

ORIENTATION

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Text

Mankind explored and colonized the solar system throughout the 21st century and by 2100 many planets and moons were home to outposts and mining stations. The nations of Earth had over-reached themselves, however, and much of the cost of the space effort was tendered out to Southern Cross Mining. Likewise, Luna had divested itself of the burden of maintaining mining outposts and space colonies, offering the enterprises to the Reiner-Gamma Corporation.

Within a decade or two Earth and Luna were politically united, but the human race was under an immense population and resource pressure. Reiner-Gama soon swallowed up Southern Cross and dominated the solar system, supplying petroleum and minerals to Earth at any price it chose. The other, major corporations of Earth put their faith in a new breakthrough, the quantum hyperspace tunnelling effect, and after the first hyperspace ship returned from Alpha Centauri in 2120, were soon building ships able to scout out resources in neighbouring star systems. We had a Faster-Than-Light drive!

THE FIRST RECESSION [2166-2170]

After the creation of an interstellar drive, a scramble for the stars ensued as mining and oil drilling companies desperately sought out resources that they could supply to Earth – thereby skirting Reiner-Gama's near monopoly within the Solar System. Within thirty years there were twenty flourishing colonies within 4 parsecs of Earth and dozens of small outposts and mining installations.

On Earth, stresses were beginning to show within the world government of the Earth Union. The Chinese Communist Party initiated greatly-needed and wide-ranging reforms but

these could not stem the economic and social problems that had piled up over the past four decades. In 2166 the Communist Party was abolished and amid political turmoil a new, more democratic government, was established. Earth, tied intimately into the Chinese economy was plunged into the First Recession, the world government reacted poorly, and lost the confidence of many nations. China broke apart, just as the Earth Union itself collapsed. Manchuria successfully seceded from the 'new' China to create the People's Republic of Guandong. Various autonomous regions in the far west, including Tibet and Xinjiang, followed



suit. The economic heartland of China, the wealthy and well populated east coast styled itself as the Federal Republic of China. The chaos lasted for a decade, and within that time of uncertainty and of a shrinking China, Japan and its powerful corporations stepped up.

Japan had itself undergone social and economic transformation starting twenty years earlier, and had tackled systemic problems of an aging population, a shrinking population and a reliance on foreign raw materials. With controlled immigration from within the Asia-Pacific region, and renewed focus on automation, robotics and artificial intelligence technologies to increase productivity, Japan was looking boldly into the future. As China entered its time of crisis and First Recession began to bite, Japan was able to show leadership in the

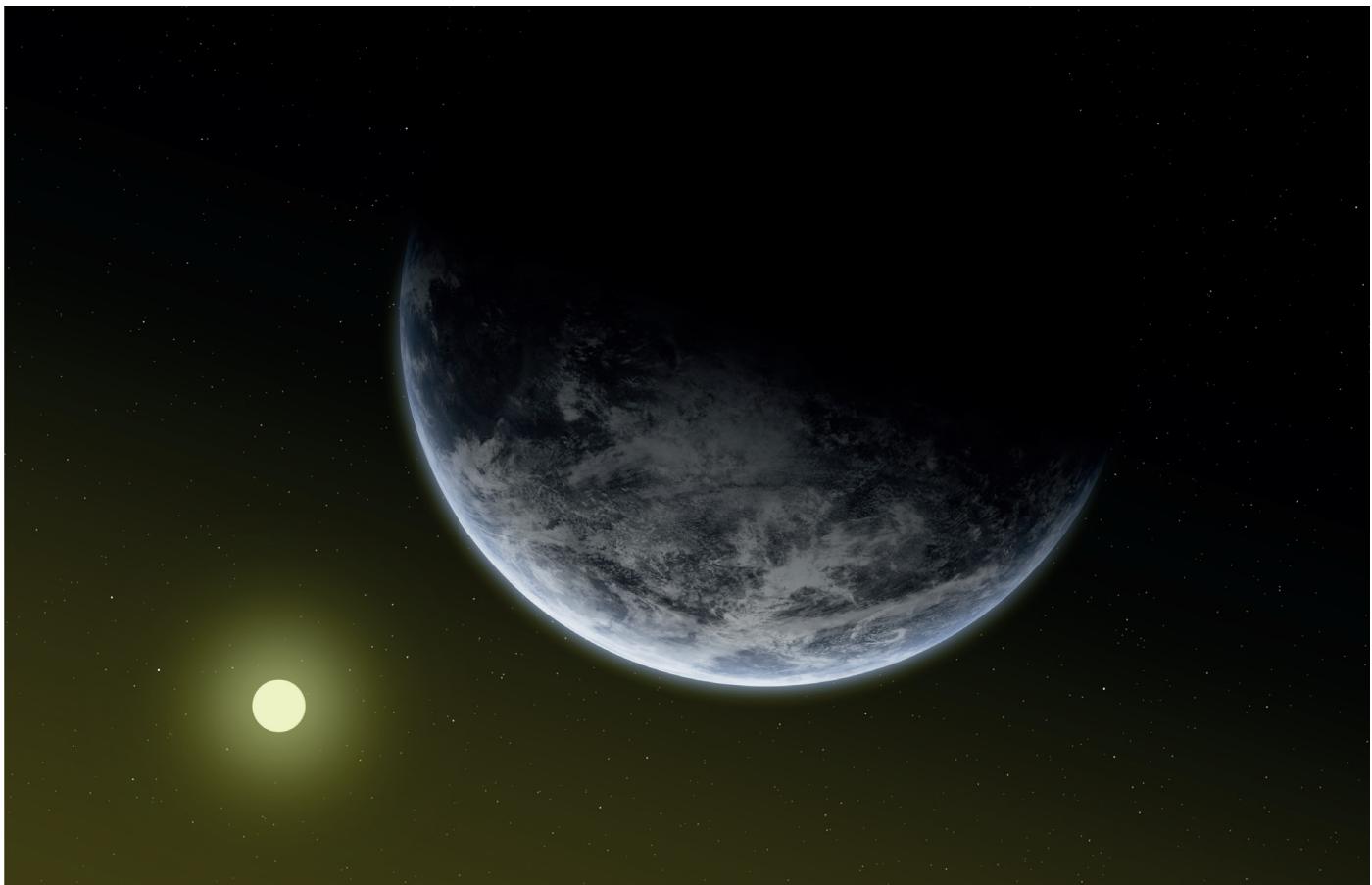
region and formed the Asia Pacific Partnership in an attempt to weather the storm. China had lost its lead in the region – Japan once again dominated the Far Eastern area. In 2170 the major corporations of the world came together in Singapore to create the United Corporate Combine - essentially a standing inter-corporate council. The Combine's first task was to establish agencies which would regulate international business and practices, something the United Nations had once done, and that the Earth Union had then continued. The Earth Union had ceased to exist in all but name two years earlier at the height of the First Recession. Corporations now seemed to wield the most power on and off of Earth, and their 'voters' were their customers. Nations relied on these industrial giants for both their valuable business and their lucrative investments.

THE SECOND RECESSION (2200-2215)

The nations of Earth would need these resources, as, in 2200, the oil reserves dried up (or at least became unprofitable to exploit). Oil was desperately needed, not for fuel, since most vehicles ran from hydrogen fuel cells and power-stations were fusion-based and required helium-3. Petroleum was needed by the plastics and the chemicals industries. Bioplastic was in use, but its reliance on vegetable matter grown in fields that could otherwise be used to feed starving millions, meant that oil, tried and tested over centuries and understood by all chemical engineers and plant designers, remained the primary choice. Now oil reserves on distant moons and on harsh planets would have to provide a source for that oil. The Oil Crisis of 2200 initiated a Second Recession lasting for 15 years. Some colonies and outposts were temporarily abandoned due to cost-saving exercises. In Macapa, Brazil, an extraordinary construction was begun: a vast oil pipeline stretching from the surface all the way to the edge of the atmosphere and beyond

out to a distant orbit. This Trans Atmospheric Petroleum Pipeline (TAPP) was funded by a unique corporate consortium for the Community of American States. It was a statement: 'once this pipeline is completed – the recession will end'. And end it did. Oil flowed, prices dropped, economies began to flourish and a new era began in human history.

The colonization of space was not some great altruistic project, an attempt to 'spread humanity across the stars' or to 'explore the unknown', it was all about profit. No nation could justify such an undertaking, and so the corporations sought their profits out there on asteroids and icy moons, on planets good and bad. Mineral extraction, logging and oil drilling were the big industries in space and a vast infrastructure of tugs, space stations, cargo starships, spaceports and terminals was constructed.



INSURRECTION ON TAU CETI (2215-)

Colonies *were* established, mostly within 4 parsecs of Earth, but these large-scale settlements today typically service the extraction industries operating out toward the Outer Rim and beyond. Most serve as way stations and technical bases for the large corporations and their space enterprises. The oldest of the Off-World colonies, Tau Ceti, has been plunged into war during the past decade. The planet had been settled separately by two nations: China and the United States of America, but with the fall of China during the First Recession, the Chinese colony was abandoned. Only after the recession did a brutal counter-insurgency war on Tau Ceti begin - factions supported by the new competing Chinese nations struggled to capture Shulin, the Chinese colony. When the UCC ruled that only independence for Tau Ceti (both American

and Chinese colonies) would end the crisis, the United States was invited to act as peacekeeper within the Chinese colony, until a stable government could be formed and independence for Tau Ceti organized. From that moment in 2215, the Chinese factions turned on the American peacekeepers with great ferocity. The USA has gotten embroiled in a savage counter-insurgency that is costing thousands of lives every year and trillions of dollars annually. Washington cannot let the Chinese colony fail, to do so would endanger the safety and security of the successful American colony, Lindbergh, on the same world. With the Chinese and American colonies both united and independent, the USA would have a strong and powerful pro-American ally in the Near Earth Zone.

ECO COLLAPSE



The impact of ten billion people and their high technology lifestyles had a great impact on planet Earth, and then of course there has been the effect of global warming – a fact, no matter what its source. The late 22nd century saw rising sea levels, droughts and rampant desertification, with millions of hectares of farmland being lost to the encroaching sand dunes. Climates began a permanent shift; large parts of the United States, for example, have become hot, almost rainless and dry. A blistering sun kills crops in the fields and scorching winds blow in desert sands to cover them over. Many American cities suffer from water shortages making life hard for the poorest in society. Expert water management in North America has prevented this climatic shift from becoming a agricultural catastrophe,

however, and intensive farming can still continue to feed the people in the cities. While America and Europe bravely struggle to stave off total eco-collapse, there are many nations that have failed. Kyrgyzstan has been thoroughly 'desertified', as has Mali, Chad and the Sonoran region of Mexico.

Many American cities are dry and dusty; a bourbon-colored haze fills the air, cutting visibility to only a few miles. On bad days only the tops of distant skyscrapers and arcologies can be seen rising up above the orange-brown smog. 'You don't have to go to other stars to find a planet where the atmosphere is trying to kill you,' said senator Terry Enderman, famously. 'The air above L.A. is as nasty as it gets. Drop a 21st century Angelino in here and I bet they'd classify it as "alien".'

Today the corporations are all-mighty; they wield power and budgets that dwarf many nations on Earth. And much of their power comes from their role as suppliers of petroleum, helium-3, minerals and other raw materials to an ever-hungry (and ever growing) population. Reiner-Gama has claimed by force much of the solar system as a corporate preserve, and it continues to supply Earth with valuable raw materials – at a price. But competition from the off-world mining and drilling colonies has increased year-by-year.

THE NATIONS OF EARTH

Political instability on Earth toppled the world government that had kept the peace for half a century, now the biggest players on the global stage are three political blocs, each led by a strident and powerful nation. These alliances are:

Community of American States (CAS)

This includes most of the nations of North and South America, and includes Britain. It is dominated and led by the United States of America. The CAS is a massive power bloc and has access to numerous space-launch facilities as well as the incredible Trans-Atmospheric Petroleum Pipeline that transfers off-world oil from starships arriving from distant planets.

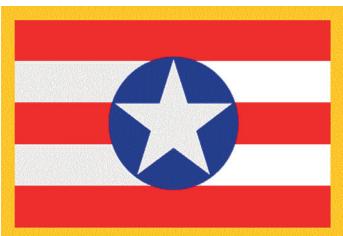
Western European Union (WEU)

This trans-national entity once existed in the 1960's and 1970's and was re-established around sixty years ago. Its ancient predecessor, the European Union, dissolved in the early 21st century. The Western European Union is a tight, German-dominated circle of high-tech, western European neighbours.

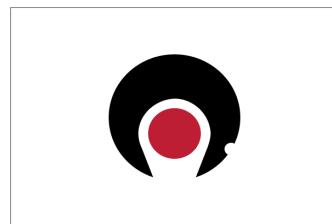
Asia-Pacific Partnership (APP)

Following China's collapse and balkanization during the First Recession, Japan was ready to step up to lead the nervous nations of East Asia. The chaos and economic uncertainty of the recession helped to pull Japan's neighbours into that country's powerful orbit. Tokyo now rules most of East Asia through this Asia-Pacific Partnership. Raw materials and skilled migrants flow into a resurgent Japan, whilst exported goods flow out to the other nations of the APP. Of the three Chinese splinter states, only the Federation of China (the industrialized eastern seaboard of China) has refused to join the APP.

The alliances are similar in nature to the trans-national groups of the 21st century; entities like the Arab League, ASEAN, the Commonwealth of Independent States, NAFTA and others. But the difference here is the lack of an equal say - terrible shocks in the global economy and aggressive threats of war by some large nations, forced smaller nations to seek the patronage of the biggest and most powerful. These powerhouses now dominate the alliances that they are (ostensibly) equal members of, but their actual power is magnified greatly by the loyalty and fealty of the other nations within the union. In the CAS, for example, US military forces conduct peacekeeping forces inside war-torn member states, and US-based corporations enjoy significant benefits within the alliance. Member nations of the blocs are still mostly free and independent, yet many have become almost dependencies of their powerful patron. A similar arrangement existed during the First Cold War, when Soviet Russia presided over a Warsaw Pact of ostensibly free sovereign nations.



Community of
American States



Asia Pacific
Partnership



Western European
Union



Federal Republic
of China



United Corporate
Combine



Republic of
Xinjiang



Tau Ceti Free State



People's Republic of
Guandong

RISE OF THE CORPORATION

While the Earth became more disunited, the corporations found that they had many things in common and were forced to find ways to arbitrate the many disputes and trade deals that had previously gone through the world government. In 2170 the United Corporate Combine (the UCC, or simply 'Combine') was established. It is a permanent council for arbitration and corporate law that was established by the major corporations to handle matters of international and interstellar law. It manages several offices which focus on specific areas, including the Mining Regulation Commission (MRC), the Interstellar Commerce Organization (ICO) and the Extra-Solar Colonization Administration (ESDA).

Several of Earth's corporations are extremely powerful; like the nations that they feed from, many have abandoned public shareholdings. The most powerful are privately owned, run by families and clans. Each corporation is comprised of multiple companies with robust internal transactions, all controlled by a single, near all-powerful chairman that acts both as manager and de-facto owner of the entire enterprise. Each is vertically organized, with manufacturing, supply, finance and banking, and distribution all in-house. Sub-companies are created to run these sectors and benefit the umbrella organization.

The bank and general trading company sit at the heart of the corporation. Typical concerns of a corporation are banking, insurance, steel, trading, manufacturing, electronics, gas and power, chemical and interstellar development and ship-building. The general trading company (the heart) concerns itself with logistics, plant development, and both international and interstellar resource exploration. These corporations trade in many markets (or diversify) for security, and all the component companies own shares in one another's companies, thus preventing hostile take-overs, allowing the monitoring and disciplining of firms and easing pressure on management, allowing the corporation to focus on long-term goals. These 23rd century corporations resemble the South Korean *chaebol* and the Japanese *keiretsu* of the 21st century, both of which formed in the post-war world of the 1950s. All the corporations have plenty of power on Earth amongst the political blocs, and everyone knows that if *they* fail, they bring the global economies down with them. Many politicians are also sponsored by these corporations. They are powerful: who regulates a transnational company if not a transnational body that is transparent and responsive to global stakeholders? Such a body does not exist. The UN was disbanded long-ago.



THE MAJOR CONGLOMERATES

Leyland-Okuda

Built on an engineering pedigree, Leyland-Okuda is rapidly diversifying. Based in Dubai.

Erebus

Growing to power on Antarctic oil, this British-based conglomerate continues to focus on resource extraction.

Voroncovo

Based on high-tech companies and on security, this Russian conglomerate has since branched out.

Wu-Ketai

The most powerful of the Asia Pacific conglomerates, Wu-Ketai owns some of the best technical brands.

Reiner-Gama

Although its mining and oil drilling operations are restricted to the Solar System, Reiner-Gama constructs key components for the aerospace industry.

Tharsis

Once a Martian conglomerate, Tharsis is now US-based and active in all fields. Its chairman is 223 year-old Compton de Vaille.

Matsuyama

This Japanese conglomerate has a number of successful defense corporations, but is also known for colonial development and genetic products.

