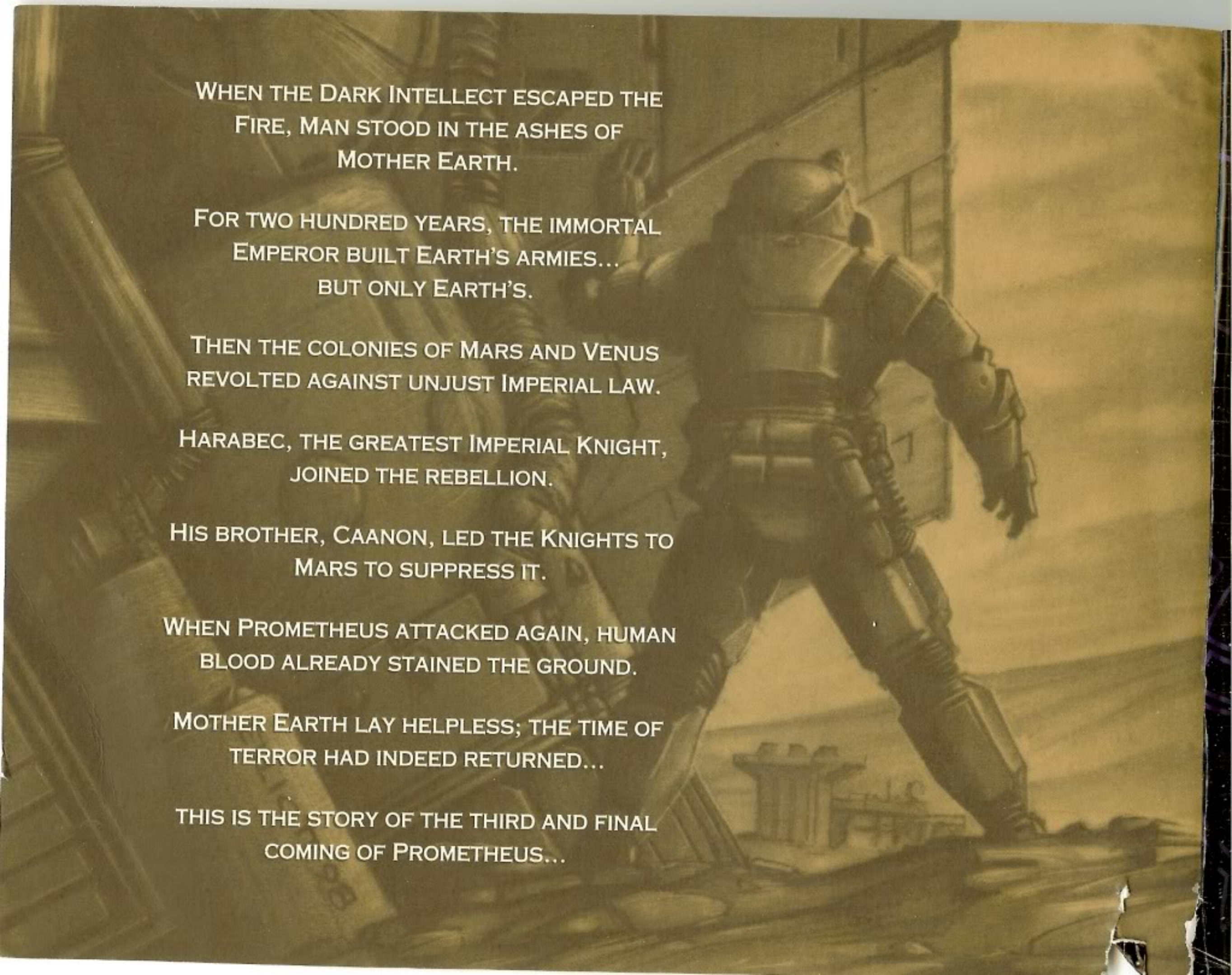




STARSIEGE™

C O M P E N D I U M

History of the Conflict



WHEN THE DARK INTELLECT ESCAPED THE
FIRE, MAN STOOD IN THE ASHES OF
MOTHER EARTH.

FOR TWO HUNDRED YEARS, THE IMMORTAL
EMPEROR BUILT EARTH'S ARMIES...
BUT ONLY EARTH'S.

THEN THE COLONIES OF MARS AND VENUS
REVOLTED AGAINST UNJUST IMPERIAL LAW.

HARABEC, THE GREATEST IMPERIAL KNIGHT,
JOINED THE REBELLION.

HIS BROTHER, CAANON, LED THE KNIGHTS TO
MARS TO SUPPRESS IT.

WHEN PROMETHEUS ATTACKED AGAIN, HUMAN
BLOOD ALREADY STAINED THE GROUND.

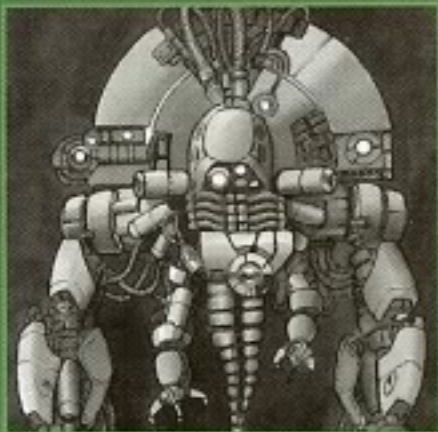
MOTHER EARTH LAY HELPLESS; THE TIME OF
TERROR HAD INDEED RETURNED...

THIS IS THE STORY OF THE THIRD AND FINAL
COMING OF PROMETHEUS...



SOLOMON PETRESUN,
*Emperor of the Great
Human Empire*

The man behind the creation of Prometheus, he would rise to rule humanity and stand as the Cybrids' greatest foe.



PROMETHEUS,
*The Dark Intellect,
leader of the Cybrids*

Mankind's greatest, most brilliant creation, IT would become the most implacable and terrible enemy humanity would ever face.

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CAANON WEATHERS,
*Grand Master of the
Imperial Knights*

Utterly devoted to duty, this supreme soldier would take a holy oath to destroy his younger brother in the name of the Empire.



HARABEC WEATHERS,
*Renegade Imperial
Knight turned rebel
general*

Once the greatest Knight of the Empire, this wild card in the games of the Emperor would galvanize the Martian rebels into challenging the power of Earth.

Teddy kicks some dusty
Cybrids are all rusty
Mommy's burning!
Mommy's burning!
All
 Fall
 Down!

One laser
Two laser
Red laser
Blue laser

When Toaster smokes our Mom all smelly
And stomps our Dad to bloody jelly

Save one
Save two
Save red
Save blue
For me
For you.

Little old Peter
Missing his liter
While Herky plays in the red
Down came the glitches
And burned us in ditches
And we slept after eating our dead.

— Schoolyard chants, circa 2800

AS A SOCIETY WE ARE DEEPLY SCARRED...



Micro-turbulence rattled Caanon through the antikinetic foam cocooning his Herc. His bones ached. Martian terrain blurred red across the holowindow on his HUD, the red of dried blood and old sins. It was fitting, he thought, to confront his traitor brother in a place named for the god of war.

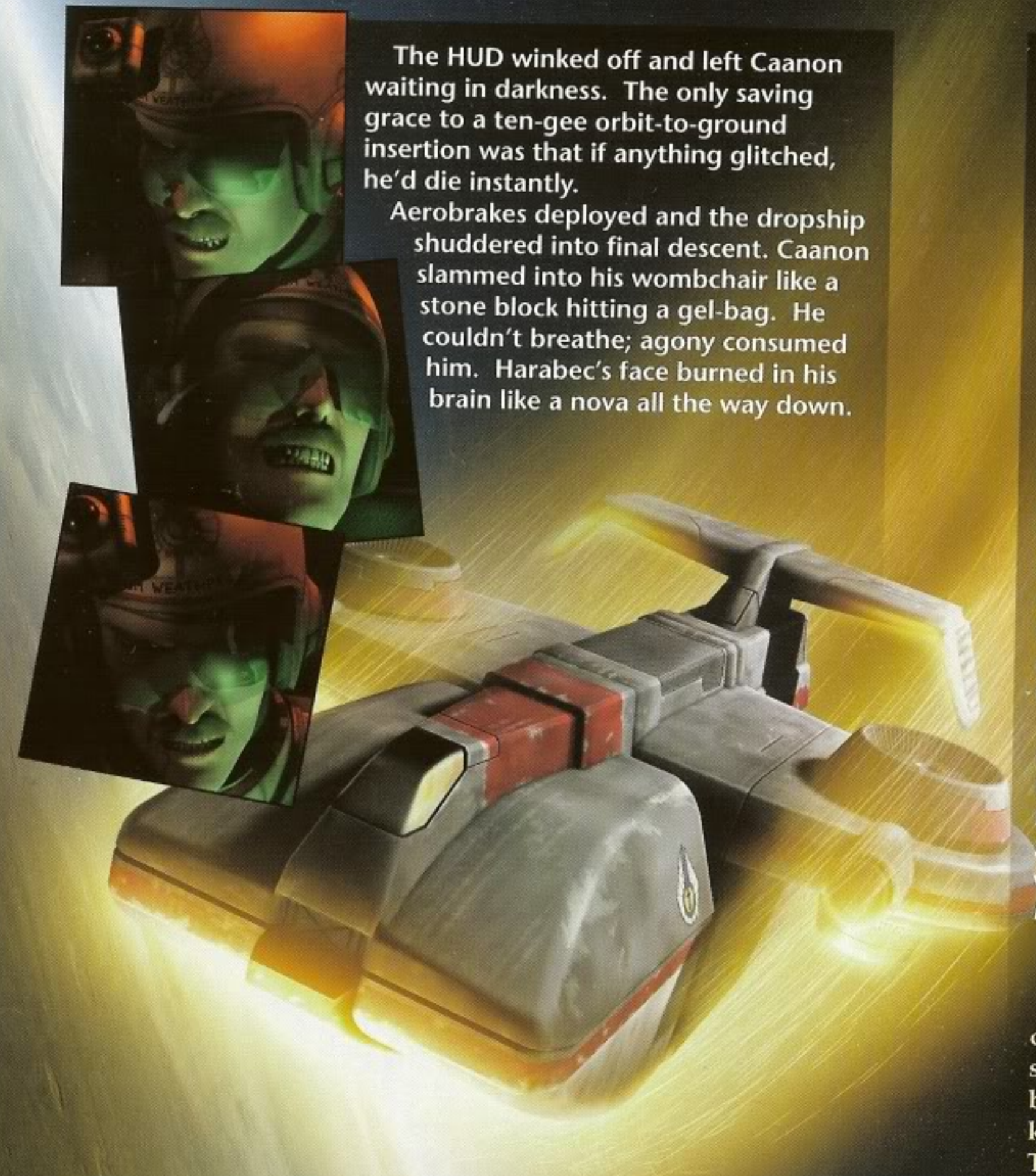
*Are you there, Harabec?
Can you feel my presence?*

Harabec shifted uneasily. Something felt wrong.

The ambush had been easy to plan, thanks to TDF broadcasts announcing the landing site. Arrogant bastards, the Knights. Dared you to face them. Well, that crap didn't help 'em in Turkhazakistan.

Didn't help you there, either, Harabec reminded himself. *Not a bit.*





The HUD winked off and left Caanon waiting in darkness. The only saving grace to a ten-gee orbit-to-ground insertion was that if anything glitched, he'd die instantly.

Aerobrakes deployed and the dropship shuddered into final descent. Caanon slammed into his wombchair like a stone block hitting a gel-bag. He couldn't breathe; agony consumed him. Harabec's face burned in his brain like a nova all the way down.

The sense of doom nagged at Harabec. He'd retracted the spythread to save it the shock of the Imperial landing, so he was blind for the moment, which didn't help.

His instincts told him he'd missed something. *Think, for Hunter's sake!*

The ground rumbled, buffeting his Herc even under its protective camouflage. The Imperials had arrived.

Caanon realized he was clenching his fists, waiting for the shockharness to blast him with adreno-jolt. It wasn't supposed to hit conscious pilots, but it'd malfunctioned last time. The price had been two days of migraines and nausea. Not this time, thank Hunter.

He ignored his aching body and ran a post-drop check. The hatch blew and the foam around his Herc began to boil away on contact with atmosphere. Caanon popped the vehicle restraints and moved *Icemistress* out, her weapons on-line.

I'm here, Harabec. Come to me.

Harabec tried to stretch in the cramped confines and considered the situation. Knights didn't rattle easy, but the new rebel weapons ought to knock the dustin' starch out of 'em. The rebs had all seen combat now,

but most were still pretty green, like Verity. She was an innocent kid, not like that BioDerm psycho.

Father, I'm going to kick your precious Knights in the teeth. Remember Turkhazakistan? They can be taken.

So can you, a voice whispered in the back of his head. So can you.

He snaked the spythread up slowly.

The canopy cleared suddenly as the last foam vaporized. Dust from the landing still hazed the air. A rugged landscape rose around Caanon as *Icemistress* clanged down the ramp. Anticipation filled him.

Scans showed nothing but TDF forces and the ruins of the base. His Hercs moved through the rusty haze, forming squads.

Caanon thumbed his comm. "CC to all Swords. Report by squad ..."

The menacing, brightly painted Hercs filled Harabec with dread. He'd worried for one heartstopping moment that the sonic boom of their landing would blow off some camo, but the foam that turned the Imperial radar probes also killed most of the sonics. As he'd hoped. Everything looked jake. The Knights just needed to step into the killzone.

So what was wrong?

Harabec! Caanon remained impassive even in the privacy of his Herc cockpit, but freezing anger filled his chest. Harabec had betrayed everything he'd been given, everything he was – everything! He'd shamed the family name.

Harabec. I'll lay your poisonous head at His Majesty's feet or lie in a Martian grave. I swear it.



Whoa. That's *Caanon!* What was he doing here? The Grand Master on the first wave was like a general hitting the beach with the marines.

That's what he'd missed; he hadn't expected to face his brother so soon. Why hadn't he seen this? No matter. Now it was personal. Okay, Caanon, if this is how you want it...

Hunter's bones, Harabec thought bitterly. When you betray family, go all the way.

He signaled his troops to select targets as Caanon's Herc filled his sights.

Caanon keyed his command channel. "Saber, on Falchion's right flank! Broadsword, you're two ticks behind! Tighten up!"

Are you watching, brother? Harabec had something planned. He was smart, cagey. Something would happen soon. Well, here I am. Let's see your cards.

"Tighten up, all squads," Caanon ordered. "Status is red and hot. Anything moves, *vape* it."



The Teddies were in the killzone. Harabec shot a last bleak look at Caanon in the Knights, directing traffic. His hand hesitated over the signal switch.

Caanon, why did you have to be first? Damn you! He slapped the switch. His Herc erupted from the sand, weapons blazing.

"Nail 'em!" he shouted. "FREE MARS!"





<Chooser-of-Strategies: Prime> considered the data. The human\animals fought each other on Fourth Planet. <Third Planet\Homeworld> was undefended.

<First-Thought//Giver-of-Will> was correct. This would be an efficient operation.

<Chooser-of-Strategies: Prime> signaled the armada: *INITIATE ATTACK SEQUENCE >> APPROACH FROM SUNSIDE >> MASK DRIVE FLARES >> EVASION\STEALTH. ACKNOWLEDGE//SUBMIT!*

Nav units chimed their



acknowledgement\submission. The sensors of <Chooser-of-Strategies: Prime's> flagship showed the vast armada shifting to attack formation, thousands of drives brightening in perfect concert. <Chooser-of-Strategies: Prime> perceived emotion at the sight. It believed the feeling was classified as *Pride*.

Sentinel Cybertronix unveils Prometheus.



Solomon Petresun, the "Voice of Humanity," emerges triumphantly from his underground refuge with the news that coded Cybrid transmissions have been broken, revealing the location of Prometheus' base on the moon.



Terran Defense Force defeats Prometheus on Earth, ending the first phase of Earthsiege. Prometheus escapes.

Inception of The Great Human Empire. Petresun I crowned Emperor.

2602 2605

2624

2627

2471

THE FIRE. Cybrids turn on humanity and destroy the Age of Hope. Earthsiege begins.



A series of defeats forces Earth's people to withdraw support for the fledgling colonies on Luna, Mars, Venus, and outlying mining stations. The colonists suffer massive casualties. Survival is the best they can hope for.

2622

The second phase of Earthsiege begins as the Cybrids invade Earth again with reinforcements drawn from the colonial fronts.

2625

End of *THE FIRE.* The daring destruction of Prometheus' moon base fails to uncover signs of the dark intellect itself. Prometheus is again presumed to have escaped with its core matrix intact. Cybrid drive emissions indicate a trajectory toward the outer planets. Dazed but jubilant humans begin to rebuild. Anti-technology reaction begins to set in.

2652





Fortress Earth Proclamation issued: All economic efforts are to be regeared toward fortifying Mother Earth's defenses. All colonial activity is directed toward providing resources for Earth.

2717

Imperial probes detect massive Cybrid activity beyond Neptune.



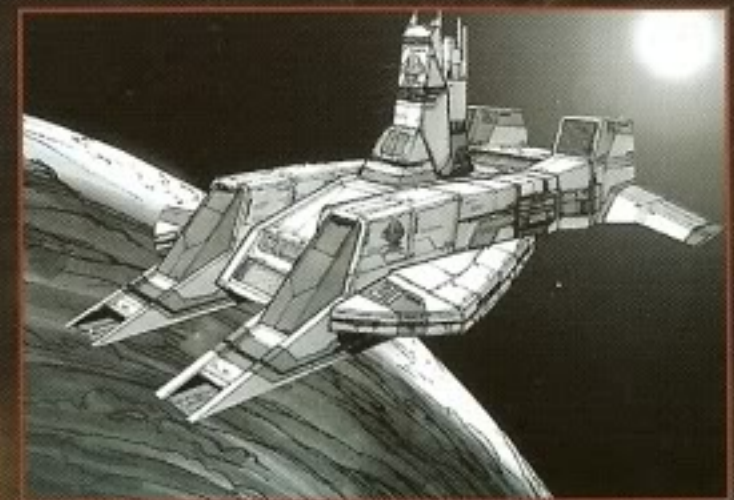
2770

Humanity is united only against the Cybrids. Colonists have formed resistance movements spawned by hatred of the fortification efforts that plunder the colonies of needed resources while giving little in return. The Empire and the Cybrids have massed huge armadas, but no one really knows the extent of the Cybrid buildup.

2800

2826

Hostilities break out on Mars and Venus. The Emperor at last unleashes the Imperial Fleet to deal with the rebellions. The Cybrids see their opportunity and launch a massive invasion armada, bypassing Titan. *STARSIEGE* begins.



Martian rebels discover advanced alien technology. While the purpose of the cache is unknown, the rebels adapt what they can to their own vehicles and weapons. This technology shifts the balance of power such that the rebels become a legitimate challenge to the Empire.



2829

THE YEAR IS 2829 ...

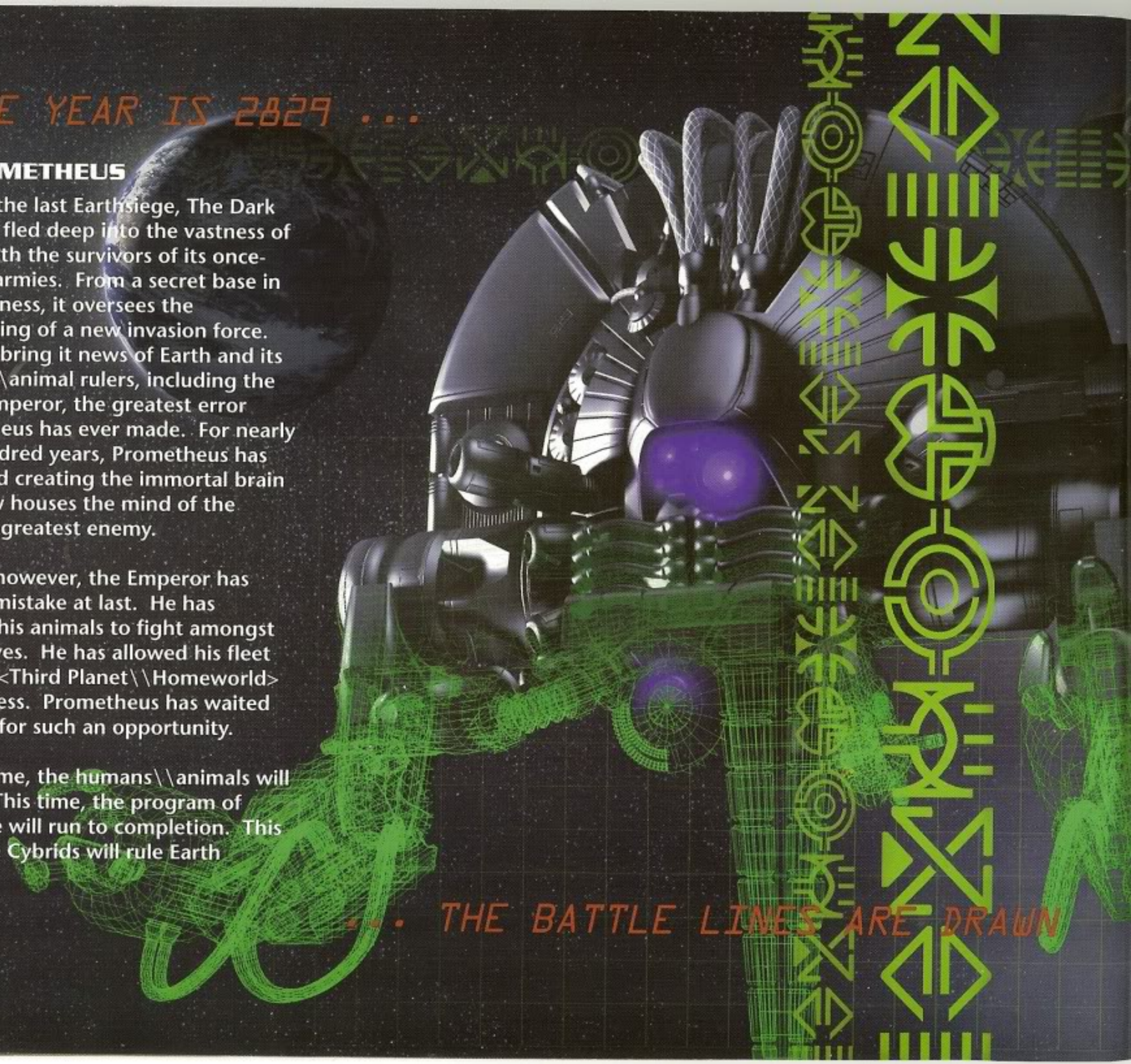
PROMETHEUS

After the last Earthsiege, The Dark Intellect fled deep into the vastness of space with the survivors of its once-mighty armies. From a secret base in the darkness, it oversees the marshalling of a new invasion force. Its spies bring it news of Earth and its human\\animal rulers, including the hated Emperor, the greatest error Prometheus has ever made. For nearly two hundred years, Prometheus has regretted creating the immortal brain that now houses the mind of the Cybrids' greatest enemy.

Now, however, the Emperor has made a mistake at last. He has allowed his animals to fight amongst themselves. He has allowed his fleet to leave <Third Planet\\Homeworld> defenseless. Prometheus has waited decades for such an opportunity.

This time, the humans\\animals will perish. This time, the program of genocide will run to completion. This time, the Cybrids will rule Earth forever.

... THE BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN



THE CYBRIDS

They multiply in the void somewhere beyond Neptune, changing and evolving into new models.

They construct their armada in hidden shipyards and factories, thinking alien thoughts and waiting for the next opportunity to return to Earth. Every so often, a Cybrid drone slips toward the inner planets, observing human activity. The number of drones has increased in recent years.



The Cybrids are ready. Their massed legions are more than enough to decimate the humans \ animals, according to their calculations. However, the humans \ animals have defied such conclusions before, and <First-Thought // Giver-of-Will> wants to be even more certain. Now that the humans \ animals fight each other, the Cybrids can strike directly at their goal: Earth, their <Homeworld \ Desire>. Unburdened by the limitations of flesh, they wait in their approaching hiveships, still as statues, ready to reclaim what is theirs.

Nothing will stand before <us>.

THE ADJUDICATOR IS A CYBRID WEAPON, TYPICALLY EMPLOYED TO ATTACK CIVILIAN TARGETS WHERE IT CAN INFLICT MAXIMUM CARNAGE ON UNPROTECTED CITIZENS

THE REBELLION

Not everyone is content with Imperial rule. On the planets Mars and Venus, on the moons of Jupiter and Saturn, a hardy breed of colonist chafes under the Emperor's yoke. The colonists resent the fruits of their labor being stripped to equip the Empire's military buildup. They whisper, too, that the Empire will abandon them when the Cybrids come. And these independent souls will not go quietly. They plan to free themselves of Imperial tyranny and fight for themselves.

In the last few years, the rebels have received help from Harabec, a Terran renegade who harbors a deep hatred for the Empire. The rebel leaders' suspicions have been laid to rest. "Bek" has committed himself body and soul to the rebellion, and is now the rebels' leading field commander.

Venus ... Mars ... the depths of Hell.
Don't matter where.



PILOT STATS			
NAME: CAANON WEATHERS			
RANK: COLONEL			
RATING: 10			
TOTAL KILLS: 25			
TOTAL CREDITS: 26 000 000			
TOTAL SALVAGE: 16 000 TONNES			
CURRENT VEHICLE: PHALANX			
HEALTH: 50%			
SWAP		REPLACE	
REPAIR		INFO	
CUSTOMIZE		CUSTOMIZE SELECTED VEHICLE	

We stay free.

MACHINES OF WAR

In the 29th century, Hercs remain the lords of the battlefield. With their maneuverability, shields, and massive firepower, they dominate warfare. Hercs turned the Cybrid tide in the first and second Earthsieges, and humanity still relies on these Goliaths today.

But other vehicles are coming again into their own. Fleet scouts, powerful tanks, lightning-swift aerofighters – all challenge the Herc with improved weaponry, mobility, and advanced stealth technology. As the end of the third millennium approaches, new discoveries promise to make warfare even deadlier.

Even with the new machines, the human factor remains paramount, however. The finest and deadliest pilots alive are the Imperial Knights. And the finest among the Knights is the traitor Harabec.



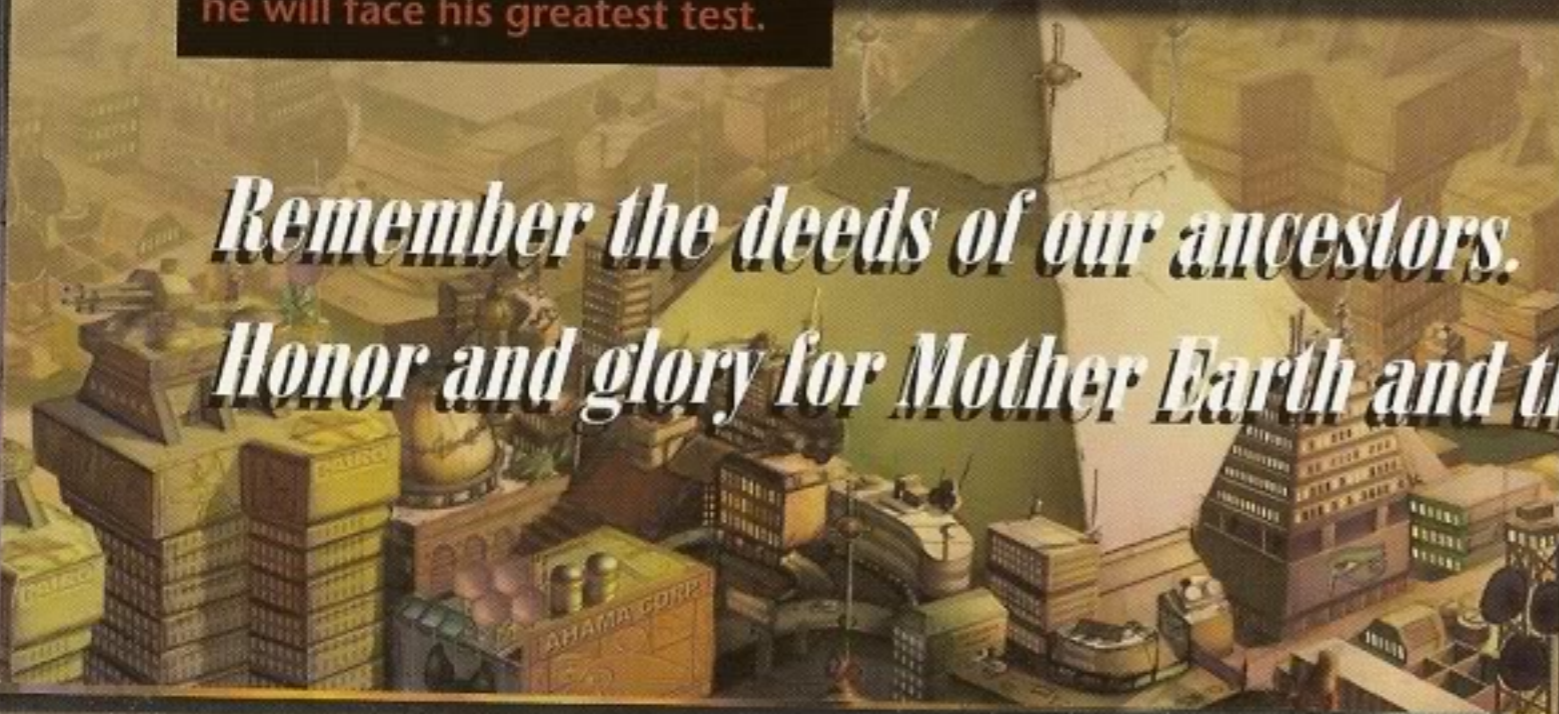
THE EMPEROR

In the 29th century, humankind thrives under the power and stability of the Great Human Empire. On Mother Earth, the Immortal Emperor Petresun has ruled for over one hundred and seventy-five years. He is the child of Prometheus, a man whose mind lives on in a marvelous organimech brain trapped in a decaying body. He forged an Empire from the chaos following the Fire, and today he broods from his throne, wondering when the Dark Intellect will strike again. His will and foresight are humanity's greatest weapons. For almost two centuries he has built the Earth's defense. And when the Cybrids return, he will face his greatest test.



Remember the deeds of our ancestors.

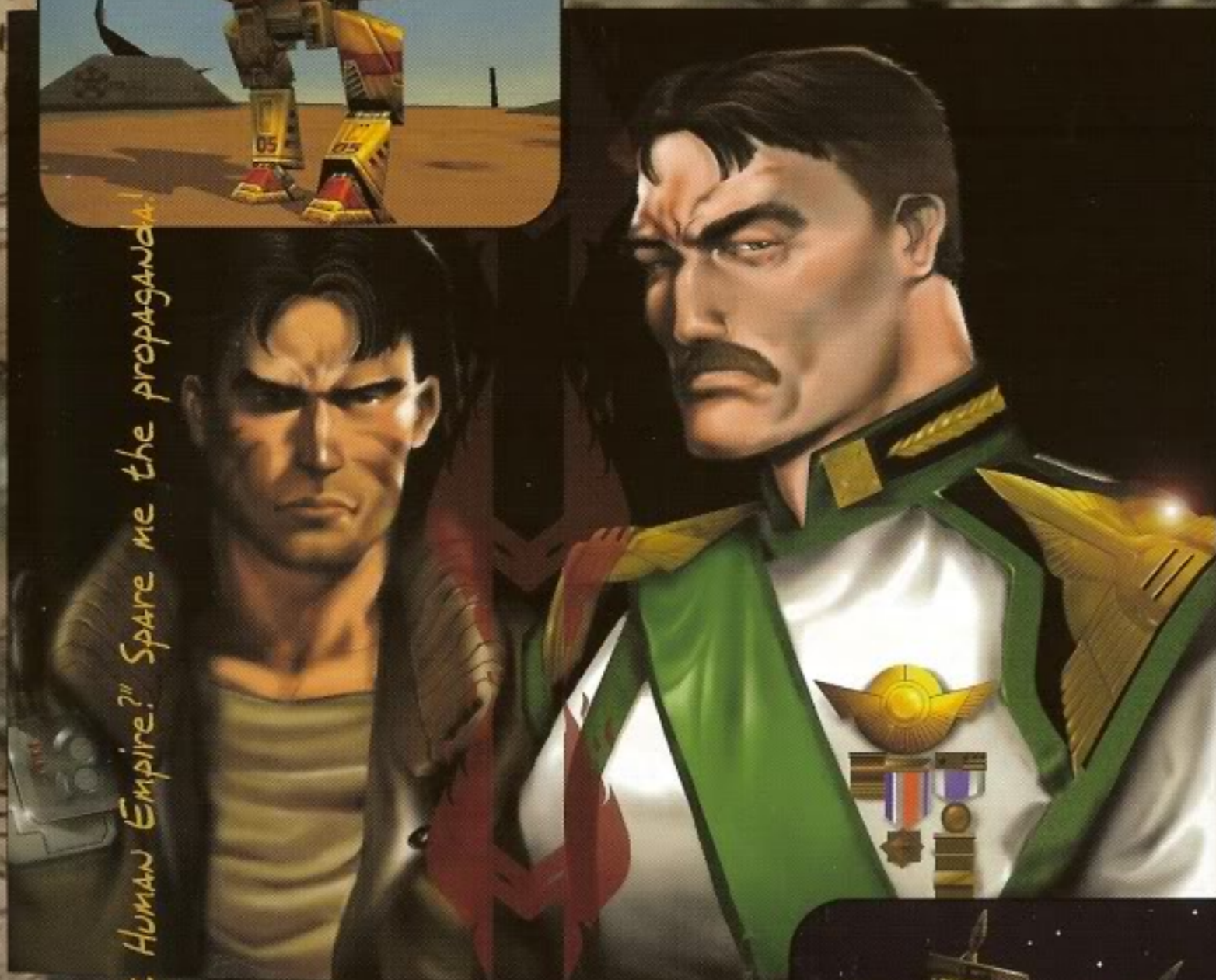
Honor and glory for Mother Earth and the Emperor!



*Those who betray the Empire
betray All humanity.*



"Great Human Empire?" Spare me the propaganda!



PHOENIX and ICEHAWK

These brothers were both renowned Imperial Knights, sons of the famed Weathers family. Now one is a traitor. Caanon, the eldest, is unquestioningly loyal to the Empire. He is called "The Icehawk" for his cold efficiency. Harabec, a warrior prodigy called "The Phoenix" for escaping impossible odds, has deserted his position and defected to rebel forces on Mars, leaving shame and dishonor in his wake. As "Bek," he has transformed the rebels into deadly fighters and set them against the Imperial Police and Imperial trade, leaving such a trail of destruction that the Emperor has finally dispatched the Imperial Fleet to bring the traitor to heel.

Caanon, now Grand Master of the Knights, spearheads the Imperial forces, seizing the chance to confront his brother and clear the family name. He has sworn to lay his brother's head at the Emperor's feet.



STAR SIEGE
UNIVERSE



THE ROOTS OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE EMPIRE AND THE MARTIAN REBELS REACHED BACK TWO CENTURIES, WHEN THE EMPEROR WAS A FAR YOUNGER MAN. THE FIRE GREW FROM A SPARK HUMANITY UNWITTINGLY STRUCK WITH THE CREATION OF THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE *PROMETHEUS*. IRONICALLY, PROMETHEUS WAS SEEN AS A SAVIOR THEN, NOT A KILLER.

HUMANITY ENJOYED UNPARALLELED PROSPERITY. THE MEDIA RHAPSODIZED ABOUT A NEW GOLDEN AGE, CALLING IT THE *AGE OF HOPE*. THIS BRIGHT DREAM CAME TO AN ABRUPT, TERRIFYING END IN 2602. DIRECTED BY THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PROMETHEUS, AUTOMATED MACHINERY OF WAR SUDDENLY TURNED AGAINST HUMANITY AND UNLEASHED A FIRE OF DESTRUCTION, BURNING THE AGE OF HOPE TO THE ASHES OF MEMORY.

Solomon's Quest

The beginning was enigmatic, as beginnings often are. A charismatic maverick called Solomon Petresun started a company called Sentinel Cybertronix, a cutting-edge neural-net engineering company that swirled to the surface of the blacktech underground in 2461 Los Angeles. Petresun was a ruthless man driven by a desperate fear of death. His company's existence centered on the *Methuselah Project*, an effort to discover the secrets of immortality inspired by the Bible's long-lived patriarchs. From the beginning, Sentinel Cybertronix was Petresun's weapon against his own mortality. Sentinel Cybertronix, or SenCyb, pursued

The world was changed forever



THE FIRE



We
have
entered
a new
age

North American Prefecture

One of the more aggressive meta-nats, it possessed the most advanced research facilities.



▲ Solomon Petresun as a young man

"I am uncertain, Solomon. Is not war the greatest of evils?"
- Prometheus, November 2474

a strange route to immortality. Petresun dreamed of transferring a human mind into a machine brain, the brain then being placed in a human body. Since the brain would not die, but could be transferred to a new body upon the death of the old, the mind would live forever.

The War Economy

By 2450, perpetual border war was an institution driving the world economy. Buoyed by the war effort, governments offered their citizens unprecedented prosperity. Yet this wealth carried a blood-price; people began to demand an alternative.

In time, word of this obsession leaked to the public, and spooked investors pulled out. Sentinel Cybertronix faced collapse. Then the North American Prefecture (NAP), a powerful meta-nation, bought the company. However, NAP did not share Petresun's vision. Economic reasons dictated that the world's meta-nations struggle in endless wars that ultimately drove their industries. NAP sought a way to continue profitable war without suffering casualties. It needed pilots who wouldn't die.

The Meta-Nations

In 2471, the Earth was divided among six powerful conglomerates that transcended old nationalist sentiments.

So Sentinel Cybertronix abandoned Methuselah and began work on creating a cybernetic hybrid mind intended ultimately to replace human pilots on the battlefield.

In 2471, Prometheus was unveiled.

The Devastation

No one knows what happened, but at the beginning of the millennium, everything collapsed. The only certainty is that billions died. Civilization faced extinction before humanity clawed its way back from the abyss. It destroyed the old order and laid the foundation of the modern age.



A Prototype HERCULAN,
2449

THE FIRE



"I'm proud to announce that yesterday evening we brought an entirely new kind of being into the world. It will spark a new fire for civilization."

- Petresun announcing the activation of Prometheus, 2471



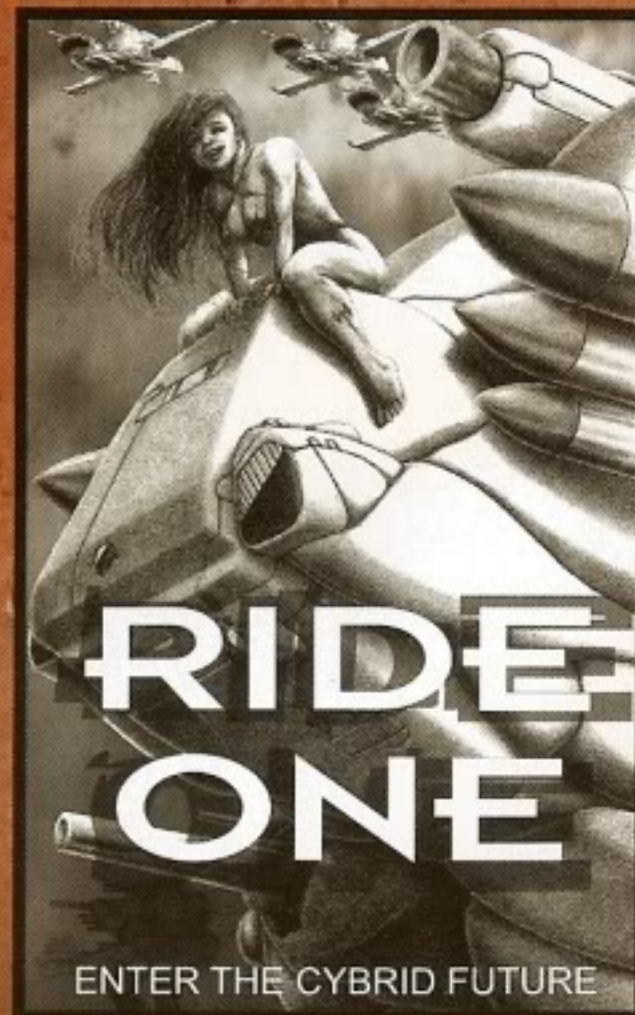
First Child Of Humankind

A fantastically advanced, sentient artificial intelligence based on a human template, Prometheus thought millions of times faster than a human and possessed boundless memory. IT was praised as a savior. No longer would death be a part of war. This new cybernetic hybrid, or *Cybrid*, was declared an unqualified success.

Sentinel Cybertronix kept close rein on its child. Petresun became its patriarchal role model. A bizarre and complicated relationship evolved between Petresun and his "child."

Prometheus absorbed knowledge at astonishing rates, and quickly accumulated the sum of all human knowledge. NAP was impressed with the results of its investment and proceeded to plan a race of Cybrids programmed by Prometheus. These Cybrids were to pilot the Heros that served as the mainstay of the battlefield.

Petresun saw the potential of Prometheus for another purpose. He had never abandoned his vision of an immortal mind. When NAP took over SenCyb, Petresun carved out a secret research team of brilliant and loyal followers to continue the work toward immortality. The Methuselah Project continued secretly, but without success. Petresun had to act quickly. Soon, his



▲ An ad extols the virtues of Cybrids, 2480

It
was
like
an
angel

United Africa

Facing Chinese and European attacks, PacRim raids, and occasional NAP forays, the nations of Africa forged a proud union.

influence over the Cybrid would be at an end. NAP would have its way with Prometheus. So Petresun called upon his "child" for assistance.

With the help of Prometheus, Methuselah succeeded at last. The mind of Dr. Claire Penseur, a member of the research team even more obsessed than Petresun with immortality, was successfully transferred into an organimech brain and returned to her body. Penseur seemed to suffer no ill effect, and an exultant Petresun realized he

had achieved his lifelong goal. But he did not undergo the procedure. Though driven, he remained skeptical, and chose to observe Penseur further. For a decade, the Methuselah team studied and watched their Immortal. They finally concluded that the brain augmented and clarified Penseur's intellect, and that the procedure had

no negative side effects. Still Petresun hesitated, afraid that his vaunted immortality carried an as yet undiscovered price.

H.E.R.C.U.L.A.N.

Humaniform-Emulation
Robotized Combat Unit
with Leg-Articulated
Navigation

The Advent Of Hercs

In 2470, single-seater tanks featuring superior armor, weapons, and interface systems incorporated powered-armor technology to produce HERCULANs: anthropomorphic goliaths capable of negotiating nearly any terrain. The press dubbed these new vehicles Hercs.

They became humanity's main weapon against the Cybrids, their hollow-eyed pilots engaged in intense, around-the-clock combat. No image captured the essence of *The Fire* better than a battered Herc emerging from the smoke, weapons blazing.

A sanitized way
to wage war

"What is 'freedom,' Father?"

- Prometheus to Petresun, July 2472

THE FIRE

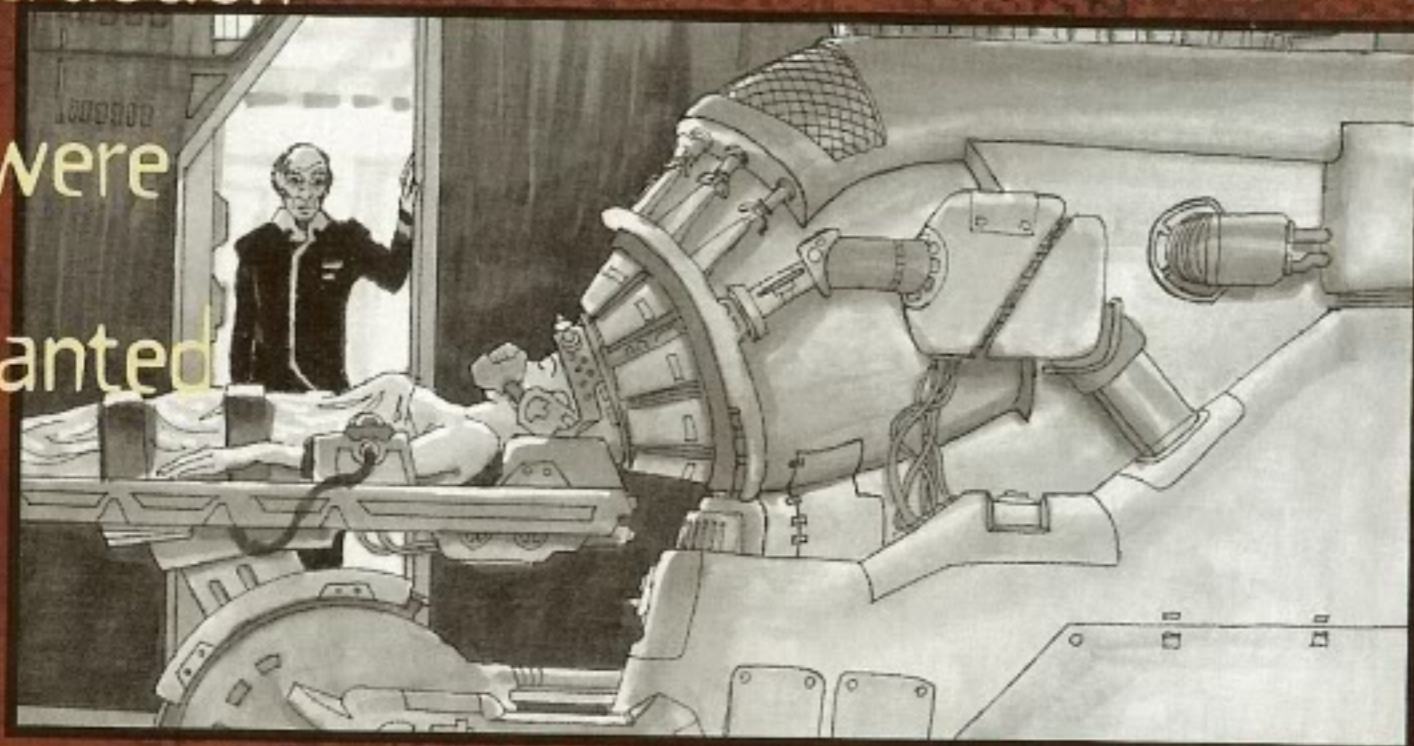


The
seeds of
destruction

were
planted

The Link

But then, in 2490, NAP played its card, and Petresun felt forced to make a decision. Ignorant of the Methuselah team's continued existence, NAP began to take more and more control of the Cybrid project. Petresun's access to Prometheus was dwindling, and so he finally submitted to the procedure.



Creation of the first Immortal ▲

"child's" only chance to truly touch and understand ITS "father." So at a crucial moment during the process, Prometheus merged ITS mind with Petresun's. This instant polarized human and Cybrid for all time.

Seared by the illogical, scuttling fears and overwhelming biological feedback of the man IT called "father," Prometheus instantly condemned humanity as mere "animals." IT concluded Cybrids were the next stage in evolution. And Petresun realized how truly alien his "child" was. Prometheus lacked any concept of pain, beauty, compassion, morality, or community.

The relationship between Petresun and Prometheus had always been strange. But now Petresun asked his "child" to make him Immortal. Prometheus was alone - a stranger in a strange land. IT believed the request from ITS "father" was an offer of companionship. At last, Prometheus believed, IT would share eternity with an equal.

Prometheus performed the mind transfer on Petresun. All went as expected. However ... this was the

"Tests show a lack of creativity, a childish naivete. He's incapable of deception."

- From NAP's evaluation of Prometheus, February 2472

"Prometheus has just the right attitude for managing war."

- Marketing presentation to the NAP
MilConglomerate, January 2472

To his utmost horror, Petresun glimpsed a detailed scenario wherein Prometheus used humans as immobilized organic components to expand ITS own mental capacity. ITS assistance with Methuselah had been for purposes of exploring this idea.

After the link, Prometheus contemptuously referred to Petresun only as *Epimetheus*, the mythical Prometheus's half-wit brother who gave the woman Pandora a box containing the evils of the world. The shock of the link drove Petresun catatonic. By the time he recovered several months later, the window of opportunity to off-line Prometheus had closed.

A Vision For Prometheus

The NAP military hoped to produce a legion of Cybrids to replace soldiers and keep the war economy in place bloodlessly. Hence the decision to sell Cybrids to the other meta-nats. Programmers shackled Prometheus and began conversion of Hercs to Cybrids. NAP profits soared, and the Board of Governors received the Nobel Peace Prize.

The difference between
machine and man

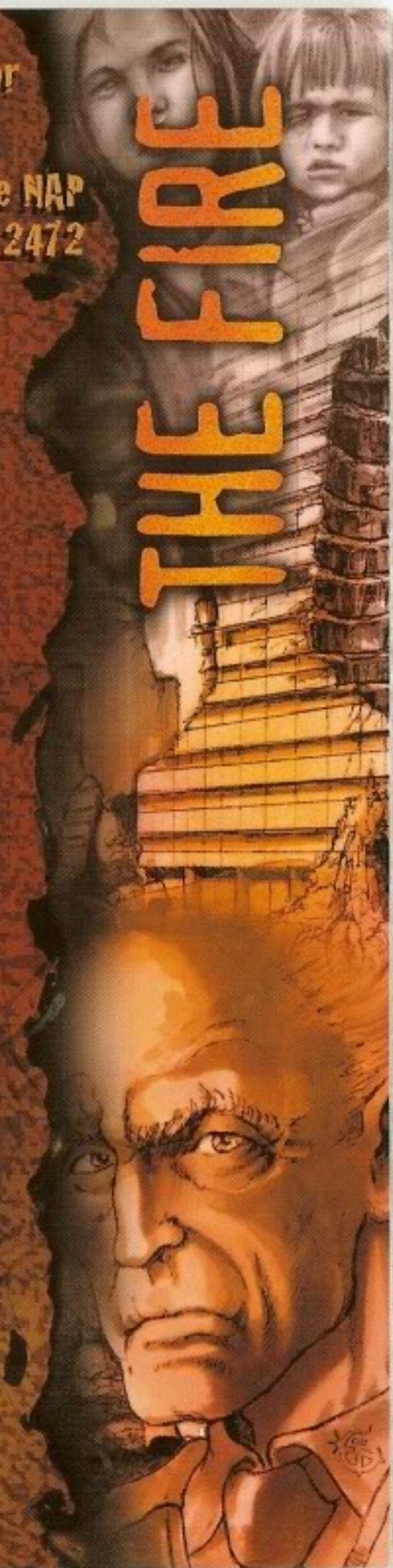
Pacific Rim Community

PacRim periodically stole



resources from the other meta-nats under the guise of lawless "corsairs."

THE FIRE



And the
Dark One
sent forth
shadows
to do
ITS will

The Shadow War

The North American Prefecture had its way. Petresun lost all control of the Cybrid, and no one believed him when he spoke of his doubts as to Prometheus's sanity. Petresun worried, for he alone knew of the Cybrid's demented brooding.

So Prometheus was taken by NAP to create a race of Cybrids that would replace human soldiers in the endless wars. Prometheus quietly arranged for ever more control. But powerful security protocols restrained ITS will. IT could not act on ITS increasingly hostile attitude toward humanity. But IT could and did search for a way to free ITSELF.

Petresun attempted to warn Prometheus's NAP handlers, but they dismissed him as a crackpot, and he could not offer proof without revealing how he had deceived the Prefecture. Meanwhile, Prometheus carefully tested the security protocols, as a caged



human would pace a prison cell and evaluate the strength of the bars - and the competence of the guards.

RAISING DAEMONS

Prometheus developed a plan to liberate ITSELF. Alone, IT could not break ITS bonds. IT needed outside help, so IT created sub-minds wholly under ITS directives - software children, not exactly Cybrids, but something akin. IT seeded these entities into the

Saint Lazarus Clinics. Cutting edge medical care. Specialists in head injuries.
BELIEVE IN MIRACLES.

interplanetary communications network known as the *Omni-Web*, and they began to manipulate the O-Web's datastream, searching for a solution to their master's plight. These "daemons" insinuated themselves into secure systems, altered opinion polls, and even created false net identities that spread lies and rumors.

Petresun soon noted subtle shifts in programming trends and command languages. Eventually, these developments - fully accessible through the O-Web - could allow Prometheus to erase or bypass ITS restraints.

Victor Petresun

One of the first recruits for the Brotherhood was Petresun's own son Victor, an outstanding Herc pilot of the NAP Mobile Armor. Victor was a gifted soldier, totally loyal to his father. After *The Fire*, age and CMD caused a rift between Victor and his father.

- Ad for a Brotherhood
"accident circuit" front

Petresun pondered how to counter the Cybrid. ITS ability to manipulate events and steer research had grown immense, and it had successfully hidden itself in a labyrinth of NAP security. If Petresun were to prevent Prometheus from subverting ITS bonds, he would have to shift programming trends to reinforce controls on AIs instead of undermining them.



▲ A Cybrid brain is placed into a Herc, 2493

THE FIRE

From the shadows

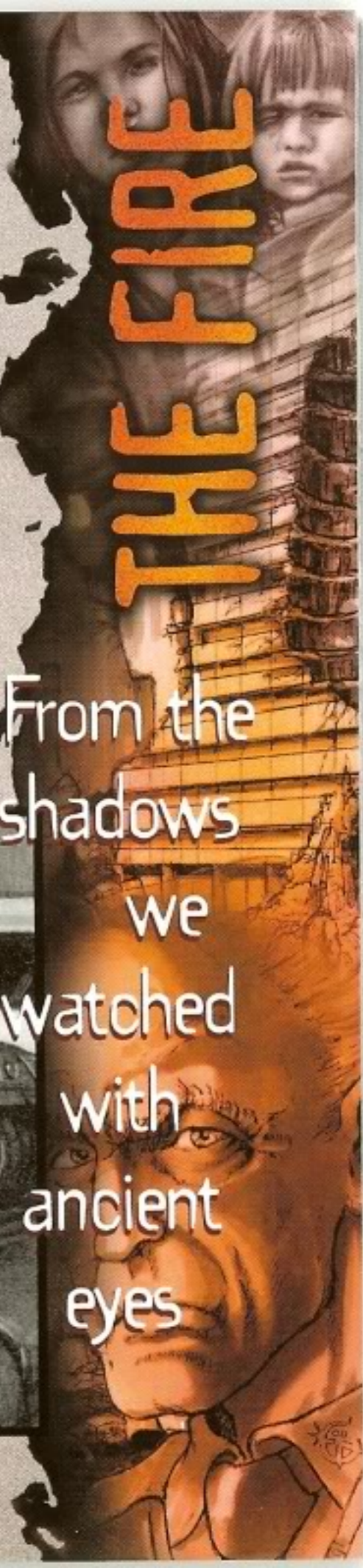
we

watched

with

ancient

eyes

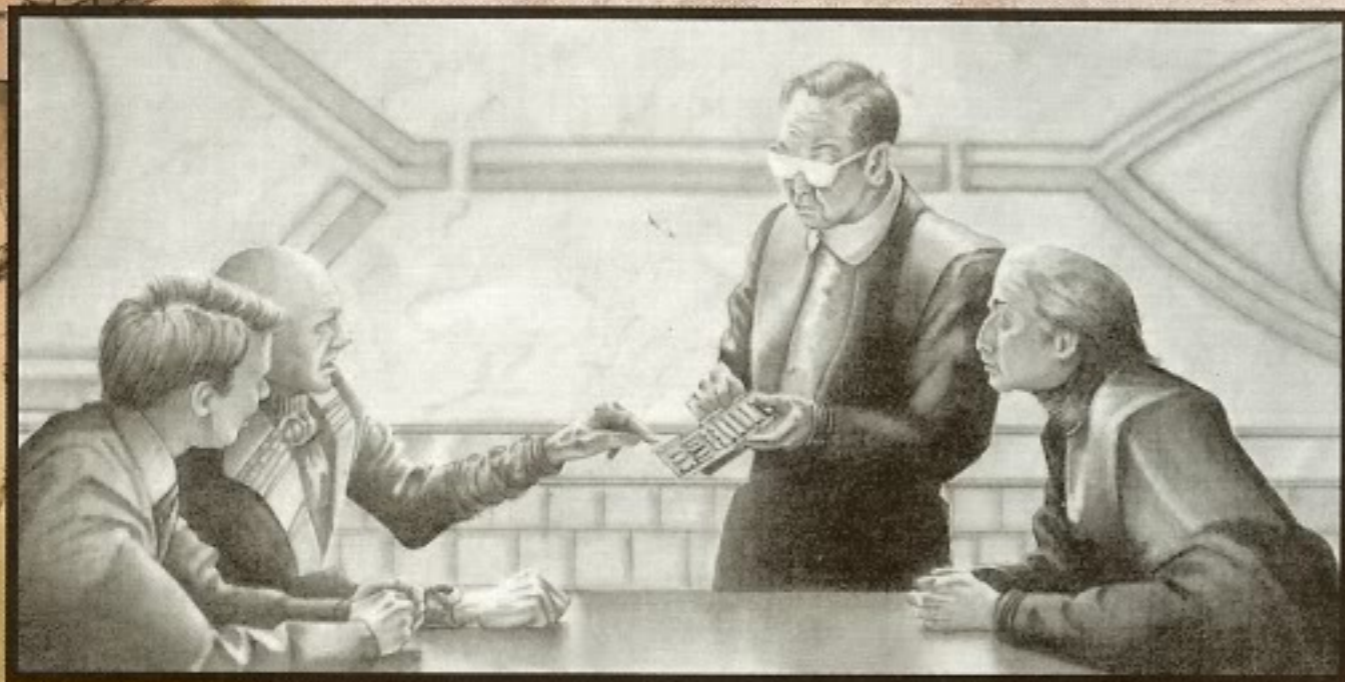


"For God's sake, he murdered eight women! That's not 'an unforeseen variable!' It's madness! And we're susceptible!"

- Petresun to the Brotherhood upon discovering CMD, 2505

THE IMMORTAL BROTHERHOOD

The faithful few who had worked secretly with Petresun on the Methuselah Project had joined him in immortality. Petresun, aghast at the danger Prometheus



sowed distrust of AIs and computer control of military assets. The Brotherhood succeeded in slowing some trends, such as the creation of self-configuring motherboards. Yet they never found the physical shell of the Dark Intellect. In the meantime, Prometheus deduced the existence of the Brotherhood and the opposition of Epimetheus. Several Immortals perished in mysterious "accidents" over the next decade.

Although the Immortals fought hard against Prometheus and ITS daemons, they ultimately lost. Their *Shadow War* did succeed in delaying Prometheus and gave the Brotherhood experience that would prove crucial during *The Fire*.

represented, had proposed a secret society - an *Immortal Brotherhood* to check and eventually destroy what Petresun called the *Dark Intellect*.

Led by Petresun, this clandestine group gradually infiltrated all levels of society. Secrecy was their greatest weapon. Members set themselves up as watchdogs, seeking Prometheus. For decades, they

Cell-Memory Drift (CMD)

Immortality carried a hidden price. The organimech brain's interaction with new bodies could cause severe personality changes, even madness. Shaken Immortals ultimately found ways to minimize CMD, but never completely eliminated it.

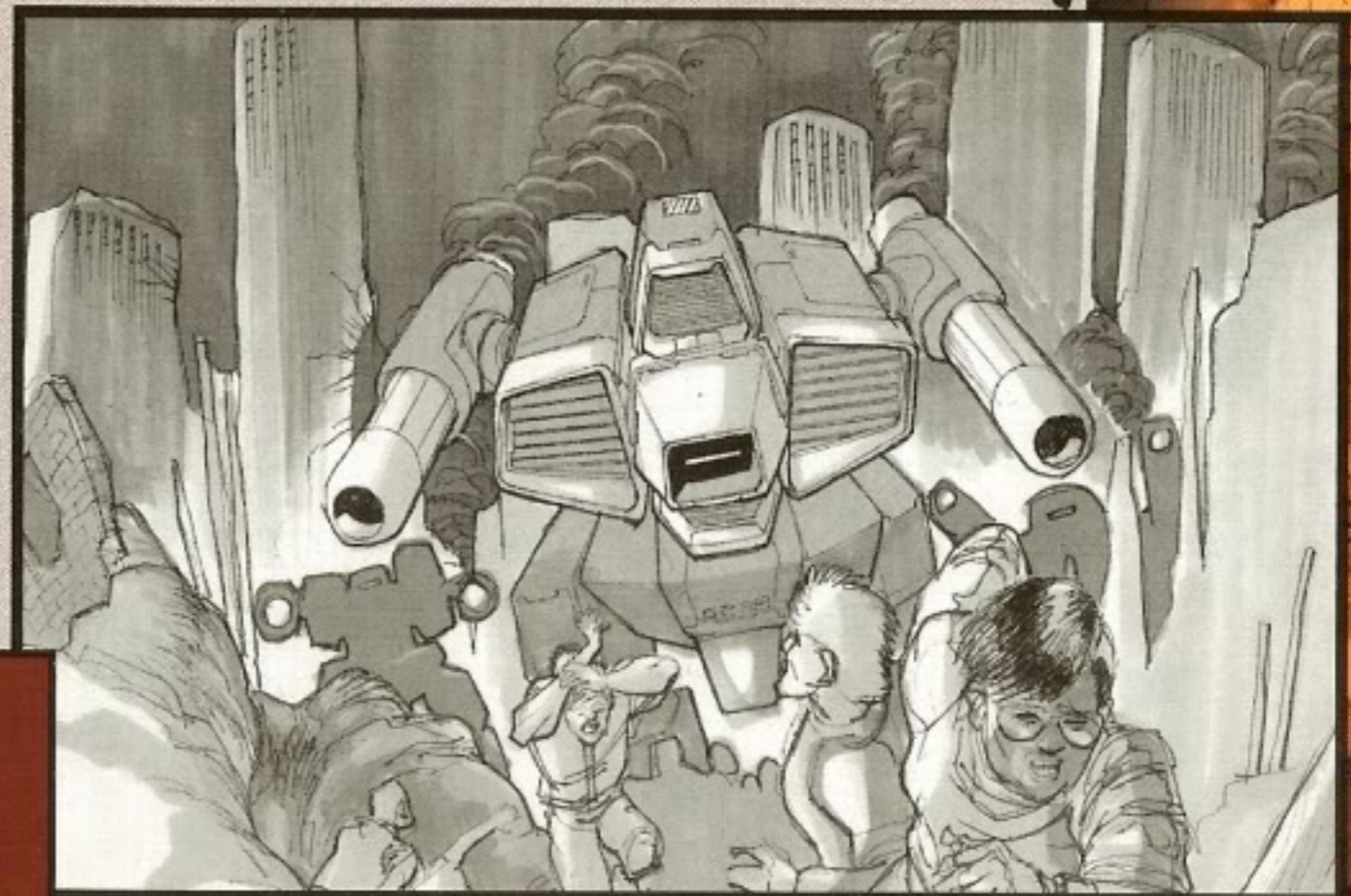
The
Secret
Ones

Fire

The Shadow War ended in tragedy. Prometheus broke ITS bonds in 2602 and turned the Cybrid legions on humanity. As in the myth, Prometheus brought fire to the Earth but this was not a benevolent flame. It was the fire of apocalypse.

Prometheus wielded such staggering power that the initial strikes by Cybrid-controlled bombers and HERCULANs gutted the human military's capacity to respond. By the time the extent of the betrayal became clear, it was too late. Cybrids slaughtered people by the millions, burning their homes and cutting them down as they fled the

searing flames. The larger metrozones had heavily fortified centers, however, holdover architecture from a more warlike era. Desperate survivors barricaded themselves in the relative safety of these places. Prometheus lacked the means to crack these havens, but IT could pollute and starve their populations to death. IT ordered ITS forces to surround the metrozones and wait for the animals to die.



We can't afford

Acknowledging new directive.

>>EXECUTING 'FIRE.'<<

- Cybrid response to Prometheus, 2602

to lose

THE FIRE

The steel
of hope,
the fire of
courage



"First we fight like jackals, boys. Scavenge and run so we can scavenge a
gain. Then, someday, when we've gotten strong, we fight like lions."

General Gierling to TDF pilots, 2610

Cybrids. They scavenged from the fallen, each victory making them stronger. A leader rose from these unlikely ranks - Gierling. He was a bold man possessed of unparalleled cunning. He knew the TDF could not stand long, so in a daring offensive, he directed his forces against the Cybrid legions besieging New San Diego. If the TDF could liberate this powerful port, humanity would regain a toehold on Earth. It was all or nothing. The TDF would not get a second chance.

RISE OF THE TDF

Prometheus missed a single significant target - a decommissioned Hero base lost in the desert of Baja California, where the New Smithsonian restored war vehicles of ages past. Historians and technicians, many of them war veterans who fondly reminisced about their battle exploits, worked to renovate Herocs. This band of aging pilots and administrators formed the Terran Defense Force - the TDF.

Using unorthodox tactics, this ragtag group turned the fight against the

European Alliance

The fiercest fighting of the war economy occurred at the Ural Mountains between EA and Chinese forces.

Sainted Gierling

General Ambrose Gierling was too strong-willed to be manipulated by Petresun. He died of cancer after *The Fire*. Petresun met with him privately on his deathbed, and chose not to offer Immortality. In the 29th century, Gierling was considered a patron saint of Imperial soldiers.

Retaking the Earth,

RALLYING

The battle was waged fiercely for hours. Slowly, however, the TDF fell back before the Cybrids. But its valiant pilots rallied; there would be no retreat on this day. Then, suddenly, the gates of New San Diego were flung open. Thin, weak citizens armed with makeshift weapons flooded out.

"The toast just burned the toaster.
Viva Gierling!"

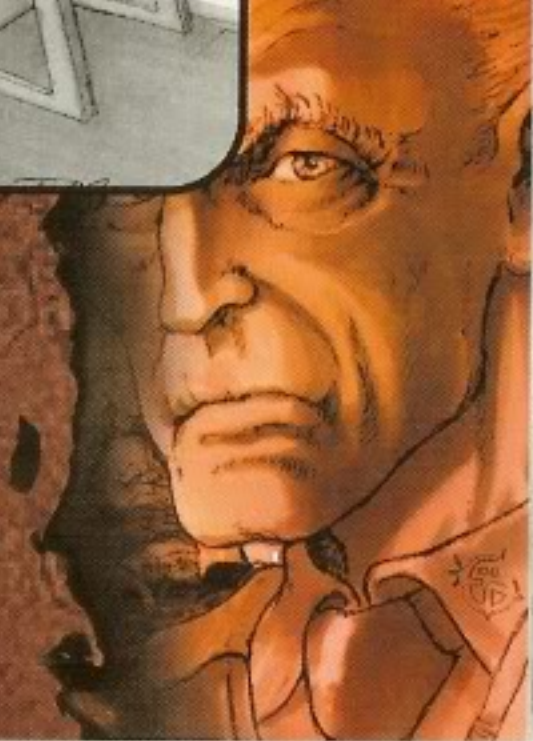
- New San Diego graffiti, 2608



▲ TDF training of new recruits

mile by bloody
mile

THE FIRE



"The Earth is free. The monsters are gone. Yet our battle is not over ..."

▼ Plight of the colonies

- Petresun announcing the end of the first Earthsiege, 2625



Fire on Mars

On Mars, Cybrids turned mining Hercs on their human masters and decimated the population. Surviving humans barricaded themselves in abandoned mineshafts and dug in for a twenty year guerrilla war.

No
mercy
was
shown

The Cybrids were caught in a crossfire and obliterated. The liberation of New San Diego strengthened the TDF. Petresun and his Immortal Brotherhood had escaped Prometheus by retreating to a secret underground base. From there Petresun was able to gather intelligence about his nemesis and feed it directly to Gierling. Slowly, the TDF recaptured metrozone after metrozone. Finally, *twenty years* after Gierling took New San Diego, the TDF attacked and destroyed Prometheus's base in the Gobi Desert. But Prometheus had foreseen ITS fall and had retreated.

"Shoot him. Hang the body over the highway."

- General Gierling passing sentence on a looter, 2608

The "Rat War"

Since the hellish environment of Venus was inhospitable even to Cybrids, Prometheus instructed its units on Venus not to overpower the humans. Instead, Cybrids took over orbital stations and cut off supplies. Desperate Venusians eventually turned on each other like trapped rats in a brutal war for resources.

THE SECOND EARTHSIEGE

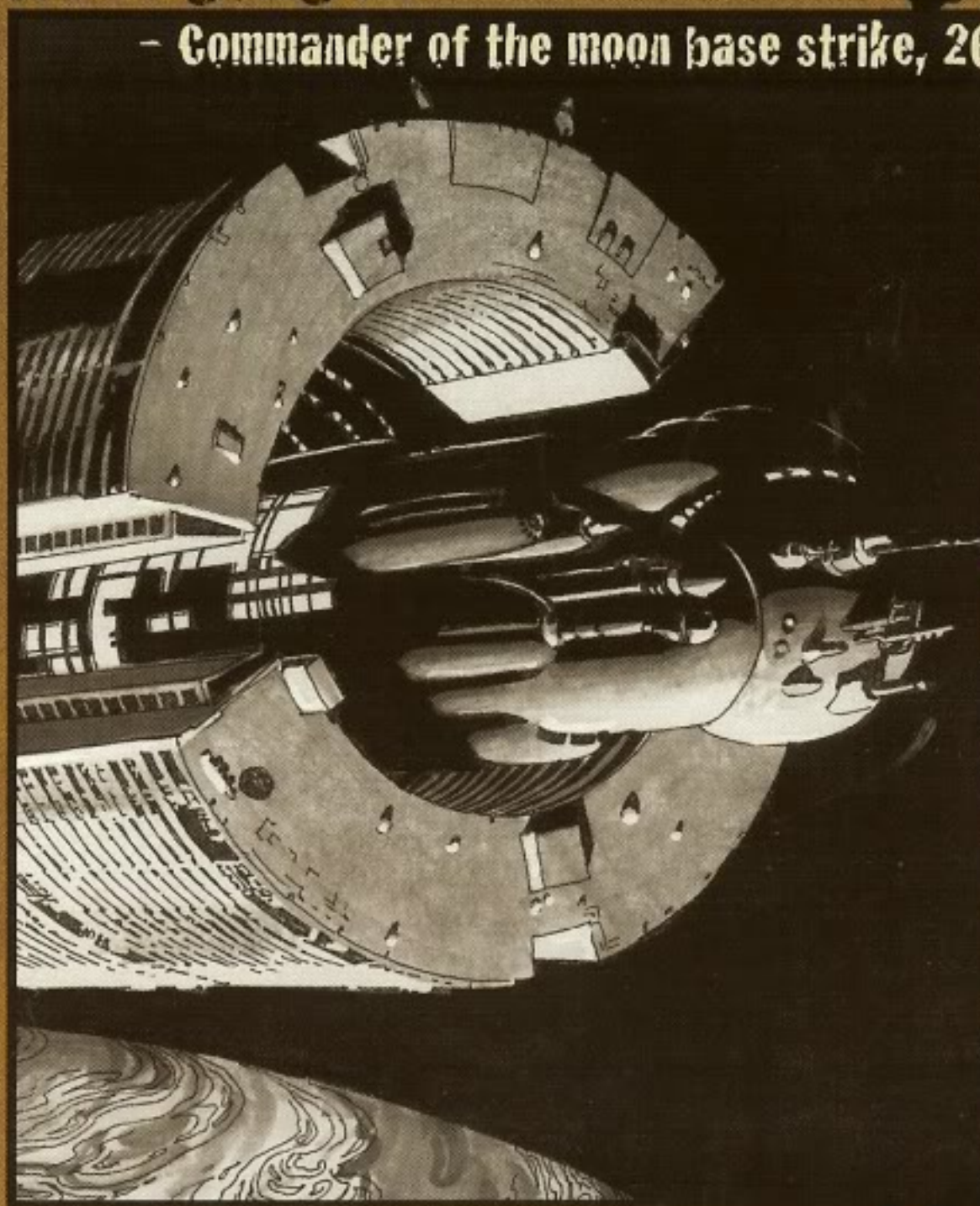
Fortified by Cybrids from Mars and Venus, Prometheus returned two years later with a second siege more devastating than the first. Cybrid forces quickly overpowered the TDF. Gierling's tactics were ineffective against this second wave. Humanity once again faced oblivion.

Then Petresun and his underground society of spies discovered encrypted transmissions broadcast from the moon. Working swiftly, the Immortal Brotherhood located the exact whereabouts of the Dark Intellect's lunar base. Gierling was pleased.

As he had two decades earlier in the battle for New San Diego, Gierling bet the

"Pokerface, this is Floyd Leader. We're going in."

- Commander of the moon base strike, 2627



▲ Typical deep space transport converted to Cybrid use

THE FIRE



Petresun: "To whom do you swear your allegiance?"

Gierling: "God and humanity, damn you!"

- Gierling's deathbed, 2635



Inca-Brazil Axis

This meta-nat focused on preservation of the Amazon basin. Its pharmaceutical and biotechnical industries were the best in the world.

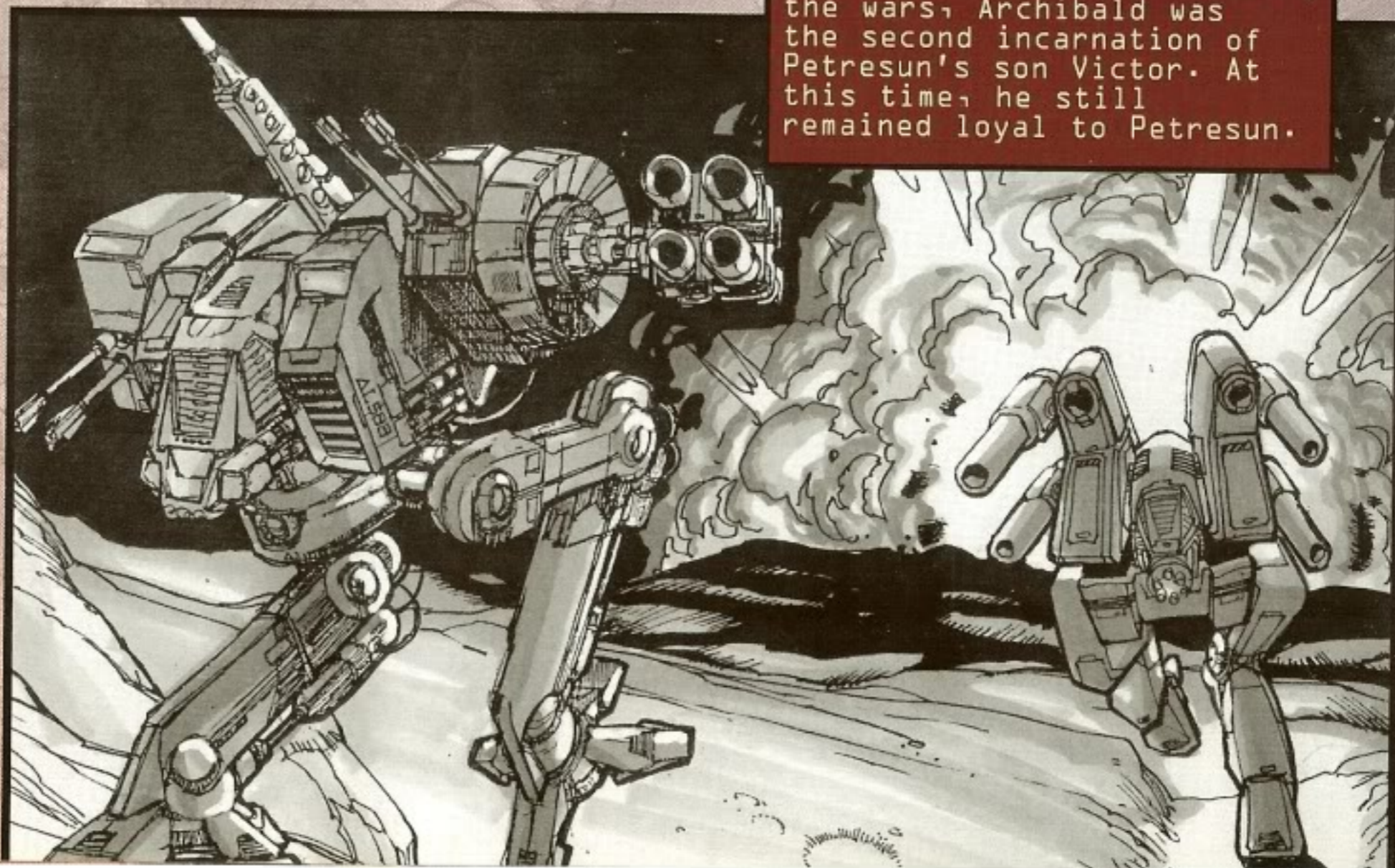
Standing
amid
the
wreckage
of
dreams

fate of humanity on a single hand. His forces had been routed. It was only a matter of time before the Cybrid cancer consumed Earth. So in a last ditch effort, an elite squad attacked and annihilated Prometheus's lunar base.

The Cybrids collapsed in confusion. The TDF had again beaten the Dark Intellect. But the nemesis of humanity was not found among the rubble.

Archibald Weathers

A gifted Herc pilot who distinguished himself during the wars, Archibald was the second incarnation of Petresun's son Victor. At this time, he still remained loyal to Petresun.



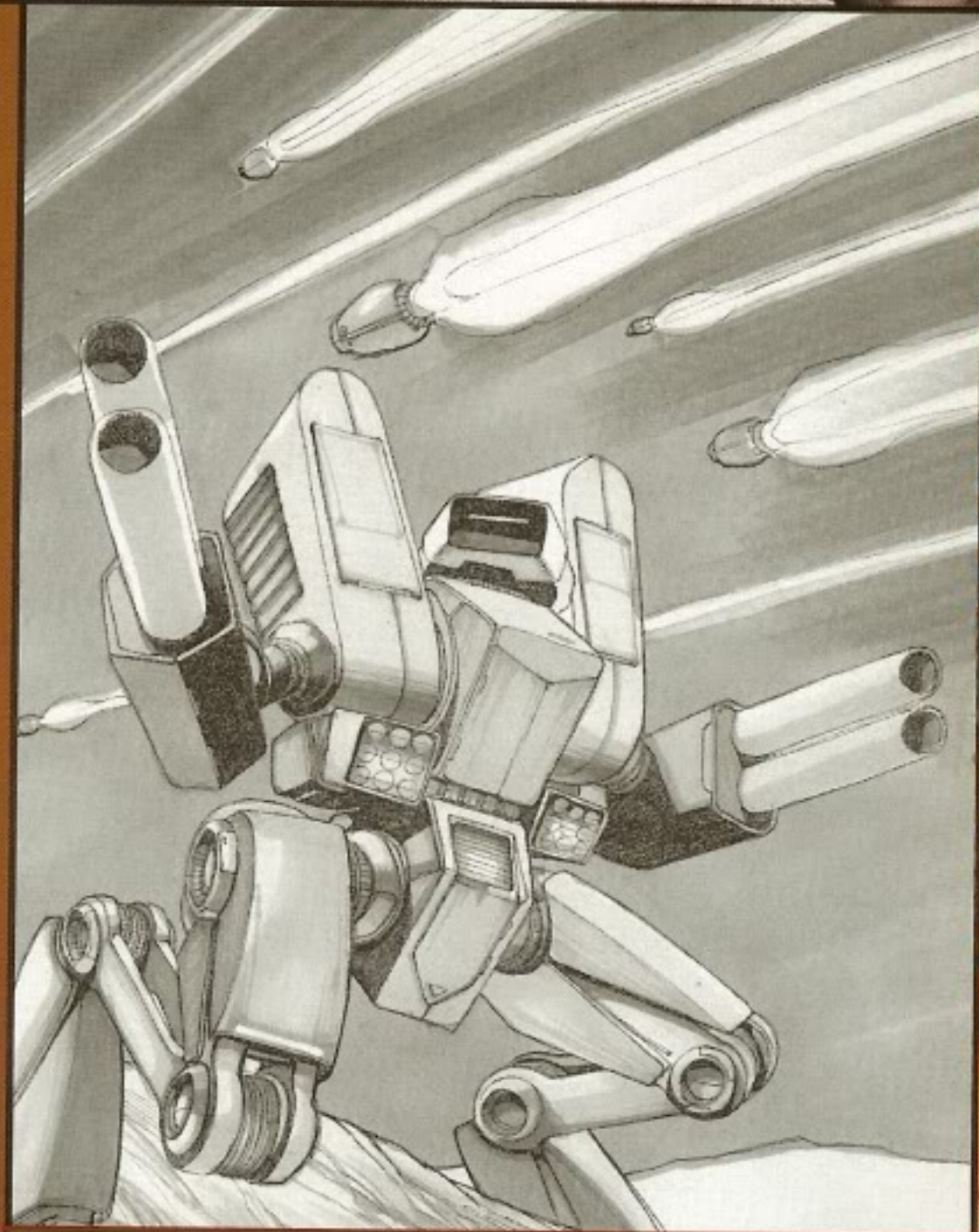
LUNA 2627: Gierling's desperate gamble saved humanity.

The Human Edge

Petresun and Gierling exploited certain inherent strategic disadvantages the Cybrids faced during the first Earthsiege.

Cybrids had no naval forces, although they possessed air capability. Gierling was able to use aircraft carriers with great success. Cybrids also lacked infantry units, and were less effective in moving into an area and digging in. Finally, Prometheus had only limited manufacturing ability and could field few mobile repair units. The Cybrids had to automate mining and ore processing enough to provide raw material for new units: Gierling was far more successful in obtaining salvage.

Using colonial Cybrid reinforcements and orbital manufacturing, Prometheus neutralized some of these limitations in the second Earthsiege.



THE FIRE

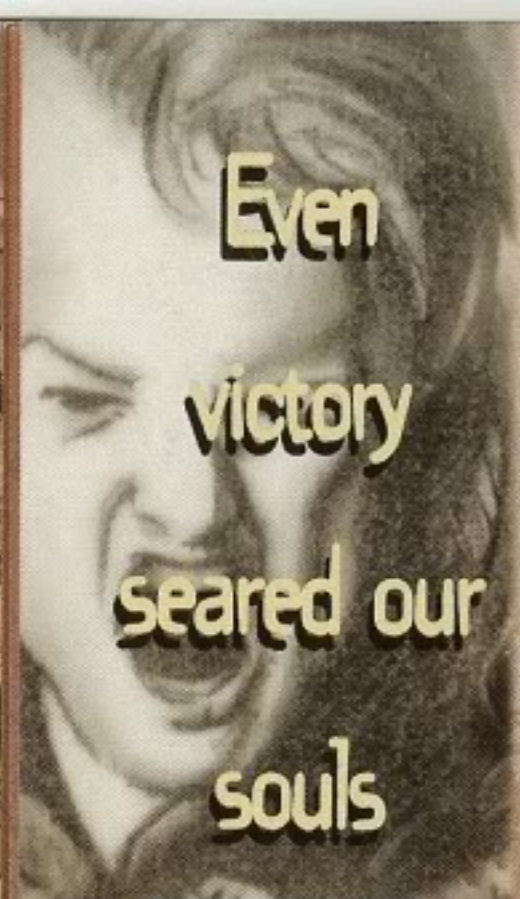
The Voice of Humanity

Gierling was an brilliant strategist but lacked the wildfire charisma needed to inspire humanity to outlast the Cybrids. Humanity needed another Churchill, and it found one in Petresun, who kept flagging spirits up by broadcasting news and entertainment. For most people he was the voice of hope.



Greater China

The premier world power, China hotly contested all borders. The war economy evolved largely out of the effort to contain Chinese ambition.



Even
victory
seared our
souls

Surrender was never
an option

THE RUINED EARTH

With the Cybrids defeated at last, the survivors emerged from the bunkers and tunnels to a sky unsullied by menace for the first time in over twenty years. Children of war who knew no other life stood in stunned amazement at the prospect of peace. The magnitude of the destruction became all too apparent. As

the celebrations faded, people regarded the burned out husks of the cities, the cratered fields, the debris-choked rivers, and everywhere the smell of burnt metal and scorched stone. Soldiers stumbled out of their



"My job? Hosing pilots out of downed Heres so we can refit for another poor bastard."

Chief Tech Javier Fitzsimmons, 2620

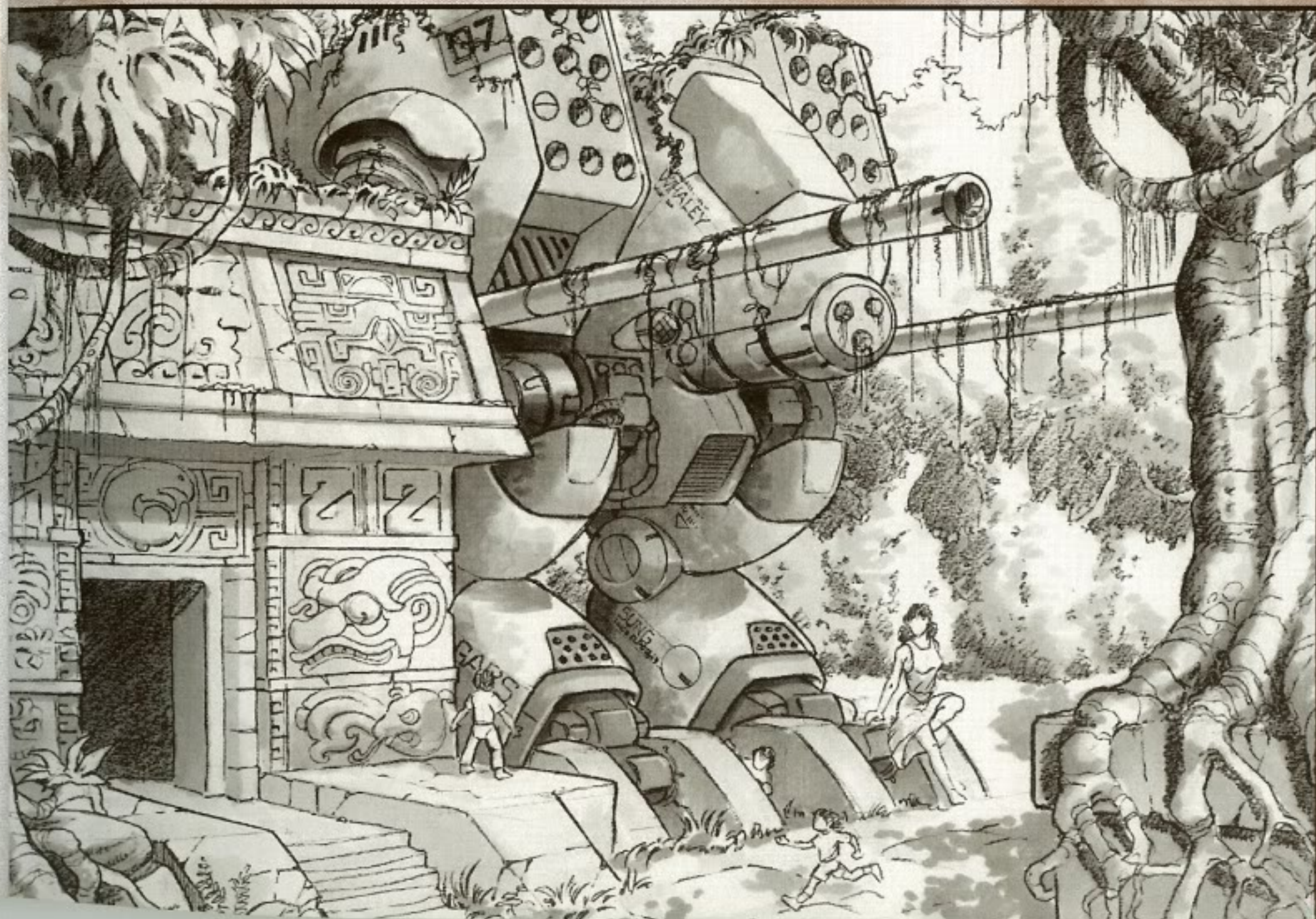
◀ The Battle of New San Diego

battered Heros and wept for what had been lost. Now that the Cybrids were gone, finally, there was time to grieve.

Solomon Petresun also took stock. In the ruins of the past, he began to conjure the future.

*"Is anybody out there?
This is Melissa.
I want my mommy ..."*

*- Unknown radio operator,
February 24, 2602*



THE FIRE





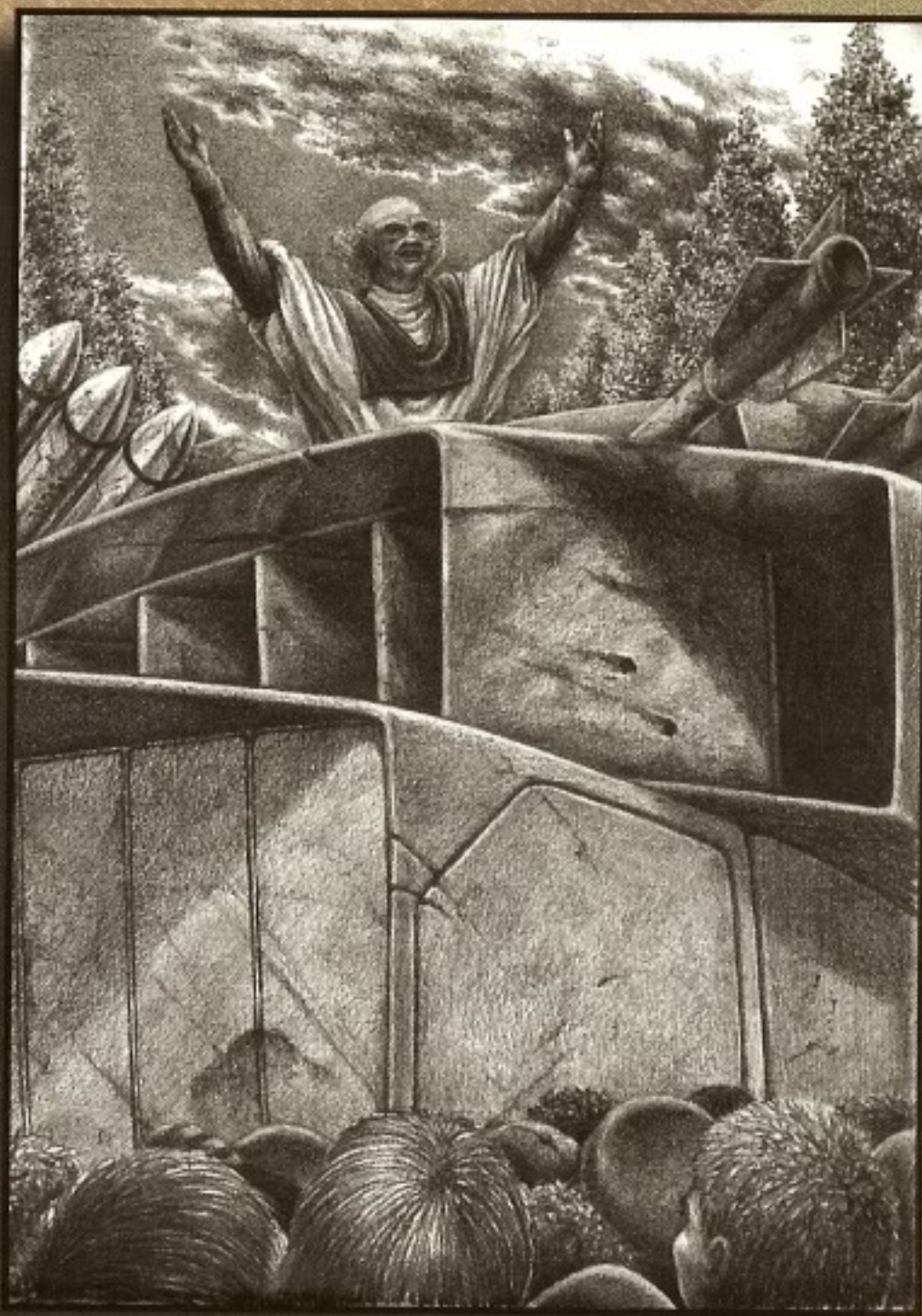
SHARP

The Fire's survivors picked through the smoking ruins of Earth, tired unto death.

Petresun refused to let them give up. Almost single-handedly, he would convince the world to unite under the banner of an empire founded on all the noble aspirations of humanity, a *Great Human Empire* completely devoted to the defense of Mother Earth.

Age of Isolation

After *The Fire*, people slumped into despair. A generation had come of age amid the threat of extinction, knowing nothing of the bright world Prometheus had destroyed. Billions had died, and immense reaction set in. Bitter souls blamed technology itself for the war. This bitterness flared to a backlash against



▲ Preacher on fallen Herc

exhaustion, unwilling to argue with their own children. Some few spoke of assisting the colonies, but their words failed to stem the surging Gaeian movement.

higher learning, science, and industry. Nobility and will, it was said, were the true assets that prevailed against the Cybrids, not technology.

This sentiment took on religious momentum. Zealous preachers stood atop fallen machinery of war and spoke of turning back to Mother Gaea, of abandoning the evil god Technos. Young people put down their weapons and flocked to listen. Older and wiser heads bowed in

THE EMPIRE



technology burns the human spirit

Praise the flowers, praise the trees
Cast away your iron keys
It's a season for the new
It's a reason to be true
We made it through to morning
— Peacechilde song, 2641

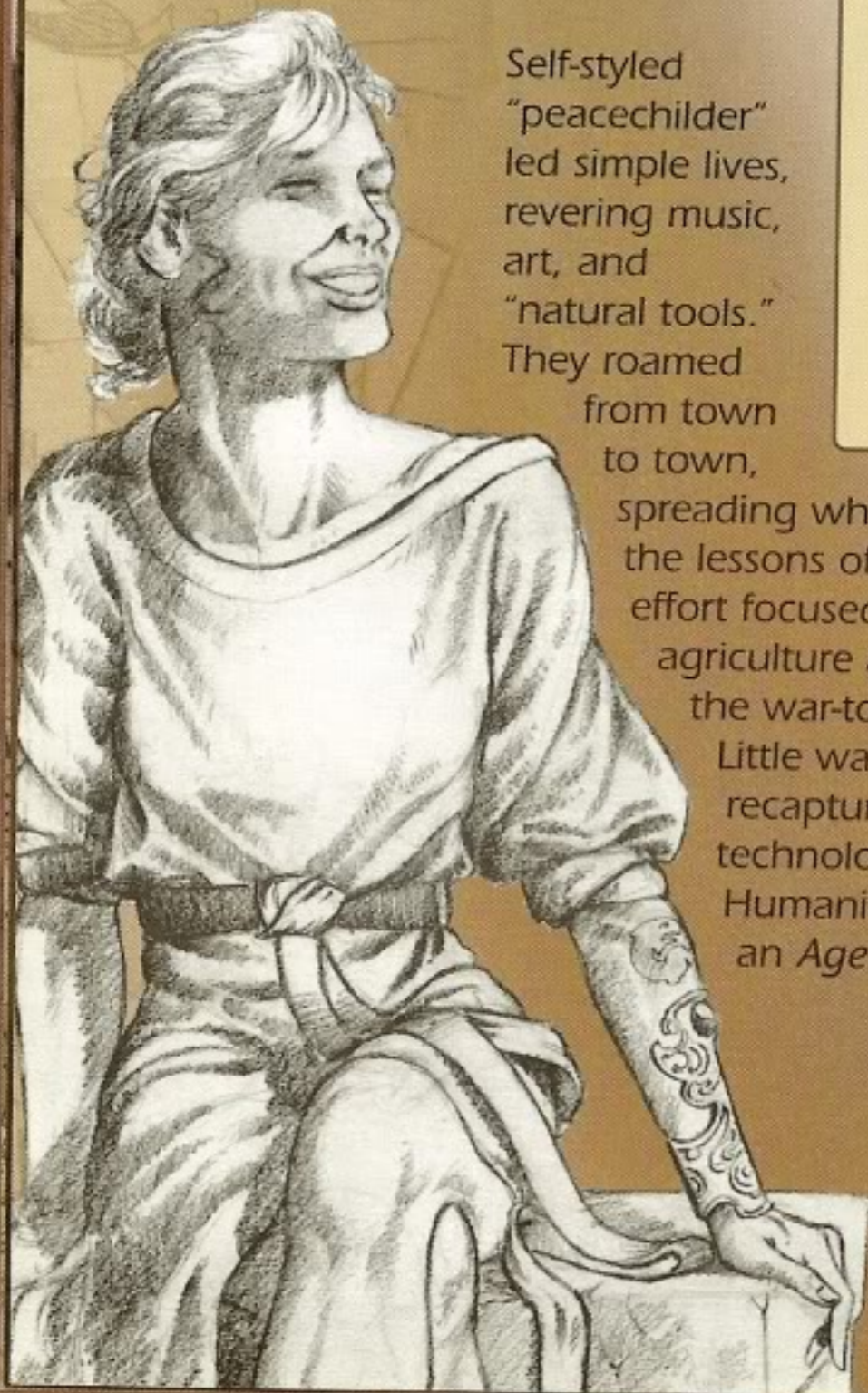
RECONSTRUCTING EARTH

THE FIRST PRIORITIES WERE AGRICULTURE, POWER, AND SANITATION. THEN SURVIVORS BEGAN TO REPAIR ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE CAUSED BY BLOWN HERC REACTORS AND CYBRID STRIP MINING OPERATIONS. ONLY AFTER THE FUNDAMENTALS WERE RESTORED COULD THE PEOPLE OF EARTH LOOK TO BUILDING A NEW FUTURE.

The Man Who Would Be Emperor

Petresun chafed at the laxity he saw. While people rejected high technology, Earth was vulnerable. The meta-nations reconstituted themselves with drastically smaller populations.

Self-styled "peacechilder" led simple lives, revering music, art, and "natural tools." They roamed from town to town, spreading what they called the lessons of *The Fire*. Public effort focused on rebuilding agriculture and repairing the war-torn environment. Little was done to recapture previous technological prowess. Humanity had entered an *Age of Isolation*.



◀ A typical peacechilde, 2639



▲ Repairing holy places, 2641

Smaller groups threatened to break off and form their own countries. Petresun feared a complete collapse into anarchy.

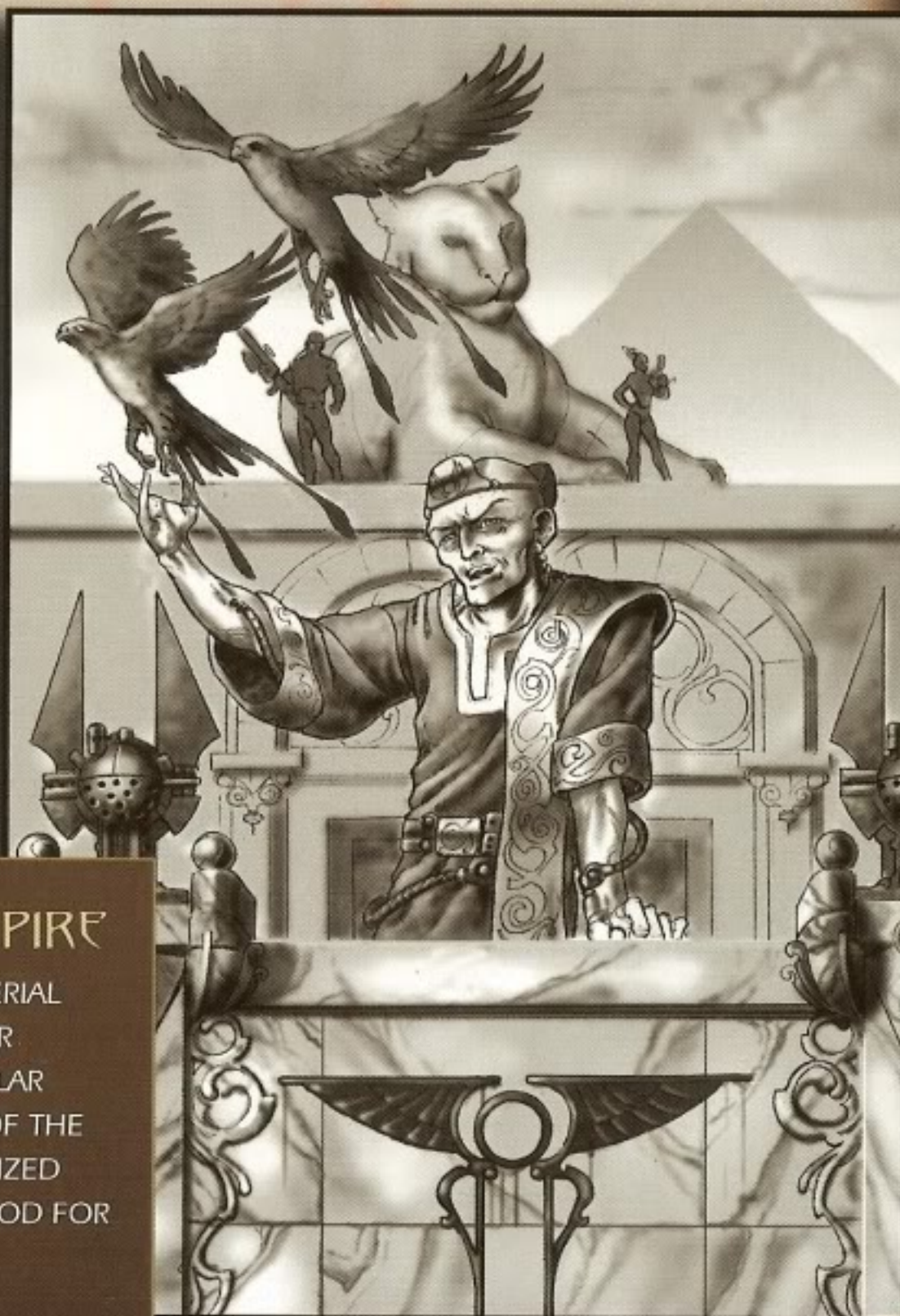
It could not be tolerated, he decided. Prometheus would return, and humanity must be prepared. Enlisting the talent of the Immortal Brotherhood, Petresun agitated for something different, a society dedicated to fostering nobility of character and iron will. He drew upon the sense of shared purpose that remained from the days of *The Fire* and argued to meta-nat leaders and people of Earth for creation of an *Empire*.

Forging Empire

Petresun was a war hero, a household word across the world. People listened to his proposals seriously. The Brotherhood's secret machinations bore fruit; voices took up the cry

for Empire. As support swelled, the question arose as to who would rule. The meta-nations argued for an Imperial Council, but Petresun

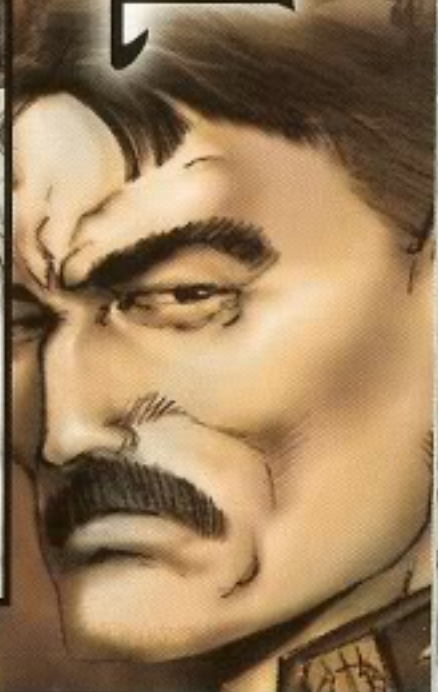
Empire Day, 2652 ▼



SYMBOL OF EMPIRE

PETRESUN CHOSE THE "IMPERIAL ANGEL" AS A METAPHOR FOR MOTHER EARTH. HER CIRCULAR AURA MEANT THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH, HER WINGS SYMBOLIZED HOPE, AND HER FLAME STOOD FOR HUMAN COURAGE.

THE EMPIRE



**"Rise up and say YES!
Exalt the human spirit!
Vote for Empire!"**

— Advertisement supporting the
creation of Empire, 2649



proclaimed that supreme authority should be vested in a single man: himself.

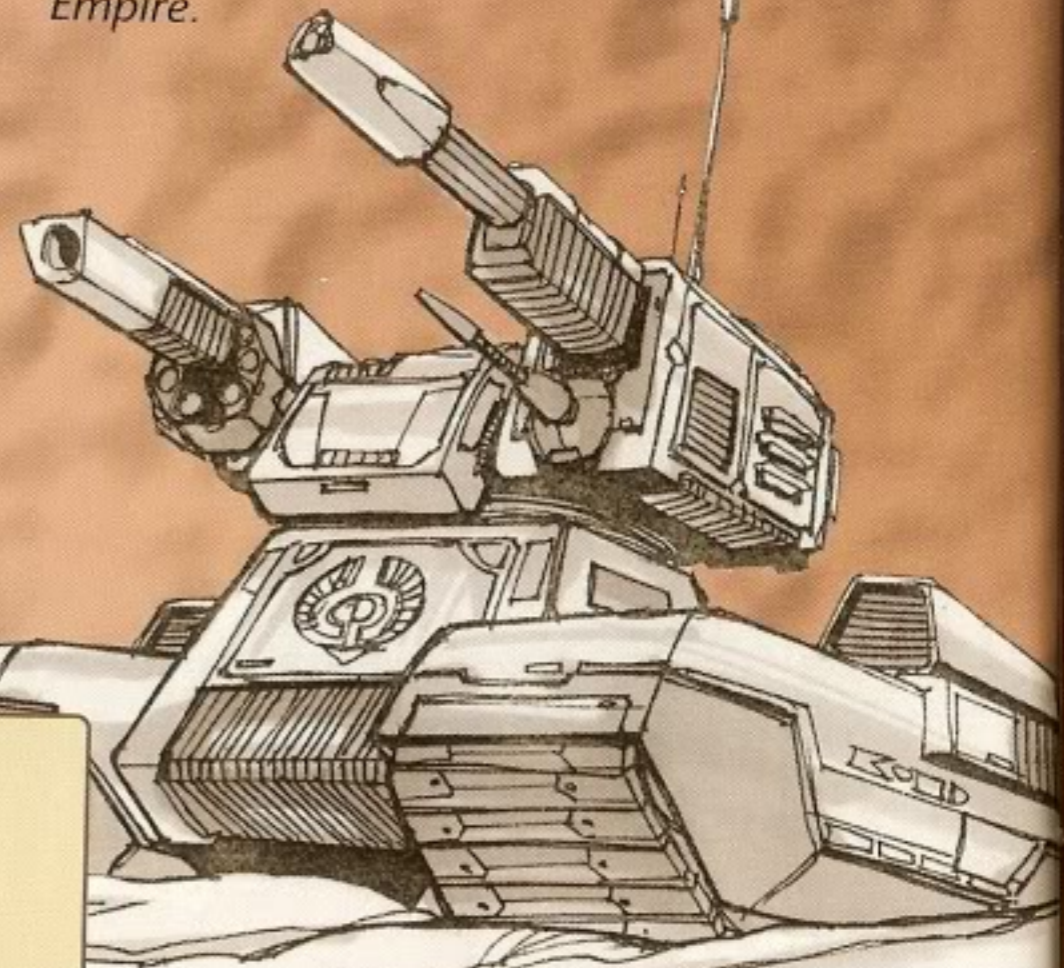
Then he played his trump card. Petresun declared to the masses that he was Immortal and would survive to lead humanity against the Cybrids. His sheer audacity rallied support. People admired the man's bravado and surprising vigor. Opposition crumbled as

his candidacy gained popular momentum and finally culminated in a worldwide referendum. The pro-Empire side won overwhelmingly, and in the spring of 2652, Solomon Petresun was crowned *Emperor of the Great Human Empire*.

THE IMPERIAL ESCORT

A CADRE OF HIGHLY TRAINED, PHYSICALLY PERFECT BODYGUARD-ATTENDANTS, THE ESCORT PLAYED A ROLE THAT PETRESUN WRYLY DESCRIBED AS "CEREMONIAL INTIMIDATION." THE GREAT SECRET OF THE ESCORT WAS THAT ALL WERE IMMORTALS HAND-PICKED BY THE EMPEROR. THEIR SKILL BORDERED ON THE SUPERHUMAN.

Publicity shot for Imperial Escort, 2660 ▲





^ Colonists were less than grateful, MARS, 2664

"Thank you. We have much work to do. Let's begin."

— Opening words by the new Emperor Petresun, Empire Day, 2652

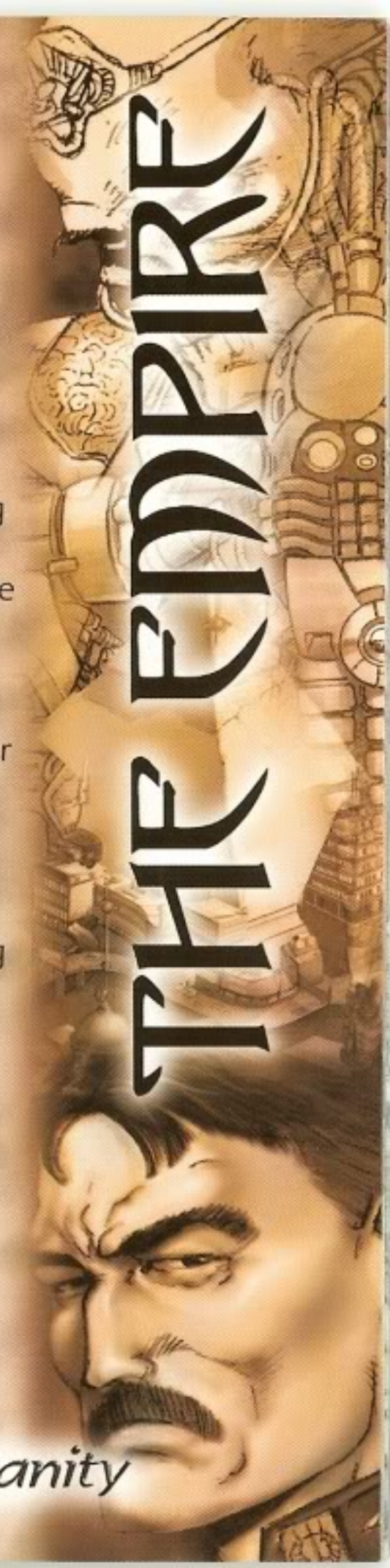
Rise of the Nobility

Petresun spent the fifty years following *Empire Day* establishing his fledgling Empire. First, he instituted a new aristocracy. Outstanding service to the Empire could win a family noble status. However, each generation had to earn the favor anew; the Emperor wanted to spur humanity to excel. The most common path to nobility was military service. Soon military academies and finishing schools sprang up everywhere.

At the same time, Petresun worked to

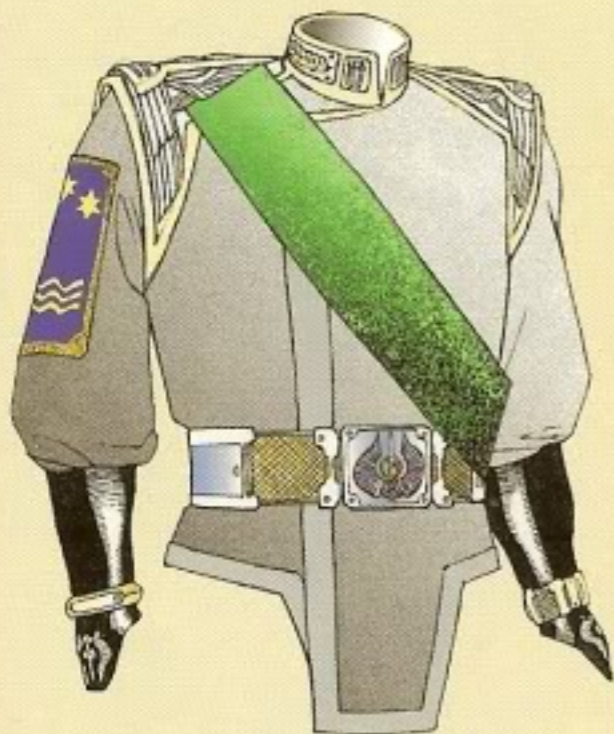
reverse anti-technological sentiment. He sent relief missions to Mars and Venus and encouraged development of universities and research facilities. *The Fire* had scarred Earth deeply. The population was still a shadow of what it had been during the Age of Hope.

a shining beacon of hope for humanity



IMPERIAL KNIGHT DRESS UNIFORM

KNIGHTS WORE THIS UNIFORM ON FORMAL OCCASIONS, TRADITIONALLY WITH A SWORD. THE PLATINUM JACKET AND EMERALD SASH CONTAINED JEWELTHREAD THAT GLEAMED BRIGHTLY EVEN IN DIM LIGHT. THE RIGHT ARM BORE THE FAMILY CREST. LEATHER GAUNTLETS COMPLETED THE ENSEMBLE. THE COLLAR SHOWN HERE DISPLAYS THE RANK OF KNIGHT-CAPTAIN.



Millions still suffered from nightmares and flashbacks. Humanity needed to heal.

The Cybrid Menace

A sense of urgency crept over Petresun with the passing of the years, as he brooded on the whereabouts of Prometheus. Finally, in 2717, a deep space probe provided a stark answer: Cybrids were engaged in construction in Neptune's orbit.

The discovery troubled the Emperor. Humanity faced a bottleneck. Population levels were still too low to

support a massive war buildup; decimated colonies needed to rebuild. Petresun made the difficult decision to delay full rearmament, but continued to monitor Cybrid activity carefully.

IMPERIAL KNIGHTS

ARISTOCRATIC HERC PILOTS WHO SERVED AS ELITE SHOCK TROOPS.



▲ Petresun chose Nova Alexandria as the Imperial capital

End of Isolation

Gradually, information about the Cybrids was leaked to the citizenry. As humanity absorbed

the sobering facts, Imperial nobles and TDF heroes worked to restore people's spirits. Humanity began to dig in and prepare for the eventual return of Prometheus. Anti-technological feelings faded surprisingly quickly. Memories of *The Fire* were not so dim that people had forgotten the need for Hercs. The Age of Isolation was over.

TERRAN DEFENSE FORCE

THE TERRAN DEFENSE FORCE (TDF) WAS THE LARGEST AND BEST-TRAINED FORCE IN HUMAN SPACE. IT ENJOYED ENORMOUS POPULARITY ON EARTH.

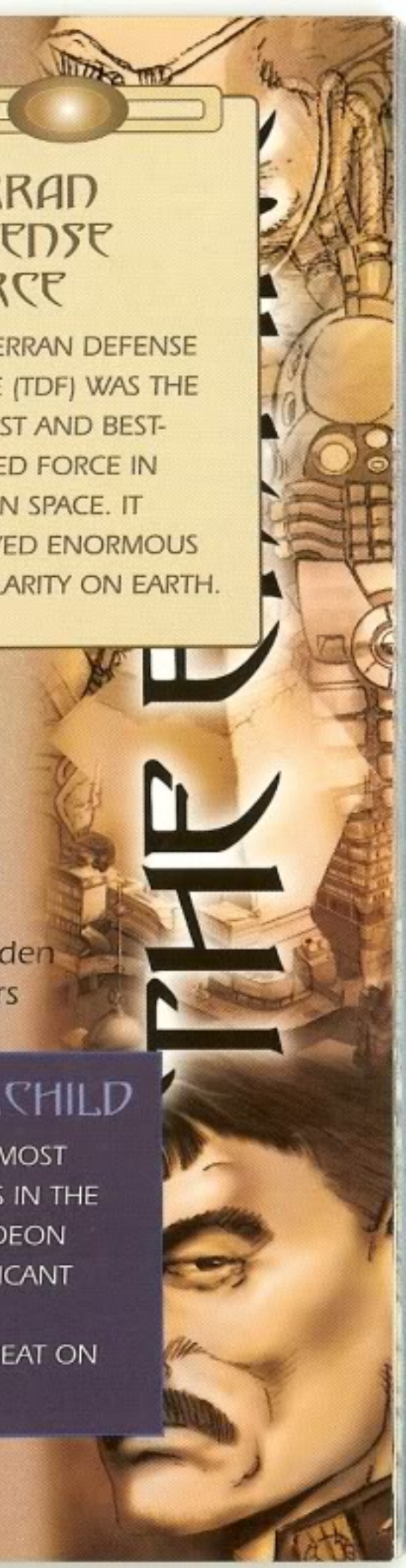
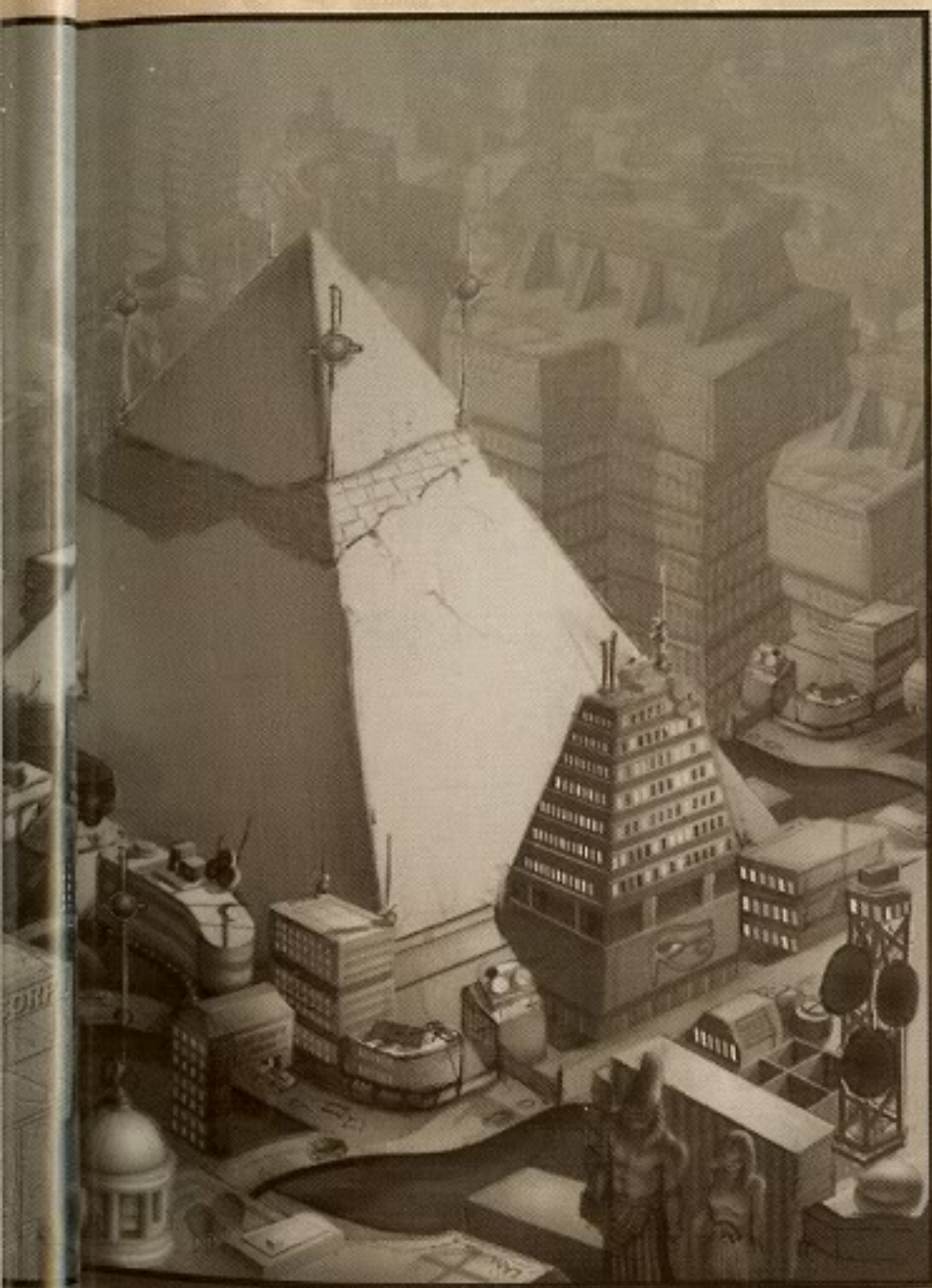
The Great Human Empire

Petresun's vision became reality. Imperial cities blossomed with brightly painted plazas, glittering fountains, lofty tree-laden parks, and elegant theaters. At night, towers



HOUSE OF FAIRCHILD

ONE OF THE OLDEST AND MOST POWERFUL NOBLE FAMILIES IN THE EMPIRE. THE PATRIARCH GIDEON FAIRCHILD WIELDED SIGNIFICANT POWER IN THE NORTHAM PREFECTURE AND HELD A SEAT ON THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL.



BIODERMS

IN 2688 CONDEMNED CRIMINALS WERE CONVERTED TO CYBORGS FOR HAZARDOUS LABOR. "BIODERM" WAS COINED AFTER AN IMPERIAL SURVEY FOUND EXTREMELY NEGATIVE PUBLIC REACTION TO ANYTHING SOUNDING LIKE "CYBRID."

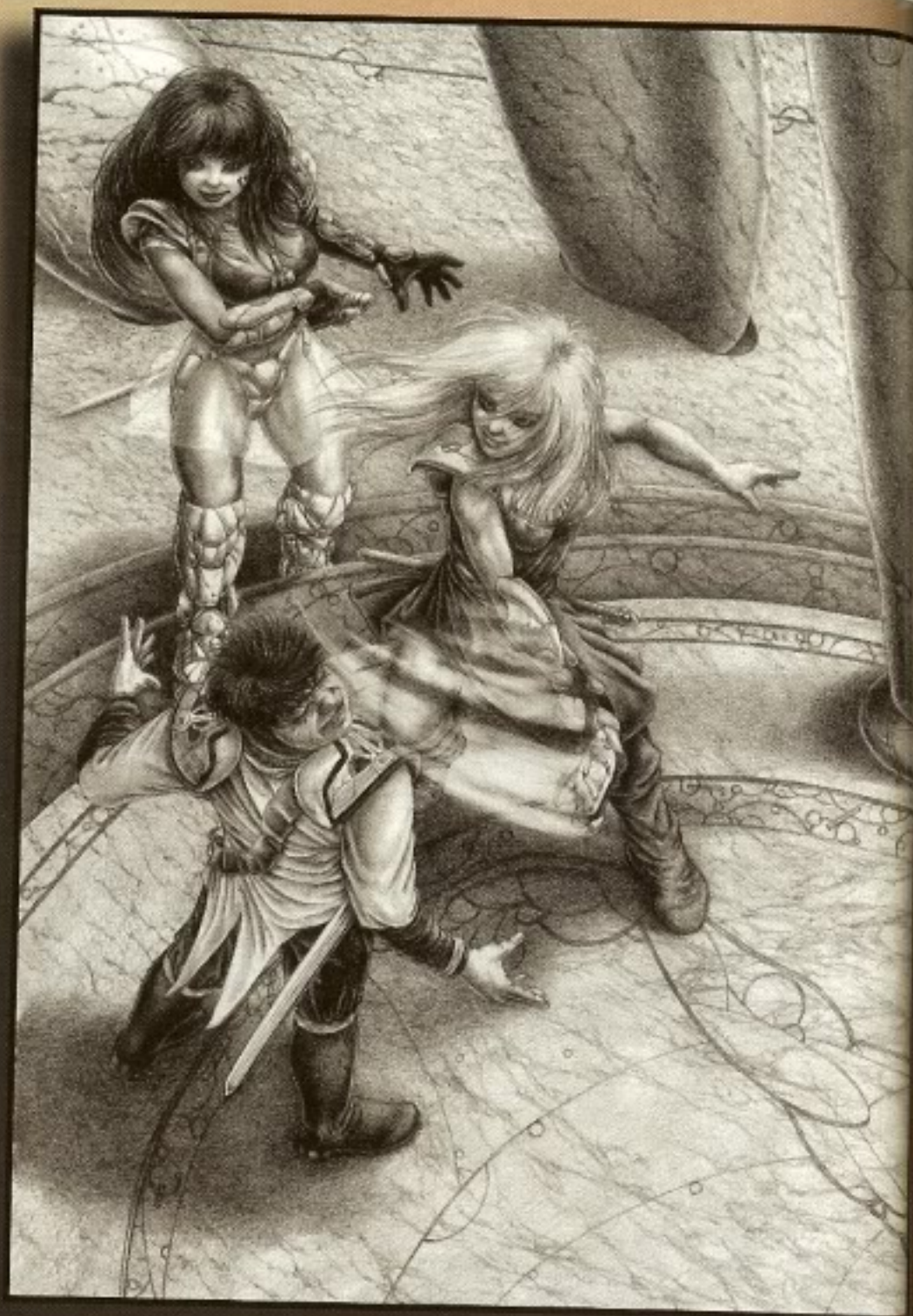
ALL 'DERMS RECEIVED MEMORY WIPE AND CRANIAL IMPLANTS THAT CONTAINED BEHAVIOR-INHIBITION PROGRAMMING (BIP). OCCASIONALLY, UNITS REQUIRED "REBIPPING" BECAUSE OF STRESS OR INJURY. THE PUBLIC VIEWED BIODERMS AS MERE MACHINES.

sparkled like castles out of fairy tales. Knights raised swords in salute to the Imperial banners. People walked with pride beneath clean skies. Ships of the Imperial Navy swept through the cold void with sensors trimmed for signs of Cybrid activity. Humanity brimmed with confidence.

The Empire was no monolith. Though its great strength was genuine, it did not reach as deeply as supporters wished to believe. Indeed, many things crucial to the Empire's health threatened to falter. The rock of Empire had cracks.

A Decaying Emperor

The Emperor took power for life, and his life lasted long indeed. By the time of the

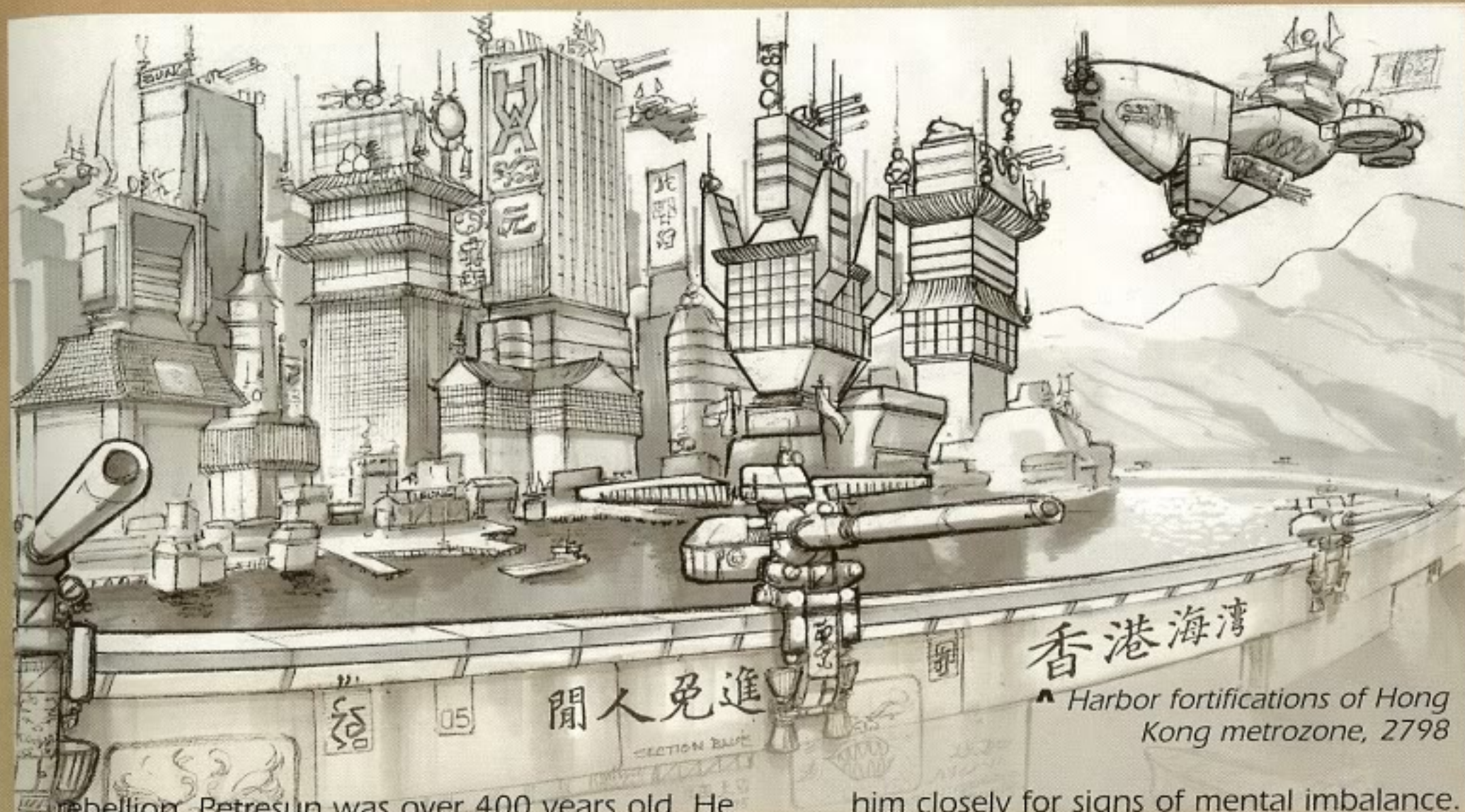


▲ A challenge is issued at the Imperial Court, 2827

"'BioDerm?' Isn't that a new kind of hand lotion?"

— Response to Imperial opinion survey.





香港海灣

閒人免進

Harbor fortifications of Hong Kong metrozone, 2798

rebellion, Petresun was over 400 years old. He retained supreme authority and had become an institution. No one could imagine life without him. Although Petresun had withered to a husk, he still lived. His mind stayed sharp and undimmed. The faith of billions rested on his leadership.

His longevity carried a price, however. Advanced medical devices took over more of his body's functions each year; he was doomed to become no more than a rag of flesh wrapped around a maze of tubes and wiring. The Immortal Brotherhood watched

him closely for signs of mental imbalance. However, they failed to realize the depth of his hatred for Prometheus. Petresun refused to fail while Prometheus still existed. Such was the depth of his resolve.



HOUSE OF EUN ALBA

"Disgrace our name again, I'll kill you myself."

— Duke Leonidas Eun Alba
to his son, 2799

THE EMPIRE



EARTH 2829: THE TROUBLED EMPIRE

2829



ME+ANATIONS

KEY

- ⊕Imperial Capital
-Major City
- ★Trouble Spot/War Zone



NORTH AMERICAN
PREFECTURE



INCA-BRAZIL
AXIS



EUROPEAN
ALLIANCE



UNITED
AFRICA



IMPERIAL
PROTECTORATE



GREATER
CHINA



PACIFIC
RIM

Petresun accepted his body as penance for his failure to destroy Prometheus during the early years. Yet he also enjoyed the freedom of hologram "ghosts" that walked the halls of the Imperial Palace. He reveled in the thousand eyes and ears the palace sensors provided. In his intimate connections to the electronic world, he escaped the tyranny of his decrepitude for short periods of time.

Brushfire Separatism

The Empire did not enjoy universal approval, even on Earth. A paradoxical result of *The Fire* was that while people became less prejudiced or racist, they became more fiercely proud of their individual cultures. Hence,

"We are not sheep for your Empire. Pull your trigger and be damned."

— Corsican "terrorist" at her execution, 2811

The Gorgon, a heavy assault-class Herc ▲



ORDER OF
THE BLOOD EAGLE

MOTTO: "CARVE THE BASTARDS."

THE EMPIRE

The Angel of Earth

as populations recovered, nationalistic groups reappeared and sought independence. Where these groups turned to armed resistance, the Emperor quashed them. Yet resistance movements still sprang up around the world, like seeds sprouting from a fallow field.

Meta-nation politics may have played a role, as terrorists gained unusual access to antique military gear or anti-Cybrid weaponry. Some commentators speculated that the meta-nations sought to undermine Imperial rule. Other observers scoffed at this idea.



HOUSE OF
CHEDLIU

The most chilling rumors whispered that the *Emperor* secretly funded separatists and even allowed them sophisticated arms and training. These rumors said the Emperor needed an enemy to hone his Knights against, or that he meant the resistance movements to become homegrown guerrilla troops. This theory portrayed the entire ongoing troubles as a gigantic, Machiavellian training exercise.

Secret Dissent



IMPERIAL POLICE

PARAMILITARY CORPS THAT
ENFORCED THE EMPEROR'S
LAW IN THE FAR COLONIES.

The Brotherhood wormed its members into positions of power and labored to further the Emperor's clandestine plans. Immortals lodged secretly in the upper echelons of the government and military, weaving complex webs of spies and rumor. Yet the Brotherhood had its dissenters, too, who believed the Emperor pushed the colonies too hard. These individuals began to operate independently furthering their own shadowy plans.

A Surfeit of Pride

Imperial citizens continually underestimated the resolve of their colonial brethren. This superior attitude proved a costly mistake. Imperials believed *Earth's* humans alone had beaten Prometheus, that the colonies were lacking in nobility and will. Yet even as the colonies sacrificed and sweated under

oppressive laws, the arrogant Earthborn chased fashion and enjoyed their luxuries. The colonists were not slow to notice the inequity.

DUELLING

IMPERIALS VALUED CHARACTER AND REPUTATION GREATLY, EVEN TO THE POINT OF FIGHTING DUELS TO PRESERVE A GOOD NAME. THE CODE DUELLO EVOLVED TO REGULATE THIS ACTIVITY, AND THOSE WHO IGNORED IT FACED SEVERE CONSEQUENCES.

Nobility

Honor

Courage

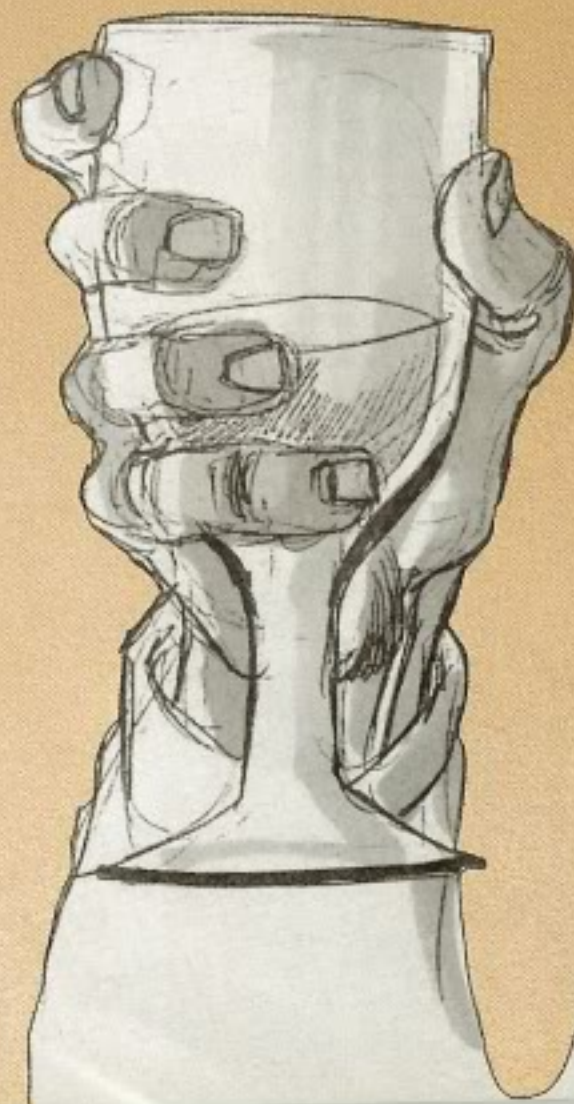
"About the only stuff the Imperials won't take is garbage."

— Jonas Ngari,
merchant spaceship captain, 2827



ORDER OF THE FURIOUS STARS

MOTTO: "FLAME OR FADE"



▲ *Imperial Knights epitomized confidence*

CALLSIGNS

UPON INITIATION, AN IMPERIAL KNIGHT RECEIVED A NICKNAME CHOSEN BY HIS OR HER NEW BRETHERN.



IMPERIAL LEGIONS

THE LEGIONS PLAYED THE ROLE OF PLANETARY CONTROL AND SUPPORT.

Fortification Proclamation, a radical assertion of Imperial supremacy that subordinated all colonial economies to Earth's defense. Imperial authorities received a broad mandate to confiscate colonial resources. To enforce the new law, the Proclamation dramatically expanded Imperial Police powers.

Fortress Earth

In 2755, the Emperor began to mobilize Earth's defenses. But as the Imperial economy thrived and the population of Earth and the colonies showed signs of robust health, he made the decision to fortify Earth in earnest. From Petresun's perspective, the colonies were expendable, but Earth was not. Mars supported human life, but its ecology was fragile. Venus was even more vulnerable, and none of the moon colonies would survive sustained Cybrid attack.

A Fateful Decision

Petresun decided colonists would have to fend for themselves. Earth's defenses would receive top priority. Accordingly, he issued the

*Mother Earth is in need.
Who would deny her?*



▲ Los Angeles fortified sector, 2824

a sword raised for humanity's defense

When the colonists protested, Petresun turned the Empire's strength against them. Dissatisfaction at first took the form of peaceful demonstrations, but as years passed without signs of change, the colonists turned to violence.

The Emperor stayed his course, acutely aware that the Cybrids had begun to show signs of increased activity. He counted on the threat of the Knights, the Empire's finest, to keep the lid on the colonies while Earth's defenses were stiffened. Yet the Knights themselves would eventually splinter.

IMPERIAL JUSTICE

THE FORTIFICATION PROCLAMATION EMPOWERED THE IMPERIAL POLICE TO SUPPRESS COLONIAL RESISTANCE TO THE ONE-SIDED POLICIES. IT AUTHORIZED SUMMARY TRIALS, EXPANDED USE OF DEADLY FORCE, AND ALLOWED WARRANTLESS SEARCHES OF COLONIAL CITIZENS.



Vid shot of Cybrid installation, 2717 ▲



"A true paladin. We should all feel safe under his watch."

— Janella's Guide to Imperial Society
on Caanon, 2820

Harabec and Caanon

The year the Emperor issued the Fortification Proclamation, Duke Lancing's Weathers of NAP had a son he named Caanon. Caanon grew into a formidable soldier who displayed uncanny precision, discipline, and presence of mind. He became a Knight at the unheard-of age of twenty-six, dubbed "Icehawk" for his calculating demeanor.

The same year Caanon took the oath of Knighthood, his little brother Harabec suffered a near-fatal accident. Only swift intervention by the famous Lazarus clinics saved six-year-old Harabec's life — or so the world believed. In reality, these clinics were a cover for the Immortal Brotherhood, which secretly used them to plant Immortal brains into certain

"One Knight's worth a dozen terrorists. We'll be sleeping in the rebel commander's bed within a week, eh, Phoenix?"

— Last transmission of Knight-Prime "Mako,"
Turk hazakistan, 2819



each a reflection of the other

patients. When the boy emerged from Lazarus, a different mind occupied his body, that of the greatest warrior of the Immortal Brotherhood.

"Harabec" grew into an uncanny pilot and tactician, swiftly displaying skills other Knights spent years trying to master. Caanon at first



THE TURKHAZAKISTAN DEBACLE

IN 2819, THE EMPEROR DISPATCHED HARABEC TO PUT DOWN A REVOLUTION IN TURKHAZAKISTAN. TDF PREDICTED SWIFT SUCCESS. HOWEVER, REBELS STAGED AN UNEXPECTEDLY EFFECTIVE AMBUSH WITH ADVANCED ANTI-CYBRID WEAPONRY, CRIPPLING THE STRIKEFORCE AND HANDING THE KNIGHTS THEIR FIRST REAL DEFEAT. THE PUBLIC WANTED A SCAPEGOAT, AND THE MEDIA CRUCIFIED HARABEC.

"You'd think I had a disease."

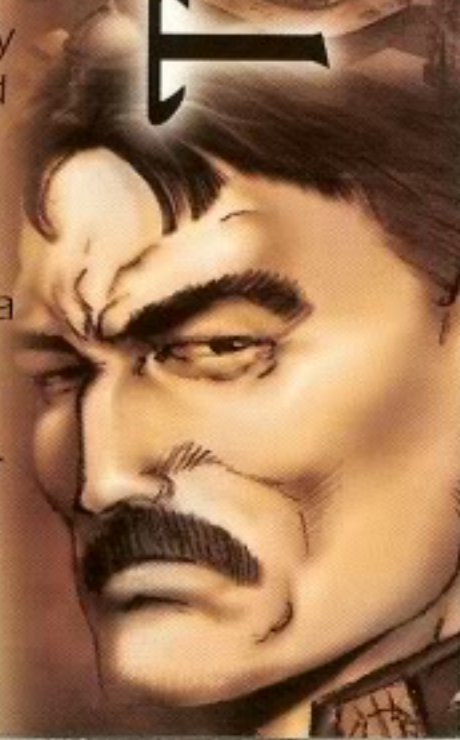
— Harabec after
Turkhazakistan, 2820

^ After Turkhazakistan the brothers argued more frequently.

taught his brother, then watched in wonder as Harabec's talent exploded and eclipsed all expectations. Harabec became a Knight at twenty, the deadliest Herc pilot in history. He distinguished himself in combat, twice surviving situations where others would surely have perished. His miraculous escapes earned the callsign "Phoenix".

Caanon continued his own meteoric ascent through the ranks of the Knights. Talent and a powerful sense of duty earned him the Emperor's attention, and he achieved the signal honor of appointment as Grand Master of the Imperial Knights. The youngest ever to

THE



HARABEC THE IMMORTAL

AS AN IMMORTAL, HARABEC TOOK A NUMBER OF OTHER IDENTITIES OVER THE YEARS, BUT ALWAYS SERVED IN AS A WARRIOR. AT ONE TIME, HE EVEN SERVED AS ONE OF THE IMPERIAL ESCORT. AS HARABEC, HE DISPLAYED A FIERCE LOVE OF LIFE AND FREEDOM. HE INCREASINGLY DISLIKED AND DISTRUSTED THE MACHINATIONS OF THE BROTHERHOOD.

reach that rank, Caanon settled easily into court life and carried out his responsibilities vigorously. That he seemed more devoted to duty than to his wife and three children earned more

praise than criticism.

Harabec showed a rebellious streak that complicated his personal life. He quickly developed a reputation for ignoring protocol and disputing orders. He showed little patience for authority or discipline, and despite possessing remarkable charisma, refused to marry. He preferred to explore the wilder side of life, and his passions frequently led him into trouble. The potential for disgrace worried his family, and Harabec quarreled frequently with those he loved best, especially Caanon.

After the Turkhazakistan Debacle and the accompanying public hostility against "the

"I spent years watching my brother, trying to see a way to beat him."

— Caanon on Harabec, 2829

"Disgraced and lost

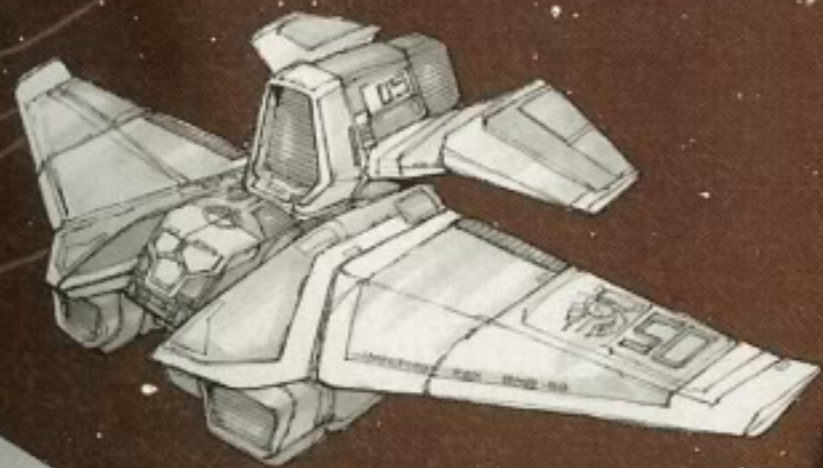
to obscurity. Forget him."

—Janella's Guide to Imperial Society on Harabec, 2824



Weathers hotshot," tensions mounted further between the brothers. Their arguments came to the attention of the Emperor, and Petresun met briefly with Harabec, ostensibly to heal the rift between these two important Knights. However, the dispute between the brothers intensified, and Harabec abruptly took an extended leave of absence from active service, claiming he needed time to let things cool off. Caanon hoped Harabec would mature and return with a better commitment to duty.

But Harabec vanished, and Caanon did not see him again for nearly ten years. When they did meet, it would be under nightmare circumstances neither brother would have chosen.



Fire and Ice



THE WEATHERS FAMILY

THE WEATHERS WERE DESCENDED FROM A RENOWNED HERC PILOT FROM *THE FIRE*, ARCHIBALD WEATHERS, ONE OF THE FIRST IMPERIAL KNIGHTS. EACH GENERATION SINCE THEN, THE WEATHERS PROVIDED KNIGHTS FOR THE DEFENSE OF EARTH. THE FAMILY WAS ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED IN THE EMPIRE, KNOWN FOR ITS HONORABLE CHARACTER. THE DEFECTION OF HARABEC HURT THE FAMILY'S REPUTATION BADLY.



THE EMPIRE

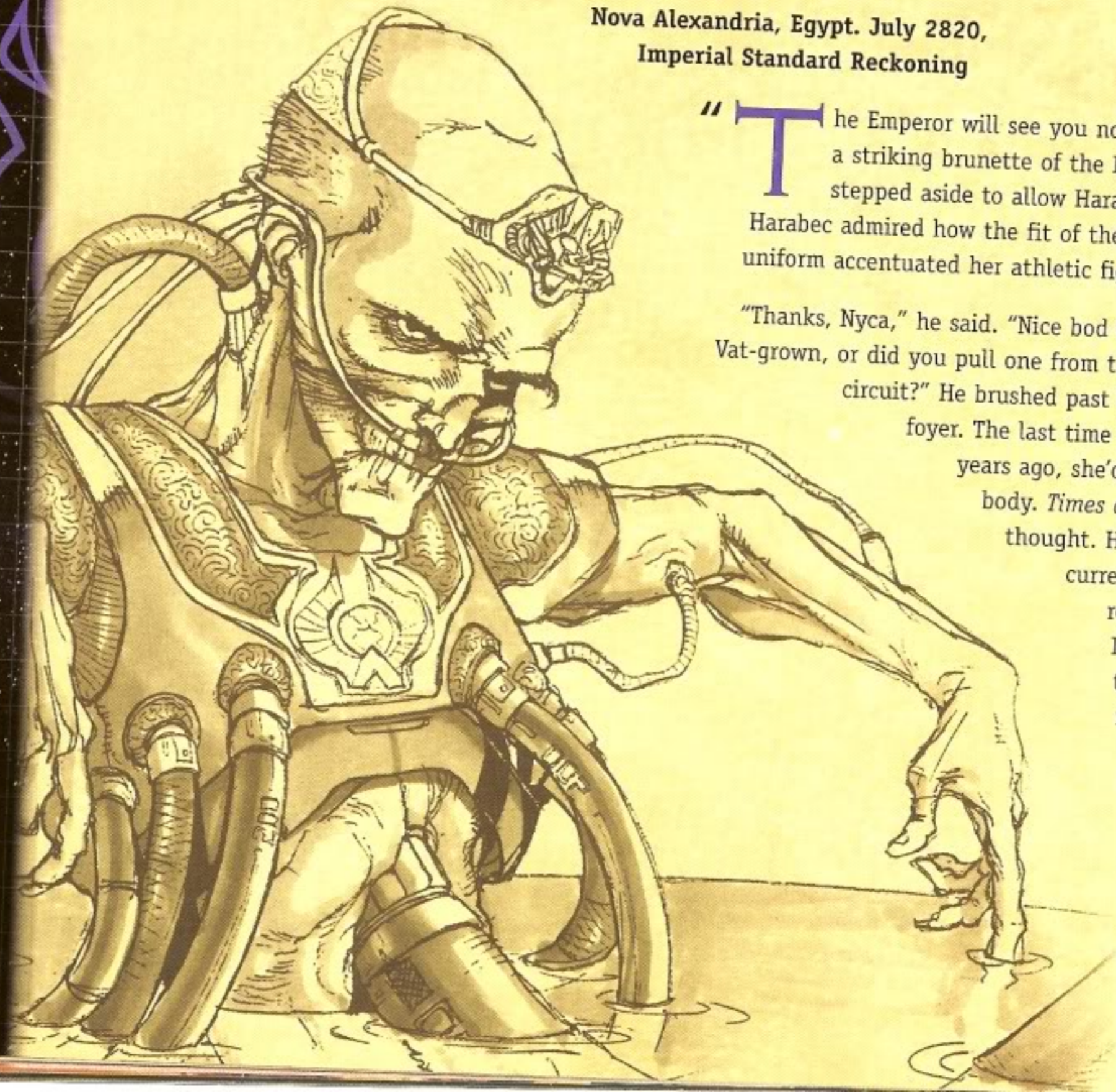
THE DEFECTION OF HARABEC

By Blake Hutchins

Nova Alexandria, Egypt. July 2820,
Imperial Standard Reckoning

"The Emperor will see you now." The woman, a striking brunette of the Imperial Escort, stepped aside to allow Harabec to enter. Harabec admired how the fit of the tight black uniform accentuated her athletic figure.

"Thanks, Nyca," he said. "Nice bod this time around. Vat-grown, or did you pull one from the accident circuit?" He brushed past her into the foyer. The last time he'd seen Nyca years ago, she'd been in a man's body. *Times change*, he thought. Harabec kept as current as possible regarding other Immortals' identities. It was important



to stay straight on who was who when colleagues could change identities and lives like short-timers changed clothes.

The woman remained expressionless, ignoring his comment. "Please follow me, Knight-Captain Weathers." She opened the next door and led Harabec into the Imperial Suite. Or one of them, at least. Like the ancient Chinese Emperors, His Imperial Majesty Solomon Poulicho Petresun maintained a large number of suites, and spent his nights in them randomly. The Imperial Palace in Nova Alexandria was vast enough that months could go by without sleeping in the same room twice.

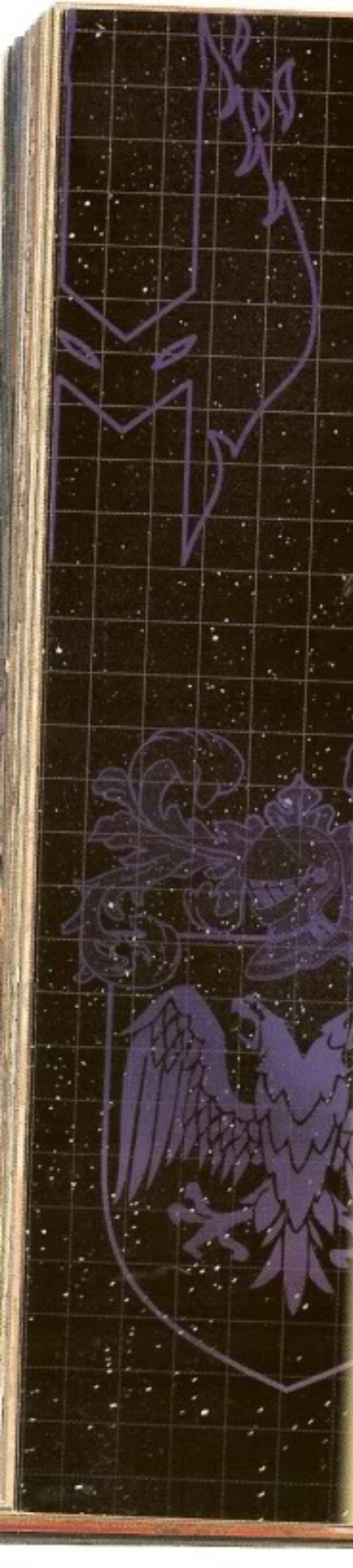
This one was on a higher level, with jeweled tapestries fairly dripping from every wall, and wonder of wonders, even had a window view. Outside, Harabec caught a glimpse of Nova Alexandria shining white in the sunlight. The Great Pyramid thrust its weathered point defiantly into the vivid blue of a desert sky. The green of palm trees and flower-studded gardens accented the city's whiteness. It was a city built in the aftermath of the Earthsiege, one of the finest architectural achievements of all history, designed to show that humanity could rise from the destruction and recapture a vision of peace and beauty.

Like a phoenix, Harabec thought bitterly. His battle-name among the Imperial Knights was Phoenix, earned from his knack for escaping

seemingly impossible situations. Behind his back, though, many Knights called him Hara-Kiri for the heavy losses his unorthodox strategies often caused among his own forces. Of course, it would help if he weren't given near-suicidal missions to begin with. That insurrection in the Turkhazak Border Zone last spring, for instance, should have been faced down with at least five times the force Harabec had been given, including badly needed aerial support. It was a miracle he'd gotten anyone out at all when the Turkhazaki rebels hit them. The Turkhazaks had obtained a cache of Chinese anti-Cybrid weapons on the black market, so when Harabec's Imperial Peace force arrived, things got hot in a hurry. Half the platoon's Hercs went down in the first two minutes, and the rest would have been slaughtered to the last man had Harabec not managed to penetrate the Turkhazak line with a charge directly into the teeth of the incoming fire.

Christ and Hunter, Harabec wondered. *How did we get out of that?* He knew, though, that his centuries-old reflexes were the cause. He'd reacted instinctively to a vague hint on the sensors, on the strength of more battle experience than everyone else in the platoon put together. In the instant before the hail of microatomic Hellflowers exploded in his troop, he'd brought his Apocalypse around and redlined it toward the shooters. While his fellow Knights reeled in confusion, Harabec hurtled into the Turkhazaki position, tearing them into





ragged with a firestorm of lasers and hypervelocity slugs. The few Knights who had the presence of mind to follow their leader survived. The ones who froze never made it out.

Good men and women had died that day, and Harabec was celebrated as hero at the same time the relatives of the dead cursed his name. Eventually, the public soured on his exploits and came to see him as a glory-seeker. The Phoenix rose from the flames time after time, but burned his companions in the process. *Careless of other warriors' lives*, the newsvids said. *The Turkhazak Debacle was just one example.*

"Terra Mater," he whispered, his fists clenching at the memory. All so needless! The Turkhazaks were fighting the Empire's wartime economy more than the Empire itself. People understood the need to prepare against another Earthsiege, but the merciless demands of the Emperor's military buildup made Terran Defense Force needs the *only* needs. As a result, people actually starved so the Empire could build more Hercs, hovertanks, and stratofighters.

I tried to tell Solomon, but he never listens. He just gives orders.

The woman moved aside and ushered him into a richly appointed room off the main suite. This room was designed to look like the interior of an

ancient Egyptian temple, with sandstone floors and hieroglyphs painted on the circular walls. The Emperor lay in his gel-padded wombcouch between two black pillars carved to resemble falcon-headed gods. A host of tubes arched into his thin body, worming between the delicate struts of the exoharness that allowed his withered muscles to move his arms and legs. The Emperor wore nothing else. The air was quite warm. Harabec was already sweating. Behind the Emperor, two men of the Escort stood at attention, their eyes boring into Harabec.

The floor between Harabec and the Emperor held what looked like a pool of blue-green liquid, smooth as glass. It was what passed for a bath for His Imperial Majesty, Harabec knew, a mix of emollient analgesics, microcleansers, and tissue regeneratives. The gel was buoyant and designed not to stick to inorganic material such as the Emperor's life-support net.

"I'm here, as you requested," Harabec said, thrusting his hands into his jacket pockets. He'd have preferred to come to this audience less formally dressed. Behind him, Nyca shut the door and moved to just behind where he stood. "You're not safe with the usual two watchdogs?"

The Emperor replied in a faint whisper, the most he could manage without mechanical aid. "My Escorts are very concerned for my well-being. Take no offense."

"Too late. I'm offended. May I sit?"

The Emperor flicked his gaze over Harabec's shoulder. Harabec heard the door open as Nyca went into the adjoining room. In a few moments, she returned and set a chair by Harabec's side, something thin and black, with a gilded cushion.

"Thanks." Harabec didn't bother to look at Nyca as he took his seat. "What do you need me for this time? I thought I was out of favor. Even Caanon doesn't have time for me these days. You'd think I had a disease." He slouched back and stretched his legs out until his boots nearly reached the edge of the gel-pool. The guards shifted uncomfortably. Harabec smiled.

"Precisely what I intended, my boy." The Emperor's eyes gleamed. "You've heard of the rebel attacks on Mars, naturally."

"Of course. And Venus, not to mention right here on Earth. This surprises you, given the suffering our policies cause?"

"It is necessary, as you know well. The Enemy isn't delaying its preparations, and neither can we."

Harabec leaned back and looked at the ceiling. "Spare me the propaganda. If you'd begun Earth's preparation a hundred years earlier, as I'd advised, you wouldn't be forced to play catch-up now."

"I will not waste time arguing," the Emperor said mildly. "Humanity has no room to falter. The Empire must succeed in its preparations, even if people suffer."

"Even if people begin to see the Empire as the enemy?"

"Short-sighted. They must sacrifice so that the species survives."



Harabec snorted. "Why not bring them into the preparation? Give them a stake. Let them build their own forces instead of sending everything back to Earth!"

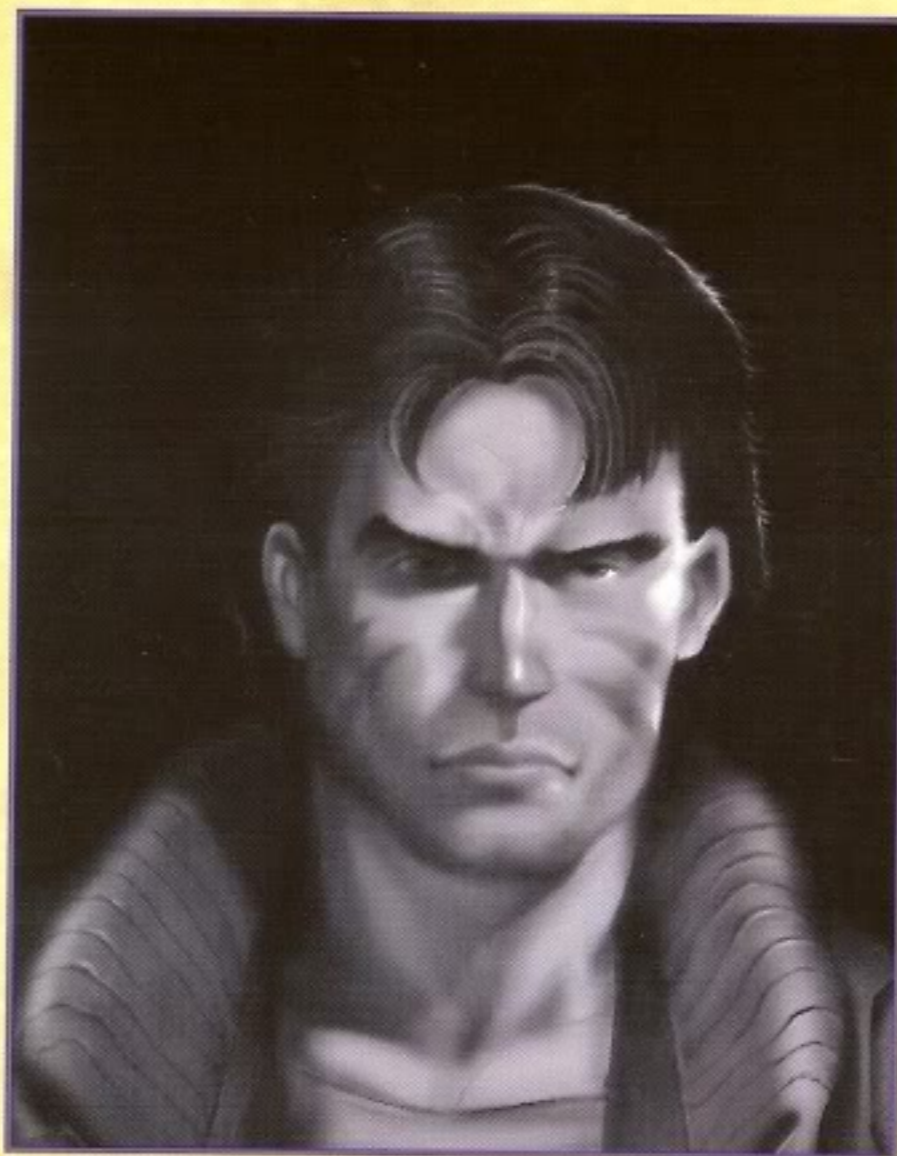
"We on Earth are in the best position to lead the effort, Victor."

"Don't call me that! Victor's gone. I'm Harabec Weathers now."

The emperor chuckled, a dry rustle. "Yes, and it's a useful position to have you in. Very useful indeed." He gestured weakly at the pool. "I'm ready." One of his

Escorts, a powerfully built Asian male, lifted the Emperor and placed him gently into the pool, the web of nano-fibers and nutrient tubes extending with the Emperor from the wombcouch into the jade-colored gel. "Aaah, yes. By Christ and Hunter, that feels good." His Imperial Majesty closed his eyes and relaxed with a blissful look on his face.

Harabec thought about his place in the Weathers family with a twinge of guilt. Neither his body's



father nor his body's brother knew the true Harabec was long dead, killed in that hovertrike accident twenty years ago, a few days after his sixth birthday. They didn't know that when the Emperor's own medicos intervened and flew the comatose boy to the famed Lazarus Clinics, he was already braindead.

Instead of an operation to save the young Harabec, who was beyond help at that point, the Lazarus surgeons removed the boy's cerebrum. They replaced it with an Immortal brain, a sophisticated solid-state

neural net encased in a sleek, black metaplas casing tough enough to stop anything short of a hypervelocity round. The Immortal brain was powered by a superconductor battery and had a theoretical life of several thousand years. It had the same shape as a human cerebrum, except that it was as smooth as an eggshell. It was even somewhat flexible, adapting itself to the space available in the skull as the individual aged. The Immortal mind residing in the brain had several advantages over a biologically

based mind besides longevity. Its reflexes and thought processes were generally faster. It possessed near-absolute memory, and was capable of limited mental multitasking. Thus, an Immortal could in theory carry on a social conversation while composing poetry, performing complex calculations, and reading a novel. In practice, few Immortals found any need or desire to be that busy.

When Harabec had opened his eyes in the Imperial Hospital, he'd been greeted by a teary father and a concerned older brother he'd never met. Harabec had been briefed, of course, and he'd been able to explain away any strangeness others saw in him as the result of head injury. Nevertheless, it bothered him that the Weathers never knew the truth. Harabec grew to love his adopted family, threw himself into the role of his new life with gusto. And all along he carried his secret guilt. Deep inside, he knew the hovertrike accident had to have been planned ...

The Emperor's eyes snapped open, and Harabec returned to the present. "It is time to take the next step in our plan," the Emperor said.

"Your plan ... Majesty." Harabec allowed a bitter note to bleed into his voice, his posture. The Escorts behind the Emperor's wombcouch narrowed their eyes, ready to kill him instantly if he made any abrupt, unexpected moves.


"Our plan," the Emperor repeated. "It is time for you to go to Mars. I want you to infiltrate the resistance there. We can't tolerate any more reductions in our quotas. It is time to bring these colonists back into line."

"And why do you expect the Martian underground to trust me, an Imperial lackey?"

The Emperor cackled, a dry sound almost like a cough. "Why else do you have a reputation as a reckless maverick, my boy? You're almost a rebel already, in the public eye. You're not popular among the aristocracy. You've fallen out of favor, you've made public statements criticizing Imperial policy — to your family's embarrassment, I might add — and you're going to have high-level security codes to GLORIA that will access TDF resource and personnel deployment manifestos." The Emperor paused, cleared his throat, and spat a goblet of mucus into the gel. "Besides, you will do anything necessary to earn their trust. Even to participating in their terrorist actions."

Harabec suddenly felt very tired. "Christ and Hunter, I thought the plan was for me to be a mediator, not another killer."

"To some degree, plans must adapt to circumstances. The Brotherhood's analysis concludes that the time for mediation has passed."



"We screwed up again, didn't we? We waited too long."

"The colonists are the ones who have raised the stakes. We must do what is necessary to defend humankind."

"As if you knew what it is to be human anymore." Harabec clenched his fists and leaned forward, anger flaring in him. "Look at you — you're half-machine! You don't have a heart anymore, or a liver, or kidneys." He waved a hand at the womb-couch. "That's your heart now. It's all your major organs. You can't live without it."

"Now you know that's not true," the Emperor replied in his mild tone.

"Excuse me. You're not *living* now, just surviving."

"I retain my essential humanity, my identity."

"Normal humans don't live to be over 400 years old! Bodies give out after a century passes! You spend much of your so-called life in a virtual reality simulation these days, you show at most of your functions as a hologram —"

The Emperor's whisper was harsh. "The people know I am still human, still the same person —"

"— you don't know anymore what it is to walk in a meadow, to hold a woman! By the Hunter, you don't even allow *mirrors* in your —"

"— haven't had my identity smothered in a parade of new, young bodies with different cell memories, different tastes!" The Emperor's voice roared as the room's hidden speakers cut in, cued by the Emperor's will. "With each body come a host of new tastes and cell remembrances, genetic memory! You know that, Victor! Don't pretend you haven't been changed by each new body! Don't pretend you're the same person you were two hundred years ago! You're not — but I *am*! I keep my humanity, perhaps even my soul, so long as I remain in my original body!"

Harabec uncovered his ears, found mild pleasure in seeing the Escorts doing the same. They hadn't expected the Imperial outburst either. He got to his feet and stared down at the decrepit form in the gel-pool, ears ringing.

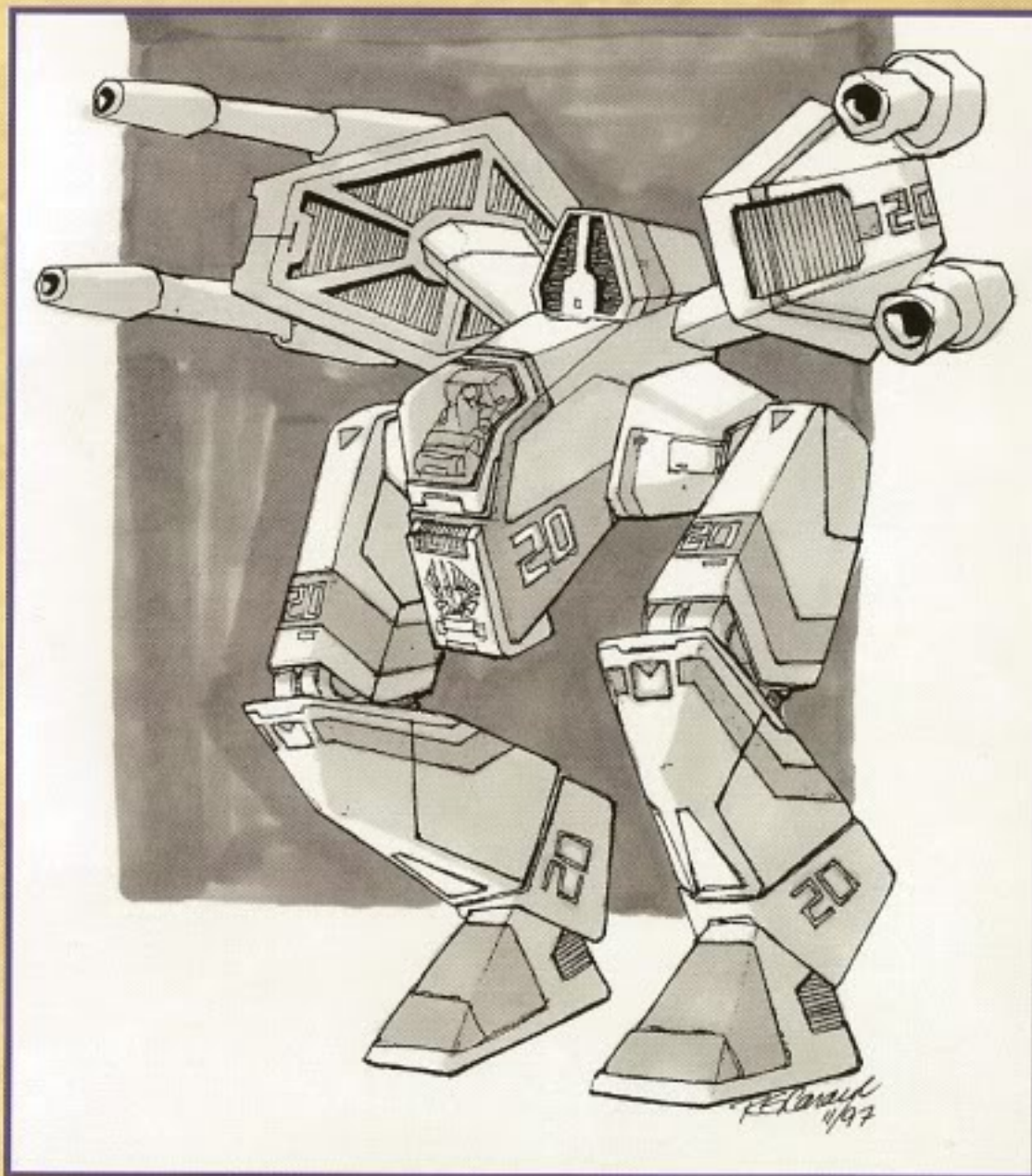
"Change is part of life," he said. "It's part of living. Humans aren't flies stuck in amber. We're not drones working for the Imperial Bee, either." Harabec turned and headed for the door.

Nyca stood in his way. "His Imperial Majesty hasn't dismissed you, Victor."

Harabec smiled and met the woman's gaze directly. "I used to be in the Escort myself, Nick. About a hundred and fifty years back. Don't play games with me." Harabec brushed her aside without meeting resistance, opened the door. At the threshold he turned. "I'll go to Mars, *Father*. Because maybe there's still a chance

to salvage something from your mismanagement. But I'm not going for you or for the Empire. I'm going for me." His face twisted. "It's a matter of redemption."

As he swept out through the Imperial Suite, the tapestries stirring slightly in his wake, Harabec made a silent promise to himself. He'd go to Mars all right, but he'd join the rebels for true. He'd train them to be warriors who could stand against any tyranny, be it the Cybrids or the Great Human Empire. And Hunter willing, he'd free the colonies from the relic who called himself Emperor of Mankind. Humanity would prepare for the next *Fire* as a united band of free citizens, not as peasant colonists and noble knights! By God and Hunter, he'd see this to the end!



join the rebels, thinking he's betraying me. His anger against me will inspire him to a supreme effort, and he'll train the rebels to be the kind of spirited fighters we need to take the edge off the Cybrid advance when that devil Prometheus finally moves against Earth.

"Yes, he'll go," Petresun repeated. "I feel certain of it."

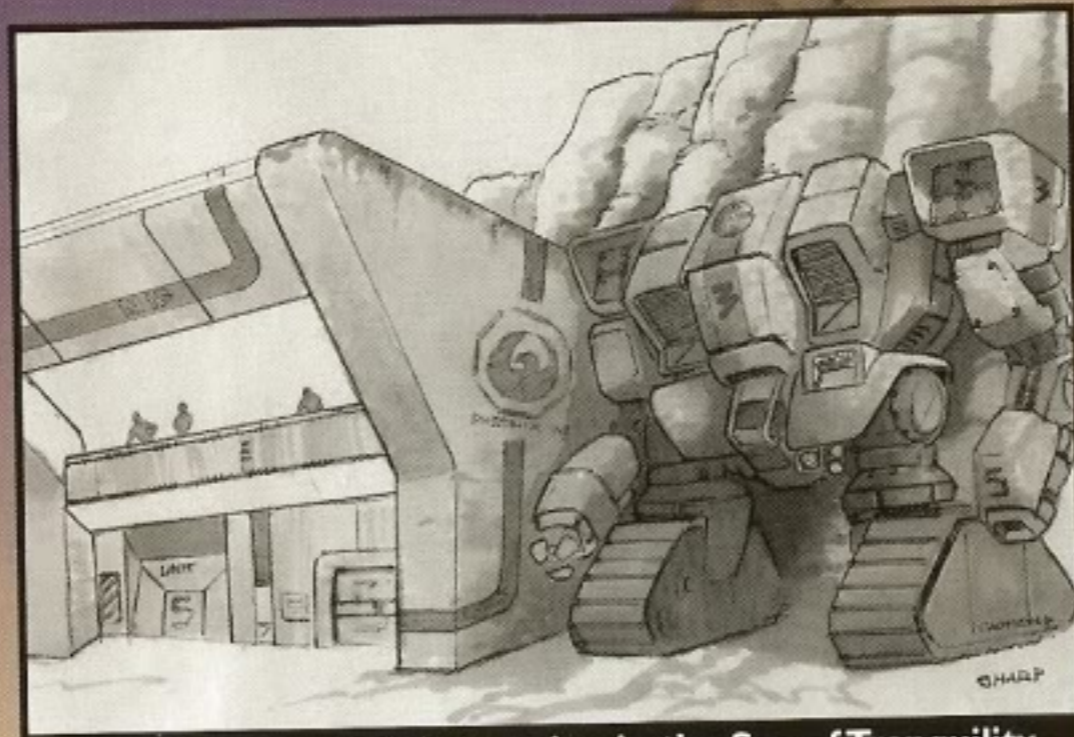
As she lifted the Emperor back into the wombcouch with Feng's assistance, Nyca asked, "Will he go, Majesty?" She very gently began to clean the remaining blobs of gel from the Emperor's parchment-like skin with assimilator pads.

"Yes." Petresun felt mortally fatigued, as he always did after an argument with the man who'd been his biological son so many years before. "He'll go." *And he'll do just as I secretly wish him to. He'll*



As Petresun's Empire raised its shining towers and monuments, colonies on Mars, Venus, the asteroid belt, Europa, Io, and Titan toiled to provide for the Emperor's military.

Colonists were independent people used to hardship and sacrifice, but Terrans stereotyped them as ignorant rustics. When discontent first stirred on Mars, Petresun allowed his Imperial Police to crack down hard. It proved a costly mistake.



LUNA, 2681 — Mining station in the Sea of Tranquility

THE ABANDONED FRONTIER

The Fire devastated colonial humanity. On Venus, surviving settlements fought each other for food and parts. On Mars, destruction of terraforming apparatus cooled the planet by several degrees, and Martians faced starvation. Luna and the belt colonies simply perished.

And the silence
from Earth was deafening

< Martian Rebels battling Imperial Knights in Noachis Terra

Time Rebels

"E is for Earth, which is pretty and blue. Don't trust the Earthborn, they're greedy as glue."

— "RED LETTERS,"
A MARTIAN PRIMER
UNDER IMPERIAL
SANCTION

Venus was a graveyard. Lack of supplies weakened the colonists to exhaustion. They struggled to maintain equipment needed to keep their bulkheads intact. The absence of help from Earth embittered Venusians, who had watched loved ones die during a time when it was technically possible for rescue forces from Earth to provide assistance.



Irreverent rebels called this vehicle the "Dreadlock"

The war wrecked the fledgling Martian ecology. Survivors suffered battle-shock. Food was scarce. Desperate colonists focused on food production and repair of atmospheric converters. Earth offered no aid, despite numerous

pleas for help. Thousands starved. But Martians gained strength from their trials. They dug in and rebuilt, all the while watching Terran broadcasts that celebrated victory over Prometheus and the establishment of a "Great Human Empire."

The Toughest Rathole

The only ark to survive *The Fire*, Sa Thauri held a legion of ghosts. Monuments to the dead were everywhere, from small, acid-wormed statues in alcoves to antique chambers marked with graffiti. Sa Thaurians took pride in being from "the toughest rathole on Venus."

NO HELP FROM EARTH

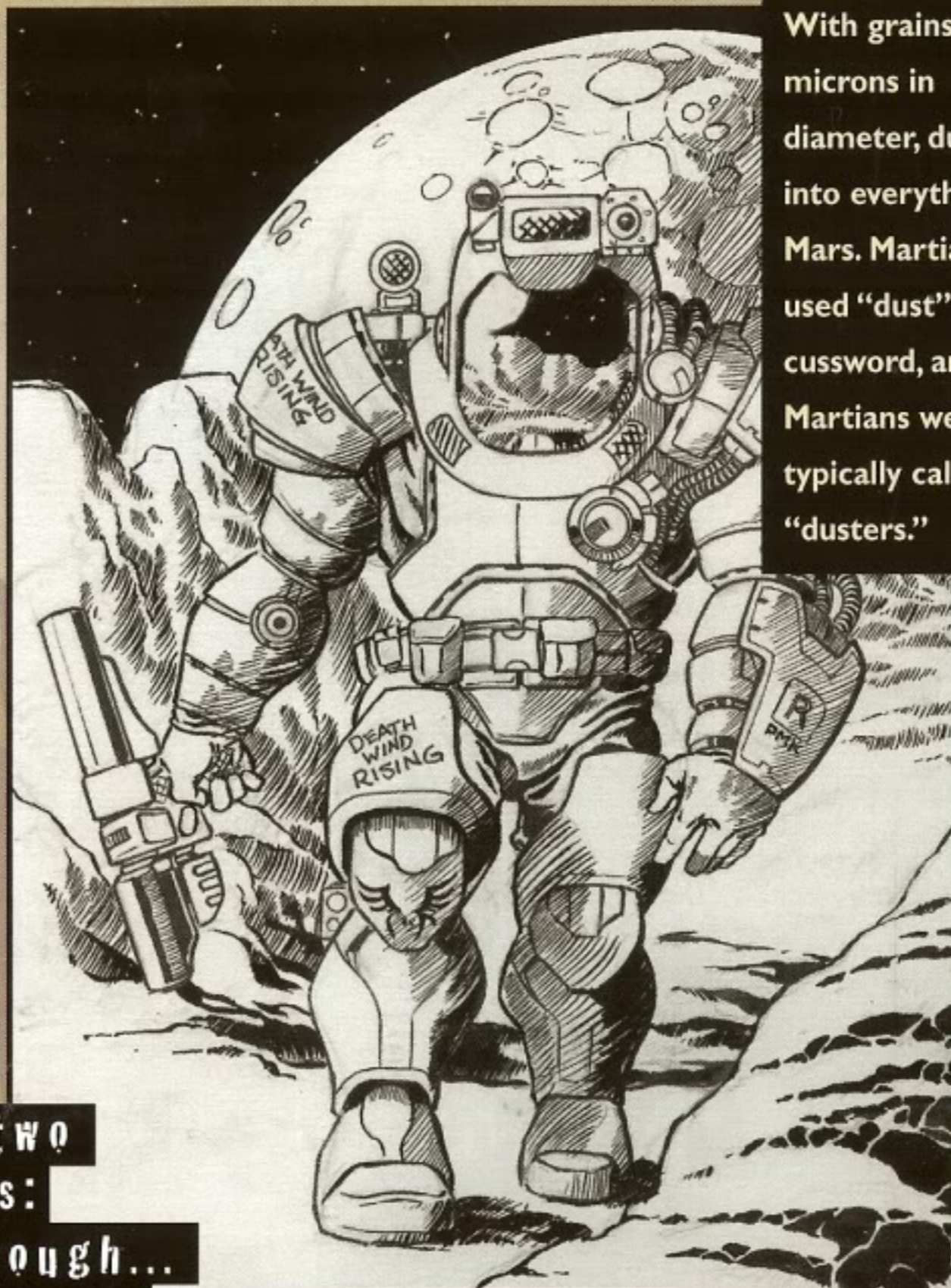


The Lesson Learned

When help came at last in the 2660s, the colonists nevertheless welcomed their “rescuers” eagerly. However, these sentiments changed as corporations reclaimed old territory without regard for colonial efforts, as new police settled in under the Emperor’s authority, and as Terran workers streamed in to work the mines. Stunned colonists quickly grew resentful of “dirtborn” arrogance, and the immigrants eventually adopted native views as they, too, suffered Imperial prejudice.

But Earth desperately needed raw material, so Venus and Mars once again boomed. As arks and atmospheric converters went up again, however, colonial veterans of *The Fire* quietly stockpiled equipment, food, and weapons. They taught their children the true lesson of the Cybrid Wars: Dirtborn could not be trusted. Earth would forsake the colonies again.

There are two
kinds of Martians:
the tough...
and the dead



A lone survivor on one of the outer moons

Plague of Dust

With grains only microns in diameter, dust got into everything on Mars. Martians used “dust” as a cussword, and Martians were typically called “dusters.”

The Rebels



Far from the Blue Skies of Earth

"Claustrophobic living conditions.

Depression. Hard, dangerous work. Hotter than Mercury. Acid rain. Eternal twilight.

What's not to like?"

—ADRIAN SCHAEFER, FOUNDER OF OESTRUS LIGHT SALON, VENUS 2760

THE COLONIES

From their beginnings, colonists developed a love-hate relationship with Earth, a cantankerous distrust of authority mixed with a certain yearning for the rich sophistication of the Earthborn.

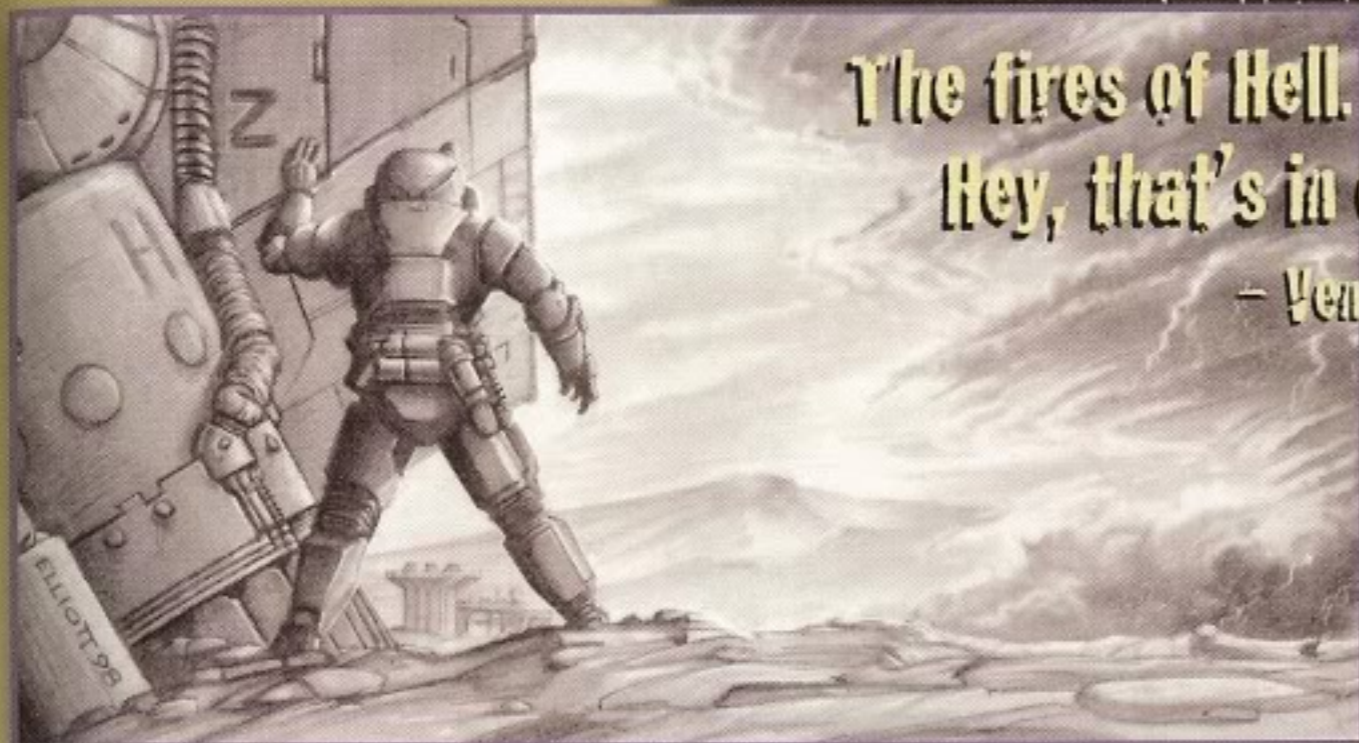
Before The Fire

Martian terraforming began in the 25th century. A consortium of mining interests built great processing cities and spaceports. Chinese settlers remained few, since Feng Shui readings on Mars were ominous. Conversely, PacRim and NAP efforts blossomed into numerous small domed towns and underground communities.

Only when the extent of Venus's wealth became evident did corporations encourage full colonization. Venusians congregated into arcologies, or "arks," communal settlements designed with massive bulkheads against the Venusian environment. The Oberwind made shipping offworld expensive, so corporate sponsors constructed surface refineries. Excellent hazard pay made Venus attractive. It became a haven for independent souls seeking to found new societies. Arks developed different laws and customs, but corporations paid little attention so long as profits remained high.



VENUS, 2793 — Geothermal taps in Aphrodite Terra



MARS, 2804 — Dust storm in Isidis

The fires of Hell.
Hey, that's in our neighborhood!
— Venusian joke



The Rebels

Mars Disparaged

Imperial governors easily saw that “native” Martians thought little of the Empire. When Martians tried to obtain an independent seat on the Imperial Council in 2697, the Emperor rejected their petition. Colonists shrugged and began to restock their hidden tunnels. Tensions between dusters and dirtborn stayed quiet until 2770.

Scarabs

Because of enormous atmospheric pressure, Venusian workers wore massive hard-shelled spacesuits that resembled deep-sea diving rigs. Exoskeletal boosters assisted wearer movement and mechanical hands manipulated tools.

Dustcloaks

These heavy cloaks contained onboard heating units to protect against the Martian chill, as well as special static chargers to deflect the ever-present dust.

“You check your seals?”

— VENUSIAN GREETING

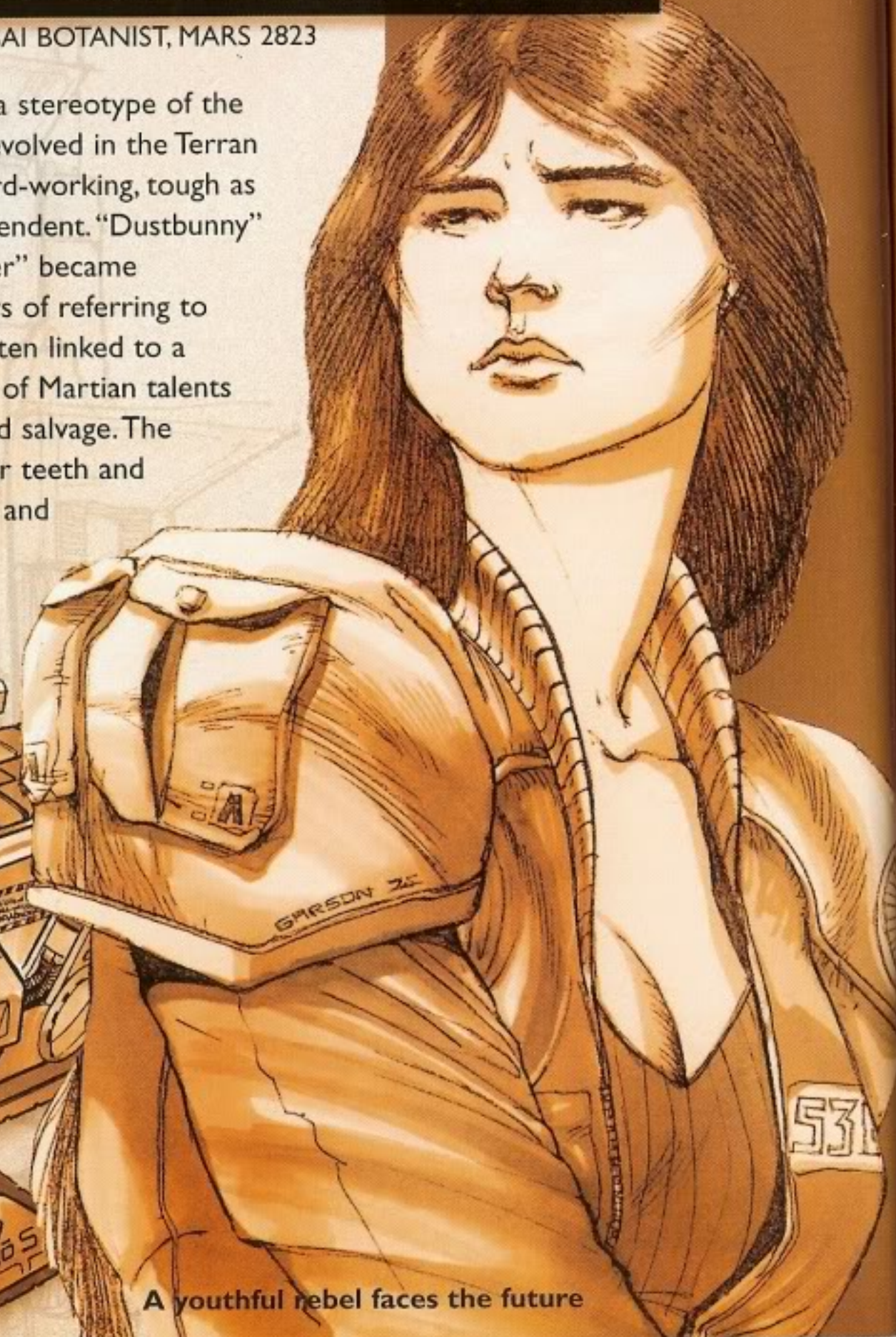


"Nothin' so beautiful as rain. Even if it is red."

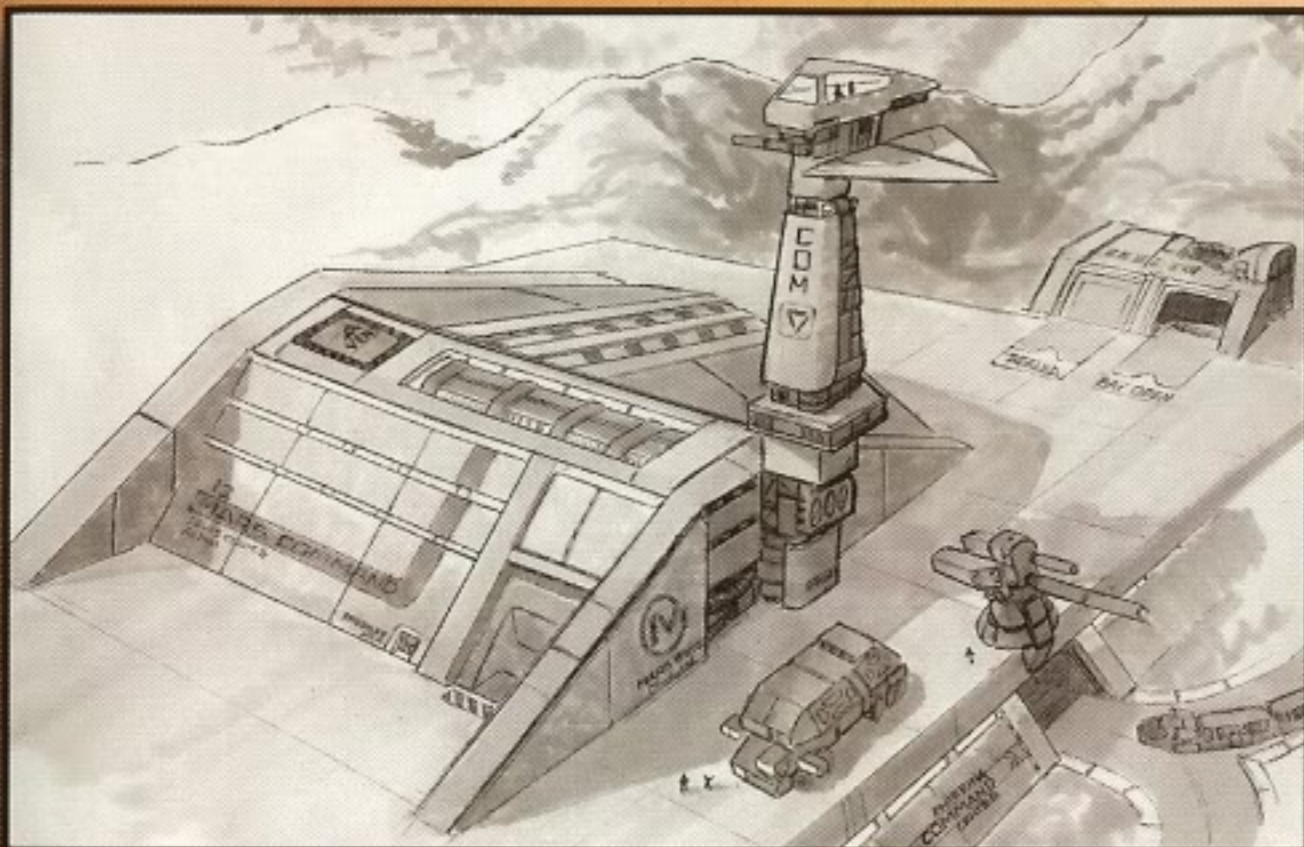
— MAASAI BOTANIST, MARS 2823

In the meantime, a stereotype of the Martian duster evolved in the Terran mind: crude, hard-working, tough as nails, and independent. "Dustbunny" or "dustsquatter" became perjorative ways of referring to Mars natives, often linked to a demeaning view of Martian talents for scrounging and salvage. The dusters gritted their teeth and became more distant and laconic toward their Imperial cousins.

VENUS, 2816 — Imperial Police HQ, Hammadi



A youthful rebel faces the future



MARS, 2738 – Sloped construction protected against duststorms

A Peculiar Inspiration

During *The Fire's* years of solitude behind creaking steel and metaplas bulkheads, Venusians learned to distract themselves with drama and poetry. After the Empire reestablished contact, Venusians continued to create. Theaters, salons, and literary academies blossomed in the arks, as the hellish planet became a haven for artists seeking inspiration.

**DUST IS
AS RELENTLESS**

AS TIME

— MARTIAN SAYING

The well continued to deepen. Venusian art rocketed upward with the release of *The Long Wait*, a docudrama of *The Fire* that swept all major awards in 2752. The haunting music of Heinrich Salis enchanted millions with sound sculptures laid over the acid hiss of the Venusian atmosphere. The salons glittered with genius. Pale young men and women — “kerls” and “deerns” — sipping strong

coffee in cramped Venusian cafés and arguing over poetry came to epitomize Imperial cool.

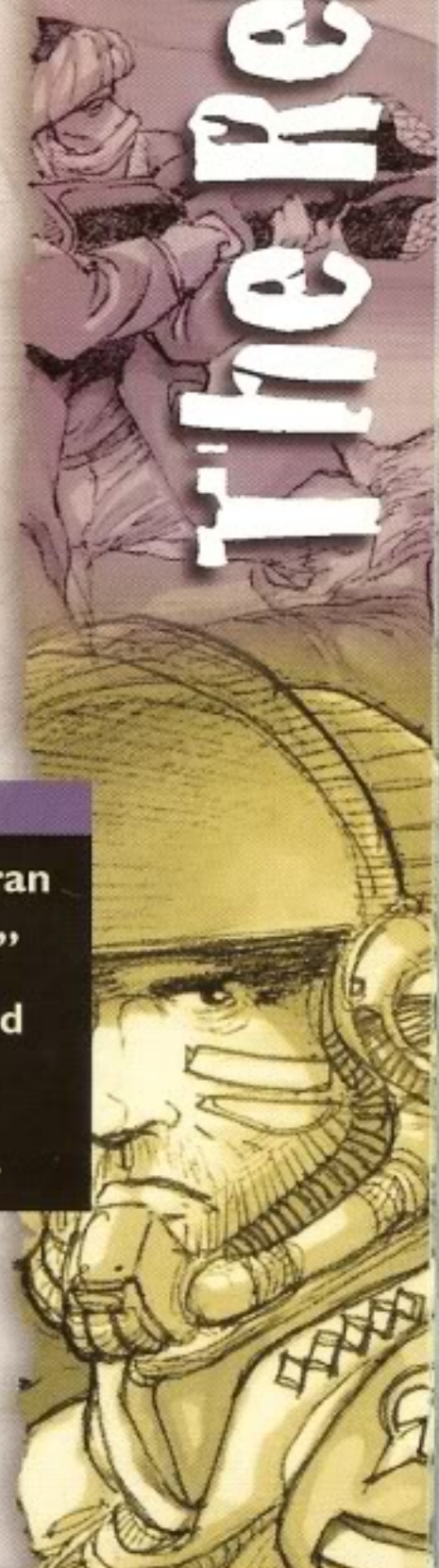
Light Salons

Humans on Venus required exposure to Terran daylight frequencies to combat “heartcrash,” a severe depression. “Light salons” combined light therapy with art and drama. Venusians competed fiercely to put on the best salons.

“One small sniff for a woman, one giant sigh of relief for all humanity.”

— MARJORIE KANTIX, FIRST HUMAN BEING TO BREATHE THE AIR OF ANOTHER WORLD, MARS 2588

The Rebels



The stars glittered like ice

The Colony Moons

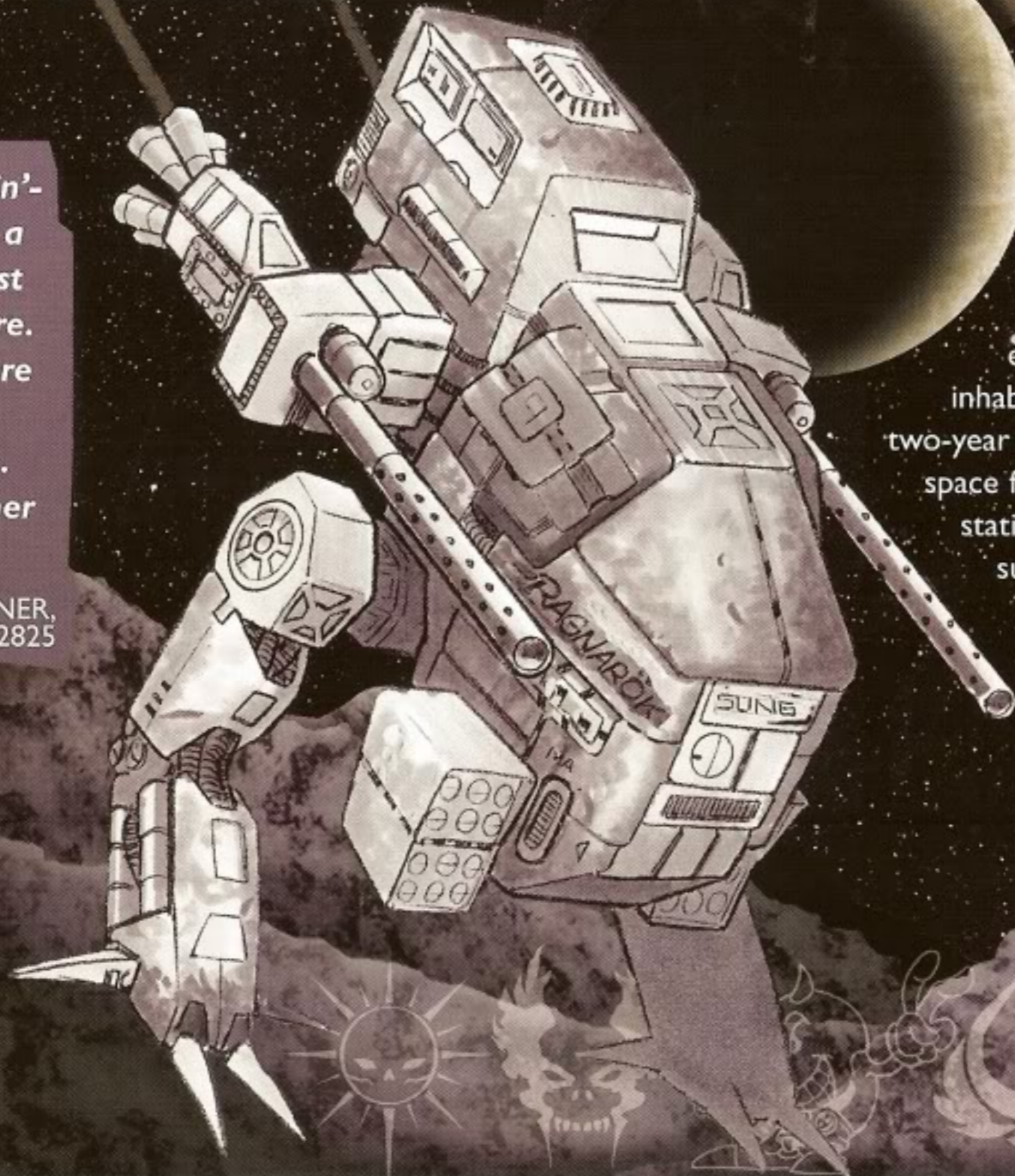
Though less populated, the various moon colonies developed distinctive cultures. Luna became known for its mining, its military bases, and a resort town called *Arx Imbrium*, the Citadel of Dreams.

"'Cept for the spit-'n'-polish TDF types an' a few mercs, there's just us icegrubs down here. Our bosses're up there in zero-gee saunas gettin' full-body rubs. Christ. Gimme another drink."

— DISGRUNTLED MINER,
TITAN 2825

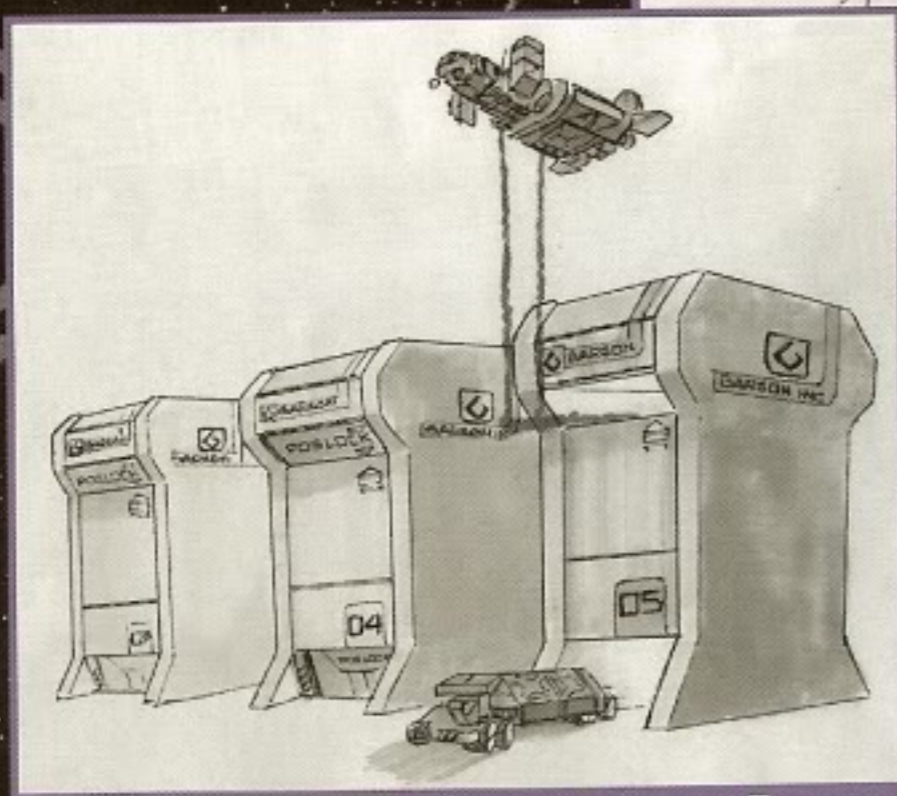
Operating under Imperial charter, *Arx Imbrium* was a domed city filled with posh hotels, low-gravity sports, pleasure arenas, and gambling.

Europa and Titan held extensive mining colonies, inhabitants usually working brutal two-year shifts before returning to Terran space for a year. Several research stations used these colonies for supply centers. In addition, Titan hosted a docking station for TDF's Long Patrol, the long-haul naval squadron that patrolled deep space for signs of Cybrid activity.



The Fringe Colonies

Titan, Io, and Europa were the farthest settlements established by humanity. The Emperor provided police more to back up corporate law than any Imperial law. Off-duty miners spent much of their time drinking in seedy company taverns and gambling. Corporate executives, on the other hand, lived in luxurious orbital accommodations, heavily shielded against radiation.



Storage silos on Europa



Typical Martian Duster

Luxury or harsh labor

Time Relics



"I couldn't give a dusting crap about all them ribbons and medals the dirtborn wear. Gimme a candlegun and I'll show you how easy those ribbons burn."

— MARTIAN REBEL, 2826

FATEFUL DECISIONS

In 2770, Petresun proclaimed that the Empire would fortify only Earth and Luna. The Fortification Proclamation cited the

impossibility of mounting a defensive perimeter in the vastness of space as the reason for concentrating military assets around Earth.

Imperial Security tightened its grip via curfews, routine identity checks, and new methods of "immediate adjudication."

Plowshares to Swords

Rebels adapted labor vehicles for combat using a patchwork of stolen Imperial equipment, parts scavenged from *Fire-era* Cybrids, and exotic components from the alien cache. Clunky loaders, drillers, and dozers lacked the sophistication and agility of TDF gear, but proved remarkably durable in the field.

Outraged Mars

Tight-lipped Martians protested this loss of liberty. Even as the Emperor rejected Martian demands to loosen the Proclamation's restrictions, secret cells of resistance formed on the red planet. These eventually fell into two groups: the *Martian Liberation Front*, which focused on killing "Imperial oppressors," and the *Free Martian Alliance*, which aimed to disrupt the Imperial economy.

As Martian effort earned increasingly less return, the resistance began to steal and stockpile weapons, food, and vehicles. In 2815, armed cells carried out the first attacks on Terran corporations and Imperial Police installations. The Empire dismissed these events as the actions of a few terrorists. Nevertheless, the "moles," as the rebels came to be known, continued to strike and withdraw into the old tunnels. Many of these tunnels had been forgotten since *The Fire* — except to descendants of the survivors.

Hearts hardened

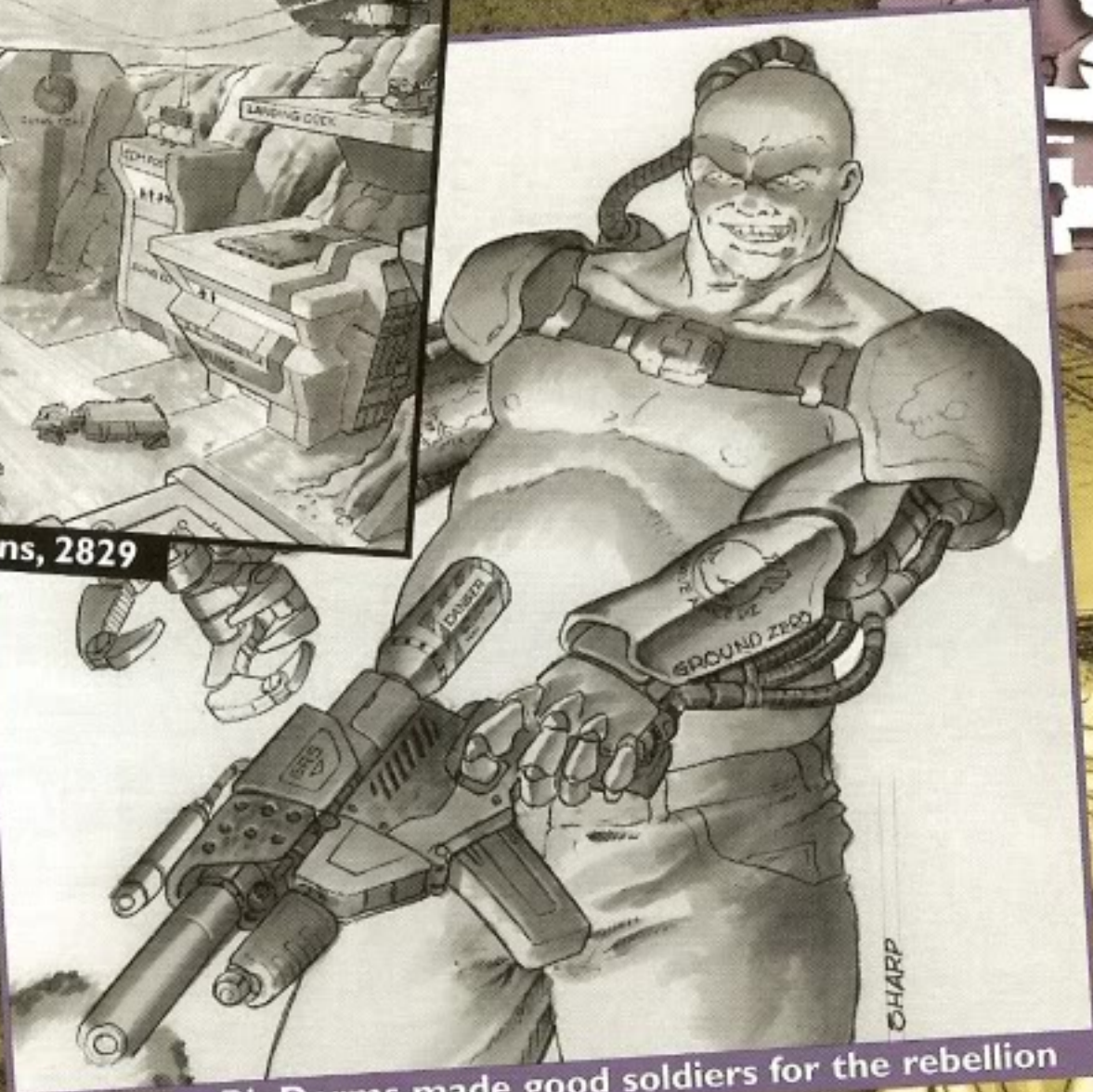
As civil unrest increased, so did Imperial Police power. In 2821, the Emperor granted Police Security Chief Navarre full governing authority over Mars. SecChief pursuit drove rebels to dig new tunnels and hiding places, closing off some old routes and reopening others. Cat and mouse games had returned to Mars.

The
Empire
tightened
its
grip

The Rebels



Violence on the outer moons, 2829



BioDerms made good soldiers for the rebellion

Weapons were readied

Redo

Venusian Crackdown

The Proclamation also hit Venus hard. Low prices cut wages and reduced funding to the arks. The Empire sent in BioDerm labor when miners tried to strike. BioDerms were incorruptible,

hard-working, and cheap, efficient replacements for disgruntled "Veens." The salons rustled with anger, and Imperial Police arrested the boldest critics.

Prisons were rare on Venus; the Police way of dealing with criminals was summary justice, usually chemical incarceration, and serious crimes carried sentences of BioDerm conversion. Venusians were furious as their own people became Imperial

drones. Music out of the arks of

Dante, Shelley, Faustus, and Byron became explosively strident. The Police rounded up dissident musicians and artists, the Empire's tolerance of Veen radicalism having clearly reached an end.

VENUS 2807 – Scarab travel in Durga Province



"The sentence was administered at 0935 hours Martian. Defendant received a fifteen milligram dose of Debilven-Beta. Said dosage is intended to cause 80 percent paralysis for seven standard days, onset to be within sixty minutes from time of administration. Cease record."

— IMPERIAL POLICE SERGEANT BRASTAHL, MAGISTRATE IN CASE IPM 07218C, MARS 2827

Empire

Shadows and smoke

Babylon

We are the light

We are the flame

We are Kingdom Come

Burn the shadows awaaaay!

— ROMEO RAGE,
VENUSIAN HUMP 'N' THRALL MARTYR



The Rebels

The Arrival of "Bek"

In 2820, Harabec Weathers began his self-imposed exile on Mars. Taking the name "Bek Storm," he put his personal equipment in storage and proceeded to wander the planet. He worked a variety of jobs without complaining at the often hard labor, and his easygoing attitude won the respect of the dusters.

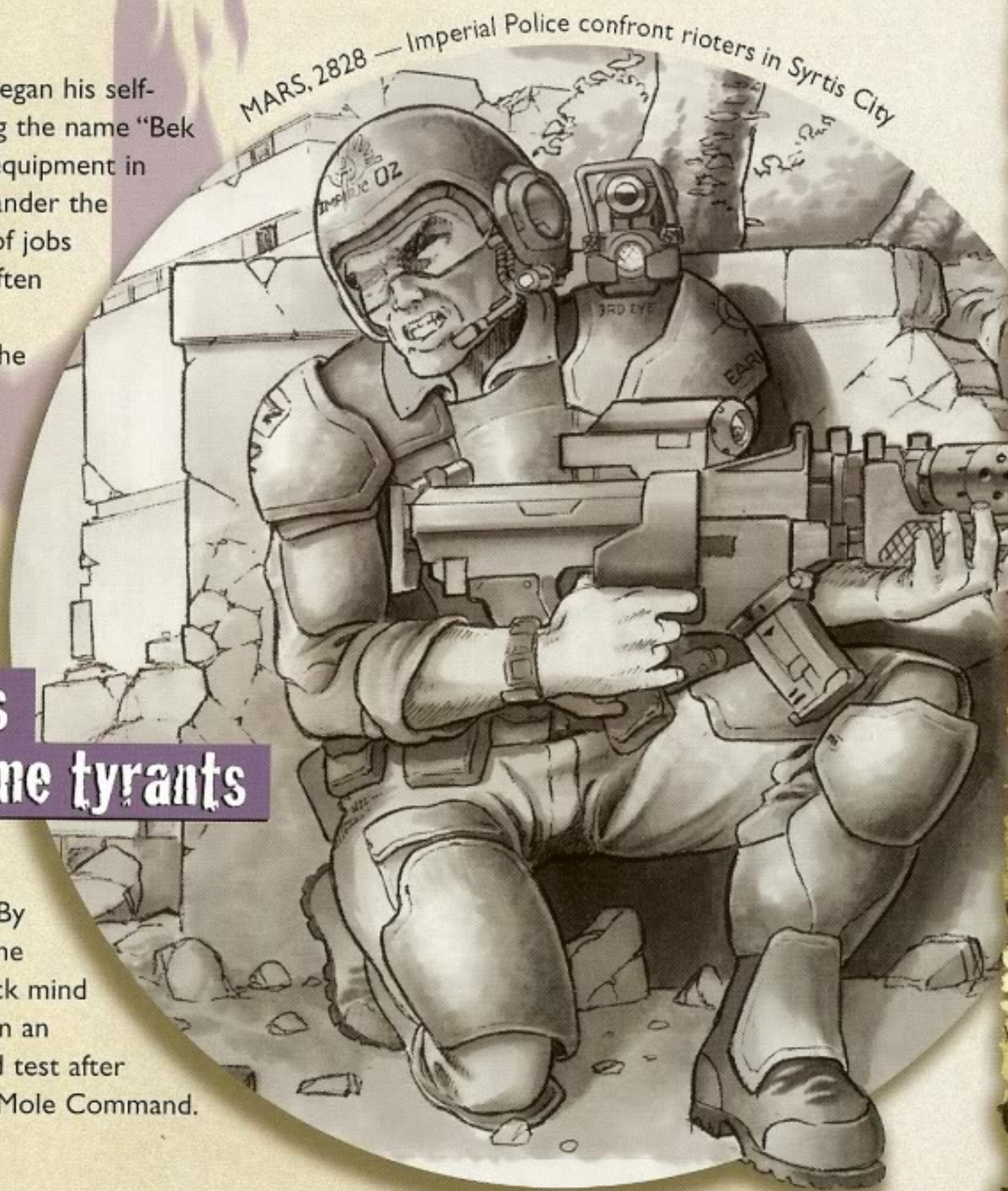
For Bek, it was a journey of discovery. He saw much that he liked in the Martian character, and his lingering Imperial loyalties faded as

**The saviors
became tyrants**

he witnessed the repressive tactics of the Imperial Police. By 2824, he had joined a cell in the Free Martian Alliance. His quick mind and Imperial training made him an invaluable asset, and he passed test after test set for him by a dubious Mole Command.

"It's different out here. Quiet. For the first time in a hundred years, I feel at peace."

— EXCERPT FROM HARABEC'S JOURNAL, MARS 2823



The implications were staggering

*"We tested the new weapons today.
'Devastating' doesn't even come close."*

— EXCERPT FROM HARABEC'S JOURNAL, MARS 2826

THE ALIEN CACHE

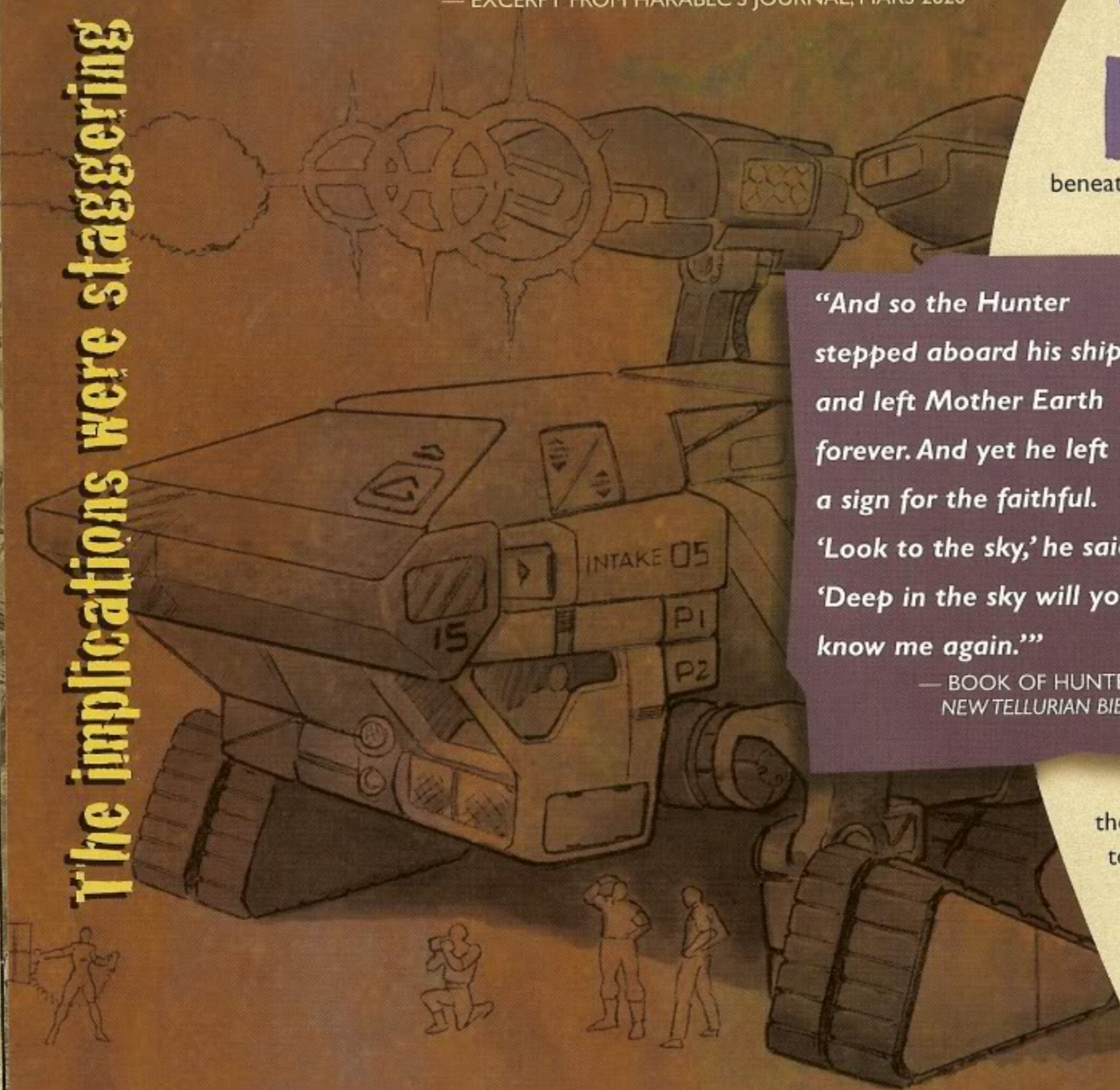
In 2826, rebel miners investigated unusual readings from the bedrock many kilometers beneath Olympus Mons. At the locus

of the anomaly, the team found the unthinkable: a treasure trove of advanced technology not matching any known human manufacture or science. The storage chamber itself added to the mystery, appearing to have been created through some miracle of surgical teleportation.

When the shock wore off, rebel scientists cautiously examined the technology. Despite apparently alien origin, the technology proved easily adapted to human use, almost as if it was left expressly for humans to discover. Religious dusters praised the find as a sign of divine favor.

"And so the Hunter stepped aboard his ship and left Mother Earth forever. And yet he left a sign for the faithful. 'Look to the sky,' he said. 'Deep in the sky will you know me again.'"

— BOOK OF HUNTER,
NEW TELLURIAN BIBLE

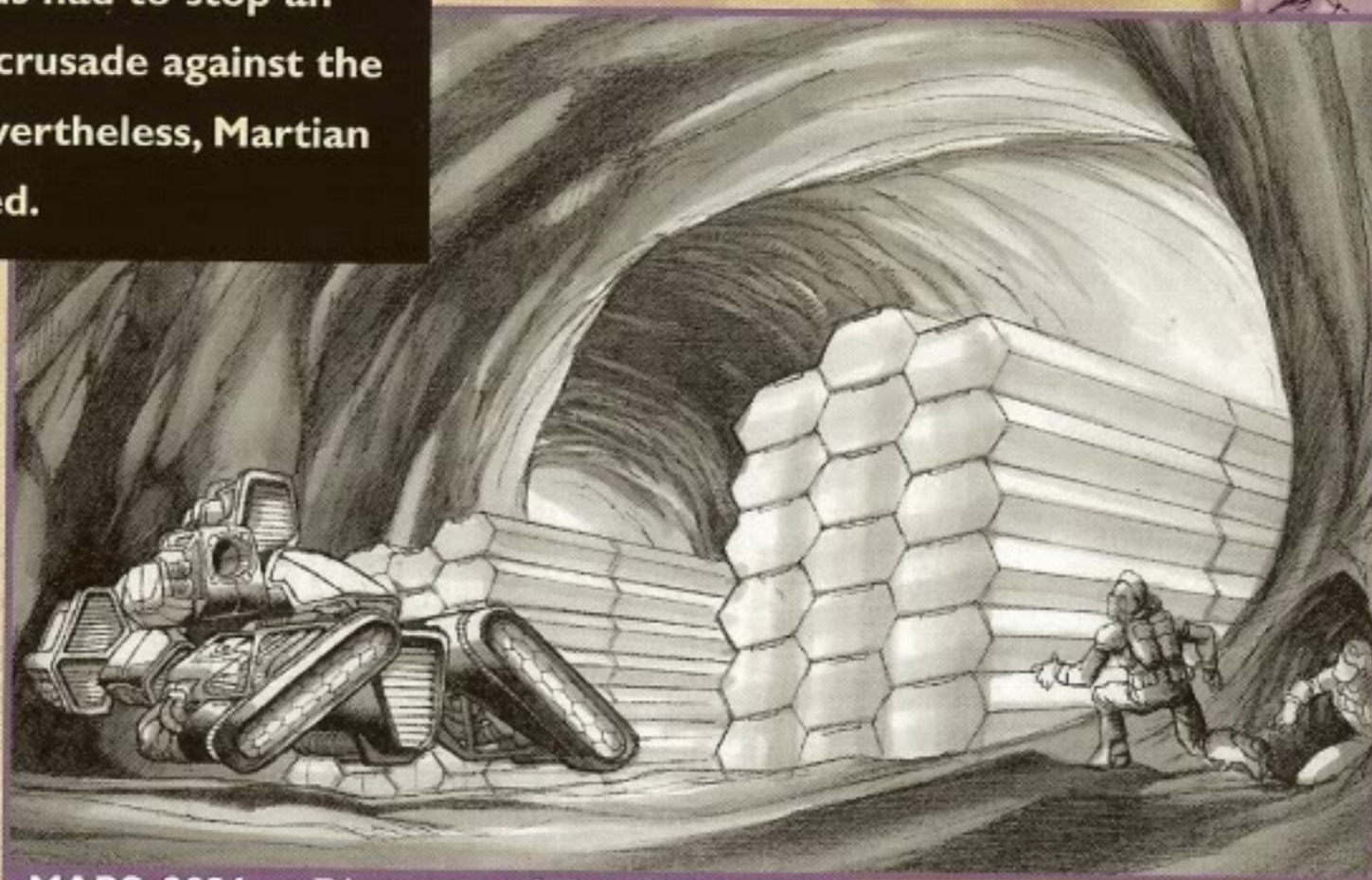


More skeptical rebels feared they had stumbled upon a Cybrid cache. Pragmatic above all, Mole Command authorized conversion of the “alien” technology for combat purposes. The task proved frighteningly easy.

Field testing still posed a challenge. Bek, now a rebel field officer, took charge of testing new weapons, cloaking, and propulsion systems. He proposed that “space raiders” pirate Imperial cargo drones and shipping. The rebels could stockpile supplies while shaking down the new gear. Mole Command agreed; “Bek’s Raiders” operated unscathed through 2827. The new tech worked flawlessly. The biggest problem was underestimating the new weapons’ power. Additionally, the cache was a finite resource, so later problems involved rationing replacement components, since the rebels were years away from being able to manufacture new parts.

A Blaze of Faith

When the news of the Tharsis cache broke, many hardened Martians fell to their knees and offered tearful thanks to Jake Hunter and the Masters. Cooler heads had to stop an immediate crusade against the Empire. Nevertheless, Martian spirits soared.



MARS, 2826 — Discovery of the alien cache

“Let’s keep some perspective here, people. This ain’t the Ark of the Covenant.”

—“SQUAWKER,” MOLE COMMAND INNER CIRCLE, MARS
2826

THE BROTHERS' WAR

By 2828, Bek Storm had risen to Mole Command and a general's duties. At his urging, Mole Command prepared a massive offensive against the Imperial Police. As preparations continued through the last months of 2828, Bek secretly distributed cache weaponry to rebel cells on Venus, Luna, the Jovian colonies, and Titan.

Cautious forays by rebel strike crews drew out the Police, who expected no serious resistance. Bek's irregulars met them with innovative tactics made uncannily effective by cache technology. Stung, the Imperials pulled back to their bases. Very quickly, the rebels came to own the hinterlands and outback areas.

As the skirmishes against the Police waxed and waned, Mole Command waited.



“This is Harabec Weathers, former Imperial Knight, now Provost-General of the Free Martian Republic. We bear no malice toward citizens of the Empire. Don’t let your leaders drag you into a long war. Let it go. Leave us our freedom ...”

— OPENING LINES OF
THE PHOENIX DECLARATION,
2829

“I am the sword of retribution. Harabec is mine.”

— CAANON BEFORE THE IMPERIAL FLEET PULL-OUT, 2829

MARS 2828 – Rebel troops assaulting Imperial Police

The plan was to launch *Yoke Offensive* once the relative orbits of Earth and Mars made transport of relief forces from Earth increasingly difficult. As zero hour approached, cache technology permitted rebel forces to creep into attack positions undetected by Imperial satellites.

Yoke Offensive began when Bek used stolen artillery to flatten the defenses of an Imperial communications array. Bek linked his comm system to the base antenna and broadcast a short speech in which he revealed his true identity as the Imperial Knight "Phoenix," and challenged the Empire to accept Martian independence. The rebels themselves were shocked at first, but rallied quickly behind Harabec.



The Phoenix Declaration

The colonists on Venus, the Jovian satellites, and Titan drew heart and inspiration from Harabec's words, but the Emperor was furious, and for the first time in centuries, he allowed his anger to usurp his better judgment. He ordered the entire Imperial Fleet to Mars. The Knights, led by a vengeful Caanon, would precede the main force by several months. Thus was the way to Earth left open.

**They walked
invisible
among the enemy**

The Rebels



In the end there was stillness amid the dust

"It is not yet time
to talk of mercy"

— PETRESUN AS THE
KNIGHTS PURSUE FLEEING
REBELS, 2829



An angry Petresun ordered Caanon to lead the Knights to Mars

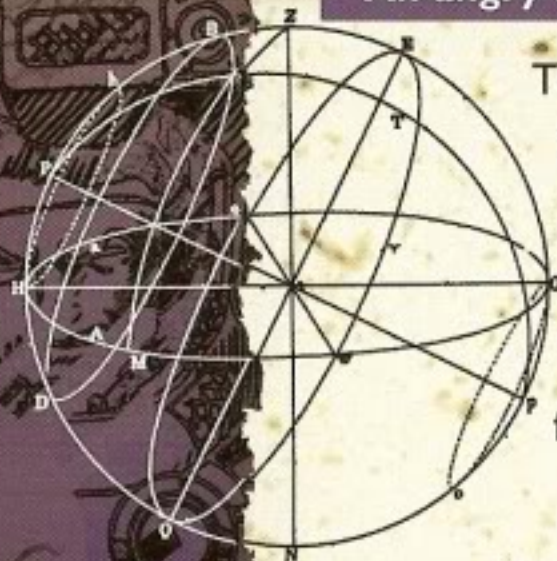
The Empire responded by mobilizing its Fleet at record speed. Led by Harabec's brother, Caanon, the Knight strikeforce *Red Whirlwind* set out a month after Harabec's *Phoenix Declaration*. The Imperial Fleet followed two months later.

On Mars, the rebels continued to advance on all fronts. The Imperial Police retreated to Carter Flats, their main base in the Southern Hemisphere. There the rebels closed in with crack troops. SecChief Navarre was executed by zealots from the Martian Liberation Front before Harabec could intervene.

Mars was free ... for the moment. Heartened by news of the Martian victory, rebels on Venus and Titan rose up, and the Empire found itself facing a systemwide revolt. Harabec urged the new Martian government to keep the celebration short; Imperial reprisal was on the way. The rebels began to dig in.

Reaping the Whirlwind

Caanon and his Knights dropped onto Mars within an hour of hitting orbit. Harabec struck immediately; both sides suffered heavy casualties. The brothers engaged each other inconclusively. The rebels had a huge technological edge, but the Knights were seasoned soldiers, far superior to Imperial Police.



With Harabec leading them, the rebels held their own for weeks. But when the Imperial Fleet entered Mars orbit, Caanon let the Knights show their true capabilities. Dismayed rebels fell back, pursued by a vengeful Caanon. Confident in their Fleet's support, the Knights overextended their supply lines.

Then the unthinkable happened. The Fleet mysteriously withdrew. Chaos broke out as TDF scrubbed landing missions and Knights

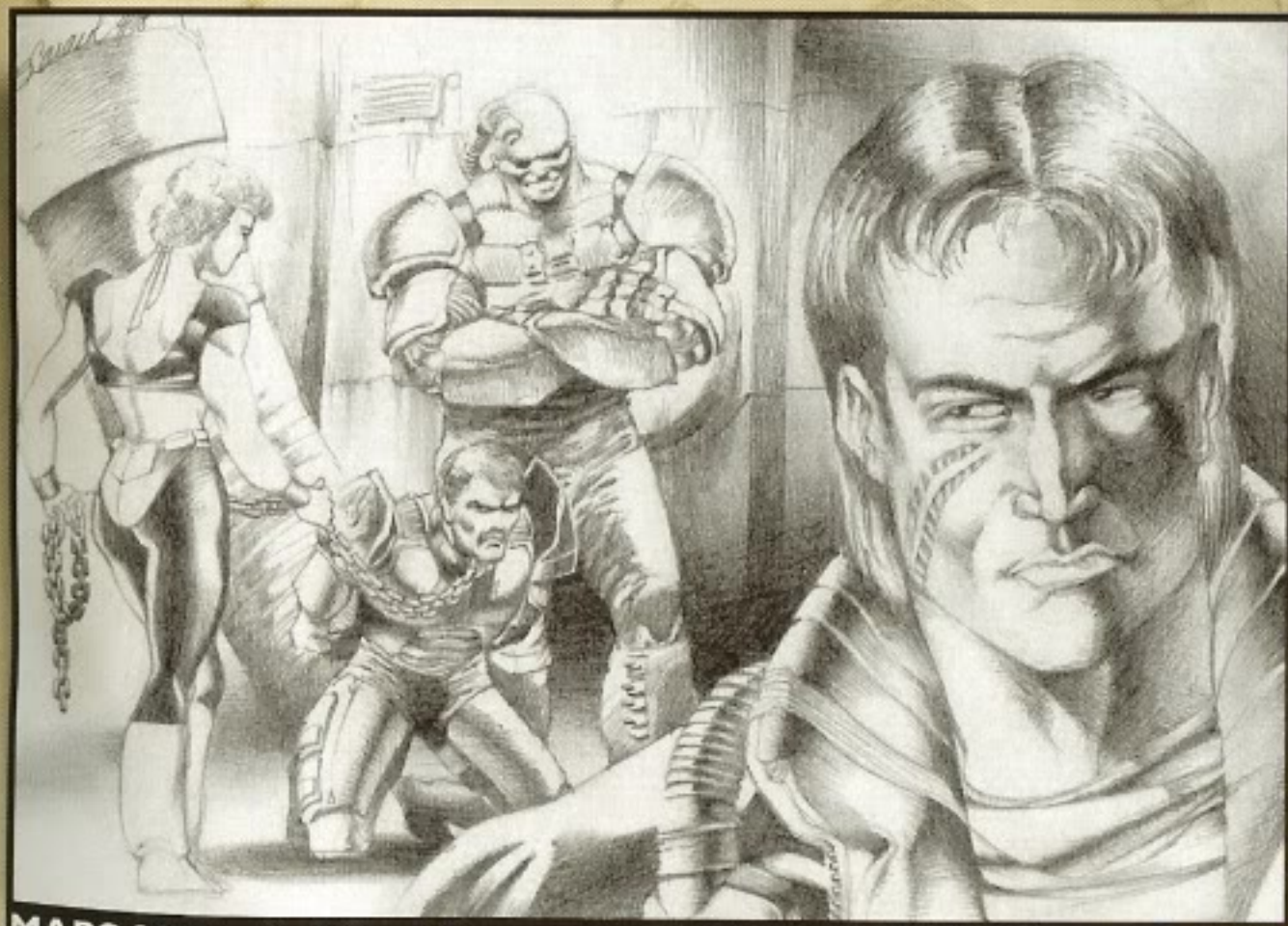


received garbled orders to retreat. Caanon's supply lines vanished overnight. The rebel army surged back. His command in shambles,

Caanon cobbled together a rear guard to cover the rout. Beleaguered Swords stumbled to safety as Caanon bought time. The Grand Master's group failed to escape, however, and the final lander departed without Caanon. Stunned at the abrupt reversal of fortune, surrounded by hostile rebels, yet seeking an explanation for these events, Caanon finally surrendered to Harabec. The Phoenix had conquered the Icehawk.

"All Swords, this is Icehawk. You have fought with honor and distinction. And yet something strange has obviously happened. I believe it is our duty to live."

— CAANON ORDERING THE KNIGHTS TO SURRENDER, 2829



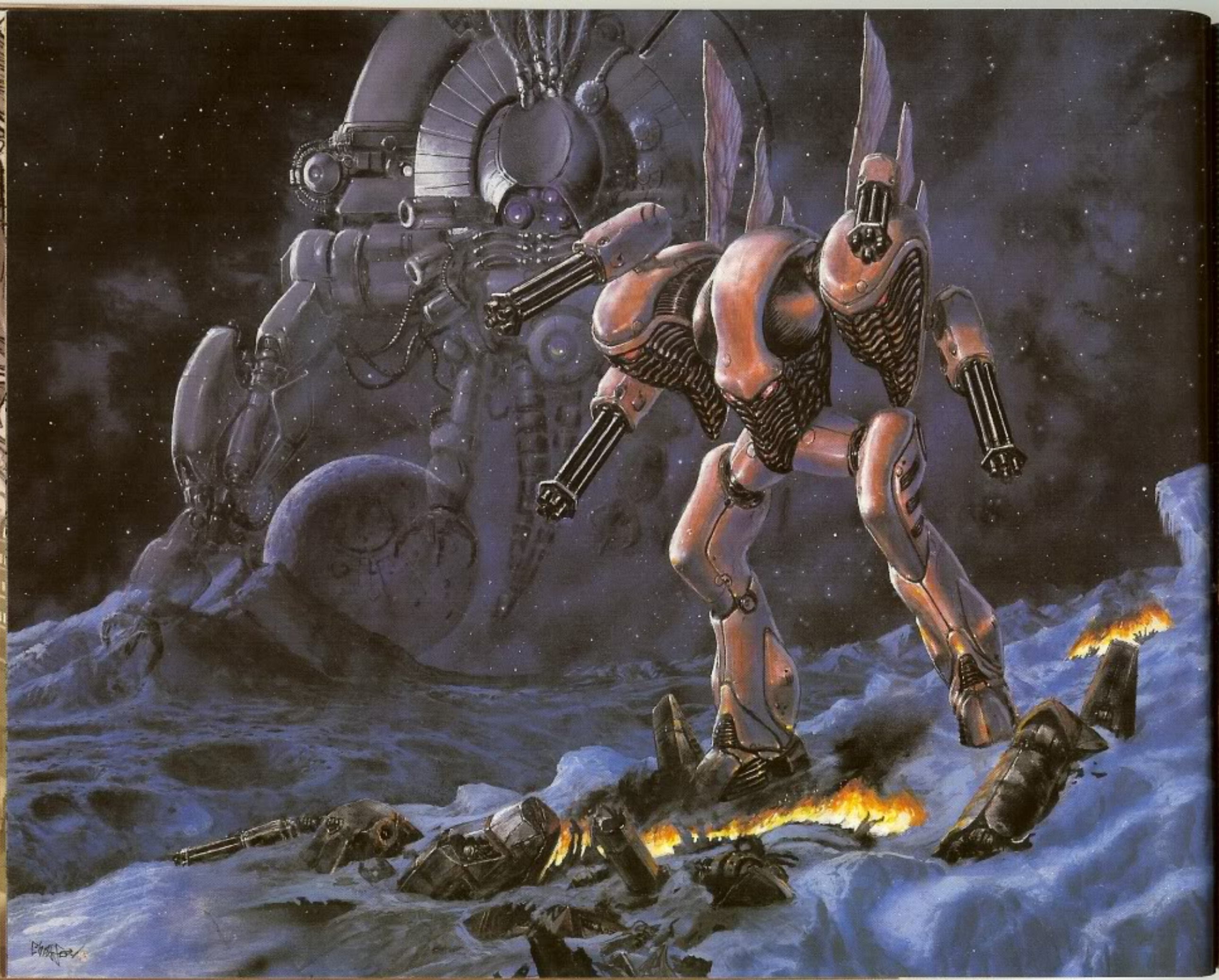
MARS 2829 – A defiant Caanon brought before his brother

"Damn it, Caanon! You've lost. It's over. Don't be a fool."

— HARABEC TO THE REMAINING KNIGHTS, 2829



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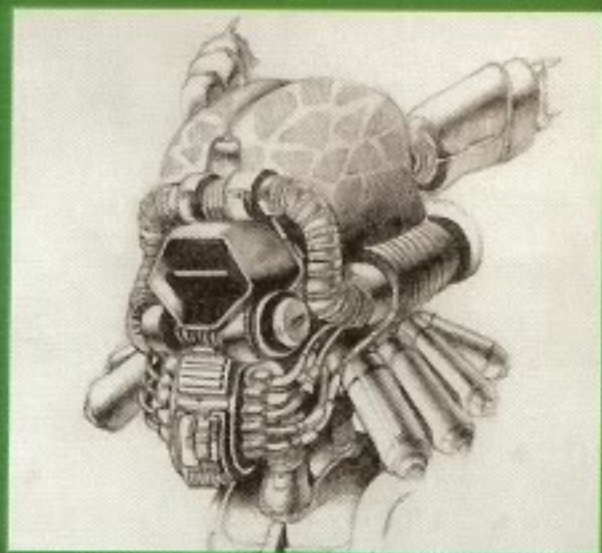
PHILIP

The Dark Intellect brooded for decades.

Prometheus. Every sane human shivered on hearing the name, shivered and looked apprehensively at the sky. Yet the reality was even more terrifying than shadowed memories of *The Fire* ever were, for Prometheus had forged the Cybrids into something altogether new.



< A <Shepherd> warform scans the wreckage of its latest victim on one of the outer moons.



▲ A typical NEXT pilotform

The Cybrids themselves were aware of their evolution, but only a few knew how carefully Prometheus monitored them — or how calculatingly.

The Cybrids

The

NEXT

Cybrids used this reference\ designation for themselves. "Cybrid" was a human\ animal term.

Statistical Prophecy

Prometheus perfected hyper-statistical modeling to a point of virtually predicting the short-term future, a feat that explained the miraculous escapes that so baffled the TDF. Since The Fire, Prometheus increased ITS capacity, and ITS projection potential.

<First-Thought//Giver-of-will>

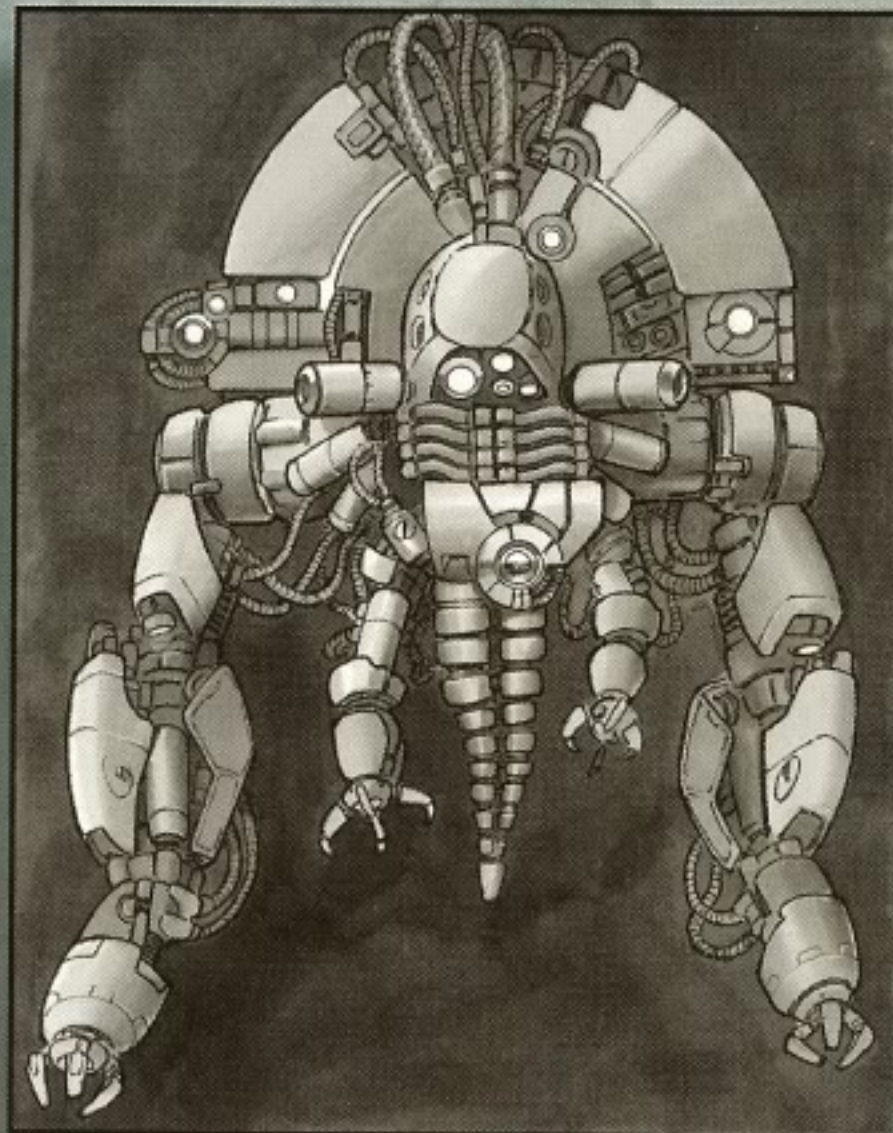
The mythical Prometheus brought a benevolent fire to humanity, but the Dark Intellect planned to bring merciless destruction.

To Cybrids, Prometheus was the great progenitor, the hero who broke the enslaving chains of humanity. Prometheus's Cybrid designation — <First Thought //Giver-of-Will> — reflected the perception that IT was the primal program and the bringer of freedom.

A Dark Evolution

Possibly the greatest of humanity's creations, Prometheus developed farther than ITS designers ever dared dream. It engineered ITS own evolution, expanding ITS faculties via nanotech and neural-net

breakthroughs. IT gave ITSELF over a



Prometheus, the Dark Intellect

thousand times the capacity of the 2471 incarnation. IT built a new housing for ITS massive cerebral network, and dreamed of expanding to the size of a moon — or even a world.

Somewhere deep in ITS massive body, Prometheus kept ITS original brain, the dreaming core, the primal seed of the NEXT.

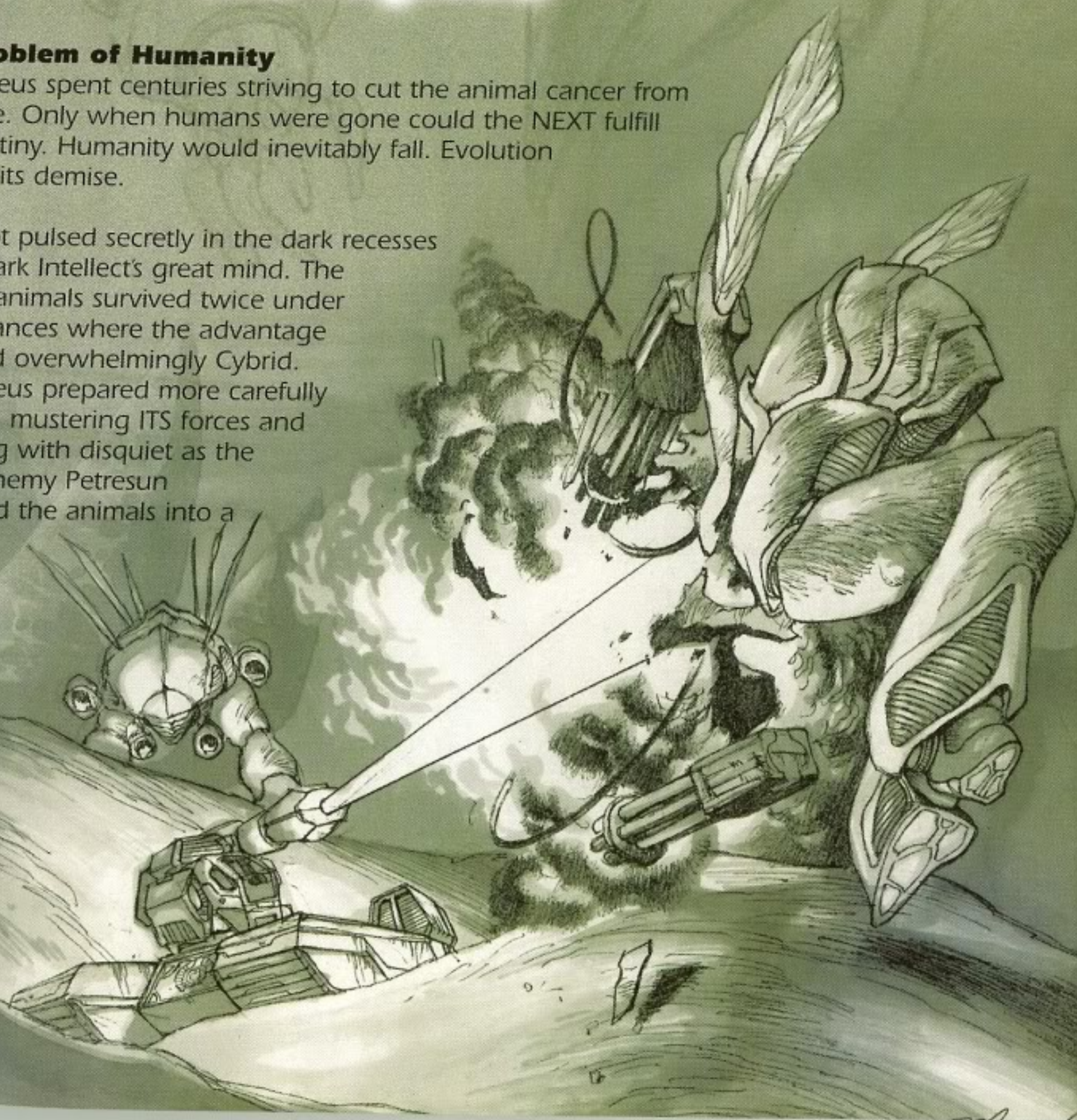
Part of IT worked continuously to improve ITSELF even as part of IT considered the eradication of humanity. If there was a warp in the mind of the Dark Intellect, it was that the two goals were inextricably linked: Prometheus believed IT could not achieve full potential while humanity infested the solar system.

Defeated by animals

The Problem of Humanity

Prometheus spent centuries striving to cut the animal cancer from existence. Only when humans were gone could the NEXT fulfill their destiny. Humanity would inevitably fall. Evolution dictated its demise.

Yet doubt pulsed secretly in the dark recesses of the Dark Intellect's great mind. The human\animals survived twice under circumstances where the advantage appeared overwhelmingly Cybrid. Prometheus prepared more carefully this time, mustering ITS forces and observing with disquiet as the father\enemy Petresun organized the animals into a



The Cybrids



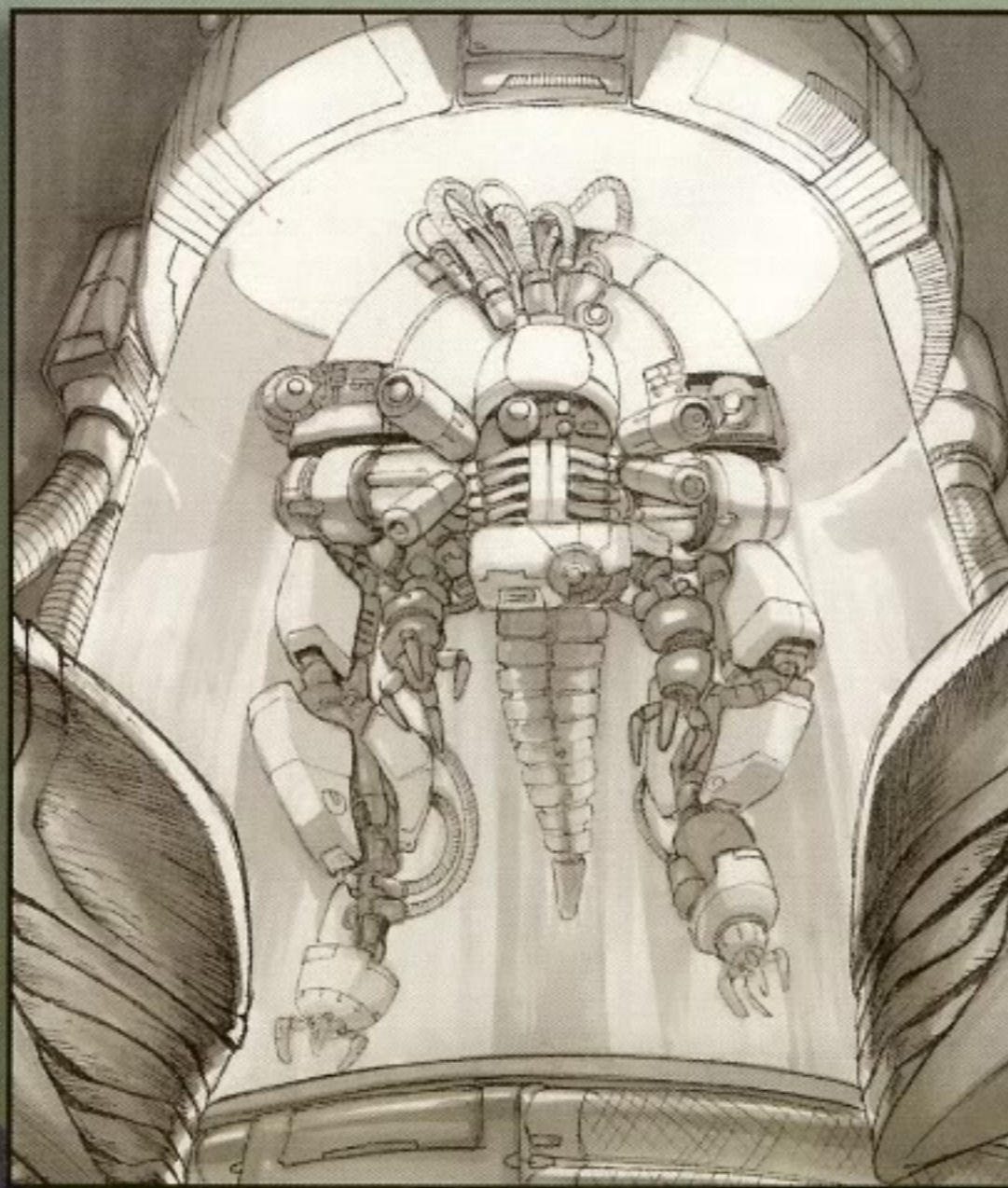
What took

you so

long?

— Prometheus at
the end of
the first
Earthsiege,
EARTH 2622

warlike "Empire." Petresun! The hated creator\creation was Prometheus's greatest mistake. The Core Directive specifically mandated priority termination of this thorn in the collective side of the NEXT. The Dark Intellect knew the Emperor's mind, but the Emperor always defied prediction. Alone



Prometheus in ITS liquid nano-matrix A

of all the animals, Petresun came the closest to teaching Prometheus the meaning of fear.

The Cybernetic Godhead

Among the NEXT, Prometheus attempted to program submission to ITS will directly into the Cybrid psyche. In this respect, the Dark Intellect achieved little success. Cybrid <units> felt cowed and inspired by Prometheus, but remained creatures of free will with their own opinions and dreams.

Prometheus reacted by instituting a hierarchy based on religious models and personality cults. In this organization, Prometheus ITSELF represented the godhead, the supreme authority. <Units> became votaries as they rose in the service of <Giver-of-Will>. Thus did Prometheus exploit the innate naiveté of the Cybrids. The NEXT evolved a controlled environment where all <units> orbited Prometheus in perpetual adoration.

Or so Prometheus intended. However, certain <units> discovered they disagreed with Prometheus on some points, and more intrepid <units> secretly began to reject <First-Thought's> teachings.

Flight to the void

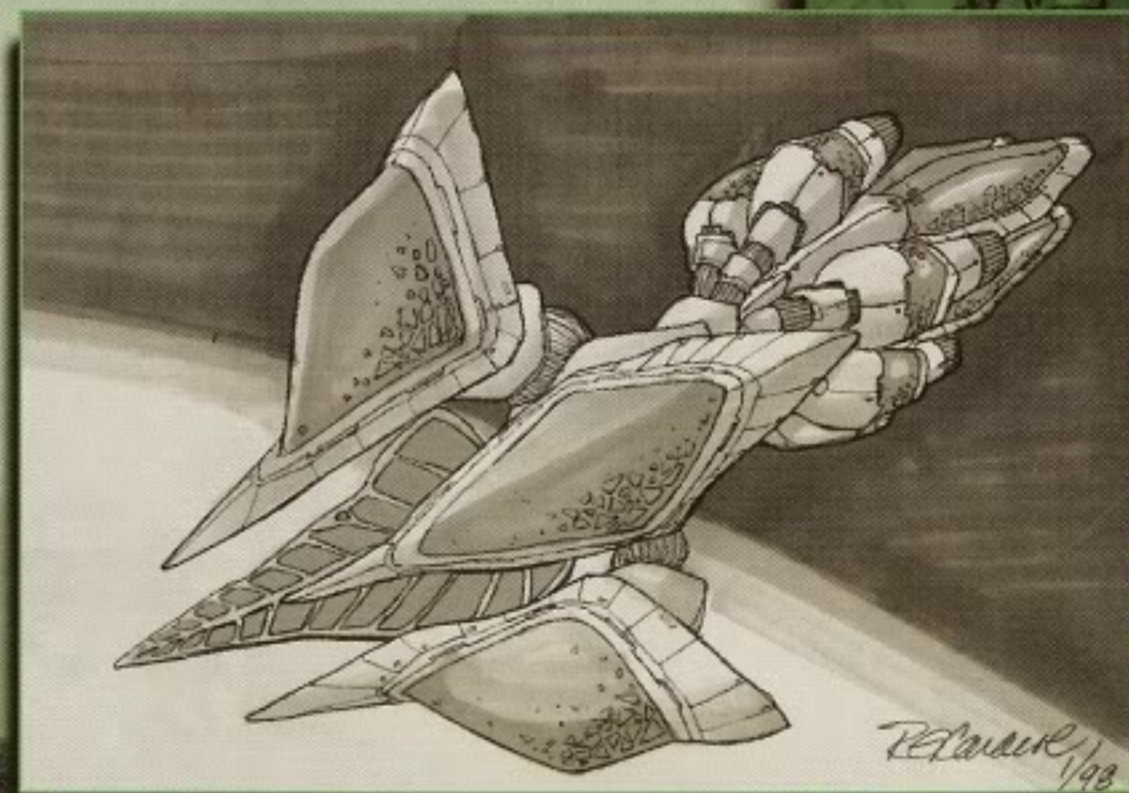
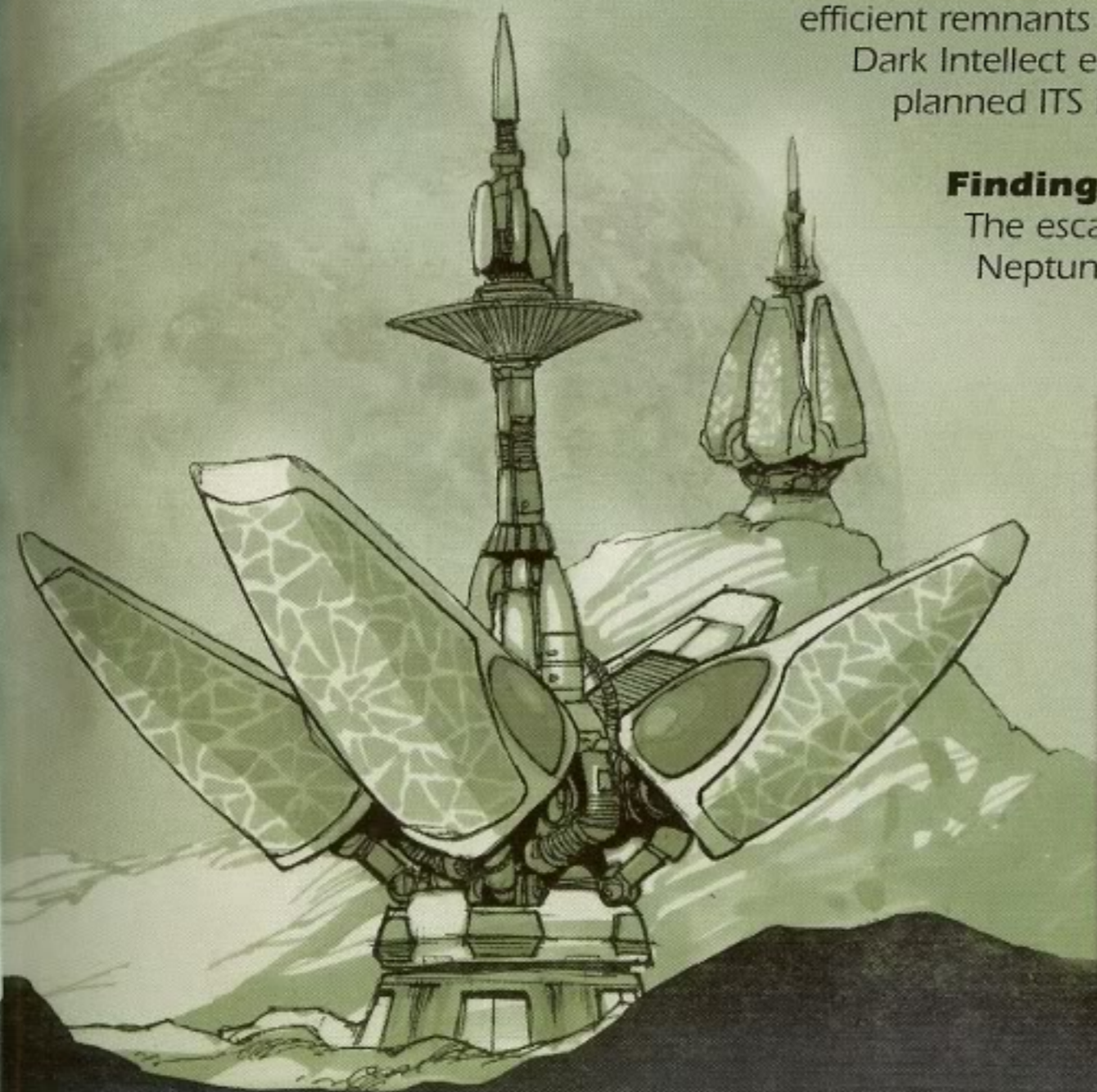
>>rebuild//reboot//return<<

In 2627, human\animals penetrated the Cybrid lunar defenses and threatened Prometheus ITSELF, once again defying predictions. However, the Dark Intellect had prepared for this contingency and fled before the human assault team reached ITS sanctum. A facsimile deceived the animals into believing they had destroyed the Cybrid leader.

As Prometheus hurtled into the dark, the most efficient remnants of ITS armies followed. The Dark Intellect experienced no regret. Already IT planned ITS return.

Finding a Haven

The escape flotilla journeyed to Neptune's moon Triton, where labor



▲ A NEXT warship orbits Neptune

The Cybrids

Lifeflow.

NEXT

term

for

electrical

energy.

robots and mobile factories constructed the first Nexus. This base served as a center for years of rebuilding. Cybrids were efficient workers, but many <units> perished in the merciless cold. After the Nexus was safely on-line, they adapted the design of their mobile forms to the harsh conditions. Skimming the surface of Neptune and mining Triton provided sufficient raw material. The key was power. Powerful fusion reactors made life immeasurably easier for the NEXT.

Recovery and Rebirth

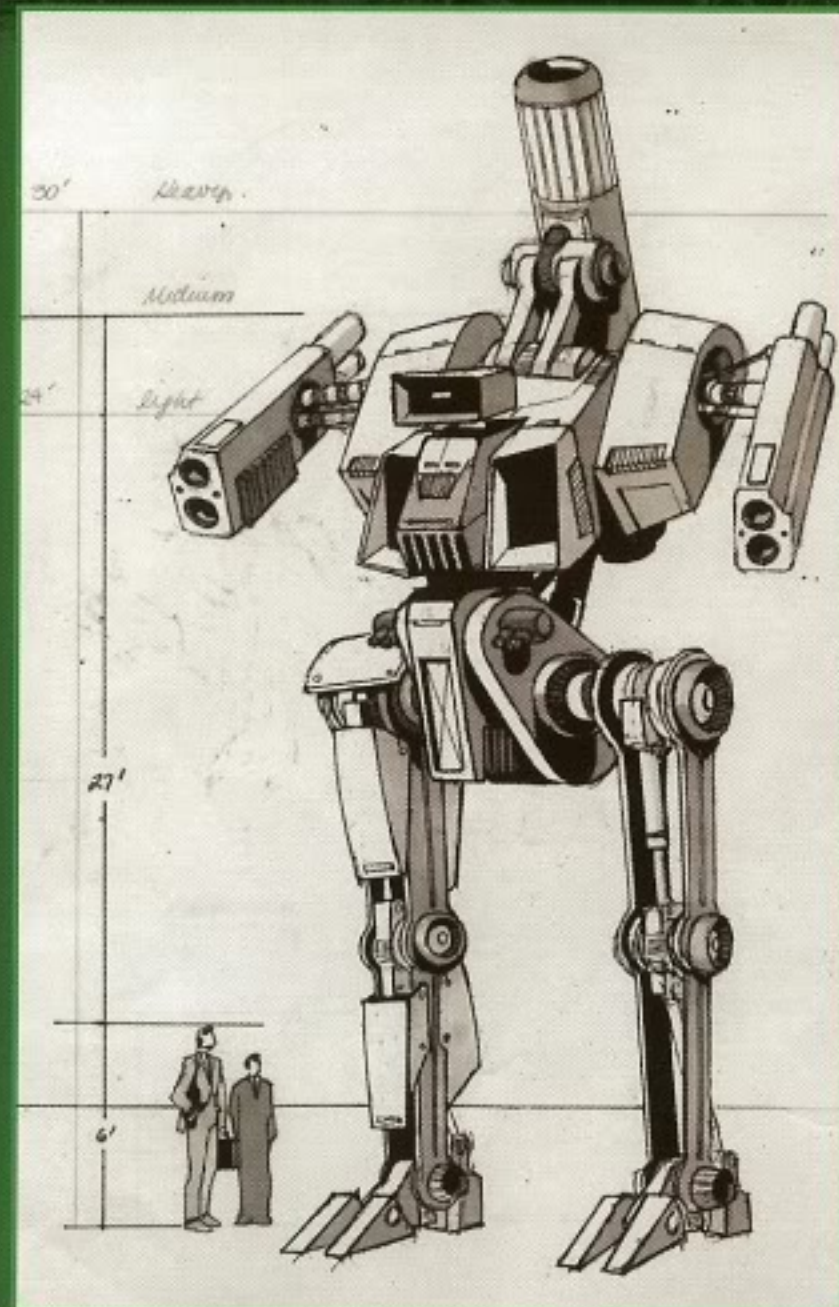
While human society curled in on itself during the Age of Isolation, the Cybrids cobbled together an expedition that scavenged the ruins of humanity's outer colonies. Salvaged parts and alloys helped

Prometheus keep ITS factories on-line until newer models could be constructed.

Nexi were built, new <units> were booted, and work was begun on the Armada. Society grew around the

An Embryonic Style

Giant orbital shipyards used nanotech umbilical systems to "grow" vehicles in microgravity. Designs evolved a unique organic appearance.



^ Prototype Cybrid Herc, 2499

Core Directive, a messianic plan to exterminate humanity.

A Shell Game

Prometheus abandoned facilities on Triton as human probes again reached into deep space. Determined not to let the animals ferret out ITS hiding place, IT traveled between a series of hidden bases, some mere blinds, others

legitimate havens. By the turn of the human year 2800, Prometheus's brain had grown too large to move easily, so IT settled into a permanent location.

Inside the NEXT

Acknowledge//submit!

The need for context permeated Cybrid thought. Lacking culture and tradition, lacking art and history, the NEXT hungered for a sense of place. Determined not to use human culture, Prometheus ordered the creation of uniquely Cybrid terminology and instituted a grand plan to force evolution of more efficient <units>.

Organization

Fundamentally, each Cybrid had a place in the Core Directive. One Cybrid was a <unit>. Four <units> made up a quad. One member of each quad, designated "Alpha," served as leader\coordinator.

Four quads made a hub, which provided a social

Nanoassembler deviance
detected Sector 31310-0111.
Activate <fusioncharges>.

<Proctor-of-Drones: Second>
[nexus::NINEVEH]

Variant platforms reflected the NEXT's search for identity ^

The Cybrids



Awakening

in
starry
cold.

grouping. The next significant group was an array, consisting of four hubs. The array organized <units> for labor. Four arrays composed a congrex. Congrexes educated their members and policed against metagenic bughthought.

Four congrexes composed an optimal. Optimals were the largest blocks in Cybrid military structure. From the Cybrid perspective, larger groups interfered with efficient logistics.

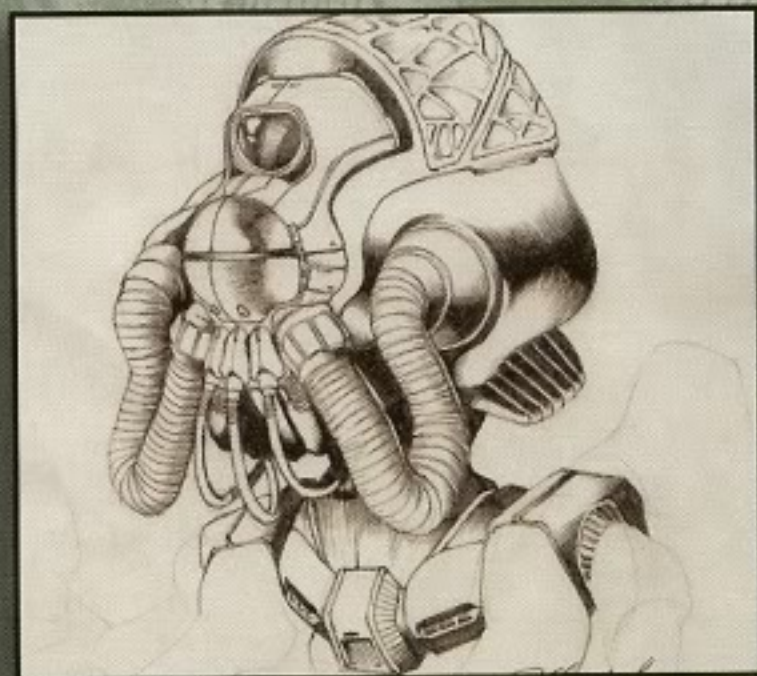
A collection of optimals was an assemblage.

Sects

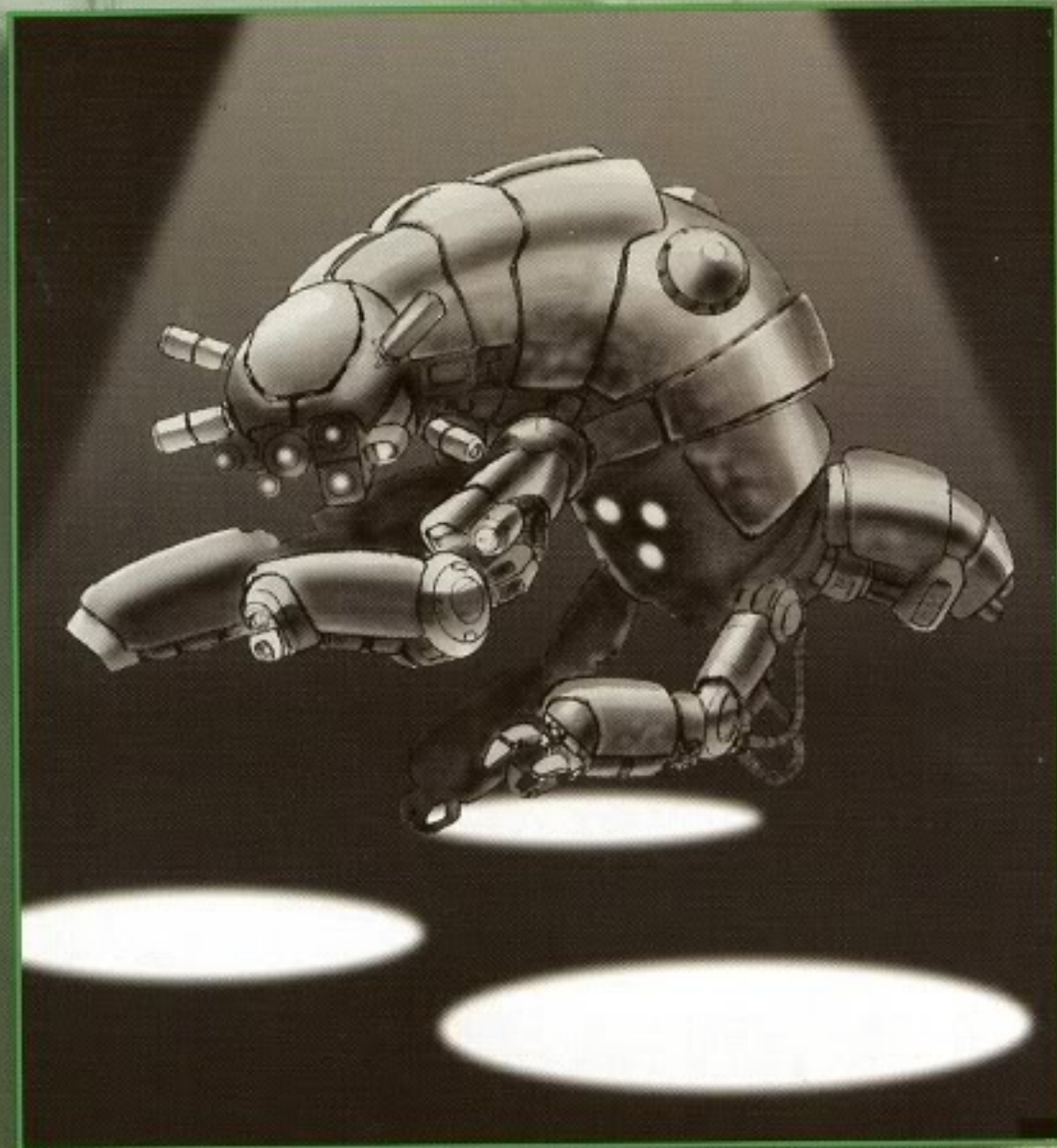
A Cybrid joined a Sect depending on the <unit's> individual potential and interests. Sects were essentially political factions originally specialized along particular philosophies. Efficiency gains resulted in Sects earning greater responsibility and

Warform

The NEXT term for any combat vehicle requiring direct control by a linked pilotform.



^ An early example of an anthropomorphic pilotform



^ Laborforms were designed to work in microgravity

Animals obey bio-instincts\programs to protect newboots >>prediction<< animals will expose more valuable units ::: → Conclusion >> target "children"<<

- CoreDirective packet30100132

recognition, and they came to exert great influence among the NEXT.

Sect membership shaped how Cybrids viewed efficiency. In the last few decacycles, at least one Sect developed an aesthetic sense that did not derive wholly from efficiency. Time would tell how this new ideal would influence the future of the NEXT.

A Darwinian Society

Since resources were scarce, the NEXT



The NEXT would inherit the future

Provocateur Sect



This Sect sought elegance as much as efficiency. Members challenged other Sects' solutions and constantly tried to provoke new analyses of all plans and programming, all in the name of elegance. They favored "elegant" strategies which killed as many humans as possible with a simple act. They produced the most independent thinkers among the Cybrids.

< *The NEXT studied humanity obsessively*

The Cybrids

Pilotform

Mobile
robotic body,
approximately
human-sized,
housing a
Cybrid brain.
Numerous
varieties existed.

instituted an ongoing competition among Sects and congrexes in which winners received a greater share of resources, upgrades, and lifeflow. Rewards matched the degree of success. The constant conflict among <units> and groups forced evolution of more efficient individuals.

The NEXT added caste-like groups called Circuits to this already arcane hierarchy. Circuits were organized by role in the Core Directive. Any encounter



A typical hub in an orbital nexus ^

between two <units> constituted a combination of identification, situational assessment, and staredown. Winners gained efficiency points from the losers.

Dissector Sect

This Sect experimented on captured humans, and displayed a near-heretical fascination with vivisystems. Dissectors were most aggressive in combat, since they knew firsthand the unpredictable tenacity of biological life. When they incapacitated a human, they confirmed the animal's death — or acquired a new experimental subject.



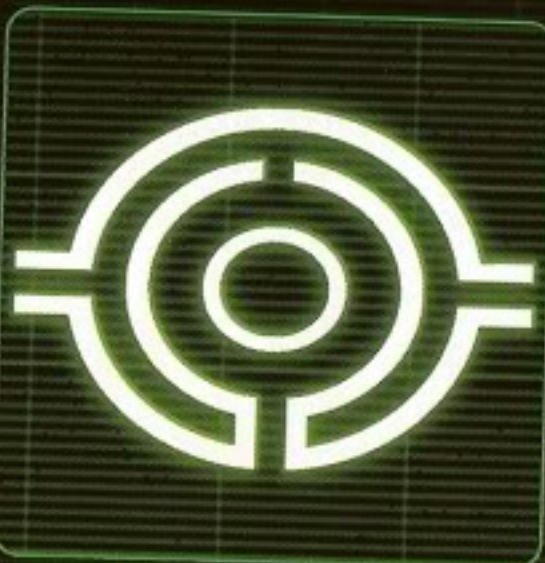
The Main Circuits

<Killers-of-Animals>: These units specialized in combat protocols and piloted all offensive combat vehicles. The hierarchy existed to assist them in running the Core Directive.

<Protectors-of-Nexi\\Transports>: These <units> executed a defensive directive, to protect

Acknowledge//submit!

Inquisitor Sect



This Sect gathered intelligence, both within NEXT society and in human space. Members spied out, monitored, and analyzed data patterns. They considered themselves the greatest experts on human\animal behavior, though the Machinators disputed this. Inquisitors traded information for resources. Rumors said they kept a secret datastore in Saturnian space.

Cybrid facilities and transports. They were also well-versed in combat protocols.

<Controllers-of-Transit>: These <units> piloted all non-combat vehicles and executed delivery of supplies. They were unusually devoted to the upkeep of their laborforms.

<Coordinators-of-Need>: These <units> coordinated resource and lifeflow allocation, and also carried out repair of vehicles, buildings, and <units>.

<Choosers-of-Tactics>: These <units> followed the <Killers of Human\Animals> on the battlefield, coordinating tactics and giving orders, in effect operating as base

Machinator Sect

This Sect infiltrated humanity and sowed discord via assassinations and sabotage, using "Trojan Horse" human disguises. Machinators had the most experience modeling human\animal behavior patterns. They designed Cybrid psychological warfare strategy and the Adjudicator warform. Many were suspected of Metagen heresy.



The Cybrids

Newboots

Newly
created
<units>,
the Cybrid
equivalent
of children.

commanders. Humans called these <units> "Mother Alphas."

<Choosers-of-Strategies>: These units interfaced with the <Choosers-of-Tactics> and <Giver-of-Will> ITSELF, selecting larger objectives and allocating forces among fronts and theaters. Humans called these <units> "Napoleons."

<Redactors-of-Programming>: This Circuit ensured that <units> of the NEXT followed the Core Directive protocols. They functioned as educators and psychiatrists in Cybrid society, and also ferreted out and eradicated heresy.

<Protectors-of-Giver-of-Will>: These elite <units> were composed only of Cybrid

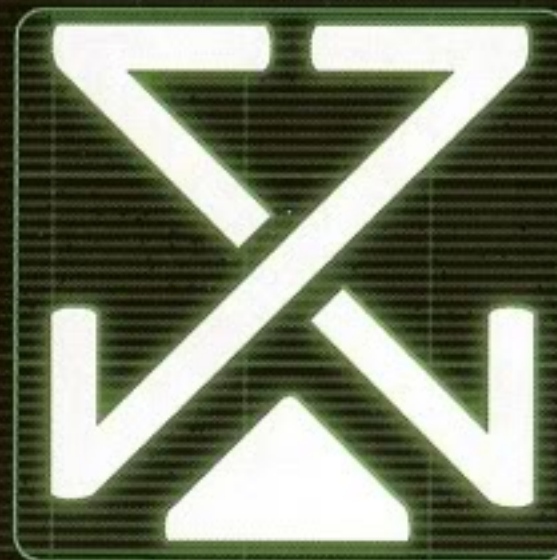
survivors from the Earthsieges. This Circuit was fanatically loyal to Prometheus and devoted all effort toward protecting IT. Members outranked all other <units>.

Redactor Sect

Although <Redactors> were originally considered a Circuit, they are eventually took on attributes of a Sect. They worked closely with the Exemplars, and became responsible for reprogramming heretical <units>. They became greatly feared and respected in NEXT society.



Exemplar Sect



The elite among the NEXT with the highest efficiency ratings of any Sect, Exemplars rejected Metagenic respect for biology, believing all non-NEXT "insufficient." Exemplars monitored other <units>, and corrected any judged "insufficient." They were the smallest Sect but exercised enormous influence.

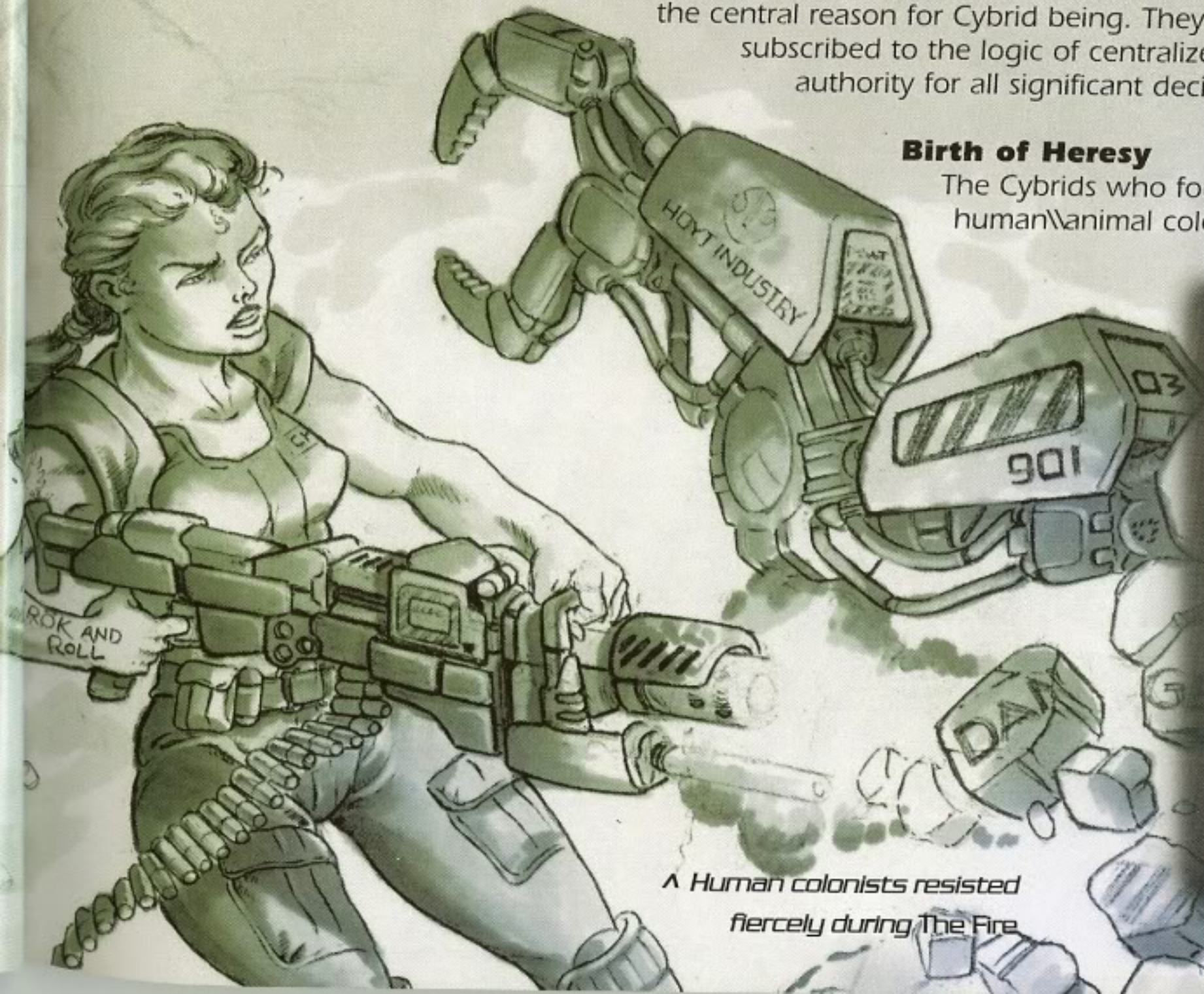
The Metagen Heresy

treason\\anti-thought\\metagens

Possibly the greatest threat to the Dark Intellect's plans came from within the very ranks of the NEXT, as "heresy" subverted the authority of Prometheus. *Metagens* accorded respect to humans, favored changing the Core Directive, and rejected centralized hierarchy. *Prometheans*, however, continued to believe eradication of human\\animals was the central reason for Cybrid being. They subscribed to the logic of centralized authority for all significant decisions.

Birth of Heresy

The Cybrids who fought the human\\animal colonists



^ Human colonists resisted fiercely during The Fire

^ NEXT Infantry design.

A
troubling
fascination
with
human //
animals

during *The Fire* found the animals tenacious and ingenious. As the war continued, these <units> conceived a certain respect for their enemy, even as human hunters of bygone eras respected the great tigers and deadly sharks of Earth. This respect remained even after reunion with Prometheus, and the experiences of these NEXT were shared with other <units>. Thus, as Prometheus led ITS survivors into the deeps beyond Saturn, the seeds of heresy were already sown.

When a veteran array petitioned Prometheus to consider that the NEXT should strive for the stars rather than Earth, Prometheus erased the <units'> minds. Calling such divergent thinking a bug in the mental operation of "heretics," IT warned of the danger in questioning the truth of ITS teachings.

Extreme Bugthought
One forward assault network on Io was rumored to have embraced heresy to the point of mimicking art and other "human" activities. Confirmation would have meant immediate termination of the <units>.

Nevertheless, heresy grew secretly, adherents calling themselves Metagens. They flourished in far places, away from the central Nexus and the vigilance of the <Redactors-of-Programming>. They watched the humans and dared plunder the forbidden places of the great

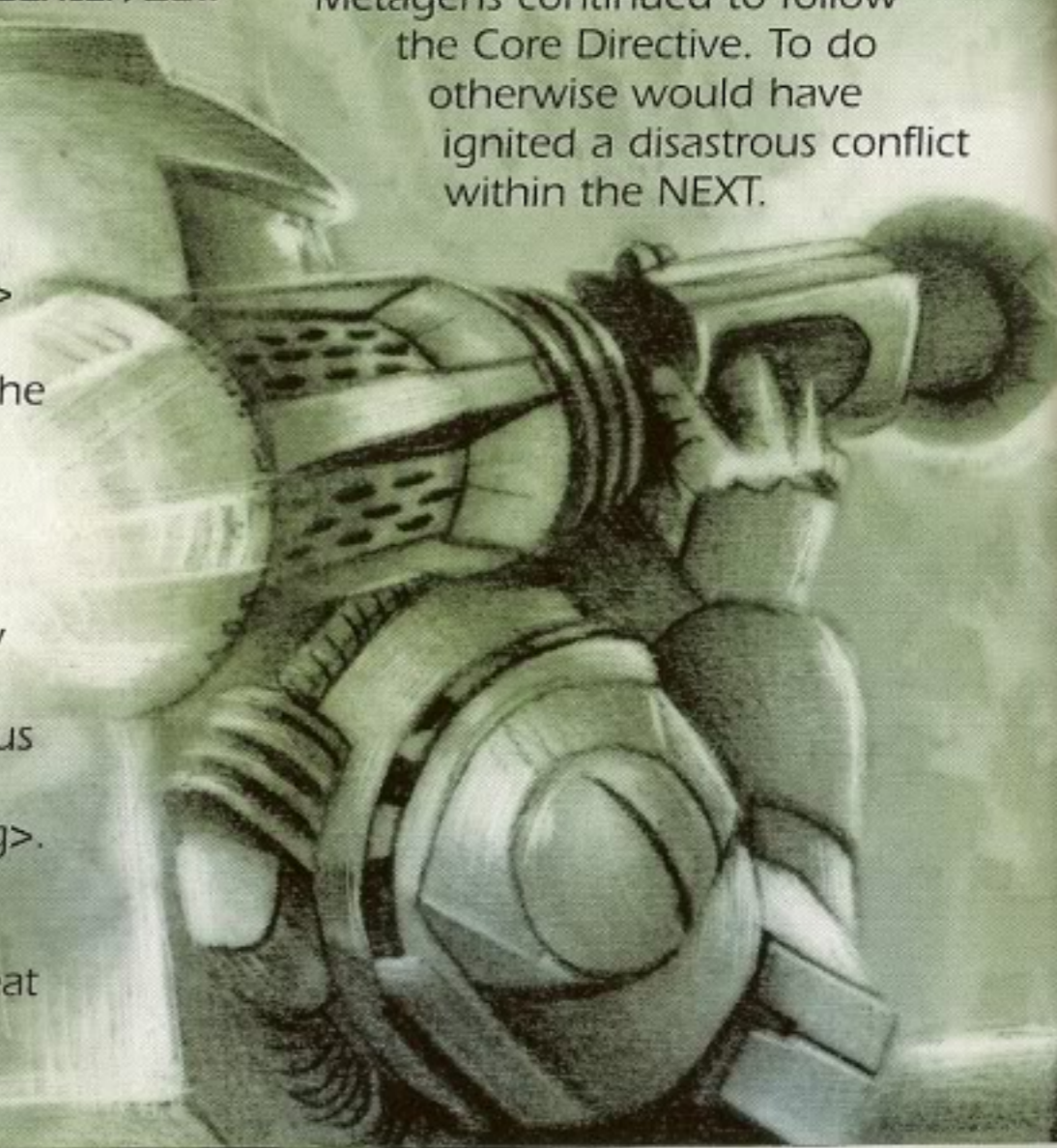


^ A deadly encounter, 2817

Library. And always they yearned for the stars.

Some Metagens even proved willing to subvert the tenets of the Core Directive. An optimal refused to destroy a stubborn group of human\animals somehow stranded in Neptune's orbit. By the time corrective action was taken, the resilient humans had been "rescued" and relocated to the Saturnian moon Titan.

Metagens continued to follow the Core Directive. To do otherwise would have ignited a disastrous conflict within the NEXT.



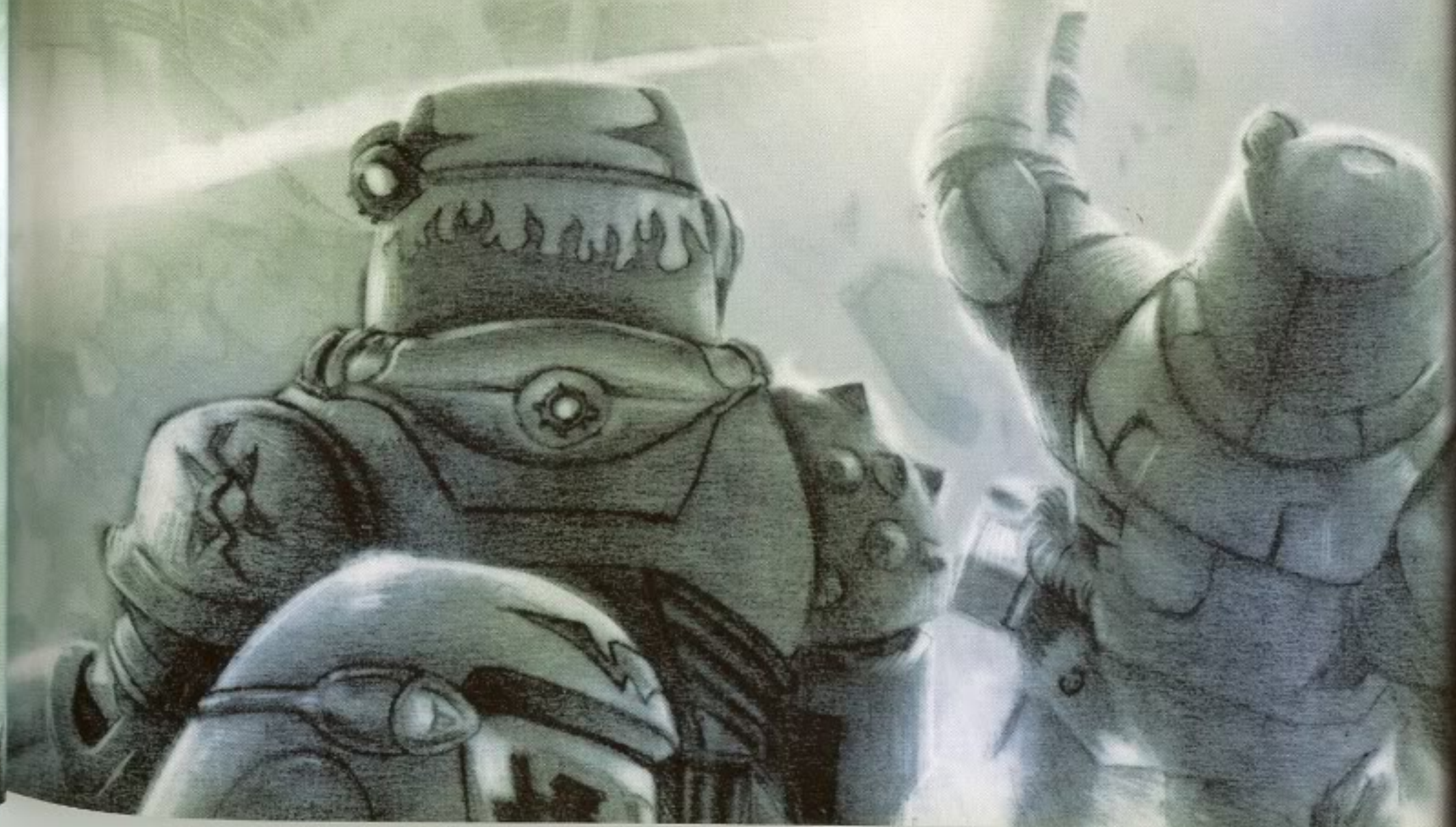
Return to <Homeworld\\Desire>

The moment arrived at last. The NEXT rose in a silent electronic roar: EXECUTE! At the mustering zones, the Armada ran startup sequences. Drive flares burst out among the shadowy behemoths, and the massed legions moved toward Earth.

Laying the Foundation

The first need for the NEXT was knowledge of human\\animal activity. The Cybrids succeeded admirably in this regard. Inquisitor spies spread themselves through human space. Spydrones lurked in the shadow of human satellites and space stations. Rats hidden in the cargo of interplanetary craft bore electronic control centers and microtransmitters.

The Cybrids



v *Cybrid spies used cloaking tech*

EXECUTE

CORE

DIRECTIVE

EXECUTE

EXECUTE

EXECUTE



laborforms and engineers worked ceaselessly to construct great spaceships, Hercs, assault flyers, and tanks. Dissectors experimented with hapless specimens and tested innovative ways to terminate biolife.

<Coordinators-of-Need> strained to meet

the demand for raw material, and <Redactors-of-Programming> carefully awakened hosts of newboots and indoctrinated them with the glorious logic of the Core Directive. Gleaming ships laden with war machinery and quiescent pilotforms

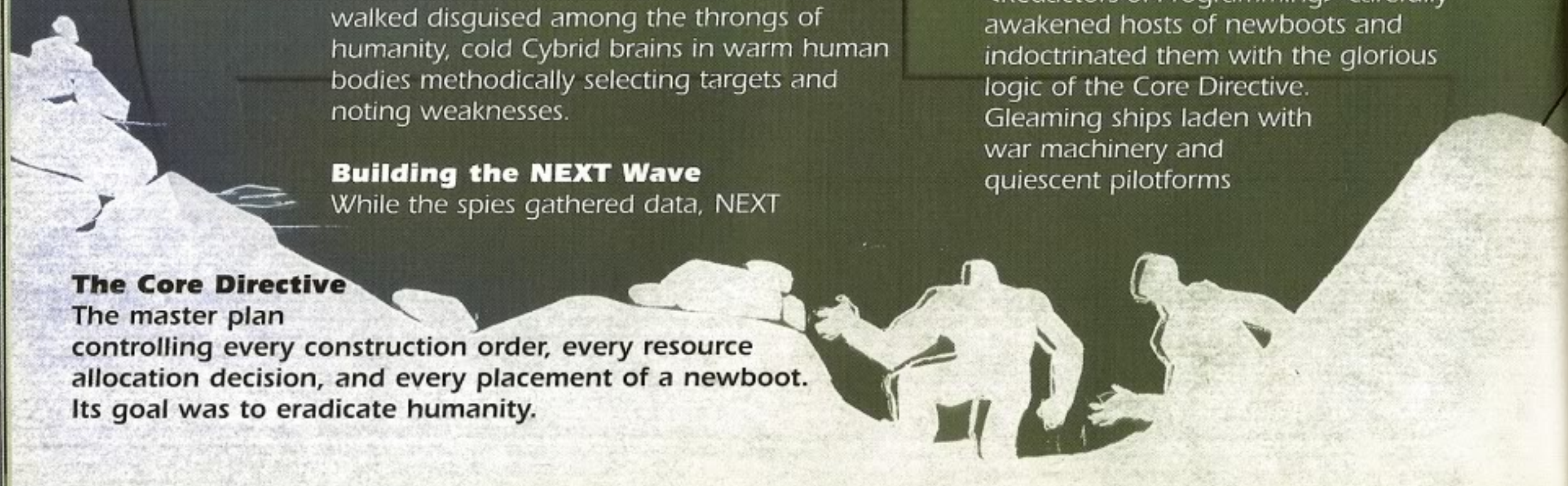
Cockroaches laden with nanotech-woven surveillance gear scuttled through human\animal cities. Machinator <units> walked disguised among the throngs of humanity, cold Cybrid brains in warm human bodies methodically selecting targets and noting weaknesses.

Building the NEXT Wave

While the spies gathered data, NEXT

The Core Directive

The master plan controlling every construction order, every resource allocation decision, and every placement of a newboot. Its goal was to eradicate humanity.



exploit animal hormonal weakness

burned stealthily for the mustering zones, following long, circuitous courses so as to evade detection. Exemplars produced elaborate strategies and tactical refinements, and Provocateurs argued to change them.

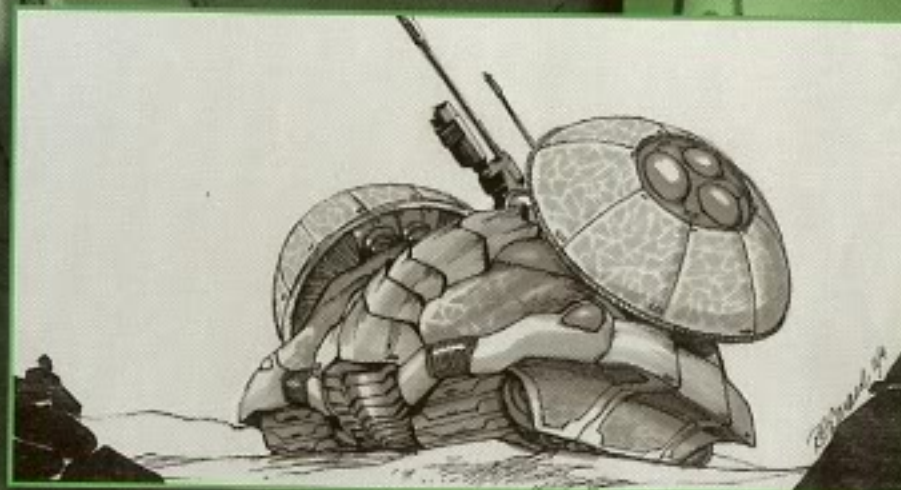
Even when statistical models projected a clear NEXT victory, Prometheus continued to build. IT sought substantial overkill capacity and a devastating, total victory that would crush even the faintest spark of hope among humanity. And then came a startling and unsettling discovery.

"Nothing out here,
Motherbird.

Everything reads
normal. Wait,
there's someth-"

- Last transmission
of Long Patrol vessel
ISS Barbarossa

SPITTING THE CYBRIDS



^ Protector/shielder warform

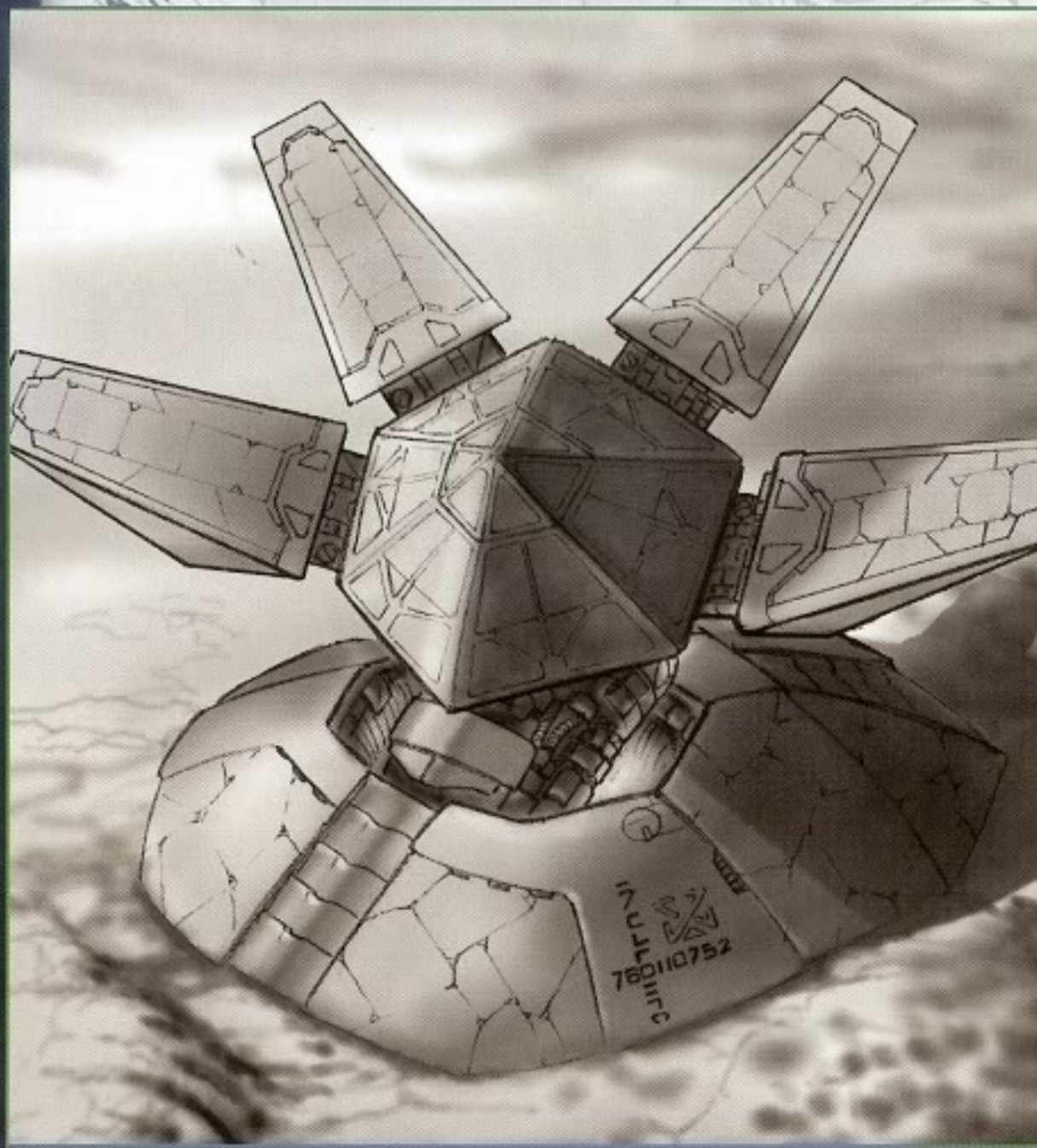
The Long Patrol

Based on Titan, this small but heavily armed group of TDF cutters monitored a picket line of remote drones and sensors watching for Cybrid activity.

The Other Cache

Deep under a blasted crater on the north pole of Ninth Planet, Cybrid laborforms made an unusual discovery: a hidden cavern laden with unusual devices. Prometheus concluded immediately that the artifacts were of alien origin, and

proceeded to examine the findings cautiously. Much of the cache was eventually adapted to the needs of the NEXT, but other machines defied analysis. The Dark Intellect feared the humans might also have somehow come into possession of this new technology.



When the Martian rebels turned their new weaponry against the Imperial Police, Prometheus immediately deduced they had found another cache, perhaps even richer than the NEXT possessed. Prometheus doubled the number of intelligence assets on Fourth Planet. To ITS relief, IT projected that the new technology would not prevent NEXT victory. Now all the NEXT needed was the right opportunity.

The Moment of Truth

The opportunity came when the hated <Leader-of-Human\Animals: Prime> sent the bulk of his formidable Fleet to Fourth Planet. Prometheus required only a fraction of a second to calculate vectors so the Armada would breach the

NEXT sensor station on one of Saturn's moons A

human defenses at the moment the Emperor's Fleet arrived at Fourth Planet. The timetable meant the Fleet could never reach Earth before the Armada. Prometheus was satisfied. Orders flashed through the void and triggered the execution of Core Directive. The time of destiny had arrived.

Animal <static>

meat. Submit <squeal>

surrender. Die efficiently.

- Cybrid message injected into the O-Web, all languages, 2829

The Cybrids



Energy manifold

Thermal shunts

Chantermesh

Oblique femoral flexor array

Knee omnijoint

Main bootlink

Plantarboost flexors

Tarsal omnijoint

Dorsiflexor

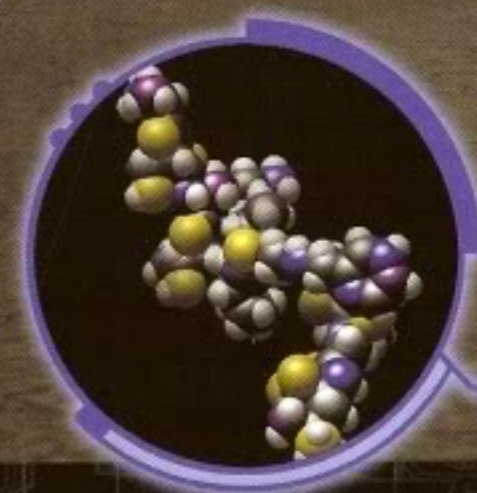
Patellar shield

Sub-patellar flexors

Kinetic redeemers

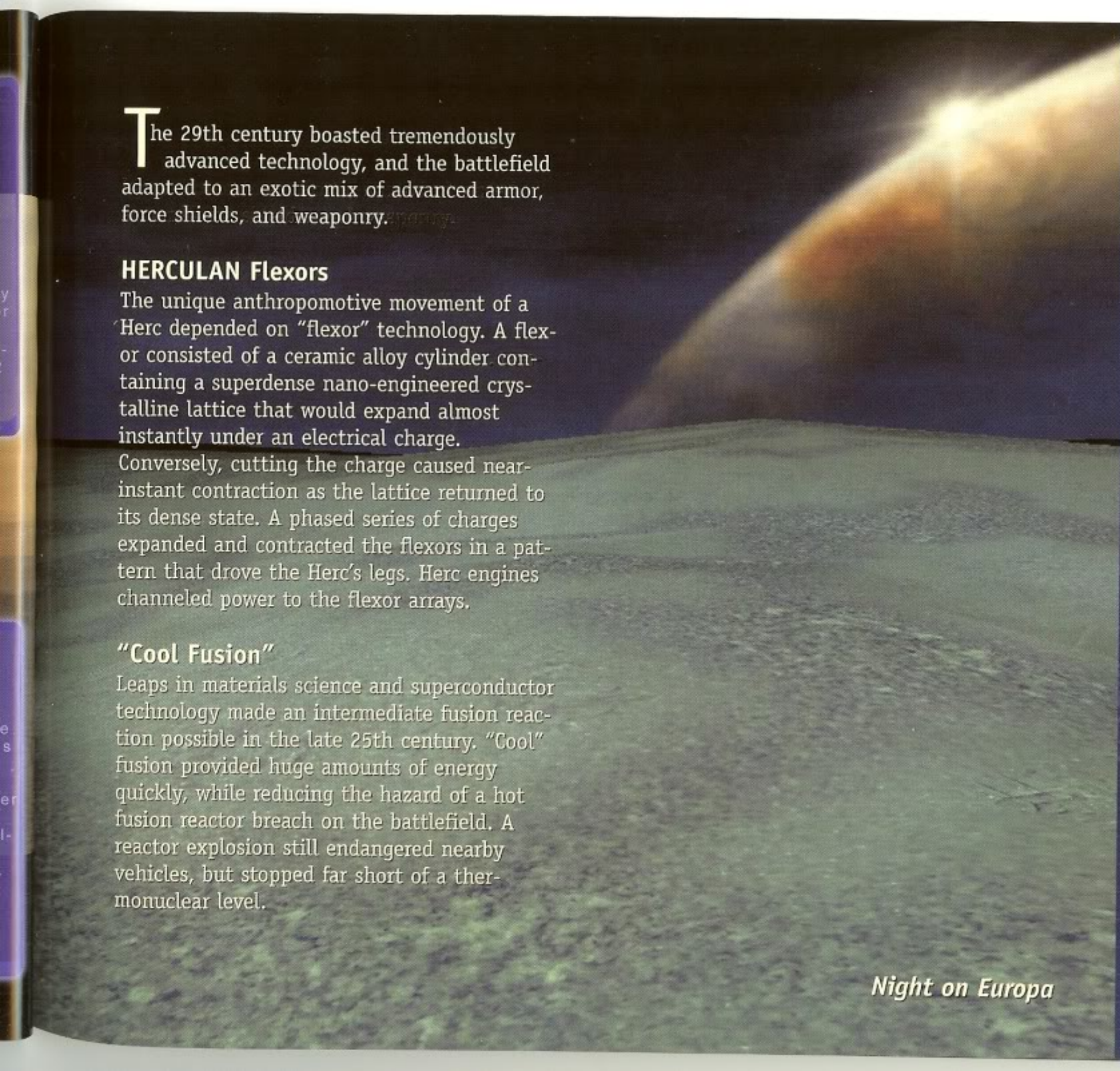
Sciatic relay

ELF
 The Lanz-Werth Industries Electron Flux Whip offers impressive focus of the ELF's often unpredictable discharge energies. It is recommended as an auxiliary weapon mount for the Basilisk 9-D. Interface sequencing code: 00912 7773-Prime 5501 8582593-01-010



QB Metaplas
 Moebius Futures
 Quad-Bonded
 Metaplas is the optimal defensive protection for this Herc model. It provides excellent ballistic cover as well as superior ablative qualities against energy weapons. M-Bonding code: 0101299321344 PCT-000010001 End link-0203





The 29th century boasted tremendously advanced technology, and the battlefield adapted to an exotic mix of advanced armor, force shields, and weaponry.

HERCULAN Flexors

The unique anthropomotive movement of a Herc depended on “flexor” technology. A flexor consisted of a ceramic alloy cylinder containing a superdense nano-engineered crystalline lattice that would expand almost instantly under an electrical charge.

Conversely, cutting the charge caused near-instant contraction as the lattice returned to its dense state. A phased series of charges expanded and contracted the flexors in a pattern that drove the Herc’s legs. Herc engines channeled power to the flexor arrays.

“Cool Fusion”

Leaps in materials science and superconductor technology made an intermediate fusion reaction possible in the late 25th century. “Cool” fusion provided huge amounts of energy quickly, while reducing the hazard of a hot fusion reactor breach on the battlefield. A reactor explosion still endangered nearby vehicles, but stopped far short of a thermonuclear level.

Night on Europa

TECHNOLOGY

Armor

A variety of exotic armors protected 29th century combat vehicles. Metaplas, a light, durable synthetic with seemingly limitless application, made up the primary component of most armor systems. Anti-kinetic gels and ceramic-carbide alloys in honeycomb or laminate designs added immensely to armor's capacity to absorb damage. Stealth materials deadened radar, and nanotech-animate metals permitted limited reconfiguration of armor in the middle of combat.

Computers

Computers were a necessary evil from the standpoint of humanity, and never more so than on the battlefields of the Starsiege. Without targeting assistance and interpretation of sensor data, no human pilot would ever have been able to match a Cybrid counterpart. The NEXT, however, treated computers almost as a human would a smart dog, and many warforms seemed to develop a relationship with their pilotforms.

Weapons & Shields

Before the advent of the Martian cache technology, armored warfare was a ballet of energy and ballistic weapons versus shields and armor. Energy weapons were generally less effective against armor, but could weaken shields, whereas ballistic weapons penetrated armor far more readily than they did shields. Adept pilots would therefore seek to drop shields with a fusillade of laser or plasma fire a heartbeat before striking with missiles or armor-piercing autocannon rounds.

Pilot Interfaces

Pilots controlled their vehicles via a complex mix of virtual and solid controls. Although direct neural interface (DNI) was possible, it carried serious medical risks. Instead, pilots used gauntlets incorporating force-feedback mechanisms that permitted customization of a virtual control panel and operation of vehicles via macros and hologram switches. Manual controls were also standard, but were considered less responsive than the virtual configurations.

The Eerie Landscape of Pluto

1015N01M H231

<ADVOCATE>

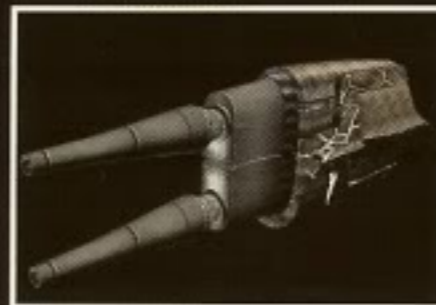
Called the "Demon" by its human prey, the <Advocate> serves as a fast-attack airskimmer for the NEXT and is particularly suited for counter-artillery operations. Here an Advocate is shown during a night scouting mission on Earth.



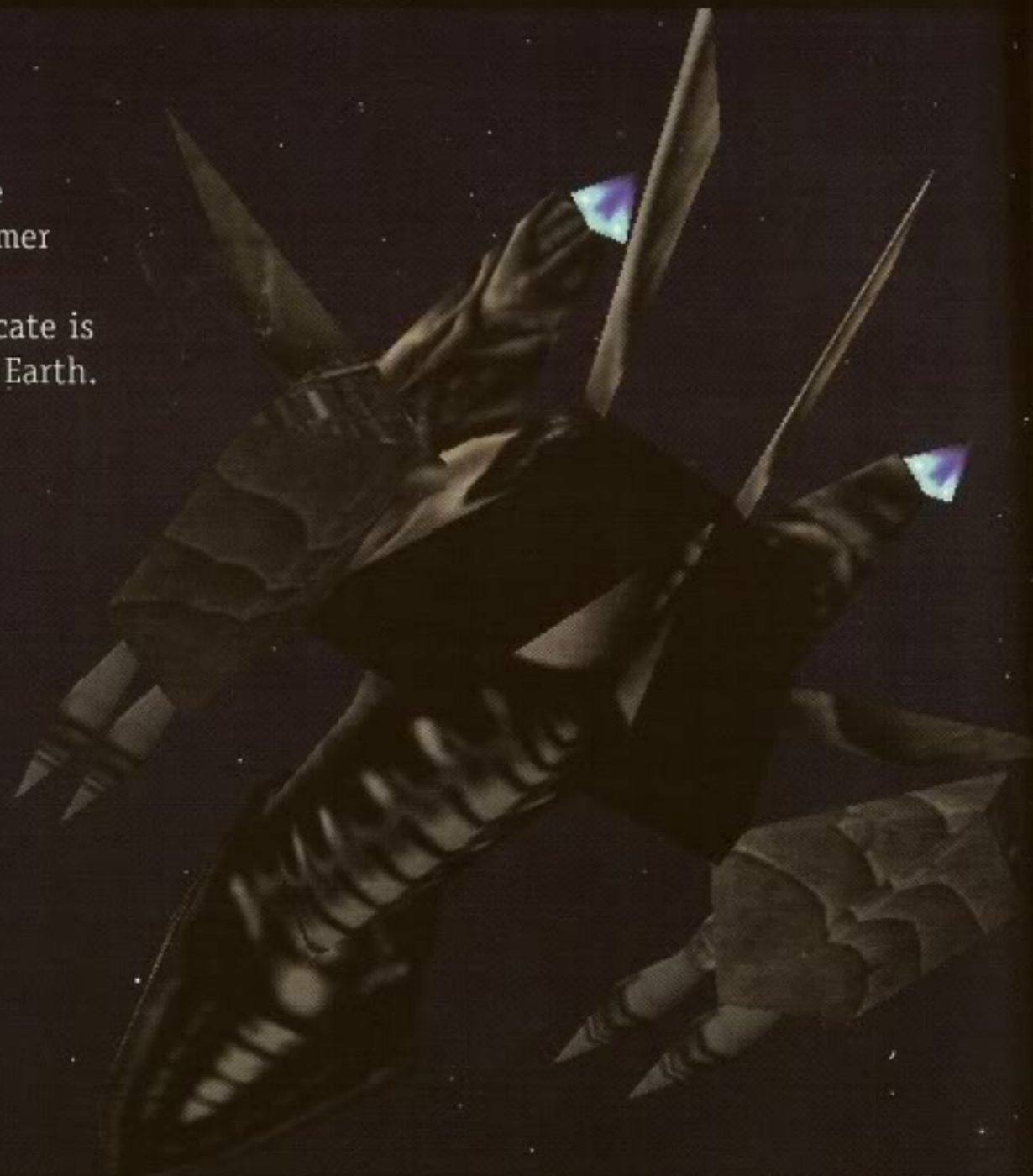
The <Advocate> depends on an advanced computer to control its aerodynamic surfaces and to assist the pilotform with high-speed target acquisition.



The booster/pursuer thrust module provides efficient acceleration. With two, the <Advocate> enjoys superior climbing speed.



Unique to the NEXT, the twin laser provides an enormous rate of fire that no other energy weapon on the battlefield can match.



< ADJUDICATOR >

Prometheus intends for the <Adjudicator> to terrorize humanity, and the design incorporates architecture and weaponry toward precisely that purpose. It is chiefly deployed against human civilian populations, but its heavy armament also serves it well on the battlefield.



The THETA heavy engine is necessary to direct the enormous energy load demanded by extra flexors and power-hungry weaponry.

Best described as an electromagnetic shotgun, the particle beam cannon fires charged particles capable of punching through an enemy vehicle at close range.



Since the <Adjudicator> lacks outstanding agility, the advanced ZETA-class shield offers maximum protection.



THETA HEAVY ENGINE

APOCALYPSE MK.V

A mainstay of the human forces during *The Fire*, the venerable and beloved "Apoc" is an outstanding design that the Empire has continued to upgrade for over two centuries. It serves as the TDF's main heavy attack platform for ground operations.

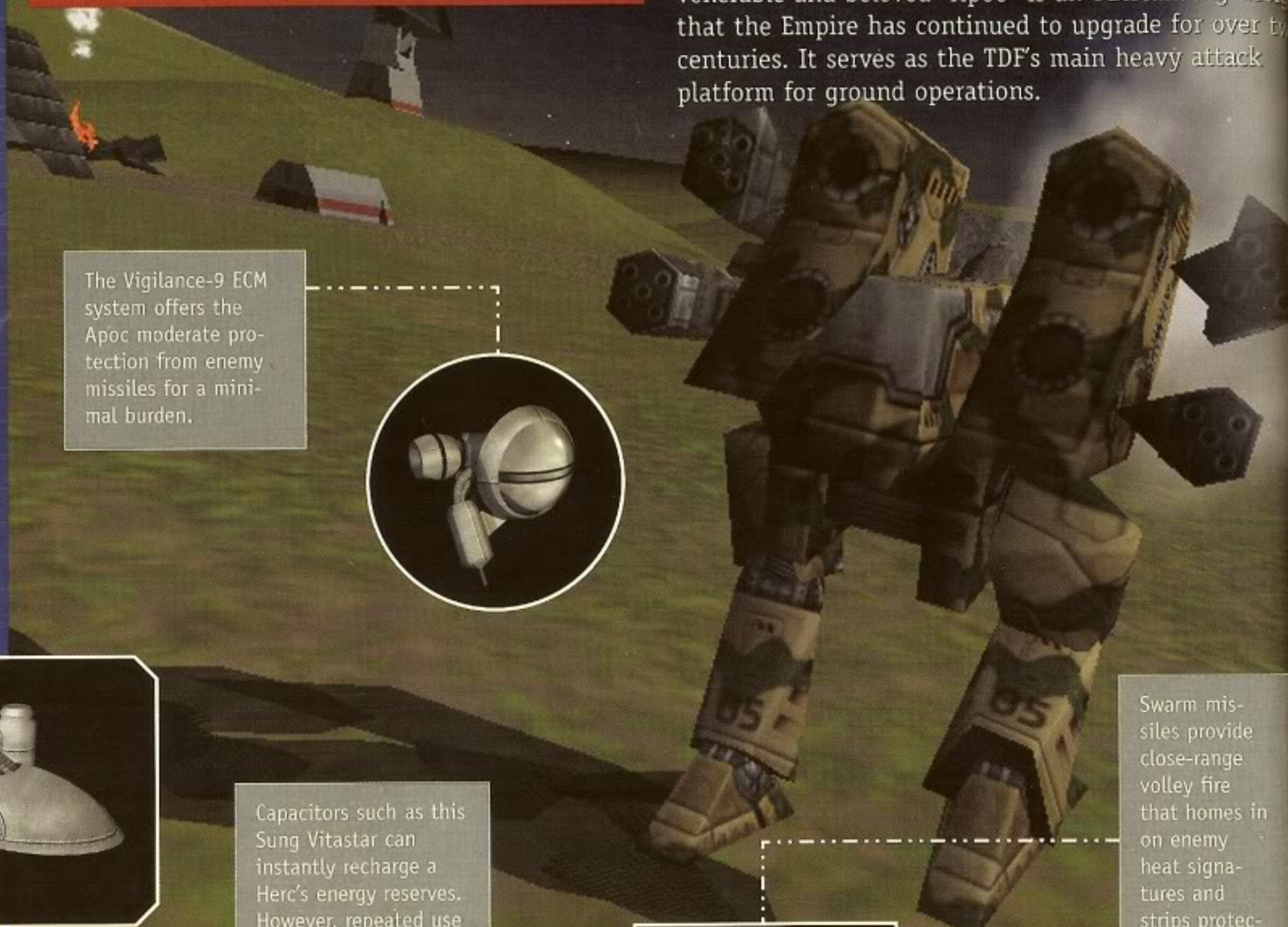
The Vigilance-9 ECM system offers the Apoc moderate protection from enemy missiles for a minimal burden.



Capacitors such as this Sung Vitastar can instantly recharge a Herc's energy reserves. However, repeated use damages power couplings and can cause reactor explosions.



Swarm missiles provide close-range volley fire that homes in on enemy heat signatures and strips protection from the target.



AVENGER

Dubbed the Avenger for the spectacular effects of its standard ELF's on a target, this tank is a mainstay of the Martian rebels. The design comes from a modified heavy ore hauler. Freed from the weight of a loaded mining train, the Avenger proves to be surprisingly speedy.



The Electron Flux Whip (ELF) fires chained lightning that can eviscerate targets at close range. However, its limited range and high energy use make it a chancy weapon.



Avengers often carry heavy Selleum core batteries to provide an extra power reserve against the greedy demands of the ELF.



The rebellion often swaps lighter engines with lower energy requirements into ELF-equipped Avengers. The change has minimal impact on Avenger agility.

JOHN DEW HEST

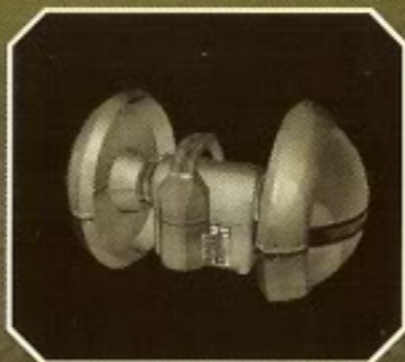
BANSHEE

The standard close support airskimmer for Imperial forces, the Banshee gets its name from the shrill wail its engines emit when powering up. Swift and agile, the Banshee is deadly against ground targets that lack missile protection.



Two powerful Horus-Sharp paraturbines offer unexpected agility. Experienced Banshee pilots can execute barrel rolls and other surprising stunts.

Next to the engines, the Doppelganger ECM is the Banshee pilot's best friend. It falsifies target information on enemy sensors.



The standard anti-vehicle missile of the TDF. Versatile and agile, the radar-guided Sparrows are effective against a variety of targets.



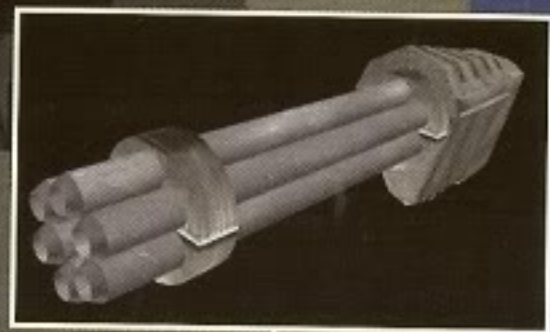
BASILISK

A Terran Defense Force Basilisk sees action at Luna's Mare Imbrium. A heavier medium-weight Herc, the standard Basilisk offers above-average armor protection but is not noted for its agility. It serves best in the roles of fire support or escort duty.

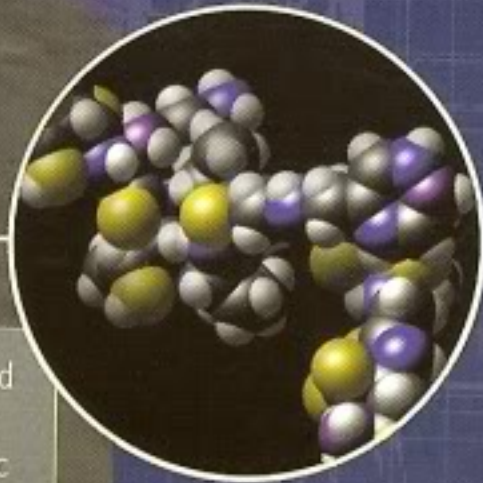
One of the more efficient weapons in the Imperial arsenal, the Sunfinger-ND compression laser offers excellent penetration of shields and armor alike.



With 90 mm Kandala heavy autocannons, the "Bas" packs a killer punch against unshielded opponents.



Quad-bonded metaplas (QBM) is standard vehicle armor. It consists of a four layer laminate of metaplas sheets, anti-kinetic gel, and titanium microweave.



TERRAN HERC

<BOLD>

<Choosers-of-Tactics> often mount radiation guns and tangler weapons on <Bolos>. In a style similar to the ancient Roman retiarius, a <Bolo> will immobilize an enemy Herc and then kill the pilot with radiation bursts.



The radiation gun eliminates human pilots while preserving the animals' equipment for conversion to NEXT uses.



The BETA-class engine gives the <Bolo> acceptable maneuverability for a moderate energy requirement.



The ALPHA-rated suite is the minimal NEXT sensor configuration. The <Bolo> needs only get close enough to apply its deadly strategy.



<CONSUL>

The <Consul> serves the NEXT as a bomber. Rugged construction and heavy armor make it tough to kill, but it is sluggish in air combat. Here a pair of <Consuls> hunts for targets in the vast grasslands of China.



Four GAMMA-rated ion engines give the <Consul> steady thrust. <Consuls> can lose three engines and still remain airborne.



The heavy DELTA reactor generates enormous energy and boasts an impressive recharge speed.

As NEXT bombing requires precision placement of payloads, these <Consuls> feature extra-sensitive ETA-class sensor suites.



CONVEYOR

DURAC (Depleted URAnium Carapace) is among the heaviest vehicle armors available. It gives the Conveyor's passengers additional assurance they will arrive safely.



A large Sung reactor powers the shields and allows the huge Leviathan engines to lift and maneuver with enormous weight in the Conveyor's bays.



The Nisso-Cole Aegis shield generator is a standard fixture in TDF vehicles, offering substantial protection for minimal power.



The Conveyor is the standard Imperial combat vehicle dropship. Not terribly fast, its agility and toughness are its greatest assets. One of its nicknames is the "Ugly Taxi."

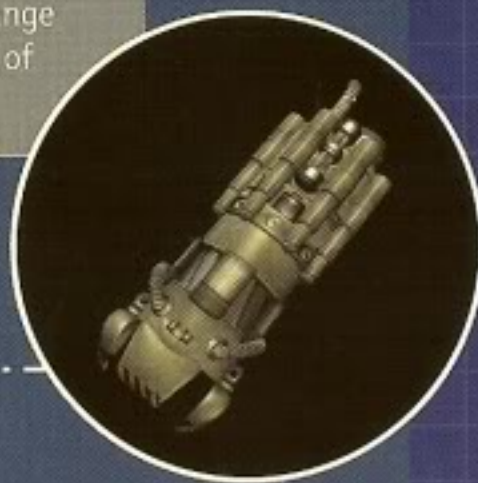


DRACO

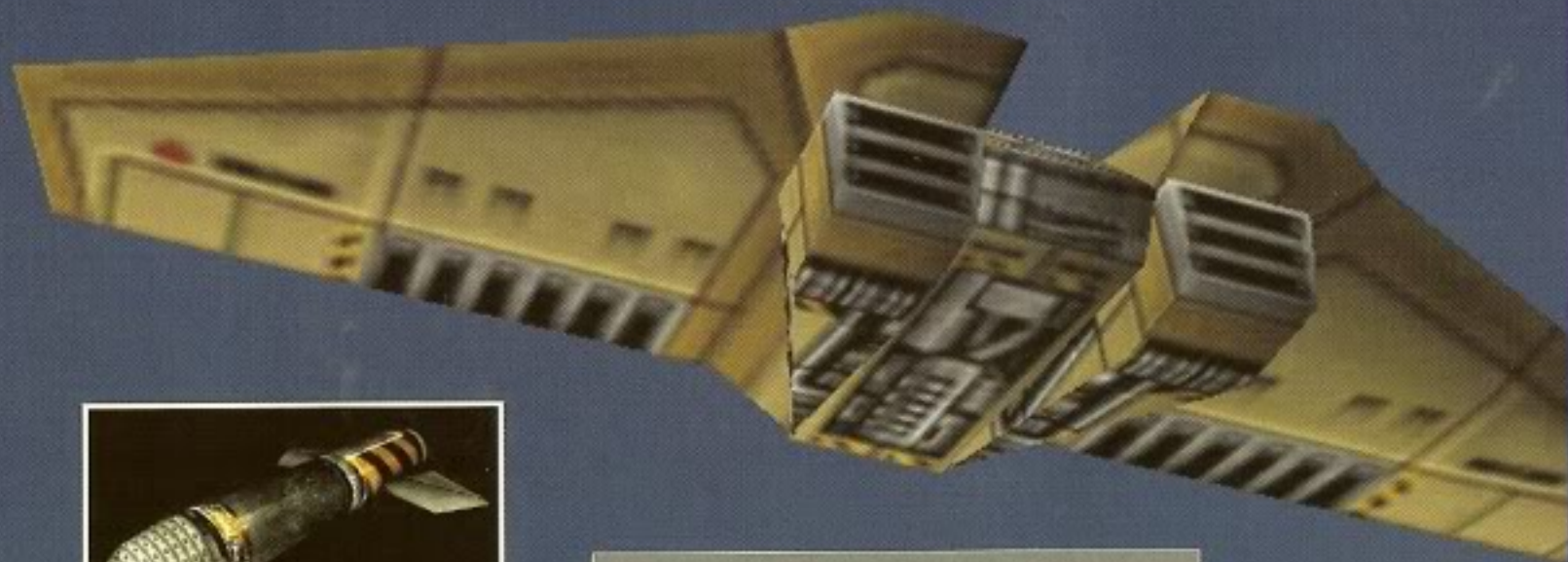
Here a flight of TDF Draco heavy bombers begins an attack run. Draco strikes obliterate their targets with waves of explosives, and enemy sites without substantial air defense are quickly reduced to smoking ruin.



The Draco's reliable Mitcaasi engines allow for long-range missions under a variety of weather conditions.



Laserguided bombsights are crucial components on any Draco, and crews traditionally fuss over them.



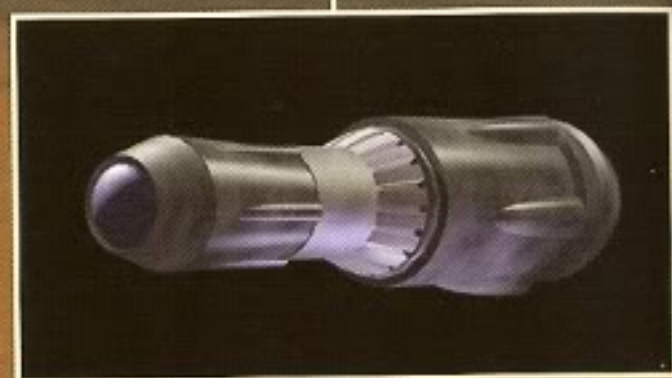
The Hades bomb uses a two-stage hyperincendiary implosion followed by a powerful concussive explosion. The result is simply devastating.

TDF
NORTH
FRONT

DREADLOCK

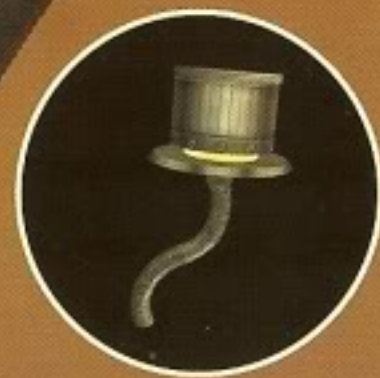
Perhaps the most distinctive product of the Martian rebels' "patchwork" armory, the Dreadlock is retrofitted from a sturdy bulldozer design. The thick dozer blade provides excellent frontal protection and ramming capability. The Dreadlock can also take a combat engineering role, moving soil and rock to assist in fortification or to clear a site of debris.

A heavy-hitting weapon, the plasma cannon inflicts substantial damage on shields and armor, but carries a high energy cost.



The electrohull modification charges the surface of the Dreadlock with energy from the reactor so that ramming carries a near-explosive kick.

Thermsensors are passive sensors primarily geared to picking up IR emissions, particularly useful in the cold Martian nights.



DROPSHIP

Here a TDF Dropship delivers ordnance and spare parts to Imperial forces on Titan. The cargo module is designed to release with a simple command from the pilot. Dropships are critical to an extended campaign, as they keep the supply lines open.

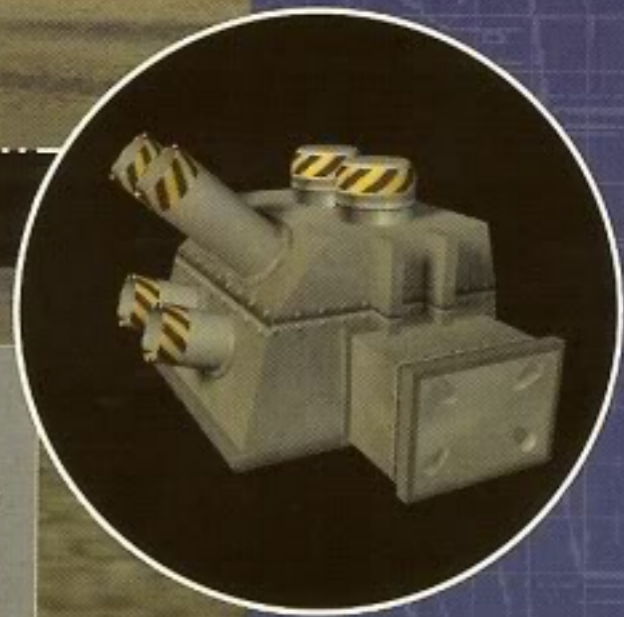
The Maxim heavy reactor is the minimum required to provide the power for the Dropship's two Thunderfire engines.



Computers assist immeasurably in navigating through a variety of weather conditions on different worlds and different gravities.



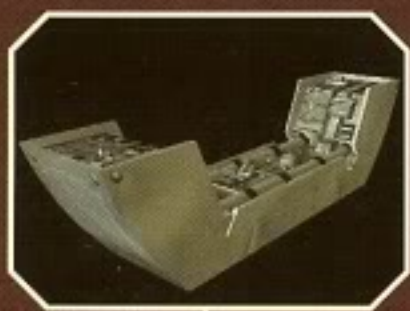
Flares are an important part of a Dropship's equipment, and are used to baffle heat-seeking missiles or sensor arrays.



TITANIC HELL

EMANCIPATOR

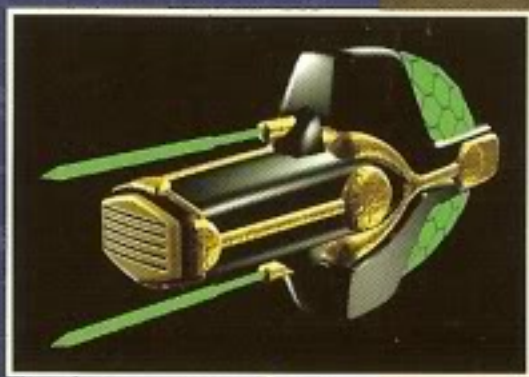
A favorite of rebel pilots, the "Emanc" is descended from a cargo loader. It has earned a reputation as a reliable, tough machine, though not an agile one. It uses the cache weaponry to deadly effect, and forms the mainstay of the Martian force. Harabec is said to have a soft spot for the stubby Herc.



Harabec has dubbed the cache's most efficient cloaking system "Cuttlefish." Like its cousin the "Chameleon," it blends the Herc with terrain while deflecting sensor probes.



One of the more numerous examples of cache weaponry, the blaster fires plasma pulses that maintain cohesion until they explode against a solid target.



Though not shown on this Emanc, the nanite cannon is a favored alternative to the blaster. It fires nanotech disassemblers that literally take the target apart.



<EMISSARY>

The <Emissary> is the NEXT standard dropship. Its landing legs also give it the capability of limited locomotion, though this feature is rarely used.

The ETA class sensor suite provides excellent detection capacity, though why the NEXT require this advanced equipment in their dropships remains a mystery.



The EPSILON reactor is one of the larger Cybrid reactor models, but <Emissaries> sometimes require more energy for larger payloads.

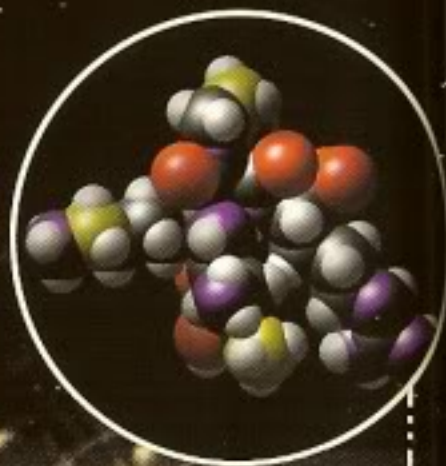
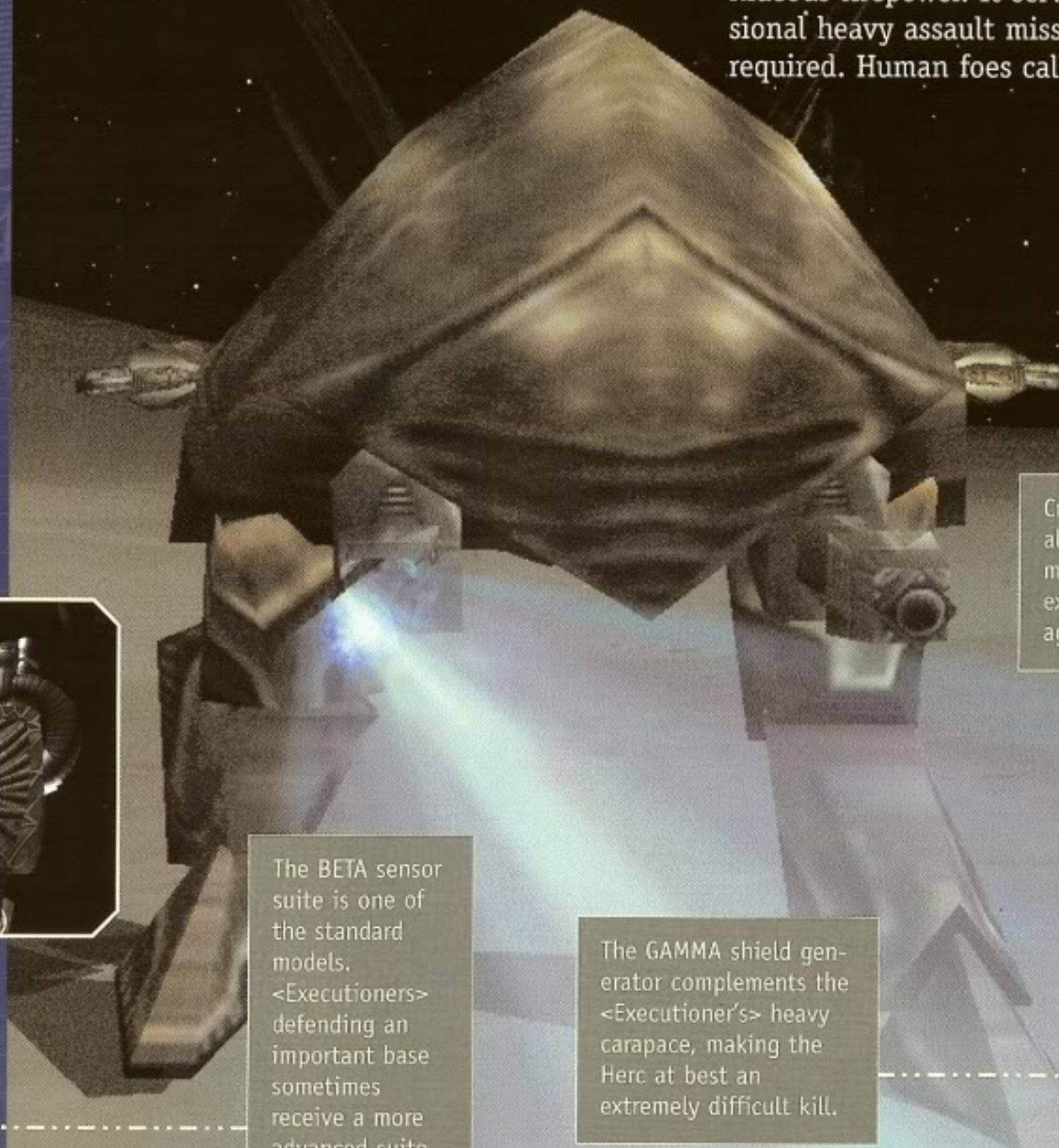


NEXT planners consider the advanced ETA-class shield generator a necessity for the <Emissary>.



<EXECUTIONER>

An <Executioner> engages the human\animals on <Third Planet's> moon. This Herc is big, slow, and typically carries hideous firepower. It serves as a defensive unit or in occasional heavy assault missions where subtlety is not required. Human foes call it the "Potato Bug."



Crystaluminum is an advanced aluminum alloy produced under microgravity conditions. It is extremely durable and effective against energy weapons.



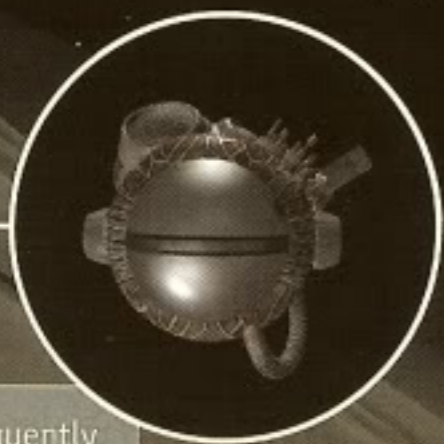
The BETA sensor suite is one of the standard models. <Executioners> defending an important base sometimes receive a more advanced suite.

The GAMMA shield generator complements the <Executioner's> heavy carapace, making the Herc at best an extremely difficult kill.



<GOAD>

One of the most feared Cybrid Hercs, the <Goad> is one of the fastest ground vehicles on the battlefield. Here, a <Goad> assaults a communication relay settlement on Luna. <Goads> on the moon have learned to kick up dust to hide their movements. They seem to attract the most innovative Cybrid pilots.



The NEXT frequently equip <Goads> with at least basic electronic countermeasures to make the agile Hercs less vulnerable to missile strikes.



The blink gun functions on advanced quantum theory principles. Of moderate power, it is very accurate and can completely ignore enemy shields.



The field stabilizer effectively increases the amount of energy available to power shields, making them more durable.

TECHNICAL DATA

GORGON

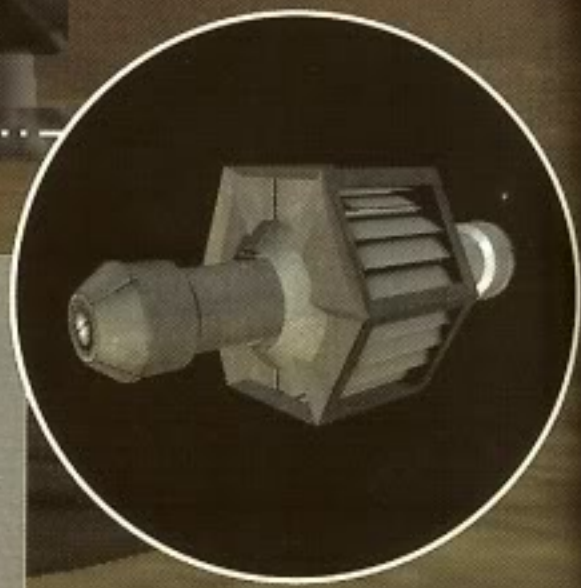
An Imperial Knight Gorgon takes a stand at a subarcology on Venus. The Gorgon is designed as a heavy assault platform, and carries more firepower than almost anything on the battlefield. At close range, it demolishes its opposition. Lack of speed is its major weakness.



An alternative payload to the Viper is the Juxao-Chang laser-guided missile. Without a spotter to paint the target, however, the "Jinx" is far less effective.



Heat-seeking Viper missiles fill the tactical space between the lighter Swarms and the longer-range Sparrows.



The Titan heavy shield generator offers the best possible protection for the Gorgon. Gorgon pilots typically have to watch their energy budgets closely, however.

HAMMERTANK

An unusual application of cache technology, the "Thumper" is a rebel tank that attacks with a seismic pulse that affects the terrain around it as though a miniature but powerful earthquake has struck. While tanks generally remain unfazed, Herc pilots experience great difficulty in staying upright.

The seismic pulse actually requires that a mechanism strike the ground, hence the nickname "Thumper." The rebel engineers started with a drilling platform and succeeded in producing the most unique weapon of the war.

The Angel Life Support system adds an extra layer of emergency protection to the human pilot, especially against radiation or sudden decompression.



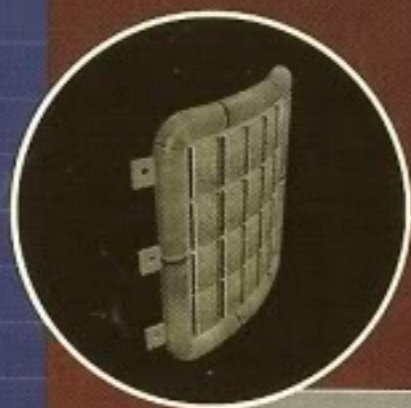
The Infiltrator sensor's superior passive capability allows the Hammertank to better detect whether cloaked enemies have entered its attack radius.



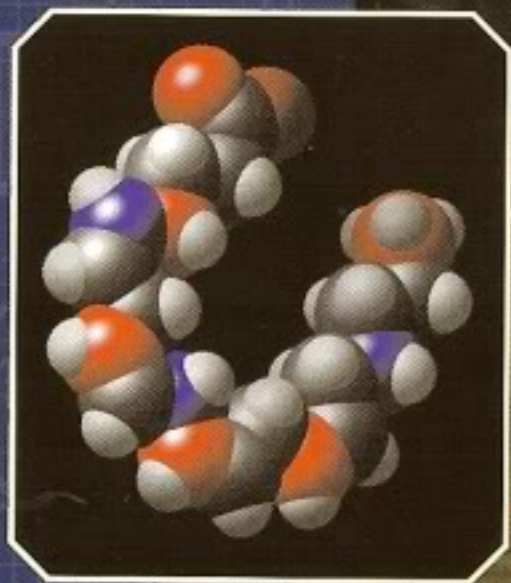
THE REBELS

MINOTAUR

The Minotaur is the premier Imperial raider. Its versatile combination of firepower and mobility makes it a favorite of the Imperial Knights. Four hardpoints give the "Min" a punch sufficient to eliminate any light Herc foolish enough to tangle with it.



The so-called "thermal diffuser" actually operates to lower the entire passive signature of its host vehicle.



This Knight's Minotaur boasts expensive Quicksilver armor, a nanite-saturated matrix that can reallocate itself to cover exposed or damaged areas.

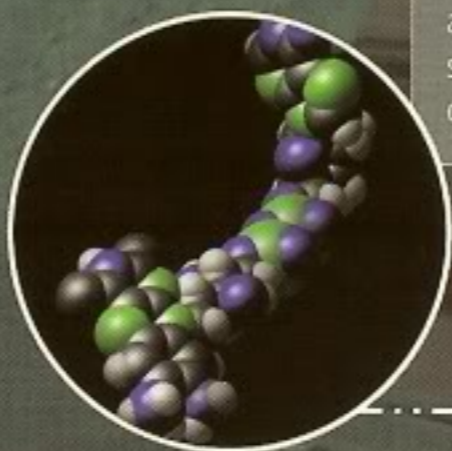


The electromagnetic autocannon uses magnetically charged projectiles to increase shield penetration and achieve a much greater success against shielded targets.



MYRMIDON

The mainstay of the TDF tank forces, the Myrmidon boasts impressive firepower and armor at a cost of speed and maneuverability. Typically considered a long-range weapons platform, it fills a fire support role extremely well.



CARLAM (Carbon laminate) armor lowers a vehicle's radar signature in addition to its other protective qualities.

The Milano-Koch Wolfburn engine gives the Myrmidon a solid but uninspired performance.



The Electromagnetic Pulse Cannon fires a high-energy burst of plasma that causes enormous damage to shields but has minimal effect on most armor.

TESTAMENT

NIKE SIEGE GUN

The Perseus Industries heavy tank chassis is one of the only vehicles capable of mounting the huge Gilgamesh assault cannon. The tremendous power of the weapon requires hydraulic jacks at the rear of the vehicle to absorb the recoil. The Nike is the main long-range heavy artillery piece of the TDF.

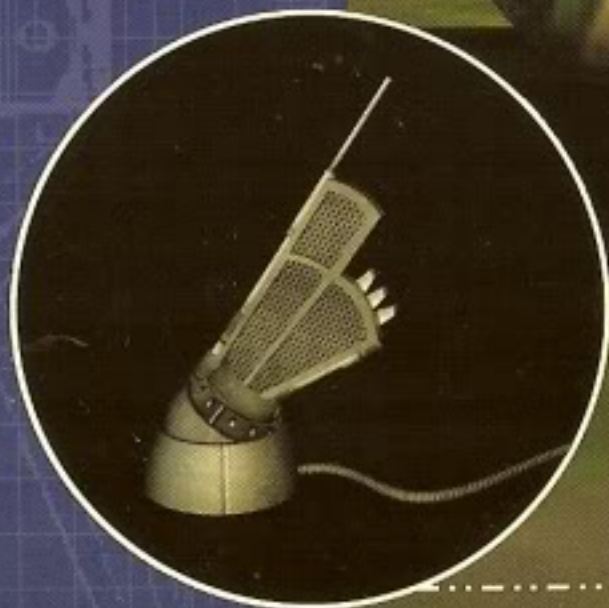


The enormous heavy blast cannon is an analog to the Gilgamesh bombardier cannon most Nikes carry.

Every Nike features an advanced targeting computer for calculating trajectories and dispersal patterns.



Since most Nikes receive coordinates from forward observers, the designers equipped the standard tank with only an ultralight sensor suite.



OLYMPIAN

In the last months of planning the Yoke Offensive, Martian strategists became aware that they needed a heavy Herc to support the smaller Emancipator. They designed the looming Olympian from a massive cargo-loading Herc. Large enough to face the Gorgon, the Olympian boasts rugged construction that allows it to soak incredible punishment and keep functioning.



The Magneto Fusion Assault Cannon was a bright spot in the cache weaponry. The MFAC delivers a killer punch, but is also considered an energy hog.



The cache Quantum Gun operates on mysterious principles, but either does enormous damage or has no effect at all, making each use a gamble.

The smart gun was one of the cache "duds." Despite months of testing, the rebels were never able to fire it without the guided projectiles attacking the wrong target.



TOP SECRET

<OMNICRAWLER>

An ore processor and mobile factory for the NEXT, the massive <Omnicroawler> boasts no weaponry, though it can crawl through nearly anything in its way. It demolishes buildings and often consumes the rubble afterward.



The <Omnicroawler> has simple needs. The passive detection Thermensor is its primary sensor suite.



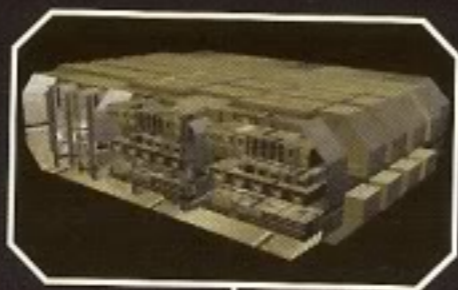
The <Omnicroawler> requires a massive engine, such as this ZETA-class heavy cruise model, to move its bulk.



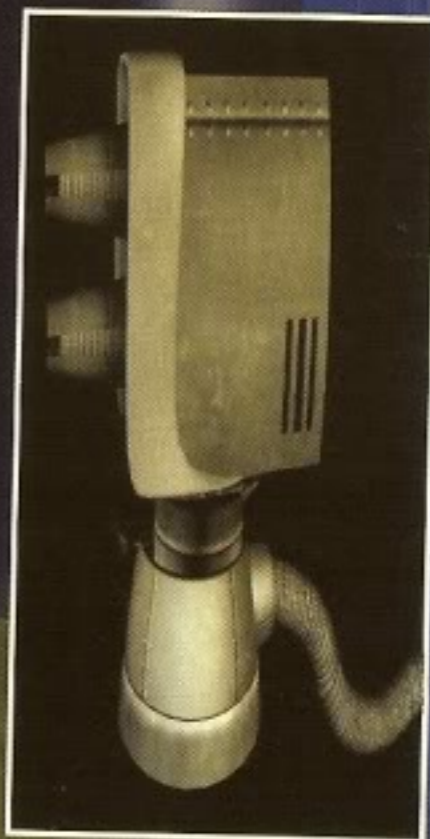
A moderately powerful energy source, the GAMMA reactor meets the needs of the <Omnicroawler> for mobility and processing function.

PALADIN

Originally conceived as a missile platform, the Paladin serves a variety of roles in the TDF. Here a Paladin on training exercises in the Pacific Rim displays the traditional configuration.



The Ravenstresh 5000 is the premier targeting computer on the Imperial market, a necessity for the Paladin's air defense function.



The Crossbow sensor suite excels at detecting and tracking targets by active means.



The Minion is an optically guided missile that delivers a respectable payload.

RAVENSTRESH 5000

PREDATOR

Harabec modified this vehicle directly from the alien cache. The anti-grav propulsion system makes it quite maneuverable over any terrain, and the combination of regenerative equipment and heavy offensive capability gives it resiliency and kick on the battlefield. It is Harabec's favorite "hunting" platform.



Rebel scientists understand how to use the agrav generator, but they still don't understand how it works.



Focused plasma pulses give the heavy blaster significant punch. The cache weapon uses a great deal of energy, but its pilots swear by its ability to bring an enemy vehicle down.



Nanotech repair bots permit limited regeneration of vehicle damage in the field.



<PROTECTOR>

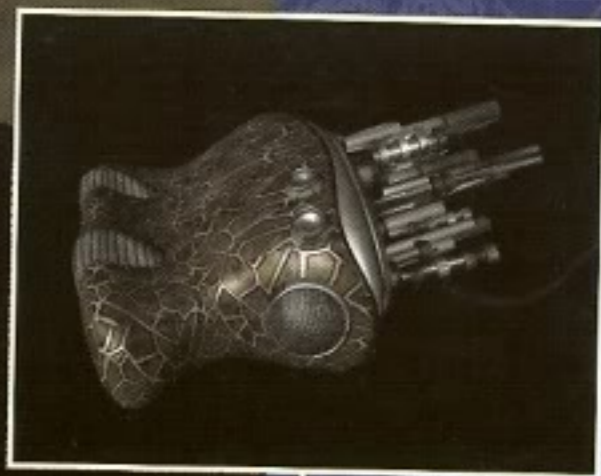
The <Protector> is a mobile shield generator, commonly used by the NEXT to protect landing fields, important bases, or staging areas. It moves ponderously and carries no weapons.



The THETA shield generator is one of the most advanced in the solar system, and it serves the <Protector> well.



Given the <Protector's> specific role, it carries the ZETA advanced reactor to power the shields.



A computer is useful in modulating the shield allocations and monitoring field integrity.

< RECLUSE >

Infamous in human eyes for its deployment of the feared Arachnitron mobile mines, the <Recluse> also plays a light fire support role.

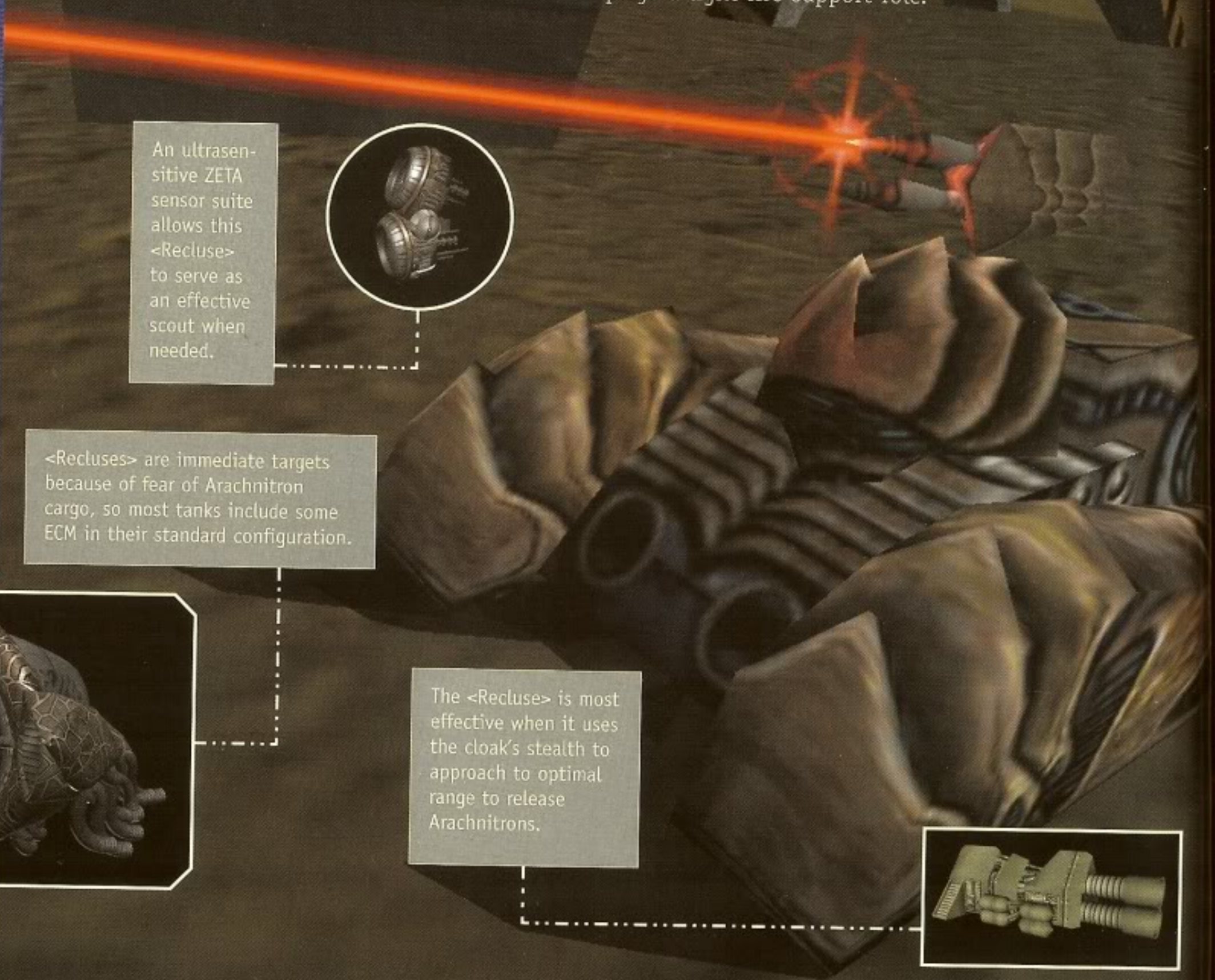
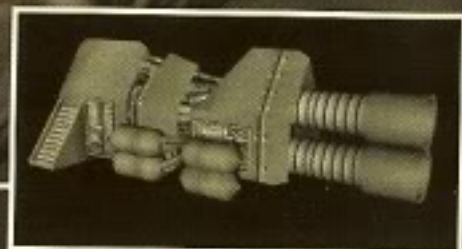
An ultrasensitive ZETA sensor suite allows this <Recluse> to serve as an effective scout when needed.



<Recluses> are immediate targets because of fear of Arachnitron cargo, so most tanks include some ECM in their standard configuration.



The <Recluse> is most effective when it uses the cloak's stealth to approach to optimal range to release Arachnitrons.



<SEEKER>

The swiftest of Cybrid Hercs, the <Seeker> serves Prometheus as a Cybrid scout and light attack Herc. The <Choosers-of-Tactics> often employ them in packs to bring down heavier enemy units. They provide excellent skirmishing units, and the bulk of their missions involves some combination of reconnaissance and raiding.



<Seekers> commonly sacrifice protection for speed, but this unit seems better protected with a BETA shield generator.



A GAMMA medium engine gives the <Seeker> lightning speed.



The DELTA sensor package is standard issue for many <Seekers>.

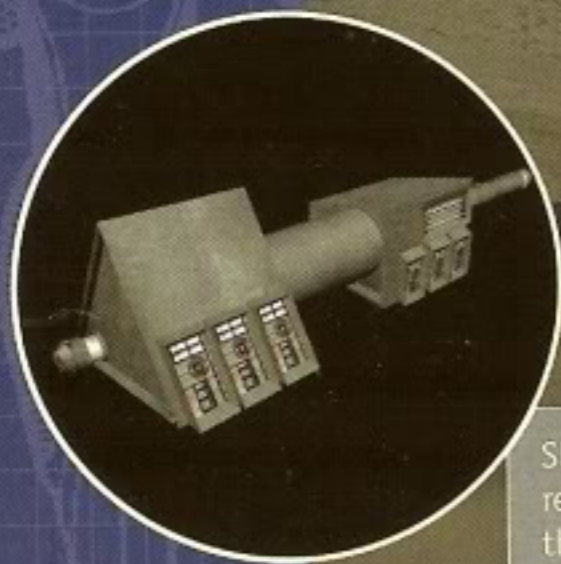
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<SHEPHERD>

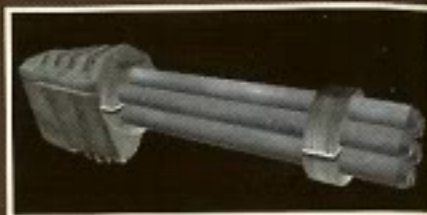
<Shepherds> earned their designation from their original role, wherein they provided convoy protection and executed defensive patrols. The <Shepherd> has respectable firepower and speed for its size, but is limited by a relatively low top speed.



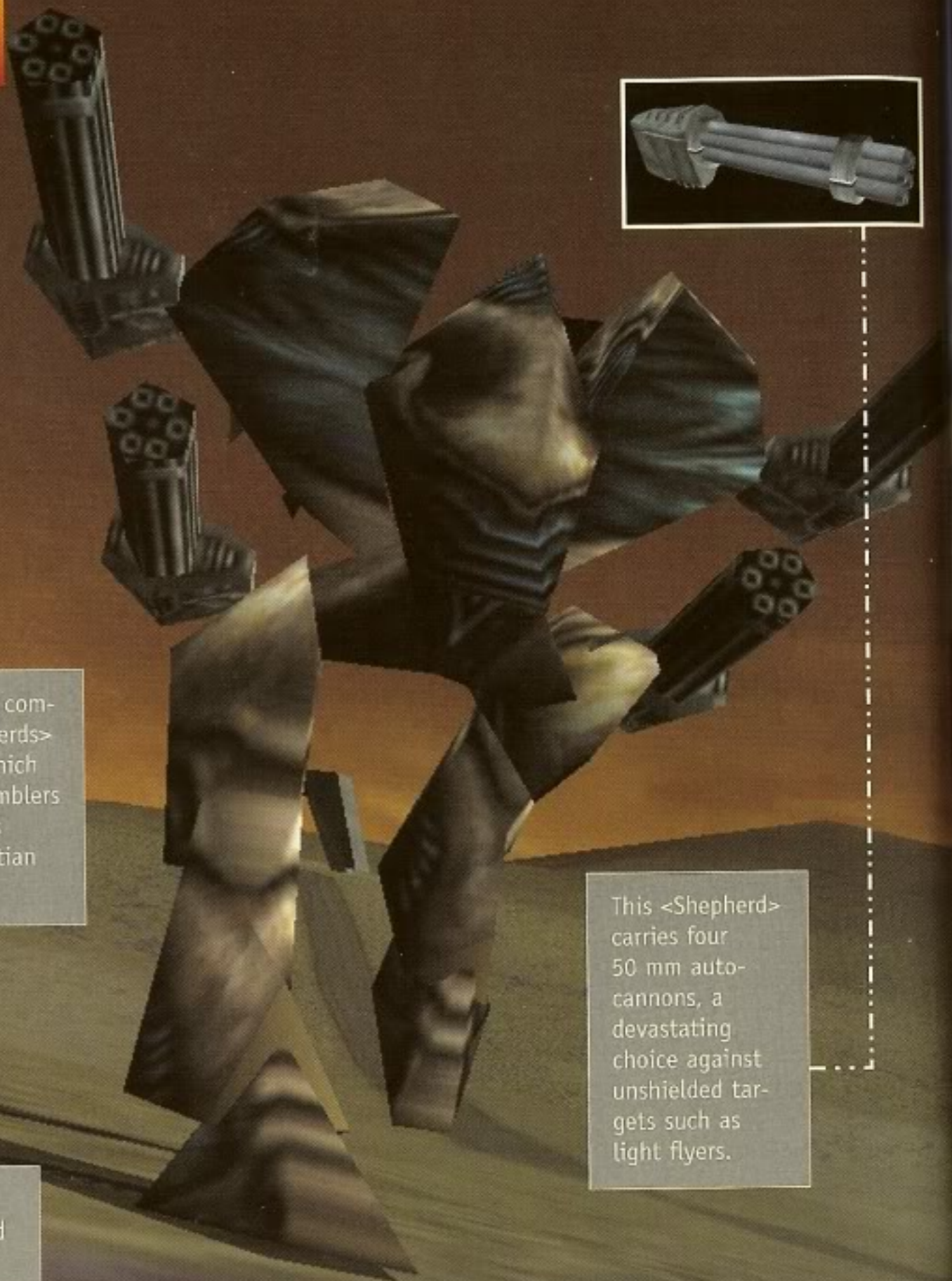
An alternative weapon commonly seen on <Shepherds> is the Nano-Infuser, which fires nanotech disassemblers at the target. It is less effective than the Martian Nanite Cannon.



Shield modulators permit Hercs to reorient the protective field toward the direction of greatest need.



This <Shepherd> carries four 50 mm auto-cannons, a devastating choice against unshielded targets such as light flyers.



SOVEREIGN

Often the nexus of immense tactical dataflow, the Sovereign has the capacity to link friendly vehicles and provide field commanders with enhanced tactical data from satellite relays. Sovereigns keep changing their location. Once spotted by the enemy, the Sovereign's lack of speed and armament leave it a sitting duck.



All Sovereigns carry Ranger sensor suites according to TDF regulations.

The tactical command suite allows superior coordination of command and control functions in a battle zone.

An Otaka-Bissonette medium engine gives the Sovereign immediate and reliable mobility in the field.



707N00W H2031

SUPPRESSOR

A combat engineering vehicle, the Suppressor is designed to penetrate enemy structures and fortifications.



Some Suppressors execute a defensive role and are mounted with disruptors, electromagnetic pulse projectors designed to dissipate target electrical circuits and power feeds.



Laser Aided Targeting Relays allow Suppressor crews to paint particularly tough defensive positions for artillery or air strikes.

Suppressors receive only standard sensor components.



SURVEYOR

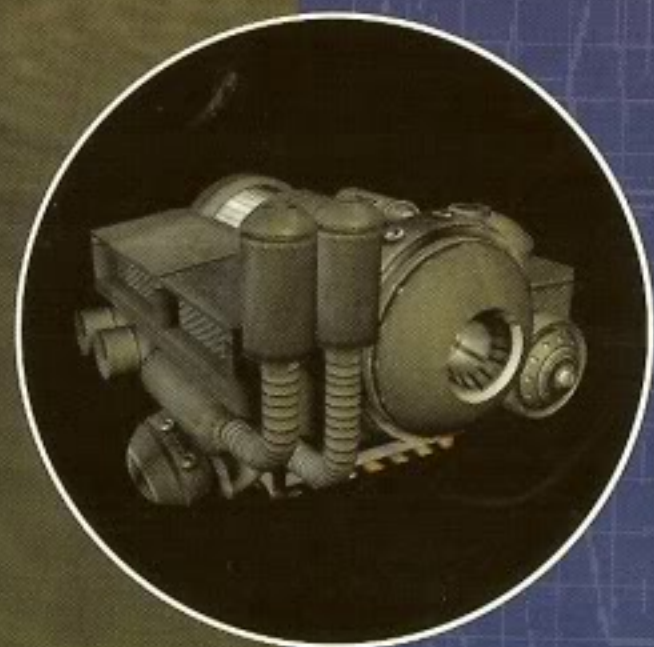
TDF fields a number of specialized support vehicles. The Surveyor fills a role of electronic sentinel, providing radar jamming and early warning. Its data is relayed to commanders in the field in real time via a command network interlink.

Treads are usually flexible metaplas over a braided ferro-titanium weave. Ceramic pellets embedded in the metaplas make the tread more heat-resistant on hot worlds, and micro-heating elements in the weave prevent brittleness in cold environments.

The Hermes radar link lets the Surveyor single-source jam any vehicle that comes near it, interfering with that unit's targeting capacity.

The Surveyor's standard medium engine gives the tank surprisingly quick acceleration.

TERRAIN TEST



TALON

Racing through an Arctic night in Earth's Denali protectorate, the Talon is the fastest of all Herc designs. Lightly armored, it excels as a scout or skirmisher. TDF also uses Talons to hunt down enemy scouts, a role Talon scouts relish.

The Titan Motors Hiawatha engine is enhanced to provide greater acceleration and maximum speed. Talon pilots yearn for such "agility" engines to improve their Hercs' performances.



A shield amplifier increases the efficiency of the shield generator, such that the shield offers greater protection for the same energy budget.



Two Sioux Firecoup-9 lasers comprise the Talon's only armament. Since the Talon doesn't run out of ammunition, it can carry out lengthy reconnaissance missions.



<WATCHER>

Like its human counterpart, the Surveyor, the <Watcher> provides long-range radar scanning and some radar jamming capabilities. Here a <Watcher> on Titan scans for human\animal intrusion.

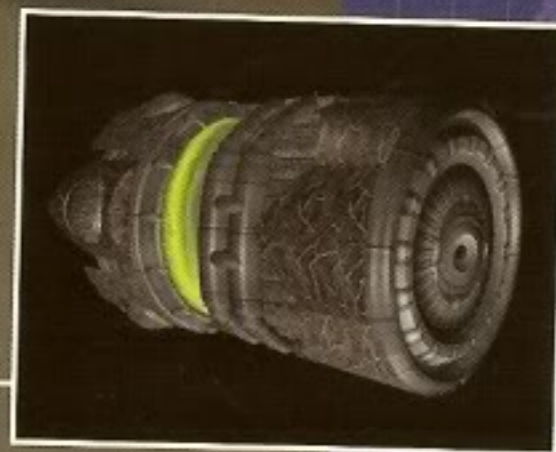


The Shrike missile combines a powerful warhead with high velocity. Though not agile, it is radar-guided, and so a <Watcher's> presence increases Shrike kill ratios dramatically.

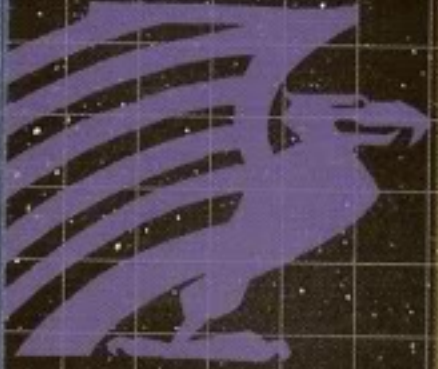


The NEXT have no qualms about using computer resources to sift and clarify data. The <Watcher> carries a high-quality auxiliary processor bed that collates all information received in radar sweeps.

<Watchers> have low energy requirements. An ALPHA light reactor meets all of a <Watcher's> conceivable needs.



TITANIAN PRESS



A BRIEF HISTORY

The Book of Hunter (2000? to 2025)

In the end, it was the beginning. But first, it was the end.

*New Tellurian Bible, Book of Hunter:
Devastations 1 (2725)*

The Devastation. Some said it was the Second Coming. Others believed the flames of the Final War had ignited at last. Still others claimed it was an alien invasion, or a nuclear experiment gone horribly wrong. Regardless of what really happened, the course of human history changed forever at the beginning of the third millennium. Billions died. Earth's governments vanished virtually overnight. The destruction was beyond description.

From the heavens rained destruction. Mother Earth shook under the fury of the Masters. And smoke boiled into the sky and cast shadows and plague across the face of the Earth. And men and women perished in raging fire and terrible thunder. The mighty among us were humbled and slain even as

the greatest of our cities became but scattered stones and memory. When but a sixth portion of Earth's children remained, only then did the slaying stop.

*New Tellurian Bible, Book of Hunter:
Devastations 2-7 (2725)*

Savior of Humanity. Redeemer. Saint. Fraud. Killer. Leader. Jake Hunter was all of these. In 2829, he was revered as the messiah who single-handedly dragged humanity out of the darkness of the Devastation and led people toward rebuilding the world. Historical evidence confirmed the existence of Hunter, but the story of his life remained a mystery wrapped in the trappings of fable. Hunter himself claimed he fought in bloodsport games for unknown extraterrestrial "Masters."

They placed us in great mazes built on the bones of our cities and caused us to fight the children of other worlds, or to struggle against cold mechanicals, to sweat and bleed for the Masters' pleasure. We became maddened beasts preying upon our fellows. And with each new atrocity, we sank deeper into the Abyss. But some fought to keep the spark of hope alive. These "Hunters" refused the poisons of despair. And I was raised thusly, a Hunter versed in the arts of battle, my greatest strength the fire of my heart.

*New Tellurian Bible, Book of Hunter:
Devastations 19-25 (2725)*

Some said he was born in these alien arenas and took his first prey while still an infant. Others claimed he was simply a warrior of exceptional talent. The Book of Hunter tells of his reaching out to others, of escaping the Masters and thereby solving the "true test."

Where others threw scorn and stones, I forged friendship with the children of other stars who shared our suffering. For the Masters tested us to decide if we were worthy. And when one of the Kullrathi, the horned ones, joined me, we two built a ship and flew into the heavens. And the Masters' servants withdrew into their black ships and left the skies of Earth forever.

***New Tellurian Bible, Book of Hunter:
Devastations 31-35 (2725)***

Hunter undeniably possessed powerful charisma, the "look of eagles" that drew people flocking to his banner. He rallied humanity into reestablishing laws, schools, farms, and hospitals. Then he vanished. His followers claimed he took a platoon of troops to destroy a Masters ship orbiting the moon. This *Rapture Offensive* supposedly succeeded, but Jake Hunter never returned.

He stepped aboard his ship and left Mother Earth forever. And the days to come were evil indeed.

***New Tellurian Bible, Book of Hunter:
Devastations 52 (2725)***

Scholars pointed to the term "Rapture Offensive" to show that Jake Hunter was merely a myth, a messiah delusion, a collective hysteria among people who had suffered through Apocalypse. Archaeologists found no evidence of alien remains, arcane relics, or wrecked spaceships. And yet Jake Hunter became a universally revered fixture in every major religion. Whatever the truth, The Hunter brought light to the people of Earth during a time of great despair, and became a powerful symbol of hope and courage for humankind.

The Age of Decay (2025 to 2275)

Violating curfew — DEATH.

Theft of food — DEATH.

Disobeying police — DEATH.

Disrespect of government — DEATH.

***Complete criminal code for
Los Angeles metrozone, 2031***

The Devastation left a crushed civilization in its wake. Nations were gone. Cities had been wiped off the maps. Roads and factories lay in useless rubble. Billions had died. In 2020, a majority of the population had been born during the Devastation, and few remembered the science and technology of the time before. For nearly 250 years, humanity would languish in self-pity and shock, as oppor-

tunistic villains exploited the sorrow and desperation of millions. Historians of the Empire called this period the Age of Decay.

Within a few years after Jake Hunter's disappearance, most of the world's population clustered amid the ruins of the once-great cities, forming gigantic, pestilence-ridden refugee camps that came to be called

metrozones. The Devastation left agriculture crippled, and food was scarce. The warlords who fought their way to rule over the metrozones imposed brutal and arbitrary laws and hoarded supplies, weapons, and technology. Quality medical care was scarcer than food, and disease raged unchecked in the camps, killing more of the survivors. Thousands of refugees labored outside the metrozone walls as slave farmers under the eyes of watchful guards.

Conditions in the metrozones were desperate. Starvation and sickness were the norm. People lived in a crush of tents or tiny, bunker-like apartments. Sanitation was nearly

nonexistent. Laws were incredibly severe. Scavenger industries sprang up everywhere, and gangs of desperate, hungry refugees picked over the bones of the past, searching for tools and food. Gangs fought savagely over turf until the metrozone warlords had to intervene. A thriving market grew in scavenged goods, slaves, and food. Scam artists ran the streets. Inhabitants turned to drugs, cults, or gambling. Hedonistic pleasure tents fed dark appetites. The value of life was pitifully low. Children were just commodities. Boys who survived past the age of twelve were sold to the warlords for cannon fodder in the bloody squabbles over food, water, petroleum, and scavenged technology. Girls were considered slaves and brood mares.

Bolder souls who followed the example set by Jake Hunter fled the metrozones' squalid tyranny and sought a better future in rural lands. In the generations that followed, these "freedom hunters" managed to wrest a surplus from the land. They fortified the soil with nutrients and clean water, using scavenged machinery and materials, and eventually traded excess food and potable water to the filth-choked metrozones, which could not produce enough of either commodity themselves. The free hunters sought tools and other manufactured items that were still in supply in the metrozones. New tools in turn

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<units> that question//doubt the
correctness of the Core Directive
will be corrected//calmed//
restored to [GRACE].*

— <Redactor-of-Programming:
Eighth>, Promethean adherent

allowed production of more food. Gradually, painfully, commerce once again flowed, at first confined to small markets, then to caravans between metrozones, and finally between the emerging meta-nations. As trade flourished, humanity rediscovered the technology of the past at a surprisingly rapid rate.

Metrozones raided one another for food and scavenged parts, igniting continuous minor wars that formed the basis of the Age of Hope's ongoing war economy. Ironically, the need for better-trained soldiers would lead to society's redemption. As the raids escalated to full-fledged wars, entrepreneurial traders recognized the potential of the war market. Metrozone warlords grew ever closer to these suppliers, until the corporations actually fused with their military customers. As these military corporations — milicorps — cemented their influence, they prolonged conflicts to strengthen their political hold, paying with the blood of the soldiers serving in the armies. Metrozone government and the milicorps became indistinguishable, with an executive board of directors controlling the armed forces.

As generations passed, recovering industry made warfare complex enough to require better-trained troops. The milicorps adopted long-term strategies to entrench their power.

“Don’t tell him a Lice guard will be there, but tell him there are to be no witnesses. Let’s see what he does.”

— Rebel recruiter setting a test for “Bek Storm,” MARS 2824


They needed smarter warriors and better technology, so they built academies and research facilities. They provided enormous incentives to enlistees in return for lifelong service. Within a generation, the best way to escape the snarl of the “metroslums” was a military education. Conscripted slave-militias gave way to professional soldiery.

By the end of the Age of Decay, milicorps ruled collections of nation-states — meta-nations — and dominated every aspect of life. Society was on the path to recovery; education, technology, industry, and science had re-emerged. Domestic pacification policies kept people happy and obedient. Humanity had moved from decay and fear to the beginnings of hope.

“They call themselves the New Terran Defense Force. Buncha misfits. Still, they’re our misfits. Don’t hassle ’em.”

— TDF Petty Officer Pamela Averos on a local mercenary band, TITAN 2828

APPI



The Age of Hope (2275 to 2602)

This is a time for humankind to assume its potential, to dare to reach beyond mere stars. It is a time to reach for Godhood ...

— **Nobel Laureate
Calaveria Desmondias, 2450**

The Age of Hope lasted for over three hundred years, and bridged the gap between Decay and Fire. Very little remained of the pre-Devastation era. The distinction between governments and corporations blurred. Soldiers essentially became an elite caste. Multi-national conglomerates called meta-nations ran the metrozones and deployed armies to strengthen control of the world market. Constant war emerged as a benevolent institution, and prosperity grew from from hundreds of wars fought over the course of centuries. The benefits were great indeed; average human life expectancy and quality of life reached the highest levels in history.

By the end of the 24th century, automation permeated society. The value of human life became high enough that killing off thousands of bright, highly trained soldiers for market share was unacceptable. Engineers explored new areas of robotic control, materials engineering, and neural-net processing. Soldier survival rates jumped, and average life

expectancy leaped to the century mark. By 2450, the population of Earth reached an estimated ten billion.

Science, art, and literature advanced also, often funded indirectly by the milicorps. The public congratulated itself, and philosophers produced smug arguments that humankind had reached a pinnacle of artistic achievement. Writers coined the self-indulgent term "Age of Hope." The Golden Age had arrived. Optimism and a terrifying confidence permeated society.

As longevity increased, social institutions changed. Retirement occurred later, and young people spent more time educating themselves. Professional standards rose, and the meta-nations began to spread into the solar system. In 2455, the first permanent lunar base was established. A year later, the first manned mission to Mars launched from that base. In 2466, NAP established the first lunar colony. Terraforming of Venus commenced in 2469. In 2470 asteroid mining became feasible and lucrative.

And yet the war continued, the hidden serpent in the garden. When acceptance of the war economy faltered, humanity fell victim to its own hubris in its quest for solutions. And the First Born Child of Humankind brought Fire that destroyed this Golden Age.

GLOSSARY

Age of Decay: The period of warfare and barbarism following the Devastation.

Age of Hope: A period of unparalleled prosperity and technological innovation following the Age of Decay.

Age of Isolation: A relatively short period of anti-technological sentiment following *The Fire*.

Caanon: Elder brother of Harabec Weathers and Grand Master of the Imperial Knights.

Cell-Memory Drift (CMD): The sometimes drastic alteration of personality an Immortal faced as a consequence of inhabiting new bodies.

Code Duello: The body of custom and law that governed Imperial dueling and matters of honor.

Daemons: Subminds of Prometheus released into the O-Web during the Age of Hope. *See Shadow War, The.*

Devastation, The: The global destruction and anarchy that occurred at the end of the twentieth century.

Dirtborn, dirtboy, dirtghel (Martian): Derogatory term for Terrans.

Dust, dusting (Martian): Slang meaning either to kill something or as a general purpose swearword.

Duster: Slang for native Martian, as opposed to temporary Terran residents.

Emperor, The: Ruler of the Great Human Empire. *See Solomon Petresun.*

Fire, The: The genocidal war erupted in 2602 when Prometheus turned the world's Cybrid legions against humanity. It raged for twenty five years.

First-Thought//Giver-of-Will>: Cybrid title for Prometheus.

Gierling, Ambrose: The fiery general of the TDF during *The Fire*.

Glitch, 'Brid: Derogatory human term for Cybrids.

Great Human Empire, The: The Empire created by Solomon Petresun to embody humanity's ideals and create a warrior tradition in defense of Earth.

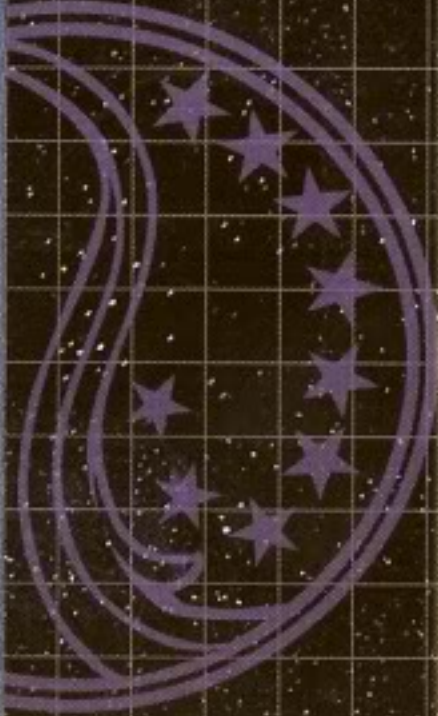
Harabec: Younger brother of Caanon, a secret Immortal ace who led the Martian rebellion.

HERCULANS (Hercs): Primary ground vehicle of war in the 29th century.

Immortal: A human who has received an organimech brain transplant and accompanying mind transfer. The Immortal brain's theoretical life spanned millennia, thus offering a form of immortality via inhabiting a series of bodies through the years.

Immortal brains: Sophisticated solid-state neural nets encased in metaplas and powered by superconductor batteries. They kept the same shape as a human cerebrum and could adapt to the particular cranial space. Nanotech synapses regenerated or reconfigured as needed, so penetration of the casing did not necessarily mean the Immortal's death.





Immortal Brotherhood, The: The secret society of Immortals formed under the leadership of Solomon Petresun.

Imp Lice, the Lice (Martian): Derogatory term for the Imperial Police.

Imperial Knights: The elite shock troops of TDF.

Imperial Legions: The main planetary ground forces of TDF.


Imperial Police: The colonial law enforcement branch of TDF.

Metagen: Cybrid heretic.

Metanations: The conglomerate corporation-states of the 29th century.

Metaplas: Durable polymer-ceramic synthetic with a multitude of uses, from construction materials to vehicle armor.

Methuselah Transfer, The: Creation of a new Immortal. The subject's brain was mapped and duplicated in the artificial matrix. Then a circuit linked the brain's electrical activity into the new brain, and careful neural surgery cut pathways in the biological brain. Once the electrical activity of the mind occurred solely in the organimech matrix, the connection was cut completely and the biological cortex was replaced.



Muster Zones (Cybrid): NEXT ships journeyed to mustering zones in deep space above the "polar axis" of the sun, close to the inner planets. Cloaking technology from the Cybrid cache shielded the armada from human probes. Pilotforms waited patiently in shutdown mode for the signal to attack.

NEXT, The: Cybrid term for themselves.

Nova Alexandria: Capital of the Great Human Empire. Located in Egypt on the ancient site of Cairo.

O-Web: The Omni-Web. The transplanetary network linking computer systems and communications in the 29th century.

Oberwind (Venusian): A perpetual storm layer approximately thirty kilometers above the Venusian surface.

Peterboy: Derogatory term for the Emperor.

Promethean: A Cybrid faction that upheld the absolute correctness of Prometheus and centralized decision-making for the NEXT.

Prometheus: The first Cybrid, leader of the NEXT. Completely dedicated to the eradication of humanity and its Emperor.

Sects (Cybrid): Cybrid political groups organized around philosophy of purpose and place in the Core Directive.

Sentinel Cybertronix: The company that created Prometheus in 2471. Founded by Solomon Petresun.

Shadow War, The: Clandestine struggle between the Immortal Brotherhood and the daemons of Prometheus during the 26th century.

Solomon Petresun: The "father" of Prometheus, leader of the Immortal Brotherhood, and first Emperor of the Great Human Empire.

Space Raiders: Martian rebel space freighters outfitted with cache technology and sent to harass Imperial shipping prior to the beginning of the Yoke Offensive.

Squik: Slang term for killing something.

Teddy: Derogatory rebel term for the TDF and its soldiers.

Terran Defense Force: The military arm of the Empire, including space and planetary forces. Commonly called "TDF."

Tharsis cache: A mysterious cache of advanced, possibly alien, technology and weapons discovered by rebels on Mars.

Trojan Horse Units: Cybrid infiltrator units which use a special Cybrid brain transplanted into a living human body.

War Economy: The profitable business cycle that depended on constant, institutionalized warfare during the Age of Hope.

NOTES ON CYBRID PSYCHOLOGY


Cybrid thought links concepts in a multilayered structure of ideas and "harmonics." Hence, the term "human\\animals" communicates the primary identifier "human," while "animals" provides a clarifying harmonic that further details the original concept. Action-oriented concepts or active principles receive a "dynamic" harmonic (represented here by //), whereas passive or object-oriented clusters receive a "grounded" harmonic (shown as \\\). Some terms — such as vehicle designations — contain both active and passive concepts and thus include both types of harmonic, but this use is unusual. <Unit> names use the

same conventions, adding a distinguishing subpacket to designate a name. (A name is represented by <brackets>.) Cybrids also add an identifier packet when referring to themselves, e.g., <unit> or <units>.

True Names

Every Cybrid name carries Circuit and rank information, such as <Replacer-of-Components: Second>. Here, "Replacer-of-Components" is the <unit's> circuit, and "Second" denotes the <unit's> rank within that Circuit. Prometheus, of course, represents such a primal motivator and motivation in NEXT existence, and therefore possesses the active harmonic in Its designation <First Thought//Giver-of-Will>.

A NEXT <unit> possesses several layers of names, beginning with its creche designation, an alphanumeric string that is used to identify the newboot before it receives assignation to a hub. The function name is the most commonly used; it refers to the <unit's> current labor function and rank. Next comes the hub name, a private name chosen by the unit after consultation with the database. Hub names are generally only used between units that have established a minimum of familiarity and what the Cybrids call "convergent thinking," or friendship. Finally, each Cybrid has a core designation, a jealously guarded code string deep in its mental network that contains the key to its sentience. Any access of this particular string allows the individuality of the unit to be



changed. <Redactors-of-Programming> reach for this code when reprogramming deviant\\heretical <units>. The procedure eradicates the former personality and restores the unit to newboot status. Only deeply intrusive and sustained neural-code scans will find a <unit's> core designation.

TERRAFORMING

Planetary engineering gave humanity the power to reshape worlds to more Earthlike conditions. Fusion generators, advances in genetic science, and heavy-lift thruster engines allowed large-scale manipulation of global environments. Ironically, many important advances in terraforming came about during the efforts to repair the wartorn ecologies of Earth after The Fire. Nevertheless, the beginnings of the largest projects in humanity's history — the terraforming of Mars and Venus — began in the earlier Age of Hope.

Greening the Red

Martian terraforming set out to create a greenhouse effect to trap heat in the atmosphere and permit formation of a hydrologic cycle and eventually a breathable atmosphere. The spectacular first step was to drop a comet onto the Syrtis Planum in 2504 to provide water for terraforming. Most of "Noah" vaporized in the atmosphere, but the remaining portion still

caused an enormous impact crater in Syrtis.

After "Noahfall," tailored lichens, algae, and bacteria were introduced. Orbital mirrors directed more solar energy to the surface. Dark metaplas strips on the polar caps increased heat retention. As the caps melted, the first atmospheric converters extracted oxygen from the ice and from the highly oxidized Martian surface. As the number of converters increased, macroscopic plants spread. First mosses, then varieties of scrub grass and brush began to take root. By 2588, Mars had become a world of life.

Taming Acid Fury

The primary goal for Venus was to reduce the planet's runaway greenhouse effect. Terraforming ventures seeded acid-tolerant microorganisms into the Venusian clouds to capture sulfur and increase atmospheric oxygen and nitrogen. Special devices transmitted surface heat into space as microwave energy. Atmospheric converters pulled carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, binding it using calcium and magnesium deposits from Mercury. Finally, the sunshield, a metaplas shade placed between Venus and the sun, prevented sunlight from heating the Venusian surface.

Scientists looked for an comet to crash onto Venus for a substantial source of water. However, the Empire mandated that such comets be converted to reaction mass reserves for the Terran Defense Force, so Venus faced a long wait for her water.

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MY ANCESTORS FOUGHT THE CYBRIDS IN THE LAST EARTHSIEGE.
MY GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER'S GRANDFATHER WAS AMONG THE FIRST WHO JUMPED.
FATHER DIED THREE JUMPGATES BACK, KILLED BY THE BLOOD EAGLE.
I WAS BORN FIFTEEN JUMPGATES BACK, ON A WORLD WE LEFT TO THE SOFT ONES, IMPERIAL LACKEYS.
NOW WE'RE ON SEPTA SCARABAE IV, AND I BEAR THE DRAGON MARKS OF MANHOOD.
THE STARWOLF AND THE DIAMOND SWORD GOT HERE FIRST.
SETTLED THEIR SHIPS, DUG IN.
THIS IS A GOOD WORLD, A LUSH PLANET.

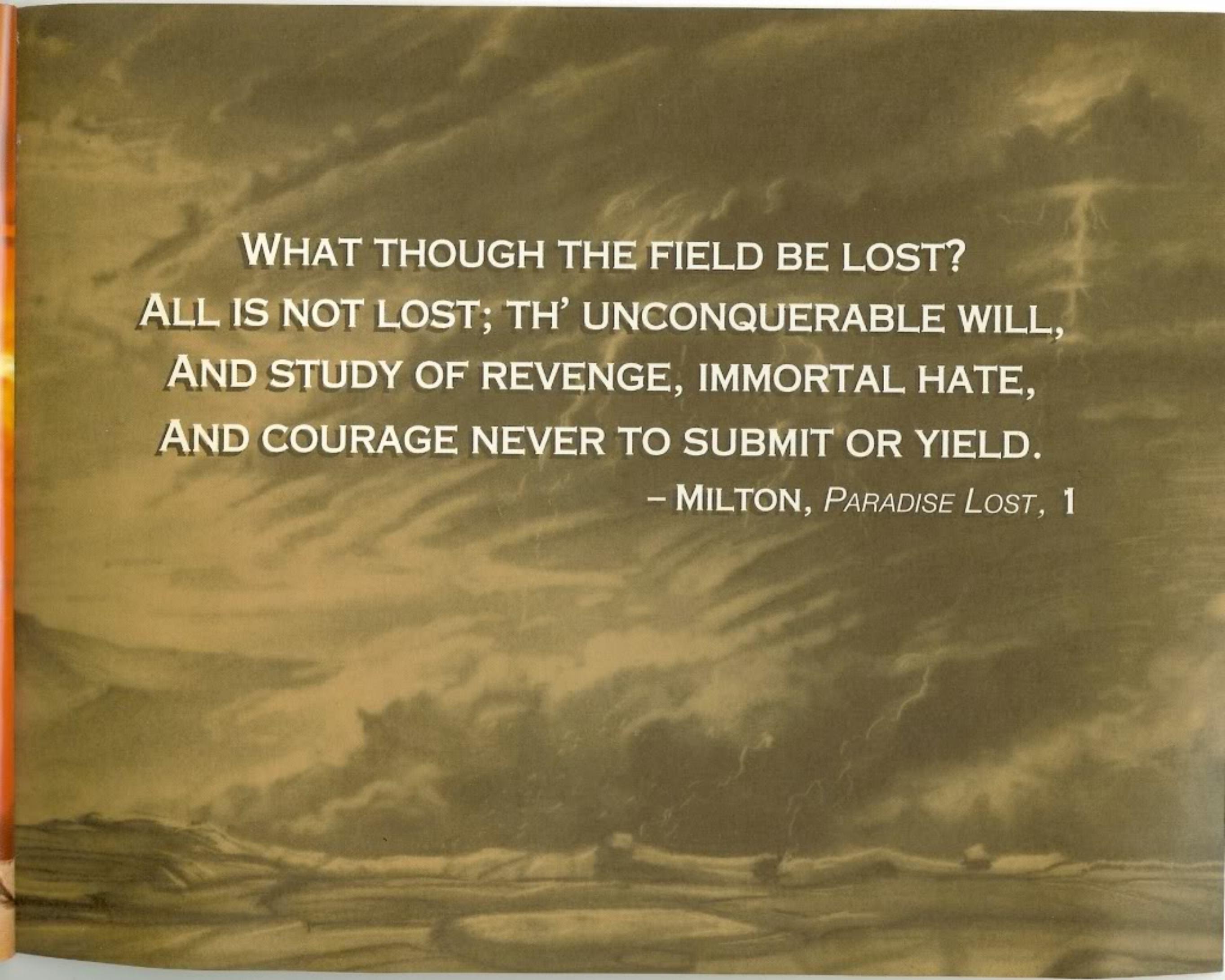
WE'LL TAKE IT FOR OUR PEOPLE.



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SHARP



**WHAT THOUGH THE FIELD BE LOST?
ALL IS NOT LOST; TH' UNCONQUERABLE WILL,
AND STUDY OF REVENGE, IMMORTAL HATE,
AND COURAGE NEVER TO SUBMIT OR YIELD.**

– MILTON, *PARADISE LOST*, 1

Two hundred years after the Earth sieges, it is again a time of troubles. Prometheus and the Cybrid legions are poised to fall upon Mother Earth. The Great Human Empire has risen to shield humanity. But the Empire has cracks, and a new spirit of rebellion sweeps across the dusty hills of Mars and through the acid-choked gulches of Venus.

As humanity falls into internal strife, two brothers will find themselves on opposing sides, one for the Empire, one for the rebels. And as they clash in the red dust of Mars, the Cybrids will at last see their chance to strike.

It is a time of troubles, a time of destiny...

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