

>>> BEGIN NEPTUNE TRANSMISSION <<<

From: **Æon Trinity, Neptune Division**

To: **All Æon operatives**

Transmission type: **textfile**

Encryption: **DSE**

Time is Money

In the 22nd-century, gigantic corporations wield more power than many countries. Commerce is a science involving variables of advertising, promotion and target markets, with the goal of discovering the perfect consumer. Business isn't just part of society, it *is* society.

Business is Business

The sixth **Trinity Field Report, Corporate Life** looks at business society in the 22nd century. From high-stakes corporate intrigue to middle-management skullduggery to entry level hell, this "minibook" sheds light on the dynamic, cut-throat world that is big business.

>>> END TRANSMISSION <<<

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Trinity Field Report: Corporate Life

A Trinity Universe™ Update

Available free of charge only here, **TFR: Corporate Life** is an official resource for the **Trinity** game setting.

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>>> NEPTUNE TEMPLATE <<<

Greetings Colleague —

What follows is a brief primer on the history, culture and current activity of one of the most prominent social forces in modern life: the corporation. Along with religion and government, the corporation forms one of the most prominent abstract organizational concepts for human life. Being the youngest by far of the "big three" power structures, the corporation is probably the least predictable, the most innovative, the least reliable, and the most mutable of all. Ruled by only a single principle — profit

über alles — corporations adapt and spontaneously arise with a speed that no other organization can rival. Big business goes everywhere, oversees almost everything, and has a hand in every significant undertaking.

Before moving on to the proper body of this document, I feel I should provide two warnings. First, the document you hold is necessarily brief. Æon has access to literally millions of files on various subjects relating to corporate style, history, motivation and action patterns. Some might claim that condensing such a broad subject does it, and you, a disservice: a little information might be worse than none at all. Take what you read with a grain of salt. Expecting to leave this document with anything but the most rudimentary understanding is foolhardy. Consider this to be a very grainy map of a foreign continent. It will give you outlines of lakes and let you find mountains, but don't rely on it to get you straight to grandmother's house.

The second warning is that even the biggest corporation is composed of individuals. Even if you can confidently predict the actions of a particular business organization, don't assume that every employee supports a company agenda — or is even aware of it.

Keeping those factors in mind, here is an intensely condensed overview of the role of the corporation in modern life.

Ad Astra

Neville Archer

Director, Neptune Division

Æon Trinity

Hope • Sacrifice • Unity

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>>> TRITON TEMPLATE <<<

Corporate Theory and History

— **Professor Brenda Hamilton, Ph.D., Adjunct Historiographer, Neptune Division Associate**

The corporation as we know it had its genesis when European kings and queens licensed trade rights to groups of merchants and nobles in

return for a piece of the action. This seemed a logical extension of the feudal system, in which the nobles owned the land and permitted serfs to work it in exchange for part of the harvest.

Technical advances in transport made the ownership of these trade routes incredibly lucrative, and that resulted in widespread currency trade: after all, a slab of beef or bushel of grain wouldn't have value forever. The nobles could only retain their wealth by transforming it into durable goods — generally ships with which to complete more trading voyages. This put a lot of money in the hands of shipbuilders, but these voyages, while rewarding, were both expensive and risky: therefore the traders spread the risk out among numerous investors, who received a proportionate return on their investment if the voyage was successful. As venture capital became more important, the owners of this capital (the banks) also grew in stature, until they were no longer limited to a single country.

As international trade became increasingly complicated, the nobles subcontracted more and more of it to skilled laborers and non-nobles who would form the core of the later “bourgeoisie.” The drive to make trade and shipbuilding more efficient led to the development of the factory, which was the driving force behind the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution was (in *extreme* brief) the transition of the wealth focus from the countryside (the source of impermanent wealth like corn and chickens) to the city (the source of permanent wealth like ships, buildings and mass-produced tools). Although few people recognized it at the time, this was also the point where capitalism began to grow.

Capitalism

There are really two meanings of the word “capitalism.” There's capitalism as an economic effect, and capitalism as a political theory.

Economic capitalism is simply the process by which people with money lend it to people who need it. If all goes well, the people who borrow use the money to produce goods or services they

otherwise couldn't. They then sell these goods or services and make enough money to pay back the loan with interest while pocketing some profit. If it works, everyone's happy: the lender recoups an investment and then some, and the borrower pays for the use of resources that he could not, otherwise, afford. To look at economic capitalism from a slightly more abstract perspective, capitalism was a new wealth focus. Instead of perishable wealth (produce) or tangible wealth (tools), capitalism concerned the manipulation of intangible or symbolic wealth: the ability to get things done.

The men who perceived many important things about capitalism were Marx and Engels, who then attempted to develop their own, alternate system for resource allocation. This system, communism, is still used in modified form in China today, and it's basically an attempt to put the means of production in the hands of the government and then (eventually) directly in the hands of the workers. Communism was perceived (correctly, in some cases) as a tremendous threat to the entrenched power structures of the world at that time. One way that traditional, non-communist societies countered this perceived menace was by enshrining capitalism as a political and social theory — not just an aspect of the free market, but as a good in itself.

Political capitalism is the theory that free competition in an open marketplace produces the greatest good for everyone involved. It's like a democracy where people vote with their yuan: the best (or cheapest) product attracts the most consumers, and the company that produces it thrives. The threat that another company might build a better mousetrap (or undercut their prices) drives every company to improve their products in an attempt to woo the consumer.

Capitalist theory co-evolved with the early Darwin model of biology, which presented animals in constant competition for food and breeding rights. Our modern view of biology recognizes that cooperation is just as much of a factor in evolution (seen in everything from bees pollinating plants to the symbiosis between cell

and mitochondria). As it happened, it was a tremendous factor in capitalist economies as well. Rather than competing for market share, companies realized they could combine their assets, form monopolies, and charge as much as they wanted. This trend was broken up in its earliest form in the then United States by anti-trust laws, but monopolies-in-effect arose again when the next wealth foci arose. These new wealth foci were information and the perception of value.

Marketism

The value of information and the nature of an information economy is visible today in the pervasive corporate espionage, in the licensing fees for Nihonjin technology, and in the download fees for software use and entertainment products. The impact of a value perception economy is subtler: it's known as marketism.

The end of the 20th century saw a surge of invention in communication equipment, with an accompanying boom in corporate entertainment for money. These new entertainment media were subsidized by advertising, which rapidly increased in sophistication. Eventually it reached the point where a product's popularity often depended less on its quality than on the marketing budget behind it. This was the genesis of marketism. Especially in the entertainment and fashion industries (where "quality" is highly subjective), the importance of creating the perception of desirability came to eclipse the importance of actual desirability. To put it plainly, it was easier to *convince* the consumer that your product was good than it was to make a good product.

>>> OPEN NEPTUNE ARCHIVE <<<

Pavementarianism

— Excerpt: "Psychosocial History" holo-lecture series with Dr. Renee Lautrec

The philosophy known as "pavementarianism" arose over 100 years ago. It represented the fullest extent of the perceptual schism between "nature" and "artifice."

Since antiquity, humankind saw itself as some-

how separate from "nature" — be it by virtue of being made in God's image, by being conscious, by using technology or through some other virtue. In the last decades of the 20th century, before Aberrants overshadowed virtually all other social concerns, there was an increasing movement toward ecology. People were encouraged to value and preserve "nature" in the abstract.

Pavementarianism was a backlash against ecology. It questioned the fundamental value of nature. The slogan "Pave the Planet" indicated the contempt for the products of biology and evolution: from the pavementist perspective nature became obsolete when humanity no longer needed an "ecosphere" to survive.

The most common form of pavementarianism was simply rather cavalier about losing species and ecosystems here and there. The radical "pavers" didn't want to ever see an animal except in a zoo or on a plate.

Naturally, corporations which had chafed under the restraints of pollution ordinances and logging licenses were all in favor of pavementarianism, and corporate marketing efforts made sure that the philosophy got plenty of attention. Still a new social factor and viewed positively by many, Aberrants also became involved in a number of cultural issues, pavementarianism among them. The support of a few flashy, powerful "novas" generated even more interest in the movement.

This philosophy was based on a sort of biophobia that persists today. In the modern universe, however, people with a distaste for uncontrolled nature have the option of living in completely human-controlled environments — up the well, on Antarctica, at the core of an arcology or in one of the undersea cities. Back then, those options were not available, and the pavers had some impact on the public policy of their time.

It would be easy to dismiss pavementarianism. Some say its only long-term effect was to inhibit attempts to protect the environment. Others claim it was a spur to the development of

ecotech that's used in hostile environments to this day. But anyone who thinks mankind has lost the longing to totally transform and control the terrestrial habitat has clearly never visited the Home Islands.

>>> CLOSE ARCHIVE <<<

The Livingry Theory

R. Buckminster Fuller coined the phrase "livingry" to describe his idea for an alternative technology — one focused on living and happiness, rather than focused on war and death.

In addition to being a mathematician, inventor and poet, Fuller was a student of history. He was particularly interested in the history of invention, and his research convinced him that most human innovation had focussed on new ways to kill and conquer. He yearned for a future in which the effort that had been focussed towards the military would be redirected towards providing food, shelter and health care for all.

One would be tempted to dismiss Fuller as an idealistic dreamer if his analysis of corporate motivation had not proved so insightful and accurate. Fuller pointed out that a corporation's sole *raison d'être* is to make profit, and that a corporation that hesitates because of ethics has a disadvantage when faced with an unethical business. In a dark reflection of political capitalism, the market rewards the companies that blanch at nothing. The moral result is a race to the bottom.

Fuller hoped that individuals would demand a new set of priorities from their governments and businesses. Unfortunately, conflict has continued to provide economic impetus for many countries and corporations. Not that this can be blamed solely on those institutions: neither Fuller, nor any politician, nor any CEO could have predicted the Aberrant War or the Chromatic Conflict.

Current technology, however, is approaching the livingry that Fuller envisioned. In order to colonize space, we have been forced to develop efficient power sources, economical dwelling units, technologies to purify air and water,

machines to produce food. It would take very little modification of a large space residence unit to make it into cheap housing suitable for use in the Blight zones or French countryside. However, financial pressure from several metanats has resulted in excessive taxation on these technologies when the off planet companies creating them try to import them for terrestrial use. Not every country has these burdensome taxes, of course: only those with spaceports big enough to make large scale import viable. Various tactics have been used to keep these technologies off Earth: everything from trumped up trade conflicts to groundless claims that the purification technologies could adversely impact Earth's biosphere. Æon has investigated these claims, and found them groundless: clearly someone (or something) wealthy and powerful is exerting pressure to keep Earth using obsolete — but profitable — housing and personal support technology.

It's not hard to see who's threatened by widespread prosperity and contentment: any government that relies on the engagement of its citizens has a great deal to lose from the apathy of happiness. Equally, any business that's propped up by consumerism (and that's almost all of them) definitely does not want to see people become satisfied and serene.

>>> EARTH TEMPLATE <<<

Corporate Life on Earth

Despite the importance and wealth of the near space colonies and the incredible opportunities in the far colonies, Earth retains the bulk of humanity. Earth has the history, the infrastructure and the biosphere we need. Accordingly, 80% of humankind's business is transacted on *terra firma*.

Africa

The idea of "karma" is an innately attractive one to human beings. We like to think that if you suffer long enough, you get rewarded. Africa appears to be a case in point. Famine and unrest followed decades of conquest. However, the instability of the region left much of its signifi-

cant mineral wealth untouched. Now, under the umbrella of the UAN, Africa has become a world center of commerce and manufacturing. The corporate culture there is dynamic, optimistic and generally positive. After all, when business is good, you can indulge in a few luxuries, like ethical business practices. There are exceptions that prove the rule, however.

GENEius, Inc.

GENEius is a small, new bioengineering firm started by an Æsculapian and a Lunar millionaire. They haven't garnered a lot of public attention: as far as the press is concerned, they're working on organ replacement technologies.

GENEius started out looking for a way to clone discrete human organs without using the existing expensive and exclusive methods. This isn't an original idea, of course. Medical researchers have long hoped to create genetically tailored, rapidly (and inexpensively) produced human organs. This Holy Grail of medical technology eluded medical science for a dozen decades, and even by the 2100s remains a significantly time-consuming and expensive process. Only the wealthy can afford engineered organs; the majority of people must still rely on traditional organ donation or artificial implants. Even with tremendous hardtech advances and the implementation of bio- and vitakinetic processes, the era of "organs on demand" has yet to be adequately achieved.

Most medical researchers agree that the key involves combining hardtech and biotech processes. GENEius hoped to be the first to accomplish this, becoming *the* interstellar organ producer. Imagine: every organ bank in human space could be replaced with GENEius equipment, providing perfectly tailored, gene matched organs to those in need.

Unfortunately, the loss of the Human Genome Project data during the Crash, coupled with the perennial difficulties with cloning (technical, ethical and especially legal) ate up a great deal of GENEius' capital without bearing fruit. Two years ago, the company changed its focus (a move which prompted its co-founder, Dr. Loretta

Chen, to quit in protest) from discrete cloning to bioware prostheses. Put simply, GENEius worked to develop bioapps that resembled various organs and functioned the same way — much like the hardtech prostheses used now, though more versatile in application.

The company was more successful at this, but unfortunately the costs involved in gaining the necessary biotechnological data and the talent to take it to the cutting edge proved shockingly exorbitant. The fees that GENEius charged in an attempt to recoup even a portion of its ongoing development costs were staggering — anyone in need of a new organ could get a top of the line hardtech replacement heart for half the cost. The financial impetus to continue simply was not there.

The company was in desperate straits. Investors dropped like flies. As of the end of the last fiscal quarter, GENEius had been at work for half a decade and had absolutely nothing to show for it.

In a surprise move, GENEius opened a new research facility just a few months ago. Favorable development reports helped its stock rebound splendidly. Someone pumped a great deal of cash into GENEius at its moment of greatest need, and the biomed firm is obviously working on some big project. The company has made no announcements as to just *what* it's working on, but Dr. Chen was curious enough to do some checking and pass her findings on to us.

She said the big buzz around GENEius concerns what was initially considered a minor cosmetic development — a bioapp skin that closely resembled human skin. Dr. Chen also learned that the company was working closely with the interactive sim branch of Stahu Entertainment. An Æon investigative team poked around covertly and uncovered two additional interesting facts: first, that Tangent Technologies was retained to develop a marketing strategy. (We even managed to copy one proposal and its comments, which is reproduced below.) Second, we learned that the big investment came from North America, leading to the speculation that Orgotek was funding some long-shot, *outré*

research it didn't want coming out with its own logo stamped on it.

>>> OPEN MEDIA ARCHIVE <<<

Dreams You Can Touch

Have you ever wished your computer agent had a body? Not just a framework where the circuitry lived, but a warm, breathing human body?

The next generation of interaction is here. GENEius Incorporated has perfected an android so lifelike that it can fool even the closest inspection. In conjunction with Stahu Intersoft, the makers of the popular Victoria Companion software, GENEius is now taking orders for Victoria Walker — a dedicated version of the Victoria agent, in a body with her familiar appearance, but *tangible without a sim suit*.

[Insert holo graphic of Victoria Walker to left of text in final ad placement. Make sure the image is tweaked to key on the top desired physiological characteristics for each major market.]

[Contact and pre-order info goes at the bottom.]

>>> Comments <<<

The picture and title are perfect, but the text is a little weak, isn't it? Why do we need to be so circumspect? Half our target market has a cyberassociative or neuroaddictive disorder already. The "Bed Doll" concept is not going to repulse them. Why not just call a spade a spade? Also, the ending is weak. We need something strong to close the deal.

>>> CLOSE ARCHIVE <<<

>>> OPEN TRITON ARCHIVE <<<

Subject: They Walk Among Us?

From: Todd ibn Ishaq, Triton Division

To: Jose Miguel Valdez, Administrator, Triton Data Analysis: Earth

Security: DSE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 11:35:22 7.19.2121

This is too preliminary to even be a preliminary report, but I had a brainstorm I needed to pass on. We're looking at a company that, apparently,

is secretly developing an unformatted bioapp that can physically pass as a human being. I'm infamous for crying "Qin!" whenever I see bioware, but follow me on this and see if it doesn't make sense:

- 1) The Qin are parsecs ahead of us in biotech development.
- 2) If we consider something to be possible with biotech, *they* can probably do it already.
- 3) Therefore, the Qin could easily create biotech "human suits." (Personally, I've always wondered why the suits they wear in public are so obviously artificial.)

So the question is: have the aliens done it? (I know that if we were in their place, we would have. On the other hand, I know the dangers of ascribing human motivations to alien beings.) Bringing it back around to what we've seen here so far: Have the Qin provided the process to GENEius? Or, if they haven't achieved these advances on their own, are they working with GENEius on developing the technology?

You must admit that this sort of thing is right up the slugs' alley.

>>> CLOSE ARCHIVE <<<

Language Systems, Inc.

LSI is a giant in the vocoder industry. Its stock has been buoyant lately, bolstered by the anticipated release of "Vox Populi," the next generation of translation software. I've been lucky enough to examine one of the prototypes: the Vox Populi modules are smaller and lighter — more like earrings than the clunkier old vocoders. LSI also promises that the Vox Populi software has doubled the density of previous nuance sensitivity algorithms. In other words, it's supposed to take word choice, context and even tone into account when translating.

Some people theorized that the Populi would be an instant translator, like EZ-Voice (LSI's biggest competitor). It's not, and LSI defends its comparatively slow translation by phrase (rather than by word) with appeals to clarity. After all, there's a radical difference between Mandarin grammar and Deutsche. While it's only margin-

ally faster than last year's model, the Vox Populi is both smoother and clearer.

A more impressive innovation is the inclusion of a short range radio transceiver. This allows any two Vox Populi to "talk" to each other in a shared translation language — specifically, in esperanto — if needed. In effect, it doubles the translation time, but it allows any two (or more) people equipped with Vox Populi to understand each other — as long as they both understand one language coded into their translators.

LSI's research and development team recently got a green light for an even more ambitious project — a universal human translator (or UHT). LSI already has a huge central language database, which can translate between any two of its thousands of languages and dialects. The UHT would be a different type of machine altogether: instead of merely comparing and contrasting until the words matched up, it would be programmed to use the linguistic patterns imbedded in the human brain, forging deeper and truer connections between the two languages. Instead of translating like a person with a dictionary, it would have *true fluency*. In addition to being faster, a UHT would be efficient enough to distribute cheaply through the mass communication channels. For a nominal fee, a user could have every foreign speaker who calls translated.

There are rumors that LSI is looking even further. It's developed a fairly close relationship with the Qin over the years (having had little luck in making an alliance with China's Ministry). Now there's talk of forming a bioware arm of LSI to work on developing translators based on *telepathy*. This will obviously have huge appeal considering the diversity of human languages out there, but now that the Upeo are back, translating alien languages is going to be a huge business.

LSI has already filed a restraint-of-trade lawsuit in the FSA, claiming that Orgotek attempted to develop a monopoly on translating the Chromatic language. Considering the accusations floating around that claim Orgotek was actually

in league with the Chromatics, the Big O has taken the suit very seriously. Not only could a conviction (in a probably hostile FSA court) be expensive, the bad PR could be just as damaging for Orgotek — especially in light of the still-recent Huang-Marr scandal. My guess is Orgotek will play generous and openly give the results of its research to everyone. I also predict that the Federated States' CSA will claim that Orgotek is holding back and use it as a pretext to force its way into the company's database. But only time will tell.

I haven't been able to find out if there's any truth to the claims within Æon that LSI has offered enormous bounties for the intact, preserved brain of a Chromatic or any Coalition race. Since the details of the second Coalition encounter are still classified, this rumor has the flavor of urban legend. On the other hand, if LSI was willing to spy on its customers to advance its own agenda, it would certainly have the resources (both financial and technical) to do so effectively.

>>> OPEN TRITON ARCHIVE <<<

Corporate Training Factories

A Kazuhito Yamashita Exclusive

The conveyor belt is a long polymer streamer, gliding silently down a factory floor. From the ineffable bowels of huge plastic and metal machines, parts are extruded, plopping like dung nuggets into the hands of waiting workers. Each worker seizes their particular part and then inserts, installs or integrates it into a whole. At the beginning of the conveyor belt is a small, clunky servomotor. That's grabbed, and a little metal widget is stuck on. The belt moves, and a large plastic wheel is added. The belt moves, and two more protrusions are added, then two more at the next station. The belt moves every 20 seconds, and while the pieces at the beginning are fairly simple to add to the whole, at the end the workers' fingers must fairly fly, in unceasing motion for most of their four two hour shifts every day.

What is this? A struggling factory deep in the heart of France? A subversive cabal, desperately

producing weapons on Khantze Lu Ge? Karroo colonists trying to keep their ships running and their fooders fooding?

None of the above. All these workers are potential executives competing for positions in the upper echelons of the highly competitive Bootle Tootsie Toy Company (UAN).

“In order to manage effectively, one has to know the product — inside and out,” says Eggbert Schaeffer, one of the “workers” at the factory and a recent graduate Unified Lunar U’s school of business. “Nothing teaches you the parameters of the product, its tolerances and its strengths the way building one does.”

Even though the assembly could easily be done much faster by robots, the executives work slavishly — today they’re assembling interactive “Strike Force Psion” action figures — trying to stand out, trying to prove themselves worthy to be Bootle Tootsie managers.

“It’s tough,” says Kristi Paranagas, another would-be BT exec. “Everyone is constantly looking for a way to make the factory more efficient. There was a guy two years ago who figured out that assembling the components of Glinty the Clown Interaction Theater in a different order would shave a second and a half off assembly time. He jumped on the fast track: most people don’t make that much of a splash, but everyone’s trying to get ahead.”

Apparently some of the competitors aren’t above a little dirty pool: while none of the workers would confirm the story, two local cops told me they escorted three candidates away from the factory a month ago after they got into a brawl on the Purple Pupples Playset line.

“It turned out two of the guys thought the third was putting tranquilizers in their snack bars to slow them down and make them look bad. When they found out, they came after him looking for blood. When we got there, the accused poisoner had knocked one out with a taser, but the other had him down and was flogging him with a belt buckle.”

>>> CLOSE ARCHIVE <<<

North America

If an optimist can point to Africa as evidence of karma, a cynic could point to North America and say “See? It’s good to be bad.” Though still a shadow of its onetime glory, the Federated States have made something of a recovery. Industry rules the land in all but name, and it has created circumstances in which industry can thrive. Unions are dead and buried, their graves sown with salt. There’s no minimum wage and plenty of unemployed, desperate workers. Staffing is not a problem, and if you have factory casualties due to exhaustion or unsafe conditions, well, there are always more people in the fringe slums eager to get a steady paycheck in *any* factory no matter *what* the conditions.

North American companies are trying to make a go of it on the strength of plentiful manpower and sheer aggression. It would have worked in the past, but modern industry demands technical skill. A boundless supply of warm bodies won’t cut it anymore. The North American firms that succeed are generally those whose operations are half as efficient as their competitor’s, but four times as large. The exception to the rule, of course, is Orgotek — but Orgotek has problems of its own these days.

Orgotek

If you’ve got stock in Orgotek or its subsidiaries, my advice is to sell now. On the other hand, if you don’t have any stock in the Big O, wait a while longer before you buy: I suspect that their downward trend is going to continue.

A long-term recovery is possible, even likely. Orgotek’s assets, patents and presence have put it at the forefront of biotech research and production, and that industry as a whole has grown by leaps and bounds each year. On the other hand, Orgotek took a very bad one-two punch recently from which it’s still reeling.

The first blow was the Huang-Marr conspiracy. Some Orgotek and Æsculapian researchers were uncovered developing bioapps that created and harnessed actual taint radiation in order to boost psion power levels. The Huang-Marr cabal

secretly funneled Orgotek funds, equipment and facilities to carry out unethical (and usually deadly) experiments on unwilling human subjects. No definite link was ever made to top Orgotek executives, but rumors still abound.

Orgotek could normally have shrugged off such a jab with little difficulty — bandage it over with press releases and dismiss it as the actions of a few rogue researchers. Sure, Huang-Marr made the Big O look bad. However, most of the blame fell on the Æsculapians. The media concentrated on the rex angle, not only because that connection was far more concrete, but because it was more dramatic — humanity's healers gone rotten, etc. But though the docs got nailed, the teks still took a glancing blow.

Thing is, just as Orgotek was trying to clear its head from that shot, it got popped by the Chromatics. Remember those aliens suddenly appearing in our Solar System piloting what looked disturbingly like Orgotek-designed biofighters? The Chromatic ships were so similar that when Gleeful Thon released the *Lights in the Sky* sim game, Orgosoft lawyers sued them for copyright infringement! The Orgotek subsidiary claimed that the "Chromatic fighter" portrayed in the game conformed to trademarked Orgosoft designs. (A judge who examined the game and the military footage of the attack stated that Gleeful Thon was within the tolerances of historical accuracy, and that the portrayal of an historic event permitted the use of the design. She stated on record that if conceptual piracy had occurred, the Chromatics had committed it, not the game company.)

Let's be clear: extensive Æon research strongly suggests that Orgotek had nothing to do with the Chromatics' biotechnology. If the company *was* in league with the aliens, Cassel's admirable cadre of spin doctors would have at least developed a convincing lie months in advance. Indeed, considering how savvy the Prexy's shown himself in the past, I would think they would've created distinctly different ship designs to throw off suspicion. Instead, the psi order was caught totally off guard. Its conflicting, hasty press

releases supplement our behind-the-scenes research, indicating that the designs were somehow stolen or copied, just as Cassel claims. Unfortunately for him, a well-crafted lie would have persuaded more people than the blurted, stammering truth did.

Coming in such rapid succession, these two events have staggered even Orgotek's formidable PR machine. Currently, people aren't paying attention to Cassel's noble initiatives like Knowledge in Motion, and they're forgetting about the electrokinetics' defense of humanity against Aberrants. Instead, they're seeing Orgotek as a sinister, secretive force. Viewed as an army with inhuman powers performing inhuman experiments and tied to inhuman invaders, Orgotek is starting to live up to the FSA's accusations. At least, that's how it appears to the general public.

As if all this wasn't bad enough, the recently-returned Upeo wa Macho may deliver the knockout punch. The Æon Council hasn't released the full details behind the Upeo situation, but it appears that many teleporters bear a considerable grudge toward the Electrokinesis Order. We do know that the Upeo voluntarily left Earth in 2114 and that even before their departure, many were captured and enslaved by the Chromatics. Not surprisingly, I suppose, these Upeo slaves are among the staunchest believers that the aliens were in league with the teks. Even the Upeo who remained free after the Exodus accuse Orgotek of attempting to destroy or enslave them — the rationale the Upeo wa Macho offer for abandoning Earth in the first place.

Regardless of the truth of these accusations, Orgotek and its subsidiary companies are starting to face even more negative scrutiny. This certainly doesn't help the Big O's sales — especially into space, where Orgotek has been trying with little success to get jumpers to carry their freight. While Æon has given Orgotek access to jump ships, the Leviathans are far less cost effective than Upeo 'ports are. The jumper boycott has already pushed up the prices on those Orgosoft and Tekne products that have

made it to the deep space colonies. Coupled with its problems on Earth, a barrier to extraplanetary trade is the last thing that Orgotek needs.

>>> OPEN PROTEUS ARCHIVE <<<

Subject: Even worse

From: Jeff Kenyatta

To: Alex Cassel

Security: DSE

Transmission type: holofile

Date: 13:27:11 5.11.2121

Our mole in Æon finally came through with the results of its teleportation tests. The bad news is, the Trinity's been hiding someone with a teleportation mode, which *can* interfere with a Leviathan jump. The worse news is, their secret jumper only has it as an *auxiliary* mode.

Here it is: straight, no chaser. Jumpers can sabotage Leviathans. Æon's auxiliary jumper can impede a jump for about five minutes with effort. Now that the Upeo are back, the Trinity's started tests with real teleporters. That data's still out of our source's reach. Still, based on the worst-case scenarios we've extrapolated, a skilled full teleporter could stop a Leviathan *single-handedly*. Again, this is speculation currently, but I think we'd do well to expect the worst.

Alex, make peace with them if you can. I know you designed the jump ships' Tessers to give us a hundred back doors if we ever need them.

Problem is, what good does it do us to have every Leviathan under our control if the Upeo can pop in and shut 'em all down? We cannot afford to have the Upeo wa Macho as enemies.

>>> CLOSE ARCHIVE <<<

South America

In Africa, people work hard and it works. In the FSA, they work even harder, and it *almost* works. But to an outsider, it appears that South America's economy works *without* the work. It seems, like in the Taoist verse, that they "do nothing, yet nothing remains undone." The truth of the matter is more like a decidedly western adage about a swimming duck. Nothing seems to

happen on the surface, but underneath — where you can't see it — there is furious activity.

Kostbaar

Kostbaar — man, industry, legend and supposed "deity." What is one to make of the contradictions and conundrums that tie together Kostbaar, Kostbaarism and Kostbaar Ltd.?

The simplest explanation is that Kostbaar Ltd. is the sum of the relationship. An arrogant and talented young Dutch man took his family's small fortune and parlayed it into a gigantic fortune. As a small fashion house, Kostbaar innovated wildly. He aggressively became the leading edge of fashion, providing *couture* for only the richest and most hip. Once he'd caught people's attention, he moved downscale and began following the mainstream.

By toning down his earliest designs, Kostbaar gave people something identifiable instead of alienating. At the same time, he kept a great deal of the complexity and flair of his early work, so that his mainstream clothes were different enough to be intriguing. It seems to have worked: in the course of 20 years, Kostbaar went from following current fashion to practically dictating it (it helps that his main competition was lost in the *Esperanza* tragedy). He maintains a small line of top end designs (just to keep his cachet with the trendsetters) but most of the effort of Kostbaar Ltd. goes toward producing a full 20% of the clothing worn in all of settled space. If one believes that the company comes first, then Kostbaar's religious posturing becomes nothing more than the antics of a talented seeker of publicity.

An equally possible focus is Kostbaar the man. It may be that he is simply a supreme egoist, using every means at his disposal to live his life as flamboyantly as he wishes. Granted, one would need to be a megalomaniac to utter all of Kostbaar's statements in complete seriousness ("I am the dominant iteration of human consciousness, and I look *fabulous!*") but it's pretty clear that he does not mean them that way. If one adopts this attitude, then his life has been one long, convoluted expression of self. Not surpris-

ingly, self-expression (primarily through appearance) is a principle tenet of Kostbaarism.

Perhaps one of those theories, or a synthesis of both, is true. Perhaps either one (or both) were true in the past. However, when one examines Kostbaar's interviews and articles, it becomes increasingly difficult to think that's *all* there is. Whatever else he is, Kostbaar is certainly bright, even a genius in his own way. If personal luxury and indulgence were his only priorities, would he have gone to the trouble of writing a thousand page autobiography that manages to be more about history and society than about his personal experience? Furthermore, would he have written "Kostbaar Life" by himself, without the aid of either ghostwriter or SI composition software? Check the Triton archives on this: the manuscript was written entirely by hand.

Kostbaar is a rich man who likes to have fun. I don't doubt that. But Kostbaar is also a smart man who wants to spread some pretty important ideas. (At least, *he* thinks they're pretty important.) First and foremost is the importance of self-expression. Cynics argue that "Kostbaar wants everyone to be their own art — and he'll sell them the paint." Yet Kostbaar's innovations in color-tuned clothes and programmed patterns took old optic-weave fibers in entirely new directions.

Perhaps most importantly, Kostbaar constantly challenges the barriers between people and cultures. His very life calls into question the distinction between "individual" "corporation" and "religion." History may record that Kostbaar has done humanity a service simply by widely calling those categories into question.

Apoderado Designs

Every so often, some software company goes charging up the hill of Artificial Intelligence, only to come tumbling back down without reaching the summit. Sometimes they fall with an innovative new code trick or algorithm set clutched in their hands, but no one has gotten the brass ring from the top of the mountain — a truly intelligent and self-aware machine.

Apoderado is making the climb most recently. Like every other software firm, they've got talent, moxie and venture capital. Unlike the others, they've got help from the Norça as well.

Common wisdom has it that the psion particle is the key to self-awareness: other machines could mimic the chemical functions of the brain with greater or lesser success, but none could *reproduce* the brain's noetic interactions. Now Apoderado is working with the del Fuego family on a biocomp that has noetic circuits in addition to standard bioelectric ones. In theory, this noetic computer will be capable of true reflection and free will. Rumor is, it will have to spend its first years of existence formatted to a psion, sharing that psion's perceptions and experiences. By observing the universe through a human medium, the computer will come to be intellectually conscious on its own, just like a human.

Given current computer and noetic theory, it is possible, I suppose. I wouldn't bet the farm on it, though. The few times I've mentioned the idea to our Qin friends, they let out that odd, confusing sound they use for laughter.

>>> OPEN MEDIA ARCHIVE <<<

How To Dress Like a Billionaire

— Dazyl Grenich, *Lifestyles* © 2120 MMI

My fashion advice for the new decade is simple: no plain, no gain. The complicated patterns, the jingling hooks, the buttons and buckles and flaps of yesteryear are still fashion forward — if you're touring an FSA arco or visiting your grandparents. If you're dressing to be seen, though, pick one color and wear it. At the Sydney Media Awards, Cori Heisler was wearing a fabulous white sheath from Risoletto designs. (Congratulations on winning a Syd, Cori!)

And you won't see her in that gown again, sweethearts! You see, each Risoletto gown has no fasteners — specialized looms weave each dress design on the buyer's body to get a sheer, perfect fit. The only way to get it off is to cut it or tear it!

For the serious businessman, the latest fashion is *ultrablack*. This new biotech fiber was devel-

oped by Artemis fashions — with (it's rumored) a little help from the Qin. The amazing thing about ultrablack is that it sucks light in. Wearing it is like being wrapped up in night. A few lunar rakehells like to mix an ultrablack coat with a glossy black turtleneck and flat black slacks. For the heavy hitters in the business world, though, nothing makes a statement like a double-breasted ultrablack suit with a white or ivory shirt.

Word from the rumormill is that Kostbaar isn't too happy with the competition from these new innovators. You know what I say, darlings? It's about time our special K had a wake-up call in the fashion department!

>>> CLOSE ARCHIVE <<<

Australia

Australia is a prime example of a “virtual economy” — a marketplace, not of physical goods and practical services, but of ideas and high concepts and inchoate desires. The Australian megameds produce comparatively little that can be touched or felt, but their manipulation of perceived value makes it a multibillion yuan industry. As noted earlier, the *perception* of value is often of greater worth than value itself. A mediocre product with excellent buzz will handily outsell an excellent product with a mediocre reputation.

MMI, Genman, Stahu and the other megameds have an interesting — and powerful — position in the international marketplace. Each megamed consolidated scores of previously independent news and entertainment sources. Despite their pretence of impartiality, Genman and MMI news should be viewed with some caution when they report on the actions of other corporations. In the rarefied atmosphere occupied by the largest metanationals, every action is taken with full consideration of the repercussions for other metanats. If Genman runs a report saying that the new Reed Rosen design is unsafe, you can be sure that Genman has something to gain from Reed Rosen's loss: similarly, any praise doled out by MMI is likely to be part of a hidden, baroque but very real *quid pro quo*.

As for Stahu, its influence is subtler but possibly even more pervasive. People watching Genman and MMI believe they're watching the truth, and they consider everything they see with the skepticism accorded to assertions of fact. Stahu, on the other hand, produces entertainment, and someone watching a fiction is much less likely to be distrustful. Perversely, the subconscious lessons learned watching “Laser Robot Death Police” or “Settlers in the Belt” may be more influential in the long run.

FangTech

FangTech stands out among the large Australian companies because its interest is remarkably tangible: Compared with the advanced marketing paradigms of MMI or OBC, the idea of building a better vehicle to go new places seems almost medieval.

FangTech just unveiled its prototypes for deep space mining equipment. While rock mining is lucrative and established, FangTech's designs are intended for use in the riskier, newer field of gas mining — sending ships skimming across the tops of gas giant planets in order to siphon off useful materials. With their experience building undersea vehicles, FangTech is an old hand at providing skin integrity and maneuverability in varying pressures.

They are also said to be working on a “trybrid” craft — one capable of vacuum flight, atmospheric flight, *and* subsea operation. Such a craft would allow a gas miner to skim Saturn or Jupiter for water or other gasses, getting down into the atmosphere until the pressure was as great as any oceanic pressure on Earth, then emerge and get the goods to market all without the pilot leaving the craft. FangTech will likely position the craft as “one stop shopping” come to the water mining industry.

Another blue sky project for FangTech is a mantle craft. Using oluminium and other orbital materials, FangTech is hoping to produce an unmanned craft that can travel not only through the pressures of deep sea water, but through the earth's molten core. The scientific possibilities of such an endeavor are staggering: if the continen-

tal shelves could be mapped from underneath, predicting earthquakes would become far more exact. Such a durable craft could be modified for extraterrestrial use as well, of course: something with heat shielding that good would be able to make a detailed survey of Earth's sun, or of the Karroo pulsar.

Asia

China casts a long shadow across Asia, and that shadow is peculiar, from a corporate standpoint. China is a manufacturing powerhouse, but its goods are rarely exported: instead, they're exchanged and allocated within the country, under the supposedly benign eye of the Party. Of course, these communists are firm believers in "incentives" — a worker who meets his goals has yuan to exchange for "luxury" items like extra food and increased heat in his flat. On the other hand, even the laziest, least competent worker in China is living the good life compared to many in the FSA and Europe.

Compared to Asia's introverted economy, Nippon has a definite interest in trade — but only according to its own agenda. No biotech comes in. Certain computer processes never go out. What Nippon wants from the outside universe is biomass and raw materials, and what it offers in return are ephemeral (but essential) technological advances. Neither commodity has value forever: rice rots, steel rusts, and ideas become obsolete when the next brilliant programmer has a breakthrough. That's why the Nihonjin government has given tremendous support to ToshiGinko. Money, credit and liquid capital show no signs of losing their value any time soon.

Wazukana

Humanity's biggest computer company has its problems. If it standardizes its systems, it runs the risk of its software being used on rival hardware. If it doesn't standardize, it risks losing hardware sales to platforms that can run the latest must-have agent. Since Wazukana is at the forefront, any radical innovation it makes has a good chance of making its goods less profitable:

but the computer field has always been one where innovation can yield shocking rewards.

One piece of good news for the Nippon metanet is the current distress of Orgotek. As far as Wazukana is concerned, every day (and every yuan) the EK order spends dealing with suspicion, lawsuits and bad PR is one it *doesn't* spend developing biocomputers. Wazukana is well aware that a "lesser" biotech firm might come up with something, but considers Orgosoft the only major threat. As it sees things, only WEI has the clout to push biocomps into household use, or to make them a business standard.

Wazukana is built on a highly competitive model. Indeed, many openly call it "sharkish." Wazukana is not expected to compete with other companies: with its tremendous dominance, that's no challenge. It expects to ruin, assimilate or bury the competition. No, to forestall complacency, Wazukana has focussed its competitive structure inward, forcing its separate divisions (business hardware, business agents, home software, home utility agents, home entertainment agents) to compete with *each other* for profitability. The chief of the lead division gets a staggering bonus budget each year to trickle down through the works as he or she sees fit. The least profitable division suffers a universal wage freeze for the year — no one gets a raise, not even a cost of living increase.

The problem with this system is that when a division falls into last place, it tends to stay there as its best employees jump ship for other companies — or even other divisions within Wazukana. Accordingly, the power politics at Wazukana are both Byzantine and brutal.

>>> OPEN PROTEUS ARCHIVE <<<

Transmission Intercept: Wazukana Internal ComNet

— Proteus agent intercept, codefile EPP23, 8.17.2120

Individuals identified as Niimi Ryu (Vice President) and Bruce Reddell (Senior Director, New Projects), Wazukana/ EnterAgency. Translated from Nihonjin.

>>> transmission intercept begins <<<

Niimi Ryu: ...asked for a status report, not a sermon.

Bruce Reddell: I'm sorry, ma'am, but I've just been thinking about the publicity backlash if this gets out.

NR: It's not going to get out, and even if it does, who's going to break the story? One of Stahu's pathetic news outlets? Four viewers will see it and two of them will think Stahu is trying to shift the blame for poisoning its customers. Or do you think Genman or MMI is going to give much time and attention to a story that makes one of their huge competitors look *less* monstrous? Use your head for once. Even if someone wanted to blab this to the public, no one would dare. Losing our advertising would leave them bleeding, not to mention their reliance on tech support. It's not getting out. And, again, if it does, no one will believe it.

BR: All right. It's just... what if the virus mutates?

NR: We're paying giga bucks for a stable, unpleasant but *nonlethal* virus. Do I have to tell you what's at stake here? Interactive porn is a *trillion yuan market*. If this Stahu/GENE-whatever thing can do even half the business we project, it's going to throw sales from our division into a tailspin.

BR: But infecting customers... I guess I just don't like the precedent.

NR: They're not *our* customers. Do you want to see Wazukana/ EnterAgency become the last place division?

BR: No. But we're kind of putting all our eggs in one risky basket. What about our research on Humanimates?

NR: Years away from what they've got. Besides, why should we bother doing all the expensive R&D? Once their venture fails — spectacularly — we swoop in, buy them up at a discount, wait a couple years until the buzz dies down, then bring them out with *our* software. There is way too much money at stake here to bother with your selfish doubts, Bruce. Now, can I rely on

you, or do you want to go slinking back to fucking DataWarp?

BR: ...No, Ms. Niimi. I mean, yes, you can rely on me.

NR: Good. Now, is the virus ready?

BR: Yes. It's harmless to the GENEius bioware, but causes fever and skin blisters in humans for about 20 days. It's only contagious through fluid exchange.

NR: Stupendous. Now, our plant in Africa — this is someone we can rely on?

BR: Absolutely. The agent is in place and will have access to the Victoria Walker master gene matrix.

NR: Superb. All we have to do is dose the DNA, sit back while our rivals implode, then buy up the pieces at a discount. See? Didn't I tell you that you'd get on the fast track with us?

BR: Yes ma'am. You certainly did.

>>> transmission intercept ends <<<

>>> CLOSE ARCHIVE <<<

Europe

What is there to say about Europe? Business can only thrive when it can compete, and Europe has been knocked back to subsistence farming in many areas. It doesn't have the capital, the infrastructure or the consumer awareness to make a dent in sales from companies in the UAN or Luna. With a few notable exceptions in shielded countries, Europe is moving into an incestuous business spiral. Foreign markets don't want many European goods: the manufacturers don't have the advertising budget to create cachet or the shipping budget to make bargains. So European companies count on local sales, and adapt themselves to that market by producing their goods as inexpensively as possible. No one outside Europe wants its cheap goods. No one inside Europe can afford anything else.

Voss Armaments

The exception to the dismal rule of European commerce is Voss Armaments. The story of its success dates back to 2050, when it developed

the Voss 1S1 — the first laser pistol that operated off the same cells used for commercial appliances. Though underpowered compared to other laser weapons of its age, the 1S1 triumphed because it was easy to find ammunition — even in an emergency situation, when specialized laser clips were hard to come by. Voss diversified into power cell production, and eventually common appliances were taking cells that had enough juice for a laser pistol, rather than vice versa.

When *Esperanza* was launched, Voss was one of the few major European companies with no manufacturing space on it. (Reed Rosen was another, claiming that it was just wasteful to build cars in orbit and import them back down to Earth.) Voss was conservative, having been burned just a year before when a product that made heavy use of compounds that could only be manufactured in zero-g showed significant malfunctions when subjected to high pressures on Earth. When the Aberrants returned, Voss factories were protected enough to escape their depredations — and the demand for heavy plasma weaponry was greater than ever.

Today, Voss produces the most popular laser weapons in Europe, the most popular hardtech lasers in the Solar System, and the most popular plasma weapons anywhere. Demand among Legionnaires for the new Voss 22P plasma pistol (commonly called the “deuce deuce”) is so great that Voss has temporarily taken it off the market for non-military consumers.

With its profit margin secured by multiple arenas — the ongoing conflict on Khantze Lu Ge, the threat of the Coalition and tensions in Europe’s Deutsche Allianz and New Ottoman Empire — Voss has the resources to plan for the future. Specifically, it is looking for hardtech solutions to biotech threats.

In essence, Voss is drawing a distinction between “living,” “machine” and “biotech” and hoping to find something that is only harmful to the last category. Early lab reports describe experiments with clouds of nanomachines (probably based on licensed Nippon tech) that search for the organic

signatures of bioware and attack them. The early verdict is that the nanomachines aren’t discerning enough. If they’re small enough to function as gaseous cells, they can’t tell the difference between biotech cells and other inert but organic materials (such as silk, dead wood, certain plastics, human hair, etc.). If built large enough to be picky, they’re too expensive and complicated to cover a large area.

Another possibility is producing some sort of noetic disruption — a tiny reflection of a jump ship’s psionic backlash could (theoretically) be tuned enough to temporarily “stun” any bioapps in an area while leaving human beings unharmed. The big drawback of this approach is that no one knows how to generate noetic particles with hard tech. (Of course, if Voss can find a way to produce psion particles — even untuned ones — with only hard tech, the implications will reach much farther than a mere bioapp-disabling weapon.)

As for using biotech to produce the pulse, such a weapon would self-destruct when used. A noetic pulse grenade might be possible, but the common feeling among experts is that using one such grenade would probably set off all other nearby grenades of the type — meaning that you could only usefully carry one. In any event, biotech is not Voss’ *forté*.

Simply the possibility of such a weapon has many biotech producers concerned, of course. Voss claims it’s doing this to protect humanity (and considering the use of biotech by the Chromatics, it has a good claim) but it can’t have escaped the hardtech armaments manufacturer’s attention that such a weapon would render many competing products obsolete.

>>> **SPACE TEMPLATE** <<<

Corporate Life in Near Space

Luna is a center for commerce in the Solar System. Its advantages — central location, weak gravity well, high population — more than offset the costs of maintaining the settlements’ structural integrity. Perhaps the biggest factors in Luna’s favor, however, are simply newness and

organization. Many business infrastructures on Earth have been in place (one way or another) for centuries. Potential inefficiencies were built into the system decades before the technologies they impede were developed — but once the problems became apparent, the cost of fixing them far outweighed the gains. On Luna, however, the comparative newness has allowed investors to use the most advanced techniques and technologies, in the most efficient fashion.

Stavros Weapons Designs

Stavros, maker of the notorious “pimp daddy” model autopistol, has had several tough months due to a confluence of factors. One not-so-subtle factor was the clear presentation of its weapons in the hands of a gang of irritating, treacherous, inept and repugnantly perverse criminals in the popular vid “Red Sunset II: Darkness Falls.” This, in turn, was arguably due to pressure from Pope Benedict XVIII, who has publicly condemned Stavros for refusing to contribute to his international fund for the victims of violence.

Every other major handgun manufacturer agreed to raise the price of each weapon by two yuan, earmarking those monies for the papal fund. Stavros initially refused, reasoning that its niche was producing inexpensive guns and that its consumer base was unlikely to let a religious condemnation deter them from bargain hunting.

The company’s existing consumer base changed little. The real pinch came from investments. Newsflats made enough of the story that a number of Stavros investors bailed out — presumably due to “issues of conscience.” Once the price of the stock dipped, other Stavros investors got spooked, jumped ship and the stock price dropped even more. Stavros tried to alleviate the resulting cash crunch through a small price raise. The MMI special “Looking Out for Number Yuan” claimed that Stavros was betraying its previous rhetoric by raising its prices like everyone else — then pocketing the money instead of donating it. This alienated some Stavros consumers, who may not have cared about the Pope’s fund, but they weren’t about to stand for being robbed.

After nine months, Stavros caved in and joined the papal fund, but by then the damage was done. However, its stock has seen a price upturn recently as people trade on the rumor that Stavros is getting into a new field. Æon knows that these rumors are true. Stavros has acquired a license to produce zero-gravity weapons for use in vacuum. In short, weapons for space ships and space stations.

We’ve long suspected Stavros of underworld ties, but the company always seemed content to sell handguns to street toughs. It could be that the company is moving into a higher stakes field — arming pirates. Stavros’ Luna base puts the company in an ideal position to service that particular market. On the other hand, previews of its marketing data indicate that Stavros is planning to pitch these devices to asteroid miners who are afraid of pirate attack.

We haven’t been able to get a look at actual designs (tentatively titled the “Ship Guard” line). When asked, sources inside Stavros indicate that most SG prototypes seem to lean toward single use, fire and forget systems. If this is true, it does seem likely that they’re being designed for emergency defense, rather than sustained use.

>>> OPEN MEDIA ARCHIVE <<<

Our Customers Are #1

— Excerpt: Stavros press release, 2.17.2121

Recently, Stavros was invited to contribute to a religious fund. We declined. In response, we have been slandered, vilified and publicly condemned. Now we’re going to tell our side of the story.

If Orgotek, Aris, Voss and the rest of them want to band together in a price fixing scheme — and no matter how well intentioned the Pope’s fund is, it all amounts to gouging — that’s their business. Our business is, and always has been, providing personal protection technology that is both reasonable and reliable. Our customers know exactly what they’re getting, and they know they’re paying a fair price for it. We aren’t making pretty guns for firearm fetishists, and we’re not selling overpriced heavy weapons to

spendthrift governments. We make no-frills, decent sidearms for the defense of everyday people. If our customers want to contribute to the Catholic Church, more power to them. But we're not going to force them to.

Our business is protecting freedom, not taking it away.

>>> **CLOSE ARCHIVE** <<<

ICE

The International Consortium on Ecomining has embarked on a bold new enterprise — interstellar colonization. While the costs of starting an extrasolar colony are usually estimated in trillions, ICE's new subsidiary — ICE Interstellar — claims that a self-sufficient colony can be built for only one billion yuan.

The typical extrasolar colony has always been built on a planetary (or lunar) surface, predicated on an import/ export economy, stabilized with gravcrystals and other high tech solutions. Our current colonies were all built on extraordinary systems — either those with marginally Earthlike planets (KLG and Averiguas) or those with mineral or scientific value (Far Nyumba and Karroo). ICE Interstellar proposes to colonize solar systems that early clairsentient scans dismissed as marginal. All a human colony needs (it claims) is carbon, water, iron, nickel and silicon. If a system has enough of those elements, in close enough proximity, a self-sufficient colony can be established with as few as 500 people. Given the parameters ICE has set, over a dozen systems ISRA has catalogued would be suitable.

The key to the ICE Interstellar scheme is using the simplest and most reliable technology possible — almost exclusively hardtech. It proposes building modular units that can be assembled into gigantic space cities. The units, while large, are simple in design. The biggest cost is materials, not technology or construction (as with all of humanity's other space stations to date). The ICE stations would operate on hyper-fusion and solar power. Everything would be built to double the tolerances of normal space stations, without

many of the high tech elements that are considered “natural” to a space station. For instance, no gravcrystals would be used: each station would spin to produce artificial gravity. Instead of costly, reusable meteor defense cannons, a few disposable warheads would be taken for large “nemesis” asteroids: the station walls would simply be built thick enough to withstand most meteor strikes. If more armor was needed, rock could easily be mined from the system itself.

A 500-person colony would need one large freighter and two small mining ships, capable of either mining an asteroid belt or skimming the atmosphere of a gas giant (if the system had an appropriate planet). The population could triple in size before it would need to expand the city, and with that much person-power they'd be able to create their own habitat modules from local asteroids. That's the theory, anyhow.

Biological needs are the biggest barrier, and ICE Interstellar claims to have overcome this obstacle with help from the Qin, who have developed several “symbiot species” able to produce food, oxygen and potable water from human byproducts and either sunlight or electricity.

<1>Deep Space

Business in deep space is the most long term, risky, investment-intensive environment there is. Consequently, the profit potential is also the highest, but almost no one can afford the stakes except governments and metanats. The Upeo strike (because that's what it really amounts to) was a blindside attack against those who invested in extrasolar colonies. Now the teleporters are back on the job and facing competition in the form of Leviathans (licensed out by Æon, of course) and the small band of Star-Crossed. Still, it's anyone's guess if extrasolar commerce can recover any time soon.

Karroo Mining Consortium

Karroo is doing well, financially. Chromatic attacks drastically cut down the colony's mining output, and the mining it did was for materials to repair the station. However, with recontact and steady jumps between Karroo and Sol, there's a

tremendous market for Karroo minerals. The main reason for this is a sense of altruism. People like to feel they're helping the less fortunate through their purchases, and the plight of embattled Karroo is dramatic enough that everyone wants a piece of it. The money and material that have been charitably donated to Karroo are approaching staggering levels: it would take two Leviathan jumps just to carry all the food and clothing: there's enough for every individual on Karroo for 100 years.

Few people recall that Karroo was originally established as a research outpost as well as a mining station. The scientists on hand during the lost years studied as much of the Crab Nebula as they could. They also spent quite a bit of time observing the Chromatics. Their findings are currently in great demand by numerous Earthside agencies, and have already resulted in an influx of even more scientists — from astronomers and physicists eager to learn more about the unique nebula to exobiologists and exosociologists rushing to examine the remaining Chromatics.

This same sense of drama makes Karroo attractive to a few well-heeled tourists and to the boldest of neutral pioneers. While many people on Karroo want nothing more than to get back to Earth, there are plenty of people on Earth who are eager to weave themselves into the story of Karroo.

The Star-Crossed

While not a corporation in the traditional sense, the so-called "Star-Crossed" teleporters are certainly a major factor in any consideration of interstellar commerce. The Star-Crossed are those teleporters who have broken all ties with the Upeo wa Macho and operate independently of Bolade Atwan's authority.

Though small in number, the Star-Crossed have already made substantial sums of money by moving goods and personnel for two clients the Upeo seem disinclined to work with — the Ministry and Orgotek. The jumpers' willingness to work with Orgotek may decrease as time goes by, however: without a Prometheus chamber, the

only way the Star-Crossed can grow is by recruiting those already accepted by Atwan. (Considering the Upeo Proxy makes a point of choosing candidates who show the order great loyalty, pickings are bound to be slim. After all, the Star-Crossed themselves make up less than 5% of the total number of active teleporters.) So far, most of the Star-Crossed's new members have come from those jumpers who were held captive by the Chromatics during the time of the Upeo exodus. Many of these recently-liberated teleporters are convinced that Orgotek was in league with their alien captors, and refuse to work for or with the Big O.

In any event, this should not be considered to be a corporate competition in the classic sense. The Upeo still base their prices on their personal priorities (instead of charging what the market will bear) and the Star-Crossed are at a definite disadvantage in terms of numbers and experience. On the other hand, it's more competition than teleportation had before. What happens next is anyone's guess.

>>> END FIELD REPORT <<<

Corporate Life Credits

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