considering the Knights' limited manpower at these heights — with the cessation of imperial offensive operations within the city there were less wounded than the Knights could "recruit" from —, left the fortress in the early morning of the 14th.

Marching to their tunnel entrances, they were ambushed by a pirate force no less than ten fists strong. Little more than 300 men were no match for over 1,000, and the pirates were no strangers to war and their strength as soldiers could be attested to by anyone who had faced them. Repelled, the three companies withdrew back behind the thick walls of the harborside castle and what was at first ten fists became twenty, then thirty, and finally they settled in around Kula'Kuladin with the clear intention of besieging it and defeating the imperial force inside. Hemmed in by more than 3,000 enemy combatants, there was little that the Knights could do other than dig in for defense.

Of course, the pirates could not challenge access to the sea. Five Knights were sent out, using the tunnels that connected directly with the caves below the fortress to reach the harbor, where they took a hidden, powered inflatable boat out to sea. The waters were calm. There had been a lull in the weather after the summer storms. Carefully, they left Tiwanaku and headed toward one of the small ships that was clearly visible just at the edge of the horizon. Without consistent communication with imperial authorities outside the city, reaching one of those ships was perhaps the fastest way to communicate the dire situation the Fortress of Kula'Kuladin suddenly found itself in. Behind them, they left behind the ruins of a once great city and the sounds of war that composed the only signs of life it still had. As they traveled farther and farther, the tragedy of Tiwanaku came into view in its totality, like a landscape photo of a city so destroyed by battle that it had been permanently abandoned except by those soldiers foolish enough to continue fighting for something that was already lost.

Ironical that it was the robbery of life that gave impression of it to begin with.

17 August 2028

Peremarq Gotak looked through the narrow slit that ancient archers once used to rain hell upon their enemy. The peremarq's soldiers didn't use these, they made their own. Kula'Kuladin's walls were pockmarked with holes and damage caused by centuries of war, accelerated of course by this last one and the utter annihilation that came with it.

Below, he could see enemy heads and helmets bob as they ran through the various trenchlines that they had dug all around the fortress' walls where there was land. They had even started to cover the caves in the cliffs, although here the Knights were more than able to repulse them when needed. Certainly, no pirate would enter the fortress from below. But, their siege lines were tightening and their efforts to close the caves suggested that they sought to cut the Knights off from even the hope of naval resupply — although, this they would surely find a challenge.

The peremarq was none too concerned. Neither did Anaqas Jovlías, who turned the corner into the hallway the peremarq was in.

"Hail," greeted Peremarq Gotak. "Strange to see you alone. These days, none of us seem to be afforded time for ourselves."

"Aye, it *is* a rare pleasure, peremarq," replied Jovlías. He asked, "How is the situation outside?"

Gotak grimaced. "Worse than it was three days ago. There are more of them now, perhaps fifty or sixty fists total. I estimate perhaps 7,000 fighters, in all. Our access to supplies is slowly being compromised. Even from the sea. If the *Kríermada* resupplied us, we'd have to meet them in the harbor or somehow bring the supplies through the caves. But even the latter are slowly being compromised. When we plug them, it doesn't mean we deny the enemy access."

"Hm," said the anaqas. "That seems dire, indeed. But, we should have enough stores to last us for many months, no?"

The peremarq nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Good." The general walked up to the slit that Gotak had been looking out of and gave the outside world a view of his own. He said, after some time, "Gloomy. You know, I remember this city from the first and second wars with the pirates. It was beautiful. It still is, in some ways. I doubt it will ever return to what it was, however."

"No," answered Gotak. "I don't think so, either."

"And the men you sent to the fleet?" The anaqas turned to look at him then.

Gotak nodded again. "They made contact, sir. But little of value has been relayed back to us."

Jovlías sighed. Then said, "The August barrage season has yet to come. Perhaps that should give us hope."

"Perhaps, anaqas," replied Gotak. "Perhaps. But those siegelines are close to the fortress. The *kriermada* will fear striking us and our fortification in their bombardment, and even if the barrage succeeds at first the enemy will simply move closer to our walls to increase that risk of friendly casualties. Support will have to come from elsewhere. Maybe aircraft. But all of these things are big mabies. They don't want to tell us anything because of intelligence sensitivities they say. They won't even give us a damn permanent line of communication. Even after all of this, even as we are cornered and starved. Its a gods damn disgrace, sir. *A gods damn disgrace.*"

The anaqas smiled then. It was a thin smile, but one nonetheless. "What is Willed cannot be changed, peremarq. If our survival is Willed, then we *will* survive. If it is not...remember that the universe has a plan for us all, and no matter how we think we fit, the universe knows better than us."

"Do you really believe that?" asked Gotak.

"And what else am I to believe?" retorted the anaqas.

Silence momentarily prevailed, then with heavy breath, Gotak said, "The longer this war drags on, the longer I am here in Tiwanaku, the more faith I lose in what is Willed. I do not—"

Something caught his eye and it cut him off midthought. He looked through the slit. The anarqas looked at him curiously. Below, hundreds of pirate fighters were still traveling up and down the dozens of trench lines carved into the earth like deep, ugly scars. Among them there were six men towing what looked like an old artillery canon. But it looked like nothing he had ever seen before. The barrel, or more accurately the launcher, was mounted on wheels, but it did not look organic. It looked ad hoc. A metallic guard around the barrel protected the crew pushing it into place from the machinegun and rifle fire coming from the defenders in the fortress, who no doubt were seeing and thinking the same thing as Gotak. What were they thinking? That the pirates were not here to wait until the Knights surrendered. They would bring about that ending on their own.

The peremarq looked over to his general. "Anaqas," he said, "we should go now and get away from this wall."

The earth shuddered, then, and something struck the wall with a force that sent them both off their feet. Down the hall and elsewhere in the castle there was yelling and the sound of boot steps on the cold, stone floors. Another shudder and another strike. Then another, and another, and another. There were more than just one of those ad hoc cannons. And just one was dangerous enough.

"Pick a force of your best thirty men, peremarq," said the anaqas as they climbed back to their feet. "Lead those best thirty men through the cavers, sally, and destroy those siege cannons."

18 August 2028

Even after a sole night, the pirates' impromptu siege cannons had taken a toll on the superstructure of the fortress. Towers that had stood for hundreds of years crumbled to the sea below. The walls, despite their great thickness, were buckling at points, as if ready to collapse in their totality. And if those cannons were not destroyed soon, they most surely would.

Early morning on the 18th of August, Gotak led his thirty hand-picked men down through the cavernous tunnels directly below the fortress. These the Knights still had under their control, even if their outlets had been guarded or closed by the pirates. The peremarq didn't head to the caves, though. Instead, he took a less well-known route that would take him to an exit about eight hundred meters behind the enemy's siege lines. As this tunnel wasn't connected to the rest, it was possible that the pirates had not yet discovered it. If they did, then the peremarq's mission may have already been compromised; success counted on the element of surprise.

Gotak and his squad emerged outside after a long trot down the narrow, shoulder-width tunnel. The sun had hardly displaced the moon yet and a long shadow still covered much of the earth. Tiwanaku was even more depressing in the dark than it was in the night, and the decrepit free-standing walls of old buildings stood tall like ancient guards who had seen better days. Luckily, there was not an enemy man in sight, although these areas were undoubtedly crawling with pirates. The peremarq had given orders prior to the launching of the operation and these were faithfully carried out. The thirty men split into six groups of five and they dispersed among the ad hoc paths between walls of rubble to better hide within it and escape detection. And if one group or another stumbled upon the enemy, that way it would not compromise the entire force.

As it was, the pirates were well positioned and dispersed amongst the ruins. Gotak, leading five others, silently cursed when he heard the first gunfights echo through the forest of urban waste, but he pressed on otherwise unconcerned with what was happening around him. He knew that this was a suicide mission to begin with, and that only through extreme perserverence would any of the five groups reach their objectives.

He reached what looked like a city street, although the asphalt had suffered from the siege as all other parts of the city had. Little of it was left, in fact, and that which remained existed in churned clumps, and that only if it hadn't already been covered by pieces of brick and steel. Although he had been to Tiwanaku many times before, even during peacetime, the peremarq could hardly recognize what he saw. He remembered only as it was now, and that only because this had been his home for little more than a year now. The Frommian had fought in the gritty "Zarbian Marche" before a long period of service at the old Guffingfordi Frontier, when the Holy Empire of Stevid's armies still occupied a strip of Guffingfordi land on the imperial continent. Then had come the Indran campaign, but nothing had prepared him for this. Nothing could have prepared him for the

Knights of Kula'Kuladin.

There was no obvious route through the rubble that could take them back to the siege lines except one across the street. The skeletons of several buildings rose up on all sides and in these there were surely enemy sentries and other forces that could observe them crossing. The firefights behind enemy lines were also becoming louder, surely several of the other assault squads had been found as well by now. But, Peremarq Gotak could not fail this mission. No. He did not come this far to die holed up in an ancient fortress of stone perched upon the rocks on the harbor's flank, butchered by mad pirates who valued chaos and non-civilization so much that they would sacrifice their cities for an evil sort of liberty. No, that was not how we would go.

And if he had to die, he would die on the attack.

He ordered his men to cross the street quickly and they did so, one by one. Nothing happened. They kept moving down a path that headed in a slight southwestern direction. Suddenly, there was movement ahead. They stopped and found cover where they could, observing what was ahead. A crew-sized patrolling force of local guerrillas emerged from a tunnel that intersected with their path and turned the other way, headed south-southwest as well.

Gotak motioned for his men to stand still while they waited for the enemy patrol to disappear behind a bend in the route. Then they followed. Swinging their rifles behind their backs to reveal blades instead and crouching low as they trotted, the Peremarq's Knight's fell upon the local insurgents from the rear and with great ferocity. Slashing and stabbing, they killed all fifty in the column, more than half of them executed after they had been wounded and incapacitated. It was a butchery by all means, but one necessitated by a war where there were no resources to spare for prisoners of war. They did their dirty deeds and then continued toward their objectives.

It took them some time, but soon the rear of the pirate siege lines was clearly evident to them. The besiegers had gone about their task smartly, digging trenches that faced not only the fortress but also the rear. Defenders held positions on both sides, and the makeshift siege cannons were ahead of the forward-most trench but could with some work be brought between the two trench lines if need be. It was an impressive display of earthwork.

He could also see fighting taking place further down the lines to either side. Other squads of Knights had reached their objections as well and had started their own individual battles. All of them seemed a struggle, with large numbers of pirate and militia formations making their way to different hot spots as the situation developed. All Knight squad commanders had been given alternative objectives to choose from, allowing them to disengage, move, and attack another target when suitable. The purpose of this was to keep the enemy of his toes and unsure of where the true objective lie. It would also help confuse them further when other squads joined the battle after being slowed down by initial obstacles, such was the case of the peremarq and the men directly under his command. Splitting his men up in two teams, he arrayed them at the edge of their shelled-out overlook and gritted his teeth. His neck pulsed at the rhythm of the adrenaline.

"Wha' th' Davy Jones' locker be this!" said someone, without warning, behind them.

He turned. There were perhaps eight pirates behind them, carrying their assorted weaponry. They looked as dumbfounded to stumble upon this unsuspecting squad of Knights as the latter were of the former.

The peremarq did not notice that he had already raised his rifle. Neither did he realize that his finger had come down on the trigger until the barrel shuddered from the first round leaving its barrel. He pulled again, then again. The four Knights with him reacted just as

quickly, and together they slaughtered the eight men who had come up behind them.

Wide eyed, the Knights looked at each other.

Then, they looked at him. At his stomach.

His felt the side of his stomach with his fingers. It felt warm to the touch. They had gotten him.

The peremarg's eyes closed as he collapsed to the ground. The 'siege cannons' were still firing.

Totem of Pexoxho

18 August 2028

"Fourth platoon remains out of contact, catique," said one of the scouts to Dardel, who was sitting down upon a chair while one of his squad mates shaved his face with a blade.

He held his head still while the knife sliced millimetrically above his skin. "I suspect they've withdrawn into the nearby city, as would any of us were we in their situation. They outnumber us by three and there are likely other enemies near enough to be considered threats. Fourth platoon is no good to us, anyway."

Knight Josefán was standing across the room, one leg propped up on the wall he was leaning on. "And those explosions from afar? Could that have been the barrage?" he asked.

"No," Dardel shook his head. "It was too weak. That is something else."

"It came from the direction of Kula'Kuladin," said the scout.

Dardel said nothing. If it was true that the enemy was assaulting the fortress, the Knights there would certainly need the help of the hundred men that Dardel had taken with him. And that was precisely what he could not do, not hemmed up like he was in the tunnels beneath the city. It was difficult enough to merely survive, in fact. Two dozen men were already dead and, even with their rations, there was only another day left of food, the same as water.

When the soldier shaving the catique's face finished, Dardel stood. He looked at the men in the room, and said, "We cannot remain here. We cannot wait for the Knights in the fortress to come to our rescue, we will likely die imprisoned here before they arrive — if they arrive. Tomorrow morning, we will break out."

"And fourth platoon?" asked the scout.

Dardel nodded. "Fourth platoon will decide what is best for them when they hear the sounds of battle."

19 August 2028

The sun was still hidden under the world's furthest curve when Dardel and his men marshaled at their starting points. Of the original hundred men under the catique's command, there were perhaps sixty left with him in the tunnels. The battle had been tough and many had died. More had been wounded, and those were maimed to the point of compromising their ability to breakout were given weapons and told to clog the tunnels for as long as possible while their healthier comrades fought to escape the trap the pirates had laid for them. It was a tough order to take and a difficult fate to accept, but in the end no man denied his duty.

"Move out," said Dardel to two squads that was leading personally.

They started their way down the dark tunnel toward an exit point they knew existed.

The rest of his three platoons were similarly split up into groups of one or two squads, with the intention of breaking into the surface at as many points as possible. They'd regroup thereafter and continue their forced march back to the Fortress of Kula'Kuladin from there, that is if they made it to the surface alive.

Almost immediately, one could hear the rat-tat-tat of rifle and machinegun fire coming from some pit or shaft, and then the crying of men. This war was not for the weak or for cowards. Without paying these sounds much heed, Dardel and the twelve other men with him pushed on. Miraculously, most of their route was seemingly unguarded and unoccupied. Like them, the pirates shifted positions every night. The enemy had also suffered heavy casualties during the preceding days, outclassed by Knights who were only trained but also had the weight of a long service behind enemy lines without rest of respite. Still, the lack of an enemy made it all seem more dangerous, eerie, and uncertain.

The exits were hard to see still. As the sun had still not come out above the surface, no light peeked through any cracks in the doors or rubble covering the manholes that gave access to the subterranean routes. This made them all the harder to find, but Dardel had been to this one before and knew where it was. Unfortunately, a tunnel that ran perpendicular to their own intersected almost at the very end, giving any potential enemy an excellent position from which to ambush an escaping or patrolling force. Thus, the catique ordered his men forward carefully, using one squad to cover the other. When they reached the crossroads, it was one fire team from that second squad that covered the other one, and it was almost as soon as the first man poked his head around the corner that the machinegun opened up with unrepentant brutality. The Knight's head, the Knight who had first turned the corner, was blown right off and the soldier crumpled to the ground while the others took cover.

"Shit, shit, shit," said the squad leader, a Guffingfordi-born Knight by the name of Jorassen Rapet. Thinking quickly, he took one of the makeshift explosives they had prepared for the breakout and threw out around the corner. "Fire in the hole! Fire in the hole!" he yelled out as the other men took cover.

Boom. Something cracked and that section of the tunnel collapsed, releasing a cloud of smoke and dust that turned the corner and ravaged the tunnel Dardel and his men were in like a storm.

Dardel did not loiter. Taking advantage of the screen, the Knights quickly crossed the intersection and made their way for the exit. It did not take long for all of them to emerge from the tunnel, less the one man who had been killed in the prior action. Darkness was now their ally and they made their way to the rally point, where Dardel would take control of whatever remained of his force and begin the long trot back to the fortress.

Still, the ensuing firefight was deafening. If he and his two squads had come out of this relatively unscathed up to now, he knew that others hadn't been so lucky. Shapes moved in the shadows, pirates no doubt, and the noise of gunfire was evident both below and above ground. This breakout had catalyzed a great infantry battle, one Dardel wasn't sure he could win.

About forty men in all met him at the rally point on time. There may have been another twenty out there, somewhere, still fighting. And while he wanted to wait for them, he knew that he couldn't.

One Knight met them late, his face covered with black soot, and when the catique asked him where the rest of his squad was, the soldier said, "The pirates...they ambushed us, killed half of our eight-man force before we got out of the tunnels. Another two of us were wounded in the leg, so I left them behind. The other man with me

was killed by a sniper firing from one of the buildings." He pointed toward one of the shelled-out high-rises. Then, "We met, briefly, with elements of fourth platoon, though. They will cover our withdrawal from this place and their survivors will meet us thereafter. That is what these men said, at least."

"Who in fourth platoon did you speak to?" asked Dardel.

The Knight shook his head. "I apologize, catique, I do not know."

Dardel nodded. "It is what it is." Turning to the others, he added, "Men, you have done well to survive this war. Look around you. There are less than half of you left now. With this force we will make the trek back to home base. Be smart, be aware of what's around you, and let's make it back to Kula'Kuladin alive."

There was no cheer. No clapping. The men looked on silently. They were tired, deprived, and out of strength, but they would fight on to the very end. Dardel knew that.

With that little reassurance, he ordered the remnants of his force to move out.

Fortress of Kula'Kuladin

20 August 2028

One would think it was a miracle that any of it stood at all. For more than three days now, the fortress' walls had been relentlessly battered by the ad hoc 'siege batteries.' Truth be told, these weapons were not as formidable as their name suggested. While the pirates had shown incredible ingenuity by pairing the weapons they had with mounts, their glorified rocket launchers could only batter the target one brick at a time. And it showed. Large sections of the walls were collapsing, or on the brink of collapsing, but Kula'Kuladin still stood. Yet, to the besieged, this fact held little value or respite.

As the sun came up another day, the fields around the fortress looked as bleak as they ever had. Somehow, the pirates had managed to make Tiwanaku uglier than it was even before. The backdrop of quarter-standing buildings was now paired by an intensively organized network of trenches that cut Kula'Kuladin off from the the rest of the world. Their siege works extended to the cliffs now, cutting off the ancient castle from the sea as well. Most of the tunnel work had been collapsed or occupied.

The biggest threat was no longer the risk of an enemy breakthrough. Rather, cut off as they were, the Knights were now entirely reliant on the stocks of food and water immediately available to them. Too costly it was to take it from a pirate host that had entrenched itself and more difficult it was now, cut off as they were, to bring supplies in from the sea.

It was on this confusing, bleak situation that Dardel and the remnants of his company, including a battered fourth platoon that had joined him after the breakout, came upon when he first came in sight of the unfolding siege. Hiding in the rubble just north of the fortress, he studied his foes and their movements.

But, there was not much time for thought. By now, anybody in Tiwanaku most likely knew of his breakout and the besieging pirates were undoubtedly bracing themselves for his return.

By the look of it, there were thousands of them down there. Waiting.

He had sixty men, no more.

All of his men were close by him. The time for dispersion had gone. He would need brute strength for the upcoming battle. Turning to them, he said, "You've seen what I have seen. You know what I know. Therefore, you can hardly be surprised to hear this. The

fortress will fall unless we can lift the siege, even if only enough to allow re-supply from the sea again. This task will be difficult, if not impossible. There are thousands of enemies below us, and thousands more ready to reinforce their comrades if need be. Perhaps I am ordering you to suicide. Likely, in fact. But, what other option do we have? If anybody has one, short of surrender, I will gladly hear it. But to surrender to this enemy is suicide, and there are no allies near us to give us aid if we resisted, so why die on our terms? Why not use our deaths for good purpose? Yes. Yes, let us end our war here in glory. We will strike now and butcher as many as we can, and when the dust settles all will remember our name."

The men gave him a gruff sort of approval, although they said or did little else. Most were too tired to think and a permanent sleep did not sound so bad.

Looking back toward the siege lines, he breathed and, then, said, "First and second platoon, you're with me. Third platoon, take the right. Fourth, move up the left. We'll hit that point below us, taking out their sentry post. Then we'll work our way towards the cliffs. Move quickly, keep your head down, and even if what you seek is death, ensure that the enemy pay the price for your life with many of his own."

On those orders, they struck. The fighting began immediately. A machine gun opened up on the two platoons attacking frontally, slowing their advance considerably. However, it was silenced by a soldier in one of the two flanking forces. Dardel's company entered the trench line, slaughtering anyone in sight. Many of their own went down, as well. The violence was gritty and ruthless, and in such confined quarters many men opted for the blade. Mud walls were sprayed with red blood and crimson puddles accumulated on the floor. Bodies lay slumped, others headless, and some even worse. Through this, Dardel and his Knights fought on.

On the walls, some of the defenders took heart in the sudden appearance of the catique and his small force. They joined in, firing from their positions on pirate crews and fists adjusting their positions to meet the new threat. Mortars rained down upon the enemy like a vicious hail of steel and fire. Of course, the besiegers were no less barbarous and dangerous, bringing their superior firepower on the ground to bear.

And for all the energy the Knights expended, for all their efforts in overwhelming their opponents, there were simply too many enemies.

A loss of ten men was already the loss of almost the fifth of what remained of his company. And many more than ten men had died already.

By the time the initial fighting was done, Dardel had perhaps thirty men with him, if not less. And they had been cornered by two fists entrenched on either side, with many more on their way. Neither were their friends inside the fortress much help. None sallied. They must have been in just a dire of a situation for them to lend almost no help at all.

Exhausted, some of the Knights in the trenches simply chose to die. They walked into enemy gunfire, their own weapons firing until their mind was no longer connected to their finger.

Dardel himself, after enduring so much, succumbed finally to a rifle round that punctured his abdomen. It did not exit from the other side. His eyes went wide and he could feel the warmth from the blood flowing from the wound, down his leg. He collapsed to his knees, his breath heavy and paused. And, finally, he died.

When the rest of his men saw this, they knew the battle had been lost.

And inside the fortress, any hope that had been temporarily regained was once again lost.

The enemy cheered and taunted, gaining confidence with every passing second. After two years of death, destruction, and slow death, it seemed as if they were finally to score one of their greatest symbolic victories of all — the annihilation of the Knights of Kula'Kuladin, the last remaining imperial soldiers within the city of Tiwanaku.

...In the distance, there was a low whine. It gradually became louder, sharper. Far above the horizon, a small black dot appeared. Then two more. Finally, twenty-four of them appeared in all. Dots soon became full shapes that revealed themselves to spread utter terror upon a host that had just been celebrating. The empire had not given up on the Knights, yet.

The grounds outside the fortress trembled when down came their missiles and bombs. Fire spread from one side to the other, and the screams of men could be heard for miles. Any pirate who survived quickly scrambled, withdrew, and hid. They, in their hubris, had forgotten that the empire's aircraft excelled the most when the defenders of Tiwanaku exposed themselves on the surface, and by besieging Kula'Kuladin that was exactly what they had done. Hundreds were killed in one fell swoop, and if that wasn't enough there were plenty of more hours for the aerial bombardment to add to the count. With death from above, they accomplished what Dardel could not.

If only the catique was still alive to see it.

Some, many years after his death, would critique his seemingly thoughtless aggression. Impetuous, they'd say, and impulsive. Had he simply waited, he could have saved his own life and those of his men. These people, writing from the safety of their homes and offices, have never had to face the uncertainties of war. Among the lucky they should count themselves.

21 August 2028

Beginning at 0600 and unceasing 'til the same time three days later, on the 24th, the blockading forces of the *kriermada* began their monthly bombardment, what they called the 'barrage season.' Little of the city's surface was left untouched. Hundreds of thousands of shells and thousands of missiles were lobbed at every inch and corner of enemy-held land and the mighty pirate fists, that so close had been to crushing the Knights of Kula'Kuladin, were left immobile.

Under this cover, some three hundred Grup Koda and one thousand Koro Kirim were brought to the Fortress of Kula'Kuladin from the sea. They reached the cliffs on small rubber crafts, scaling the face of the rocks until they reached the entrances to the tunnels that connected to their objective from below. Sentries awaited them and went to fetch their commanders.

The men would not be disappointed.

For so long, the Knights had fought almost on their own. They had been entirely alone for three months. This was no longer true.

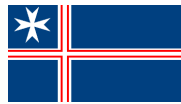
Now, the fortress would be the heart of the final stage of the empire's effort to break down the resistance within the city and its suburbs.

Last edited by [The Macabees](#) on Wed Mar 20, 2019 4:13 pm, edited 3 times in total.

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The Scandinavians
Senator

Posts: 4948
Founded: Oct 09, 2004
Capitalist

by The Scandinavians » Fri Mar 22, 2019 7:03 pm

QUOTE

Drasdag, Drana

Drasdag, the city of broken souls, was the entry port for the importation of foreign slaves into Drana. Unlike slaves who were born inside of the Empire to longstanding chattel populations foreign slaves were held in special contempt due to a distrust assigned to all people who spent time abroad. They were viewed as a natural enemy for the Scandin. One which would seek to rebel whenever they were given the chance. That they were unworthy of being treated even as valuable property. Instead, they were consigned to laboring in the rubbus fields and in the most dangerous of mines both of which carried a usual ten year period before a slave was expected to die from the harsh conditions.

The City of Broken Souls was a place designed to be incapable of falling to an internal revolt from the slaves and the fear of this had caused the city to be designed as a true fortress. As a place where the slaves outnumbered the masters 5 to 1 there was no measure considered over the top to keep if it was done to keep the order. This mindset result in Drasdag being forged to be able to weather an assault from both within and without at the same time. Such a framework proved valuable when the Golden Throne had managed to surround the city. Smelling a real chance at freedom the slaves within the city, the half which had not been sent northward before the city had been besieged, they revolted. The only thing which prevented the city from falling was the fiery discipline of the warrior caste and the keen nature of the city's defenses which enabled the garrison to contain the revolt before the slaves were able to create an opening to the siege forces.

From the north the might of the Golden Throne consistently bombarded the city as they had been doing for a number of seasons with the occasional counter-barrage from the Scandinavian artillery. They however had to deal with the notion of running out of munitions and thus used their resources quite a bit more sparingly than their enemy. The Scandin thus were confined to a narrow range of target selection meant to get targets of limited opportunity which could maximize the utility of their attacks. However, the general tone of the battle remained quite consistently dominated by the Golden Throne throughout the course of the battle.

Such a disadvantage was not something which could properly decide the eventual fate of the campaign though. The warrior caste defenders were skill in their craft and had the advantage of defending a position which had been fortified over the course of many generations. With each new cadre of leadership modernizing Drasdag's defenses so as to counter the ever changing styles of warfare that one might encounter. Whilst they added up to a situation which could be unwieldy at times it nonetheless provided for a very reliable network of fortifications which could weather intense challenges from within or without. The city had enough stores of food to last for years, constantly renewed supplies of water that the enemies could not cut, munitions store which could last a long while at the current rate of usage, and dedicated defenders unafraid of the hardships facing them.

The rebel slaves were poorly armed and merely had managed to acquire some lower quarters of the city during a time in which the warriors had been distracted by a particularity fearsome brigade from their besiegers. After which the slaves quickly fortified the areas that they had taken. If there had been some sort of coordination they could not know. The slaves had seized a good number of food supplies though rendering them capable of indefinitely holding their seized areas since the Golden Throne forces prevented them from diverting the manpower needed to subdue the rebel slaves who outnumbered the garrison by a pretty strong margin. An equation that still represented an unfavorable situation to the Scandinavian soldiers that were in Drasdag.

Based upon these conditions, the garrison was quite determined to fulfill their order to hold the line regardless of what the cost might be.

There mission, after all, was quite clear to them. They were there to defend the city of Drasdag against any enemy no matter the cost. Such a dynamic represented the inherent duty of all warriors of the Scandinvan Empire. They lived to serve the Emperors. Their duty was to fight at the request of the heirs of Erid. Their obligations demanded that the be willing to gladly march into death for the glory of the Empire. There could be no higher honor then to lay down one's life in battle against the enemies of their nation. Glory belonged the most to those who would sacrifice everything for their people.

The warriors defending Drasdag had been chosen for their deep seated commitment to the values of their caste. The Scandinvan High Command had not focused on a singular skill set such as marksmanship, but rather for their stubborn capability to weather the conditions that they would be facing. This had allowed Command to rely on the city to serve as a notable distraction from the front line. Something which would be all the more important now that the Scandinvan campaign to drive the Golden Throne back into the city was about to begin at long last.

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

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by **The Macabees** » Sun Mar 24, 2019 3:17 pm



TIWANAKU

Follows from: [3/7/2019](#); [1/17/2019](#); [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](#).

"There are rumors that some men ate their own children. I cannot disprove these."

— John "One-Eyed" Bernabus, *Black Flag Wavering* (2039 C.E.)

Fortress of Kula'Kuladin and Elsewhere

September–December 2028

To either side of the Fortress and sitting on the edge of the cliffs that oversaw the entrance of the harbor, rose two tall towers made of concrete and steel. The construction of each had not been easy. Local laborers were unable, forcing the *kríermada* to bring workers from afar, slipping them into Tiwanaku by means of landing craft and heavy escort. Landside, Knights and other special forces operatives did their part in securing the construction sites. These towers were repeated at intervals, until they disappeared far beyond the edge of the city's suburbs. Perhaps twelve or thirteen stood on either side total, including a tower on the other side of the harbor.

Manning them took a third of available manpower on the ground, but it allowed them to have almost complete control over movement from and to the sea, which the pirates continued to use to supply themselves. Once, for every nine ships which were caught running through the blockade, two more made it through. And to their credit, the pirates had learned to survive on minimal resources. But now, even the little they received was trickling toward extinction. The besieged made their desperation obvious, pulling their militias from

the insurgency to the north in order to continuously attack tower positions with costly assaults. Each tower's garrison was also strong enough to send out patrols and ambush nearby enemies forces, forcing the pirates to pull more men from the north. Every fighter who was compelled to return to Palenque to fight on the defensive would save the lives of many grateful imperial soldiers who otherwise may have been attacked by him.

More important still, the towers had tilted the balance in the siege once again. For although Tiwanaku was a crippled organism, fully blockaded as it was, for a short time the pirates had achieved a sense of victory by forcing imperial forces out of the city. This slow, but an entrenched strategy of controlling the land directly along the coastline had succeeded in crushing whatever hopes that illusion of a victory had given the besieged.

For their part, the pirates had taken to the underground. On the surface, they were persecuted by an increased presence of imperial drones which killed all enemy on sight. Thus, the enemy kept to the tunnels, sewers, and pipelines, where they could get away from the pressure of the imperial special forces and aircraft that were increasingly dominating the ruins of the city.

When they attacked, they did so suddenly and from exit hatches that were built for the specific strike, never reused except by the occasional scout or the rare civilian.

When Tower VIII was besieged by a pirate host of some 200 men, they emerged from different exit points that had been dug close to the outer concrete wall surrounding the tower. Guards posted along the battlement had little time to react, opening fire in time to save themselves from being overrun, but not sufficient to hold their position. They withdrew into the tower, which was promptly cut off from the rest of the fortifications along the coastal line. When the attackers were unable to breach the tower and after suffering heavy casualties, the pirates withdrew in good order.

Spectacularly, imperial air support had done little to relieve pressure on the platoon-sized garrison manning the fortification. The pirates constantly moved between the surface and their network of tunnels, massing above ground level only just before their attacks. Their movement was so quick that even the naval artillery found it troublesome to pin the enemy down with their firepower.

Even more impressive, however, was that when they returned with twice as many men they struck out of completely different tunnel exits. The Knights of Kula'Kuladin had laid mines covering all known enemy routes, and had even set up seismic, laser, and video gear to track their patrols and columns. But when the second attack occurred, its origins were entirely different.

This time, the two neighboring platoons deployed to lift the siege. One, coming from the north was ambushed by a fist-size contingent of local militias and put under severe strain. Only the second relief platoon, coming from the south, and intense naval bombardment dislodged the besieging forces, before this combined force could link up with the ambushed platoon and destroy the ambushers. It was a stroke of luck that had won that victory for the empire. Still, casualties had been heavy — over thirty dead on some counts, more than twice as many wounded. Over a hundred and fifty enemy bodies were recovered. Any wounded among them had been shot when found.

The battle caused the *koro kirim* in the Fortress to request three artillery batteries. To accommodate this force and protect it, they built new walls of concrete, steel, and wire in several layers that guarded an enlarged piece of land watching over the harbor's mouth. The Fortress still loomed over the area, but below it there was enough space for the artillery, new armored vehicles, and more. It was the artillery that was the most important, though. Now the towers could count on fire support within five minutes of calling for it, making it more difficult for the pirates to attack them suddenly and

en masse.

Another three artillery batteries were installed on the outer edge of Tiwanaku's furthest eastern suburb, Uetzcazán. These belonged to the operatives inside the city but were guarded by units of whatever imperial infantry unit happened to be guarding that sector of the siege lines, which now happened to be the 147th Guffingfordi auxiliary infantry division. These attached a company of mounted infantry to the outpost, which also looked over the local entrances to the city.

With better and faster fire support, the special forces grouping based at the Fortress could turn its attention to discovering and destroying supply tunnels that smugglers used to bring in goods into the city. No longer coming into the harbor to unload, smugglers were now stopping at everchanging points along the coastline, handing over cargo to ground crews that appeared as if from nowhere. Food, weapons, medication, and many other direly needed items were brought into the city this way, although not enough to put a stop to the slow, ongoing starvation of Tiwanaku's population. Those were not already dead looked little more than skeletons, with most of the food going to the warriors. Fighters were still of high value in this war, of course, while those who did not fight were otherwise of little use and they paid the price of having no price. If civilians had resisted surrender before, those that still lived were reconsidering their hostility.

Indeed, survivors trickled through to the roadblocks set up by imperial auxiliary infantry all along the exit routes that left Tiwanaku. Women came with their children and babies, mostly girls or very young boys. Any boy above the age of eleven was in some way already involved in the war, and so already long past the possibility of salvation. Sometimes these groups of refugees were ambushed along the way by pirate and militia forces seeking to discourage defection. Those that made it were taken by armored truck to holding centers set up just north of the city. From there, they were taken to one of several hundred 'imperial settlement towns,' which provided housing with electricity and running water.

Inhabitants 'agreed' to register and carry identification, which denoted their names and their 'native' town. These had to be presented to roadblock staff to leave the towns in the morning and enter in the evening. Strict daily censuses were kept, with curfew observed after a certain hour of the night. If even a single name was missing, a lockdown was established until this person could be found. In this way, those who lived in these towns were separated by pirate and native agents attempting to inspire revolutionary activity. These agents, if caught, were hanged in public, with the act carried out by local security forces provided directly by the territorial government in North Point.

North Point had only begrudgingly agreed to fund the security forces responsible for policing re-occupied portions of the unorganized territorial lands of southeastern Theohuanacu, and only because the Imperial Bureaucracy deemed it as the best option for the pacification of native populations. These forces were recruited from Theohuanacu proper, although they included colonists and other immigrants that had made the continent home only in the past decade. Still, better to police with true local police than with soldiers that everyone recognized as such. It wasn't to say that North Point wasn't justified in complaining against the costs of the endeavor. As was planned, regardless, these new towns and cities of the southeast would have to pay for their own security using their own tax money as soon as their inhabitants had time to secure a stable source of income — something that would have to wait 'til the end of the war, perhaps.

It was in this situation, under siege and harrassed even from the inside, that the pirate stronghold of Tiwanaku found itself in by the close of 2028, the second year of the revolt against imperial rule.

PALENQUE

Follows from: [12/29/2018](#); [10/14/2018](#); [9/9/2018](#); [4/15/2018](#); [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](#).

"There is a threshold in the third war where one can hardly call it a war at all."

— Vincent ten Holt, *Guffingford During the Gothic Campaign* (2078 C.E.)

Outskirts of the City

October–December 2028

The autumn winds were picking up again as a storm came over southeastern Theohuanacu. An annual affair, these tempests affected the besieged and the besiegers alike, as well as the movement of ships to, from, and along the blockade. In Palenque, for all intents and purposes, they put an end to combat for at least a few weeks. This pause was as much necessary as it was simply an excuse to give the men some respite.

From the beginning, the battling was a laborious, every-day affair. The pirates fought cunningly, avoiding large, muscle-for-muscle battles in favor of smaller engagements. Defensively, they had made the empire pay a steep price for every village and town reconquered. Although the enemy's morale had slackened after the capture of their leading man Captain Carol, the war around Palenque had only become easier by a slim margin. And now that the pirates were bottled up into the city proper and the outside suburbs and towns were firmly occupied, the *Ejermacht* settled in for a siege very similar to the one being contemporaneously waged in the neighboring city of Tiwanaku.

Like in the other city, here the enemy had built an extensive network of tunnels that connected without various points inside and outside Palenque. Similarly, tunnels that went from an outside point to somewhere inside the city were used not only to allow for the movement of their fighters, but also to bring in supplies. Despite the drones and patrols that the empire organized to undermine the resistance's logistics, somehow the besieged managed to remain well enough supplied to carry on with the defense of their city.

Of course, the pirates were equally on the offensive. When hamlets were thought to have finally been secured, they could be attacked the very next night. Locals aided them by giving them food and shelter, or by misleading security and military authorities when responding to questioning. Municipal administrators either cowered into inactivity or were brutally assassinated, as was the case of the mayor of Puyayipil. Pacoehua had been appointed to the position only two months before and he, like so many others, had come south with great hopes. Their approach had been working quite well around Tlaloc and the Imperial Bureaucracy, as well as the Territorial Government, sought to reassert the same stability in the revolting areas of the territory. But the most capable managers were the first to die. Pacoehua was killed by a car bomb outside of his home.

The town of Tlalopec was raided by a force a thousand strong, which overwhelmed local security forces. An imperial military company previously serving as a garrison had thought local security adequate in a region it believed it had thoroughly cleared in the previous long months of fighting. Security personnel were tortured and executed when caught alive, then hung on trees and lampposts so that they could be seen clearly by the townspeople below. City officials were massacred, their heads left in a pile in the town *kunsebor*. The wooden statue of the double-headed imperial eagle was toppled and burned, and the old military camp razed to the ground.

At their height, these attacks struck terror in the struggling imperial civil and military administration in southeast Theohuanacu, but the combined power of the *Ejermacht* and *Laerihans* were quick to make

the raids expensive. Those who struck Tlalopec escaped once the deed was done, leaving before they could be pursued. But, those that attacked Yelopta and Cuelmanox did not leave with the same fortunes.

When they swarmed upon Yelopta, the pirates and their native allies numbered in the many thousands. Here there was a company-sized garrison, as well as local security personnel. These combined forces were besieged while the rest of the town was ransacked, although most municipal administrators managed to escape to the military compound. When the attackers withdrew with little gain, they were ambushed by a second company that had been silently transported into the area by helicopter. Over two thousand enemies were reported dead, with twice as many wounded and captured. It was an expensive loss for the rebels, as was that at Cuelmanox.

In Cuelmanox there was no imperial garrison, and so the village and its small security outpost were overrun. All security forces and government officials were executed and displayed. However, when the five-hundred man rebel force withdrew, they were annihilated by an auxiliary infantry battalion that had rapidly deployed to intercept the attacking force. Almost the entire pirate and native host was killed, with fewer than three hundred captured.

As the years' end neared, the revolting army was bottled up into Palenque and the outlying towns were pacified one-by-one.

To better secure these areas, given the raids, the Golden Throne's armies around the city swelled to more than seven million men. With so many boots on the ground, the prospects of the resistance quickly went from slim to none. Holed up in Palenque, they were left to starve. But, although the empire offered to take in and treat well all those who surrendered, very few did.

Like her sister city, Palenque glowed in the night from the fires left behind by relentless day-and-night naval and land bombardment. Drones patrolled the skies at all times, killing any they saw moving through the streets, and so here too the resistance was forced almost entirely underground. Civilians who did not find their place in the resistance, usually transporting food or arms between pickup points and the soldiers, did not live long.

Women and children died of starvation, a thousand each day. If one had food at all it was hardly ever more than a few bites of hard, stale bread. Most of it was reserved for the fighters and those directly related to their efforts, and the little left for everyone else wasn't half of what was needed to feed the city in its entirety. The pirates burned the bodies of the dead when they could, but the drones sometimes did not let them near the corpses. Disease was rampant. If a thousand were dying per day of a lack of food, twice as many went to the plague. Given the little food that was making it into Palenque, medical supplies and attention — let alone expertise — were even scarcer.

Whatever supplies made it in were first brought in by blockade runners precedent from Chinadenga territories in Nicaro. The imperial army had crushed most of the militias, factions, and tribes that were not paying tribute or adhering to imperial law in the newly pacified satrapy, but somehow 'Blue-Eyed' Nolan found a way to keep a steady stream of ships to act as intermediaries between the Scandinvan suppliers and the Theohuanacan rebels. These ships braved the dangerous path through the imperial blockade, which had become denser and better equipped since the beginning of the war. Those that survived the gauntlet sailed to a predetermined rendezvous point, usually just off an always-changing part of the coastline far west of Palenque. Small boats carried the cargo to shore, where native teams took it across land to tunnel entrances. These pierced beneath the surface of most of southeastern Theohuanacu, leading directly into the city. All food, weapons, medications, and other supplies that made it to Palenque came in this fashion.

By the end of the year, there were so many imperial soldiers in the districts outside the great pirate city, so many ships, and so few blockade runners that the situation for the revolt in Palenque had deteriorated to far below the level of unsustainability it had had before. Now it was not just a question of long odds, it was one of human tragedy.

With the capture of Captain Carol, her soul had been crushed. Without its core to sustain it, Palenque's tissues and bones were decaying.

North Point

December 2028

The captain's long hair and beard hung like drapes as he was suspended upside down. Blood traveled down his body and it dripped on to the concrete floor. It was dark and he was alone in the room, which was at least larger than his cell. Most of the time, like now, he was alone. Francis Carol could hardly remember what sunlight looked like.

A creak of a door and the sudden flood of light betrayed someone's entrance. It had been so quiet in there that their boots sounded like thunder as they walked. Something hit him along the rib cage like a lash. He whimpered. They hit him again. And again. Months ago, he would be screaming. By now, though, the beatings had become rote. He hanged aimlessly as they struck him for hours on end...

...He was certain his arm was broken. A man had hit it with a hammer, repeatedly. When he tried to move it, a shooting pain pierced through his shoulder and down his chest to his stomach.

One of the torturers had carried him to his cell by slinging him over his back. The broken arm slammed against the man's back and it took everything Carol had not to scream. When they arrived, they threw him on to the ground. It felt like his ankle was broken as well, but it could have just been sprained. He could not inspect his arm or his leg because it was pitch black inside his small cell and there wasn't enough room, not even a tall enough ceiling, for him to move around. All he could do was lay, never stand. Even when he was out of the cell, he was usually hanging. His muscles were in a constant cramp. He had become numb to the pain.

Suddenly, the lid to the slim opening in his cell door opened and someone pushed through a plate of gruel. It landed on the floor crooked and the food splattered all over the floor, mixing in with Carol's piss. He hadn't eaten in two days. So he slowly crawled his way toward his door, using his good hand to feel for the food and shovel it into his mouth...

...His arm felt better now. Not fully healed, but almost. And no thanks to his captors. They still beat him, waterboarded him, and tortured him in countless other ways, so much so that at least it was never boring. But it was painful, gods was it painful. How many fingernails had he regrown only to have them removed again? How many bombs had they broken? How many hours had he gone without sleep?

Carol could not remember what day it was. He did not know whether it was day or night outside, and, in fact, he hadn't seen either a day or a night since he was captured and brought to the capital.

He was laying on the floor of his cell, surely on his own excrement, which he could not even smell anymore. The door opened and someone dragged him out, slung him into a cart, and pushed him down a hall. The lights were so bright he could not see and he

struggled to open his eyes. By the time he had become even a bit accustomed to the brightness, however, all became dark again as he was brought into the torture room. Captain Carol knew this room well. His breathing intensified. He hated this room. He wanted to get out of this room. He would have thrashed his legs if he didn't feel so weak. One of the guards struck him. Then another did. Then the first, again.

They beat him for some time and then they hung him up from the ceiling, letting him swing from side to side as they all left. The door closed behind him and he was left alone again, in the dark and in total silence. Then, from nowhere, loud music began blaring from speakers on all sides, bursting through his ears and penetrating into his head. His mind felt as if about to melt and his arms began to shake, like those of an epileptic.

He began sobbing...

...Whether it was morning, afternoon, or evening he had no idea, but Carol was awoken by the banging of his cell door against the wall. Someone dragged him up by the arm, almost pulling it out of his shoulder by the sudden jerk. He was brought along and thrown into the shower, a bar of soap left by his feet. He picked it up and began washing himself. How long had it been since his last shower?

Why were they giving him one now?

His eyes flared widely as he started to look all around, an intense paranoia suddenly overcoming him.

He didn't have the time to finish, regardless. The guard turned off the water a minute later and pulled him along again, taking him to another room. Here, he was given clothing. Then, by the arm still, he was dragged to yet another room, this one with a table and mirrored glass on all sides. An interrogation room.

How long since he was last here?

How long since they had bothered interrogating him? Sometimes he wished they had brought him here sooner. But then, he remembered. He remembered his life was worth little compared to the dream of independence, to freedom on the high seas. So when they sat him on the hard, steel chair, he resolved himself to silence. Even if even the idea of giving up, of avoiding more pain, felt heavenly.

When the door opened, he could not believe who stood on the other side of it. The *krierlord's* face was emotionless. He stepped in calmly and elegantly took a seat on the other side of the table. A guard stood on either side of the door. They looked at Captain Carol with eyes of death. Whether these were the same men, or at least part of the men, who beat and tortured him daily, the captain could not know. But he returned them the same look, regardless. He wondered, then, whether there was something around him he could use to kill the *krierlord* and maybe even one of the guards before they took him. It would be a better ending to his life than the one he was going through right then.

Angiko Bas must have been reading his thoughts because he laughed out loud and said, "Francis, you haven't changed one bit."

The captain said nothing, but looked back with steady green eyes. Bas, smiling now, took out a pack of cigarettes from his front coat pocket and placed them on the table, sliding them over to Carol. "Take one," he said.

Carol tried to, but when he lifted them he realized they had been chained to the table.

"Oh, sorry," said Bas, coolly. "I didn't realize you had your hands tied. Here, let me get one for you." He grabbed the pack, opened it, took

a cigarette for himself, and then produced one more the captain. He placed it between Carol's lips and then reached into an inner coat pocket to reveal a lighter, which he extended out to light the captain's cigarette and then his own. "It's been a while since we've last seen each other, Francis. You've...lost quite a bit of weight since then. You don't look so good, you know. I feel you could do better than this, live better. I could make that happen, you know."

The captain smirked. "Yes, I know, *Krierlord*. You could set me up with a life of luxury, I am sure. At what cost, though?"

"Haven't you already suffered price enough?" asked Bas.

Carol looked at him coldly as he relived the pain they had inflicted upon him. "It's not so bad," he finally responded.

The *krierlord* chuckled and then took a drag from his cigarette. Carol did the same. "You know," said Bas, after some time, "your people are really suffering without you. I hear that they have to eat the rare rat left alive in the sewers to survive. My men report the fires from the giant bonfires they set alight to burn the corpses of the thousands who die of hunger every day. The plague is everywhere, they say, even among the pirate crews and local militants. The city is more so quarantined at this point than besieged, and if your people don't surrender then they will simply die."

"That was the plan," said Carol, laconically.

Bas sniffed. "Yes, I know. But there will be no great final battle, Francis. Your men will not kill mine in a house-to-house siege to mark an epoch. No, the destruction of Palenque will be much sadder and desperate than that. Your people will die in the streets, alone. And you will watch them it from here, where you enjoy the luxury of knowing that I will not allow my men to kill you. No, your punishment must be a long-term one to make up for the sins you have committed against the sons of the empire."

"I suppose that makes sense," was all the captain said back before he took another puff of the cigarette. It was running about halfway by then and a great column of ash broke to pieces and spread out over the table top. The *krierlord* had emptied his own cigarette over an ashtray. Then, "You ought to make your torture challenging. I've suffered more at sea than I have on this rock."

"Is that so?" questioned Bas.

"Aye." The smirk never left the captain's face.

Bas' expression didn't change. The man was like a rock. He said, "If that is so, I will ask them to be harder on you. I did not realize you were such a tough man. I will have them double the pain." With that said, suddenly the *krierlord* rose. One of the guards behind him opened the door and all three of them left.

Carol, for his part, was taken back to his cell.

He soon found out that the *krierlord* would keep his word.

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

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The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

☐ by **The Macabees** » Sat Mar 30, 2019 4:42 pm



THE WINTER

"There is no worse prison than your own mind,

no worse foe than your own memory."

— From the journal of Sargént Jarl Gabán

Car'gún Díelaht—Berliston—Arras—Macabea

October–December, 2028

"What's your name, *sargént*?" asked the personnel officer. The walls, ceilings, and floors were all made of metal here. Elsewhere, they had decorated these with tile, drywall, and laminate, but this place had not been prioritized for that sort of decoration, Gabán supposed. The sick and wounded returning from the front deserved better than this cold shell.

He answered, "Jarl Gabán."

She looked at him flatly. "And your unit?"

"Koro Kirim, fifty-third *mosso*." His eyes drifted to some distant point beyond the steel walls.

"You were in the original drop?" the officer suddenly sharpened her eyes. "Gods, welcome back." — she looked around the room — "You know, it gets much better than this, wait until you see your quarters. The barracks here are not so bad, but the quarters reserved for the returnees are very nice. Almost wish I was in one of them myself."

"Almost," repeated Gabán. Her lips twisted, but she looked down. After a long moment, he added, "Better late than ever."

Turning her head, she asked, "What do you mean?"

"Coming back home," he said. "Better late than ever. Even this floating hunk of scrap sure beats the hell out of Drana."

She chuckled. She was looking at a computer file, probably his, and filling out a small stack of paperwork. Turning to him, she said, "Okay, *Sargént* Gabán. I know you're excited to get to your room, but before I can let you go you'll need to take a medical examination. Luckily, we have a doctor in the next room ready for the occasion." On the other side of the door behind him, there was a line of other returnees. It was more like an assembly line than a processing center. "A nurse will take your blood pressure and provide a battery of vaccinations. She'll need to take blood samples, as well."

"Great," he replied, as she waved him through to the next room.

The nurse did exactly as how the processing officer explained. Afterward, a doctor performed an overall physical exam. When he was finished, Gabán was sat down in a waiting room filled with other soldiers who must have already gone through their own medical examinations. He sat there with little to do except watch a screen showing the news — something about the war in Gholgoth. Gabán tried not to watch.

After two hours, they finally released him and escorted him to the barracks. They showed him to his quarters, gave him the key, and then left Gabán to his own. Other soldiers were coming and going from their own rooms, paying the new guy little to no mind. He inserted the key and twisted the handle, then opened the door and stepped inside. It was very clean, with furniture already set up for him. A small bed with new sheets occupied the far corner. There was a small two-seater couch that faced a screen, and on the other side of the sofa there was a small two-unit stovetop kitchen. In another, small room there was a toilet, a shower, and a sink. A third room, not much larger than the bathroom, was his closet, which apart from racks also had a tall dresser. Throwing his pack on the floor, Gabán took a heavy seat at the edge of the bed and let out a long breath.

He put his hands on his head and slouched over, with elbows on his legs to support himself up. For a moment, he just sat there. And then he began to cry.

Gabán was not kept at *Car'gún Díelaht* for long. After two weeks, his processing was complete and he was taken to Berliston, New Empire. The city had been the capital of a reformed United City States for over two years now and, from what he was told, it had changed quite a bit even in such a short time. First, there were many more imperial personnel than there ever were before. The Berliston *krierstatón* was complete and the Imperial fleets stationed there were large, with equally large crews. Furthermore, an army-sized formation was kept throughout multiple bases outside the capital on the surface, and these half-a-million men visited the city often for entertainment, food, and pleasure. Second, newfound wealth and prestige had led to a construction spree, including on the surface. Much of Berliston, according to its people, was more beautiful than it once was, although admittedly extensive parts of it still remained more so ghettos than neighborhoods. These were slowly disappearing, however.

This wasn't true of everywhere in the United City States, though. Dasch was thoroughly devastated by the siege. Sectors of it still held out, even. Other places brought out the worst vices in men. Paquat had become an almost purely military town, with its own growing host of drug dealers, prostitutes, and salesmen to court the fifty million imperial soldiers stationed among hundreds of garrisons and bases that watched over almost a fifth of the length of the New Imperial Frontier. Joining them were another sixteen million New Imperial conscripts, armed and trained by the Golden Throne. With Paquat being the dominant city in the far northeast, it was in a position to win the most, especially the whores and gambling houses. Halisfaven, to the south, was an extreme outpost of a city with nothing going for it, apparently. And in Harsdad, if not rebellious, its politicians still held the Golden Throne with deep resentment. Gabán was lucky to have been brought to Berliston, he was told, where prosperity, wealth, and stability were married with politics and an increasingly boring middle-class suburban lifestyle. The truth was, he didn't quite care where they took him.

In Berliston, the processing was as soulless as it had been on the floating base. They ran tests on him here, as well. He saw therapists. He brooded. Gabán's quarters were just as neat and fresh. In the morning, he'd get new sheets from the ladies who ran the laundry and then went to breakfast. If he had no examinations scheduled, he was free to roam around the base. To leave the base altogether they required written permission. As nice as Berliston may have been, he was not allowed to see it.

His therapist's name was Natasha Jugorsen, a Guffingfordi psychologist in the employ of the *Ejermacht*. She saw him twice a week. Natasha was quite beautiful and Gabán enjoyed seeing her. His sessions were one of the few things he actually liked about the city at all. He was sitting in her office then, on a coach while she was on her armchair. Two glasses of water stood on coffee tables, one by each of them. Gabán was speaking. "...you know, I thought I had seen it all in the Zarbian marche. I thought I knew what hell looked like. Sure that if it existed, then Zarbia was it. I never thought I'd be so wrong."

She looked at him with concern. "What you've experienced I could never hope to really understand, but I am sure that it's been very hard. I'm sorry that you've had to go through that."

"What are you sorry about? It's your fault," he responded.

There was a short moment of silence. Then, he said, "As long as Kabanis was alive, I felt purpose. It's weird to say. I didn't understand it this way until a few days ago. But, I realized that as long as I followed him, everything I had experienced was for a

reason. Somehow, Kabanis anchored me to this reality. When he died, that tether was severed."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

Gabán looked at her and shook his head. "Nothing," he replied.

"Let's come back to that later," she answered. "Tell me more about your time in Zarbia."

"My time," he chuckled. "You make it sound as if it were a prison. Which is pretty accurate. Anyway, it rained, *a lot*. Even during the summer, long, unbroken days of sunshine could suddenly be disturbed by lightning storms that set the jungle ablaze. During the winter and spring, you couldn't count on much except the torrents that were sure to sweep the land for months on end. We walked through more mud than the distance we covered on dirt. Men died waist deep in the shit, not even able to raise their rifles and shoot because their elbows get sucked into it when they try to aim their rifles. Strap in, shrink, 'cus there's a lot for me to tell you about Zarbia..."

A month into his stay in Berliston, they gave him a seventy-two-hour pass to leave base and experience the city. With him went three other wounded veterans of the Scandivan theater, the Díenstadi Jerome Macrul, the Indran Dragos Moisuc, and the Theohuanacan Arthur van Engelen. Their first stop was the strip club. Then, the bar.

When the sun came back up, they found a motel with vacant rooms and took one each. Gabán fell asleep almost as soon as he had come in, kicked off his shoes, and fallen into bed.

He didn't wake up until the mid-afternoon. His eyes were strained and bloodshot, and he struggled to push himself out of bed. When he finally did rise, he sat at the edge for a minute and reached for a flask standing on the side table. Twisting the cap open, he bent back his head and took a good swig until it was empty. Then he threw it against the wall, against which it fell to the floor with a loud clank. Standing took more than a few seconds and when he opened the curtains the artificial sunlight created by the outside ceiling lamps very nearly blinded him. A pang swept up his spine and into his head. Gabán vomited.

Groaning, he collected himself once more and went to the bathroom, where he vomited again and then brushed his teeth and showered. Ten minutes later, he walked out his door and into the courtyard in the middle. Looking around, he saw a diner adjacent to the motel and figured that if the others were awake they'd be there getting some coffee. Pussies.

A woman was pushing a cleaning cart down the hallway on the edge of the courtyard and, as she walked by Gabán, he gave her a note valued at R100.

She smiled. He did not. She would understand later, when she got to his room.

Walking over to the diner, he swung the door open when he got there and saw all three of them already sitting at a table together. They each had mugs in their hands and they looked as bad as he did. Dragos hadn't even bothered to shower, the fuggin' dirty Indran. When Gabán sat down next to Arthur, the Theohuacan recoiled after catching a whiff from his breath. "Whaaaat? I brushed my teeth," Jarl laughed.

"Shit man, how much have you been drinking?" Arthur shook his head. He spoke díenstadi well, probably growing up learning how to speak and write it. "I like having fun with you dude, but drinking all the time isn't good for you."

"Why don't you mind your own business, van Engelen?" said Gabán,

with a flat stare.

The other man narrowed his eyes. "I'm just being honest with you."

"Mind your own business." His voice was a low growl.

The waitress walked up their table and interrupted. "Hi, welcome to Duffy's. Want some coffee? I just brewed it." She spoke in Common.

"No thanks," said Jarl, his own otherwise good Common tinged with a thick diénstadi accent, and he temporarily took his attention away from the Theohuacan. He looked at the menu for a few seconds, the three others looking at him warily, and then he said, "I'd like the Berliston waffle with the eggs scrambled, with the potatoes. Add another side of scrambled eggs and one of bacon. Do you serve whiskey here?"

"No," she answered.

Tisking, he replied, "I bet this place would be more popular if it served alcohol."

The server was in her mid-forties, a bit overweight, and she wore her hair short. She gave him a tired look. "I find that our guests already come with their fair share of alcohol in them. Most of them are aware of it." She refilled the others' mugs and then went back to the kitchen to put in his order.

When she was gone, it was Jerome who said something first, before anyone had time to go back to the argument. "So, Gabán, do you know what you're up to, once we're back home?"

Jarl shook his head. "No. What about you?"

"Well," said Jerome, "I figure that after they replace my leg, they'll ship me back out to war. Probably Gholgoth again, although they say that veterans like us are getting priority for stations in the empire. A friend of mine fought on Drana last year and is now in Holy Panooly for his second tour. He said most of his unit is made up of combat veterans."

"Many vets shipped back to Gholgoth too," said Dragos, solemnly. He had a thick accent and his diénstadi was broken.

The waitress came back with a glass of water for Gabán. "Yea, well, I'm not going back to war," he said when she left again.

"What do you mean?" asked Arthur.

He took a sip from the glass of water and put it back down. "I mean that I'm not going back to war. My time is over. They've ruled me unfit for service."

"On what grounds?" It was Jerome.

"Psychological." Jarl looked away.

"Damn," said Jerome.

He shook his head. "No, I'm glad."

"So what are you going to do once you're back out there with the civilians, anyway?" asked Arthur. "You know it's a rat race, right? A gods be damned maze for the automaton. I wouldn't survive in that cesspool for a minute, believe me. But, I've heard you experienced some real shit in your lifetime. Nothing concrete, mind you. Just talk. But, I believe it. I think you'll do just fine. You're a survivor." He cleared his throat. "So, what are your plans?"

Gabán chuckled. "Don't got any."

Arthur looked at him strangely. "You must have some idea. Some skill."

Some connection."

"Like you said, van Engelen, civilian life is a puppet show," he replied.

"So what then?" asked Jerome, across the table.

"I don't know," Jarl said, after some time.

They fell silent again when the waitress came back with his food. All of it was on a big plate together. He ate it quickly, jamming the food into his mouth as if he hadn't eaten in days. The others finished their coffees and watched, until Jerome said, "For what it's worth, Gabán, I understand."

Jarl gave him a pointed look. "What do you mean?"

"Well," answered Jerome, "you're probably damn good at what you've done since you first joined the service. Like Arthur said, we've all know of your experience. There isn't much room for killers in the civilian world, you have to understand that. There, they want office drones. People who can sit down for eight hours a day and work on a computer. Almost everything else is done by machines. But, there's a place for people like you. And me, I've already settled on it. Tarn. Soldiers are welcomed there, and the companies pay well. I hear Rubino is a hot market for veterans too, although you get much less talk coming from there than you do from Tarn. Think of all the exotic places you'll visit."

"I've already had my fair share of the 'exotic,'" said Jarl.

He ate the last bite of his food, put down his utensils, and then got up. Walking to the cash register, he paid his bill and left.

As it turned out, the three-day pass into Berliston was a way for the *Ejermacht* to allow Gabán to relax before leaving New Empire for Arras. He had to travel to the surface and then to a military airbase to leave, but finally he arrived at the large militarized island just west of the Dienstadi peninsula. He was more familiar with this place.

They escorted him to his room in one of the barracks almost immediately. No more medicals, they said. He'd just have to wait another two or three weeks to be out-processed, and from there he'd get a one-way ticket to Macabea.

Those last three weeks felt like three months. There wasn't much to do in these parts of Arras, and there was hardly time or reason to take a cab to other parts of the island. There were bars, clubs, and other forms of entertainment, but on Arras everything was under the jurisdiction of the military. Freedom was not a true concept. Instead, he devoted his time to working out and reading survival and military manuals, including literature on improvised explosive devices used by insurgents in the home combat theaters. Sometimes he surfed the internet, whether to lurk on various military and political boards or to research some lone-wolf terrorist attack or another.

It wasn't soon enough that they finally processed his discharge and he was put on a plane to the old capital, the stunning and ancient city of Macabea. It was a short flight, at least when compared to that from *Car'gún Díelaht* to Berliston, or even from the New Imperial capital to Arras. Almost too short. When he touched ground again, he was on his own and without a home in the city.

He took up a room in a motel in one of the subterranean neighborhoods, where the rates were cheapest. He dropped off his bags in the room and then left for the surface again. While the subterranean neighborhoods were built and engineered for space and comfort, city planners having the benefit of foresight when founding new submunicipalities, there was still nothing like the natural wind and light of that which stood above ground.

He breathed the air in and then took a good look at Macabea.

Tall buildings surrounded him on all sides. At street level there were shops, like bookstores, coffeehouses, and other boutiques. Thousands walked up and down the concrete sidewalks, as in the broad streets between them hundreds of cars rushed by, honking, swerving, and screeching. It was more noise even than a battle, it seemed. Gabán put his hands up to his ears and gritted his teeth. Walking up to a pickup station, he pressed the button for a cab and almost immediately a small, dome-like vehicle pulled up beside him. The back door popped open and he stepped inside. Inside, it was amazingly clean and it smelled refreshing. There was no driver.

The car pulled away almost as soon as he shut the door. "Where are we headed today, sir?" asked a voice coming from the speaker in the center console.

"The Díenstad building," he said.

"Very well," responded the sweet, computerized voice. "ETA, eight minutes."

Being a boy from southern Díenstad, Jarl had actually never seen the capital of the old kingdom. It was as beautiful as everyone said. The homes were all of the old Díenstadi style, with large rectangular doors, sharply angled roofs, and elaborately decorated trims. Every major boulevard and avenue was decorated by numerous triumphal arches, commemorating victories from as far back as the late first millennium BC. Some stood barely at all, no more than two columns of ancient stone. Others were displayed in full glory, with bronze cast deities, warriors, and heroes standing atop their crests. Palaces sprawled at different points of the city, including the emperor's expansive summer residence that formed much of Macabea's northwestern perimeter. Other parts were more commercial, with high-end stores and shopping centers alike. Of course, there was also the port and the adjacent beaches.

The Díenstad building was in the old center of Macabea, where most of the political and administrative buildings were. They were almost all of the styles from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, although a very large archeological park was preserved to showcase surviving relics of various pasts, including parts of a wall erected over three thousand years before.

As for itself, the Díenstad building was half-glass, half-marble, a newer façade providing the sacred grounds of Díenstadi politics with a more modern, updated looks. The mixture gave prominence to the beauty of the classical architecture but balanced it with glass and titanium that came out in waves. When the taxi left him at the curb at the opposite side of the boulevard running parallel to the front of the palace, he crossed the street and sat down on a bench at the edge of a park right next to the palace's perimeter. Sitting, he took in the Díenstad building and all of its glory, smiling, almost as if day-dreaming. There was a certain gleam in his eye.

After an hour, he walked his way back down the sidewalk, until he found a pickup station. He took the cab to the harbor this time, where he caught a ferry tour. This took him to the impact site of the Stevidian nuclear missile that had attacked and devastated the area. Parts of the crater were still preserved and there was a floating memorial from which one could see some of the wreckages of the ships destroyed in the blast.

Taking it all in, Jarl Gabán wished that the warheads had taken the city as well.

He found himself an apartment over the next few days and moved in. Buying an inflatable mattress, he didn't bother with other furniture, other than an old working table that he found tossed out by the side of the street. With his roof secure, he then went shopping. He

needed clothes, but not many and they weren't very expensive. Jeans, underwear, shirts, and socks. Then he went to the wholesale store and bought cleaning supplies, cooking oil, fertilizer, and a very wide assortment of other items. He took these back home, where he was either at the work table or in his bed.

The table was covered with different items of metal or plastic. One, long light hung suspended from the ceiling overhead. Different pliers, screws, and drills lay in no particular order all around.

On the corner of the table, his cellphone began to vibrate as if someone were calling. "Hello?" he answered.

"Hey, Jarl. It's Jerome. Jerome Macrul, from Berliston," said the voice on the other side of the line.

At first, silence. Then, "What the hell do you want?"

"Just wanted to see how you were doing. I remembered you said you were going back to swim with the civvies, figured I'd check in and see what you decided to do."

"Don't call me again," said Jarl, coldly.

He went back to building his bomb.

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THE WINTER

"This war was symbolic. Its value was in its role in fueling the imperial cult."

— A. Aguirre, *Ka'Reik* (2138 C.E.)

Komsektor Boris

November–March, 2028–29

"The enemy's winter counterattacks have been weaker than expected, then," said the *krierlord*.

Lasagos Carlos Devreel, a Frommian by birth, nodded. "That is correct, Krierlord Dago. We've lost territory in some areas and gained in others. The changes pertain mostly to defensive advantages, be that to modify the shape of the front in accordance with the course of a river or with the ridgeline of our mountain-top positions. Otherwise, our positions look remarkably similar to how they did at the end of the last year. We should be on good footing when we launch the spring offensive."

Jerom Dago was young for a krierlord, with thirty-six years of age. His promotion had come recently, but having been sponsored by the traitor Mikael Varis Dago's career took an early hit. The Gholgoth mission was, in fact, a method of forcing him out of the empire while things within the Imperial Bureaucracy cooled down after the mutiny in Krasnova. Most of the diplomacy was still in the hands of Jogornos Rikjaard Johansen, who had built quite the reputation for himself having led talks with not just Havensky and Golghant, but also according to rumors with the Kraven Reich. That left Dago with little

more than an intermediary role between imperial forces in Gholgoth and the emperor, who used his krierlord to meet personally with major commanders in-theater and report back on the war's progress. Still, Dago was intent on making the best of the opportunity, knowing that by its very nature his Gholgoth posting would pay off in the long-run.

"If the enemy did not attack us on a more wholesale level, then what did they do?" asked the imperial advisor, while looking at the map on the table. Macabéan and allied forces now occupied much of the southwestern corner of Drana, the Scandinavian Empire's homeland island. There was still so much left to fight for and, if the reports were to be believed, the Scandinavians had restrained themselves defensively during the landings and the subsequent breakout operations. Many battles had been fought and millions had died on both sides, but it was known that the Scandinavians had soldiers in the billions. The war so far had only been a prelude. The question remained, what were they planning?

The lasagos looked over to the hawk-nosed Komstrategos Gonzalo Iñato, who led in-theater military intelligence collection, analysis, and distribution. The general stepped forward. "The enemy has poured many resources into concealing their movements, yet because of their scale it is difficult for them to hide their preparations from us in their entirety."

"What then are they preparing, komstrategos?" asked Dago, sharply. The krierlord was not fond of Zarbians.

Although Iñato was born in the Rezeghi city of Fernai, to a mother and father also born in that same city, his brown skin, name, and the fact that his grandfather had immigrated long ago to Sidi Rezegh condemned him to hate in the eyes of many Díenstadis. Dago was one such Díenstadi. But, Iñato seemed unperturbed at the krierlord's tone when he replied, "They are moving hundreds of millions of men into position along the front. The challenge is knowing how many and where exactly they are, but the scale of it all, like I said, is hard to hide. *Koro Kirim* continue to operate in their rare, reporting on supply routes and convoy sizes, as well as patrol frequency and sizes. We also have ample satellite evidence. But, they know our satellite's orbital schedules and our capacity to collect human intelligence is still limited. In any case, I surmise that they plan either to soak our upcoming offensive, which they must inevitably expect, or they will foil our invasion with a premeditated counterstroke."

Dago frowned. The Scandinavian conduct during the war was most confusing. Their major southwestern port and slave trade hub, Drasdag, was being invested on all sides. It had effectively ended the slave trading empire's capacity to do just that. The economic effects of this were beyond Dago's understanding, but they must have been significant. To them had to be added the capture and destruction of the southwestern rubbus fields, Drana's most important cash crop. Bendred was under siege too. All the while, the Scandinavians had withdrawn north of the great central mountains and amassed their manpower, but all the same remained relatively quiet during the duration of the winter.

"If they do decide to launch a spring counterstroke, we will be prepared to meet it," said the lasagos. "Our front line commanders have taken the initiative to fortify and entrench their positions. Trench lines, barbed wires, and pillboxes in conjunction with other defensive structures help protect a frontage held by three hundred and forty million men. They are covered by artillery firebases with interlinking fields of fire."

"Furthermore, over the land we've occupied we hold what can only be deemed practical air superiority. Over the enemy, their own control is disputed." It was Laestrategos Venkat Medora's voice. Of an ancient noble house of Díenstad, Medora was old now, with wrinkled skin and grey hair. Some thought that it would be good for him to retire, at his age. But none disputed his talent.

The krierlord seemed about to ask the old laestrategos something,

but instead turned his attention back to Lasagos Devreel. "What of our reserve forces?"

Pointing to the map, Devreel answered, "Around Drasdag, we have forty million men. These include forces assigned to patrolling and counterinsurgency duties, namely in efforts to close supply line routes through the mountains. Otherwise, there are one hundred and eighty million men in reserve. Another one hundred and twenty million are in Cargún Dielaht or enroute, and the empire has already prepared a billion men total in *Ejermacht* personnel alone, as you know."

"So we should be able to capably defend against a possible spring counterstroke?" asked Dago.

"Yes," replied the lasagos. "Undoubtedly, kríerlord. And if we lose land, consider it a trade for blood. If we defend intelligently and in-depth, we can bleed them dry, weaken them, and then counterattack to begin our great late spring or early summer offensive. By then, hundreds of millions of more fresh forces will have arrived with which we can regain lost ground and push into the central highlands."

Dago nodded. He turned to the laestrategos. "The new F/A-36 aircraft, we have them in good number now, no?"

Medora nodded. "That is correct, kríerlord."

"How many?" the imperial representative asked.

"Three thousand now, the largest deployment of imperial F/A-36 anywhere, including the home provinces," the Laerihans Commander in Gholgoth responded. "Almost the entirety of the aircraft's production has been allotted to operations on Drana, in fact. The only other sizeable deployments that I know of are those in Pezlevko-Rubino, Indras, and New Empire, although we have perhaps as many or more as all of those places combined. Their stealth and lethality will be appreciated in the coming months, I'm sure. Still, the workhorse fighter remains the Lu-25 Hawk and a fine aircraft it is."

Dago thought for a moment. He asked then, "The air war so far has been more subdued than one would have expected, no?"

Medora gave an unconvincing look. "It has been easier than expected to challenge Scandinvan air superiority over combat areas and directly behind these lines, but they also have an intricate network of SAM batteries and radar stations that severely restrict our ability to interdict their supply lines and deployment routes. At this moment, the enemy has effective freedom of movement behind their side of the front. We are most successful when engaging them on the defensive since their troops are necessarily leaving their area of coverage to enter ours. The F/A-36 will hopefully play a role in breaking this deadlock."

The kríerlord nodded. The new fighter aircraft was supposed to be state-of-the-art, the best on the market. Indeed, it had to be to induce the traditionalist Laerihans to replace the Hawk and with a foreign-designed plane no less. "Has it been tested? What are the results?" he inquired.

For his part, the laestrategos smiled. "We have used it sparingly, kríerlord. Until recent months, they were actually quite rare and they were not directly involved in combat. It has been for the upcoming offensive that most of the new aircraft and their pilots have deployed in-theater. Still, yes, we have used them in tactical attacks, namely strikes on discovered radar and anti-aircraft battery positions. They penetrate enemy air space first and the Hawks exploit, striking Scandinvan ground forces in the area."

"And those ground battles? What are their purpose?" The kríerlord turned to the lasagos.

Devreel stepped forward again. "Kríerlord, tactical battles along the

front are common. If we find the enemy in a position where we can cause casualties and occupy ground, we pounce on the opportunity. They do the same to us. These battles occur in hundreds of places along the front, some involving only a handful of companies and others entire divisions."

Turning to Admirant Gelson Jerant, who hadn't spoken in the briefing meeting yet, Dago said, "And you, admirant. Any news from the sea?"

"Relatively silent, as has been the norm," responded Jerant, who had recently been made XO of Kriermak 'Gholgoth.' In his late thirties, he was considered young for the post.

The admirant made his way to the table with the map, which displayed a great portion of the sea south of Drana. Markers depicting the enormous allied flotilla that the Golden Throne and Imbrinium had assembled to blockade the southern coastline of the Scandinvan Empire's home island covered much of the space colored blue. It was an impressive sight, indeed. He remarked, "We are restricted in our operational space to a great degree by the treaty the emperor signed with the Gothic Council almost three years ago now. And the Scandinvan navy won't give into a decisive battle."

"If they were to deploy their fleets in strength to fight a decisive battle, would we be ready for it?" the krierlord asked. It was a critical question, for control of the seas south of Drana were required to resupply the ground and air forces on the island. If those supply routes were endangered, it could put the invasion in deadly jeopardy. That is why the allied fleet combined to make up the numbers it did.

Answering the question, Admirant Jerant said, "If they did, our fleets are deployed in such strength that it would be a very long battle indeed. We are also advantaged by Cargún Dielaht, from which we can resupply and rally. Their own southern ports will be threatened by our ground and air forces, and therefore inaccessible to them. It would be a sufficiently drawn-out battle to give us time to make strategic decisions concerning the ground war, at any rate." His lack of clarity was an evasion of the implications of the latter. But everyone in the room understood. He finished, "Besides, their attention is just as well split by the Gothic Council's operations in Shen Almaru."

Pensive, Dago asked, "What were you saying about constraints?"

"I think I have an idea that would draw out the Scandinvan navy to battle and, at the same time, be within the terms of the treaty with the council," responded Jerant.

The admirant proceeded to move the markers on the map to show the krierlord what he meant. Around them, the others gathered to see what he was doing. Some of the officers nodded approvingly, others shook their head with skepticism. When Jerant was finished, the room fell into silence while the krierlord continued to look at the display the XO had built.

After a long moment, the krierlord said, "It is certainly a risky plan, admirant. We would stand to lose many ships."

"But, it would show our aggression and commitment to decisive victory," Jerant insisted.

The krierlord looked at him for a long while. Then, "Tell your commanding officer the plan is approved."

"He doesn't know about it yet," said the admirant.

Dago smiled. He liked this guy.

"Move forward, please," said the officer in dienstadi, as she waved to the man to step in her direction.

Since the man couldn't understand her, a guard lightly pushed him forward. "C'mon," said the Macabéan soldier. He pointed to the officer. To the man, he said, "It's your turn now."

The woman gave him a flat stare as he stepped up to her. He was perhaps the thousandth of his kind that she had seen that day, if not more. He was neither the slowest nor the most difficult to communicate with. They were all, in effect, the same in those regards, all equally as frustrating and difficult to talk to.

This one's name was Heydar. He had been liberated from a rubbus plantation somewhere to the east and after a long holding period had finally been brought to one of the dozens of processing centers established along the southern coastline, from which they could be transported to Cargún Dielaht and from there taken to Greater Dienstad. Tens of millions had been gathered and shipped out already and there were tens of millions more waiting, and all of them had to jump through the same gauntlet of medical tests, interviews, and other hoops. They were like cattle, moved from one place to the next.

Even though she could see it on her screen, the officer still asked, "What's your name?"

Returning a blank stare, the free slave said nothing. Then the guard with him translated. According to those who knew the language enough to communicate, even a little, with them, the slaves spoke a vulgar and pidgin form of Scandinvan, usually mixed with their language of origin. Heydar was originally from Parthia, sold as a slave to the Scandinvans. When the guard translated, the slave said with a dull voice, "Heydar."

Looking at Heydar, she replied, "How old are you?" The guard translated.

Heydar shook his head.

"He doesn't know," said the guard. "Most don't even know how to count."

She shook her head and punched a few things into the computer through the keyboard. Turning to the slave, she asked, "How did you score in the medical test?" The guard translated.

Heydar would be unlikely to know how to answer. These questions helped to further establish the cognitive abilities of each individual, a characteristic that had been squashed and suppressed by their former Scandinvan owners. Together with other data collected during the processing period, it would be used to determine how to relocate the individual once arrived in the Golden Throne. Most went to New Empire, Holy Panooly, and Zarbia, where they could work in manual labor and other menial jobs, but the rare liberated slave could survive in a more intellectual world. Heydar was not one of the latter, obviously. He simply shook his head at the question, but not in a way that acknowledged his ignorance — it was, rather, more like how one would do who did not understand the concept at all. A Scandinvan slave, unlike a free person, did not have to be self-aware.

The female officer noted his response down. Her task was to give the interrogators an advanced idea of who they were dealing with. To process freed slaves more effectively — a task that still took quite a bit of time given just how many slaves had been liberated so far —, these scores were categorized into five buckets. It was beyond her understanding, but the interrogators had a set of questions and an approach specific to each bucket. What did the interrogators look for? That she understood even less, but according to what she had heard they sought intelligence, whether on military matters or even

on civilian and language issues.

"Where are you from?" she inquired next. The guard translated everything she said. Like all guards, this one was here on a short three-week 'rest and recovery.' His dark, tanned skin would betray him as a Zarbian if the accent hadn't already done so. Most likely recruited after the annexation, this one probably toured in Theohuanacu, Holy Panooly, or New Empire before having a one-to-two month break spent in Mokastana or Haishan, or on Car'gun Dilaht. Then would begin his 15-to-24 month tour in Gholgoth, where several months of combat were broken up by mere weeks of 'R&Rs' that exchanged blood boiling frontline duty with boring, mindless busy work. Some men preferred fighting, others simply counted down the days left of their deployment, regardless of where they were and when. Indeed, after the initial week, few valued the exoticness of Gholgoth after a first taste of the vicious ground war.

The slave, Heydar, took some time to comprehend the question and answer. He said, after a moment, "Ysmena."

Recently liberated, then. Ysmena was somewhere close to the front. She had heard of it before, several of the other individuals processed already having claimed to come from the same plantation. From the tales that the few who could or were willing to speak gave, while Ysmena was not the worst of plantations it was nevertheless a brutal place where an owned person could hardly expect to live more than ten years. What continued to strike her, the office, as unusual or strange, though, was that every slave she asked that question to answered with their plantation and not their original home. This one, Heydar, after all had come from Parthia. But that identity had been beaten out of him a long time ago.

Suddenly, the slave named Heydar began shaking, while muttering something in his language. The Zarbian listened until the end and then offered the translation. "He says that his masters will be angered that he left. You know, they beat them so badly that the slaves can hardly move and then they rise them in the morning for work all the same. I've liberated plantations like the one he came from. I've seen it all with my very own eyes."

"Where did you fight?" asked the officer.

"I arrived here three months ago and was immediately moved to the frontlines northeast of Bendred. We advanced a little, overcoming giant slave worked farmlands and mines, and then winter set in and the offensive came to a halt. The Scandinvan counterattacks have been small in scale, but the bastards are tough to fight off. Their artillery is just like ours, and they have fighter jets and missiles just like us. But we've held on for the most part," he answered. "But, nothing as challenging as what this lad and his kin have been through, I'm sure."

She knew that some ground had been lost around Bendred. The city had been surrounded and cut off from the rest of the Scandinvan mainland, like Drasdag, months ago, but the enemy had managed to open a corridor to the city and resupply it. Perhaps those were the battles that the Zarbian had fought. "They must have been difficult, nonetheless" she said.

"Aye," he responded. "But I reckon that by the time I'm back on the front lines, we'll be just about ready to be moving forward again. And I much rather be the one attacking than the one being attacked."

"I can imagine." She turned to Heydar, saying, "You no longer have to worry about your masters. You have been liberated by the Golden Throne."

The guard translated and the slave took some time to think. He replied to her, a long response, and the Zarbian translated. "He says that he does not know what to do without a master. He says he'd like to go back, for at least he had friends on the plantation. And at least he had a purpose, something to do."

She laughed, but Heydar didn't find it funny. "You will not be going back," she said, more seriously now, and the guard translated. "As for friends, you will make new ones, I promise you. As for work, you will have it. Don't worry, now you are in the gracious hands of the empire and you will be well taken care of."

"Hell," said the Zarbian, in dienstadi, "if you're especially lucky, like me, maybe they'll put a rifle in your hand and give you a paid ticket back to this place."

She gave him a narrow stare. "That's enough, sargént." Heydar looked at both of them, blankly, not understanding the language.

"Yes, ma'am. Sorry, ma'am," replied the guard, with a dangerously mischievous expression. He then finished translating what the officer had said originally. When finished, Heydar looked uncertain about all of these great benefits that she had spoken of. He spoke and, again, the Zarbian translated. "He asks whether he will live with others of his same people."

Nodding, she answered, "You will continue to go through processing for the next week, after which you will take a flight to Paquat, New Empire. There, you will undergo further processing, after which you'll be allotted land and employment. There is plenty of work for all in New Empire, as it is a land of new opportunities and abundance. You will live together with the others who came with you from Ysmena. Don't worry, Mr. Heydar, you are entering a new and better life. Perhaps you'll even meet a woman and have children. Those children can join the armed forces when they are of age and earn themselves, and yourself, citizenship."

He began crying. Muttering and stammering, he was saying something. The Zarbian came closer to hear and placed his hand on the man's back. The guard translated, "He says he had a son once. That the son died while still an infant. Disease, he thinks. He says that he still rather be returned to the plantation. The sooner he returns, the lighter the punishment."

She shook her head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Heydar. I'm sorry that you had to go through what you did. But, it's over now and you will never be going back to that place. That plantation has been burned to the ground, I assure you. And you, you will soon be on your way to New Empire."

Heydar looked at her pitifully as the Zarbian solemnly translated for the officer. When the guard had finished, the slave simply stood there and looked ahead. She studied the man for a moment. He had no will, no purpose to drive himself forward. It made her sad. She very much doubted he'd survive very long in the rough frontier lands of New Empire. Sighing, she waved him forward, "Show him the way to the next station. They will take him to his new temporary quarters. Then bring me the next one."

"Yes, ma'am," said the Zarbian.

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Posts: 3870
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☐ by **The Macabees** » Sat Jun 29, 2019 2:41 pm

QUOTE

2029 SPRING OFFENSIVE, PART 1A

"In the spring came the seeds and during the summer they flowered."

Komsektor Aridna, Operation BRILLIANT PYTHON

April–May, 2029

"Drasdag must fall," were the words His Imperial Majesty Fedor I was to have used when explained the military objectives of the year by his armed forces high command.

Invested for over six months now, the southwestern port city had withstood the Macabéan siege quite impressively thus far. Some generals did not believe it could be taken in the current year at all, others believed that if it *did* fall it would be at great imperial cost. Fedor would have nothing of it. Without Drasdag, the entire invasion was in peril. The great port would make resupply easier, giving the *Kriermada* a better nexus for bringing in weapons and ammunition, other supplies, and more men. If it did not fall in 2029, the year could very well mark the end of the war. When high command recommended a more conservative posture on the city, seeking to merely continue denying its use to the Scandinavians, the emperor adamantly refused and had their orders revised. Drasdag was to be taken before the end of the summer. Failure could mean the careers of leading military men, he said.

In preparation for Operation BRILLIANT PYTHON, as the urban offensive into Drasdag was named, fifteen million men were earmarked, briefed, and positioned around the city. The operation's name paid homage to the python's habit of twisting around its prey and constricting it until it ceased to breathe. The Golden Throne sought to do something similar here.

For six months, the *Ejermacht* sought to gain footholds all around the landward perimeter of the port. It would use these to launch their spring forays into Drasdag, with the intention of exploiting these gains in the summer with even more aggressive operations, mirroring the general offensive pattern of the broader front. With fifteen million combat personnel involved, it was hoped that these forces could not only find and eliminate Scandinavian troops within the city, but also patrol occupied sectors to further reduce the supply and distribution of food and ammunition to besieged enemy forces. This slow asphyxiation would lead to Drasdag's surrender, or so went the plan.

Most buildings were in ruin. Months of perpetual bombardment from land, air, and sea had taken their toll on the once beautiful coastal megalopolis. Missiles and shells alike had done their damage, and it was extensive and grave. Hundreds of thousands already lay dead beneath layers of rubble composed of concrete, brick, and steel. Likewise, almost every street had already seen combat, much as had the sewers and transportation tunnels. Men had fought and died on almost every corner of the city. If it wasn't for dirt, broached to by the sheer force of neverending impacts, consuming the blood that flowed from the bodies and into the street, Drasdag would be a city of red rivers. Some days it was dark even when the sun was out, its colossal presence not enough to overcome the shadows of tens of thousands of projectiles falling upon it like apocalyptic meteors arriving in showers.

But the pummeling hadn't worked. The Scandinavian defense, cut off from the rest of its forces as it was, still held position of most of the city.

For their part, the *Ejermacht* still had millions of forces pinned down by the need to lay siege. The fifteen million gathered for the spring offensive were just a fraction of the total forces involved. Tens of millions more held positions on a long front that held back the Scandinavian army from linking up with their own besieged forces. More still patrolled and bottlenecked the mountain passes to the outer suburbs with heavily manned checkpoints, helping to reduce the

amount of food, medical aid, and ammunition smuggled to the defenders by brave trail hikers who were often as young as six. These were soldiers who could instead be fighting to conquer the rest of Drana.

Operation BRILLIANT PYTHON was the solution to the problem of the urban quagmire called a battle that the *Fuermak* had gotten itself into. Combined with a summer surge in combat forces involved directly with the assault on the city, the objective was to take Drasdag by autumn so that the men could be redeployed to shore up defensive lines in preparation for the inevitable Scandinvan winter counter-offensive of 2029–30.

To make way for the offensive the triple-axis bombardment of the megalopolis ceased three weeks prior to the beginning of ground operations. This was done not only to psychologically affect the defenders, who had endured a constant barrage for months and must have now been wondering what was to come, but also to allow the battle to settle somewhat so that *Ejermacht* reconnaissance elements could take stock of their enemies, their positions, and distribution.

The bombardment renewed itself twenty-four hours prior to d-day, h-hour. If before they had been indiscriminate, this time the enemy would quickly understand that they were being targeted with greater precision. The intention was no longer to block movement and smother but to soften hard points and eliminate them when possible. Fighter jets, who had long ago achieved air superiority over the city, dropped their bombs and missiles. From offshore, ships launched missiles of their own and even a baker's dozen of battleships fired their heavy cannons into the city. Artillery rained down their own projectiles from the surrounding mountains, delivering a hellish hail of gunpowder and steel.

Finally, when the infernal storm came to an end, it was only a few long minutes before one could hear the sudden escalation in rifle fire accompanied by the sound of thousands of rumbling motors. The imperial spring offensive on Drasdag was finally underway and in full force. It started with tens of thousands of men, as they advanced on foot and by armored personnel carrier. The latter were larger and smaller alike, whether heavy set Arica Is or variants of the Nakíl, including escorting Dejárd urban assault units. Nakíl 1A2M+s, armed with heavier 140mm cannons, provided heavy direct firepower as well, and together this combined armed force struck Scandinvan defensive positions on the surface with sudden and unmistakable fury. Above, fighter jets dropped heavy bunker busters on suspected tunnel network nexuses and intersections, hoping to slow and impede enemy movement through tunnels, sewers, and other subterranean passages. Mushroom-shaped plumes of smoke, dirt, and rubble rose up toward the sky everywhere the eye could see. Drasdag was consumed in flames.

Soldiers and civilians cried and died together. The smart ones hid where they could, although even like this survival was a challenge like no other. If not the victim of a stray bullet or an unsuspected bomb, it was the sudden errant lick of an adjacent flame or simply asphyxiation from a lack of oxygen. Those who had survived the first six months would find the next ones even more difficult.

Vicstrategos Jerardo Maniqüa looked at the smoke rise from the dark depths of Drasdag. The entire city was consumed in a battle for survival, whether it was the enemy on defense or the general's own men while fighting to take the city. He hadn't seen anything like this before. Having joined the *Ejermacht* from the academy after the War of Golden Succession, he missed the great battles of old and was part of a generation who knew little more than the 'Long Wars.'

Born in western Sidi Rezegh, to agriculturalist parents living in the small town of Lidezga, he always felt as if he were something other than Macabéan. What that demonym meant was something that

most were still trying to figure out and, given the color of his skin and the accent of his Dénstadi, Jerardo was almost more Zarbian than he was anything else. Although he had never visited that country during his childhood, he soon got to it very well during operations in the Zarbian Marche and, once the fullscale annexation was underway in 2026, the Zarbian Territories. Fighting in the jungles between 2019–2027, he had seen little else of the world. Only a fifteen-month tour to Theohuanacu and periodic two-month province-side R&Rs interrupted his Zarbian "lullaby."

He caught his breath as he took it all in. There was a certain majesty to the great waste that the Siege of Drasdag was proving to be. He thought that not just for strategic reasons or even for the sake of his own men. Millions of Scandinavians were dying as well, all people who before this war formed part of a budding society which produced goods, art, and knowledge. And who were they now? Corpses, whether dead or soon-to-be.

"Initial reports are mostly positive, vicstrategos." It was Leutstrategos Heres Ledán, a Dénstadi of half-stock. His mother was Weigari. The short, stocky aide walked up to him and stopped three paces away.

Not taking his gaze off the city, Jerardo nodded and replied, "We will go over them soon, Ledán. Thank you."

Heres turned to look at what his commander was staring at. The leutstrategos' eyes narrowed slightly. "Beautiful, sir," he said.

"In a way, I suppose it is," was all Jerardo answered.

Heres Ledán was a true believer, an apostle of the Cult of the Willed. His conviction was so strong that he hardly prayed the other gods at all, except perhaps Fortune. Her threads were hard to ignore. The others, though, meant little now. With the modern enlightenment product of 'science' Will had overcome the rest of them. During the Triumph, Heres had fallen to his knees when the emperor had passed them by in His golden-trimmed chariot.

The leutstrategos stepped forward. "It truly is," he said, voice quiet and trance-like. "Think about it, millions of men amidst the toil of struggle that gives shape to the tide of history. We are here taking part in the realization of His vision. And this battle will be one of the most remembered because it will be a defining moment in this war. I'm blessed to be witness to it, and so are you."

Jerardo closed his eyes. He had never liked the man.

Heres paused for a moment, then added, "Anyway, I came to report that divisional and corps level commanders are applying their reserves to add momentum to the offensive."

"Good," said Jerardo, eyes still closed. "Thank you."

"Of course, vicstrategos," replied Heres, who came to attention and gave a slight bow.

Once the leutstrategos' footsteps disappeared down the hill, Jerardo opened his eyes again to the glowing embers of Drasdag. He did so just as the noise of war escalated again, with hundreds of thousands of more men joining the fighting with unrepentant eagerness. The front commander struggled to see the supposed beauty.

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by [The Macabees](#) » Tue Jul 02, 2019 1:17 pm



2029 SPRING OFFENSIVE, PART IB

*"We should have known we'd be wading
through the mud."*

— R.S. Sarabia, *Mi Odisea en el Ejército
Macabeo* (2034 C.E.)

Komsektor Boris, Operation FLOWER BED

April–May, 2029

He tilted the Hawk ever so slightly just to catch a glimpse of the unfolding battle below. He could see millions of troops, over a hundred million in fact, like ants crawling over the sands of a spilled farm. A chill ran down his spine. It was an impressive sight. He had never seen a war on this scale before. Alfonso wasn't sure he ever wanted to see another like this one again.

Tens of thousands of fiery bulbs popped here and there as artillery shells and bombs struck enemy positions without remorse. Sometimes bulbs turned into curtains of flames as heavy bombers and aircraft, or even the rocket launchers and ground-based missile systems, saturated entire areas with their unquestionable firepower. It was almost beautiful.

Even more extraordinary was the aerial formation around him. Like the fighting on the ground, which stretched from the western coast of Drana all the way to the outskirts of Bendred, there were aircraft as far as the eye could see and the imagination could stretch. Screens of Lu-45 Hawks, just like his, cut through perpendicularly to provide defensive coverage against Scandinvan aerial incursions into what was now Macabéan airspace and GLI-44 Blackjesters circled around to collect and distribute data to the four-dimensional fighting force now locked into an offensive that would surely enter history as one of the largest and most complicated ever.

"Go ahead and move to my right, Copperhead," said a static-fractured voice over the radio.

"Roger that, Arrow." He banked slightly to split off from the formation and take a position off the tip of Leutkoronel Kiratek's Lu-45.

Ahead of them, the central mountain ranges of Drana were getting closer and larger, much larger. Tall mountains looked like walls of earth. Alfonso hated to think of being one of the men on the ground. Infantry, he heard, traveled mostly by foot in that terrain. Their supporting vehicles traveled along narrow roads prone to ambushes and other sorts of traps. It wasn't the kind of fighting that attracted him, even if his job was no easier and no less dangerous.

Their mission was no less suicidal, no less likely to result in their deaths. Those mountains truly were like walls. For both combatants, the opposite side was like a black hole — radar coverage was hardly permanent and assets sent to establish that sort of visibility were prime targets, making it precarious and fatal work. Still, Blackjesters traveled with them, like islands surrounded by an ocean of escort and other fighter aircraft. The GLI-44s would be the eyes and ears of the operation, acting as some of the most important sources of intelligence and data. Indeed, their task was to coordinate the aerial offensive against the Scandinvans north of those treacherous snowcapped peaks. No wonder they were so well protected. Without them, pilots like Alfonso would have a much harder time finding and eliminating their targets. Without them, there could be no operation.

They began to gain altitude. Using the mountains as cover was in some sense ideal, but in others not so much. The Scandinvans still retained control over most of the area and they used the terrain

intelligently. Hidden SAM batteries and other weapons were capable of tearing through imperial aircraft formations like machinegun bullets in a crowd, as the *Laerihans* was quick to learn during the winter months.

As if they were reading his mind, a formation of F/A-36s darted ahead from below. They were a gorgeous aircraft, better even than the Hawk. Built for sheer stealth and lethality, they were expensive, fragile, and the perfect weapon for hunting and destroying exactly the sort of enemy assets that could make life so difficult for pilots like Alfonso. He looked at them as they maneuvered through the heightening slopes of the southern foothills, which were more like smaller mountains than taller hills. They released their missiles on some target and then turned to disappear back south. Something came out from a deep ravine, trailed by smoke and fire, and it moved at such speed that one of the F/A-36s simply could not shake it off. The aircraft went down in a fiery wreck, the pilot ejecting just in time to land somewhere in the wilderness. Fortunate, in some sense.

Alfonso turned his attention back to his own business as the mountains crept up suddenly and were, soon enough, beneath them...

The kid's face was colored gray. He had been dead for some time now. Some of the snow was still red, but fresh snowfall in the night had covered most of that sort of evidence on the battlefield. Primsargént Benedic Jorascu looked away. He had seen a lot of war, been involved in a lot of fighting, but he could never get used to the wasting of so much of the empire's youth.

Many soldiers had died here. Dozens. The Scandinvan machinegun nest had been really well hidden and, admittedly, superbly positioned. So much so that it basically commanded entry into the narrow pass, to the extent that it took a well-placed air-delivered bomb to remove it. And when the boys on the ground moved forward again they simply discovered another one, and another one, and then a pillbox, and so on and so forth. The enemy had used the winter well to prepare their defenses for the following year, that much was made obvious by the bodies that littered the floor by their feet as they marched up the endless passageway between the towering ravine walls. Dozens turned into hundreds, and hundreds — Benedic was sure, once one considered the breadth of the offensive — into thousands and tens of thousands. The idea shattered his mind, reminding him of his own mortality.

He was younger than others, only twenty-three years of age. But he felt much older. Benedic had already seen his fair share of war. Volunteering at the age of fifteen, he never had much hope for himself out in the real world. The rat race simply wasn't for him. His first deployment was to Theohuanacu, where he fought in the First Pirate War. He witnessed the destruction of Tlaloc with his own eyes and thought then that it would be the most brutal thing he ever saw for himself. Oh, ho wrong he'd be. If only the primsargént could go back in time to warn his younger self that there was much worse to come.

It would take some time for him to see that sort of war again. His second deployment was to the Guffingfordi Frontier, which offered a different sort of anxiety. Back then, a war between the Golden Throne and Stevid always seemed an accidental trigger pull away. Propaganda blared constantly and the patrols could be harrowing. War never came. Sometimes that's worse than war itself.

Strange that Benedic once considered himself lucky. His third tour, this time once again in Theohuanacu, narrowly missed the meat of the Second Pirate War. Action there was confined to post-war occupation duties. Likewise, his tour ended before the current rebellion, sparing him from what he knew to be a harrowing war that taxed a man's soul. It wouldn't be until the invasion of Indras that he saw combat again, and there it's fair to say the war was easy, as it

was during his fifth tour in New Empire. The latter amounted little more to border duties and whores. It wouldn't be until now, with "rest and recovery" more of a processing period this time, that he'd remember what true war was like. It wasn't until now that he be reminded of what it was like not to lose a comrade, but all of them. Some men may have broken down and cried then, but Benedic was beyond that. The only thing he could do is wait for his own time, which could only be soon.

He took his mind off the thought.

The column of soldiers marched through the pass in near silence. Most avoided looking at the corpses. Others were braver...or simply more sadistic, or perhaps dead in all but the physical sense.

If they were silent, the battlefield was not. The distant thundering of artillery wasn't always so distant and the farther they marched the closer the gunfire sounded. Not much progress had been made in the past days. That the Scandinavian manpower reserves were vast was well-known, but how many men exactly they had mobilized and deployed in time was unknown. Now there was some idea that it numbered over a billion, a truly breathtaking figure that was difficult to grasp. These enemy soldiers were tasked with holding Macabéan forces back and they were using the geography to their advantage without remorse or hesitation.

After a long trek, they arrived at a forward marshaling point. There were men with grit-covered faces, dim expressions, and eyes of emptiness. Most did not look at them as they arrived. Other NCOs and officers were giving orders left and right, sometimes to them and other times not. They were organizing another big attack further down the pass. Apparently, an enemy pillbox was holding up the advance and artillery was unable to put out of action. They'd need to try to take it by force until air support arrived.

When the orders to move out for the attack came, Benedic learned that his unit would be at the front of it all...

As soon as they overcame the highest crests of the central mountains, Alfonso saw the deep expanse of northern Drana in all its terror. Hundreds of missiles were crisscrossing the sky, leaving black trails of smoke behind them as they flamed toward their targets. Thousands of aircraft circled each other, some striking at a distance but most caught in the dance of a dogfight.

Many think that modern war is always at beyond visual range, but when the skies are filled and space is compact, those tactics lose some of their relevance. Here, over Drana, the air war was more hectic, dangerous, and short distanced. Alfonso and his squadron had little time before they were in the thick of it. He peeled away to meet the enemy head-on. Keeping one eye on his HUD and another on a Scandinavian fighter that had cut in front of him like an arrow, he turned to follow it. It banked right, then left, then pulled up, then down, and Alfonso — Copperhead, as he was known here — followed as best as he could.

Below him, other Hawks sped on towards ground targets. If the F/A-36s focused on the suppression of enemy air defenses, these Hawks were tasked with striking targets like supply and vehicle depots, ground force bases, airfields, and other positions directly related to the Scandinavian ability to defend the mountain passes. Many would not make it to their target, as missiles clipped their wings to send them spiraling toward the ground or simply blew them out of the sky altogether. Others would drop their bombs and launch their missiles, only be eliminated before they could make a withdrawal. This was not a child's game. All involved here had grown into men or women with balls as big as men's.

As his target came into view, he released his short-range air-to-air missile...

...By the time the pillbox came into view, it was too late to think about anything other than survival.

Bullets ripped into flesh. Comrades fell left and right. There wasn't much space in the pass for maneuvering and those who attacked from the front were the easiest to hit. Others advanced from the top of either ridgeline, flanking the pillbox or suppressing it from the other side. But the Scandinavians had organized their defenses well and flanking forces often found themselves caught in a battle of their own against separate defensive positions.

Enemy fortifications on crests and ridges were easier to strike with artillery and other indirect munitions. Those embedded within the rock or protected by the strange, irregular curvatures and surfaces of the mountains were more difficult to knock out, even impervious to indirect fire. Fighter jets and bombers overhead had to expend heavy munitions to put a dent in the Scandinavian defensive line, and as soon as one obstacle was overcome the ground forces simply stumbled into another one. It was like this incessantly. A breakthrough would not come soon; if one came at all, the Macabéans were paying a heavy toll for it.

Benedic had little thought for strategic concerns. His focus was on staying alive. Using what he could as cover, he directed his squad forward. The commanding officer, Leutnant Grojean, had died within minutes of the attack. He was the effective commanding officer now. Screaming at his men, he had them hold tight against the rock, using whatever angle and protrusion they could to protect themselves from enemy gunfire.

He heard the mechanical sound of a heavy vehicle approaching. It was coming from the rear...friendly, *thank the Gods*.

A modified G11/G appeared. Small and light, it could fit through the narrow canyon to reach the infantry forces pinned down by the concrete monstrosity the Scandinavians had built here. Enemy machine gun fire rattled its glacis plate. It didn't wait long to release its two missiles, which struck the pillbox directly. The G11 withdrew quickly, throwing its gears into reverse. As it left and the smoke cleared, it was obvious the pillbox still stood. So, as infantrymen cowered behind rocks or slowly crept forward, all the while dying or crying from the pain of their wounds, the G11 was reloaded until it could move forward and fire again. And like this, the battle went on until this fortification was cleared.

There was hardly a respite before Benedic and his men, or those who were still alive and in fighting condition, marched on to the next fight.

Last edited by [The Macabees](#) on Tue Jul 02, 2019 1:18 pm, edited 1 time in total.

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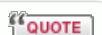
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☐ by [The Macabees](#) » Wed Jul 03, 2019 8:46 am



2029 SPRING OFFENSIVE, PART IC

"I was lucky to be in the east. Which isn't saying much. Because we were all just as likely to die."

— R. Bunhabin, *My Time in Bendred* (2042 C.E.)

Komsektor Darius, Operation EASTERN HORN

April–May, 2029

The great southern city of Bendred may not have been in as much ruin as Drasdag, to the west, but it had suffered its own pain during this war.

Imbrinumian forces had been tasked with taking the metropolis, but their efforts had been somewhat thwarted during the winter months by a strategic Scandinvan counter-offensive which had opened a supply corridor to the besieged. Reinforced, fed, and re-supplied with weapons and ammunition, the enemy was now in a position to hold out for another year.

It was this situation that Lasagos Gareth Benó, a blue-eyed Díenstadi of the old stock, was told to remedy by orders of His Imperial Majesty Himself. With flowers in full bloom and the days getting longer, he knew that it was time to deliver Bendred's head to the emperor. He thought of it as he ran the track around the base in the brisk morning air, the sweat cool to touch as it slowly rolled down his skin.

Of the three *komsektor* commanders he perhaps had the easiest job of them all. While the bulk of his forces were engaged to the north, his operational objectives since the beginning of the invasion had been relatively simple: hold the right flank of the imperial invasion force. To anchor this flank, he was to assist the Imbrinumians by cutting off Bendred from Scandinvan forces. Once taken, the city could be used as a shield in the right hand, as *Komsektor* Boris acted as the sword in the right. For much of last year, the plan had worked. But the Imbrinumians never took the city, and now the Scandinvans were moving forces and materials within and without. An easy job had been botched and Gareth knew he was on his last leg. If he did not deliver soon, the Lasagos would be stripped of his command — that much he had been warned of by his good friend, Rikjaard Johansen.

The *jogornos* had arrived again at the base late during the previous night. Gareth had not gone to see him, being preoccupied with other things. They'd see each other this morning, regardless.

Gareth finished his run, ending it where he started. From there, he ran all the way to his on-base residence, a small mobile home they had set up for him near the *nuklek*. After a short, cold shower, he put on his fatigues and boots, then headed out to the central administrative building where Rikjaard and the others were most likely already waiting for him.

They — the *jogornos*, Gareth's aide *Komstrategos* Faro Hetak, and a host of other front area and front commanders — were all there in the room when he arrived. All but the diplomat snapped to attention when he walked in, although he knew their vigor had more to do with appearances. Rikjaard's growing relationship with the emperor was well-known. The man would likely be promoted into the *kíerlordship* soon and the boys were always sure to be at their most pristine when one of His Imperial Majesty's advisors was present. Gareth had known Rikjaard for a long time and he found it hard to think of him that way.

"Lasagos Benó, my good friend," said the light-coffee-colored diplomat. "How have you been doing?"

Smiling, he answered, "Good, Rikjaard. Very good." Pausing, he then added, "I apologize, *jogornos*. I forget we are in public."

"Nonsense, nonsense, old friend." Rikjaard waved his concerns for propriety away. "Besides, we have plenty of business to discuss today. It feels good to start with something lighter. Tell me, have you spoken with the wife lately? How is she? And your kids? You

must miss them very much, I imagine."

Nodding, he said, "I speak to them almost every day. I take advantage of the luxury now that I have it, for when operations begin I doubt I will have the time." It had been over a year since had seen them last. He had been afforded one last visit home before the commencement of the invasion during the summer of the last year. It was the shortest week of his life and what came after became the longest year. Garet missed the golden curls of his wife's hair and her deep emerald eyes that always said more than her words. "The kids are healthy and growing, says Margaret. One day, we should all get together again."

"That would be swell," said Rikjaard. The *jogornos* looked at the others. "Let us discuss operational plans. *Krierlord* Jerom Dago has tasked me with personally reporting the details to him."

"Sure," said the *lasagos*. He turned to his aide, "Komstrategos Hetak, would you like to give the sitrep?"

Faro stepped forward and bowed slightly. "Of course, *lasagos*."

A map slowly mechanically descended from a case in which it had been rolled up. It showed the local terrain and geography, including the greater metropolitan area of Bendred, the outlying area, and the fringe of *Komsektor* Boris. "This is our *komsektor* area, as you all know. The black lines represent our front positions. We begin spring operations at a slight disadvantage compared to the end of autumn, thanks in large part to the success of our opponents during the winter months. They have, again, as well all know, opened a supply corridor to the city. Through it, they move men, ammunition, weapons, and other supplies that have kept Bendred well and alive despite the *Kriermada's* tight blockade and the best efforts of our Imbrinumian allies. Our own lines are strong and reinforced, with reserves in place for the upcoming offensive. The *Laerihans* has promised us ample aerial support, as I'm sure Komstrategos Arias here can reaffirm."

The *Laerihans* general nodded and stepped forward, separating himself from the rest. Beside him was *Vicadmirant* Yor Jensen, who was the *Kriermada* representative for the *komsektor*. "While most of our assets will be focused on achieving air superiority north of the central mountain ranges, as well as on destroying Scandinvan anti-air defenses in the same area, *Komsektor* Darius will receive the support it needs to achieve its objectives. Furthermore, should the Scandinvans shift their own air forces in response to our pressure to the northwest we shall respond in kind."

"Good," said the *jogornos*. Rikjaard turned back to Garet. "And the offensive? I trust it will begin on time."

"Yes," replied the *lasagos*. "Our first objective will be to cut the Scandinvan corridor to the city off. With the land, sea, and air blockade fully reinstated, the city's defenders will be starved of the basic necessities required for Bendred's defense. I trust that under those conditions our allies will be able to storm and take it by the end of summer."

The *jogornos* clicked his tongue. "That's what we were told of Drasdag, as well. And that city's siege was never lifted nor broken, and yet it still stands."

"Yes, that is true," responded Garet, swallowing. Rikjaard had changed since they had last seen each other. Perhaps the *jogornos* had let his newfound responsibilities go to his head. He certainly seemed more...rigid. Less...forgiving. Their friendship wouldn't save Garet, the commander understood that now. "Regardless, we will take Bendred, even if imperial troops must be used in the city itself."

"Good," repeated Rikjaard.

They continued discussing operational details well into the early

afternoon. When they were finished, all but Gareth and Rikjaard cleared the room. The *jogornos* remained silent for a time, sitting atop a desk, looking at the map in detail. Finally, he asked, "How much longer we will fight this war, Gareth? Even the emperor is becoming restless, I hear."

"Until it is won, I suppose," responded the commander.

Rikjaard laughed. "Until it is done. And when will that be?"

The lasagos stepped forward. "Is all good on the home front?"

"For now," replied the diplomat. "For now. But, our position in the region is not as strong as it once was. Our competitors know that our hands are full. They take advantage of our limited resources. The Reich has returned to Krasnova, although for now it has amounted little more than political influence. Still, with the Mokans withdrawn and their allies disinterested, the Ordenite reconquest of the island is only a matter of time. And when that happens what will be the future between our two countries? The situation is unstable and it would be best for the empire to focus where it matters most, in Greater Dénstad. This...this distraction must end."

"What will it take to end it?" asked Gareth.

Rikjaard looked at him. "We must win it. Win it, Gareth. Take Bendred. It must fall before the end of spring. If it does not, the emperor will not be happy and if the emperor is unhappy so will *Kríerlord* Dago. And if both of them are angry, so will I." His eyes were as sharp as a freshly whetted blade. Here, with so much at stake, Rikjaard was no longer a friend.

The early morning air bit with its icy frost as the rumbling engines of thousands of vehicles were started at once.

Millions of soldiers were armed and ready. Overheard, aircraft screamed toward the horizon.

Operation EASTERN HORN, the operation to cut the Scandivan supply corridor to Bendred and reinstate the complete blockade of the city would soon be underway. Nerves frayed with the anticipation. Most emptied their bowels now that they could. The initial advances would be intense, with little opportunity to stop and rest. Commanders had orders to complete the operation within three days, four days at most. Anything longer would be considered a failure.

When the artillery barrage ended there was a sudden eerie silence that pervaded the entire front. Then, minutes later, the fire came back alive as the thousands of tanks, tens of thousands of armored personnel vehicles, and millions of infantrymen marched forward with unrestrained resolve.

The battle had begun and Bendred's fate hung in the balance.

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Morrdh
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Democratic Socialists

by **Morrdh** » Wed Jul 03, 2019 8:08 pm



North of Drasdag Drana Province Scandivan Theater

Things for the Morridanes had been quiet over the winter months, it was a time to learn the lay of the land and refine patrol tactics. Rifle companies would conduct wide sweeps whilst Sealgairí special forces teams would scout ahead to locate Scandivan supply caches and

routes. This proved to be effective as it enabled the Sealgaí teams to ply their trade as stealthers, but at the same time they would have the considerable firepower of an infantry company a radio call away. Whilst this didn't completely cut the back country supply routes, it made life difficult for the Scandivans running supplies along said routes.

Spring came and with it also came an increase in the tempo of operations as the Macabeans sought to gain the initiative at the start of the campaign season and go on the offensive. The city of Drasdag was to fall and that warranted aggressive patrolling to ensure that the besieged city was completely blockaded, something that necessitated the Morridane task force being increased in size to a division of three brigades. Each brigade was assigned a sector, allowing Morridane forces to concentrate in certain areas in order to shut down the Scandivan supply routes once and for all.

When it came to the great Macabean assault on Drasdag, the Morridanes had a grandstand view of the storm that engulfed the city. One Morridane soldier, observing the final bombardment of the city at night, described it as; *"Morrigan's Wrath...making the night glow blood red."*

Orders came down to all Morridane units from divisional HQ; they were being put on an one hour notice to move in case they were wanted to support the attack on Drasdag. It was a prospect that nobody particularly relished, especially a city ravaged by the rage of a war goddess.

Irish/Celtic Themed Nation - [Factbook](#)

In your Uplink, hijacking your guard band.



The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

☐ by **The Macabees** » Thu Jul 04, 2019 10:25 am



2029 SPRING OFFENSIVE, PART ID

"The Scandinavian Navy did not want to come out and play, so the game was taken to them."

— S.T. Marona, *The Gothic War: The Conflict at Sea* (2066 C.E.)

Kríermak 'Gholgoth,' Operation GOLDEN CYCLONE *April, 2029*

If the blockade of the southern coast of Drana had been a success with little cost to it, it was only because the Scandinavian navy had put little effort into disputing it. Instead, they had transferred most of their ships north in an effort to conserve strength and maintain sufficient assets to defend their holding in Vismer and the conquered islands of Shen Almaru. It was a wise strategic decision, perhaps, but one that frustrated Macabéan naval commanders nonetheless. The *Laerihans* and *Ejermacht* were experiencing the brunt of combat and most of the *Kríermada* was left thirsty for action of their own. Knowing that the Scandivans were not interested in pursuing battle, it was decided to take the battle to them.

Roughly six thousand combat vessels would break off from the main fleet, which was already split in two in the shape of blockading and

reserve forces, and round the eastern coast of the Scandinavian homeland. Passing between the northeastern tip of the latter and the southwestern coastline of Kregaia, this fleet was tasked with subsequently raiding the northern Scandinavian ports with the intention of engaging and destroying the enemy navy.

The operation had two major long-term objectives. First, if successful, the operation would give *Kríermak* 'Gholgoth' the basis to begin a full blockade of the entire island, isolating it from foreign resupply and possible reinforcement. Second, by doing so it would also sever Scandinavian supply lines between Drana and its external holdings. The latter would have the added consequence of aiding allied Gothic efforts in Shen Almaru, which they intended to liberate and restore to Pudite rule. A Macabéan naval victory in the north would be a major blow to the Scandinavian war effort and could, perhaps, even bring them to the negotiating table.

Most dangerous, until the fighting itself, was the passage between the enemy and Kregaia. Here, the fleet could not put distance between itself and the Scandinavian mainland and there they still held strongly and firmly. The threat of sustained aerial and land-based attack was very likely. Thus, a third of the fleet was tasked with passing through the straits first and provide several advanced screens on the other side, to disallow the Scandinavians of the opportunity of bottling the greater body of the fleet inside and destroying it through sheer force of numbers. These two thousand ships sailed first, with their fleets and squadrons deployed in their standard fashion. Carriers protected by their own battle groups traveled in the center, with raiding squadrons widely deployed in layers of screens across the greater ocean. Behind them, the other four thousand warships traveled in very much the same formation, the shape of the greater body skewed toward the south.

Because of the [treaty signed with the Gothic Council](#), the *Kríermada* was restricted to operations beneath the latitudinal line which passed just south of Kregaia. This would hamper the fleet's ability to skew north and therefore put distance between its most important assets and the Scandinavian mainland, a dangerous prospect for even the most arrogant of commanders.

Of course, to pass through the straits between the two countries, most of the southwestern coastline would have to be suppressed. A purely aerial strategy was unlikely to succeed without immense material costs. Carrier-based aircraft would be needed once the fleet made it through, losing them in a battle of attrition before they arrived to the true fight seemed and was counterproductive. High command understood this well enough.

Coupled with the *Kríermada's* maneuver was Operation SECOND FOG. An initial invasion force of over fifteen million group troops was to land along the southwestern edge of Drana, with the mission of establishing a beachhead out of which reinforcements could break out into the Scandinavian rear. If successful, the amphibious assault would not only draw Scandinavian troops out of the mountains, it would also offer the *Ejermacht* a second route to the enemy's capital. The screening force traveling north, assuming the successful completion of the rest of the fleet's rounding of the island, would then form a reserve given the active mission of supporting ground forces with air and offshore fire support.

The landings would coincide with the anniversary of the 2028 landings. If a beachhead could be successfully captured, the new front would be inflated until more than a hundred million soldiers could be inserted. Even the initial operation would require port facilities, which either had to be captured or hastily constructed. The latter would take time. It would undoubtedly and unforgivingly be as challenging or more than the first amphibious landings.

Success, however, would not simply give the war a new balance. If further success could be achieved in subsequent breakout operations, the *Laerihans* could establish bases in what was to be termed *Komsektor* Ekano. From these, they could support

suppression missions all along the northwestern tip of Drana, helping to protect a vulnerable fleet attempting a break out of its own. The further west the fleet traveled from the northernmost tip of the Scandinvan homeland, the further south the island's coast would be from their carriers and transports. Land-based air support could make all the difference in reaching that point intact and in fighting strength. Finally, the same bases could support air strikes on Scandinvan ports in that area of the home island. Simply put, Operation SECOND FOG was pivotal if Operation GOLDEN CYCLONE was to end in a Macabéan victory.

With these theories in mind, six thousand ships separated themselves from the main body of *Kríermak* 'Gholgoth' and began moving northwest in two bodies — one larger and one smaller. Aircraft of all types, including AEW and their escorts circulated in intricate patterns over individual squadrons, fleets, fleet groups, and ultimately the larger formation.

The largest naval action of the Gothic War was underway and the fate of the war hung in the balance.

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by **The Macabees** » Wed Jul 24, 2019 12:09 pm



THE DESTRUCTION OF TIWANAKU

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*"Was it the best way to end the rebellion?
That question is impossible to answer."*

— L.R. Jerasté, *Memoirs of a War* (2037 C.E.)

Imperial Palace, Fedala

January 2029

His Imperial Majesty Fedor I paced around the room for some time. There were at least a dozen other officials with him in the large study, most military commanders. A map of the southeastern Theohuacan coastline hung spread out against a back wall, concealing the dark maple-constructed bookcases behind it. Stopping finally, he said, "The rebellion has been allowed to persist for over two years. Every month that it continues we look weaker. In the territories, resistance against our rule continues to grow. We must send a message. The rebellions in Tiwanaku and Palenque must be put to an end."

No one responded for a second but, finally, one commander spoke up. "The cities are dead. They are graveyards of ruined buildings and rotting carcasses. Survivors are mostly enemy combatants looking for scraps and resisting only until the very last drop of energy in their body gives out. I know that the idea of a quick victory is tempting, but we know the casualties involved in the fullscale urban assault required to clear out every last corner of the cities."

"I have heard the same excuse for more than two years," snarled Fedor. "I'm tired of it. We are the Empire of the Golden Throne."

"What do you suggest, then?" asked the same general.

The emperor looked at him with a sudden ferocity in his piercing blue eyes. "What do *I* suggest? Isn't that why I have military commanders like you? To suggest things to *me*?"

Saying nothing, the commander looked down. Another one cleared his throat and stepped forward. "Your Imperial Majesty, I understand your concerns. It is true, regardless, that we know of the cost that a fullscale assault would require. We also know that if the assault proves to be difficult, it can tie down millions of our troops."

"Millions of our troops are *already* tied down," replied the emperor with cutting words. "Or are there not millions of soldiers posted along the siege lines and behind?"

"True," answered the second man. "Still, they are not involved in combat and can be redeployed at a moment's notice, Your Majesty."

Fedor looked at the map. "What then?"

There were some nervous stares shared between the commanders in the room. The second man said, "There is always the Weigar Option."

Silence befell those in the study, including the emperor. Still looking at the map, Fedor resigned himself to his thoughts for some time. He did not like being reminded of Weigar. Much of the city still lay in ruins and most of it was uninhabited, despite the clean-up efforts. But it had been a necessary choice at the time. With the Ruskan Frontier overrun by the armies of Safehaven, the Weigari Rebellion had to be put down before it divided the empire further and forced the collapse of Fedor's defense of his crown. Thus, Weigar — the ancient capital of the province that went by that same name — had to be destroyed in one fell swoop. What better way to do that than with a nuclear warhead? And so the city was devastated in the most absolute of terms. The Weigar Option it was called now. Could he do that again? Could he subject another city, another city of the empire, to that fate? He mulled it over as he studied the colored lines and shapes representing the battlefield.

Finally, the emperor said, "No, not the Weigar Option. At least, not as it was done in Weigar."

"What then?" asked one of the commanders, although not one of the two who had already spoken.

Fedor gave them his plan, then when finished he added, "Begin the evacuation of our forces from the city immediately."

There was a chorus of, "Yes, Your Majesty," as all those present exited the study. When they had all left, Fedor placed his hands on the edge of the table and leaned forward, putting his weight on the tabletop. Letting out a long breath, he shook his head. How many cities would he have to destroy before he brought peace to the empire? He thought about the question for a short while and then an answer came to him. As many he would need to.

Tiwanaku Siege Lines

February 2029

A strange silence had befallen the city once again. Even in the suburbs, one did not hear the gunfights that once pervaded the outskirts of Tiwanaku. It had been several weeks now since the last major combat operations into the ruined, rubble-strewn megalopolis had ended. Even the near-constant hum of tank engines was no longer as audible, most of the heavy equipment now sitting idle in their depots.

There were still battles here-and-there, especially behind the lines, but even the most drastic of enemy attacks had been curtailed to quite a degree. As more and more surviving civilians were isolated within the new structured, guarded, and controlled towns, the more

separated they were from the pirates insurgents and their allied militias. They could no longer hide in plain sight. No more did they receive food from sympathizers. And with the sheer presence of the imperial military and local security, the enemy's movements were more apparent and far easier to respond to. The rebellion, for lack of a better term, was dying.

Still, damage was done where the rebels could cause it. If the imperial military could no longer be baited into urban battle and raids behind the lines were becoming more difficult, then the pirates were responding well by simply changing their targets. The civilians who went to the new towns were safe, for the most part, behind imperial walls and their guards, but those that ventured out — for work and whatever other daily reason most of them had to leave the confines of their new municipalities — found themselves increasingly at risk. Too common was it to find a vehicle ambushed and riddled with bullet holes on the side of the highway, and too slow was the imperial response to counteract these sort of cowardly attacks. But it was the local politicians who were most vulnerable. Whatever advances in replacing the old, autonomous bureaucracy of the southern extremes of the territory, these were constantly set back with drive-bys, well-placed rockets, and even car bombs now. Every local leader and innocent person who died was another reason to trust the empire less and, with the rebellion in almost its third year, the reasons to trust were already low.

A solution had to be found.

The emperor's decision had not yet been made public. To most, the conflict still seemed unending. Had this been a more conventional war, perhaps three years would be seen as normal. But, this was not a conventional war. Millions of men sat idle most of the time, committed to patrols or simply guarding the new towns and villages. Combat missions into the city were always feared, but at least they brought some form of excitement. Now there was very little in the way of action and fingers were growing itchy with frustration. Some thought, if the rebellion was dying, then why could it not be ended?

Most could not be informed that the siege would end soon enough. The emperor's plan had to be kept a secret. It did not help, then, that most were ordered to pull back to new siege lines without being told why. These new lines were farther away from the city. Suburbs, most of which had been taken only after months or years of hard, hard fighting, were abandoned. One can imagine the confusion this caused.

On the other hand, there were signs that the empire's attitude had changed. With more civilians entering the new towns and villages, a distinction between civilians and combatants could now be made. Those that surrendered could find a new life. Those that didn't were considered militants. And because the pirates and their militias could not self-regulate, or did not want to, their aggression toward civilians and bureaucrats brought the hard price of a new imperial policy: those captured by force would be executed by *atemtumparo*, or crucifixion. Tens of thousands of fighters already lined the imperial highway, impaled on tall stakes with their hands outstretched to either side and nailed to a plank traveling perpendicular to the post. It was a gruesome sight. The enemy took these down where they could, but soon there were too many. It served as a powerful reminder of imperial authority.

Still, as preparations were made toward the end of the rebellion in Tiwanaku, tensions were on the rise and there were more questions asked now than ever before.

What was to come would surprise all.

After such a stunning victory during the August siege of the city and with all the preparation for greater offensive operations within the city since then, it seemed counterintuitive that all forces were suddenly being pulled out from the fortress and the string of towers constructed along the urban coastline. Why, after so many months of effort, after so much progress, was this project being abandoned?

No clear answers were forthcoming as first the heavy equipment, including the new artillery batteries installed since the siege of August 2028, was removed and then the personnel.

Finally, by April 2029 the last men were extracted from the fortress. The ancient harborside castle stood empty and hollow, not a single candle flickering from within any longer. Its walls were decrepit and lifeless. As the last man looked back from the small craft transporting him to a ship waiting some distance to the south he could see a stone falling from one of the parapets. It was a sad vision. Men had fought and died for those walls. And for many, that ruined fortress had been home for more than a year. For many, that ruined fortress had been their salvation. They had thought themselves dead, wounded in the streets after some battle, only to be pulled to safety by the Knights, trained, and made able again. For many, that ruined fortress had given them purpose, a reason to continue living, and hope. What was that worth now? For what had that struggle been? And, what could they look forward to now? Would they have to do it all over again, start from zero? And why?

Now that Kula'Kuladin was being abandoned, the bombed-out harbor would be open to pirate smugglers again. Of course, the number of captains and crews willing to brave the journey had fallen since the increase in pressure on the Chinadenga pirates in Nicaro. After their attempt to move their bases of operations to the west had been foiled by the empire and its ally in the form of an empowered Tsarina-led cartel, there were few coves, few hideaways, to conceal oneself in. The pirate menace had been severely curtailed.

Perhaps this was why Kula'Kuladin was being abandoned. Had it lost its role?

But from within it, the Knights had launched raids on the enemy within the city. They had collected intelligence leading to the destruction of secret tunnels and other routes the pirates were taking to move around and leave the city. Surely, these tasks were important, vital even, especially now since civilians were becoming the target of choice. Did it not make sense to maintain the position?

What would happen if high command, or the Imperial Bureaucracy, or whoever was calling the shots, realized their mistake?

Disgruntlement and discontent was rampant.

The Knights were shipped out to Arras, far to the north and away from the combat zone.

There, kept under watch — especially after some, sad and dejected after losing their purpose, took their own lives —, they'd have to wait a little longer to learn the truth of it all.

Final Preparations

April 2029

As the weather warmed and the days grew longer, Tiwanaku grew quieter except for the siege lines. For months, imperial aircraft had dropped leaflets warning those in the city to surrender at the checkpoints organized all along the front. They were told that failure would do so could mean death, that a major bombardment was coming. Of course, bombardments had been par for the course for anyone who had braved the siege for so long. There was no major increase or influx in those who came forward; it was simply a last-ditch effort on part of the Golden Throne and her armies. For the

most part, life for the soldiers on the ground was more of the same.

One could see the dot and speckle of an imperial warship on the horizon, evidence of the continued blockade. But, their heavy guns sounded no more and missiles had not rained down upon Tiwanaku for quite some time. It was almost as if there was peace, even if all knew that not to be the truth. An eerie reality, most certainly.

If there had been frustration from not knowing what was to come, then it had escalated over the past two months. Discipline was beginning to give way.

Commanders responded the way they knew best: punishment. For light crimes, such as theft or other such petty misdemeanors, a soldier could get days of grueling work and punishment of that nature. For murder, a soldier was executed. If these more serious crimes happened among some units more so than others, then the unit was punished as a whole through decimation. It was a practice that anyone who fought in the *Fuermak* knew well.

This pattern continued for days longer, until one day the order trickled down from commander to officer, from officer to NCO, and from NCO to soldier, that the siege lines were to be closed. No one knew was to be allowed through. Those that attempted to surrender were to be shot on sight and the practice was to be discouraged.

It was a brutal order, but one that signaled a change.

The men began to become excited again.

What was coming?

Some prepared their combat equipment. They put together bags, accounted for ammunition and weapons, talked among themselves of the heroic deeds they'd perform when the final assault on the city began. For that was what most believed: that all of this was for one more final big push that would end the siege. Their commanders did not correct them. The men were allowed to think what they wanted.

The truth was that the real action was taking place far above the ground, in the blackness of space, around the orbit of the planet.

The End of Tiwanaku

June 2029

A tungsten rod the length of two telephone poles and the diameter of three-foot-long rulers sped down from the heavens. It was ended by a small mechanical unit of thrusters. Five others like it fell along with it, plummeting down toward the surface below like rocks. Fire burned around them upon hitting the atmosphere, but even that could not stop them. Their impact was inevitable.

They fell upon Tiwanaku within the blink of an eye. Soldiers watching from afar barely caught a glimpse, if they saw what had happened at all.

Suddenly, there was a great flash of white light and then there was a bulb of dirt, rubble, and flesh that rose into the air. The ground shook as if the whole world had been hit by an earthquake, feeling as if the earth should open up and swallow those on the surface whole. The sound was deafening. And the damage was unbelievable.

When the haze cleared, Tiwanaku was...gone.

The rebellion there was over.

Those that dared to rebel against the empire would now understand the cost. They would understand that for them there was never hope for victory. Because the Golden Throne, under the strong leadership of His Imperial Majesty Fedor I, would do whatever it took to

establish peace for its citizens, even if it meant ridding themselves of those who sought to make trouble.

Just like Weigar had been destroyed for insolence, so had Tiwanaku.

And so would Palenque, if it did not learn Tiwanaku's lesson.

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by **The Macabees** » Fri Jul 26, 2019 12:25 pm



THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN CAROL, PART V

Follows from: [3/24/2019](#); [12/29/2018](#); [10/14/2018](#); [9/9/2018](#); [4/15/2018](#); [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](#).

"The inevitability of total destruction can be a powerful incentive."

— Attributed to His Imperial Majesty Fedor Katalán

North Point

July 2029

The Macabéans had kept to their word when they promised to "double the pain." Their torturers were as cruel as they were effective and the next six months seemed more like six years to Captain Francis Carol, the once-proud generalissimo who had led the resistance in Palenque. Yet, it wasn't the grinding down of his bones, the ripping of his breasts, or the instruments they ripped into every orifice of his body that finally broke him. The physical pain he could withstand, and even the psychological torture was survival enough. It was the footage they showed him, hour after hour, day after day, of the destruction of Palenque that finally caused him to give up. It was the sound of the city's destruction that they blasted over loudspeakers at night that destroyed his will to resist. And so this was the beginning of the end for the siege of Palenque, for even now as it slowly rotted under siege it withstood the pressure as long as the survivors knew that spiritually their leader was very much alive.

Soon, though, the people of Palenque would know that even the great Francis Carol could no longer go on. He had succumbed to the empire. How foolish of them to think otherwise, in hindsight. For how can you resist what is Willed? How can you stop a force whose wings were granted by Fortune herself?

He hadn't seen the *kríerlord* since the man's last visit in...when was it? December? Yes, December, he remembered listening to the festivities on the streets outside of the prison's stone walls. Yet, when the pirate captain told his guards that he was ready to accept imperial demands Angiko Bas was there waiting for him as soon as the now bone-thin, bloodied prisoner was pulled by the hair into a small, cold, and musty room.

"They tell me you have finally been visited by Wisdom," said the *kríerlord*.

Angiko looked tired, although Francis could not guess as to why. He didn't know just how much more angry, aggressive, and paranoid the emperor had become. He had no way of knowing that the responsibilities of occupation and war were taking a toll on the man who sat on the golden throne. Francis had his own pains to worry

about. "Tiwanaku is...gone," he said in response.

Smiling, the *krierlord* said, "Yes. Soon so will Palenque."

"No," answered Francis, shaking his head. "No."

"You want it spared?" asked Angiko.

The prisoner nodded.

Angiko was still smiling, his mouth twisted in the most sinister of fashions. "Then you will do exactly as I say. And should you resist any aspect of my demands then my clemency will end and Palenque, I promise you Captain Francis Carol, will meet the same fate as Tiwanaku. Her people shall be crushed under the weight of the gods themselves, destroyed by rods launched like lightning from the heavens above. Do you understand?"

"Yes," answered the prisoner, nodding again.

There was a momentary silence, then Francis spoke again. "But know, *krierlord*, and let your emperor know as well, that the universe will seek retribution for your crimes. There were innocents in Tiwanaku, millions. And there are innocents in Palenque. One day, when the gods are no longer in need of your little, puny empire, which is a mere speck in the cosmos, they will abandon you and your people shall suffer from the same fate that you subjected upon us, your enemies. I promise you that, *krierlord*. The pain you have brought others will be returned upon you a hundredfold."

The *krierlord* laughed. "We shall see, we shall see. After all, the universe will simply do what is Willed. And who are we, us mortals, to deny the Willed of their Fortune?"

"*Fuck your Will*," spat Francis Carol. Breathing heavily through his nose, he said, "Let's get this over with. What do I need to do?"

"All in due time," replied the *krierlord*. Signaling to the guards, Angiko pointed to the prisoner and said, "Take him and bring him with us."

Palenque

August 2029

"In our arrogance and folly, we illegally and immorally endeavored to overthrow the rule of an empire that has given our people so much. Even after two rebellions, His Imperial Majesty Fedor I showed us mercy. Our cities retained their autonomy. Freedom was still ours. And in our reckless audacity men like me have put that freedom at risk. I fear that it is too late to completely turn back time. Things will never be the same. Our sister city, Tiwanaku, is gone. Her people are...gone. It was a tragedy that must not be repeated. But, the empire was right in her actions and us wrong in ours. Therefore, it must be us who take the first steps towards reconciliation and peace, towards a future that for our children will mean prosperity and, most important of all, peace and security. To do that, to take that first step, the war must end, the rebellion must end. I call upon you, people of Palenque, to surrender, to accept the rightful rulership of the Second Empire of the Golden Throne. Otherwise, I fear that all will be lost, that not only will our children not know peace, but that they will not know at all, for continued resistance will surely mean the ruin of us all."

Captain Carol's call to surrender was repeated over and over again via loudspeakers set up around the tightening perimeter of the imperial siege lines, as well as from aircraft, helicopters, and armored vehicles penetrating into the core of the broken city. There was no respite from the captain's words. Nowhere to go to avoid them. The empire was relentless in its propaganda.

The fighting went on in the meantime. Most of the defender's

infrastructure had been destroyed during the preceding months and their fighters have been cornered into pockets as the city was gradually carved up into sectors, some liberated and others still highly contested. Palenque looked like a graveyard of concrete, brick, and steel, with no building left standing, no wall left intact. Even the structures that had already suffered from three years of war were pummeled into greater submission by imperial artillery, aircraft, and warships, as the resistance was hunted down and skewered like rats.

As Captain Carol's message was played and replayed the strength of the resistance, as weak as it already was, began to slacken even more. Their will to resist had eroded and only the most die-hard rejected the idea of surrender.

Much of the Council of Palenque's original members were dead by now, but its ranks had been refilled with fresh blood. These men were younger and more radical, but now even most of them began to see the logic in ending the rebellion. They hardly had any soldiers left. Their wives and children were dead, or close to it. And no one else seemed interested in fighting anymore, just dying.

At first, gangs of pirates patrolling the streets attempted to maintain control and disincentivize surrender by shooting those who tried. But even these death squads could not kill everyone or go on forever.

When the killers began to kill themselves through suicide, most realized that Palenque's time had come. The war had to end.

Before the month's end, the Council called a meeting with the Macabéan commander of the siege. There, they signed their unconditional surrender. Some, the most ideological, continued to resist, but they were left to bide their time hiding in their holes as those who willingly put down their arms and gave themselves up were marched out of the city and into nearby hamlets, where they were kept under heavy guard.

And when enough time had been given to remove all those who surrendered by their own volition from Palenque and its suburbs, the *Ejermacht* began to withdraw, much like it had in Tiwanaku. It was early morning day in the second week of September when a flash of light consumed the land that had once claimed this pirate haven and when the flash receded the city was gone, destroyed in its totality in the same exact fashion its western neighbor had.

The last two pirate cities, Tiwanaku and Palenque, were no more.

The pirates were no more.

Finally, the rebellion was *no more*.

Theohuanacu, a continent that had given the empire so much trouble since it first occupied it ten years before, had once-and-for-all been tamed. The empire stood victorious over a battlefield laid to waste. A hollow victory in some senses. One in which there would be little celebration knowing all the work to be done in rebuilding a broken land.

Fedala

September 2029

In chains, Francis Carol was brought to the capital by aircraft, arriving in the early morning.

There was a prison in the city dedicated to the political enemies of the emperor. That would be the captain's residence for the foreseeable future, at least until the end of the war in Gholgoth. There was no more torture, just simply the pain of waiting for what he did not know. Kept in his dark cell, fed little food and given only a minimum of water, he wasted away his days until he had forgotten the concept of time altogether...



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Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by **The Macabees** » Mon Aug 19, 2019 2:35 pm



[**OOC:** With the rebellion in Theohuanacu concluded with the destruction of [Tiwanaku](#) and [Palenque](#), this post will bridge the gap between [the last relevant post](#), set in February 2028 — and OOCly published over a year ago! —, and the end of the pirate rebellion in August 2029. It will focus mostly on the war against the pirates with only tangential details regarding other happenings in the satrapy. With Nicaro and Theohuanacu wrapped up, this thread can focus on the final months of what the Golden Throne ICly knows as the 'Gothic War.']

THE END OF A DREAM

Follows from: [8/12/2018](#); [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](#).

"The defeat of the Chinadenga pirates was inevitable once their extermination became the empire's priority."

— R. Alvarez, *La Guerra en Nicaro* (2084 C.E.)

Migration

March–June 2028

The nights of *jinhare*m, whores, and festivities went on for almost a week. They celebrated as if they weren't fighting a war. And well deserved it was, because these two brothers, Jonah and Liam (now known as "Blue-Eyed" Nolan), hadn't seen each other in years. But, their ecstasy was constrained by the circumstances, and troubling circumstances these were.

To the west, San Carlos had fallen and the island around it was slowly being expunged of its Chinadenga-aligned militias. Even with their limited forces, the Golden Throne had begun their occupation intelligently. Knowing that the pirates couldn't reinforce their position there, the *Fuermak* decided to starve its opposition into submission. Indeed, soldiers were quickly put to work building new, walled communities that would house most of the island's population outside of the city. These were constructed as close to original areas of settlement as possible to avoid entirely uplifting the locals' lives, but ultimately the new imperial military administration did what it needed to do to pacify the area. All civilians were issued new identification, which they were ordered to present when leaving and entering the new settlements. To force them to return in the evening, the *Fuermak* enforced an unrepentant curfew. With the population under control, the military administration then began restricting where foodstuff and other output produced by local farmers could be sold. They also restricted how imported foodstuff and other civilian supplies were distributed.

Through this program, the *Fuermak* slowly put in place a chokehold on the supply of resources to local militants who were living off the local population. Without supplies coming from outside of the island, and with the friendly locals now under pressure and confined, the militias began to wither. Surrenders took place almost immediately and it was only a matter of time before the entire resistance collapsed. The Golden Throne, through the satrapical government, also made sure to reward cooperation. Towns and areas that experienced a diminishing militant presence had certain restrictions lifted, including the curfew. Thus, an incentive to work for the empire's proxies and against Chinadenga irregulars was put in place.

To the south, Chinadenga — the city — had [fallen in the previous](#)

[year](#), although insurgents continued (and continue) to operate in its surroundings. But, similar tactics and a heavy imperial military presence were taking their toll. There were nearly 70,000 imperial troops in the area known to them as *Komsektor IV* total, which displaced irregular combatants southwards, where the the Macabéan military occupation was less dense, by means of sheer overbearing force. Furthermore, there was a disproportionate focus on destroying the Chinadenga pirate organization and militias found that subtle shifts in allegiances could reduce the pressure on them drastically. Thus, while insurgents were bound to remain insurgents, by closing ties with the Chinadenga pirates they were able to reduce their observability.

Around San Pecc, the last pirate stronghold in Nicaro, the noose was tightening and the city was bound to fall soon. Indeed, while the *Ejermacht* had only some 25,000 troops in the area in addition to 20,000 friendly militia fighters (formerly GNLF, now reorganized into the newborn *Guardia de Asalto*), they were preparing themselves for a siege. The pirates would resist here more strongly than they did in Chinadenga, but it was a battle they would ultimately lose.

All considered the facts spelled doom for Chinadenga and their Theohuacan brethren.

Thus, when Liam told Jonah of his plan, Jonah listened attentively. It was a risky one, but what other option did the pirates have? If they stayed put and resisted, they would all die and little use that would be to their brothers fighting on in Theohuanacu. Thus, instead, Liam put into motion the transfer of the coastline infrastructure from the west to the east. He posited that the Golden Throne would soon cut access to the western shoreline and that their relatively hands-off approach in the east, where the Tsarina and her cartel were informally put in power, would make it easier for pirate vessels to operate unsuspectingly. But, it was a risky plan because it would not only temporarily expose much of this infrastructure, but it would also make it unavailable until it was re-established in the east. However, Liam explained that he had an ace up his sleeve: the Tsarina was secretly in cahoots with Chinadenga. Indeed, it was under he good graces that this redeployment would happen.

As the guerilla conflict around San Pecc continued, the pirate crews packed up their belongings and began work on disassembling the coastal infrastructure that allowed them to dock and resupply their ships. This was moved eastward in small batches on donkey- and horse-drawn wagons through thick jungles and on small, winding mud roads. The ships themselves would have to be sailed to their destination, a journey that was becoming more dangerous every passing day.

But, this migration was "Blue-Eyed's" last hope of salvaging a pirate presence in Nicaro that was crucial to the ongoing resistance in Tiwanaku and Palenque. After all, if not for the Chinadenga pirates, who else would risk running the imperial blockade to resupply the two great last pirate cities of central Greater Dienstad?

Ambush

July 2028

Over the course of four months, the pirates toiled to move their most prized assets to the west, where the coastlines were free of imperial soldiers. It was a slow and intensive affair that met with many pitfalls. Convoys were interdicted and destroyed, lives were lost, and by the end of June the Chinadenga pirates were a muscle-less skeleton of their former selves. Still, the pirate presence had been salvaged.

Although San Pecc still stood, a phenomenon which was the product of the very limited presence of Imperial troops (nearly 25,000), the territory around it had been slowly reduced. Like in San Carlos and around the city of Chinadenga, the local population outside of the

urban areas was reorganized into artificial settlements built by Macabéan troops in conjunction with the 20,000 former GNLF militants organized into the satrapical state's new paramilitary force, the *Guardia de Asalto*. Bottling the remaining militias up into the city had given them the men to secure the countryside and without a major urban center, there was nothing anchoring the occupying power in place and no 'safe zone' to dissuade troops from pacifying the surrounding jungle. Much like they were doing around San Carlos, the Golden Throne began to disconnect the local population from the insurgency through walls, curfews, and the control of food distribution.

Imperial nuclear submarines had also begun to operate within the bay that flanked the Satrapy of Nicaro to the west. This had effectively closed entry and exit, which would put an end to the use of the bay as a nexus for pirate supply lines, which previously connected to Gholgoth and, in the other direction, Theohuanacu from this very same bay. With the transfer of infrastructure to the east, it would be the smaller bay and the straits which emptied the bay into the Sea of Ordena that would serve that role from then on. At least, this was true in theory. In practice, other events would get in the way.

Indeed, if the Tsarina had been inclined to accommodate the Chinadenga pirate remnants in her territory, the latter would soon find out that it was no longer true or that it had been a ruse all along. Surviving ships and the infrastructure needed to tend to them, including loading them and preparing them for the long journey south to Theohuanacu, was put in place. The Tsarina's presence was almost unfelt at first, as the groundwork for the reestablishment of Scandinvan-Theohuanacu supply lines was laid in place. In fact, in many ways, it felt like an improvement over the previous situation. Although the pirate fleet had been greatly diminished in the move and most of the militias had dissipated, here the ongoing insurgent conflict had been almost completely suppressed due to the local militias' overall loyalty to the imperial-backed power of the Tsarina. This meant less Macabéan troops and therefore less imperial visibility on ongoing pirate operations.

However, just as supply operations began to pick up again, a trap was sprung. The Tsarina no longer felt that her bet on the pirates was a safe one. Or, she never had and this had been a trick, which was all considered the more plausible option. Perhaps, or very likely, the Golden Throne had caught on early and planned the ambush with her. Regardless of the truth of it all, it was during an early morning in the middle of July when militants loyal to the Tsarina and Macabéan *Koro Kirim* special forces struck the newly established Chinadenga pirate positions all along the coast. There was no battle, only a slaughter. Within days, the extreme efforts that Liam, Jonah, and their men had put into rebuilding what had been lost in the west was made valueless. Almost the entirety of the new infrastructure was destroyed and only the ships that had already left for Theohuanacu survived.

Like that, the story of the Chinadenga pirates in Nicaro ended. Only San Pecc stood, which meant little all considered knowing that in that city the remnants of the pirates and their militias were bottled up and gradually starved — a strategy similar to that employed in Theohuanacu, where Tiwanaku, Palenque, and the fighters within those two great corsair megalopolis' were gradually eroded until the only thing left was the dust of their bones.

Exile

August 2028

Liam and Jonah, the two brothers who had found each other in this land after so many years of separation, survived the culling.

For Liam, or "Blue-Eyed" Nolan as he been known for so many years, the destruction of the pirate crews under his overarching command was a great tragedy. No longer did he dispose of the forces and

liberty necessary to resupply his beleaguered compatriots in southeastern Theohuanacu. Still, he did not resign himself to failure. He and Jonah fled west, where they infiltrated themselves back into San Pecc.

The city was dying. It was not as grand as the southern cities of Theohuanacu. Small, cramped, and impoverished of everything including culture, it was a human dump of a metropolis. Although many of its buildings were pockmarked and at least partially collapsed from the ongoing artillery and aerial bombardment, one thing going in its favor was that the majority of it was still standing. The empire either did not have the personnel or did not see an urban siege worth fighting, and so San Pecc was simply cordoned off and its occupants forced to live under increasingly desperate conditions. By the time Liam and Jonah returned to it, there were perhaps 6,000 fighters left from the Chinadenga-aligned militias, along with less than 400 pirates who were assisting in the city's defense. The others had either died or surrendered by this time, a fate that the rest were more and more resigned to as the time passed.

Here, the two pirate brothers would not organize a much-needed resuscitation of the resistance against the Golden Throne. Thus, in the last week of August, Liam took with him the remaining pirate crews and escaped the city via its harbor. They took small boats and motorized dinghies, on which they went southeast toward the coastline south of Chinadenga. There, they smuggled themselves back into satrapical territory as quietly as they could and made their way east, to the other side of the country. Their objective was simply to reach the Devonian border and, hopefully, find a way to leave this blasted continent altogether.

It was not easy going, however, and the crew members became increasingly restless. Liam's leadership was soon substituted for something more democratic, with long debates held into the dark night over where this small group of pirate survivors would go. Some favored returning to either Palenque or Tiwanaku and joining the defense of the cities. Most, however, sought to abandon the fight altogether and disperse into the wider region, perhaps even seeking legitimate work among those societies that would accept them. The Golden Throne was even considered by many, knowing its policies of open borders and open arms, as long as one was willing to exert energy into labor and self-improvement. Yet, Liam did not favor either of those two options and instead argued for a long journey to Scandinvan Drana, where perhaps he could organize a supply convoy and even persuade the authorities there to send a war fleet to Greater Dienstad.

Rumors had begun to trickle in about the beginning of a gargantuan Macabéan amphibious landing on the southeastern coast of the great Scandinvan homeland, although little of concrete nature was known to them. Still, even casting the titanic struggle unfolding in Gholgoth aside, the great majority of men present there thought Liam the "Blue-Eyed" to be nothing short of insane. Surely, his dedication to the cause was going too far, they decried.

Indeed, Scandinvan military and pecuniary aid had been dwindling already. Of the imperial fleet sent to Gholgoth, said to be more than 24,000 ships strong between the two Triumvirate powers present, little more than the abstract was known. Still, its effect on the plausibility of Scandinvan supply convoys reaching the region of Greater Dienstad could at least easily be deduced. Now that the ground invasion was finally underway, it was imagined that the Scandinvans would be even less able and willing to expend precious resources on propping a rebellion that looked on the verge of failure regardless. Why would the arrival of a mere 300 pirates change anything?

But, Liam would not relent. Even his brother, Jonah, could not change his mind.

And, so, each crew member did as he (or she, as as many as 18 were women) thought best. Most found their own way in a much-changed

world. Years later, of the 300 no less than 37 would write memoirs. This included Jonah, who for such a long time was thought dead. Most traveled however they could to the shores of the Golden Throne. Some went to Safehaven, others to the Reich, and a handful to as many other countries as there were of them.

For their part, Liam and Jonah departed the Satrapy of Nicaro together. They made their way to Díenghant, where it was known the pirate presence was not only strong but also an arm of the state itself. Although it was known that Díenghant had signed an agreement with the Golden Throne, perhaps there the two brothers could at least find friends that would take them in and give them the tools to one day plan a retributive resurgence.

Even in death, dreamers do not cease to dream.

Fall of San Pecc

September 2028

When the last pirate left, the defenses of San Pecc were left with little more than 6,000 fighters precedent from the various militias that operated around it. These warriors had little reason to fight now that the source of their income had dried up. Most, therefore, surrendered to the Golden Throne or to the *Guardia de Asalto*. After all, surrender carried with it penalties that were a world less harsh than those doled out to the captured.

The city of San Pecc fell with a whimper. When imperial troops marched into it, it was nothing more than a ghost town.

Of its 870,000 pre-war inhabitants, perhaps only 35,000 were left. They lived off a sewer diet, meaning rats and what weeds grew inside the cracks along the street. The remainder were either dead or, in reference to the great majority, had become refugees who now lived in encampments throughout the satrapy, living in scarcely better conditions than those who had remained. Regardless, for the survivors still in the city Imperial occupation was a godsend. With them they brought food, water, and medical supplies that made for an immediate improvement in the standard of living within San Pecc. Within weeks, hundreds of thousands of the city's old inhabitants had returned to take advantage of this deluge of aid. The Golden Throne, now that the fight against the pirates was confined to the wilderness and the more general warring in the Región Autonoma de Firmador was coming to an end, made these supplies readily available.

There was a special significance to the fall of San Pecc in that it represented the last, and the strongest, stronghold of the Chinadenga militias which had for so long retained control over the western coastline of Firmador. San Carlos had already fallen, as had the city of Chinadenga itself, but whereas both of these were taken easily by imperial forces San Pecc had resisted until the last. It remained a specter, a reminder of an old and brutal power for the millions of civilians who lived in these areas. But, the shackles of this fear were at once loosened by the occupation of San Pecc. And while some of the militias continued their insurgent war, no longer were they governors of a lawless territory long ago abandoned by a weak Firmadoran government.

Now, it truly was as if Firmador and Nicaro — now only "Satrapy of Nicaro" — had turned a page into a new era, an era marked by the supremacy and dominance of the Golden Throne. But also an era that would be known for the beginnings of something that better-approximated democracy in a country that had suffered from autocracy and civil war for too long. A democracy corrupted by the needs of a foreign imperial power to slowly institutionalize their own control, but a government that included the people at large in a far more comprehensive way than the last one.

To commemorate the victory, what was deemed as the "final victory" by the press, His Imperial Majesty Fedor I promised to personally fund

the construction of a great triumphal arch which would rise above what was the city's greatest boulevard: *Paseo del Buque Yalarcón*. It had already been designed, an entablature depicting scenes of the war fought by imperial troops and their local allies topped by an attic decorated by bronze statues of the imperial gods Will, Fortune, and Death personified. These sat on a triple arch, each outer leg showcasing stone-carved double-headed eagles of the Golden Throne and the inner ones wrapped in concrete garlands of victory. At the very highest point, a bronze statue of Fedor I on a four-horse chariot would glitter like gold. It was a powerful piece of propaganda that sought not only to remind the people of San Pecc of who the true source of their freedoms was but also as a testament to the cooperation of two people toward the same goal. Of course, the boulevard would be redesigned almost in its entirety to do justice to such a glorious monument to His Imperial Majesty, the "liberation" of San Pecc from the tyranny of the pirates, and the newly founded satrapy.

The *Paseo del Buque Yalarcón* would not only be repaved, but the strip down its center would be reconstructed with well-groomed gardens interrupted every so often by numerous fountains. New plazas would be built with even greater fountains, some centered around the old gods, other around motifs native to Firmador and Nicaro. Perhaps the most spoken about was the statue of the fallen sailor, a memory of the pirates' defeat and humiliation. It was already under construction and one could see the beginnings of the shapes of an imperial soldier running a corsair, positioned to show subjugation, through with his bayonet. This project would be funded by the treasury of the empire.

Finally, four new buildings were planned, all around the triumphal arch to come. One was the *Museo de Guerra*, which would exhibit not just the military history of Nicaro and Firmador, but also that of the Golden Throne. Another was the *Palacio de Carcomillas*, a building with tall, spiraling towers that would serve as the seat of the *estado's* government. The third, on the other side of the plaza which would flow around the emperor's arch, was the *Ermita de la Lengua*, a beautiful building that matched the others and dedicated to the preservation of the Nicaroan language. Finally, and next to this last, would be the *Templo de la Victoria*, a stunning, domed temple dedicated to the Goddess Will, open to any and all who wished to visits its hallowed grounds. It sat over the old square that the pirates used to execute the disloyal to forever serve as a testament to the empire's power and what it signified to the people of San Pecc and Nicaro as a whole.

All of these projects, funded by the empire, would be joined by others paid for by the satrapical government, oftentimes under imperial pressure. These were often more modest in scope and include the establishment of new security stations for the *Guardia de Asalto*, who would serve as the primary cross-Nicarosan internal security force, as well as the reconstruction of residential buildings to replace those lost in the war or simply those in need of repair. It was all part of an overall beautification process that would be carried out in all the major cities of the satrapy to usher in the new era.

Death Throes

November 2028

As significant a symbolic victory the fall of San Pecc was, the insurgency was not yet over.

In the autonomous region of Nicador, the insurgency had never truly been defeated. The imperial deployment there was too light to prevent the disbandment of the GNLF during the culling. The majority of their forces went into hiding, forming their own bands and organizations in the vacuum that followed. Whatever forces were deployed to Nicaro sat on the frontier and even these suffered when part of these forces was redeployed north around Chinadenga and San Pecc.

The autonomous region of Firmador was, by now, comparably stable. But resistance continued around Chinadenga and San Pecc, and to the east the informal governance awarded to the Tsarina was not as effective as she had promised. There were signs that the ancillary militias and guerrilla organizations were not as loyal to her, or as willing to follow her commands, as had been originally sold. Regardless, at least in Firmador there was a more visible imperial military presence and the situation was, when compared to the south, far more stable. This presented both challenges and opportunities.

Since the beginning of combat operations in the country, the imperial military presence had grown to around 400,000 men. It would not grow larger. Anti-war protests in the provinces were becoming louder and more frequent, and the Imperial Bureaucracy was set on maintaining as small of a footprint in the new satrapy as possible. It was as much about limiting the involvement of imperial troops as it was about avoiding a complete admittance of the truth, that Nicaro was being occupied and not simply "defended." Furthermore, with insurgencies ongoing elsewhere, including the rebellion in Theohuanacu, and those in Indras, the Zarbian Territories, and continued resistance in some of New Empire's cities, regional Macabéan forces were occupied. Thus, the satrapy was to be pacified with the soldiers on hand. This would require generals to focus on one problem and then the next.

In Firmador, *Guardia de Asalto* forces had already progressively taken on greater responsibilities. These focused on policing tasks, including maintaining security in the cities and regularly patrolling the rural countryside. The *Guardia de Asalto* was structured very much after an imperial model, not just cosmetically but also in terms of leadership. If the old Nicaroan regime had been top-heavy and reluctant to offer junior officers the necessary flexibility, these complexities were slowly ironed out by heavy-handed hand-twisting techniques applied not only from the top down, but also throughout the entire structure of command. It required a change in culture, one that valued merit, but it was a change that came hand-in-hand with that being made elsewhere in the country's structure of governance. Further progress in this area was crucial for the success of the *Guardia de Asalto* program, which were expected to take on more and more of the internal security responsibilities from the *Ejermacht*.

To accelerate the process, the *Guardia* force was heavily subsidized by the empire. It was planned for this funding to reduce itself over the years, but it was considered crucial in the beginning stages. This was partly to afford higher salaries and therefore attract better talent, but also to make available funds that could be used to reward good behavior. In this way, the tenets of minimal force could be inculcated into a paramilitary force that had only known the gruesome incivilities of civil war.

Nicaró would also see the settlement of more than twenty million imperial combat veterans. As part of the agreements that established the relationship to the empire as a satrap, the estate of the Imperial Bureaucracy had been handed more than 400,000 square kilometers of land in both Firmador and Nicaro — an incredible amount that amounted to a considerably high percentage of the total size of the country. It was a sign of the demographic tragedy the civil war had caused and also of the country's desperation. How this land would be organized among the veterans depended on the years of service and rank of the individual in question. A minority of veterans, or 350,000 20-year veterans benefiting from full retirement, would be awarded 230-acre (on average) plots of rural land. The rest were to receive imperially-financed housing in the cities and in new communities built on estate-owned land, where they and their families could live. These veterans would be transferred to "reserve" status, accommodating them with continued (albeit diminished) pay and the responsibility to provide security services during the pacification period. Over a period of ten years, these veterans would be further demobilized into full civilian status in tranches, so that they could be better integrated into the local economy.

The settled soldiers would be made up almost entirely of Havenic and Zarbian auxiliaries returning from the Gothic *stratekom*. Speakers of a similar language, it was thought that they were the best suited to cross-assimilate with the local population. These twenty million soldiers were expected to be transferred to Nicador within six to twelve months after the cessation of hostilities in Gholgoth, a date which — admittedly — was to-date unknown. Regardless, the longer, some thought, the better, as the infrastructure for their arrival had yet to be put in place.

In the meanwhile, as this land and the communities these veterans would be settled into were developed, imperial forces relied on food denial and small unit patrol tactics to slowly chip away at remaining guerilla forces. *Guardia de Asalto* patrols were rewarded for any success achieved, including bonus payments for [proven] kills, ambushes, and other forms of success, as measured by imperial standards. In Firmador, the *Guardia* was expected to complete these patrols almost entirely on their own. Imperial military personnel participated in larger missions but otherwise began to redeploy south into the Autonomous Region of Nicador, where the guerrilla presence was still heavy and violent.

In this fashion, Macabéan forces could focus their strength where the situation was least stable, while local paramilitaries handled the more peaceful and quiet sections. This offered the latter the gradual training and experience they required to become more formidable and disciplined agents of peace in the new satrapy.

Punishment

February 2029

Until the satrapical government and its paramilitary forces were slowly whipped into shape, the Imperial Bureaucracy was not beyond the use of fear.

As a reminder of what happened to those who resisted the new order in the Satrapy of Nicaro, the *Ejermacht* tried roughly 60,000 captured militants for war crimes against the civilian population. The trials were highly publicized in the local press, the image of their crimes sculpted to underscore how evil these men were and how deserved their punishment was. Photos and videos of the massacres were circulated. Stories of victims fortunate enough to be alive were spread. The bloodlust of the locals was raised. Their desire for vengeance flamed. And, in the end, 50,000 prisoners of war were found guilty and sentenced, each with the overwhelming approval of the Nicaroan people. Their punishment was the very same one used in Tiwanaku and Palenque: *atemtumparo*, or crucifixion.

They decorated the rural highways and roads so that all could see the consequences of action considered to be at the detriment to the interests of a strong, independent Nicaro and its protector, the Golden Throne.

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

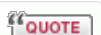
[The Macabees' Guides to Roleplaying, Worldbuilding, and Other Stuff](#)
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The Scandinavians
Senator

Posts: 4948
Founded: Oct 09, 2004
Capitalizt

by [The Scandinavians](#) » Mon Aug 26, 2019 6:30 pm



The Sermon of Resolution

Imperial News Network Broadcast

A reading from the Book of Erid: The Accounts of the Saints," I walked across the lands of the dres'Erid seeking the hidden meaning of the faith in nature. Through my observations I sought to come across some unknown revelation which had existed in plain sight since the beginning. Finding no new insight I turned to the holdings of

the dres'nalar thinking that their debauchery might offer some knowledge into the designs of the Almighty which had been ignored by other scholars. From them I found only weakness and depravity. Thus, I turned to the lost texts of the apostles and undertook a great pilgrimage to the lands that they had once tread.

Among their followers I sought counsel and came to realize how much the faith had been corrupted. Instead of predicating the salvation of mankind on the conversion of all peoples to the ageless truth they rather embraced the notion that they could be a shining city on a hill which was meant to wait till the judgement in which the pure would be sorted from the wicked. This precept is born from the misunderstanding of the Book of Revelations. Revelations serves as a series of dire warnings about the corruption that the Roman Empire was rendering onto the faith and what could come about if Christians failed in their mission. Sadly, during my debates with them they refused to acknowledge my correct points. They deflected saying that the commandment to spread the faith by all means was not valid and that the whole of humanity did not need to be converted to the truth to redeem humanity.

Their neglect in this mission has certainly been the cause for the endless factions which have emerged to divide the faithful. Such divisions have invited open heresies into the fold. Some even deny the inherently divine nature of the Risen Lord from his conception. These differences have fundamentally weakened the ability of true Christians to retain control of doctrine. Over time this will surely invite a disease so fundamental as to make even the more orthodox segments of their society inherently heretical. Then it became clear to me. That was my revelation. That only the dres'Erid will ultimately preserve the true faith and protect it from deviancy."

In short, there are no words that the dres'nalar can offer us that would improve our understanding of the world around us. The Almighty, through his gracious providence, has imparted on us sufficient wisdom already to embark onto the path of righteousness. As this war wages on we must remember our sacred duties and do what is needed to preserve our Empire from the vile infection that all the nonbelievers carry within them. There can be no higher duty at this point then to purge them from our land. Fight them until their kind knows no peace within our dominions, strike them down wherever you find the dres'nalar. Serve in the great crusade to reclaim our home from our enemies, and above all serve the glory of the Almighty.

Now we must address the evils within so that we can properly ascertain the threat. A threat which, if allowed to grow further within our midst, will destroy everything we hold dear. This infection bring the darkness..."

Emergency Broad: Patriarchal Authorization for Sermon Interruption: Christus Invictus

Imperial News Network Update

We have terrible news. Emperor Godwin has been murdered in his sleep by his personal caretaker. His personal attendant, whose name will not be broadcast so as to not raise up the status of a traitor, murdered him the on orders of what appears to be an unnamed terrorist group. This individual took their own life rather than face the righteous fury of the Scandinvan people. Imperial authorities are currently undertaking an intensive investigation into this vile act and all those involved shall see their tainted lines declared casteless after those responsible are burned on the pyre."

As the broadcast continued there was an interruption as the camera swiveled to left a bit, but still remained close to a normal shot. From

behind the cameraman walked towards the anchor with a small blade unsheathed. By the time he could again be seen he had taken out a small object with a three inch point. Walking forward the anchor was just dumbfounded and when he finally came to his senses he said, "We have an emergency Samson to report on, please compose yourself."

Samson ignored the suggestion and continued silently forward. Grimly and in a brisk walk he continued forward committed to his assigned task. After another five seconds he jumped over the anchor table and shouted, "Through the deaths of the tyrants shall come the embrace of liberty!"

With that said the transmission was terminated forthwith by censors. The imperial government now knew that this was a much more organized event than they could have ever imagined. Yet, it was made of cells not in communication with each other. An uprising meant to strike fear into the very foundations of the Empire.

These events, despite their importance, were just part of a much larger effort to cause such social turmoil in the Scandinvan Empire that the very fabric of the social order was torn asunder. Finally allowing a real revolution to take place once the imperial administration was drowning in the blood of its leaders. That those who have only known oppression would rise up at the moment where they could taste even the faintest bit of freedom in the air. A dream furthered by the war with the Golden Throne in the country. They hoped to be able to make a deal with: the Scandinvans who had fed the pirates in return for peace.

Imperial Palace, Valgard

In the midst of the rubble a single figure stood. Garbed entirely in various pieces of cloth meant to hide his visage the man walked amidst the rubble searching for his target. Though there were dozens of dead only one person there truly mattered. The shepherd of all the oppression in the Empire. The appointed heir of Erid whose death would lead to a dynastic struggle now that both the Emperor and his successor were dead with no alternative publicly known proclaimed. Fenric's death represented the greatest chance for the system to finally come crashing down on itself. Therefore his death was the only objective which had absolute importance. All other deaths were merely meant to add fodder to the chaos.

Walking towards the back of the great room the assassin finally found his target. Amidst some scattered rubble there was laying the Crown Prince in his power armor now shattered in places with blood exiting out of those locales. Through his upper left shoulder a metal pipe was impaled. At his side were one of his sons and one of his daughters, who were both old enough to have just begun reading in earnest, trying to rouse him. When they saw the menacing stranger coming towards them the children began to throw rocks at him. Undaunted the man dedicated to slaying a tyrant pulled out a gun and fired a round into the air.

This scared the children away who proceeded to run off to try to find some guards. Walking over to Fenric he thought he was looking at a corpse in the making. There was enough blood to suggest that a major artery had been severed somewhere on his body, though the power armor and debris prevented a clear line of sight from any such wound. Bending down he checked the Prince's vitals and saw that they were failing. Smiling underneath his mask the man said, "You will be dead soon. You have been conquered Now I can proceed to my secondary objective of purging your line's evil from this world. Now where did those future tyrants run off too..."

With those words said something awoke in Fenric which he had not felt before and his power armor came to life as in a single motion he lunged forward to grab the man's throat. The thought of his children being murdered drove him over an edge. In a split second he put the

would be tyrannicide in a death grip and declared," Christus invictus dres'nalar."

The assassin was overwhelmed by shock to the point where he could not respond to this whole episode. By the time the tyrannicide could even begin to collect his thoughts Fenric had ripped out the front of the man's throat. Thereby dooming him to an inglorious death. Falling backwards he looked towards his two children who were now running back after having failed to find a guard and hearing their father's voice. They had thought that he had managed to regain his bearings after besting his foe. On what he thought would be his final breath he said, "I am sorry to you and your siblings. I have failed you. May the Almighty keep you. Know that I will always love each of you."

This chaotic scene was mimicked all across Scandinvan holdings as rebels resorted to a massive campaign of terror attacks to utterly break the morale of the Empire. Schools were burned down with students inside, hospitals were subject to suicide bombings, trains carrying people to work were derailed by acts of sabotage, families of notables were butchered in their homes, and mass shootings of crowds all transpired. Within 48 hours hundreds of thousands were dead and over a million were wounded. These vile acts were meant with a simple reframe, "Christus Invictus." The phrase which had been meant as an allusion to an oncoming victory now became one of unwavering resolve. As Christ had overcome hell, so shall the Scandinvan people best their current tribulations.

From the perspective of the movement behind the attacks it was harder to discern the truth of their motivations for it was in effect all encompassing of all opposition. Among their number were people who were merely seeking to exact revenge against officials who had oppressed them to advocates for a communist revolution. Though the most popular strain of belief was establishing a type of democracy which saw the excesses of the current regime's absolutism, slaving, and theocratic reign removed. With the notion of a type of constitutional monarchy being agreed upon. The inspiration of an actual democracy, Havensky, within Gholgoth became a rallying cry of sorts for it proved to them that not every nation in their region needed to be ruled over by some sort of despot.

Imperial Emergency Martial Broadcast

"Soldiers of the Empire: I am the Sworn Sword of Fenric whose life now hangs in the balance due to the actions of those who seek to destroy our people. The time has come to bring the wrath of the heavens upon the Golden Throne. We shall avenge our murdered family. We shall show them the price that must be paid for their invasion of our homes. Under the authority of the Shattered Bastion doctrine I hereby institute the Judas Sanction: all Scandinvan subjects who have materially aided the Golden Throne are to be condemned to the pyre, all soldiers who have deserted are to have their heirs made casteless, all slaves who helped the enemy are to be killed upon discovery, and those found to be distributing the lies of the traitors are found to be heretics whose deaths are to as painful as possible. Christus invictus!"

Drana, Northern Provinces

The call was heard at long last. The warrior caste was to go en masse to the front. The stored might of the storied legions of the throne would be turned against the Golden Throne. No more would levies dominate the battlefield. Instead, those who were bred for war, reared for battle, and whose sole profession was combat would meet the invading foes. They would be, at least in their minds, the force that drove off the vile intruders into their sacred homeland. They marched south as warriors, but would come home heroic liberators.

Thus, did the 500 million strong mass of the warrior caste begin to deploy southward at long last. No more would there be some sort of obfuscation meant to hide their movements. Their intent was to be visible to all. The element of surprise, beyond that which they had maintained up until that point, was to be abandoned. The fully fury of the Scandinvan people would now suffice. A burning passion born of an army which believed that the only way to avenge their murdered kin would be to drive the enemy back into the sea. There would be no doubt to the righteousness of their cause anymore. All weakness had to be driven out for the Glorious Empire to survive.

With the warrior caste came the long withheld support of the noble houses who had been holding their own forces back fearing a potential invasion of the northern hinterlands where their homes largely were concentrated. Their private armies numbered around thirty million well trained men who had up until the terror campaign of the rebels been stationed to guard against Gothic forays at Valgard and Valdra. Along with these the Church had mustered ten million of their own legions who had been reserved for other tasks up until that. Attached to both of these units was a horde of fifty million casteless who had been rounded by press gangs in the last few months in the lead up to the planned offensive. Now they would be thrown against the enemy as a type of distraction. For their combat skills were wanting and would be more valuable as cannon fodder in the eyes of high command.

Among them came the waving of the black banner of vengeance and the thundering cry of Erid's horn. No retreat would be brokered. No doubt would be tolerated. No weakness would be forgiven. These things had to be set aside for the very survival of the Scandinvan people was now considered to be at stake. Where even the Golden Throne could not not harm, the terror attacks now pierced the psyche of the dres'Erid.

The time had come to set aside the reservations of the past. The cold calculus of the war smiths would give way to the withheld fanaticism of the faithful. The desire for advantage would be swept away by the wailing of widows and orphans. Now only the wrath of a awakened people remained. The Sons of Erid had achieved their victory at last. All their efforts lead to the outcome that they had been aiming for.

The Sons of Erid now found themselves with an aggrieved nation where the noble caste had suffered a great disturbance which shattered the illusion that isolation would protect them. The commoners now saw that there could no peace whilst a shadow of doubt took root in their society. The warrior caste had been exposed to a prolonged conflict against a modern foe which would give them the experience needed to bring war to foreign shores on a much better footing. The war smiths now had the information they needed to understand the developments which had taken place during the decades of relatively insular peace the Glorious Empire had seen. Thereby fundamentally altering the outlook and skills of the Scandinvans in such a way as to balance the equation in a fashion that meet the designs of the Sons of Erid leadership.

Southern Front, Drana

Now that the time for the offensive had begun there would be no more restraint shown. The full resources of the dres'Erid will be brought to bear against the Golden Throne who had previously only been shown portions of their true might. However, such notions were all talk ultimately. The battlefield would prove the mettle of the Scandinvans and give an indication for what could be expected when next they marched off to war in full force. For only by the shedding of blood in sufficient quantities would the history of this conflict be written.

In accordance with the total mobilization of the Scandinvan martial

resources the hidden tunnels underneath the central mountain range of Drana were opened up. From the depths of the Earth a million members of warrior caste poured out an hour ready to do battle bringing them with their accompanying machinery of war. Regardless of one was closed by enemy bombardment another would merely open to allow the constant rush of legions to go on essentially unabated. The centuries of quarrying and the decades of fortification had allow High Command to construct one of the most vast networks of underground transit in the world. They had, until they were just opened, kept marked as quarrying tunnels whose stone had been used for all sorts of projects across Drana. The logs even justified the tonnage of stone to be distributed to the cities. A bit of creative accounting had failed to make note that massive amounts of stone had been utilized in the construction of artificial reefs or islands in the proceeding decades as that material was merely labelled as reclaimed refuse.

Every hour saw 100 new legions arrive at the front fully equipped, well rested, and with burning fury in their hearts. They joined their strength to the levies and took up positions. From the mountain roads, under the protections of powerful air defense platforms and the mountains themselves, came 500 (5,000,000 men) legions of warriors prepared to join their fellows in the offense. Thankfully the months of early preparation allowed for such a massive dispatchment of warriors who had all that they needed to fight and had the supplies in storage waiting for them. After a mere 5 days of this scale of movement would see the offensive begin.

The advance of the warrior caste was not to be alone though. For even with the sheer mass of it there was a concern that there was still unknown enemy abilities which, if concentrated, could halt their rapid deployment southward. As such, the 1/3 of the Scandinvan air assets previously held in reserve were fully dispatched to provide a cover for them and to challenge the Golden Throne's assumed air superiority. There had to be a total change in all factors in this campaign so that the advance would drive the enemy back into the sea as fast as possible. Born from this desire other defenses of Drana not in use were to be activated. Ones which had been designed for an invasion from a more terrible invasion from either the Relay's machine men or the clone armies of the oath breaker. Things which were meant to be kept secret earlier due to the desire to keep them as aces in the hole.

To better soften the enemy who had been despoiling their lands for too long and to help offer some cover for the warriors, Command had given the instruction to activate the Array of Deliverance. This was a mixture of missile systems and huge artillery guns hidden within the Spine itself. With the orders given long range guns firing 205 mm shells propelled forward by a mixture of traditional combustion and magnetic acceleration higher up in the chamber. With a yield equal to the explosion of 3.25 tons of dynamite each shell fired was a rather destructive force alone. However, when launched on the order of tens of thousands the devastation they wrought was horrific. They were among the most powerful forces that the Scandinvans had which did not violate the prohibitions set out when the war began. Accompanying this effort were other revelations in the arsenal of the Glorious Empire.

Further weapons had their existence publicly declared for the first time along with the Array of Deliverance. Within the laboratories of the Empire had the Attestors been refined to be a readily deplorable force now. No longer were their behemoth 20 foot tall power armors kill them. The Attestor units additionally had been undergoing years of training and war games. The raid on Citadel City and testing had provided the engineers with enough information to refine the armor structures to be ready for combat. Though just a hundred thousand strong at this point they would be only Scandinvan unit deployed in a proper battle formation equipped in power armor. An advantage which would be fairly limited due to their generally small numbers. Though they could inflict a good bit of damage on the preconceptions of the Maccabean generals. Something which could prove a valuable distraction to the enlisted ranks as well.

Overall, the scene had been set. The oncoming start of the offensive, whilst fully on display now, would not be something that the enemy had yet encountered. The warrior caste represented the finest large scale force available to the heirs of Erid. The unveiling of hidden assets would alter the balance of power on the front in the minds of Scandinvan command. The new determination of the dres'Erid to carry this war to its bloody conclusion had been redoubled. Once more would the world the price of daring to invade blessed Drana.

During the time leading up to the start of the offensive of the largely warrior forces the start of it saw the levies begin to aggressively push forward. With the aim fo the Array and the increased air power they were more bold than they had ever been. Their goal was to prevent any immediate withdrawal of forces from portions of the front and to keep the foes' attention as divided as possible. Using their forces which now numbered well over a billion strong they held a strong numerical advantage. A point which they now exploited readily.

In the levies' general struggle against the front now that they were making forays into trying to keep the attention of the Golden Throne's forces, they were joined by their local artillery and missile batteries greatly increasing their efforts. The scene would not be some mass rush of infantry going forward alone. They would enjoy the standard cover that they had been employing in the conflict tus far. Despite the increased zeal of the soldiers, High Command refused to just cast aside all notions of strategy for the sake of blood lust. Things had to go forward carefully if the war was to be properly.

Through the five days of the advance of the warriors from the North and the renewed efforts of the levies to begin to gnaw at the enemy lines, there can came to be a new force in the air. Realizing that they likely still maintained the element of surprise the order to advance was issued for the warrior caste. Whilst not being at full strength, they still enjoyed the support of fifty million of their caste peers already at the front. Therefore creating a situation where they numbered around two hundred million. A force which was large enough to begin to push forward in the eyes of the War Smiths. Once the attack began they would be continuously reinforced by a mass influx of more and more warriors for around another week. The type of situation which they were happy to be working with at this point.

Thus was the advance ordered to begin in full force. All the levies, every single warrior, and every man under arms was ordered to begin a mass push along the front. There was no design to engage in some grand encirclement of their enemies. They would utterly overwhelm in a drowning tide in which the waves would make create weakness in the enemies' front. From these points would the valor of the warrior caste be put into the test as these would be the locales where they would be directed in their largest numbers. Ideally creating focal points which could see the release of the mass tank formation of Doomani pattern tanks so long held in reserve due to the front being mostly defined by wetlands up until the Golden Throne's mercenaries had advanced unto the plains closer to the mountains. With them would come the ongoing influx of warriors who would reinforce and exploit such points. Though they were by no means the final surprise.

The Scandinvans, long predicting a potential war against the Kravenite menace, had been forging weapons capable of defeating the armor of the Capitol Police. Whilst not exactly made for power armor, the principle was largely the same. Depleted uranium rounds powered by a sufficiently powerful charge. With these weapons having been produced and hoarded for years now the warrior caste had enough to ensure that fire times could dynamically be equipped to counter any power armored formations which normal battle rifles could not readily bring down. A nasty little treat for those who had not yet met the full wrath of the Glorious Empire.

With the enactment of the Judas Decree the Scandinvans stuck behind enemy lines rightly feared what would happen what might

happen once the war was over. There was no real precedent in living memory for such an event. However, prior rebellions had scene entire cities leveled and families reduced to casteless status for not having resisted actively enough an enemy of the Empire. Therefore, hoping to prevent themselves from being targeted for reprisals many Scandin now refused to have anything to do with the Goldne Throne's forces. Thereby drastically decreasing local support for the occupation. Combined with this was the activation of the Shadows Final Bastion contingency.

In the wake of the murder of their charge, the Emperor Godwin, and the rendering comatose of his heir the leadership of the Shadows had now called for the enactment of a total war scenario against all contenders. Throughout the South cells were now commanded to harass the enemy at every turn. Bridges were to be destroyed, electricity grids rendered null, and enemy patrols be ambushed. The agents to perform these were no elites typically. They merely were Scandin who had been recruited before the war. Those who were willing to die to defend their blessed Drana from dres'nalar intrusion. Those men who believed in the promise of salvation that was offered to all those who fell in the name of Erid and the Almighty.

After all these things had been done was the Scandinvan hand now being played for the world. The fury of a people who had witnessed the largest terror campaign in their history was now turned against a foreign invader. The long contained warrior caste had been unleashed after being held in reserve throughout the war. Secrets kept hidden had been unleashed to destroy the confidence of the enemy. All these things had been done so that the enemy's resolve to continue would break and they would be forced to agree to a total withdrawal.

Last edited by [The Scandinvans](#) on Mon Aug 26, 2019 7:27 pm, edited 4 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



Morrdh
Powerbroker

Posts: 8417
Founded: Apr 16, 2008
Democratic Socialists

by [Morrdh](#) » Sat Aug 31, 2019 9:25 pm



North of Drasdag Drana Province Scandivan Theater

There was a tense atmosphere in the HQ of the 1st Commonwealth Division, as the task force had recently and officially been made, as it anxiously awaited the call to support the Macabean attack on Drasdag. A fair sized portion of the division's motor pool had been assembled and troops moved to mustering points ready to move out once the call came. But the wait had turned into a drag, soldiers started getting bored which did little to ease their anxiety about assaulting a heavy contested city.

Major-General Dignam, officer commanding 1 COMDIV, was still conscious of the mission his troops was here to perform in the form of guarding Macabean lines of communications. To this end he ordered the 34th Battalion, Royal Morridane Regiment (34 RMR), under Lt. Colonel Hogan 'up country' to continue the Morridanes' patrol efforts. It was simply keeping boots on the ground until the initial uncertainty over the assault on Drasdag had been resolved, though Dignam still detailed the rest of the 29th Brigade as a ready reserve in case the lone battalion ran into serious trouble. Dignam did also plan to start rotating units after a few days to keep them fresh and to try to ward off boredom.

It was late in the afternoon of the second day of the assault on Drasdag when one of the radios in the Ops tent crackled to life. There was an expectation that this was finally the call from the Macabeans, though the voice that spoke had a very Morridane accent and only said three words. *"Contact! Wait, out."*

Drana, Northern Province

The men of 7 Platoon, part of 34th Battalion's C Company, had been conducting a ranging sweep before turning back for their encampment for the night. It was a routine patrol to ensure that the immediate area round the platoon's camp was clear before the men posted sentries and settled down for the night, though during the day at least one section of ten men guarded the camp and manned the radio set. The other platoons of the battalion was conducting similar activities, ensuring that a wide an area as possible was covered.

3 Section was in the patrol's vanguard, followed by the Platoon HQ and 1 Section in turn. It was also the first of 7 Platoon to make contact with the enemy, literally emerging from some trees and coming face-to-face with a group of Scand soldiers coming the other way. A moment of bemusement passed as the opposing forces stared at one another before the realisation struck home just who it was they were looking at. Curses quickly filled the air, even more quickly followed by lead as weapons were brought to bear. The Morridanes giving as good as they got with their L54 assault rifles as they fought a fighting retreat back through the tree they'd just came through.

Hearing the sudden exchange of gunfire the commander of 7 Platoon, Lt. O'Neill, got on the radio and called in the contact as his men rushed to counter the unexpected threat.

Last edited by [Morrdh](#) on Fri Sep 06, 2019 8:01 pm, edited 1 time in total.

Irish/Celtic Themed Nation - [Factbook](#)

In your Uplink, hijacking your guard band.



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Founded: Apr 16, 2008
Democratic Socialists

☐ by [Morrdh](#) » Fri Sep 06, 2019 8:32 pm



The seemed to be filled with angry bees, though metal with the strong possibility of being lethal. Men cried out and fell to the ground as they were hit, but the hail of fire only seemed to increase. For 3 Section the enemy seemed like an unstoppable tide as the Morridanes attempted to fall back to the treeline, working as pairs with one firing back as the other dashed a few meters before the pair switched roles. Lt. O'Neill's HQ section and 1 Section had taken up position in the trees, 1 Section ins particular bringing its LSW to bear to provide covering fire to their beleaguered comrades as they sought relative safety.

Bullets whipped through the trees, channelling grooves through the bark. O'Neill and his men were forced to hug the ground and return fire best they could, scant cover was available and so the men had to do the best they could to make themselves as small a target as possible. For Lt. O'Neill it made the task of contacting his superiors over the radio difficult, forced to cover behind a tree to try and avoid enemy fire.

"Three, this is three-one." Called O'Neill. "Contact, enemy greater than my callsign size. Requesting immediate support. Over."

"Three-one, three. Can you estimate enemy size? Over."

"Enemy is at least battalion in size, can not hold them for long. Over."

"Understood. Directing reinforcements to your position, tasking sheldrake for immediate support. Out."

"Foxhound three-one, this is sheldrake. Send fire order. Over."

"Seldrake, three-one. Fire mission. Grid four-eight-five-eight-five-three. Direction, four-one degrees. Enemy infantry in open. Destroy. Over."

"Acknowledge fire order. Fire mission. Grid four-eight-five-eight-five-three. Direction, four-one degrees. Enemy infantry in open. Destroy. Over."

"Fire order, correct. Over."

"Adjusting, shot five-zero." There was a muffled thud in the distance, followed a short while later by a whistling over head as the ranging shot flew through the sky and landed shot of the enemy infantry. O'Neill cursed and got back on the radio.

"Left zero-eight, add six-zero."

"Shot five-zero." This time the shot landed down amidst the enemy forces.

"On target, fire fire fire."

There was a number of thuds in the distance and shells streaked overhead, then hammered down amongst the enemy in blossoms of fire that sent men and dirt flying. What began as a trickle soon become a rain of shells, the distant thuds merging into one continuous noise as the artillery guns were fired soon as they were loaded. Though for 7 Platoon, the battle was just beginning.

1 COMDIV HQ Drana Province

By luck or by fate, Lt. Colonel Hogan had been visiting division HQ to meet with Major-General Dignam to discuss operational planning the engagement started. Hogan's second-in-command of 34 RMR, Commandant O'Riordan, had already ordered the rest of C Company to converge on 7 Platoon's position in order to relieve the embattled unit. Much to Hogan's satisfaction, O'Riordan had also ordered the rest of the battalion to be at combat readiness. With matters seemingly in hand, Hogan made his way over to the command post to meet with Dignam.

"Ah Hogan," Dignam greeted as Hogan entered the tent. "Seems some of yer lads have gotten themselves into a scrap."

"Aye sir, but me second-in-command is dealing with that skirmish." Hogan answered. "C coy is moving up to relieve seven platoon, rest of the battalion is standing by."

"Hopefully they won't be needed." Replied Dignam. "Though can't say I like the timing o' it, especially with the assault on Drasdag."

"Ye think the Scands have launched a major attack?"

"Tis ta early ta tell, but I'm willing ta put some money on it." Dignam answered. "So I'm redeploying the division to better face, and thus counter, the Scand if it does prove to be a start o' an offensive."

"Wot o' the Macabeans sir?"

"I've notified them naturally, but their focus is Drasdag. Granted that's a moot point given the reserves they have ta hand."

"Yeah, we're chickenshit compared ta those numbers."

"Agreed, but unless it turns out ta be half the Scand army I doubt

they'll be much interested."

"Fer our sakes, sir, I hope it ain't half the Scand army....doubt we have anywhere near enough bullets fer that."

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In your Uplink, hijacking your guard band.



The Macabees
Senator

Posts: 3870
Founded: Antiquity
Anarchy

by [The Macabees](#) » Wed Jan 29, 2020 7:56 pm



2029 SPRING OFFENSIVE, PART 2

***Kríermak* 'Gholgoth,' Operation GOLDEN CYCLONE and Operation SECOND FOG**

Late May, 2029

The fleet's path was left red and fiery, as half of *Kríermak* 'Gholgoth' sailed around the eastern coastline of Drana, engaging with Scandinvan coastal and aerial defenses along the way. Hundreds of aircrafts made raids throughout, suppressing enemy air defenses and striking at Scandinvan reserves and logistics bases far away from the main front. They were aided by ship-launched missiles and the larger ships' plentiful cannons, which swept the lands nearest to the coastline like a hurricane with such power that no stone was left unturned, no tree left uprooted. It was a titanic display, one that intensified as the fleet approached the proposed beaches for the amphibious landings slated to take place under the directive of Operation SECOND FOG. As if to underscore the sheer immensity of the operation, the troopships and vast train of supply ships trailing behind the war fleet were no less impressive in number and appearance.

Although the intention of the forces anchored to Operation GOLDEN CYCLONE was to round Drana and engage the Scandinvan fleet hidden in their northern ports, the first phase of the ambitious strategy focused on the preparation for and protection of the landings. For several days, fleet forces bombed, bombarded, and missiled Scandinvan defenses directly along the coast, behind it, and even deep inland. Aside from air defense suppression, aircraft swept inland to engage ground forces and restrict their movement. Each attack left devastation behind it, although the attackers did not leave unscathed. The task at hand was expensive, not just in money and material, but in human life, as well.

As summer neared, the time for the second invasion of Drana was at hand. The moment's ripeness was no less aided by the Scandinvan counterstroke along the main front, affecting imperial soldiers in all three original *komsektors* — Aridna, Boris, and Darius. This sheer show of strength would undoubtedly leave its impression among Macabéan soldiers who, once on the offensive, would find themselves desperately trying to hold on to bloodstained ground already taken. As always, though, "the obstacle was the way." This shift in the balance, this gargantuan mobilization and application of force to the southwest, left the Scandinvan rear relatively vulnerable.

Not intending to allow a moment like this one to pass them by, the Golden Throne began Operation SECOND FOG early.

In the early hours of the day, before the sun's first rays made their appearance in the east, thousands of landing craft made their way

toward the long, expansive coastline. In the distance, they could see the faint outline of hills, mountains, and cliffs, and finally the beaches themselves. As these crafts made their way towards the landing zones, the fleet directed almost all of its energy toward the destruction of defensive fortifications and Scandinvan ground deployments.

As the invasion forces neared, the fleet switched its targets, striking at enemy positions deeper inland. As they pursued this in vigor, the ground forces began making their landings. In principle, there were fifteen million soldiers available for SECOND FOG. Of course, not all of these could land at once. The initial landings involved a combined half-a-million soldiers, including infantry, tanks, and other armored vehicles. By the end of the first week, the *Ejermacht* intended to have almost two million men on the ground. The rest would disembark by the end of June, although this to a great degree would also depend on the capture of port cities and coastal towns that could be used to facilitate resupply, replacing temporary ports that would be established once the beachheads were captured and consolidated.

War clouds gathered over northeastern Drana, as the fires' flames danced below, and land once untouched by the Gothic War now found itself in the thick of the action. Millions of lives would be lost, perhaps more civilian than military.

Komsektor Aridna, Operation BRILLIANT PYTHON

Late May, 2029

Drasdag was but a shadow of its former self. The once vibrant southwestern port city had been reduced to little more than a graveyard. There were more rats than humans living within its shelled out walls by this time.

Operation BRILLIANT PYTHON called out for none other than the capture of the entire city to free tens of millions of soldiers to redeploy north, along the front. Progress toward this outcome devastated an already ruined metropolis. Churches, cathedrals, and other religious institutions were stripped of their icons and wealth, this loot appropriated by the Macabéan soldiers who stole it. Much of it was gathered by imperial authorities during the frequent inspections, but most of it would never be returned. Instead, it was shipped back to the imperial homeland, where it would fill museums and private collections. It wasn't just religious centers that suffered this fate, but Drasdag's museums and governmental buildings, as well — at least, whatever was left standing, which was very little given the intensity of the bombardment which had been ongoing for almost a year already.

At first, the *Fuermak* had tried to instill military discipline, prohibiting theft, murder, and other crimes against the civilian population. Prisoners of war were treated in accordance under the most reasonable scope of justice. Most prisoners, in fact, were shipped back to the provinces, where they were well-fed and exercised, kept in prisons that had been built during the War of Golden Succession. There, they even received a limited education in Dénstadi and the history of the Kingdom of Macabea and the First and Second Empires of the Golden Throne. When, and if, they returned home after the Gothic War, they would go back with a different impression of their enemy than they had when captured. This was still being done in the bigger picture, but in Drasdag much of the framework behind the rules had collapsed. The Macabéan soldiers were tired, angry, and an energy that could only be unleashed by killing and stealing. Many of these soldiers were also conscripts from the territories, trained well, but having been brought up with different values in more violent places. In Drasdag, the rules did not always apply and, in most cases, the officers did not punish indiscipline unless it affected combat capabilities.

When not looting captured parts of the city, Macabéan soldiers fought for what was left to conquer. This was done street by street,

house by house. The Scandinavian defenders were tenacious and aided by the civilians that still remained within the non-occupied districts and neighborhoods. Supported by tanks and urban assault vehicles, the latter being heavily armored variants of armored personnel carriers designed to deliver a heavy punch with their massive 160mm howitzers. Despite the losses, the *Ejermacht's* forces were relentless in their task. Drasdag had to be taken, at any cost.

The fighting didn't take place only in the city and its suburbs. For many months now, the *Ejermacht* had sent forces into the surrounding hills, mountains, and wider countryside to eliminate insurgents and enemy supply lines running to Drasdag. These forces had evolved, taking on a style that one wouldn't see on the front. Unarmored, they traveled lightly and in small groups, no often larger than a platoon. Decentralized and spread out, these patrols scoured large swaths of land to find, harass, and eliminate whatever guerrilla and informal systems of resistance the Scandinavians within Drasdag could rely on.

Against the insurgents, if airpower was used at all, it was only used to provide intelligence and close air support. Several hundred GLI-23s had been shipped out to Drana, the most unexpected of places for the deployment of a vulnerable bird like the GLI-23, but in the rear where the Scandinavian air force no longer could patrol the skies, these well-armed, lumbering aircraft kept a close watch on the ground below. Loud and ferocious, their chainguns dangerous and deadly, their name would be spoken of for many years by the people who witnessed them.

The aerial and naval bombardment of Drasdag had also dwindled and was becoming more strategic. Most of the city was already destroyed; there was little left to pulverize. While sufficient naval assets were left to continue the blockade of the port, the rest of the ships rejoined *Kríermak* 'Gholgoth' in its larger efforts to maintain control of the seas south of the Scandinavian mainland.

Komsektor Boris, Operation FLOWER BED

Late May, 2029

Operation FLOWER BED was what the *Fuermak* had termed the spring offensive along the front within *Komsektor Boris*, the middle combat sector. Whereas Aridna held the left flank and Darius the right, Boris faced the brunt of the fighting. Over the past two months, they had made steady progress through Drana's central mountains, reaching even the highest peaks. They were within the range of securing the necessary positions to launch a summer offensive into the northern and eastern parts of the island, a two-punch move that could end the war by the end of the year.

The Scandinavian counterstroke threatened to undo much of the hard work completed since April. Indeed, as the end of May neared, the Macabéans were struggling to hold on to their advanced positions.

But, if the Scandinavians had used the geography to their advantage when slowing down the Macabéan offensives both this spring and during the previous summer-autumn seasons, the *Ejermacht* would do the same with them. Halting the spring offensive, Macabéan ground forces along the front dug in and began to defend their positions with nasty determination. The defensive emplacements were not quite as well prepared as the Scandinavians' had been, especially since these had either been destroyed or often protected from the "wrong" direction, but the going was tough for them regardless. As they attacked in wave after wave, these were cut down with machinegun and rifle fire from hidden placements, supported by mortars, artillery, and the *Laerihans*. Thousands of Scandinavians fell, thousands filled their place, and this cycle was forever going. When under too heavy of pressure, or simply when out of men and bullets, the Macabéans withdrew to positions further to the rear, creating a new line. The Scandinavians would find their advances painstaking and costly.

Imperial artillery was relentless and used to great effect. The great masses of enemy troops were especially vulnerable to rocket artillery, where a single truck's load could eradicate an opponent's formation within almost three square kilometers of area. The *Fuermak* had these in large number, as well as light fixed artillery and self-propelled howitzers. They bombarded the great Scandinavian armies that washed up on the "shores" of the long Macabéan frontline without mercy. The noise of each rocket's blast could hardly contain the screams of the soldiers who died where it struck.

It wasn't all gritty defensive operations, however. There were points along the front where the enemy would sense weakness in their probes. They'd advance farther and faster than at other points. They would break through the Macabéan lines and rush into the rear, threatening the positions of those units along the flank. When these "opportunities" to break through were taken, they ballooned into salients.

The occupied lands had been dotted with SAM batteries and other anti-air defenses designed to engage the Scandinavian air force when it penetrated into occupied air space. Until now, most of these defenses had seen little action. Most of the air war had taken place over Scandinavian-controlled territory, with the corresponding disadvantage to the *Laerihans*. Now, the tables had turned. Where salients were created, *Ejermacht* reserves were deployed to slow and contain the advance. Scandinavian units within the pockets were bombarded from the ground — by traditional and rocket artillery — and from the air. In this way, the strategy of allowing the enemy to break through at points and mass in the imperial rear was a ruse to ambush these forces and eliminate large numbers of Scandinavians who had advanced into tenuous and vulnerable positions. If their air force came to support them, they'd find themselves flying over a forest of SAM batteries itching to prove their worth.

As the Scandinavian counterstroke unfolded, the *Ejermacht* began to deploy more and more of its reserves to the front. Now at its height, the imperial army in Gholgoth numbered almost one billion combatants. This unholy number had not yet been fully applied; indeed, most had only just arrived in-theater, slated to participate in the great summer offensive that the *Fuermak* intended to launch, Scandinavian counterstroke or not.

Komsektor Boris, Operation GOLDEN LAW

The Scandinavian spring counterstroke wasn't just about the conventional war along the front. Hundreds of thousands of Scandinavians living within the occupied zone were called to arms and these intensified the guerrilla war against the *Ejermacht* and other invading forces. To a great extent, this eventuality had been expected and commanders were prepared. Still, the rising was considerable and it proved to be a rather large thorn in the *Fuermak's* side.

Destroying bridges, ambushing supply convoys, and conducting all sorts of havoc, these insurgents were making it more difficult to deliver ammunition and other necessary supplies to units at the front. Furthermore, they were uprooting any semblance of law and order that the occupying forces had established over the occupied lands. The *Fuermak* had gone to great lengths to prove themselves liberators, not conquerors, by freeing millions of slaves and treating the local populations relatively well. The old guard, the elites that had ruled these hamlets, towns, and cities, had been sent back to the provinces, where they lived with "sponsors" tasked with keeping them under house arrest. This new order, which was tenuous and always meant to be temporary, was nevertheless at risk. As a response to the uprising, the *Fuermak* earmarked fifty million of its infantrymen to contain it.

Applying the lessons learned from the fighting in the countryside

around Drasdag, these forces were lightly armored and built to move quickly, and in small groups. They were supported by artillery and other sources of indirect fire, including close air support assets, that could bring to bear heavy power when needed. Otherwise, the rules of the game were to cause minimal damage to the civilian infrastructure, maintain civilian casualties to a minimum, and focus on controlling the local populations by disincentivizing their support for the guerillas and offering them superior alternatives.

To better control the civilian population within the occupied territories, these had already been subdivided into thousands of smaller military districts that often ran across civilian jurisdictional lines. Major villages and towns were walled in, most often by fencing and towers. Almost every municipality, even down to villages of little more than a few hundred people, had a garrison that provided security. These garrisons did more than that, however. They also enforced a curfew and tightly regulated traffic going in and out by establishing and manning checkpoints along the walled perimeter. If someone left their hamlet, the local garrison would more than likely know. Headcounts occurred daily and nightly. Failure to appear before curfew led to severe punishment for the perpetrator if caught. For his or her family, the consequences were no less dire.

The local garrisons also enforced food restrictions. Only certain vendors were allowed to sell certain wares, especially food. The insurgents would have to be fed somehow, usually from local sources as there was no greater logistical network to feed them — this was occupied territory, after all. By controlling who sold the food, the garrisons could control who bought it. They often used these vendors to deny guerrillas the fuel they needed to survive and, otherwise, collect human and electronic intelligence to find and eliminate them. It was a slow, tedious process, but one that produced results.

Further, strategic bridges and other major arteries were given small garrisons as well. Highways and roads were regularly patrolled by platoon-sized units. Like in *Komsektor Aridna*, these smaller forces allowed the fifty-million-strong army dedicated to defeating the guerrilla war to spread out and use their numbers more effectively. Larger forces were liable to scare the fighters away; smaller forces were more vulnerable, more likely to draw the enemy, and also faster, more flexible, and more able to find the enemy. These lessons had been and were still being learned in the 'Long Wars' back home. Now they were being applied in Drana, as well.

Komsektor Darius, Operation EASTERN HORN

Late May, 2029

In the east, imperial ambitions were relatively constrained. Over the winter of 2028–29, the Scandinavians had successfully reestablished their connection to the besieged city of Bendred. Imbriniumian forces had not yet captured the city and with the Golden Throne focused to the west and the north, the siege lines around the great port city had been ruptured on their eastern edge. Operation EASTERN HORN was meant to close the siege lines once again.

It was originally intended to follow EASTERN HORN with a second operation, to coincide with the general summer offensive. This was codenamed EASTERN LANCE. Not only would the *Ejermacht* contribute forces to the taking of Bendred, but they would simultaneously launch an offensive east, with the objective of taking the remainder of the Scandinavian southern coastline. These forces would eventually link up with ground forces advancing from the area occupied during Operation SECOND FOG, either by the end of this year's autumn or by the spring of the next.

The Scandinavian counterstroke had thrown these plans awry. High command deemed that the needs for the central and northern forces were too great. The task of holding the Scandinavian hordes back was too complex and required too many men. It was not just a question of manpower to hold the front, but also of reserves to plug gaps,

contain pockets, and launch tactical counterattacks to throw the Scandinvans back at points where they threatened to destabilize the defensive lines directly along the front. EASTERN HORN was therefore restricted to closing the siege lines again, holding these against Scandinavian attack, and consolidating them to hold during the winter if the Imbrinumians could not take the city by then. The Imbrinumians, understandably, were pressured to hurry with the completion of their objective. They had to do whatever is required to take the port city by the onset of winter so that it could be used to anchor and protect the eastern flank of the great invasion.

Like in Drasdag, Scandinavian resistance was heavy and, unlike in Drasdag, there wasn't the sheer weight of numbers available to overwhelm the city's defenses. And whereas in Drasdag, even with such strength of numbers and firepower, the taking of the city was proving to be quite the costly and slowgoing exercise, the fighting in Bendred had reached a status that could only be described as little more than a stalemate.

Yet, its fall was highly prized.

The taking of two major southern ports would prove to be a great boon for the invading forces, not least of which because it would provide them with two important harbors from which to station their fleet. Thus, while EASTERN HORN had lost some of its long-run strategic luster, it nevertheless continued unimpeded to the extent that its principal mission was to close off Bendred from overland resupply.

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